

Bikini Berlin seeks to make an impression

A new style of mall has opened in Berlin, but how unique is it? John Ryan finds out

In July 1946, the United States carried out the first of a number of atomic tests at the remote Bikini Atoll in the southern Pacific Ocean. A few days later a French engineer and fashion designer called Louis Réard unveiled a swimsuit called the bikini, on the principle that its effect would be similar to that of an A-bomb. It's an accusation that could not readily be levelled at the oddly-named Bikini mall in Berlin.

Bikini Berlin is a newly opened 'concept mall'. And the name springs from what the blurb claims was "a reference to an open floor separating the building horizontally into two parts like the two-piece swimsuit".

There are two interior trading floors, and a garden level on the roof. The garden is huge, covering an area of 75,000 sq ft and offering views of the baboon enclosure in the adjacent Berlin Zoological Garden.

Why it's different

In its former life the Bikini complex was a mix of residential and office space and was something of a show-piece for this affluent part of west Berlin. It had fallen on relatively hard times, however, and in spite of the structure's listed status it was in need of a rethink and a makeover.

The decision to revitalise was taken and Munich-based developer Bayerische Hausbau handed the job of revamping the building to architect Hild und K, also from Munich.

The outcome is a shopping centre that melds mostly fashion retail and leisure in the shape of dining, a hotel and a cinema as well as a high-rise office block.

On the face of it, calling the centre a concept mall therefore raises the ques-

BIKINI BERLIN

Opened The mall has "opened gradually since autumn 2013"

Number of floors Three

Developer Bayerische Hausbau

Architect Hild und K

Ambience Alternative

Standout feature

The view into Berlin Zoo



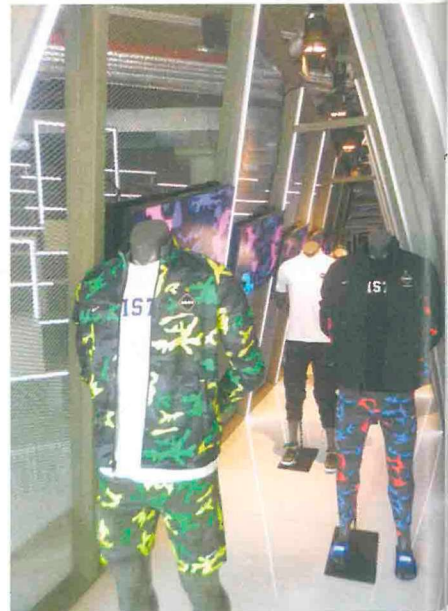
tion: what makes it different? Most shopping centres emerging from the development pipeline these days mix leisure, office or residential and retail with a hotel or two thrown in for good measure.

Yet there really is a difference about this scheme, on the retail side of things at least.

Walk in from the west end of the centre and you are in the 'Bikini Pool'. This is a 35,500 sq ft space on the ground floor that has shops around the perimeter and 19 mid-mall 'boxes'.

These are open-sided unfinished timber affairs and are home to a wide variety of short-term tenants. It is tantamount to being a pop-up mall, a little akin to Shoreditch's Boxpark, the difference in this instance being that it is contained within a shopping centre.

Oddly the pop-ups serve to grab the





The former residential building in west Berlin has been redeveloped into a retail-leisure mall with a large roof garden, pop-ups, a fashionista offer and view into Berlin Zoo





attention in a way that the permanent tenants do not and although there is a branch of German supermarket perennial Kaiser's close to the entrance it would be easy to miss it, given the brightly coloured, quirky and designed nature of most of the products that are on view in the pop-up units.

This end of the centre is also where the Supernova space/shop is located.

This really is a concept store, inasmuch as it is intended to be a "laboratory and playground for new trends". Stripping out the hyperbole, this means a street-facing unit that houses different brands, at present mostly sportswear, and where the emphasis seems to be as much on the visual merchandising as on the merchandise.



A cutting-edge fashion offer sits alongside food and homewares stores

Alternative and aspirational

The rest of the Bikini ground floor is about branded offers, familiar and unfamiliar, where names such as Carhartt and Gant jostle for position with local acts including Drei, the German offer from mobile phone network Three, and Teufel/Raumfeld, a retailer of high-end audio equipment.

The point perhaps is the high-end bit. With the exception of Cyberport, the ground floor anchor selling mid-market electricals ranging from TVs to white goods, this floor is almost entirely about aspirational fashion.

It is also about the 'alternative', a trait that is common to the way many people think of east Berlin, but not to this part of the city's more conservative western reaches.

Bikini Berlin, in terms both of its offer and architecture, is certainly not standard and does have much in common with east London in this respect.

And if the attractions of the ground floor pall, there is always the window. This massive piece of plate glass allows

shoppers to stare at the baboons and to watch the males keeping a close eye on their harems. It's an unusual distraction for a shopping centre and does add to the overall attraction of the interior, making it feel more in touch with the outside world, in spite of the multiple green-painted steel beams that are in view throughout.

So to the gallery level, aka the first floor, which has units that run around the perimeter and is, for the most part, about art displays and fashion brands that all but the most diehard fashion victims will not have heard of.

There is a distinctly secondary feel above this part of the centre and a number of units are empty. That said, it is an interesting prelude to the stairs that lead up to the garden on the roof.

Here, shoppers with time on their hands and a little money to spare can eat in the upmarket cafe space dubbed 'СУПЕРМАРКЕТ' ('supermarket' in Cyrillic...) or maybe buy an outside print of the Berlin metro system, among other things. There is also the



Gestalten Pavilion, an offshoot of an art bookshop in the city's Mitte district. The rest of the area facing the garden, for which read a roof that has plants on various parts of it, has more fashion stores and seating to allow shoppers to enjoy the warmth of the Berlin summer.

After which, the well-heeled concept shopper can head off to the 25hours hotel, a 'boutique' affair, or just make for the more normal environs of the big department stores, KdW and Peek & Cloppenburg among them, or the brand new Uniqlo, all of which are nearby.

The right concept

The question is whether this really is concept shopping and whether Bikini's call to "shop different" is in fact a reality? The answer must be a highly qualified yes.

It is certainly different in terms of shape and tenant mix, but does this mean a scheme that will take money and from which Bayerische Hausbau will be able to exact a decent yield or sell at some future point?

If the normal occupancy rates for a new city centre shopping mall, which frequently run north of 85%, are anything to go by then this one may struggle initially.

It is, however, almost entirely in keeping with the zeitgeist in Berlin and so looks a reasonable long-term bet.

It is also fair to remark that it was almost entirely devoid of shoppers on the day of visiting. But then so was everywhere else as at that point – Germany was busy hammering Portugal 4-0 in the opening match of its World Cup campaign.

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