

COLLECTOR'S
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THE GOLD STANDARD

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WHAT'S HOT FOR 2015

THE DESTINATIONS, PEOPLE & TRENDS CAUSING A BUZZ THIS YEAR

SOMEWHERE FOR THE WEEKEND? FRANKFURT

The Beatles went to Hamburg and Kennedy went to Berlin, but only merchant bankers came to this Germany city. Now it's right on the money as young designers rethink the scene

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The Plank Café-Bar-Studio in the Bahnhofsviertel area of Frankfurt, owned by local DJ Ata Marcias

JUST BEHIND the train station, in a small studio, Esther and Dimitrios Tsatsas are busy making the most beautiful handbags you've ever seen: strikingly minimal designs, precisely proportioned in an unfussy palette of black, navy and putty greys. 'Will this matter a year from now?' reads a memo on the wall. They ship their leather bags to Amsterdam, New York and Dalston, but if you find your way to their front door you can buy one from them in person.

'It was our aim to have a very contemporary look,' says Dimitrios. He could be talking about his hometown. A New World city in the heart of old Europe, it is famous for its banks and skyscrapers and for many who come here this is just a business destination. But beneath the high-rise offices, in little ateliers like Tsatsas, a quiet revolution is taking place.

People tend to look a bit surprised when I tell them Frankfurt is one of my favourite cities. Unlike Berlin or Hamburg, Frankfurt has never been remotely trendy. It's always been a bit unfashionable, not try-hard, and that's exactly what I like about it. It's the financial centre of the Eurozone, but on a Saturday morning it's like a quaint market town. There are green hills on the horizon. The River Main is never far away.

I first came here 20 years ago with my now-wife Sophie. We were only passing through, like most people, but Sophie had a friend in Frankfurt, so we stayed for a few days. After all we'd heard about the city being dull and dreary (mainly from jealous Germans who we assumed couldn't afford to live here), we were amazed at what we found. Yes, the main boulevards were bland and corporate, but the side streets were full of quirky shops and cafés. Nobody we knew had ever raved about it. It felt like our own secret discovery. I've been back several times since, and I like it more and more. Now I was here to track

down Frankfurt's new generation of designers, young creatives who are part of a dynamic movement that's changing the face of this sedate city.

Hanna Ernsting makes funky chairs and footstools just around the corner from Tsatsas. We go to **Café Plank** – a spartan, charcoal-grey space owned by Frankfurt DJ Ata Marcias, with the best coffee in town – and grab a takeout before heading back to her studio to see her work. Studios like Hanna's are helping revive the Bahnhofsviertel, a once rundown area around the station. It's still an edgy red-light district, but it isn't only about sex shops and kebab shops anymore. 'There are so many nationalities living here now,' says Hanna, enthusiastically. And there's a creative rush that comes from being at the confluence of so many diverse cultures.

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For many, Frankfurt is the gateway to Europe. Germany's biggest airport is barely 15 minutes away by train. Although it has all the trappings of a capital, it's incredibly compact. The trams run like clockwork. Within the city centre you can get to virtually anywhere on foot or bike.

Frankfurt has always been a merchant city rather than an imperial capital. The closest thing it has to a palace is the **Römer**, the medieval town hall. This is one of the few remnants of the ancient Altstadt, which was flattened by Allied bombers during World War II. The Altstadt was rebuilt in modern style, with few concessions to its former glories. So if you're looking for romantic architecture, you've come to the wrong city. However the high-rise skyline is thrilling (not for nothing is Frankfurt nicknamed Mainhattan), and beyond the centre are rows and rows of handsome

Jugendstil (Teutonic Art Nouveau) villas. The city isn't full of must-see sights but it's a very pleasing place to wander. 'The best inspiration is a blank page,' reads a sign in a shop window. After the war, Frankfurt was a blank page, but since then it has been remade.

The prettiest part of town remains Sachsenhausen, on the south bank of the River Main. Frankfurt's vast array of galleries would flatter a place twice its size, and Sachsenhausen is home to several of the finest museums, including the **Stadel**, with its brilliant art collection – all the big international names, plus a stunning array of German artists, from Old Masters such as Dürer and Cranach right through to Georg Baselitz and Gerhard Richter. There's more modern art in the **Museum der Moderne Kunst** across the river, including some

bold paintings by American artists including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. The building, by Austrian architect Hans Hollein, is an artwork in its own right. Built out of bright red sandstone, on a narrow triangular plot, it has been nicknamed the Tortenstück – the slice of cake.

It's not just the design scene that has been reinvigorated; Frankfurt's restaurants and bars are thriving, too. Back in the red-light district, **Maxie Eisen** is a buzzy bar with a speakeasy vibe – slide through the secret door at the back to find the cocktail den with its glossy red bar. By day there's bottled beer and delicious pastrami sandwiches. With its locally sourced comfort food (hot Mettwurst sausage; a honey, sesame seed and goat's cheese salad) and hip-yet-homely decor, **Margarete** is a great spot for lunch, while **Heimat** is a modernist gem where

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Left to right: the e15 furniture showroom; James Ardinast in his Maxie Eisen bar, and the bar's daytime bistro section; Margarete restaurant, which reinvents regional favourites



EVERYTHING ADHERES TO THE BAUHAUS PRINCIPLE OF FORM OVER FUNCTION

the food is just as special – classic European with a contemporary twist and matched to some delicate German wines. The menu is short and constantly changing, with the focus on quality not novelty. I can understand why resident chef Gregor Nowak is a rising star.

To stay in the very heart of it, head for the swanky **Jumeirah** (doubles from about £170), set in a sleek, 25-storey tower with twinkly cityscape views and a sublime spa. It's a big-name brand but there are some neat local touches, such as original German artworks throughout and yummy honey from the beehives on the roof.

Far more homely is **Lindenberg** (doubles from about £80), a tram ride away in the Ostend district. It's an apartment-hotel in a historic townhouse, and every room is unique and decorated in avant-garde style: Eames chairs are mixed with kitschy lampshades; a map chest has been turned into a mini sink-and-stove kitchenette; bold art hangs beneath

original mouldings. There's even a private cinema in the basement.

On my last day I head out into the suburbs, where Farah Ebrahimi runs furniture and architecture firm **e15** with her husband Philipp Mainzer. Their warehouse showroom is full of timeless designs. Everything in here adheres to the Bauhaus principle of form follows function. It is all perfectly practical and extremely easy on the eye. An Iranian who moved here from the USA, Farah encapsulates Frankfurt's internationalism, and so does this collection. 'It's more than just furniture – it's about travelling, it's about experimenting,' she tells me. 'We're very comfortable with mixing periods and pieces from different cultures.'

Frankfurt has always been a meeting place for people and ideas, but thanks to innovative outfits such as e15, it's become far more cosmopolitan.

After lunch I meet another young product designer, Sebastian Herkner, in the Offenbach district. Like many of the

creatives I met, he studied at Offenbach's prestigious University of Art & Design. He drives me to **Morgen**, a warehouse showroom in the industrial harbour quarter. 'It's an authentic and special place here, with a beautiful view,' says Sebastian. 'It's definitely an up-and-coming area.'

Sebastian's graceful glass lamps are on show here, surrounded by some very smart furniture, but Morgen isn't just a shop. It's also an artistic hub. Leading German artist Tobias Rehberger has a studio in this building. The downstairs storeroom doubles as an ad hoc dancehall. This dockside district is ripe for redevelopment, and Morgen is a catalyst. Here you can see how young designers like Sebastian are driving the regeneration of the city limits. 'The place has changed a lot,' says Sebastian. 'Now it's much more colourful.' I hate to admit it, but I fear Frankfurt might actually be becoming fashionable at last.

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Nina Hollein has lived in Frankfurt since 2001 and designs her own label of women's and children's clothes, sold in her boutique in Sachsenhausen, Frankfurt's Left Bank

THE INSIDE TRACK

'Before I moved here the picture I had of Frankfurt was a big financial metropolis with lots of skyscrapers. When we arrived, I realised that it's more like a village. That surprised me. Now I'm a huge fan. It's a very open-minded city, very international. It has a very positive mentality. I like all the cultural institutions here: the **Museum of Applied Art** (MAK) is great, and the **Museum of Modern Art**, of course. On Sundays I jog along the River Main, which is beautiful. There's a lot of places to stop and eat, such as **Restaurant Emma Metzler** in MAK, by the park, or **Restaurant Gerbermühle** for traditional Frankfurt food such as potato soup and marinated cheese. In summer it's perfect. There's a small café at the

Liebieghaus sculpture gallery (with the rather straightforward name of **Café im Liebieghaus**), which feels very hidden and romantic. I love to go there alone and order a coffee. The city's cool clubs and bars include **Club Michel** and **Neglected Grassland** (run by Frankfurt scenester Hans Romanov), and even in hip places the people are very friendly. The **Sachsenhausen** district has several museums, and attracts designers with their own labels as well as a load of artists – you always see the same faces. **Brückenstrasse** is home to small fashion shops, one after the other – a few of my favourites are **Ich War Ein Dirndl** (for Fairtrade chic), **Freud** (where everything has dots on) and **Peggy Sue** (for the rockabilly vibe). This is the alternative Frankfurt scene.'