

The Frequency Was Right

„We liked each other from the start“: The project developers at Trockland are teaming up with several renowned architectural firms. In Berlin-Oberschöneweide, the Funkytown community quarter is being developed, with the backbone being the former editorial office building of Berliner Rundfunk. A site visit

CHRISTINA BYLOW (TEXT) AND THOMAS MEYER/OSTKREUZ (PHOTOS)



A good team: Project manager Barbara Sellwig and architect Hannes Meisehen praise their harmonious collaboration.



The concrete builders have left their signatures. Letters, numbers, and, repeatedly, the year of construction, 1964, carved into the wet concrete. After that, the floor plates disappeared beneath layers of screed and linoleum. Now, they have been uncovered, freshly sandblasted, just like the walls, columns, and ceilings made of light, grainy concrete.

It was poured into steel mesh or assembled as prefabricated parts; in some places, bent iron pieces protrude like loops. Faint light pours through the empty window openings. Graffiti repeatedly appears on the long stretches of concrete walls. For example, an expressive black-and-white portrait of Rudi Dutschke, inscribed with the dedication „For Rudi D.“ Some graffiti will remain. The concrete will stay too. Cleared of all deposits and traces of neglect and vandalism, it now shows its substance.

Concrete restoration will begin soon, the next step in the complex process of a late revival. For more than 30 years, the five-story reinforced concrete skeleton building with its grid facade stood abandoned, slowly decaying on a plot along Rummelsburger Landstraße in Berlin-Oberschöneweide.

A deserted colossus, overshadowed by the nearby garden colony „Am Wilhelmstrand,“ which had been there long before, and which has nothing to fear in the future. At its feet crouch white, bungalow-like buildings; one of them houses a recording studio, and the adjoining garden with a caravan and grill resembles a wild campsite. Nature is growing wildly around, reclaiming the decaying building conglomerate. Strolling here feels like stepping back into the 1990s, into an in-between world of chaos, emptiness, and new beginnings. The metropolis frays at its edges, with holes and gaps. That is about to change.

The building, stripped to its bones, was once the editorial office of the Berliner Rundfunk, which was shut down in late 1991, with more than 300 people working there. The concrete slab building has always been overshadowed by its glamorous neighbor, the Funkhaus on Nalepastraße, built in 1952 by Franz Ehrlich, a listed brick building ensemble located right on the Spree.

After multiple changes in ownership, it is now privately owned. Inside, it houses one of the best recording studios in the world. The Block E-R, as the editorial building was known, cannot boast such advantages. However, demolition was never an option. And not just because demolitions are anything but sustainable. „We always try to preserve existing buildings,“ says Barbara Sellwig, Senior Project Manager at Trockland.

Still an emotional place

The Berlin-based real estate developer bought the site in 2022. „The history of the place helps us develop the new,“ says Sellwig. „Apart from that, we would have felt very uncomfortable just taking away this piece of history, and taking it away from the



It could be something great: A model drawing shows that a terrace on the site will offer a grand view of the former broadcasting house.

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people who once worked here. They still come by.“ Block E-R is now called Block E and is the backbone of a new district: Funkytown. „Funky“ from Funk, and this is not referring to the music genre, of course.

We are on the fourth floor, once the seat of the youth radio station DT64. Its closure, accompanied by fierce protests, was documented by some of the editors and presenters themselves. As witnesses to history, some of them are now in discussions with the current owner about a place where only the shell remains, marked by protest symbols from various eras. „Fuck AfD!“ is also part of it. „It’s still an emotional place,“ says Barbara Sellwig.

The former owner, Fortress Immobilien from Düsseldorf, had different plans for the property: car dealerships, car washes, and other uses typical for historic industrial areas. But none of that came to fruition. The architectural firm KSP Engel, which was originally hired, would have been part of the package but could have been separated by Trockland, which did not happen. „We liked each other from the start,“ says Hannes Meisehen, architect and head of the Berlin office of KSP Engel.



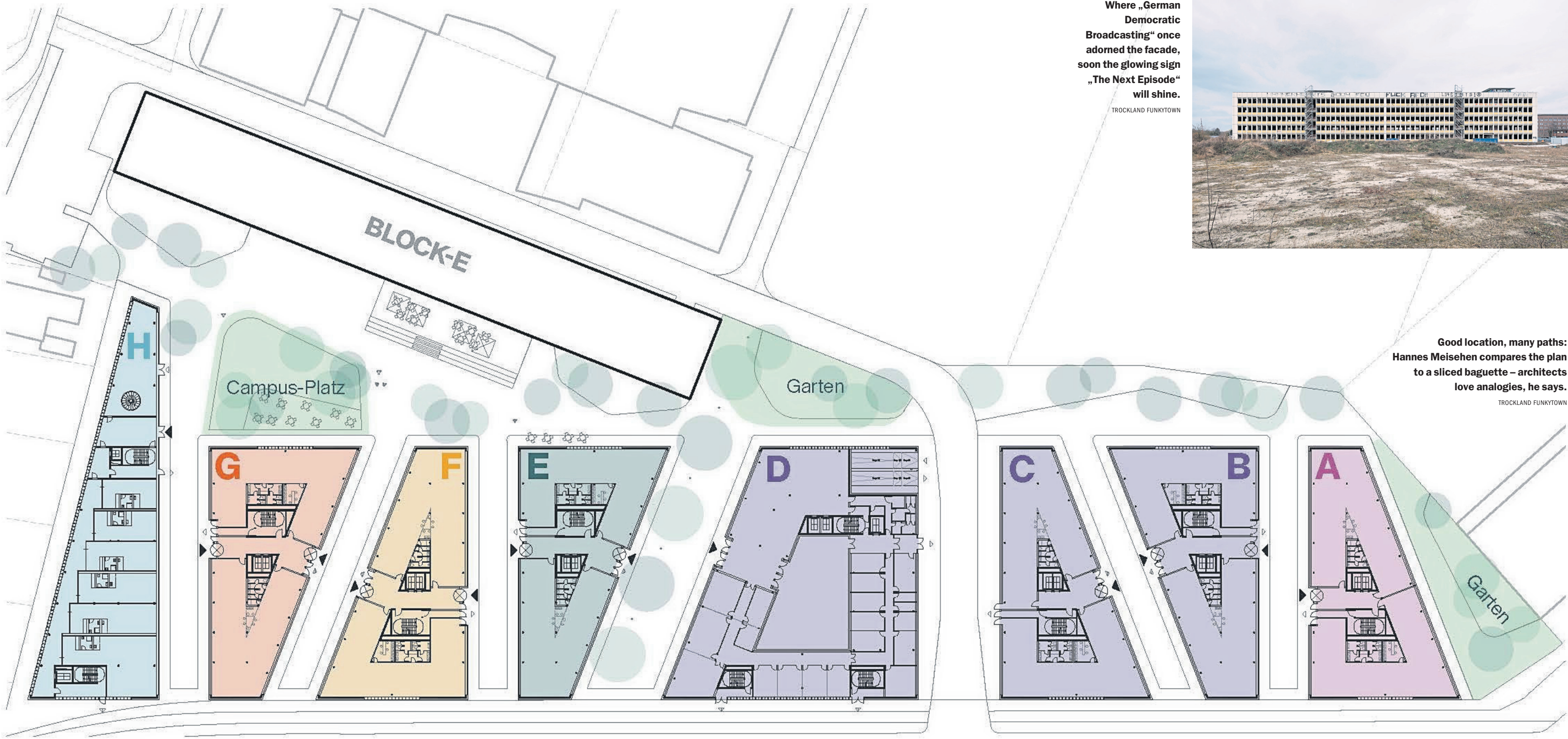
New Episode: Where „German Democratic Broadcasting“ once adorned the facade, soon the glowing sign „The Next Episode“ will shine.

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Good location, many paths: Hannes Meisehen compares the plan to a sliced baguette – architects love analogies, he says.

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Coming soon: Where Sellwig and Meisehen now stand in barren concrete halls, sprawling lounge areas will soon invite people to linger.

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list enemy. The distance to the street was also due to constant readiness for attack. Nothing remains of the tiled „Sockelklaus“, the building’s own pub in the basement, nor of the two paternoster elevators. New elevators will be installed, one for each rental unit. The 1,600-square-meter floors will be divided into units of up to 400 square meters for fire safety reasons.

Half of the units have already been rented: a social counseling facility, a physiotherapy practice, a dog daycare in the ground and basement floors, and Trockland is in negotiations with other tenants. There will be gastronomy on the roof and on the ground floor, as well as workshops and studios. The entire complex, including the new buildings, will cover 50,000 square meters and is expected to be completed by 2028.

Change of Scene: The white construction container at the edge of the site is preheated, and visualizations of the future Funkytown are hanging on the walls. The contrast between the current state and the imagined future world could not be greater: a rooftop terrace with wooden planks, bathed in warm light, spacious cushioned landscapes

in the concrete shell. Young people engaged in relaxed activity. On the roof, in large letters, the inscription „the next episode“ shines. Over 30 years ago, „Deutscher Demokratischer Rundfunk“ stood almost in the same place, with the broadcasting Berlin Bear logo visible on the roof. Later, the symbol was carelessly discarded into the bushes. The images overlap.

No lack of life there

Colorful like pie slices are the „Stations“ in the visualizations. Sometimes more, sometimes less trapezoidal, they form an airy line between the existing building and the street. Not all are of equal height, creating a slight wave. The colors belong to the brand and have nothing to do with the actual buildings. However, the shape is predetermined and was developed in consultation with the district regarding the subdivision of the land. The new buildings should not overshadow the existing building.

But how do you react to a block without simply placing another block in front of it? Hannes Meisehen uses the image of a baguette cut into pieces: „Architects always like to work with analogies during the conceptual phase.“ Between the individual „Stations,“ there will be gaps, paths. This will also change the view of the existing building. „We cut through the block through sight axes. With this, we want to create relationships, also with the Funkhaus,“ says Meisehen. Planners speak



of „through movement,“ aiming to create connections. There is no longer an inside or outside.

The entire area will be freely accessible. „We reject gated communities,“ says Barbara Sellwig. But what will the community that inhabits Funkytown be like? There will be no apartments here, as the development plan does not allow for them. Additionally, large residential complexes have been built on the other side of Rummelsburger Landstraße in recent years. In three of the „Stations,“ there will be „accommodation,“ and this in three different forms: a hostel, a hotel, and serviced apartments for guests who stay no longer than three months. With the lively event, education, and concert activities at the nearby Funkhaus Berlin, Funkytown will not be eerily quiet in the evenings. Especially since, in the future, an electric ferry will shuttle between the landing stage at Funkhaus and the Eastside Gallery.

The water so close – why is the Spree always forgotten as a road? Rotterdam, Hamburg, Venice! All role models that are brought up at the big table in the container. At Trockland, there is a rowing team, says Barbara Sellwig. „At least once a week, we row past our project.“