



Few conversions can be as surprising as the one undertaken by Juerg Judin in Berlin. The art dealer has transformed 'box' – all set amid a garden inspired by Chinese philosophy. Fuelled with enthusiasm, Jane Neal praises what



Shell Shock

a derelict 1950s Shell garage into a Modernist living space, glass-walled gallery and bright-red bath is now the sole free-standing private dwelling in the heart of the capital. Photography: Simon Upton



Previous pages: the bold architectural form of the petrol station's canopy is softened by the arching boughs of a pine tree. This page, clockwise from top left: Judin sourced nine 50-year-old pine trees to match the building's age; sliding doors from the living area open to a courtyard; a 1950s one-off chandelier designed by Elsässer & May for the Palmengarten ballroom in Frankfurt hangs above an original Knoll table and chairs; drawings by George Grosz line the left-hand wall. The white staircase leads up to the gallery. Opposite: once the Shell mechanics' workshop, the kitchen features another 1950s classic, Saarinen's 'Tulip Ensemble'





This page, clockwise from top left: for the house's walls, Judin employed Le Corbusier's recently rediscovered polychrome scheme – a palette of colours that are compatible whatever their shade or tone. Grosz's important drawing *The Unemployed* (1924) can be seen beyond Adrian Ghenie's *Untitled* (2002); this bright-red box houses the bathroom; the interior is tiled with a custom-made mosaic – what Judin terms a 'Bisazza bonanza'; a kitchen garden of herbs can be seen from the 'bath box'. Opposite: appearing like a Christmas present from the back, the block has a window that makes it look like a giant letterbox from the front





This page, clockwise from top left: Judin's floor-to-ceiling library of art books leads the eye towards the south side of the garden; a painting – *The Wall* (2008) – by young Romanian artist Adrian Chenie overlooks a Knoll suite in the living area; the former petrol pumps' canopy – whose struts have been repainted Shell red – now serves as protection for alfresco dining; the water feature is here seen from Judin's bedroom. Opposite: the fluid drawing above the bed – an MDF design – is by the Swiss/Italian artist Loredana Sperini. The solid-walnut stool, which here functions as a bedside table, was originally designed by Eames in 1960





Known as 'lovely Juerg' to his friends, charmingly convivial art dealer Juerg Judin is renowned for the fabulous dinners he cooks on his gallery's opening nights. Now he's attracting attention for a very different reason: his highly unusual, spectacular new home – a converted petrol station in Berlin, in the heart of Schöneberg. Originally a typical 1950s Shell garage, complete with forecourt, petrol tanks and mechanics' workshop, the building has been out of use since the mid-1980s. The battered 'for sale' sign has invited many possible owners, with ideas for its transformation ranging from a bicycle dealership to an oyster bar.

These ideas came to nothing when the interested parties were scared off by the daunting prospect of decontaminating the property. But having undertaken an industrial-to-domestic conversion project for a former home in his native Zurich, Judin wasn't fazed. 'The results,' he says, 'were a positive surprise, revealing there to be almost no contamination.' This, however, was only the first hurdle, as there was no planning permission for the property's conversion.

The petrol station is the only free-standing private residence in central Berlin, and the only low-rise building in Bülowstraße – a continuation of the famous Kurfürstendamm, a boulevard filled with substantial 19th-century properties. To make a feature of such a building would, according to the city planning office, be like 'having a row of teeth with one tooth missing'. But Judin was not prepared to give up hope: 'I decided

to apply for permission to build a temporary structure for seven years, hoping that, in the meantime, the plans I developed would prove so enticing they might win over the authorities.' He laughs mischievously. 'My patience paid off.'

Judin used two firms of architects for his ambitious venture: BFS Design and Thomas Brakel Architects. BFS is as well known for its furniture design as for its architecture, while Brakel had considerable experience dealing with historic buildings. Both practices have a classical approach: minimal Modernism combined with practical innovation. The project has undergone several phases and complete changes as Judin deliberated about what he wanted the building to 'be' and to incorporate: domestic living, artist's studio, public gallery, garden. In short, he wanted total flexibility. 'The purpose of the conversion was to provide a home for a single male art dealer,' he says, 'someone passionate about art, entertaining and gardening. But I also wanted the property to be a place that would provide a potential future home for all sorts of people – singles, couples and families from all walks of life.' This is particularly important for Judin, as the petrol station is a landmark in the midst of a socially and culturally diverse neighbourhood in the process of regeneration.

The structure covers 90sq m and features both the original round glass windows and the canopy that once covered the petrol pumps – the latter's supports restored to their original Shell red. Each original feature on the outside has been reno-

At night, the exterior is illuminated. The double-height glass-walled gallery space on the first floor is transformed into a mesmerising pillar of blue light. This reflects off the surface of the water feature, which itself contains strategically placed uplights to catch the frolicking carp and create silhouettes of the water lilies



vated to its former glory – including the tiles. Inside, the property boasts an impressive kitchen built by Kuchenmeister, a firm that specialises in fitting cruise ships, with a central island where the car lift in the old mechanics' workshop used to be.

Two new buildings have been added, the first and largest containing the striking gallery space. At 120sq m, the gallery features a 22m-long, 4m-high wall. The façade facing it is all glass, formed from 5m panels. During the day, the light is completely natural; at night it is spectacularly lit. Its two stories also contain a basement that houses Judin's wine cellar. The bathroom is in the second of the new buildings: a Shell-red, free-standing cube – literally a 'bath box' – that resembles a giant Christmas present. Its interior is no less surprising, with a bespoke Bisazza stone mosaic and a bath big enough for five. Running through the three spaces is a sophisticated underfloor heating and cooling system, which meets EU energy standards.

While the transformation of the building has been nothing short of miraculous, the garden rivals it for sheer visual pleasure. Designed by Swiss landscape-artist Guido Hager, it provides a blissful oasis in the heart of one of Berlin's most urban quarters, and is entered via a steel bridge that crosses a lily-filled 18m stretch of water, lit from below. The garden was inspired by a Chinese principle known as 'the three friends in winter': the pine tree that carries the snow, the evergreen bamboo that symbolises eternal life and the Chinese apricot – the year's first flower to bloom. Yellow and white predominate, complement-

ing the Shell-red walls and shiny 1950s tiles; and the elaborate planting scheme ensures something is blooming all year round. The pine tree holds particular importance. 'As the local tree of the Brandenburg area, it provided the starting point,' says Judin, 'and not a little work in terms of planning. Guido and I searched far and wide for trees to match the age of the building. Eventually we found a nursery in northwest Germany that could supply us with nine 50-year-old trees.' Their transportation proved nothing short of a logistical marvel – involving a police escort through Berlin and culminating in the trees being craned into position.

But if the garden is a calm oasis, the building itself is a source of inspiration and energy – not least to the contemporary artists represented by Judin. Painters Adrian Ghenie, Uwe Wittwer and Alex Ross were inspired by the architecture to make works that are now hung on the walls for maximum impact. Aside from capturing their imagination, the stunning new focal point of Schöneberg has attracted film, music and fashion stars wanting to use the site in productions and shoots.

Judin's petrol-station conversion is a remarkable, ground-breaking property. With its glass-walled gallery space that becomes a light box at night, the semi-public building seems a beacon of hope – testimony not only to the skill of those who worked on it, but also to the vision of its proud new owner ■ Nolan Judin's main gallery is at 50 Heidestraße, 10557 Berlin (00 49 30 21 91 58 50; nolan-judin.com)

Walking through the entrance gate at night, the visitor confronts the original building with its curved-glass windows framed by Brandenburg pine trees, which lend privacy to the property. The central island of the industrial-style kitchen sits in the same position as the car lift once did, when the space was a mechanics' workshop