

MANUEL ROY



SECRET POTSDAM



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

VILLA KOCH FAÇADES

⑫

Characters in the spotlight

Jägerallee 28–29 and Weinbergstraße 41–43
S7 Potsdam Hauptbahnhof + bus 695 (stop: Jägertor / Justizzentrum)

Of the countless contributions to Potsdam made by Friedrich Wilhelm Koch, stucco decoration expert, perhaps the most stunning is Villa Koch. The mansion stands at the corner of Jägerallee and Weinbergstraße, where the factory workshops were also located.

On the Jägerallee side, the carved heads under each of the first-floor

windows represent Otto von Bismarck, the German chancellor who masterminded the 1870 war with France – in which Koch's son perished on the battlefield.

Tribute is also paid to the young Friedrich Koch above the balcony window, featuring his helmeted head topped by a dove (symbol of love and resurrection) and surrounded by cannons bizarrely firing heart-shaped shells ... The scene is crowned with a beehive, on either side of which is the motto *Ihrem Fleisse. Die Zukunft.* (To their Ardour. The Future). In other words, 'The future they have built here pays tribute to their ardour.'

This motto, illustrated by the example of bees which work tirelessly



and cooperate for the greater good in the conservation and success of the colony, is an implicit reference to the sacrifice of men who died in battle for the safeguarding and prosperity of the homeland.

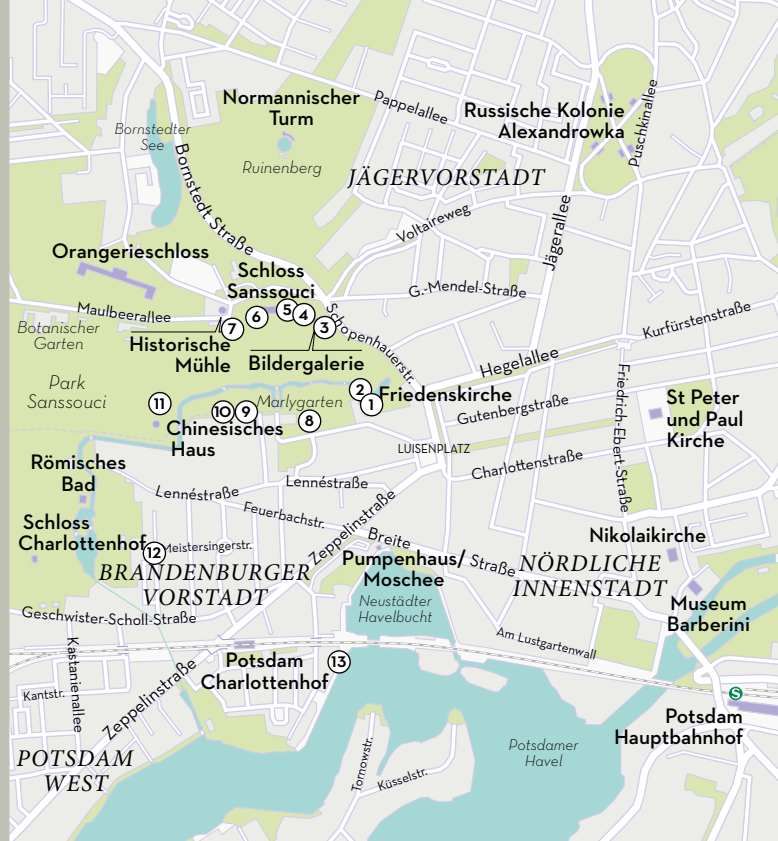
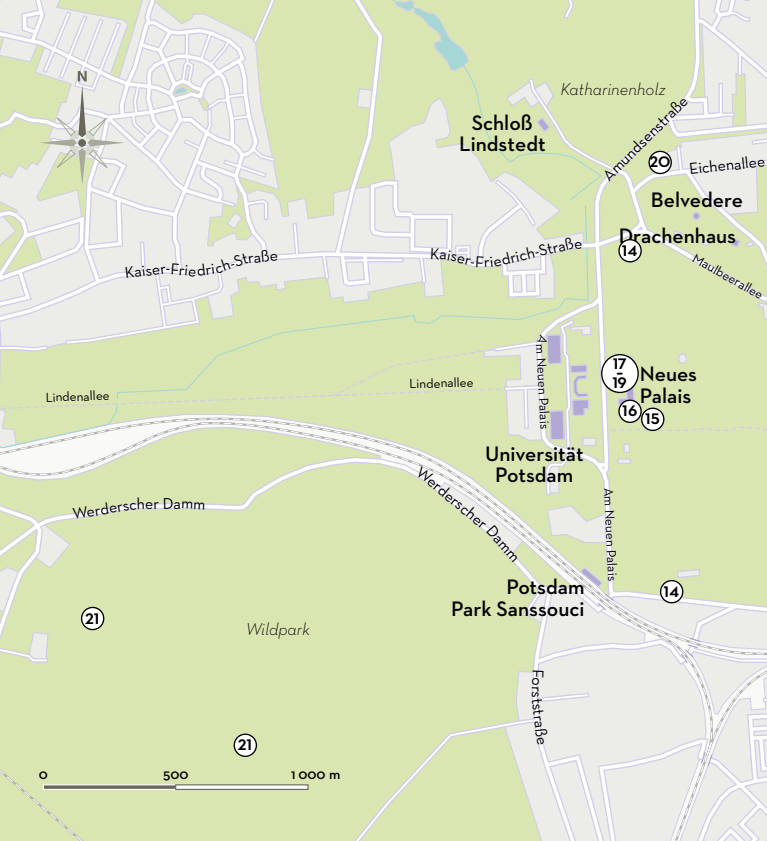
The beehive, a typical Masonic symbol, could also signify Friedrich Wilhelm Koch's being a Freemason. The hammer and compasses on either side of the motto seem to bear this out (these tools are part of the traditional symbols of the trades of mason and stonemason).

Koch, who was particularly admired for his talents as a stucco artist by Frederick William IV, worked regularly at Sanssouci during the Prussian king's reign (1840–61). He erected an apt monument to the sovereign above the magnificent balcony of the Weinbergstraße, an almost life-size standing figure. The statue is flanked by two female figures, the

first carrying a sword in the shape of a cross, the other wearing a crown: Christian symbols representing the reward (crown) promised in heaven to those who in this life have selflessly followed the example of Christ (cross).

The three cannons near the carved heads under the Jägerallee windows are thought to symbolise the three so-called 'unification' wars (hence the hearts emerging from them). These wars, orchestrated by Bismarck against Denmark, Austria and France respectively between 1864 and 1871, led to Prussian hegemony in Germany.





Sanssouci

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SPIDER'S WEB IN SANSSOUCI ⑤ MUSIC ROOM

A symbol of patient labour rather than proud genius

Schloss Sanssouci

Maulbeerallee

Winter (Nov–March): Tues–Fri 10am–4.30pm

Summer (April–Oct): Tues–Fri 9am–5.30pm

Reservations recommended: spsg.de/schloesser-gaerten/objekt/schloss-sanssouci
S7 Potsdam Hauptbahnhof + bus 695 (stop: Schloss Sanssouci)



The music room of Sanssouci Palace has a striking ceiling decoration. Above the chandelier, where a rosette might usually be, a network of golden threads unfolds like a fine spider's web. By an extraordinary game of *trompe-l'œil*, all the gilding of walls and ceiling seems to be attached to it, as if the entire room were magically hung there.

Frederick II, who was a great music lover, played the transverse (side-blown) flute magnificently and composed no fewer than 125 concertos, many of which are still performed today. A genius? The spider's web suggests, on the contrary, that the marvels that have come to light in this room are down to patiently labouring like a spider. Frederick practised the flute regularly, up to four hours a day. With this remarkable decor, is he warning against arrogance?

The philosopher king lays this on thickly in his poem *Sur la fermeté et la croyance* (On firmness and belief), which also uses the spider metaphor:

Inflexibility succeeds in the arts.

In vain you applaud your vast genius,

If you're not patient, Apollo will deny you.

[...]

This prized Petrini, whose diligent fingers

Form those sweet chords that caress your senses,

And whose hand grasping his harp seems like

A spider actively weaving its web,

This melodious tone of love,

Is not just a day's work for Petrini.

A thousand difficulties were faced;

With renewed care his fingers relaxed.



VILLA SCHÖNINGEN'S STARRY SKY

①

A reference to Schinkel's Masonic setting for The Magic Flute

Berliner Straße 86

Café: Fri-Sun 11am-6pm

Expo: Fri-Sun midday-6pm

S7 Potsdam Hauptbahnhof + tram 93 (stop: Glienicker Brücke)

The stairwell leading to the exhibition space in Villa Schöningen is discreetly decorated with a multitude of golden stars on a white background, plus a midnight-blue niche containing a bust of the great Prussian architect, Friedrich Schinkel.



This starry ceiling, which is on the original plans, pays tribute to him. The designer of Villa Schöningen, Ludwig Persius, was one of Schinkel's most eminent disciples. The design evokes Schinkel's most striking work which, strangely enough, wasn't a building but part of his set for a staging of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in 1815. The starry sky of the Queen of the Night introduced a new dimension to understanding this opera, which is studded with symbols and messages linked to Freemasonry.

In this famous decor a goddess appears, crowned with stars, dressed in blue and standing on a crescent moon. According to the traditional Masonic interpretation, this 'Queen of the Night' embodies the goddess Isis. Schinkel's personal contribution, staged almost 25 years after the first performance of *The Magic Flute* in 1791, was to offer an alternative interpretation of the identity of this central character in Mozart's opera. He implied that this was not the goddess Isis but her mother.

The European public, in the grip of the Egyptomania that followed Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign, saw a reference to the goddess Nut in the midnight-blue starry sky. The Egyptian deity of the Vault of Heaven was often represented arched above the Earth with a blue body scattered with yellow stars (or, conversely, a starry golden body on a blue background).

In mythology Nut, together with her husband Geb (god of the Earth), gave birth to five children, including Isis and Osiris, through whom she hoped to rule.

For more on *The Magic Flute* and Freemasonry, see following double page spread.

At No. 10 Am Bassin, a commemorative plaque above the door recalls that Mozart passed through Potsdam in April 1789. In search of a job with King Frederick William II of Prussia, he stayed for a few days with Waldhornist (horn-blower) Karl Türschmidt, who lived somewhere in the Bassinplatz – exact address unknown.

Midnight-blue starry ceiling of Museumsinsel metro

In the centre of Berlin, Museumsinsel metro station, opened in July 2021, also has a midnight-blue ceiling studded with stars.

PINEAPPLE FROM THE CHINESE ⑭ PARASOL OF NEUER GARTEN

In the 18th century a pineapple, speciality of Potsdam greenhouses, was worth as much as a horse

Neuer Garten
Alleestraße 10
S7 Potsdam Hauptbahnhof and tram 92 / 96 (stop: Reiterweg / Alleestraße)



The main visitor entrance to Neuer Garten (New Garden) is at the junction of Am Neuen Garten and Alleestraße. Turn left to walk along the garden fence to the north and the narrowest paths soon lead to a pretty little shelter commonly known as the Chinese Parasol. The shape of its finely worked copper roof recalls the straw hats of Asian farmers.

At the top of this parasol is a gold-plated pineapple with its green spiky leaves decorating the stand. The pineapple being a fruit of South American origin, how can this apparent contradiction be explained?

The Chinese Parasol, installed at the start of the Neuer Garten development, which began in 1787, is its oldest ornament. As the name suggests, the parasol dates back to the era of Sinomania that gripped 17th- and 18th-century European aristocracy. This passion inspired the vogue for 'chinoiserie' – decorative art objects inspired by a fantasy China, synonymous with the refined luxury associated with silk and porcelain.

Also the pineapple, grown in greenhouses in 18th-century Europe, was rare and difficult to produce. A German source dating from 1750 accords it the price of a horse.

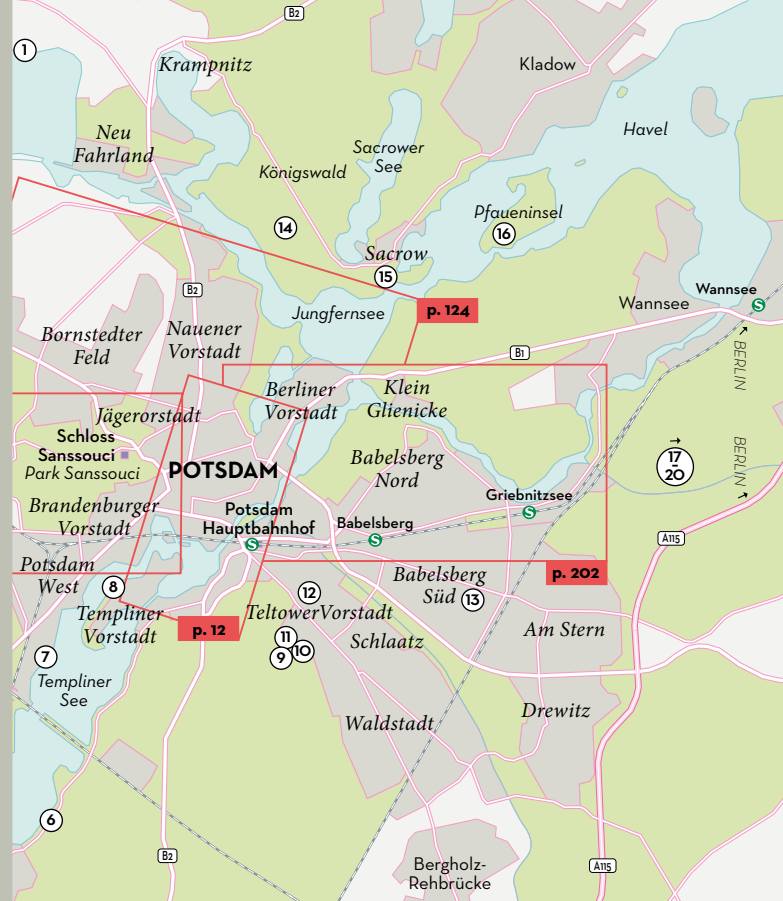
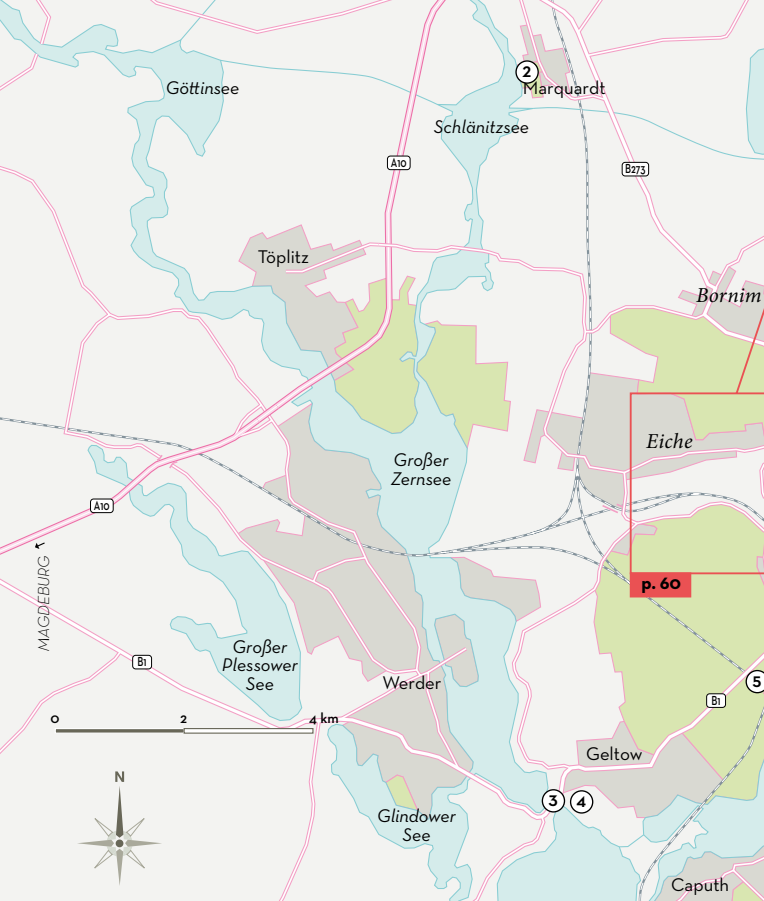
No surprise then that such a prestigious object, such a symbol of exoticism, was associated with Asia. There the fruit had been cultivated massively after being introduced by the Portuguese from Brazil as early as the end of the 16th century (Portugal occupied Macau and the current island of Taiwan for a long time).

The pineapple thus became a recurring motif in chinoiserie, as for example in the 'Pineapple Harvest' from the Beauvais tapestry series *The Story of the Emperor of China* (late 17th century).

One reason why the chinoiserie that can still be admired in Potsdam celebrates this fruit so much is probably that the greenhouse pineapple was a speciality of the city for some 150 years, even enjoying something of an international reputation.

The Potsdam pineapple cultivation initiated at Sanssouci by Frederick the Great declined towards the end of the 19th century, when the development of maritime transport reduced the price of Caribbean pineapples well below the cost of local production.

Some statues in the Chinesisches Haus (Chinese House) at Sanssouci Park also show a pineapple tasting session. The chandelier in the Jagdkammer (Hunting Lounge) of Potsdam New Palace is also decorated with a pineapple.



Outside the centre

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HOFFBAUER FOUNDATION MAINTENANCE BUILDING GATES

⑧

Tools of the maintenance workers of the Foundation's buildings

Hermannswerder, 4



On the charming Hermannswerder peninsula, not far from the water tower, few notice the magnificent wrought-iron entrance gates of the former Hoffbauer Foundation building.

In addition to the date of 1901 (see below), metallic tools are set in the centre of the sunray design of the iron gates.

Clara Hoffbauer had been involved very early in the struggle against the dangers of industrialisation and had built from 1891 to 1901 a huge educational and charitable complex on the peninsula south of Potsdam. It covers 40 hectares with about 20 buildings fulfilling various functions (hospital, orphanage, church and even a drinking-water station). The water tower is symbolic of this homogeneous architectural group characterised by the use of brick in German Gothic style.

The tools represented on the gates recall the maintenance work carried out here at the service of neighbouring establishments.

The foundation's plumbers, as well as a whole body of technicians, specialised and agricultural workers, were employed in the early 20th century to guarantee the independence of the foundation.



Hoffbauer Foundation, originator of the name Hermannswerder

When the Hoffbauer Foundation was inaugurated in 1901 by Clara Hoffbauer under the aegis of the German Lutheran Church, it had capital funds of 6 million marks and several buildings in Tornow, as Hermannswerder used to be known.

In memory of her husband Hermann, Clara Hoffbauer had Tornow renamed Hermannswerder (in German, *Werder* or *Werth* designates a river island).

Today the foundation continues its training activities and also organises social occasions, meetings, seminars and galas. A notable achievement was to set up Brandenburg's first denominational school in 1990.



TOMB OF JULIUS WISSINGER

20

An Expressionist masterpiece by Max Taut

Südwestkirchhof Stahnsdorf (Stahnsdorf South-Western Cemetery)

Bahnhofstraße 2

14532 Stahnsdorf

Brandenburg

April–Sept: 7am–8pm; Oct: 7am–6pm; Nov–Feb: 8am–5pm; March: 7am–6pm

Bus X1 (from Potsdam Hauptbahnhof) – Meisenweg



A hundred or so metres south of the chapel (Kapellenblock) of Stahnsdorf South-Western Cemetery, members of the Wissinger family are buried in the shade of a particularly striking tomb.

The memorial, built in 1922–23 based on a sketch by Berlin architect Max Taut, recalls the refined skeleton of the nave of a Gothic church. Comprising eight pillars that extend into ten pointed arches, the reinforced concrete structure forms bays that divide the gravesite into three, where the tombstones are laid.

This design by Max Taut was a contribution to Die Gläserne Kette (The Glass Chain), a community of architects in Germany in the years 1919–20 who dreamed of a utopian architecture turned towards transparency and movement ('glass' architecture).

Although they mainly designed projects without ever carrying them out, the Wissinger tomb is a notable exception. It was commissioned by Julius Wissinger and his wife Hélène, great art lovers and generous patrons, following the death of Hélène's father in 1920.

Initiated by Bruno Taut, Max's brother, the Glass Chain was a network of architects who circulated letters outlining their ideas and sketches by post. This had a determining influence on the development of German Expressionism. Philosophically it corresponds to the Nietzschean moment when the human being realises that 'God is dead', that there is no state of grace and the spirit is material in nature. This is what we see here in the work of Max Taut, who makes the sacred space (the tomb) emerge from dead matter (the volcanic stones that surround the tomb). In the same line of thought, the tomb originally held a sculpture by artist Otto Freundlich showing Golem, the man-made monster into which its creator breathed life. But even alive, it's only matter.

The Wissingers, a Berlin family who prospered in the grain and seed trade of the late 19th century, also owned a splendid warehouse, now converted, but still at Nos 5–8 Pfüelstraße in Berlin.

MANUEL ROY



SECRET

POTSDAM

A piece of the summit of Kilimanjaro at the New Palace, a swastika in Sanssouci Park, a remnant of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, the starry ceiling of a villa alluding to the Masonic setting of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, a spectacular Expressionist tomb, a stone that sings in the heart of the city, a copy of the music pavilion of one of King Louis XV's mistresses, a luminous art installation under a bridge, a carved monkey from the Leaning Tower of Pisa, chimneys replicating those at Hampton Court in London, the esoteric passions of Emperor Frederick William II, a column to commemorate the death of a parrot, a tower to calculate the displacement of the Earth's rotational axis, the last witness to the extraordinary epic of silk production in the Babelsberg district, a woman who disguised herself as a man to fight Napoleon, the spectacular hidden remains of Katharinenholz firing range, the forgotten mock-ups in Zeppelin Park ...

Potsdam offers countless opportunities to step off the beaten path and is home to any number of well-hidden treasures that are revealed only to residents and travelers who are ready to explore.

Secret Potsdam is an indispensable guide for those who think they already know Potsdam or would like to discover its hidden places, taking you far from the crowds and the usual clichés.

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