ask a local

BERLIN

JÜRGEN DAHLMANNS. THE DESIGNER BEHIND RUG STAR'S CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION FOR STARK CARPET, REVEALS HIS TOP HAUNTS IN THE GERMAN CAPITAL

FOOD AND DRINK

Qua Phe on Max-Beer-Strasse in Mitte serves the best, most authentic Vietnamese street food I have found in all of Europe, let alone Berlin; I go there for lunch regularly. Another favourite, on nearby Alte Schönhauser Strasse, is Mädchenitaliener, a small and unpretentious Italian restaurant run by my friend Silke Obladen; the homemade pasta with fresh figs, pine nuts and cured ham is sublime. Another friend, Oliver Mahne, opened his first café Oliv (oliv-cafe.de) in Mitte a while back, but since the bohemian crowd has largely moved on to West Berlin, he has followed suit by recently opening Oliv Eat, a new café on Potsdamer Strasse – a great spot for breakfast, coffee or lunch. At the weekend, I often go to the wonderful farmers' market where there's an excellent Thai food truck, or I meet friends at Café am Neuen See (cafeamneuseese.de) in Tiergarten for brunch. For Berlin's best meat and seafood, the Michelin-starred Grill Royal (grillroyal.com) overlooking the river on Friedrichstrasse is hard to beat both for food and location.
SHOPTING
I have always been interested in furniture design and am particularly drawn to the work of Danish designer Finn Juhl. His original Forties and Fifties designs are now made by Onecollection and sold at Wohnkultur 66 (wohnkultur66.de) on Brunnenstrasse. It is open just once a month or by appointment, so do check before going. Luiban (shop.luiban.com) on Rosa-Luxemburg-Strasse sells fabulous stationery, all beautifully displayed on tables, shelves and walls. I can spend hours in there admiring the different colours and textures of the papers and envelopes. As with any city, new areas become fashionable and the creative hub here is now veering towards West Berlin and the area around Potsdamer Platz. One of the hippest streets, Potsdamer Strasse, has almost single-handedly been put on the map by Andreas Murkudis (andreasmurkudis.com), director of Berlin's Museum of Design. He has two shops: the AM concept store, housed within a white, bright and spacious former newspaper building and offering an outstanding collection of fashion and accessories; and AM Möbel + Architektur, selling interiors products ranging from furniture, ceramics and linen to lighting, wallpapers and paints. For design enthusiasts, it is pure heaven. In a small street called Mulastrasse in the Mitte district, you will find several independent fashion boutiques such as Star Styling, which epitomises the bold, crazy styles of Berlin's street style. Also here is the eponymous shop of one of Berlin's fashion legends, Claudia Skoda (claudiaskoda.com), who over the past 40 years has transformed knitwear into haute couture. At the age of 76, she continues to design new collections in her studio. Nearby is Lala Berlin (lalabernin.com) on Alte Schönehauser Strasse, owned by Leyla Piedayash, who is a good friend of mine and a star of Berlin Fashion Week.

ACCOMMODATION
Sir Savigny is a fictional character invented for the purpose of defining the look and feel of the small eponymous West Berlin hotel, which is a member of Design Hotels (sirsavignyhotel.com). There is no check-in desk, no spa, no pool, just books and maps and an eclectic range of furniture, lighting and artefacts to make it feel like the home of an aristocratic, cosmopolitan traveller. The 44 bedrooms vary in size, but each has a distinctive vintage vibe, punctuated with local artwork. Rooms cost from about £150.