

Gisbert Pöppler

The free, outward-looking spirit of Berlin enhanced by a heartfelt passion for craftsmanship and international design: in his interiors Gisbert Pöppler fuses German precision with European decadence.

Photography: Helenio Barbeta, Wolfgang Stahr



"I love Berlin!" This enthusiastic statement is familiar to German travelers abroad, especially if their interlocutor works in the creative industries. Adored for its "unfinished" vibe, the city promises the creative and personal freedom that other Western cities can no longer offer. London? Too expensive. Paris? Too conservative. While Berlin is changing rapidly and gentrification has certainly transformed some neighborhoods, people still move there from all over the world to dip into this lifestyle and find their calling.

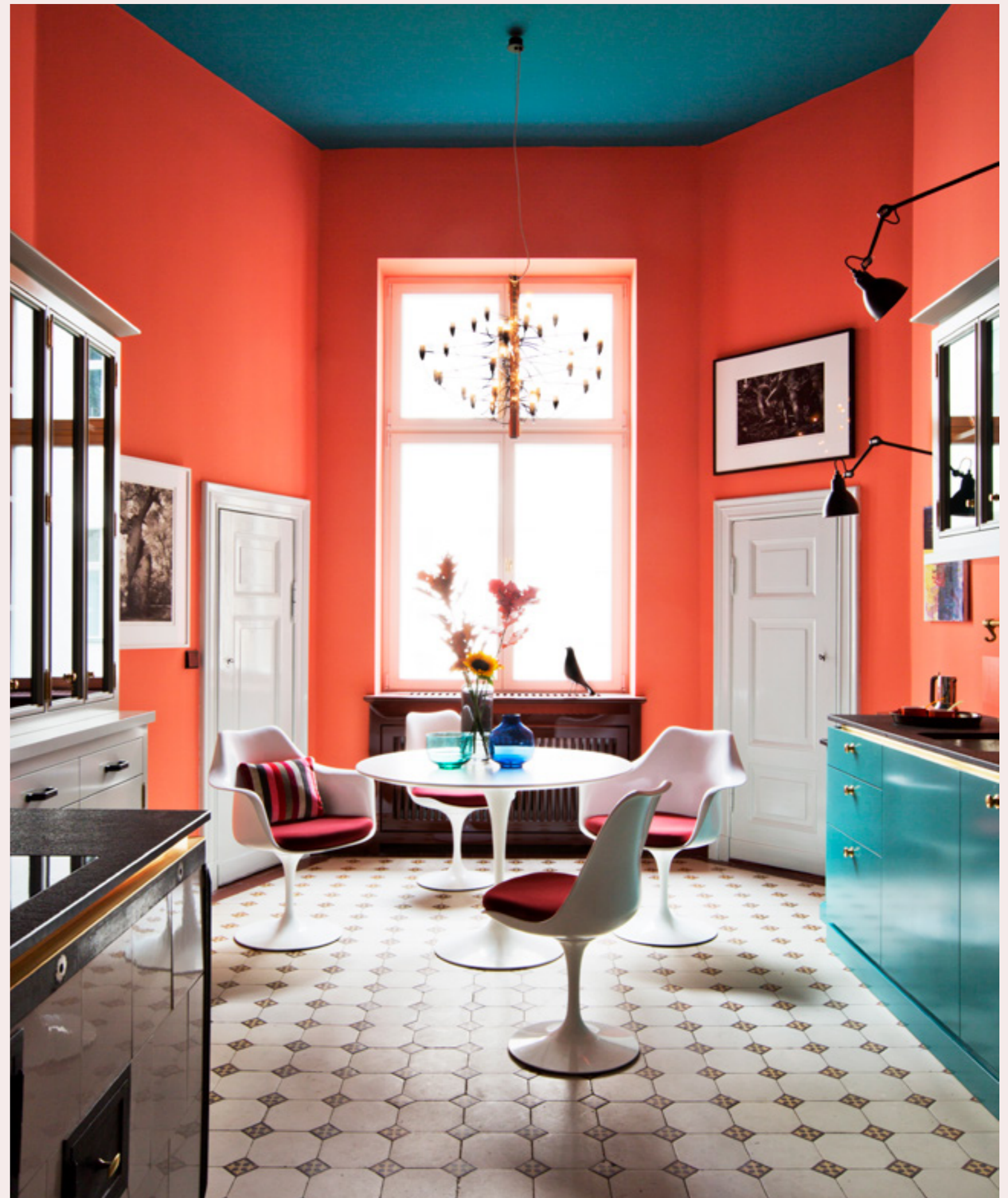
Gisbert Pöppler was way ahead of the curve. Today, he has established himself as one of the few German interior designers with both gravitas and a distinct style that feels as relevant as the work of his colleagues in Milan or New York. He did not reach this position overnight but has evolved constantly over the years while remaining open to experiment. Berlin having facilitated this in its own unique way. Pöppler arrived in the German capital to study architecture in

GISBERT PÖPPLER is known for the bold use of color for his distinctive interior designs. Over the years, he has built up a good reputation for his talent with color. One of his tactics is to combine complementary colors in a room, as can be seen here with his use of peach combined with turquoise (right) and lilacs and blues, combined with yellow and brown hues (following pages).

were a young team with no clue what they were doing and so were we." Similar jobs followed, and, in hindsight, he sees this period as a series of exercises that allowed him to learn more about interior design and try different approaches, and that ultimately prepared him for the residential projects that

1989, just before the Wall came down, and graduated in 1996, right after the burst of the real-estate bubble that followed reunification. This predicament steered him into a field he had not previously considered: "At university, we never even touched on the subject of interior design. But after my graduation I got a job at the practice of Nana von Hugo, who was furnishing interiors on a very sophisticated level, and that really intrigued me."

By 1999, he had partnered with architect Ilona Prinz to take on independent projects. A web start-up had approached the duo and asked them to design their office space. "How we got this job was in a way very Berlin," Pöppler recalls. "They







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would follow. In 2004, he was ready to go solo. Where would that lead him?

How did you find your own style?

GP: Well, the search still continues. In 2004, we got our first client that was open to experimenting a little. We did the hallway of his house and opted for wood paneling in combination with wall fabrics by Manuel Canovas. And we really immersed ourselves in looking for the right furniture for the client. This search for inspiration has never stopped and keeps driving us.

Does Berlin play a part in this search?

GP: Berlin is an inspiration, for sure. Not so much in terms of design, but more through the conversations that people have

Though vintage furniture remains a constant in most of his interior designs, you can always expect PÖPPLER to add his own particular color twist to the mix. Here, the kitchen features Saarinen’s Tulip chairs in deep cherry red, while the living room is adorned with an Eames lounge chair—usually black—in the same Egyptian blue of the hallway.

so that we can form them into something new. We know what can be done with these places and what is impossible. We are familiar with the proportions, the depth of the walls, the typical frame-and-panel doors, and we know that it is crucial to use high-quality materials whenever you can.

here. If we are looking for products, we often go to Paris and Milan.

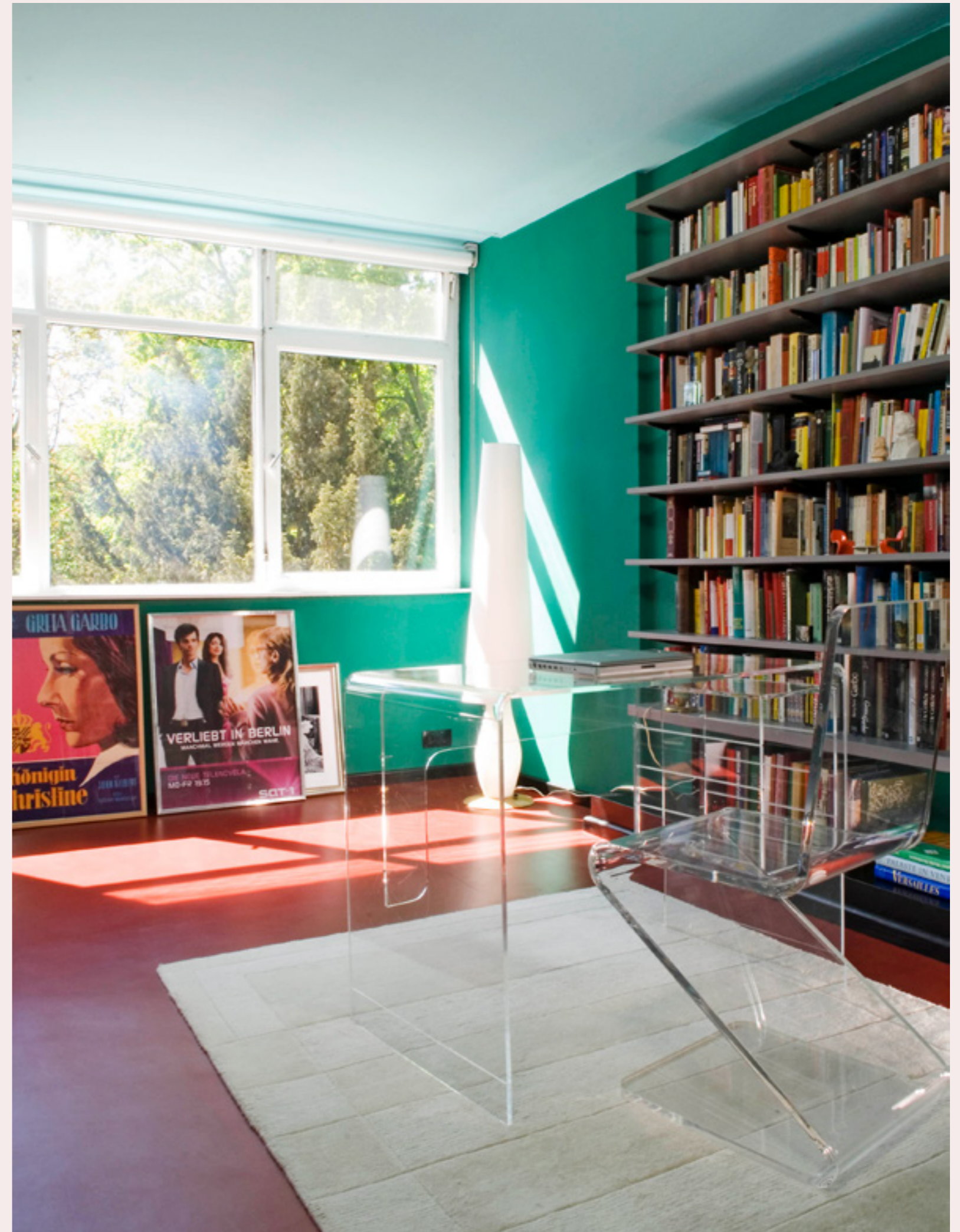
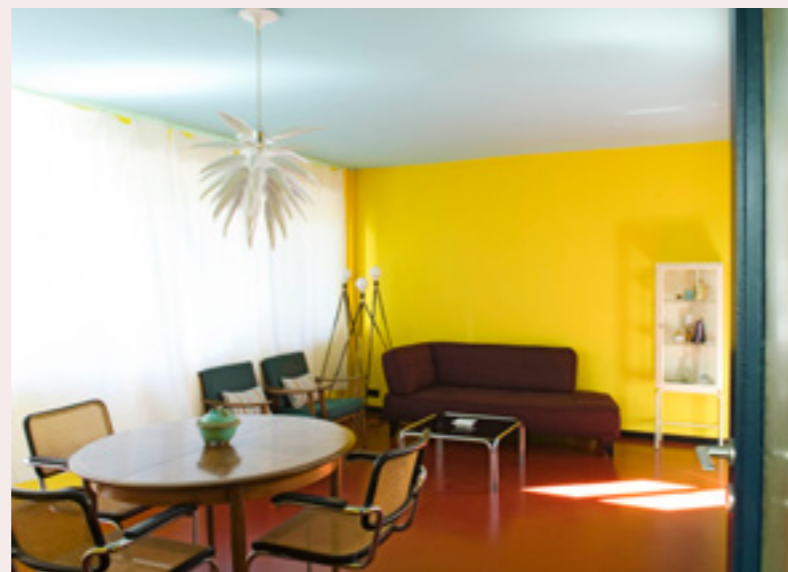
Do you think Berlin has taught you something over the years?

GP: This city has a lot of old houses and we have worked in many of these classic Berlin apartments. Usually, we bring in completely new flooring and revisit the doors and ceilings. You could say we are really experienced in “kneading” them.





PÖPLER has sensitively refurbished this apartment within the iconic Walter Gropius House, which dates back to 1957 in Berlin's Hansaviertel, recapturing some of the spirit of the original. Juxtaposed against chestnut brown linoleum flooring, the colors of the interior design recall shades favored in the 1950s—lemon yellow, turquoise, and teal.



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This home in Charlottenburg, Berlin, is centered on the family who lives there—hence the large sofas for lounging with parents and friends (*opposite*). In the kitchen (*page 191*) there is enough space to accommodate a dining table and chairs, allowing the family to enjoy meals together in an informal setting.

Pöpler's journey has also led him to a special appreciation for bolder colors—a somewhat contested subject in Germany, as mainstream taste still leans towards white and other neutral tones: it is fair to say that

you won't find a kitchen with soft-pink walls in many German houses. But Pöpler is lucky, in that his clients share his curiosity and willingness to try something new.

It is this daring touch that makes Pöpler's interiors so intriguing, effortless, and bold. Their success is rooted in the core principles of his work: a deep respect for the essence of a building, paired with a true empathy with the client. The results are spaces that feel modern, relevant, and global, while avoiding any association with the bland, soulless aesthetic that defines the rooms of many “luxury” real-estate developments all over the world. “I absolutely reject that idea—international style. That reminds me of these apartments that are being built everywhere in New York City, filled with high-end furniture that has been lacquered to death with high-gloss glazes. Everything is incredibly expensive and strives to be so unique, except it isn't—I hate it.” These apartments are designed





without a true dialogue with the client. For Pöppler, approaching a space in this way is unthinkable: his relationship with clients can become very intimate, and requires respect and trust on both sides. How would you describe the dialogue with your clients?

GP: It always starts with getting to know each other. Do we have chemistry? Usually, that takes only seconds to find

out. I always ask if it is possible to see how the client is living at that time—not to get a sense of their style, but to see the kind of life they lead. Do they keep things tidy or accept a bit of chaos? If it is a couple, we find out who sleeps on which side of the bed, or if they prefer separate bedrooms. We even organize the wardrobe and drawers for them. It really is very intimate.

What is usually the biggest challenge you face during projects?

GP: The biggest challenge is to get the foundation of the space right, by which I mean the work on the floor plan, the structural work. That is extremely important, more so than the selection of colors. Those are the icing on the cake.

Is that also the point at which you decide how you will bring in daylight?

GP: Well, yes. And you always want to pull in as much natural

PÖPPLER's architectural background is clearly evident here. He maintains many of the original 1930s features of the house—from the internal glazed doors and paneled ceiling (prev. pages) to the “porthole” front door (above) and parquet flooring (opposite).

He has even added touches that could be regarded as being art deco, like the black tiles and turquoise of the kitchen (above left) and the opal pendant light (opposite).

light as possible. But that is part of the design zeitgeist: all new-builds are filled with floor-to-ceiling windows. In an old house this can be a bit more challenging. Once, we worked on a 3,552-square-foot (330-square-meter) apartment for an Israeli client who was used to a lot of sun, but the whole side wing was north-facing, which left us with no other choice than to open up the whole

flat, so we needed to build in a lot of steel.

How much of your process is intuitive and how much do you rely on your experience?

GP: That is almost impossible to say. Intuition is not a feeling; intuition is the sum of having an informed eye, sensitivity, accretive memory, and other qualities. In my team, it's a huge topic for discussion, but architects see it as taboo. However, I believe intuition to be one of the greatest enablers.

When do you rely purely on your knowledge?

GP: When it comes to textures and surfaces. We work with very different materials: one cupboard will be finished in a high-gloss lacquer, the next one will be lacquered by hand so that you can spot every brushstroke. Or we add a wood panel





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to a wall of the same color, just to give a room a different texture, and it feels more elaborate.

An appreciation for complexity and the urge to create something unique drive Pöppler on. The idea of repeating a look bores him. That is also the reason why he is not very keen on the dominance of the omnipresent Scandinavian aesthetic: “I am not interested in this protestant, everything-looks-great style. I love Scandinavia, but most of the places there look the same. The quality of furniture, is perfect of course, but all the interiors are

For this bachelor pad in Berlin, PÖPPLER has used the owner’s incredible collection of exotica as a source of inspiration. The owner’s colonial-looking ornaments (prev. pages and above) and Hans Wegner’s Wishbone chairs (opposite) combine beautifully with the sumptuous earthy and cocoa tones of Farrow & Ball’s wall, door, and floor paints.

identical. I think my heart always beats for the things that pose a challenge.” This explains why he feels so drawn to Italian design. Some of his friends see, in his approach to proportions, even a touch of Russian influence. However, in the end—no matter how much thought and time has been put into a project—Pöppler is convinced that the result must look and feel effortless. “Some clients ask us to make sure one cannot see that we worked for them, which is quite tricky, but it is a challenge we accept quite happily.” †

