Living Traditions and Lasting Visions

The green heart of Germany invites you to explore its cultural treasures.

Thuringia has a rich Jewish heritage whose origins date back to the 11th century. Particularly in Erfurt’s historic district, much of which remains intact, many architectural and cultural traces bear witness to the city’s first Jewish community, which flourished there until the 14th century.

These include the Old Synagogue – one of the oldest, largest and best-preserved medieval synagogues, which also has a mikveh – as well as a large number of material relics such as gravestones, manuscripts, and of course the unique Erfurt Treasure, which dates back to the 13th and 14th centuries. The Erfurt Treasure comprises more than 4,000 items, including silver coins, tableware and jewelry. The most important object is a Jewish wedding ring from the early 14th century; in 2015, a replica was given to the Beit Hatfutsot Museum in Tel Aviv. The Erfurt Treasure was discovered in 1998 during archaeological excavations and has since been displayed in New York, Paris, London among other locations. In 2009, it was installed in a permanent display in the Old Synagogue.

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This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the year in which Martin Luther made his 95 theses known in Wittenberg. 2019 will mark the 100th birthday of the Bauhaus movement, which was founded in Weimar and went on to become what is arguably the most influential art and design school in the world. This, too, will be celebrated in Thuringia in grand style.

From the Bauhaus movement, to the Reformation and Jewish culture, Thuringia offers a wealth of history and culture to explore. We would like to extend our warmest invitation to visit Thuringia and enjoy our famous hospitality. There is no other place in Germany or Europe where you will be able to find this unique combination of nature and culture, relaxation and excitement, as you will here. Thuringia is brimming with discoveries – come take a look at www.visit-thuringia.com

With warmest regards,
Wolfgang Tiefensee
Thuringian Minister for Economic Affairs, Science and Digital Society

Thuringia is brimming with discoveries – come take a look

Taken together, these witnesses offer a unique glimpse into Jewish daily life and communal existence as well as the coexistence of Jewish and Christian life in medieval European towns – with a wealth of detail and an intensity that is virtually unmatched elsewhere. In Erfurt we can retrace the blossoming of Central European Jewish culture. That is why with the support of the state of Thuringia, the state capital of Erfurt is applying for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. These efforts are accompanied by many other activities that make Thuringia one of the most important and exciting destinations for everyone interested in Jewish culture and history. For example, Weimar’s University of Music has a chair dedicated to the history of Jewish music, while a research center at the University of Erfurt is dedicated to the study of religious practices and rituals. On the cultural side, the spectrum ranges from the historic Days of Jewish-Israeli Culture, in which 17 cities in Thuringia will be participating this year.

But even beyond its important Jewish heritage, Thuringia – the birthplace of the Reformation and of the Bauhaus movement, the home of Weimar Classicism and the birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach – deserves its place at the top of the list of everyone interested in European culture and history. This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the year in which Martin Luther made his 95 theses known in Wittenberg. 2019 will mark the 100th birthday of the Bauhaus movement, which was founded in Weimar and went on to become what is arguably the most influential art and design school in the world. This, too, will be celebrated in Thuringia in grand style.

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Traces of Jewish Life in Thuringia

Embracing a rich tradition immigrants today secure the community’s future

By Hartmut Bomhoff

A bout 600 years ago, Hillel of Erfurt, a Talmudic authority, left for Palestine to spend the remainder of his life in the Holy Land, thus fulfilling the vow he had made. When he had reached Vienna, he was seized by a longing to return to Thuringia because he was convinced that the Talmudical school of Erfurt would suffer through his absence. He then turned to the rabbis of Vienna who absolved him on the grounds that he had a greater task to perform in spreading Torah to the Jews of Erfurt.

Jewish merchants have been recorded in this part of Central Germany as early as the 10th century. The presence of Jews in Erfurt has also been documented during the 12th century. During the Middle Ages, Thuringia produced many scholars who contributed significantly to Jewish learning. The majority of Jews lived in free cities, which did not recognize the authority of the landgrave. After the brutal Talmud pogrom, Erfurt became again the largest Jewish community at that time in Germany. At the end of the 14th century, Erfurt’s Jewry called four or five synagogues their own, as well as four ritual slaughterhouses. However, in 1458, they were expelled from Erfurt, and in 1462, landgrave John Frederick the Brave, a fervent supporter of the Reformation, ordered the total expulsion of Jews. An act which was enforced in 1539.

The landgrave of Thuringia subsequently experienced a period of disin- tegration and was divided into a large number of minor duchies and prin- cipalities. While prohibited from living in cities, as of the latter half of the 17th century, Jews were allowed to settle on the estates of the nobility, with a few rich court Jews granted protection by the various princes. In consequence, Jewish life in the “green heart of Germany” became more rural, with peddling and cattle trade as the main source of income.

In 1783, German national poet Fried- rich Schiller gave an account of Jewish life in the countryside. Staying at the Bauerbach estate near Meiningen, he remarked, “I’m just annoyed that so many Christians make so little out of their religion, while, as I see in Bauerbach and Walldorf, the Jews are very fervent in their religious devotions!” It was not until the first decades of the 19th century, that Jews in the four duchies received charters, with the communi- ty of Saxe-Meiningen becoming the largest one. In the early 1800s, Jews were permitted to live in Erfurt again, which then had become Prussian. A new synagogue was built in 1840, and eventually a larger one was built to replace it. The opulent domed struc- ture of this Great Synagogue with seating for 500 stood until 1938, when it was destroyed in the Kristallnacht pogrom on November 9.

During the 19th century, nu- merous new synagogues and Jewish schools were built in small towns and villages, for example in 1843 in Mühlhau- sen, followed by Aschenhausen in 1843, and Berkach in 1854. In 1898, the latter, together with the neighboring school building, was spared from arson by inter- vention through local residents. In the following year, the buildings were sold to the municipality. Renovated in the 1990s, the synagogue of the small city of Mühlhausen is now a listed monument and serves as a cultural center.

Rapid growth

Another Jewish site nearby is the man- sion of the Oppé brothers on Lindenbühl, a street near the center of town. These industrialists had a decisive influence on the development of Mühlhausen as they were one of the largest employers in town. Today, the Jewish community of Erfurt is responsible for the two restored historic synagogues but doesn’t own the Aschen- hausen synagogue. The first two are used occasionally for worship, a concert, or other events, but are mostly maintained and kept open to the public by volunteers.

Towards destruction

In Erfurt, Jewish entrepreneurs be- longed to the city’s established group, among them shoe manufacturer Alfred Hess, who made many generous dona- tions of Expressionist paintings to the Angermuseum, financier Wilhelm Moos as well as horticulturalist Ernst Benary. “We bring beauty to the world” was the slogan of the seed and breeding compa- ny, founded in 1843 by Benary in Erfurt. It quickly became a household name in horticulture and counted Gregor Mendel among its prominent customers. Under Nazi rule, many members of the Benary family who had converted to Christian- ity, signed up for the German army to avoid anti-Semitic persecution. Today, Benary is an independent family busi- ness in its sixth generation and operates three breeding facilities in the United States, the Netherlands, and Germany. Their core business is the development and distribution of flower varieties for the professional bedding plant market.

After World War I, the many principal- ities were amalgamated into one state, Thuringia, with a Jewish population of about 3,600. On June 23, 1930, the Jew-
ish Telegraphic Agency reported: “Jewish visitors to the summer resorts of Thuringia are urged to disregard the warnings and threats of the anti-Semitic National Socialists against coming to Thuringia this summer in a published appeal by the Thuringian Tourists’ Union, hotel proprietors, and owners of health resorts. A member of the anti-Semitic National Socialist party, Fritz Sauckel, recently declared in the Thuringian parliament that the Jews are not wanted at Thuringia’s summer resorts. The appeal points out that Jews are never molested in Thuringia.” Nevertheless, Thuringia fell under Nazi rule even before Hitler’s appointment as chancellor, with stridently anti-modernist policies receiving considerable public support. In 1933, when Adolf Hitler assumed power, Thuringia was home to 4,500 Jews in 37 communities. About 650 Jewish family businesses fell victim to “Aryanization.”

As of the summer of 1937, the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar became the epitome of Nazi atrocities, and on May 10, 1942, the first transport with 357 Thuringian Jews departed from the Weimar train station to the Belzec ghetto near Lublin. During the Holocaust, the principal Jewish communities of Thuringia – Altenburg, Aschenhausen, Arnstadt, Eisenach, Gotha, and Meiningen – as well as many rural Jewish settlements were annihilated.

A Letter from Thuringia, July 1948

In July 1948, the London-based Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) published a sobering report on the situation of their brethren in the Soviet occupied zone. “Altogether there are 350 Jews living in Thuringia. Communities exist in Erfurt, Eisenach, Jena and Gera. The ‘Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden in Erfurt’ is the successor organization of the dissolved former communities in the district. Most of the employable Jews have found work, by which, under prevailing circumstances, they just earn their living. There are, however, many old, sick, and widowed persons, and the communities are overaged. Religious service and tuition is only provided for in Erfurt (160 Jews). It is especially depressing that the Jews there are treated like the defeated majority and not as liberated victims. Former Nazis, unless they were particularly prominent, have the same opportunities as the Jews whom they wanted to exterminate. The members of the Jewish congregations feel themselves united by their common fate, though there are, of course, also some amongst them who, in the past, were less keen to be considered as Jews. The internal organization of the Erfurt Community (religious service, youth, and social work) is satisfactory. In normal times, Erfurt had 600 members; of these, only six are left. All the others have come, nearly without exception, from Breslau, from where they had been evacuated. It is due to the experience of the former large Breslau Community that the Erfurt congregation could be reorganized. The old tradition and culture is being kept alive in modest religious services without rabbi or chazzan.”

Troubled new beginnings

Shortly after liberation, the Jewish community of Erfurt, a mere handful of 15 people, re-established itself under the leadership of Max Cars, a survivor of the Theresienstadt ghetto. Later in 1945, between 400 and 1,000 German Jews – the data vary – transferred there from Breslau (meanwhile the Polish city of Wroclaw). By August 1945, the number of affiliated Jews in Thuringia had shrunk to 130, signifying that only a few of the survivors identified as religious, or wanted to stay for good. One of them was Wolfgang M. Nos- sen, who was born in Breslau in 1931. However, after the founding of the Jewish state, he left Erfurt for Israel. In 1977, unforeseen circumstances led him to West Germany, where he somehow settled. In November 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall opened new opportunities for him. After a short visit to Erfurt, he decided to stay, and in 1993, Mr. Nossen was elected president of the Jewish Community of Thuringia – an office he would hold for seventeen years and during which he witnessed the consolidation of Jewish life. However, it was a long and bumpy road to accomplish, and for many years, the prospects remained poor.

In March 1947, the city council of Erfurt granted a request for the restitution of the site on which the Great Synagogue had stood until 1938. The community immediately began planning the construction of a new synagogue, the only one to be built in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). However, shortly after the inauguration of the New Synagogue in 1952, a decline in membership began. In the same year, an anti-Semitic show trial against leading state and party functionaries of Jewish origin took place in Czechoslovakia. Also, in East Germany, many members of the Jewish community were interrogated, detained or harassed. Jews were accused of “cosmopolitanism” and de- famed as “agents of the West,” “Zionists” and “traitors” intent on undermining the socialist state.

In 1953, around two thirds of all Jews living in the GDR fled, many of them to West Berlin. The Jewish community in Erfurt survived these troubled times, but the communities in Eisenach, Gera, and Mühlhausen vanished. With the dissolution of East Germany in 1990, only 26 Jews were registered with the Jewish community in Erfurt. Since 1990, the Erfurt community has had an influx of new members, primarily immigrants from the FSU. In April 2003, the ordination of two rabbis and the investiture of two cantors by the Abrah- am Geiger College marked a milestone in the Jewish revival in Thuringia. Today, the Jewish Community numbers around 800 members of whom about 500 live in the capital. Professor Reinhard Schramm, president of the Jüdische Landesgemeinde since 2012, puts it bluntly: “There would be no Jewish community here without the Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union. I hope that the human and financial re- sources will be made available to build a children’s and youth center with an inte- grated kindergarten.”

Our congregation is a community of a shared destiny with a growing sense of religiosity, and we are in the process of creating a spiritual home for both the non-Orthodox majority and the Orthodox minority.
A Vision Come True

Erfurt is a hotspot for connecting diverse traditions and people

People want to make up their own minds and take time to do so

In 2015, the Hebrew word achava (“friendship” or “brotherhood”) became the name of a new festival in Erfurt, ACHAVA-Festspiele Thüringen. The name reflects the agenda: ACHAVA aims to convey concepts of understanding, tolerance and mutual respect to the general public. From August 31 until September 10, 2017, the festival – in its third year – will not only enrich the cultural landscape in Thuringia, but also set standards for interreligious dialogue. "The Jewish symbol of the fig tree, in the shade of which there is room for every other with respect and attention," explains artistic director Jascha Nemtsov. The broad spectrum of topics and events is also reflected both by the festival’s venues and supporters. The crowds gather in churches, synagogues, public spaces, including a former heating plant, or in the open air. Among the many festival supporters are the Thuringian State government, regional businesses and media, as well as the Erfurt municipality, the Israeli Embassy in Berlin, and the Central Council of Jews in Germany to name but a few. Addressing and integrating more and different social groups, including the Muslim community, churches, teachers, and organisations from the adult education sector, the festival helps foster a sense of cohesion and community beyond religious and political boundaries and lives up to its name.

Insight into Jewish culture

The main focus was and is to provide insight into Jewish and Israeli culture at large. ACHAVA Festival takes the opportunity to mark the European Day of Jewish Culture, a continent-wide Jewish culture and education festival that encompasses hundreds of events in more than 30 countries. In Erfurt, the day provides both a platform by the festival’s venues and supporters. The crowds gather in churches, synagogues, public spaces, including a former heating plant, or in the open air. Among the many festival supporters are the Thuringian State government, regional businesses and media, as well as the Erfurt municipality, the Israeli Embassy in Berlin, and the Central Council of Jews in Germany to name but a few. Addressing and integrating more and different social groups, including the Muslim community, churches, teachers, and organisations from the adult education sector, the festival helps foster a sense of cohesion and community beyond religious and political boundaries and lives up to its name.

Exposing the Reformation

The exhibition “Music. Resistance. Extermination” at the Erfurt memorial site Topf & Söhne will be dedicated to the Theresienstadt musicians who performed Verdi’s “Requiem” a number of times in the ghetto. The exhibition also traces the fate of Jewish musicians in the town of Weimar. The Staatskapelle Weimar and the MDR broadcast choir will dedicate their performance of the “Requiem” at St. Marien, Erfurt’s cathedral, to the memory of the murdered musicians. A concert and discussion entitled “The Violin of Buchenwald” explores the dramatic story of a unique collection of instruments and the fate of their owners. As 2017 also marks the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in Germany, the “Erfurt Colloquies”, three panel discussions during the festival, will examine and evaluate the contemporary relevance of reformer Martin Luther. "Religious Freedom and the Secular State", "Freedom and the Rule of Law" are topics which will certainly draw large audiences. “Luckily, people want to make up their own minds and take time to do so,” says Kranz. Poet Heinrich Heine once said that the book is the Jews’ “portable homeland”, Israeli artist Nechama Levendel offers a fascinating new interpretation of this dictum. She collects discarded books from different civilisations, languages, and subjects, tears them apart and subjects, tears them apart.
and reassembles them. In this new synthesis she expresses her desire to act as a mediator between different cultures. The festival dedicates a special exhibition to Levensel's very own art of the book.

Martin Kranz knows that the festival is at the right place and comes at the right time: "Thuringia is an excellent basis. Luckily, a number of gems of Jewish cultural history have been preserved here, especially in Erfurt. This is also why the concept of the ACHAVA Festival still contributes to the city's current application for UNESCO World Heritage status. And, people from all over Germany come to our festival."

And Kranz is not the only one with this conviction: "Our first and foremost partner was the state of Thuringia, in the person of Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow. He immediately recognized the potential and current relevance and has supported the project with great enthusiasm and cooperative-ness." Reinhard Schramm as president of the Jewish Community of Thuringia has also been with us from the beginning and every year helps to mobilize members and partners. In addition, we have programmatic partners such as all political foundations in Germany and, of course, corporations and individuals acting as sponsors."

What does the future hold for the festival? "Of course I wish ACHAVA Festival mazal tov till sarah ... but I know it's no good resting on one's laurels. Thus, I am looking forward to lots of constructive feedback so that we can ensure future ACHAVA festivals will be lively, up-to-date, and interesting. A festival for the people can only be done with the people." Professor Reinhard Schramm adds: "The ACHAVA Festival enriches everyday life in our Jewish community and in society at large with Jewish culture at its best. We are involved in the preparation and the conduct of Shabbat services and of cultural and political events.

The festival is complemented by the Jewish-Israeli Cultural Days and the program of the Yiddish Summer Weimar, as well as our own cultural activities. Together with government commitment for preserving Jewish heritage, this generates a sense of Jewish normality in Thuringia. Is there any better way to promote achova friendship and brotherhood?"

ACHAVA Festival starts on August 31, 2017. www.achava-festspiele.de

WINNERS OF ACHAVA JAZZ AWARD: FRACIAL LIMIT

"The festival helps generate a sense of Jewish normality"

MEMORIAL SITE TOPF & SÖHNE

Remembrance for the 21st Century

Former headquarters of the “builders of the Auschwitz ovens” is now a museum

By Dieter Sattler

Always glad to serve you... This was how the Erfurt businessman Ernst-Wolfgang Topf concluded a letter to the SS construction management at Auschwitz. This cynical salutation is now inscribed on the exterior of the former administrative building of Topf & Söhne, the company that built crematoria ovens and ventilation systems for Auschwitz-Birkenau, Mauthausen, and other German concentration and death camps. For decades, the history of this factory facility was largely ignored. After the successor company, a storage and handling equipment manufacturer, went bankrupt in 1996, the premises remained unused until 2001, when it was occupied by squatters. However, two years earlier, a society had been founded to research the history of J. A. Topf & Söhne. In 2011, the state of Thuringia took up this initiative, establishing a memorial, writes: "With Topf & Söhne, we encounter the ordinary face of Auschwitz’s machinery of destruction, right in the midst of everyday German society." During the Nazi era, the Erfurt engineers served as veritable technicians of death. They delivered the crematoria ovens and other technology needed to carry out murder on a mass and efficient scale. Their expertise helped the Nazis implement their murderous plans quickly and efficiently. And they knew exactly what they were doing. Company employees spent months on-site, observing and monitoring the "operational reliability" of their systems, in the process becoming witnesses to mass murder.

The moral deasease that resulted from this willing complicity is exemplified by Karl Prüfer (1891–1952), Topf & Söhne’s head engineer. In his early career, Prüfer had worked in the areas of waste dispos-posal, cremation of animal corpses, and the design and construction of municipal crematoria. In 1939, Prüfer would still write, “cremation should not be debased simply to a means of cadaver disposal.” But the ovens that he would later design for the SS were intended for one purpose only: mass dispos-osal of human beings. Alongside historical documentation, the memorial center also focuses on questions of remembrance work and engagement in current issues. Among its notable initiatives was the November 2011 public commemoration of the victims of far-right murders, as well as several events held in commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda. The numerous educational activities of the center include eyewitness testimony such as the accounts of Hungarian Auschwitz survivor Eva Fahidi-Pusztai, discussions about recent developments in right-wing populism and extremism as well as media reports on the topic, and discussions of the nature of complicity and business ethics as a whole. The center also hosts workshops for refugees living in Thuringia and for Muslim university students on topics such as human rights and democracy. The memorial website includes a “web dialogue” section where online visitors can post their own contributions. In the early years, there were some who argued that the memorial was harming Erfurt’s image and “soiling its own nest.” An argument to which then-head of the Jewish community of the state of Thuringia, Wolfgang Nossen, commented: “You should have given some thought to the city’s image 80 years ago!” Today the memorial is welcomed by the city and its citizens, as well as by other local institutions. One teacher from Norway commented: “When I go home tomorrow, I’ll have questions, questions, questions.” The exhibition “Indus-try and Holocaust” is shown at the Aus-chitz-Birkenau State Museum until the end of October. For American audiences, an English and Spanish language version is available.

JEWSH VOICE FROM GERMANY

THURINGIA

LIVING TRADITIONS LASTING VISIONS

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The Bauhaus: From Weimar into the World
Pioneer of modernity still shapes our daily lives

By Elisabeth Neu

The story has a happy end. Although, for a while, it seemed unlikely. In 1919, all eyes were on Weimar, the tiny town in the heart of Thuringia. The German National Assembly had withdrawn here from the revolutionary hotbed of the Capital, Berlin. It had gathered to draw up a constitution in the “Spirit of Weimar” – home of venerated poets and thinkers like Goethe, Schiller, Wieland, and Herder. It was a spirit Germans conjured up to contrast the monstrosities of WWI. The constitution was to be that of a republic, the first on German soil.

Whilst the assembly noodled over details, Walter Gropius, a 36 year old architect, signed the contract making him director of the new Weimar Art School, the State Bauhaus. Weimar democracy was to last a mere 14 years before it was strangled by Hitler’s Nazis. Its demise was also to be the end of the Bauhaus. As a flagship of modernity this school was anathema to the Nazis. But German democracy came back to stay. And after its closure in Germany, the Bauhaus went global. By 1923, the Bauhaus will be celebrating its centenary!

Its founding director Walter Gropius had already made his mark with revolutionary designs like a factory building for shoe last producer Fagus in Alfeld near Hanover. Now, Weimar was calling. In early 1919, the local Art School and the School of Arts and Crafts, both renowned institutions, had merged to create what would later become known as “the Bauhaus.”

This clearly called for a manifesto. Its opening sentence was a bombshell: “The ultimate goal of all art is the building!” Gropius went on to demand: “Architects, sculptors, painters – we all must return to craftsmanship! For there is no such thing as ‘art by profession’. There is no essential difference between the artist and the artisan. The artist is an exalted artisan.” Expressionistically intoxicated, he continued: “Let us strive for, conceive, and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.” Well, reality was a different thing. 1919 meant hard times. The economy was stalling, provisions were scarce. Soon students and teachers complained about the lack of materials, freezing cold working spaces, frugal meals. But Gropius was a highly gifted administrator, fund raiser, and organizer – and a talent scout. Within a very short time period, he persuaded the crème de la crème of artists to sign up as Bauhaus teachers: Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Gerhard Marcks, Oskar Schlemmer, and László Moholy-Nagy rushed to Thuringia to work as “Masters of Form.” “Workshop Masters”, on the other hand, were to teach the students the skills of crafts. Committed to multi-disciplinarity and pedagogics, Gropius also drew up the Bauhaus curriculum: “The students will be instructed in crafts and drawing, and painting, as well as scientifically-theoretically too.” Sculptors, stone masons, smiths, wood cutters, and weavers and many more were to be instructed here. Likewise, composition and drawing, as well as designing furniture and everyday objects were to be taught. Theoretical lessons entailed anatomy, history of arts, materials science. But the curriculum also included heavy brick-work, contract closing, professional fees.

Top priority at the Bauhaus: Versatility! Love of experimentation! A laboratory of modernity had sprung up in Weimar. Henceforth, form had to follow function. Gone were the fancy interiors of the turn of the century, the over-ornate facades, and cumbersome architecture. The new man – his creation was also an ambition of the Bauhaus program – demanded transparency, fresh air, and sunlight in his living and work space. Clear lines, geometrical shapes, modern materials were the basis for functional, simple furniture and everyday objects ed in crafts, and drawing, and painting, as well as scientifically-theoretically too.”

The Wagenfeld lamp

Form follows function

Clear lines, geometrical shapes, modern materials were the basis for functional, simple furniture and everyday objects
at the Bauhaus: ‘Friendly intercourse between masters and students outside work, theater performances, lectures, poetry, music, fancy dress parties. Building a buoyant ceremonial at these gatherings.’ A famous photograph showing a group of Bauhausers in high spirits, bursting out of a door laughing and smoking testifies to the buoyancy, if not the ceremonial. Bauhaus parties quickly became legendary.

Art and technology

And how did the good people of Weimar react to all this? Not just the revelry but the mash needed spicing up. Alma Mahler, László Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Breuer. Bauhaus masters were of Jewish descent: mostly been baptized and were not re-converted. Not so Mrs. Gropius – as vicious as she was beautiful, remarked that the one unforgetable characteristic of the Bauhaus was that its members “reeked of garlic.”

In the summer of 1923, the Bauhaus presented the fruits of its endeavors to the public in a large exhibition. In its epicenter: The Haus am Horn, a residential house built especially for the show. On a footnote: Gropius’ original design for the house had been rejected. Instead, Georg Muche, a young painter, woodcutter and weaver, received the commission. Comfort, functionality, and efficiency were the masters of this house. The interior, carpets, radiators, tiles, furniture had all been manufactured in Bauhaus workshops. The Haus am Horn has recently been lovingly restored to its original splendor.

But dark clouds had been gathering. As for sustenance: The Bauhaus lot could now be produced in large numbers. Good (Bauhaus) design became accessible to many people. The exhibition was a huge success with visitors, critics, and the press alike – also internationally.

But dark clouds had been gathering over Weimar’s Bauhaus for some time. Finances were a problem from the beginning although Gropius had somehow always managed to scrape by. Now in 1924, Thuringia’s social democratic government, which had been in favor of the Bauhaus, was superseded by conservative-nationalistic powers. Gropius was informed that not even half of the required means would be available. Cautionary notice was given to Bauhaus teachers. And thus, the odyssey began. In 1925, the school moved to Dessau. Three years later, Gropius left. His successor Hannes Meyer was director for a mere three years when he was given notice for political reasons. He was succeeded by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, an architect like his predecessors. Then, the 1933 elections made the Nazis the largest party in Dessau. They immediately closed the Bauhaus out of town. The school continued as a private institution in Berlin; in 1933 it was dissolved under Nazi pressure. Consequently, many Bauhausers left Germany. Walter Gropius emigrated to England, then to America, where he was welcomed by the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. László Moholy-Nagy who had joined the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1923, set out to found the New Bauhaus in Chicago. Here, the Weimar curriculum was developed further. A pioneer in architecture, design, and photography in North America, the New Bauhaus is currently celebrating its 80th anniversary.

Today, Bauhaus pilgrims have plenty to explore in Thuringia. The former Bauhaus school building in Weimar, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is now bustling with students of Bauhaus University. In Jena, the refectory at Philosophenweg beckons, in Erfurt Haus Schellhorn and the building of the savings bank in the main square. But not just the teachers disseminated the Bauhaus spirit all over the world. Many of those who had studied there and left Germany took it with them. One of them was Arieh Sharon. A student of Gropius, he was to become one of Israel’s leading architects.

Today, Tel Aviv boasts the largest assembly of Bauhaus architecture worldwide. The ‘White City’ is proud of its 4,000 buildings in the International Style, as Bauhaus is called here. The original German architecture had to pay tribute to the climatic conditions of the Holy Land. Large glass fronts were replaced by small shutter-like windows; narrow canopied balconies protect from the fierce sun and heat. Over the decades since they were constructed, most of the buildings have become the worse for wear. A UNESCO World Heritage site since 2003, Tel Aviv has begun to preserve its Bauhaus treasure. Substantial renovations are being carried out. The German federal government supports the opening up of these buildings which are much loved by their inhabitants.

From Thuringia into the world – since 2009 Berlin photographer Jean Molitor has been following Bauhaus traces. His work beautifully documents Bauhaus inspired buildings, i.e. in Cuba, Turkey: Morocco, Tartastan, and Burundi. And Christian Benimana, director of the African Design Center in Kigali, thinks that today Bauhaus should serve as an inspiration for modern African urban planning.

But not all made it out into the world. One of the most talented Bauhausers, Friedel Dicker, who had followed Johannes Itten from Vienna to Weimar, could not build a new life for herself in a distant land. Born in Vienna, the all-rounder had joined the Bauhaus in 1919. She was a photographer by training but also carved puppets, designed stage sets, costumes, jewellery, stackable chairs, kindergarten interiors. In 1942, she was deported to Theresienstadt. There she dedicated herself to caring for the children. During lovingly equipped theatre performances and painting lessons she granted the little ones short reprieves of normality and joy in the hell they were living in. In 1944, Friedel Dicker was killed in Auschwitz.

Heritage sites in Weimar. If you happen to be in the area, don’t forget to take a peek into the kitchen – Theodor Bogler’s storage set is a must have for design lovers ‘til this day.

Never at a loss for a grand statement, Gropius pronounced “Art and Technology – a New Unity” at the opening of the New Bauhaus in Chicago. Here, the Weimar curriculum was developed further. A pioneer in architecture, design, and photography in North America, the New Bauhaus is currently celebrating its 80th anniversary.
A CONVERSATION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

We Embrace Our Responsibility
Bodo Ramelow on his commitment to Jewish affairs

Your first journey abroad as prime minister of Thuringia led you to Israel. It was however not your first visit. Why?

We had an amazing time," said Rabbi Richard Steinberg of Orange County in California, after a rather spontaneous stop-over in Erfurt. "We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and learnt a great deal." The Steinbergs were absolutely enthralled by their visit to the Old Synagogue, a medieval gem in the townscape of Thuringia's capital.

The Altte Synagogue with parts dating from the 11th century is the oldest synagogue in Erfurt. It was converted into a storehouse during the Nazi era. Thus, the memorial treasure is on display. History, the present and the past, is together connected with the UNESCO World Heritage proposal for the Jewish quarter of Erfurt.

The bright and the dark sides are connected in Erfurt so that we actively live with this responsibility, so that a "Never Again" to anti-Semitism has a lively home in Erfurt. We are happy to welcome guests from Haifa but also Jewish visitors from all over the world.

What significance does the fostering of and support for Jewish life in Thuringia have for you and the state?

We are grateful for the new Jewish life that enriches our cities and communities. It gives our home state Thuringia a fresh and sappy thrust of vitality, dynamics, future, and perspective. Every year we celebrate Jewish-Israeli cultural days in Thuringia that attract a growing audience.

What role does the Jewish Landesgemeinde (the Jewish community in the state) already play and what role will it play in the future?

For me as prime minister it is especially close to my heart that the Jewishische Landesgemeinde can shape Jewish life in freedom, protected as best as possible by the state and supported by society. The state government supports the state community in its efforts to preserve Jewry in all its traditional diversity and identity, is committed to the principles of the Torah as well as to a cosmopolitan understanding of Jewish life and culture.

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