



TRAVEL + LEISURE

THE

Hotels

ISSUE

FROM PARIS TO BALI, SINGAPORE TO SANTORINI

**T+L Editors Pick the Best New
Hotels in the World**



The atrium of the Fontenay hotel, which opened in early 2018 on the banks of the Aussenalster, Hamburg's man-made lake.

It was only after gazing out through the floor-to-ceiling windows of my room in the **Fontenay** (*thefontenay.de*; doubles from \$404) that I could see what the Japanese mean when they call Hamburg “the green city in the woods.” Directly below me was the Aussenalster, the artificial lake where the Alster River bulges out as it flows toward the Elbe River, Hamburg's economic lifeblood. Runners were making their way along the lakeside path under 130-year-old plane trees, past grand villas and boathouses. Sculls and sailboats sliced back and forth. It felt like a country idyll, but in the heart of a mercantile hub of almost 2 million.

This lesser-known Hamburg is veined with canals and flush with the riches of global commerce. You can see where the merchant money went in the superb white villas—much of Hamburg's architecture is white, and, by municipal decree, so is the Fontenay—but the spirit is reserved and discreet, like Hamburgers themselves. Nothing here feels overbearing, including the Fontenay. Everything in the hotel is curvy, from the concentric rings of its structure to the elliptical sofas and rugs in its circular atrium. The colors are summery—pale green, beige, sky blue—and the hotel's 140,000 square feet of glass coax in any available light.

But underneath it all there's a reassuring solidity. The wooden room doors weigh a ton. The Fontenay is a late-life passion for billionaire Klaus-Michael Kühne. Now 81, Kühne commissioned local architecture firm Störmer, Murphy & Partners, the winner of a competition, to draw up plans for the building in 2013. One of Kühne and his team's priorities was to make his guests feel like they could shut the world out when they wanted to—hence the heavy doors. →

Hats Off to Hamburg

The colorful German port where the Fab Four hit their stride endures, alongside idyllic green spaces and groundbreaking contemporary architecture—as epitomized by a sleek new hotel.

By Joshua Levine

BEFORE I WENT THERE for the first time, I had painted a picture in my mind of what Hamburg must look like based on what I knew it to be: a busy port off the cold North Sea. I knew that the Beatles had learned their trade in its rowdy riverside clubs, so throw in a few drunken sailors. Add a low gray sky and the container cranes of the St. Pauli dockyards and, voilà, the Hamburg of my imagination—gritty, commercial, and somewhat dreary.

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From my suite, I could make out the Binnenalster—the Aussenalster’s little brother. It’s barely 15 minutes on foot from the Fontenay to the main train station, on the Binnenalster’s far shore. Just beyond is the late-19th-century city hall that marks the beginning of downtown. It is one of the few remnants of Hamburg’s prewar commercial grandeur. In 1943, the British launched Operation Gomorrah—eight days of bombing that took out 80 percent of the city’s port and much of its center.

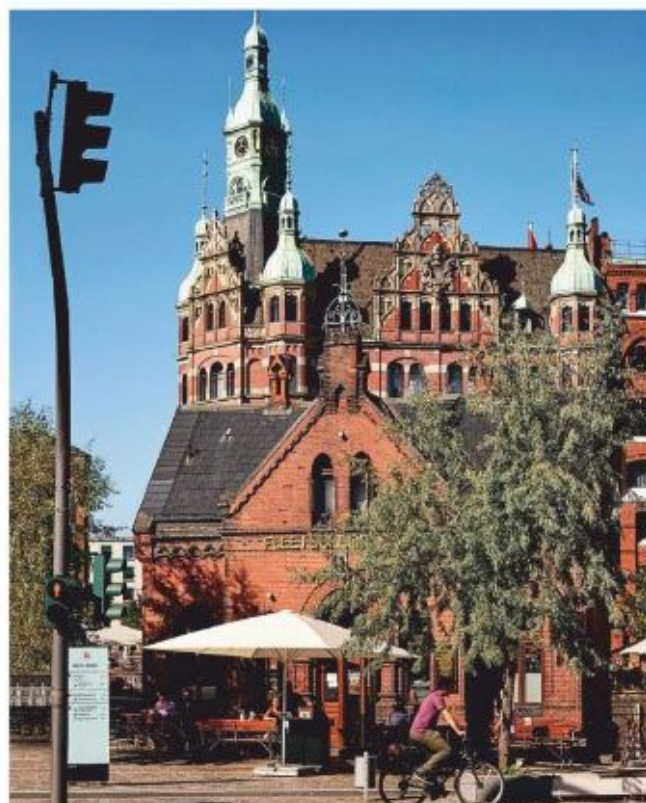
Of the architectural masterpieces that were spared, the most fantastical is **Chilehaus** (chilehaus.de), so named because the shipping magnate Henry Sloman, who financed the office building, imported saltpeter from Chile. The intricate brickwork contained within its sharp-edged triangle, which is reminiscent of New York’s Flatiron Building, helped the architect Fritz Höger earn the nickname “Der Klinker-Sticker”—the brick knitter. Today its ground floor holds an assortment of shops and cafés. It’s a short walk from Chilehaus to **Tortue Hamburg** (tortue.de; doubles from \$216), a new boutique hotel that occupies an imposing government building that escaped the bombs. There’s a charming interior courtyard and two pleasant restaurants, one a brasserie and the other serving Asian fusion cuisine.

Somehow, Hamburg’s old warehouse district on the riverbanks managed to make it through the war unscathed, too. It became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2015. The warehouses are great brown buildings, with green copper canopies like little bonnets hung high on the

walls to shelter the winches used for hauling cargo up from the canals. For the most part, the warehouses are no longer used as such, but some still house Oriental rug depots, where \$1.7 billion worth of Europe’s carpets come through each year. At the nearby **Kaffeemuseum Rösterei Burg** (kaffeemuseum-burg.de), I learned that Hamburg has also served as the point of entry for much of the continent’s coffee over the centuries. (The museum also offers some satisfying coffee tasting.)

Another warehouse has been commandeered by what a guide told me has become Germany’s most popular tourist attraction. I have rarely seen anything more German than **Miniatur Wunderland Hamburg** (miniatur-wunderland.com), which presents miniature electric-train tableaux of the world’s cities and landscapes—a Norwegian fjord, the Swiss Alps, Hamburg itself—in truly insane detail. Traffic controllers at a bank of screens could be running a modest airport. When I visited, it was crammed with German families →

From left: A jetty on the Aussenalster; the signature red brick exteriors of the warehouse district.



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The undulating roofline of the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg's new concert hall.

staring transfixed as tiny trains tootled around a pint-size Matterhorn—an amazing if bizarre example of Germany's passion for precision.

Beyond the warehouses, what has risen in the past 15 years from blighted waterfront has been a triumph for Hamburg's urban planners. This is the new **HafenCity** (hafencity.com), a huge tract of modern apartments, shops, and restaurants. The development screams luxury with buildings by Richard Meier and a David Chipperfield tower in the works, but the city has reserved one-third of HafenCity's housing for moderate- and low-income tenants.

Back from the St. Pauli dockyards lies the real Hamburg, low and leafy, veined with canals and flush with the riches of global commerce.

At HafenCity's tip sits the splendid new emblem of modern Hamburg: Herzog & de Meuron's **Elbphilharmonie** (elbphilharmonie.de), a concert space, hotel, and apartment complex that dominates the harbor like a glass ocean liner in a Wagnerian fantasy. Tickets for concerts in its two halls have been selling out, no matter who's playing, since it opened in 2017.

Hamburg has no tradition of good cooking, its signature dish being fried local fish on a bun. (No, it's not the hamburger, which is believed to have been invented in New Haven, Connecticut.) That said, there's no shortage of places to get a terrific meal. At **Bianc** (bianc.de; *entrées* \$97–\$182), a sleek new eatery in HafenCity with Italian chef Matteo Ferrantino at the helm, I had a killer dish of sea bass, artichoke, peas, and summer truffle, and another of intensely corn-flavored chicken, scallop, and polenta. Excellent as Bianc was, however, I preferred a small place called **Jellyfish** (jellyfish-restaurant.de; *tasting menus from* \$130) in the working-class Sternschanze neighborhood, just north of St. Pauli. The octopus with turnips and salsa verde was as good as octopus gels.

Walking around this bright, modern city, I realized that the Beatles belong to a bygone Hamburg. But sheesh, they're the Beatles and I am a baby boomer (my favorite: John). Anyone who has ever sung along to "I Want to Hold Your Hand" must not leave Hamburg before heading down to Beatles-Platz in St. Pauli. This is where I met Stefanie Hempel for **Hempel's Beatles-Tour** (hempels-musictour.de), right in front of a cheesy metal statue of the Fab Four.

Hempel is an ebullient young musician who didn't grow up with the quartet but knows them better than their mothers did. She showed me the Beatles' Hamburg, from the Indra Club, where they played their first concert in 1960, to the Top Ten Club, now the Moondoo, where they played for 92 nights straight. The neighborhood is still crummy, but I didn't care. I took a selfie in the doorway where a pompadoured John Lennon slouched for the photo later used on his *Rock 'n' Roll* album cover (which was shot before a local girl named Astrid Kirchherr persuaded the band to get mop-top haircuts). I have taken few tours that moved me as much, and as a bonus, Hempel brought along her ukulele for an unexpectedly rocking rendition of a Beatles song at each stop along the way. This may not be today's Hamburg, but it will always be my Hamburg. ✕