



CREATIVE

Nice rooms, lively bar, working design studio: East Berlin's Michelberger offers up a very different hotel experience

BY MARK SINCLAIR

SUITE



The Michelberger hotel in east Berlin caters for a hip clientele, for 'dreamers, movers and shakers ... artists and craftspeople' apparently. Aligned with the attitudes of its no doubt open-minded guests, the hotel has rooms that sleep four people at once, a rehearsal space, even a loft that can house a full complement of young, budding musicians with ease. It's a pretty rock 'n' roll place but perhaps what is most unusual about it, is that it also contains a design studio.

The building itself is a former factory and was developed into a hotel in 2009 by entrepreneur Tom Michelberger, who brought in Werner Aisslinger to design its interior with stylists Anja Knauer and Sibylle Oellerich. Aisslinger's approach was, he says, to create "a collage world, not a clean, designed world," to inject "something family-like in[to] it; a bit of chaos." It's within this free-form, familial atmosphere that its very own design studio has emerged, under the direction of Azar Kazimir, an art director originally from London.

Having worked at various European ad agencies, Kazimir decided to set up his own studio in Berlin and began looking for clients. The newly opened Michelberger was in need of a designer to help with its communications and so hired Kazimir, who began producing all the graphic work for the hotel, while art directing its new website. "After a while, I came up with the idea of bringing my embryonic business into the hotel to work under its name," says Kazimir, who saw a range of advantages, aside from the low cost promotional angle, of being housed within the Michelberger.

"The studio is primarily supported by the hotel business," says Kazimir of the operation, "which means that we're not in a position

Right, main image: The exterior of east Berlin's Michelberger, with hand-made type on the entrance sign created by the hotel's in-house design studio. Right, top to bottom: Self-promotional postcard for the hotel; the main lobby with lampshades and tables made of old books; Cool Guest and Special Guest door keys and the Michelberger's own hair and body wash, both designed by the studio.

The Michelberger hotel is at Warschauer Straße 39/40, 10243 Berlin. See michelbergerhotel.com for more details

of needing to take work for money. The choice of whether it's interesting creatively or not can be the deciding factor. I saw it as a way of empowering the designers, after seeing so many clients interfering in the agencies I worked in. The hotel also generates so much attention and has interesting people coming through it, that it offers a far greater platform for a design business than I could possibly achieve so quickly on my own."

HAND-MADE The studio currently has a full time staff of two (Kazimir and graphic designer Ulrike Ziggel) and is integrated into the business structure of the hotel itself. It designs all the products and graphic elements for the hotel and a playful, hand-made aesthetic pervades most of its rooms. The studio has also begun working with outside clients, recently creating an illustration for Intersection magazine in UK. But occasionally it reacts to the guests themselves, having made a biking logo for a group of riders from the European Bike Courier Championships who stayed at the hotel. An unpaid job, but potentially an extremely valuable effort in self-promotion.

"I can't see why a hotel can't produce creative work as good as that of an agency; brands are so multi-disciplinary nowadays," says Kazimir. "Why should the hotel hire an expensive studio, when it can become the agency itself? You can have a normal key card for your room, or you can do something creative and fun with it. It costs no money to do that, yet it adds something to the experience of the guests staying in the hotel. Can we tell a story on the Do Not Disturb sign? Can we make you smile when you use the shampoo?"

Stories and smiles no doubt accounted for, with a brand new website behind them, the studio is set on creating a Michelberger newspaper and banknote currency for use within the hotel. 