

## Zurich's Wild West: Langstrasse and Zurich-West

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Nowadays a trendy entertainment quarter is breathing new life into a former working-class neighborhood and industrial district where machines once clattered and soot hung in the air. In a constant state of change, the western part of Zurich unites the industrial heritage of the City on the Limmat with urban progress and a diverse mix of leisure activities. Here, in the Kreis 4 and 5 districts – commonly referred to as Zurich-West – machines have given way to art, design, gastronomy, shopping, and music. [zuerich.com](http://zuerich.com)

## Zurich-West: From Industrial District to Trendy Quarter

### Where Exactly is Zurich-West?

If someone from Zurich talks about “Zurich-West”, they generally mean the area that stretches to the west of Langstrasse almost as far as Altstetten, bordered to the south by the tracks out of the Main Train Station and to the north by the River Limmat. Nowadays, this quarter is one of the most popular and lively in Zurich, not least thanks to its colorful past. For over a century, the western part of Zurich was known as the city’s industrial district, even though it covered an area no more than half a kilometer (a third of a mile) long. Here the most renowned companies in Swiss industrial history once had their home. The buildings of the Schoeller textile factory stood alongside Escher Wyss AG’s machinery and turbine plant, and the Maag gear factory was also based here. But industry and commerce continually underwent change, and not always for the better: When in 1986 Steinfels, a manufacturer of soaps and household goods, was forced for cost reasons to relocate outside the city in Wetzikon, this marked the start of a new era in Zurich’s western district.

### “Not a Place for Visitors to Zurich”

In 1992, the presenter of the Swiss TV program, “Kultur im Gespräch”, described Zurich-West as “not a place for visitors to Zurich, but rather the fastest route out of the city”. Further plant closures left deserted streets and vacant factories in their wake, giving the place an eerie quality. But not for long. In the 1990s, Zurich-West started being used for creative and temporary purposes, instilling the district with new life. And when the Technopark – a center for the transfer of knowledge and technology with 250 enterprises and 1,800 jobs – was built on the former Sulzer site in 1993, a new chapter in the history of Zurich-West had finally begun. In 1994, the industrial site was developed to incorporate leisure facilities, restaurants, bars and clubs, as well as the multiplex movie theater, Cinemaxx, now the Kino Abaton. At the time, Zurich-West was known as the “West End”, and was a popular meeting place especially among night owls and partygoers. In 2000, the Schauspielhaus theater opened a large stage in the disused Schiffbau shipbuilding yard, complete with bar and restaurant, while new residents moved into 102 privately owned apartments in the Puls 5 building complex, among them many artists, creatives and communications experts, as well as families with children. A new tram line soon followed, and when Zurich University of the Arts relocated into this increasingly lively area, the quarter once again became one of the city’s hot spots. The 1,650 lecturers and staff and 3,100 students have brought new life to the complex on the former site of the Toni-Molkerei, in its day the largest dairy processing operation in Europe.

### The Place to Party, Then and Now

In the 1990s, Zurich-West was the hottest of Zurich’s party districts. It abounded in clubs, which – sadly, as many Zurich residents would say – no longer exist today. They were called Dachkantine, Labyrinth, Luv, Rohstofflager, and Toni-Molkerei (this club was actually located inside the disused buildings of Europe’s one-time largest milk producer). They attracted a colorful mix of people – intellectuals, homosexuals, drug addicts and ravers – all of whom felt equally at home here and partied all night long in what were nothing short of techno orgies. For various reasons, including a lack of safety regulations, drug dealing, illegal activity, and regular customers drifting away, many of these clubs were forced to close, although some just managed to struggle on into the next millennium. The quarter has nonetheless retained its party reputation to this day, and the then techno capital has now become an electro mecca, which is not only popular among the locals, but also enjoys a reputation far beyond Switzerland’s borders. Supermarket and Hive, two clubs that opened around the year 2000, celebrate electronic music with top DJs and first-rate sound systems, but hip-hop fans will also find venues here to their liking. The Härterei or Exil clubs, for example, where rock and pop concerts are also held on a regular basis. Lovers of jazz and world music frequent the Moods club in the Schiffbau building or Mehrspur on the newly developed Toni-Areal, while Aubrey, Alice Choo, or Escherwyss attract a much more mixed public.

## Langstrasse: From Sin to Fun

### Langstrasse and “Chreis Cheib”

Strictly speaking, only half of Langstrasse belongs to Zurich-West, the part on the northern side of the tracks out of Zurich Main Train Station. This is the Kreis 5 district. Kreis 4 – also called Aussersihl – stretches south of the train tracks along Langstrasse toward the lake and is often referred to by locals as “Chreis Cheib.” This is often mistakenly classed as part of Zurich-West. The Swiss dialect word “Cheib” once meant “animal cadaver”, but now it tends to refer to a bad person

or rogue. As far as “Chreis Cheib” is concerned, though, the word really does hark back to its original meaning: Aussersihl is where the carcasses of mainly horses and small animals – the “Cheib” – were dumped in the municipal pits.

### **From Independent Municipality to Den of Iniquity**

Between 1787 and 1891, Aussersihl was an independent municipality on the outskirts of Zurich. A sharp rise in the population in the 1860s coupled with financial difficulties forced the municipality to request to be incorporated into the City of Zurich. The influx of Italian construction workers and the building boom were also instrumental in rapidly transforming the district: a central cemetery was built, the rail freight terminal went into operation, and the Hardbrücke bridge was opened to traffic. The cantonal police barracks, the abattoir, the Volkshaus, and the main SBB workshops brought new life to the district, which was chiefly inhabited by foreign workers well into the 1970s. Simple restaurants, licensed houses, and restaurants for the workers began to spring up. Soon, however, Aussersihl also became the city’s red-light district, increasingly attracting marginalized people and drug addicts, which in turn led to a rise in drug dealing and criminal activity. This gave rise to enormous problems in the 1990s, when Zurich’s drug scene was concentrated mainly in the Platzspitz park behind the Swiss National Museum and later at Letten Train Station. In 2001, the “Langstrasse PLUS” project was launched in an effort to improve public order and safety.

### **The Locals’ Choice**

Since then, things have settled down considerably in the area around Langstrasse. Countless takeaways, hip restaurant chains, studios, and design boutiques have established themselves here and foster a friendly, multicultural atmosphere. The clubs, Zukunft, Gonzo, Heile Welt, Plaza, Les Garçons and Kanzlei, and popular bars like Dante, Olé Olé, Longstreet or Stubä are good for many a merry night out, especially on weekends, and are extremely popular with an ever-growing number of guests. The long opening times, after-hour parties, and the availability of snacks at virtually any time of the day or night mean that here some night owls really do party all through the night.

## **Art, Design and Music in Zurich-West**

The transition from an industrial area to what is now Zurich’s creative quarter has been helped on its way by, among other things, various museums and cultural institutions. A unique mixture of international art scene, trade, and the city’s residents can be found in the Löwenbräu complex. Nowadays, this one-time brewery dating from 1897 houses numerous galleries, the Kunsthalle art museum, and the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art. A little further to the west, in the building of the Zurich University of the Arts, the Museum für Gestaltung shows an impressive collection of 20th century design classics, while its fascinating exhibitions give visitors an insight into the history and future of art, design, and graphics. An equally interesting place to visit is MuDA, the Museum of Digital Arts. Here, digital art focuses on the intersection between creativity and technology, and shows that even binary codes can have an artistic appeal. Opposite the digital museum, music fans will find the Mehrspur club, where the jazz and pop department of the Zurich University of the Arts has its stage and internationally successful bands from the jazz, electro, indie, soul and many other scenes perform public concerts. Very similar sounds can be heard in the Moods club in the Schiffbau building: Known and loved as a jazz club, it also presents some extremely popular concerts from the genre of world music. Also based in the Schiffbau, the Schauspielhaus Zürich has three different stages, including a hall for 400–600 people depending on the seating and arrangement, which change with every new play. The Maag Music Hall is another exciting music venue; situated near Hardbrücke Train Station, the concert hall stages concerts, shows, and all kinds of events. Until the scheduled completion of the renovation work on the Tonhalle concert hall and Kongresshaus (2020), both of these venues are provisionally based in the Maag Hall.

## **Shopping in Zurich-West**

The creative sector in Zurich is booming, something that is especially apparent at the art and design hub, Zurich-West. Textile and furniture designers, jewelry and fashion makers, architects and graphic designers have their studios or stores here. Since 1999, The Gloss has provided urban and fashion-conscious city dwellers with a stylish mix of brands, including Wood Wood, Kitsuné, and Adidas. Walter Vintage Möbel & Accessoires and the smart Bogen 33 are devoted to designer furniture and vintage decor. On the Gerold-Areal, design specialists like Maiuki and Sanikai, as well as the

magazines from Print Matters!, rub shoulders in the most compact of spaces. Immediately next door, in an impressive tower of stacked-up freight containers, are 1,600 bags and accessories by the Zurich label, Freitag, the world's largest selection of individual recycled freeway bags. And under the Viaduct arches, fashionistas and shopaholics will find Swiss brands like Kitchener and Tarzan alongside international names like Arc'Teryx, Nudie Jeans, and Quicksilver.

## The Culinary West

Numerous creative restaurateurs have transformed old brick buildings and disused industrial halls into innovative restaurants. The glass façade of the LaSalle restaurant in Zurich's former industrial district offers a view into what was once a shipyard hangar, where boats and ships were constructed for international clients right through into the 20th century. In a large warehouse around the corner, a mixture of restaurant, bar, market hall, specialty store, and meeting place emanate a welcoming yet at the same time nostalgic ambiance: the Les Halles sells numerous collector's items, ranging from antique racing bicycles to amusing tin advertising signs to designer furniture, and has been serving its house specialty – mussels in different variations – for as long as anyone can remember. Not far away, a shopping and entertainment mall was set up under the arches of the historical railway viaduct in 2010. Under one of the arches, the Restaurant Viadukt serves light cuisine between solid stone walls. In Gerold Chuchi, the chef himself comes to the table and advises guests on their choice of pasta dish; in the evenings, the same tables are moved into a corner to give guests at the Hive Club enough space to dance. The décor in the Restaurant Steinfels reflects the colors of the 1970s, with only few elements bearing witness to its industrial past. Nowadays, it no longer smells of perfumed soap or washing detergent, but rather of barbecued meat, melted cheese and home-brewed beer. In the building next door, visitors can relax after a sumptuous dinner in one of the 12 movie theaters making up the Abaton complex. In the very heart of the quarter, Switzerland highest building, the Prime Tower, soars 126 meters (13 feet) into the air. The Restaurant Clouds on the 35th floor certainly lives up to its name: with first-class food on the plates and a phenomenal view over the whole of Zurich and as far as the Swiss mountains, gourmets from all corners of the globe are in seventh heaven here. And in the adjoining bar, they can look out over the city's rooftops while enjoying a glass of wine or refreshing drink.

## Events in Zurich-West

Two design events, Kreislauf 4+5 and Blickfang, give people an insight into all that Zurich-West has to offer in the way of creativity. In the run-up to Christmas, around 50 stores in the quarter take part in the local Christmas market, "Heiliger Bimbam!," where they display their wares on chic designer stalls. However, Zurich-West is not just big on design, but on art, too. In the 1990s, the site of the former Löwenbräu brewery on the bank of the River Limmat was transformed into a veritable place of pilgrimage for art enthusiasts: Both the Kunsthalle Zürich and the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art regularly organize art exhibitions here that focus less on showing well-established works and more on closely cooperating with artists from all over the world, including some working in the same building. There are also many other galleries with names like Francesca Pia, Gregor Staiger, and Hauser & Wirth, the Kunstgriff bookstore, a publishing house specializing in art publications, and even a foundation that supports artists and pioneers (Luma Foundation). The two most striking buildings on the site, both constructed in 2013, are a black residential tower comprising 58 privately owned apartments and a red office complex.

## Contact

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