



Here, in times gone by, machines clattered away and soot hung in the air. Nowadays, however, a vibrant entertainment quarter is breathing new life into the former industrial district and working-class neighborhood. The western part of Zurich is in a constant state of change, uniting the industrial heritage of the city on the Limmat with urban advances and a diverse mix of leisure activities. In the Kreis 4 and 5 districts – commonly referred to as Zürich-West – machines have given way to art, design, gastronomy, shopping, and music.

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Zürich-West: From Industrial District to Trendy Quarter

Today, if someone from Zurich talks about “Zürich-West”, they are generally referring to the area that stretches to the west of Langstrasse almost as far as Altstetten, bordered to the south by the tracks out of Zurich Main 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 Switzerland’s 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 located here. But industry and commerce were continually subject to 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 signaled the start of a new era in Zurich’s western district.

“Not a Place for Visitors to Zurich”

On a TV program broadcast in 1992¹, the presenter stated that Zürich-West was “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 atmosphere. But not for long. In the 1990s, Zürich-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 housing 250 enterprises and 1,800 jobs – was built on the former Sulzer site in 1993, a new chapter in the history of Zürich-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, Zürich-West was known as the “West End”, and was a popular meeting place particularly among night owls and partygoers. In 2000, the Schauspielhaus theater opened a large stage, complete with bar and restaurant, in the disused Schiffbau shipbuilding yard, 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 (ZHdK) relocated to this increasingly dynamic 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 Party District Then and Now

In the 1990s, Zürich-West was the hottest of Zurich’s party districts. It abounded in clubs, which – sadly, as many Zurich residents would wistfully say – no longer exist today. They bore such names as Dachkantine, Labyrinth, Luv, Rohstofflager, and Toni-Molkerei (this club was located in 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

¹ SRF “Kultur im Gespräch”, 1992

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 subsequently 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 techno capital has now become an electro mecca, which is not only popular among the locals, but also enjoys a reputation far beyond the Swiss borders. Supermarket and Hive, two clubs that opened around 2000, celebrate electronic music with top DJs and top-level sound systems, but hip-hop fans will also find venues here to their liking. For example, the Härtereie or Exil clubs, 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, SpaceMonki, or Escherwyss attract a more mixed public.

Langstrasse: From Sin to Fun

Langstrasse and “Chreis Cheib”

Strictly speaking, only half of Langstrasse belongs to Zürich-West: the part on the northern side of the tracks out of Zurich Train Station known as Kreis 5. 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 Zürich-West. The Swiss dialect word “Cheib” once meant “animal cadaver”, but now it tends to refer to a rogue or scoundrel. As far as “Chreis Cheib” is concerned, though, the word really does hark back to its original meaning: Aussersihl is the place 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 building boom and subsequent influx of Italian construction workers were also instrumental in rapidly transforming the district. The cantonal police station, the Volkshaus, and the main SBB workshop 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 assumed the role of 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 take-outs, hip restaurant chains, studios, and design boutiques have established themselves here and promote a friendly, multicultural atmosphere. The clubs, Zukunft, Gonzo, Heile Welt, Plaza, 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 Zürich-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 urban residents can be found in the Löwenbräu-Areal 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 interface 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 highly popular concerts from the genre of world music. Also based in the same building, 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 hosts concerts, shows, and all kinds of events. The Tonhalle concert hall and the Kongresshaus are also provisionally based in the Maag Hall until 2020, when renovation work on the two venues is scheduled for completion.

Shopping in Zürich-West

The creative sector in Zurich is booming. This is especially apparent in the trend hub of Zürich-West, where textile and furniture designers, jewelry and fashion makers, architects and graphic designers have set up their studios or stores in the area around Zurich University of the Arts. 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 Sanika 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. South of the railway track, in the Triangel beim Kanzeleiareal (Tribeka) quarter – to which the recently built Europaallee also belongs – shopaholics can find local handicrafts and Zurich manufactured goods. Trendsetters feel at home, too, for here they can find out-of-the-ordinary local design boutiques.

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 mix of restaurant, bar, market hall, specialty store, and meeting place emanates 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, between solid stone walls, the Restaurant Viadukt serves light cuisine. 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, the Prime Tower soars 126 meters (413 feet) into the air. The Clouds restaurant 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 Alps in the distance, 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 a refreshing drink.

Events in Zürich-West

Two design events, Kreislauf 345 and Blickfang, provide an insight into all that Zürich-West has to offer in the way of creativity. Moreover, 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, Zürich-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 that focus less on showing well-established works and more on closely cooperating with artists from all over the world, including some based 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.

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