



## »I remember the exact date: 13th of December 1981«



Maria Bojarzynska is often praised for having such a beautiful old Berlin cafe. Beautiful it is, with its antique furniture, vases of fresh flowers and glass vitrine filled with cheese cake, praline tarts and the likes, but old it is not, having opened only in 2009. The fact that people think the cafe has been around for decades and decades delights Maria. She's quick to say that her baked goods are made with real eggs, butter and milk and don't really have any competition on this street. »I've lived around Kantstraße for 12 years and whenever I was pining for something sweet there was no place to go to. I thought, this must be a gap.« The inspiration for the cafe stems from traditional Viennese coffee houses, which Maria has visited on her trips there.

It is also thanks to Vienna that Maria and her husband even found themselves in Berlin in the first place. »I remember the exact date: 13.12.81. Poland was in a state of war and we were at a friend's wedding in Vienna. We didn't want to go back to Poland, and entering West Berlin didn't require a visa. So we escaped, leaving all of our belongings in Poland except the things we had packed for the wedding. Gradually, over the years, we've brought our things to Berlin. Just my cat stayed there.«

Maria, who studied as an agricultural engineer, opened a gallery when she moved to West Berlin, then a boutique and then, in 1998, a telecommunications store, which moved once in 2006 to the place where the cafe is now. »I've actually always wanted a cafe. I used to cater but it was too impersonal. It's basically mass production. In Vienna I realized cafes don't have to be that large, so I thought I could start a small cafe in what was then the telly shop.« Maria started the cafe with her best friend, »...but after a year we parted ways. The cafe survived but the friendship didn't.« Now Maria runs the place with her husband. »We've worked together on everything since we came to Berlin. We are together 24 hours so we go on separate vacations.«

Though Maria and her husband don't want to return to Poland it's important to them, even after 31 years, to keep their connection to Poland strong, and they are able to do this through Cafe Kredenz. The cakes, which are on the list of Berlin's best in several newspapers, are baked in Poland. »I found a small pastry shop in Stettin that bakes for me - which shop, I won't tell!« The name Kredenz derives from credenza, a cupboard similar to a buffet, which Maria was given by her sister for the cafe's opening. It reminds Maria of home. Perhaps she had to leave her own credenza behind when she spontaneously fled Poland back in 81.

The cafe is decorated with delicate lace blankets. They dangle off of lamps, cover the tops of tables and hang framed on the walls. »I've collected them for years and when I got them back years after we left Poland, I thought I could display them.« Necklaces, earrings and bracelets mounted on a felt board also hang on the wall. »This is the jewelry of a Polish artist who, until recently, had an art gallery just around the corner and sold her jewelry there. Now we sell her work and it also acts as a nice decoration.«

Thirty one years after fleeing Poland and leaving everything behind, Maria has created a comforting place that brings her a bit closer to home and helps her keep her roots in place while supporting other Poles. For those none the wiser, it's just a charming cafe with delicious cakes to be discovered on the less-visited half of Kantstraße.

A crusty, deep-fried, golden face  
exits the solarium ☺ Job done 🍪