

House style

Berlin live-work space



METAL WINNER
The industrial light shades reference the building's previous life as a print works

ART OF THE MATTER
The four-poster serves both as a day bed and a modelling dais

SIDE EFFECT
The custom-made dining table and benches act as a divide between living and working areas

Clockwise from far left:
Eder in his walled garden;
the open-plan studio;
tools of the trade;
Eder's painting *Nacht*;
mixing colours

The art of living

For Berlin-based artist and alternative musician Martin Eder, a former print works with a walled garden proved the perfect shell in which to set up a home and studio

REPORT Vinny Lee PHOTOGRAPHS Darren Chung



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In the Mitte district of Berlin, just a few hundred metres from where the Wall separated the east from the west of the city, there is a tall, turn-of-the-century building that once housed a printing business. On the first floor of the rear block is the home and studio of semi-surrealist artist Martin Eder.

Some of his canvases portray partially clad young women in provocative poses, accompanied by fluffy cats or oversized fish, others poodles with teased hair. There is a discomfiting appeal in the women's forthright gazes and a skin-pricking revulsion prompted by the moist-eyed pets – a conflict of the sinister and the kitsch that he describes as the “nightmarish battle” at the core of his work.

The peeling paint and rusting metal balustrades at the entrance to the building serve as reminders of its heritage, but Eder's

‘I put a bathroom in what had been the chemical lab and painted the walls grey. Cézanne had grey walls in his studio’

apartment is strikingly contemporary and interestingly furnished. From the gloom of the stairwell, the flash of vivid green of the small enclosed garden is a surprise. “This is what made me want the space so badly,” he says, gesturing to the plants in tubs and the rambling roses and verdant creepers that wind their way through the windows and into his studio.

Born in Bavaria, Eder came to Berlin 15 years ago, having studied sculpture in Dresden. “I used to have cards and invitations printed here and, as I stood in the reception, I could see the outdoor space,” he explains, which was unplanted at the time. “I’d often ask the owner, ‘So, when are you moving on?’, and four years ago, he told me they’d found bigger premises. I immediately set about acquiring the place. Once it was mine, I knocked out some internal walls, put a bathroom in what had been the chemical lab and a kitchen where the toilets used to be and painted the walls grey. I think Cézanne had grey walls in his studio.

“The area wasn’t fashionable,” he adds, “so the rent was cheap, meaning I could hold on to my old studio, too. And my partner and our four-month-old son live in an apartment



BATHED IN GLORY
The bath is raised on a platform and set off-centre



LOTIONS AND POTIONS
Chemistry bottles make unusual receptacles for bath products



nearby.” This unconventional arrangement works for the couple, especially when Eder is focused on painting, as he is now, working towards a forthcoming exhibition at the Hauser & Wirth gallery in London.

“For me, each day is two days,” he says. “I leave the studio at 6pm, go to the apartment, cook supper and spend time with my partner and our child. Then, at about 9pm, I come back here and start my second day, painting through the night, then sleeping. When I wake up, I take a bath, eat and start all over again.”

The studio has another appeal for Eder. He is a diviner. But rather than being attuned to water, he is sensitive to magnetism. Using a bent metal coat hanger, he was able to choose an area with a strong magnetic resonance in which to set up his canvases – resonance, he believes, that gives him creative energy.

Physically, Eder has a passing resemblance to the actor Sean Bean and, dressed as he is in a collarless vintage dress shirt, boots and a long khaki apron, he might have stepped off the set of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. “I’ve become a tidy painter,” he says. “I’ve grown out of the mess. See? No paint on my hands or apron.” He favours low light when working, muted further by the floor-to-ceiling curtains at the

ON THE MOVE
Industrial canteen trolleys make useful mobile paint stores



Clockwise from top left: the bathroom; Eder at work on *Nacht* in the studio area; a statue of Hope with her anchor by the door to the garden; chemistry bottles filled with shampoo and bath oil; the four-poster bed; the kitchen and living space; Eder's desk

windows that face in to the internal courtyard.

In the middle of the studio is an 1840s four-poster bed. “I bought it in England. It’s only 6ft long and I’m 6ft 4in tall, so it’s OK for a nap or taking a cup of tea, but not very comfortable for sleeping,” he says. For that, he uses a mattress on a raised platform, with deep drawers beneath.

A pair of black leather sofas is supplemented by a pew, complete with prayer-book shelf. “It’s Austrian,” says Eder, sitting as comfortably as is possible on the hard seat. Opposite is a wooden lattice-work screen and panel. “A portable confessional used by missionaries,” he explains. “I picked them up at a flea market. I’m addicted to markets and have to limit myself to spending a maximum of £50 a visit. I go so regularly that I know most of the stuff on sale, but it’s like a game to remember what is where. When there’s something new, I can spot it immediately.” He confesses that his addiction to flea markets is one of the reasons for keeping on his previous studio. “It’s partly a storage space,” he says.

Despite his yen for quirky furniture, when it comes to the practical elements of his studio home, Eder’s choices have been carefully thought through. The bathroom has an oval

bath, arranged off-centre and raised on a two-step platform. The lavatory is set in a shallow recessed tray lined with the same shiny black mosaic tiles as the walls. The tray doubles as the base of the shower that is plumbed in on the right-hand side.

The kitchen, with its smoked-oak island unit, is stylish, well equipped and the hub of much coffee-making. Coffee is served at one of a pair of long, solid-wood dining tables and guests sit at one of the benches drawn up on each side. Surfaces are covered with artists’ paraphernalia and music-mixing equipment, the tools of Eder’s alter ego, Richard Ruin – “a dark person who plays slow, sad music and has quite a following. He only comes out at night,” he explains.

Looking out on the sun-filled garden, with birds darting from shrub to shrub, visiting this quirky character is an enjoyable experience – during daylight hours, at least. ■

Martin Eder is exhibiting at Hauser & Wirth, London W1, September 10-26 (020-7287 2300; www.hauserwirth.com). He is performing as his alter ego, Richard Ruin, at Hoxton Hall, London N1, on September 11 (020-7684 0060; www.hoxtonhall.co.uk)