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Rocco Forte Hotel de Rome

A spa pool in a former bank vault

Swim a few leisurely lengths in a former jewel vault, then sip an aperitif in the old strong room before the evening begins ...

That might sound like the ideal of Disney's Scrooge McDuck – but in real life, Berlin's Hotel de Rome may be the only place where it is really possible. This Rocco Forte hotel opened in 2006 directly on the historic Bebelplatz in the heart of the city – in a building formerly housing the Dresdner Bank headquarters until 1945.

But how can you combine a relaxed hotel atmosphere and a finance house's gravitas? For this heritage building from 1889, Italian architect Tommaso Ziffer has forged a unity between the original elements and a contemporary design. Lovingly refurbished, the bank's former main hall is today a grand ballroom of 276 square metres – still with the original decorations of sandstone balustrades and elegant stucco designs. The spa is housed in the spreading former jewel vault on the basement floor – exactly where fine society ladies placed their treasures for safe keeping over 100 years ago. The diamond vault became a 20-metre-long swimming pool – Berlin's longest hotel pool. The golden mosaic on the wall recalls the glitter of gold coins, while the dark wall tiles evoke the shape of the original vault's 400 safe deposit boxes.

But the most secure vault is a 25 square metre room at the entrance to the spa area. Still with its massive floor-length circular door as a feature, this is now a popular venue for exclusive events, private dinners, champagne receptions – and for marriage proposals. The sole source of natural light comes from a hatch used to pass down money sacks in days gone by.

The light conditions are very different on this five-star hotel's renowned Rooftop Terrace, bordered with the highest-growing lavender bushes in the city. From here, the impressive vista takes in Bebelplatz square and the State Opera House Unter den Linden, Berlin's Cathedral Church (Dom), the TV Tower and the green roof of St. Hedwig's Cathedral. A view which really is worth a mint!

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