The SelbstBau e.G. residents’ association was founded in 1990 by the tenants of the buildings at Rykestraße 13 and 14 in Berlin. This paved the way for what was to become a hugely successful cooperative.

Since then, Prenzlauer Berg has undergone change like no other district in Berlin. The former grey tenement blocks have been transformed into high-value properties with development potential. Young creatives from near and far were quick to snap up the ultra-chic, rather expensive homes that ensued. Along with the tourists who flock to the city, these trendy new residents fill the local streets with colour and life.

Older people, on the other hand, are rarely seen. Many can no longer afford the high rents and the neighbourhood offers few age-appropriate apartments in which elderly residents can comfortably live.

Some 25 years after its foundation, and at the initiative of the residents at Sredzkistraße 44, SelbstBau e.G. was able to acquire one of the last available properties by signing a 99-year leasehold agreement on the unrenovated building located right in the centre of Prenzlauer Berg. Their initiative enabled the rental apartments to be preserved and put paid to speculative real estate investment. The tenants of the newly-acquired building all joined the SelbstBau cooperative. With their active involvement, and in the face of difficult construction-related conditions, an exemplary project for communal, age-appropriate, inclusive housing was born.

Sredzkistraße 44 was over 100 years old and had become extremely run down. There were only coal-fired stoves for heating, bathrooms were non-existent and neighbours shared a toilet located on a landing between two floors. Almost all of the ceiling beams were rotten, the roof had only been patched in emergency repairs after the war and most of the stucco decorations on the facade had come away with the cracking plaster.

This has all given way to a modern, energy-efficient residential complex which still manages to radiate the charm of a century past. The historical facade was carefully restored and the original interior and exterior doors were refurbished and rehung. A lift now allows disabled access to all of the apartments and to the basement in the main building. Three apartments were specially designed to accommodate people with disabilities. An integrated information and exhibition centre located on the ground floor is used to showcase disabled-access building and housing design. The centre will gradually be used to hold thematic events, opening it up to local residents and promoting communication and exchange so others can benefit from the experience gained.

This photo documentary is designed to illustrate SelbstBau’s difficult, impressive and inspirational journey from project planning to project completion. The photographs document the city’s housing history, the Prenzlauer Berg of the past and the SelbstBau cooperative story. Younger people who pick up the book will no doubt stare at the pictures in disbelief, finding it hard to imagine how people were able to live at Sredzkistraße 44 before it was refurbished. But despite the building’s former condition, the people who lived in the old, dilapidated house were happy and had made the best of the situation. They formed a community which has since become a cooperative. They may no longer share a toilet, but what they do share is responsibility for the design of the building they live in and the communal way of life its occupants enjoy.

On behalf of the SelbstBau e.G. Management Board

Peter Weber

Special thanks go to all involved in project preparation, implementation and financing, to the tradespeople, construction workers, architects and planners – and of course to the documenting photographers, especially Thomas Imo and Jörg Schischke.
Facade
Basement
Courtyard
Apartment
Roof
Exhibition Centre
INTERGENERATIONAL HOUSING AT SREDZKI 44

Between 2015 and 2017, the SelbstBau e.G. tenants’ association in Berlin launched and completed an exemplary project for communal, age-appropriate, inclusive building and housing. They refurbished and modernised a building that was more than 100 years old and had been placed under a preservation order. Its dilapidated state, with toilets in the stairwell, coal-fired stoves for heating and no lift, meant it was no longer suited to living as we know it today. The outcome was a modern housing complex consisting of eleven apartments, offering space for self-determined living, social participation, contact and exchange. A number of apartments have been specially designed to accommodate people with disabilities. An integrated information and exhibition centre showcases practical examples of how autonomy and independence can be preserved for people in old age. The centre will gradually become a meeting place and a venue for neighbourhood events. This photo documentary illustrates SelbstBau’s difficult, impressive and inspirational journey from project planning to project completion.

SelbstBau e.G.

The housing project was promoted and funded by

Property owner: Gewobag PB Wohnen in Prenzlauer Berg GmbH
Leaseholder/Builder: SelbstBau e.G. www.selbstbau-eg.de
Planning and construction management: ai3 architekten www.ai3architekten.de
Interior design – Information Centre: raumdeuter Berlin www.raumdeuter.de
Facility systems: tga steldinger Ingenieure www.tga-steldinger.de
Structural Engineering: Ingenieurbüro Glosch www.glosch.com
Project website: www.sredzki44.de

Design: neueshandeln

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Photos taken: November 2015 to August 2017

The housing project was promoted and funded by

Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community
Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

along with other organisations and companies in their capacity as project sponsors.