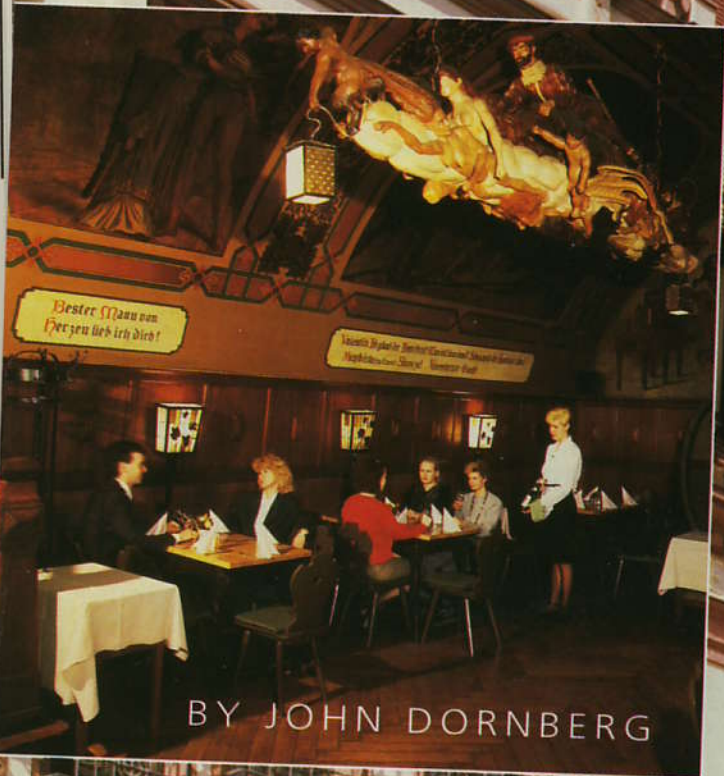


In Goethe's Footsteps

Leipzig,
Wetzlar,
Weimar



BY JOHN DORNBERG



Following Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's footsteps in this 250th anniversary of his birth would be a tour de force. Not only was Goethe an inimitable travel writer, but he was an indefatigable traveler, often escaping from some unrequited love affair.

As is the case with Napoleon Bonaparte, there are scores of places that can claim Goethe as a visitor, if not a long-term resident. Peripatetic until age 80, often traveling in the brougham on exhibit in the courtyard of his house in Weimar, he must have slept in many different beds. The German National Tourist Office lists 25 destinations associated with Goethe that you could visit this year—and that does not include Strasbourg, where he was a student, Rome, where he spent nearly two years, Karlovy Vary, the former Karlsbad, in Bohemia, where he often took the waters, or all the places in Italy and Switzerland that he described in his Italian journey. My choice narrows to three because of the role they played in Goethe's life and writings: Leipzig, Wetzlar, and Weimar.

LEIPZIG

"Leipzig to me is dear—a Paris in miniature." Thus spoke Goethe, through the words of one of the bawdy carousers in the Auerbachs Keller-scene of *Faust*, and paid tribute to the city that formed his young-adult years.

He was only 16 when he arrived on October 3, 1765, to matriculate as a law student at Leipzig University. He roomed at a merchant widow's home in the *Haus zur Grossen Feuerkugel* (House of the Big Fireball) at No. 3 Neumarkt. Neither jurisprudence nor Leipzig had been his choices. He would have preferred studying old languages, literature, history, archaeology, and orientalism at Göttingen. But his father, a prominent jurist and himself a Leipzig graduate, had insisted, and sweetened it with a princely allowance of 1,200 gulden a year.

Goethe was immediately taken by the city, which was more cosmopolitan than his native Frankfurt. "The high buildings impressed me," he wrote later in his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth), "and it is quite imposing, especially on Sundays and hol-

idays, and at night when the streets are half illuminated by the moon."

Goethe remained for three years, though energetic studying was not part of his stay. Indeed, he spent more time sowing his oats in grand homes and in taverns, especially Auerbach's, than at lectures. But when he dropped out in 1768 without a degree, much to his father's vexation, he had learned a great deal about life.

The spirit of young Goethe in Leipzig is captured by the statue of him in front of the *Alte Börse* (Old Bourse). He seems to be gazing at the university, nowadays a 365-foot skyscraper completed in 1973, but appears to be walking jauntily toward Auerbachs Keller. On the pedestal's sides are relief portraits of two young women. One is Friederike Oeser, who guided him intellectually; the other is Catharina Schönkopf, called Annettchen, three years his senior, with whom he fell madly in love. The affair inspired his first two plays: *Die Laune des Verliebten* (The Lover's Feelings) and *Die Mitschuldigen* (The Guilty Parties).

Because of extensive urban renewal and modernization of the historic *Altstadt* (Old Quarter) in the first decades of this century, and its 75-percent destruction by World War II air raids, little of Leipzig looks like it did in Goethe's time. The House of the Big Fireball was bombed to rubble in 1943. Only two places link directly to Goethe: Auerbachs Keller and the Coffe Baum café.

Auerbach's dates from 1530 when Heinrich Stromer von Auerbach, a city councilor, built a huge mercantile complex with courtyards and arcades, known as Auerbachs Hof, between Peterstrasse and Neumarkt. The wine tavern in the vaulted cellar of one of the buildings became the favorite of Leipzig as well as visiting students and professors.

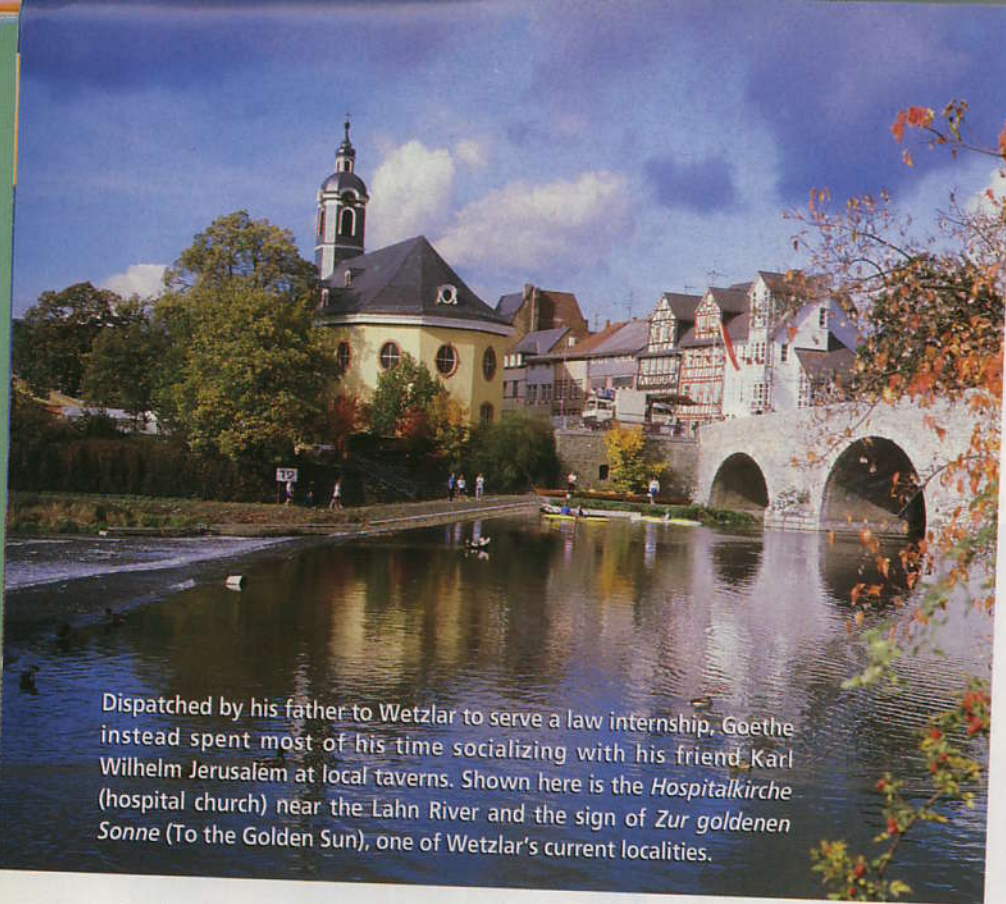
Among them was Dr. Johann Faust, a 16th-century physician, alchemist, and subject of many legends, including that he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for



Top: St. Thomas's Church; Johann Sebastian Bach served as cantor there from 1723 until his death in 1750; **Bottom:** Favored by Goethe, as well as other writers, composers, and artists, the café Zum Arabischen Coffe Baum (To the Arab Coffee Tree), is one of Europe's oldest coffeehouses. **Opposite:** Goethe statue in Leipzig; **Inset:** Auerbachs Keller in Leipzig features sculpted and painted scenes from Goethe's *Faust* throughout the establishment.

youth, knowledge, and magical powers. He was the anti-hero of a book in 1587 by Johann Spiess and of a play by Christopher Marlowe, premiered in 1593.

According to one tale, Faust, accompanied by some students, was passing by Auerbach's just as four draymen were trying to haul a wine cask out of the cellar. Faust boasted he could do that single-handedly for a price: all the wine in the



Dispatched by his father to Wetzlar to serve a law internship, Goethe instead spent most of his time socializing with his friend Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem at local taverns. Shown here is the *Hospitalkirche* (hospital church) near the Lahn River and the sign of *Zur goldenen Sonne* (To the Golden Sun), one of Wetzlar's current localities.

cask. Among much derisive laughter, he straddled the barrel and rode it out of the cellar like a horse. The truth to the story is probably that everybody was already roaring drunk. But by 1625 it was the theme of two paintings in the cellar and became part of the Faust lore that Goethe read. Knowing the tavern as well as he did, it follows that he would make a visit to Auerbach's a scene in his version of the Faust legend.

Auerbach's Hof was razed in 1912 and replaced by the *Mädler Passage*, a neo-Renaissance "trade-fair palace" commissioned by Anton Mädler, the luggage and handbag manufacturer. But the cellar was preserved, enlarged, and decorated with murals and sculptures of scenes from Faust. It is Leipzig's top spot for dining and wining.

Another favorite hangout of Goethe's, as well as of Gotthold Lessing, Johann Gottsched, Christian Gellert, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Max Klinger, and other writers, composers, and artists, was *Zum Arabischen Coffe Baum* (To the Arab Coffee Tree), one of Europe's oldest coffeehouses.

The curious name derives from a relief above the door showing a cherub handing a turbaned Turk, sitting beneath a coffee tree, a bowl of that then-exotic

beverage. The building at No. 4 Kleine Fleischgasse has been a meeting place for Leipzig intellectuals since 1718. During the Communist years it was a state-run restaurant, closed after reunification and reopened as a café last November following a four-year, \$4.8 million renovation. The rooms are filled with pictures of famous guests and objects relating to the history of coffee.

Even if there is little else relating to Goethe in Leipzig, there is plenty to see and do.

Leipzig was the city of Johann Sebastian Bach, who served as cantor of the *Thomaskirche* (St. Thomas's Church) and director of its famous boys' choir, the *Thomanerchor*, from 1723 until his death in 1750. The church, originally part of the monastery in which Leipzig University was founded in 1409, was altered numerous times until restored in neo-Gothic style in the late 19th century. St. Thomas's chief heritage today is that of Bach and its close association with Leipzig's music world. There are two main organs, one from 1908, the other completed in 1967. Concerts are held

several times a week, including Friday evening- and Saturday afternoon-performances by the *Thomanerchor*. The *Bose-Haus* across the street, a 400-year-old merchant's mansion, houses the *Bach-Museum*, a collection of memorabilia and manuscripts. Chamber music concerts take place in its main hall.

Leipzig's oldest and largest church, dating from 1165, is the *Nikolaikirche* (St. Nicholas's). Its neo-Classical interiors and paintings are the work of Adam Friedrich Oeser, Goethe's drawing teacher. In October 1989 it was the scene of the "Monday demonstrations" that triggered the opening of the Berlin Wall and the fall of East Germany's Communist regime.

For an idea of Leipzig in Goethe's time, seek out the surviving Renaissance and Baroque buildings in the Old Quarter, especially the 17th-century *Alte Börse*, now used for concerts, and the *Altes Rathaus* (Old Town Hall), completed in 1557, which houses the *Stadtgeschichtliches* (City History) Museum. *Barthels Hof* is the oldest merchants' complex, dating from 1523. Its courtyards, surrounded by "facades reaching to the sky," reminded Goethe of "a big fortress." The *Frege-Haus* on *Katharinenstrasse*, built in 1707, is named for the banking family that once owned it.

The *Königshaus*, so named because it accommodated Saxony's kings on visits to Leipzig, is two years older. The ornate *Romanus-Haus* is named for Leipzig's early 18th-century mayor Conrad Romanus, who built it for 150,000 taler but had little time to enjoy it—soon being jailed for 41 years because of financial shenanigans.



WETZLAR

After a long illness that kept him in Frankfurt most of 1769, Goethe went to Strasbourg where he reluctantly continued studying law at the university. Besides dabbling in alchemy, anatomy, and the antiquities, he had another affair—with Friederike Brion—which inspired several poems, including "Röslein auf der Heide" (Rose on the Heathland).

Goethe finally got his doctorate in jurisprudence in 1771 and returned to

Frankfurt, worked as a newspaper critic, and wrote his early masterpiece *Götz von Berlichingen*, based on the life of a rebellious 16th-century German knight. But before it was published he was dispatched by his father to Wetzlar to serve a law internship at the *Reichskammergericht*, the supreme court of the Holy Roman Empire, which had its seat there. He had a great-aunt in Wetzlar who, presumably, was to keep an eye on him.

Goethe arrived on May 10, 1772, and took a room at No. 7 Kornmarkt, across the street from his aunt's house. He soon discovered that three friends from Leipzig were also in town, including Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem. Though he duly signed in at the court, there is no evidence that he ever went to any sessions. Instead he spent most of his time socializing, imbibing with Jerusalem and other interns at the *Gasthaus zum Kronprinzen* at No. 17 Domplatz, and, most important, courting Charlotte Buff, daughter of the administrator of the *Deutschordenshof* (Court of the Teutonic Knights) and fiancée of another good friend, Johann Christian Kestner. Goethe's love for "Lotte" Buff changed his life.

On September 11, 1772, four months after arriving in Wetzlar and shortly after Lotte had firmly rejected him, he left town without saying goodbye to anyone. Six weeks later his friend Jerusalem, using two pistols borrowed from Kestner, shot himself because of his own unhappy affair with a married woman.

The unrequited ardor for Lotte, the friendship with Kestner, and Jerusalem's suicide became the central themes of Goethe's first big literary success, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther). He wrote the roman à clef, set in Wetzlar, in two months, and when it was published in the fall of 1774 it became an instant bestseller.

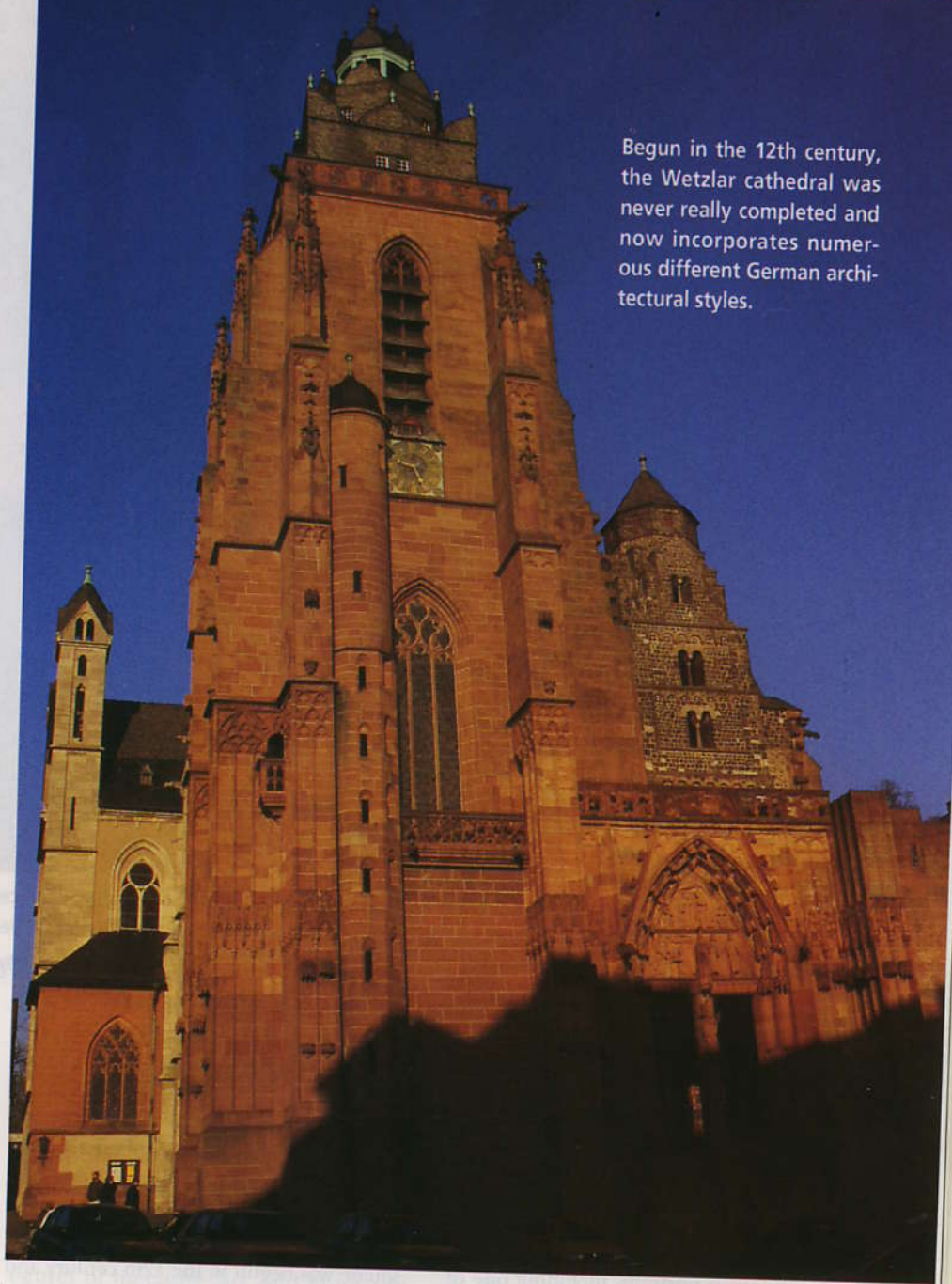
Nowhere else except in Weimar is Goethe as omnipresent as here. Besides a Goethestrasse, Lottestrasse, Kestnerstrasse, and Wertherstrasse, you will find the Lotte House, Jerusalem House, and a dozen other spots that played a role in the "Sorrows."

Starting in May and continuing through September the local tourist office will sponsor dozens of special events to mark the Goethe anniversary.

The 850-year-old town of 54,000

became a free imperial city in 1180, thrived as a commercial center in the Middle Ages, but went into sharp decline in the Thirty Years War. It regained prominence when the *Reichskammergericht* was moved there from Speyer in 1689. In the late 19th and early 20th century Wetzlar was a center of German optical manufacturing and birthplace of the Leica, the world's first 35-millimeter camera. Because there was relatively little damage during World War II, its Old Quarter looks almost as it did in Goethe's time: steep, winding cobblestone streets lined by half-timbered houses covering every architectural style from Gothic through Baroque.

Begun in the 12th century, the Wetzlar cathedral was never really completed and now incorporates numerous different German architectural styles.



For do-it-yourself exploring use the Tourist Office's *Historischer Rundgang in der Altstadt*, a practical 14-page guide and map to more than 40 historic sites in the Old Quarter. The most important and rewarding ones connected with Goethe are the Lottehaus, Jerusalemhaus, and the *Reichskammergerichtsmuseum*.

The Lottehaus, where Goethe spent almost every day in the summer of 1772, was the administration building of the Teutonic Knights, who had acquired land and established a hostel in Wetzlar in 1287. The Teutonic Order, founded in 1190 during the Third Crusade, was disbanded in 1809 under pressure from Napoleon. Three generations of the Buff



The Anna Amalia Library is dedicated to the woman who made Weimar into a European center of the arts. Goethe visited the city upon her invitation; Bottom: Goethe lived in his garden house on the Ilm River for the first six years of his stay in Weimar.

family resided here as administrators. The house exhibits period furnishings, documents, and early editions by Goethe.

In the 17th-century Jerusalemhaus Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, secretary of the Duchy of Brunswick's legation to the high court, had a two-room apartment from 1767 until his suicide in 1772. Among the objects in the little museum are numerous portraits, including one of Elisabeth Herd, wife of the Palatinate legation secretary, with whom Jerusalem was in love. The furnishings all date from the second half of the 18th century.

A visit to the Reichskammergerichts-museum will give you an overview of the institution's role in the Holy Roman Empire. A high court to regulate feuds and disputes between the constituent electorates, principalities, and duchies of the empire was established by Emperor Maximilian I in 1495. It held sessions in various cities until 1527 when Speyer became its permanent home. The wars with France and Louis XIV's conquests in the Rhineland, forced the court to flee eastward and settle in Wetzlar in 1689. Since all its members were

highly respected civil servants, they brought renewed prosperity to the town. The empire and the court were disbanded by Napoleon in 1806.

Though it is doubtful that Goethe was ever in it, Wetzlar's *Dom* (Cathedral), used nowadays for both Catholic and Protestant services, is a must. The huge structure that towers over *Buttermarkt* (Butter Market) square was begun in the 12th century and never really completed. It incorporates so many styles that it is like a stone album of German ecclesiastical architecture. Each master seems to have had his own ideas. Yet, it is remarkably harmonious on the inside with a trove of art treasures, including 14th-century frescoes and an unusual Pieta from 1380.

In Wetzlar you get a feeling of the past when you head down one of the steep, narrow lanes to the Lahn and cross the river by way of the 13th-century *Lahnbrücke* or Lahn Bridge. It is probably

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the route Goethe took in 1772, when he left, sorrowful like Werther.

Goethe journeyed downstream along one of Germany's most idyllic river valleys. Though it is only 60 miles—an hour's drive—to Lahnstein, where the Lahn meets the Rhine, you could easily spend a week or two here to see the sites.

WEIMAR

Goethe was only 26 but famous, thanks to *Werther* and *Götz von Berlichingen*, when in November 1775 he visited Weimar, capital of the principality of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, at the invitation of its 18-year-old Duke Carl August and his widowed mother Anna Amalia, who was making the vest-pocket duchy (394 square miles in area and total population 107,000) into a European center of the arts. The trip was a turning point. Goethe became the young



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duke's privy-councilor and, later, chief minister, and Weimar became home for the rest of his life.

The picturesque city in the heart of Thuringia, designated as Europe's "Cultural Capital" this year, abounds with sites relating to Goethe, and a week is barely enough to see everything.

The *Goethehaus*, his town mansion on the Frauenplan, was where he spent nearly 50 years writing, entertaining Europe's other great thinkers, and working as the duchy's chief civil servant. Three of the rooms were reserved for Christiane Vulpius with whom he lived out of wedlock for 18 years before they were married in 1806. The furnishings, including his substantial library, are original. A tour of it as well as the adjacent museum can take the entire day.

Goethe's *Gartenhaus* (Garden House) that he bought in 1776 is the small country house on the Ilm River where he lived during his first six years and later years when he used it only in the summer.

The Wittumspalais, at the corner of Schillerstrasse and Theaterplatz, was the dower house of Anna Amalia. Here she surrounded herself with the leading intellectuals in Germany. Besides showing period furnishings, the museum houses an important collection of paintings, Baroque costumes, and applied art.

The 'Haus der Frau von Stein,' on the edge of the Ilm Park, was where Goethe spent countless hours in the company of his greatest unrequited love, Charlotte von Stein, seven years his senior and wife of the ducal master of the house. The platonic relationship started shortly after Goethe's arrival in Weimar and lasted a decade. Though she had seven children from her husband, legend has it that she got 1,700 letters from Goethe.

The Schillerhaus on Schillerstrasse was where the poet and dramatist Friedrich Schiller, enticed to Weimar by Goethe, spent the last years of his life and wrote *William Tell* (without ever having been in Switzerland). The furnishings are not original—most of those having been sold by his widow to pay off the mortgage on the house after his premature death in 1805—but the ambience is genuine enough. The modern annex houses the Schiller Museum, a collection dealing with his life and work.

The Deutsches Nationaltheater on



— THE "GOETHE" ROAD

Theaterplatz—thrice rebuilt and in different styles—was where Goethe and Schiller staged their dramas. The statue of the two on the square dates from 1857. In 1919 it was the seat of the National Assembly that drafted the constitution of the Weimar Republic.

Though the nearly 60 years that Goethe spent there were Weimar's golden age, there is more to see than sites connected with him and Schiller. Weimar was an important center of the Reformation and briefly after World War I the cradle of German democracy and a font of liberalism in the arts. Besides Goethe and Schiller, some of the greatest figures of literature, art, and music are associated with the city: Martin Luther, Lucas Cranach, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Christoph Wieland, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Thomas Mann, Walter Gropius, Henry van de Velde, Lionel Feininger, Vasily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee.

For the sites, start on the *Markt* (Market Square), surrounded by Renaissance, Baroque, and neo-Gothic burgher houses of which the *Stadthaus*, built in 1547, and the *Cranachhaus*, Cranach the Elder's last residence, completed in 1549, are the finest. The Hotel Elephant has been Weimar's leading hostelry for more than 300 years. Thomas Mann used it as the setting for

his novel *Lotte in Weimar*.

The *Stadtkirche*, or city church, on Herderplatz was completed around 1500. Luther preached from its pulpit; Lucas Cranach the Younger painted the altarpiece depicting his father and Saxony's Elector Frederick the Wise; Bach did a stint as its organist; Herder was its pastor for nearly 30 years.

The *Residenzschloss*, just a couple of minutes' walk from the church, was the ducal palace and now houses the *Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar*, a magnificent collection of art, including works by Dürer, Cranach senior and junior, Veronese, Tintoretto, Titian, and Rubens.

The *Liszthaus* on Marienstrasse, full of original furnishings and some of his favorite instruments, is where Franz Liszt spent his summer months from 1869 until his death in 1886. Among the objects on exhibit are the portable clavichord he used when traveling and the baton with which he conducted the first Weimar performance of *Lohengrin* by his son-in-law Richard Wagner.

Diagonally across Marienstrasse is the Bauhaus School at which Kandinsky, Klee, and Feininger were teachers. It is now the Bauhaus University.

Contributing editor John Dornberg writes from Munich.

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