A cold, rainy November day in Hessen’s capital – high time to sort the many topics for the Wiesbaden Letter 2017 that have been buzzing around in my mind for some time and, at the same time, take a look at the newspapers I have gathered being old-fashioned, and let myself be inspired. Here’s to my describing a short extract from life in Wiesbaden to you at the close of the year.

I would like to report about the beautiful things first. And thus it is a great joy to justifiably claim: Wiesbaden 2017 – is a year of the patrons of the arts. We Wiesbadener, who are normally a little envious of Frankfurt and the commitment of the citizens there, are very pleased about three men who want to do the city good.

Alfred Weigle for example. By donating a million euro, he has enabled the Wiesbaden Stiftung to become owner of a building and thus come closer to achieving the goal of a Foundation Centre. The residential and commercial property is located in the centre of the city, at Michelsberg, and it guarantees annual rental income of 50,000 euro. That is a stroke of luck for the Foundation in times when banking revenues are low. The running costs can now also be met long-term, because there would be no projects without an administration (even if a lean one). This modest, elderly gentleman, who had the good fortune of the industrial after World War II era and has been an anonymous benefactor several times has been voted Foundation Senator as a measure of our gratitude, a newly introduced honorary title.

Thanks to Ferdinand Wolfgang Neess, the Museum Wiesbaden can open an excellent art nouveau and symbolism collection. The art world had all eyes on Wiesbaden when the “sensational donation agreement” between him and the State of Hessen was made public: 570 works of art – paintings and furniture – worth more than 40 million euro can be admired starting June 2019 in a specially refurbished dedicated south wing of the Museum. 2019 is the year in which Ferdinand Wolfgang Neess will celebrate his 90th birthday. By the way, parts of his collection enriched the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900.

I already mentioned in the Wiesbaden Letter 2016 that the art collector and successful businessman Reinhard Ernst wants to erect a museum for abstract art at Wilhelmstrasse 1 at his own expense (some 40 million euro), and manage it with the Reinhard & Sonja-Ernst-Stiftung. The plans are now fairly concrete and are promising. There is broad consensus in City Hall. There was a clear majority in favour of art in a citizens’ participation act on the development of this prime urban location. I’m afraid I can’t give you any news on the approval from the city
council as yet, as this meeting will take place after our letter has been printed. The architectural committee was highly impressed when the Japanese star architect, Fumihiko Maki, a friend of the collector, a winner of many awards and with an abundance of experience in museum structures, presented his design to them in the autumn. Reinhard Ernst wants to not only give his own abstract art collection, which is valued at 50 to 70 million euro by an expert commissioned by the city, room in an “open museum”, he also wants to offer various exhibitions and to invite guests to events and to the café. Together with the Nassauscher Kunstverein and the Bellevue-Saal on the “Rue” and the Landesmuseum (State Museum) on the adjacent Friedrich-Ebert-Allee the cultural mile would be perfect. The Ernst-Museum could be completed in 2021.

There is a lot happening on Friedrich-Ebert-Allee right now, and we are looking forward to the completion of the redesigned area between the Landesmuseum, which is undergoing considerable redevelopment, and the impressive new Rhein Main Congress Center. Wiesbaden will have a very special entrance to the city centre here. The senior building contractor on the state’s behalf, Henning Wossidlo, can be proud of the fact that the budget of 194 million euro for the Congress Center will not be exceeded and the opening in April 2018 is expected to take place as scheduled. The Sports Ball, which is famous throughout Germany, is expected to attract 1,400 guests in the south wing at the beginning of February. Europe’s largest Convention of Internal Medicine will take place here in June. Martin Michel, head of the city-owned Triwicon Company also responsible for the Kurhaus, and his two new management colleagues should not have any difficulty in marketing the complex which was designed by the Frankfurt architect, Ferdinand Heide. Besides the construction, the lighting concept by the Munich light designer, Vetter, is sure to cause a stir.

There is a lot of movement in the building sector and urban development. Four new hotels, new residential areas, renovation of the Stadtschloss, progress in the construction of the Kureck, the soon to be opened Coulin carpark… Friends of Wiesbaden might be sad that the days of the Hotel Bären at Drei-Lilien-Platz are gone for good. Apartments, offices and shops are now being built where O.W. Fischer or Zsa Zsa Gabor stayed, where there was a bathing house as early as 1455 and a hotel had existed since 1637.

I would like to mention one of my favourite Renaissance structures here that has been a jewel since being restored years ago: the Jagdschloss Platte with its modern glass roof construction. It is well worth an excursion and a visit. This premium urban event location is very popular for weddings. Take a look with me at the Pressehaus on Langgasse. In the investor projects category the Hessian prize for the protection of historical buildings 2017 was awarded for the extensive and scrupulous restoration of the neo-baroque and art nouveau building dating from 1909.

Let us take a brief detour from the old to the young: almost 3,000 new students at the University of Applied Sciences RheinMain celebrated the start of their semester at the Schlachthof at the beginning of October meaning that there are more than 13,000 students in Wiesbaden this winter for the first time. And the numbers are still rising.

A few more highlights: during the 20th Literaturtage, the author Frank Witzel, born in Biebrich, organised a both exciting and courageous event week as curator. The Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache (Society for the German Language) celebrated their 70th anniversary this year, The Akademie für Ältere (Academy for Senior Citizens) has been hosting a captivating programme for 25 years. And the Exground Festival ensured internationality in Wiesbaden for the 30th time.

At events like the Exground Festival or plays in the State Theatre, I see my former colleague, Dr. Gerd Klee, before me – that was his world. The feuilleton editor of the Wiesbadener Kurier newspaper died at just 65 years of age. It is difficult for many people in the city to understand why he had to pass away so early.

Sadness and happiness often come hand in hand. Several people also celebrated big birthdays: these include the free-man of the city, Professor Dr. Dr. h.c. Hans-Joachim Jentsch. He held the office of Lord Mayor, Member of the Bundestag, Thuringian Minister of Justice and Judge at the Federal Constitutional Court among others and was honoured at City Hall on the occasion of his 80th birthday. Former Lord Mayor and former Member of the Bundestag, Rudi Schmitt, will be 90 in January 2018. He too is a freeman of his hometown. Veronika Dyckerhoff, the passionate promoter of equestrian sport, celebrated her 100th birthday. And Wolfgang Nickel, former head and longest-serving member of the city council has been dedicated to “his Naurod” for forty years.

Let us stay with the people: Frank-Walter Steinmeier paid Wiesbaden a courtesy visit as the new President of Germany and entered his name in the golden book of the city and state. Surely a more pleasant task than that of finding a new government after the failure of the “Jamaica” (CDU, FDP, Green Party) coalition at the federal level…

Needless to say, Wiesbaden was again host to many festivals. Take a look at our cover picture of this year’s Twinkling Star Christmas Market! Angels float down in a cloud of stardust at the opening. The atmosphere is magical – despite all of the security measures that have unfortunately become necessary everywhere for fear of attacks. Last but not least, the many tourists are thrilled by the Yuletide hustle and bustle under the warm light of the lilies.

A very special festival series deserves a mention here: “500 Years Reformation”. The Reformation Festival also drew crowds in Wiesbaden thanks to the ambitious programme. Countless people who climbed onto the Luther pedestal in front of the Marktkirche called out “Here I stand…” for several months. There was also a major summer festival focusing on
Wiesbaden visit: President Steinmeier enters his name in the golden book of the city in the presence of Minister of Hessen Bouffier and Lord Mayor Gerich.

Japanese star architect with his design for a museum building. On the right, collector Ernst who wants to build on the Rue and run the “House of Art” at his own expense.

Wiesbaden Stiftung Leonardo School Award hosted their gala in the State Theatre for the first time to the cheers of the winning teams.

A very special entrance to the city is emerging on Friedrich-Ebert-Allee. Wiesbaden expert Erika Noack took this aerial photograph. She is also author of the book “Wiesbaden aus der Vogelperspektive”.

Popular event location: Jagdschloss Platte. It is also a destination with a breathtaking view for excursions.

Message: The Luther Church was bathed in a special light for the anniversary of the Reformation.

Handing over the keys: The Wiesbaden Stiftung is now owner of a property thanks to Alfred Weigle. Both the patron of the arts and the board are delighted.

Pleasure before work: 3000 new students of the University of Applied Science RheinMain celebrated the start of the winter term in the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof. There are now 13,000 students for the first time.

The winners: The Wiesbaden Stiftung Leonardo School Award hosted their gala in the State Theatre for the first time to the cheers of the winning teams.

Donation: Collector Neess makes Wiesbaden a centre of art nouveau.
Luther’s legacy. 1,400 people gathered in the Luther Church at the end of October for the central celebration for Hessen and Nassau. The building was bathed in a special light by the artist Jürgen Scheible, making the church and the message shine into the city.

What we absolutely must do together: take a look at the activities of the Foundation and the Friends of the Wiesbaden Stiftung. I already mentioned the Foundation building in the introduction. And I would like to encourage you to look at the www.die-wiesbaden-stiftung.de website or the Foundation brochures. The Leonardo School Award gala was held in the State Theatre and with their support for the first time. There was a wonderful ambience and a programme for 1,000 guests. Twelve Leonarados, 1,000 euro for each team and school were presented to the cheers of the audience. Wiesbaden youths have been proving team spirit and creativity impressively since the first Leonardo in 2005. The Zoom Environment competition of the Friends of the Wiesbaden Stiftung is still on the road to success. “Zoom… your way”, is the task to be given to the 12 to 25-year-olds next spring. The two projects “Zoom… your world” and “Zoom… us your tree” produced amazing photographic results and a sensitisation for the environment. The Stadtteil Historiker (District Historian) project is also continuing to be a success. The participants have since presented their research results in a series of events. A new season is starting. Allow me to mention the example of the “Barrierefrei starten” (Starting barrier-free) association that successfully opens up education and training to young people with disability by providing individual support, helped by the Bürger Stiftung. In the same way, it is committed to working with refugees as part of the “Gemeinsam in Wiesbaden” (Together in Wiesbaden) network.

Finally, I would like to give you two Wiesbaden-specific book tips. A very special way of getting to know Wiesbaden is to go on an excursion with Ekko the giant who is not only suitable for children. The somewhat different, new Ekko will, as his creator, Jürgen Heller, told me, appear in German, English and French before Christmas! Ekko has “connections” with the Foundation. The books will be presented to each winner of the “Leseritter” (children who read to others) project as an exploration book. Three authentic Wiesbadener have published their columns from the two local newspapers in a book aimed at those who like dialects: the journalists Elke Baade, Hans-Jürgen Hauzel and Olaf Streubig call on locals who understand the local dialect, former “Wissbadener” and new residents often during readings to “Bassemo uff!” (Look out!).

Let me promise you here that I will be looking out for interesting things happening in the city in 2018 and will report before 2019 starts. Until then – I wish you the very best for the New Year.

Ingeborg Salm-Boost  
(former head of local editing of the Wiesbadener Kurier newspaper)

P.S. I started with patrons of the arts and I would like to close with a patron of the arts who was honoured in his hometown of Schwerin shortly before the editorial deadline for my letter: Frank Brabant has “settled his estate”; he bequeathed half of his impressive expressionism and “Neue Sachlichkeit” collection to his birthplace, Schwerin, and to his place of residence, Wiesbaden, respectively. We can look forward to an exhibition of his treasures around his 80th birthday in April.