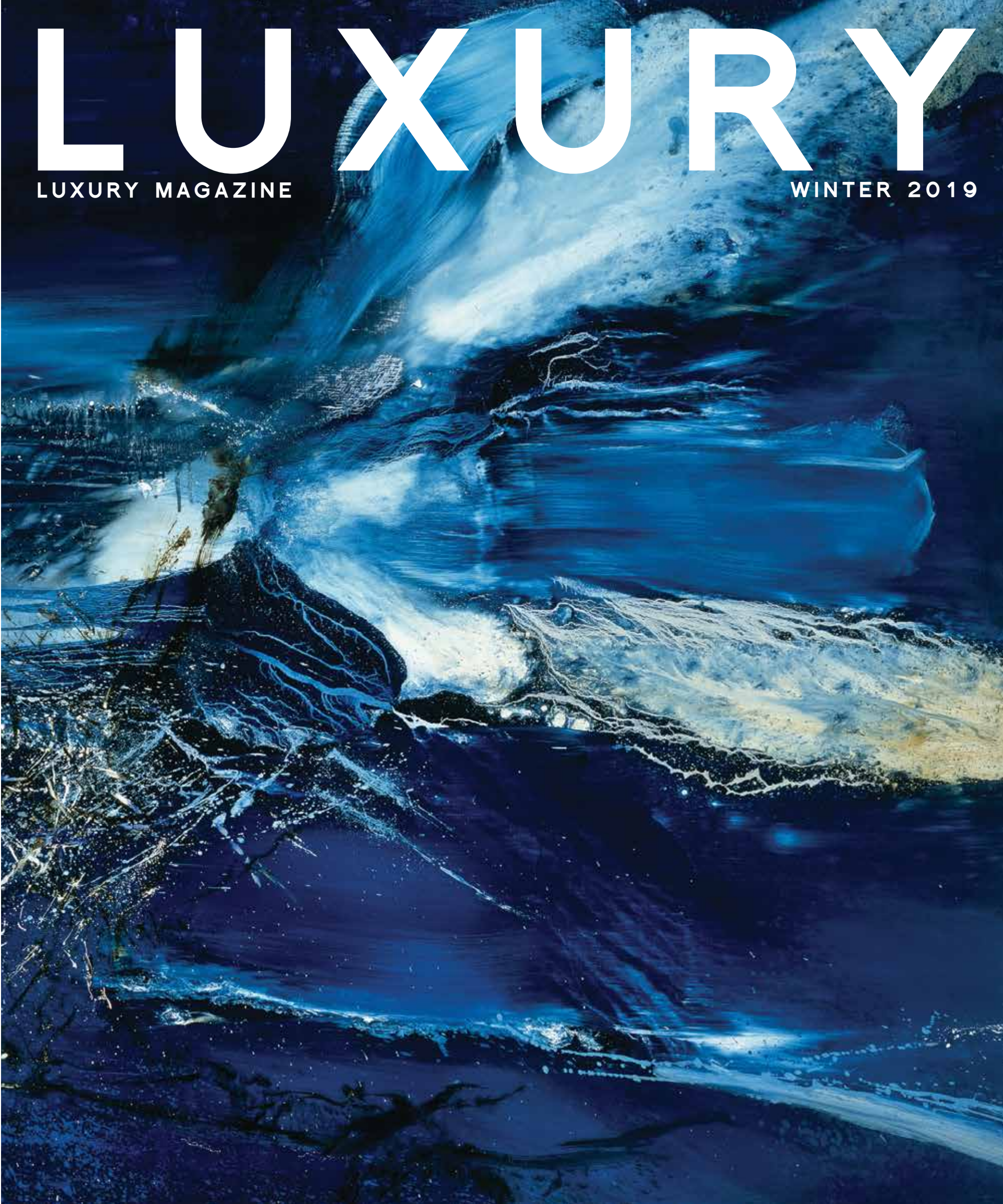


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COUP DE THEATER

RISEN FROM THE ASHES OF WORLD WAR II,
DRESDEN IS READY TO TELL
ITS STORY, HAVING UNDERGONE A
RENAISSANCE THAT SEEKS TO
RECLAIM ITS PRIOR GLORY AND
MAKING HEADLINES IN A
HISTORIC JEWELRY HEIST.

by Jason Edward Kaufman

DD Pix. Opposite Page: iStock



Seen from across the Elbe River, the Dresden skyline is known for the cupolas and domes of Baroque churches, arcaded streets, the red-tiled gables of Dresden Royal Palace, and the copper-green *Panther Quadriga* sculpture crowning the opera house. Although the panorama of 18th- and 19th-century architecture recalls another era, all is not as it seems.

Despite the aged façades, nearly all of Old Town is a modern recreation. The original was destroyed in 1945 in a series of British and American air raids, claiming thousands of lives and leveling hundreds of historic buildings. A decades-long campaign has restored the ruined landmarks, ensuring that visitors encounter a streetscape scrubbed of wartime devastation. The palace, art galleries, Semperoper opera house, and churches were all reconstructed in their original locations; nearby blocks were rebuilt with buildings that maintain the scale and style of the prewar city. Its museum collections, vast and of superlative quality, miraculously survived, having been hidden in the countryside before the war. The Russians took the collections as reparations in 1945, but returned most of them by the late 1950s when East Germany was under Soviet control.

Today these works are on display as part of the **Dresden State Art Collections** (skd.museum), a complex of 15 museums comprising several million items spanning five

centuries. Dresden's heyday was roughly 1550 to 1750, when the rulers of Saxony were at the height of their power and prestige. Enriched by the region's silver mines and industry, and eager to project status and taste, the Electors of Saxony created elaborate buildings and amassed treasures that rivaled those of sovereigns in France, Italy, England, Spain, and Russia. Public tours began in the 1580s, and by the Baroque period, guidebooks detailing the riches were available in eight languages. Today the museums welcome more than 2 million visitors a year, mainly from Central Europe and Russia, as Dresden has yet to achieve renown among world travelers.

In November the museums made international headlines when parts of three significant sets of royal jewelry were stolen from the complex in an early-morning heist that is the stuff of a Hollywood plotline. There hasn't been a bigger theft since the Second World War. At press time investigations to recover the items, valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars, were just beginning. In other news, the Semper Building at the Zwinger reopens in February 2020 with a reinstallation of Old Master painting and sculpture collections. Here, an in-the-know guide to the Zwinger and many of the complex's other museums—including the Green Vault, where the robbery took place—that are housed in the Royal Palace and other restored buildings. ►



THE ROYAL PALACE (Residenzschloss)

The Electors and Kings of Saxony lived here from the Renaissance to the First World War. Gutted in the 1945 bombing and slated for demolition, the castle, whose four main wings are topped by domed turrets, was rebuilt after Germany's reunification. In recent decades parts of the structure have reopened to the public.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Green Vault This eight-room suite contains the Saxon crown jewels and more than 2,000 plates, vessels, jewels, statuettes, and whimsical decorative objects fashioned by royal goldsmiths and European master craftsmen. The priceless riches set out in mirrored cases and gilded consoles include the 50-carat Dresden White Diamond, a 648-carat sapphire, and the gold seal ring of Martin Luther. A jewel-studded wooden figurine of a South American native carries a tortoise-shell platter heaped with Colombian emeralds. Dresden police and museum authorities reported around 100 pieces stolen during the historic November heist. Two thieves raided a display case containing sumptuous royal adornments encrusted with diamonds, many set in their mountings during the 18th century. Among the stolen goods are a bejeweled rapier and sheath, cufflinks, shoe buckles, brooches, and buttons. At press time, the lot has yet to be recovered.

The New Green Vault A thousand more treasures are one floor above in 12 state-of-the-art galleries that opened in 2004. Among the massive lathe-turned ivory goblets, inlaid gold boxes, rock crystal pitchers, and a hat clasp set with the 41-carat Dresden Green Diamond (on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Making Marvels* exhibition, through March 1, 2020), the virtuoso showpiece is a 4-foot ivory statue of Neptune holding aloft a fully rigged frigate manned by dozens of miniature sailors. One of the items, a jewel-encrusted tabletop model of an Indian palace, was valued at more than the cost of constructing the Royal Palace.

The Electoral Wardrobe This rotating display of costumes worn by the Electors and their wives is unrivaled among



international museums. The female costumes from the Renaissance, their intricately stitched fabrics perfectly preserved, are the only surviving examples in the world. The fashions are juxtaposed with painted portraits of the owners in related attire and parade weapons.

The Royal State Apartments In the lavish Audience Chamber, the throne rests on a raised platform beneath a canopy and a ceiling painting depicting Hercules. A never-used gold-embroidered imperial bed dominates the ceremonial State Bedroom. Nearby rooms present the Electoral garments and accouterments for hunts, festivals and masquerade, and a coinage and portrait medallions collection sampled from 300,000 items in the SKD's Coin Cabinet.

The Armory Saxon rulers amassed one of Europe's great collections of Medieval and Renaissance parade weapons and costumes, some 12,500 items. A vast hall displays hundreds of these pieces in a cavalcade that evokes the martial parades and tournaments once staged in the adjacent courtyard.



The Turkish Chamber This hall devoted to Ottoman art and weaponry is mysteriously darkened with pools of light enhancing the display. Saxony's great art patron August the Strong was fascinated by the sultans, sending agents on buying trips to Constantinople and receiving pieces as diplomatic gifts. He even imported camels, Arabian horses, and riding gear to enhance his festivals. ▶

Clockwise from top left: State Bedroom in the Royal State Apartments in the Residenzschloss; a lavish hall inspired by Versailles in the Royal State Apartments; coronation regalia of August the Strong replete with life mask of the Elector; the Baroque and Renaissance-style exterior of the Residenzschloss; knightly pageantry in the Armory; statue of Neptune supporting a frigate carved in ivory, displayed in the New Green Vault; the historic Green Vault is a Baroque symphony of mirrors, gold, and precious objects.

Courtesy Images, Clockwise From Top: SKD/JHC-Krass (2); SKD. Opposite Page, Courtesy Images From Top Left: SKD/Oliver Killig; SKD/David Brandt (2); SKD/Jürgen Karpinski



Counterclockwise from top left: Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*; Meissen menagerie in the Porcelain Collection; Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*; Drumming Bear automaton in the Mathematics-Physics Salon; arcaded façade of the Zwinger.



From Top: Jason Edward Kaufman; Courtesy SKG/Hans Christian Krass. Opposite: Clockwise From Top: Jason Edward Kaufman; Courtesy SKD/Wolfgang Kreische; Courtesy SKD/Juergen Loesel



THE ZWINGER

The 18th-century pleasure palace and a later-added art gallery form an oval-shaped campus that was entirely wrecked in the war and rebuilt in the 1950s and '60s. Steps from the Royal Palace, the six Baroque pavilions are linked by arcaded galleries surrounding a sprawling central garden. Sunlit galleries house the renowned Dresden porcelain collection and scientific instruments, and old master paintings and sculpture fill the art museum.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Porcelain Collection August the Strong was obsessed with porcelain, amassing one of the world's greatest collections, and establishing Europe's first factory in Meissen after a German chemist discovered the formula that had been a Chinese secret for centuries. An eccentric presentation by New York architect Peter Marino includes large-scale, blue-and-white Ming vases and painted vessels from the reign of Chinese Emperor Kangxi, as well as Imari and Kakiemon wares from 17th- and 18th-century Japan, and astounding vessels, portraits, and multi-figure statues produced at the Meissen factory. The most entertaining rooms contain life-size animals—many based on creatures in the Elector's zoo—forming a Meissen menagerie.

The Mathematics-Physics Salon The exhibit showcases hundreds of historic scientific instruments that the Electors amassed to understand the world: globes and maps, telescopes, microscopes, burning mirrors. The evolution of the clock is displayed near a 13th-century celestial globe, one of only five known from this period. Visitors can operate a 3-D model of a calculating machine developed by Blaise Pascal, and witness the inner workings of objects in digital animation, including a drumming bear made in 1625, with real fur and eyes that move in sync with the ticking clock on his chest.

The Old Master Picture Gallery (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) The signature masterpiece of Dresden's painting collection is Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (1512–13). The work is one of 3,800 paintings in a collection that spans the Renaissance to the Rococo, including Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1508–10), Correggio's *Holy Night* (1522–30), Vermeer's



Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window (1659), and Rembrandt's *Ganymede* (1635). Panels by Lucas Cranach, court painter to the Electors in the 16th century, include the first life-size, full-length royal wedding portraits.

The Albertinum In the 19th century, the 16th-century arsenal was converted into a Renaissance-style museum and named for Saxon King Albert. Disastrous flooding in 2002 led the SKD to relocate underground storage and conservation to a two-story addition capping the courtyard. In 2010 the building reopened as a museum from Romanticism to the present, picking up where the Old Master collection leaves off.

Dresden had one of Germany's largest collections of modern art until the Nazis destroyed or sold works declared "degenerate." West German museums later recovered many losses, but institutions behind the Iron Curtain were isolated from the art market, and the SKD's holdings remain thin. There are some international postwar artists, but the main focus is German artists. >



Counterclockwise from top left: Soaring interior of Dresden's Church of Our Lady; Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski; Albrechtsburg castle presides over Meissen; the Bach Museum celebrates Leipzig's most renowned resident; St. Nicholas Church, where Bach premiered works as a music director.

BEYOND THE MUSEUMS

TAKE AN ART WALK THROUGH OLD DRESDEN AND DAY TRIPS TO NEARBY MEISSEN AND LEIPZIG.

AROUND DRESDEN

The elevated, tree-lined walkway **Brühl's Terrace** overlooks the Elbe between the Royal Palace and the Albertinum. Named for August III's prime minister, who built a mansion on the embankment, the site affords panoramic views of the city. A cherished landmark is the 300-foot domed steeple of the Lutheran **Church of Our Lady (Frauenkirche)**, which served the predominantly Protestant population. The 1743 building collapsed after the bombing and was left in ruins by the Communists as an anti-war memorial. The reconstruction, completed in 2005, incorporates charred stones from the original that dot the façade. The Catholic **Hofkirche**, connected to the palace, was built by Augustus the Strong, who converted to Catholicism to assume the Polish crown. Destroyed in the war, it was rebuilt by the DDR in the 1960s. Painted in the 1870s to mark the 800th anniversary of the Wettin dynasty, the **Procession of Princes** quickly faded and was replaced by a replica on 23,000 Meissen porcelain tiles. Across the river, beyond the arched sandstone **Augustus Bridge**, is the **Neustadt** district, most of whose 18th-century buildings were unscathed in the war, including the **Japan Palace** where Augustus the Strong planned to install his porcelain collection, which houses the SKD's Museum of Ethnography. Fronting Theaterplatz is Gottfried Semper's 1878 neoclassical **Opera House (Semperoper)**. Its curving façade, based on the Colosseum, is surmounted by statues of Dionysus and Ariadne in a chariot drawn by four panthers, and the marble is interior. Home to the renowned Staatskapelle orchestra and Semperoper Ballet, the facility hosted premieres of works by Richard Strauss, Richard Wagner, and Carl Maria von Weber. Flanking the entrance are portrait busts of Goethe and the poet Friedrich Schiller, who wrote his *Ode to Joy* for a Masonic lodge in Dresden in 1785. (Beethoven adapted it for the chorus of his Ninth Symphony.)

STAY: Situated near the Royal Palace and the Zwinger, the 1705 **Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski** was constructed for Anna Constantia von Brockdorff, a mistress of Augustus the Strong, and later occupied by the crown prince's family. Restored in the 1990s, with a modern interior, the five-star property has welcomed Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, Jacques Chirac, European royals, and German leaders. Retreat to the Karl May Bar, a paneled retreat inspired by New York's Oak Room, filled with American Western motifs in homage to Dresden's renowned author of cowboy and Indian adventure stories. From \$115; kempinski.com

DINE: Set within the arcaded stone walls of the Zwinger, **Alte Meister Café & Restaurant** is ideal for lunch, a pre-theater meal, or a glass of wine on the terrace beside a bronze statue of Carl Maria von Weber. altemeister.net

MEISSEN

A half hour northwest of Dresden, accessible by car, train, or river cruise, the town rises from the Elbe to a cathedral (the spires were added in the early 20th century) and the 15th-century Albrechtsburg castle, where Augustus the Strong established Europe's first porcelain factory. The narrow streets are marked by a remarkable number of "stumbling blocks" (*Stolpersteine*) embedded in the pavement with inscribed brass plaques that mark the homes of victims of the Holocaust. The city's main attraction is the modern factory a half-hour walk from the center, where the House of Meissen Museum showcases a comprehensive collection of antique and contemporary porcelain, artisans demonstrate how it is made and painted, and a café serves afternoon tea on porcelain china, much of which is available for purchase. meissen.com

STAY: **Dorint Parkhotel**, a boutique hotel in an expanded Art Nouveau villa on the banks of the Elbe, has views of the hilltop castle and cathedral. The picturesque scene can be enjoyed from guest rooms, the spa, or the indoor/outdoor garden café and Restaurant Ohms. From \$75; hotel-meissen.dorint.com

DINE: Ratskeller Meissen is a cozy tavern on Marktplatz, the city's central square, for local fare such as pork schnitzel, and a variety of Saxon beers and local wines. ratskeller-meissen.de

LEIPZIG

Visitors to Dresden would do well to include Leipzig in their itinerary. Johann Sebastian Bach led a boys' choir in this handsome walkable Saxon town, and the churches where they performed, St. Thomas and St. Nicholas, host concerts during the annual Bach Festival (June 11–21, 2020). Head to the Bach Museum to learn about Bach's career and his multi-generational family of musicians, and continue to the Grassi Museum, which brings together the Museum for Musical Instruments, the Leipzig Museum of Ethnography, and the Museum of Applied Arts, all operated by SKD. The Museum of Fine Arts houses one of Germany's largest collections in a handsome new building, with important works by Dutch Old Masters, Lucas Cranach, Caspar David Friedrich, Max Klinger, Max Beckmann, and realist works from the DDR and the New Leipzig School, including Neo Rauch. leipzig.travel

STAY: The elegant **Hotel Fürstenhof Leipzig** occupies a converted mansion near the Old Town shopping district. Aesthetes will appreciate the artistically presented gourmet cuisine in Restaurant Villers. From \$220; hotelfuerstenhof-leipzig.com

DINE: Grab a pre-theater meal at **Restaurant Weinstock**; seating is available in a vaulted dining room, the wine cellar, or while people-watching from the outdoor terrace on Marktplatz, the city's central square. restaurant-weinstock-leipzig.de ♦

