14 Things German Homes Don't Have — And Why Americans Might Be Overdoing It
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhbqheUbvj0
Transcript: https://dontveter.com/ec/germanhomes.pdf

Walk into a German apartment for the first time. And your brain quietly starts filing complaints. Where is the closet? Why are all the interior doors closed? Why does the kitchen look like someone took it with them when they moved out?

Nothing is wrong exactly. The rules just feel different. Because Germans build their homes around an idea most Americans never really consider, with less stuff, less waste, and a lot more thinking.

Once you see what is missing from a typical German home, you start wondering if Americans have been quietly overdoing it for decades.

The first shock usually hits before you have even unpacked a single box. In America, when you sign a lease, you basically walk into a finished space. The closets are already built into the walls. The kitchen is waiting. The lights are screwed into the ceiling.

And the only thing left to do is decide which corner the couch goes in. In Germany, that fantasy quietly falls apart the second you turn the key.

There are no closets. None. Not in the bedroom, not in the hallway, not anywhere. Germans use freestanding wardrobes called schranka, and they treat them like furniture you take with you the same way you would take a sofa.

So, if you forgot to buy one, congratulations. Your clothes now live in a suitcase for the next 3 weeks. To outsiders, it sounds like an inconvenience.

To Germans, it is freedom. You design your storage around your life, not the other way around. And when you move, the wardrobe moves with you.

But the closet situation is nothing compared to what happens in the kitchen. Because in many German apartments, the kitchen itself does not exist.

You read that right. The previous tenant did not just take their dishes. They took the cabinets, the counter, the sink, sometimes even the lights above it.

You are handed an empty room with a few pipes sticking out of the wall, and a polite suggestion to bring your own kitchen.

For an American used to walking into a fully equipped space, this can feel like a practical joke. But Germans see it as logical. Why throw out a perfectly good kitchen every time someone moves?

Why not treat it like the appliance it actually is? You install it, you use it, you take it with you. It is wasteful by American standards and weirdly genius by every other measure.

And just when you think the surprises are done, you look up. The ceiling has wires sticking out of it. Bare wires hanging there.

In Germany, ceiling light fixtures are usually not included. Tenants take their lamps when they leave, and you are expected to bring your own.

Newcomers stare at the dangling wires as if they walked into an unfinished construction site. Locals barely notice. It is just how things work.

And once you adjust, the logic starts making sense. Your home is yours to assemble piece by piece, exactly how you want it. Americans inherit the previous tenants choices. Germans inherit nothing, and they prefer it that way.

These early shocks are just the surface, though. The deeper you look, the more you realize the differences aren't just about furniture or fixtures. They're built right into the walls themselves.

If you knock on the wall of a German apartment, something interesting happens. Nothing. No echo, no flex, no hollow thud.

Because German homes aren't built like American ones. Most are constructed from concrete, brick, or solid masonry. The kind of materials that turn a simple wall into a small fortress.

In the United States, wood frame construction is the standard, which keeps building cheap, fast, and flexible.

In Germany, the philosophy is the opposite. You build once, you build heavy, and you build something that's still standing in 200 years.

It's the reason German apartments stay cool in summer without air conditioning, warm in winter without overworking the heater, and quiet enough that you sometimes forget you share a wall with anyone.

The internet loves debating which approach is better. But the truth is, the two countries are solving completely different problems.

Americans build for change. Germans build for permanence. And those heavy walls connect to another thing American visitors immediately notice is missing.

Wall-to-wall carpeting. In a typical American home, soft carpeted floors stretch from room to room, sometimes covering entire houses.

In Germany, that's almost unheard of in modern apartments. Floors are usually hardwood, laminate, tile, or stone. Carpets, when they exist, are small, decorative, and easy to lift, clean, or replace.

Germans see permanent carpet as a magnet for dust mites, allergens, and stains that never fully come out.

And after a few weeks of walking around on cool, easy to mop floors, most newcomers start agreeing with them. It feels cleaner, simpler, more grown up somehow, like the floor is doing less and the home is doing more.

But maybe the strangest architectural quirk is something you cannot see at all. You feel it. In American homes, the open floor plan is practically a religion.

Kitchens flow into living rooms. Living rooms flow into dining areas. Dining areas flow into hallways. Everything is one big breathable space.

German homes are the opposite. Every single room has a door and that door is closed always. Bedroom door closed. Kitchen door closed. Bathroom door closed.

Even the door to the closet you do not have in some twisted irony would probably be closed. There is even a polite, slightly stern phrase locals grow up hearing. Tur-zu which means door shut.

It is about heat efficiency, noise, privacy, and a quiet sense of order. To Americans, it can feel claustrophobic at first. To Germans, an open door means heat is escaping, smells are spreading, and someone forgot how walls work.

Each of these structural choices points to the same idea. German homes treat your living space like a series of intentional decisions, not one big communal blur.

And nowhere is that philosophy more obvious than in the kitchen itself, where some of the most surprising things are missing entirely.

Step into a German kitchen and the first thing your hand does is reach for something that isn't there. The garbage disposal. That American switch under the sink that turns last night's pasta into mystery slurry does not exist.

Germans do not grind food into the water supply. They separate it, they compost it, and they toss it into a dedicated bio bin that gets collected weekly.

To an American, it sounds like extra work. To a German, the idea of pulverizing food and sending it into the plumbing sounds genuinely insane.

And the more you think about it, the harder it is to defend the disposal. You are using clean drinking water to dispose of organic matter through a noisy spinning blade that occasionally eats spoons. Germans skip that entire chapter.

Then there's the refrigerator. American kitchens often feature these massive, almost industrial-looking fridges with double doors, water dispensers, ice makers, and enough internal real estate to chill an entire deer.

German fridges are famously, almost adorably, small. They are often tucked beneath the counter like a slightly over-sized mini bar. To outsiders, it looks like a downgrade. To locals, it is a lifestyle.

Germans shop more often, buy fresher food, and stock fewer items at once. The fridge is not a warehouse. It is a holding zone.

When you visit the grocery store three times a week and live within walking distance of a bakery, you simply do not need a glacier in your kitchen.

The ice maker situation is just as dramatic. Most German fridges do not have one. Honestly, most Germans do not want one. Ice in drinks is rare.

You will often get a glass of water at a restaurant with maybe one polite ice cube floating on top, looking lonely.

Online, this is a constant point of cultural confusion. Americans visiting Germany swear they are being rationed. Germans visiting America genuinely worry that the ice will make them sick.

It is a small thing, but it perfectly captures the gap between two cultures. One side optimizes for cold. The other optimizes for not catching a chill from your own drink.

And then there's something you wouldn't think to look for until a mosquito buzzes past your ear at 2 in the morning. Window screens are basically standard in American homes, but in Germany, they are rare.

Most windows open wide into the open air with nothing between you and the outside world. Why? Because German windows are engineered to be miracles. They tilt. They swing, they lock, they air out an entire room in five minutes flat.

The whole concept of stobluften that aggressive blast of fresh air Germans schedule into their day like a meeting, depends on those wide open windows.

A screen would just get in the way. Mosquitoes do exist, sure, but they are treated as an occasional nuisance, not a national emergency.

It is another tiny example of how Germans accept some friction in exchange for a system that just works better overall.

Already, the absences in a German kitchen tell a story about waste, simplicity, and a different relationship with consumption, but the deepest differences might actually live somewhere quieter. The bedroom.

The first night you sleep in a German bed, something feels off. You can't quite place it. The mattress is fine. The room is quiet. The pillow is acceptable. And then you realize there's no top sheet. None.

The fitted sheet is there. And a giant fluffy duvet is draped on top. But that middle layer Americans grow up with, that thin sheet sandwiched between you and the comforter, simply isn't part of the German bed.

To Germans, it's pointless. You wash the duvet cover. You wash the fitted sheet, so why add a third thing?

To Americans, it can feel like sleeping inside a sleeping bag at first, but within a few nights, most people quietly admit it's easier, faster, and oddly more comfortable.

And here's where it gets even better. If a German couple shares a bed, they do not share a duvet. Each person gets their own. Two separate duvets side by side on the same mattress.

No more midnight tug-of-war. No more waking up freezing because your partner rolled away with everything. Just two adults, two duvet, two perfectly content sleepers.

It sounds almost too simple to be revolutionary, but anyone who has tried it instantly understands.

The internet has spent years calling this the Scandinavian sleep method, but Germans, Austrians, and much of Northern Europe have been doing it for generations.

Once you try it, the idea of fighting a partner for blanket space starts to look genuinely primitive.

There is something else missing from the average German laundry routine, too. The tumble dryer.

Yes, dryers exist in Germany, but they are nowhere near as standard as they are in America. Most households still hang their clothes on a drying rack, often in the bathroom, on the balcony, or in a special drying room in the basement.

It saves energy. It is gentler on fabrics. And given Germany's electricity prices, it just makes financial sense. Americans see clothes lines as nostalgic. Germans see them as obvious.

Why pay to spin your shirt around in hot air for an hour when the air can dry it for free?

Closely related to all of this is something most German homes do not have at all. Central air. In the United States, air conditioning is so standard that most people do not even realize how much they rely on it.

In Germany, it is still genuinely rare in homes, though that is slowly changing as summers get hotter.

Most apartments cool themselves the old-fashioned way with thick walls, smart shutters, tilting windows, and the strategic timing of when to open and close everything.

On a brutal summer day, this can feel borderline torturous to anyone used to a permanent 68 degree indoor climate.

But in a typical year, the system works surprisingly well, and it uses a fraction of the energy. It is another quiet trade-off Germans have made. Slightly less comfort, dramatically less waste.

When you take all 14 of these things together, the closets, the kitchens, the light fixtures, the heavy walls, the missing carpet, the closed doors, the absent garbage disposal, the tiny fridge, the missing ice maker, the lack of window screens, the missing top sheet, the separate duvets, the rare dryer, the absent air conditioning, a pattern starts to emerge.

German homes aren't lacking anything. They're just refusing to add things they don't actually need.

It's easy to look at American homes through this lens and start asking uncomfortable questions. Do we really need built-in closets stuffed with clothes we never wear?

Do we need fridges the size of small cars? Do we need ice in everything, screens on every window, a fan running 24 hours a day, and a top sheet? nobody actually uses.

Maybe the things Americans treat as essential are really just defaults nobody has questioned in a long time.

And maybe the things Germans live without are exactly the things that make their homes feel calmer and cleaner.

What looks like missing comfort to one culture often looks like missing waste to another.

And that is the real lesson hiding inside those bare wires and empty kitchens. Less is not always less. Sometimes it is everything you actually needed finally without all the noise.

So the next time you walk through your home, take a quick look around. Count the things you would struggle to live without and then count the things you have simply gotten used to. The line between the two is usually a lot thinner than it seems.

And maybe, just maybe, the Germans figured something out a long time ago that the rest of us are only now starting to notice.

If you enjoyed this trip through the quietly genius world of German homes, hit subscribe to Germany Rewind, and stick around for more deep dives into the habits, designs, and everyday details that make this country one of the most fascinating places on Earth.

Because once you start looking closely at how Germans live, you cannot unsee it and you will not want to.