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DRINKING & SMOKING

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So gezellig: moor the boat right at your table.
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An icon of drinking history with a bottomless vat.
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A hobbit's cave emitting rings of funny smoke.

DRINKING & SMOKING

Given this city's rep as a wild-running commune of rabid party animals, the first-time visitor may be surprised that Amsterdam is still very much a café society.

A serious and civilised institution, the cafés of any sophisticated metropolis should bring to mind intellectual types hunched over worn tables in blue-smoky rooms, dissecting the eternal themes and poring over newspapers as if they were actually working. While you can still find such folk in the canal city, and certainly plenty of smoke, they're both part of the broader Amsterdam culture – and darn good reasons for in-depth research. Someone's gotta do it, after all!

SPECIALITIES

Drinks

Lager beer is the staple, served cool and topped by a two finger-thick head of froth – supposedly to trap the flavour. Requests of 'no head please' will meet with a steely response. *Een bier, een pils* or *een vaas* will get you a normal glass; *een kleintje pils* is a small glass and *een fluitje* is a small, thin, Cologne-style glass. Many places also serve half-litre mugs (*een grote pils*) to please tourists, but somehow draught lager doesn't taste the same in a mug and goes flat if you don't drink quickly.

Popular brands include Heineken, Amstel, Grolsch, Oranjeboom, Dommelsch, Bavaria and the cheap Brouwersbier put out by the Albert Heijn supermarket chain. They contain about 5% alcohol by volume, so a few of those seemingly small glasses can pack quite a wallop. Tasty and stronger Belgian beers, such as Duvel and Westmalle Triple, are also very popular and reasonably priced. *Witbier* ('white beer', eg the Dutch Wieckse Witte, the Belgian Hoegaarden) is a somewhat murky, crisp and citrus-y blonde beer that's drunk in summer with a slice of lemon. The dark, sweet *bokbier* comes out in the autumn. Don't be surprised if the brews sold in supermarkets are not much cheaper than in pubs.

Dutch gin (*jenever*, pronounced 'ya-nay-ver', also *genever*) is made from juniper berries and is drunk chilled from a tiny glass filled to the brim. Most people prefer *jonge* (young) *jenever*, which is smooth and relatively easy to drink; *oude* (old) *jenever* has a strong juniper flavour and can be an acquired taste. A common combination, known as a *kopstoot* (head butt), is a glass of *jenever* with a beer chaser – few people can handle more than two or three of those. Brandy is known as *vieux* or *brandewijn*. There are plenty of indigenous liqueurs, including *advocaat* (a kind of eggnog) and the herb-based *Beerenburg*, a Frisian schnapps.

So long overshadowed by other tipples, wine is drunk by more Dutch than ever before. The average supermarket will stock wines from every corner of Europe (with excellent value from Spain and Bulgaria) and many countries further afield, such as Chile, South Africa and Australia. The most expensive bottle in a supermarket rarely costs more than €8 and will be quite drinkable.

The hot drink of choice is coffee – after all, it was Amsterdam's merchants who introduced coffee to Europe. It should be strong and can be excellent if it's freshly made. If you simply order *koffie* you'll get a sizeable cup of java with a small, airline-style container of *koffiemelk*, similar to unsweetened condensed milk. *Koffie verkeerd* (coffee 'wrong') comes in a bigger cup or mug with plenty of real milk. *Espresso* and *cappuccino* are also available, and most anywhere can accommodate you with decaf. A pleasant Dutch café chain, Coffee Company, has locations throughout town.

Tea is usually served as a cup of hot water with a tea bag. Many places offer a choice of bags. If you want milk, ask '*met melk, graag*' (with milk, please), but many locals add a slice of lemon instead.

Amsterdam tap water is fine but it does have a slight chemical taste – as any waiter will suggest – so mineral and soda waters are popular. Dairy drinks include chocolate milk, *Fristi* (a yogurt drink), *karnemelk* (buttermilk) and of course milk itself. A wide selection of fruit juices and soft drinks is available too.

Smoking & Soft Drugs

Most cannabis products used to be imported, but today the country has top-notch home produce, so-called *nederwiet* (*nay-der-weet*) developed by horticulturists and grown in greenhouses with up to five harvests a year. Even the police admit it's a superior product,

especially the potent 'super skunk' with up to 13% of THC, the active substance (Nigerian grass has 5% and Colombian 7%). According to a recent government-sponsored poll of coffeeshop owners, *nederwiet* has captured over half the market, and hash is in decline even among tourists.

'Space' cakes and cookies are sold in a rather low-key fashion, mainly because tourists often have problems with them. If you're unused to their effects, or the time they can take to kick in and run their course, you could be in for a rather involved experience.

Some coffeeshops might sell magic mushrooms, that is, if the psychedelic fungi aren't banned by the time you read this. These far-out vendors are the place to go for serious mind-altering products such as cacti, herbal extracts and specialist smokables like dried sage or wild lettuce (see the boxed text, p140). Whatever you decide to purchase, ask the staff how much you should take and *heed their advice*, even if nothing happens after an hour.

WHERE TO CONSUME

When the Dutch say 'café', they mean a pub, and there are over 1000 of them in the city. More than just drinking houses, cafés are places to go and hang out for hours if you like. Amsterdam has a stunning variety, and some have regular customers or a certain type of clientele that's been coming there for years, if not generations.

Many cafés have outside seating on a *terras* (terrace), glorious in summer, and sometimes covered and heated in winter. These are great places to relax and watch people pass by, soak up the sun, read a paper or write postcards. Most of these cafés serve food as well. Less adventurous chefs get by on soups, sandwiches, salads, *tostis* (ingredients such as cheese and tomato or pesto grilled between two slices of bread) and the like. Cafés that take their food seriously call themselves *etcafés*, and their food can be very good indeed.

There are a number of cafés that don't fit into the descriptions of brown cafés, grand cafés etc that we discuss in the following section; we've described these as 'Other Cafés'.

Remember, there's a *big* difference between a café – which is occasionally called a *koffiehuys*, or 'coffee house' – and a 'coffeeshop'. The latter may have nothing to do with coffee and a lot to do with cannabis (see the

following section). Lighting up in the former will get you a tongue-lashing at best.

Note that relatively few locals frequent the coffeeshops – this is generally something they try as teenagers, and then leave to the tourists (read an insider's view, p193). That said, the atmosphere in coffeeshops can vary sharply, and some have abandoned the spacey 'tune-out, turn-off' pose (eg aliens, Jamaican locks and cartoon fantasies) in lieu of a more mellow New Age vibe, especially outside of the Red Light District.

Beer Cafés

Beer cafés specialise in the brew, with many seasonal and potent brands on tap and in the bottle. At any one time, some establishments will be stocked with 300 or more varieties, and can offer excellent advice for imbibing.

Brown Cafés

The most historic and famous type of café is the brown café (*bruin café*). The name comes from the smoke stains from centuries of use (although recent aspirants slap on brown paint to catch up). You may find sand on the wooden floor or Persian rugs on the tables to soak up spilled beer. Some sell snacks or full meals as well. Most importantly: they provide an atmosphere conducive to deep, meaningful conversation – and inducing the nirvana of *gezelligheid* (see p182).

Coffeeshops

In the Netherlands a coffeeshop is a place that sells cannabis. You'll have no trouble finding one of the 200-odd coffeeshops in Amsterdam, and any place showing palm leaves and Rastafarian colours (red, gold and green) will have something to do with marijuana. Others closely resemble normal cafés.

Designer Bars

The city's array of watering holes wouldn't be complete without these 'loungey' designer bars. Some are ultramodern, some retro, others shabby-chic with furniture that looks borrowed from somebody's attic.

Grand Cafés

Grand cafés are spacious, have comfortable furniture and are, well, just grand. A good tradition in many is their indoor reading

table stacked with the day's papers and news magazines, usually with one or two in English. Another difference: they all have food menus, some quite elaborate. They're perfect for a lazy brunch with relaxing chamber music tinkling away in the background.

Irish Pubs

Amsterdam has its fair share of rollicking pubs from the Emerald Isle, often with live rock or traditional folk music. Most Irish pubs are located around Leidseplein (it teems with them) and Rembrandtplein.

Tasting Houses

There are also a few tasting houses (*proeflokalen*), on the whole intimate affairs where you can try dozens of *jenever*s and liqueurs. Some are attached to distilleries – a holdover from the 17th century when many small distilleries operated around town – while others are simply affiliated.

Theatre Cafés

Theatre cafés are normally attached or adjacent to theatres, serving meals before and drinks after performances. Generally they're good places to catch performers after the show, though they're lovely any time of day.

PRACTICALITIES

The price for a standard beer varies from around €1.25 in the outer suburbs to €2.50 in the popular Leidseplein and Rembrandtplein areas; a mixed drink (eg scotch and Coke) will set you back €3 to €5. Once you've ordered a drink you'll probably be left alone, but you might be expected to top-up. If all tables are occupied, don't be shy about asking to share. If you occupy a table or sit at the bar, it's common to put drinks on a tab and to pay when you leave.

In coffeeshops, you are free to purchase and smoke away. Many coffeeshops also live up to their literal name and serve coffee (as well as beer, other drinks and snacks). There are also a few *hashcafés*. Price and quality are OK; you won't get ripped off in a coffeeshop. Ask at the bar for the list of goods on offer, usually packaged in small bags for €4 to €12; the better the quality, the less the bag will contain. You can also buy ready-made joints in nifty, reusable packaging, a good idea because the stuff can be potent.

Opening Hours

Cafés serving some kind of breakfast tend to open around 9am or 10am, while others – notably the cosy brown cafés – are late risers, turning on the vats around midday. Closing time tends to be late, between midnight and 1am (as late as 3am at weekends). We've included opening hours where a venue's hours vary from this. Most coffeeshops do business 10am to 1am Sunday to Thursday, and until 3am Friday and Saturday, but a few, particularly in the Red Light District, open as early as 8am. So many joints, so little time...

CITY CENTRE

When it comes to imbibing and toking, Amsterdam's old centre is the mother lode. The sheer variety of establishments is astounding, and staff expertise is prized so highly that a beer café may poach a barkeeper from a competitor down the street.

MEDIEVAL CENTRE

CAFÉ HET SCHUIM Map pp62-5 Bar

☎ 638 93 57; Spuistraat 189
Schuim means 'foam' (on beer) and this grungy, arty bar is extraordinarily popular with beer-swilling locals – and it gets packed any time of day or night. While the people-watching can be distracting, it's wise to keep one eye on your belongings.

GOLLEM Map pp62-5 Beer Café

☎ 626 66 45; Raamsteeg 4
The pioneer of Amsterdam's beer cafés is a minuscule space covered all over in beer paraphernalia. The 200 beers on tap and in the bottle attract lots of drinkers.

IN DE WILDEMAN Map pp62-5 Beer Café

☎ 638 23 48; Kolksteeg 3
This former distillery tasting house has been transformed into an atmospheric yet quiet beer café with over 200 bottled beers, 18 varieties on tap and a smoke-free area. Locals rave about the choice of Trappist ales, the huge selection from Belgium and the Netherlands, and the potent French 'Belzebuth' (13% alcohol!).

CAFÉ VAN ZUYLEN Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 639 10 55; Torensteeg 4
Although the sun terrace is one of the prettiest spots for a drink on the Singel, the

interior – with its cosy rooms featuring lots of wood and old leather banquettes – is just as appealing in the cooler months.

DE SCHUTTER Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 622 46 08; Voetboogstraat 13-15
This large student *eetcafé* has a brown-café look, a relaxed vibe and inexpensive, tasty *dagschotels* (dishes of the day). It's open for lunch and dinner, and is a good place to fortify yourself on the cheap before a night on the town.

DE ZWART Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 624 65 11; Spuistraat 334
'Not everyone has knowledge of beer, but those who have it drink it here', is the translation of the slogan on a panel above this atmospheric bar with the original tile floor from 1921. Just across the alley from Hoppe, De Zwart gets a different (though amicable) crowd of left-wing journalists and writers, as well as local-government people.

HOPPE Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 420 44 20; Spui 18-20
Go on. Do your bit to ensure Hoppe maintains one of the highest beer turnovers in the city. Since 1670 drinkers have been enticed behind that velvet curtain into the dark interior to down a few glasses – the entrance is to the right of the pub-with-terrace of the same name. In summer, Hoppe's crowd of boisterous business boys spills over onto the pavement of the Spui.

OPORTO Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 638 07 02; Zoutsteeg 1
This tiny brown café is worth visiting just for the inlaid woodwork behind the bar (check out the Zodiac signs). Its wrought-iron-and-parchment lighting fixtures are said to have been the same for 60 years.

PILSENER CLUB Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 623 17 77; Begijnsteeg 4
Also known as Engelse Reet (ask the bartender for a translation), this small, narrow and ramshackle place doesn't allow you to do anything but drink and talk, which is what a 'real' brown café is all about. It opened in 1893 and has hardly changed since. Beer comes straight from the kegs in the back, via the 'shortest pipes in

Amsterdam' (most places have vats in a cellar or side room with long hoses to the bar); connoisseurs say they can taste the difference.

ABRAXAS Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 625 57 63; Jonge Roelensteeg 12
Hands down the most beautiful coffeeshop in town. Choose from southwest USA, Middle Eastern and other styles of décor, spread over three floors. There are live DJs, extrafriendly staff and free internet usage with a drink purchase.

DAMPKRING Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 638 07 05; Handboogstraat 29
You saw it in *Ocean's Twelve*, now see it up close. Consistently a winner of the Cannabis Cup, Dampkring is darkish, youngish and decorated rather hobbitish. Its name means the ring of the Earth's atmosphere where smaller items combust.

EL GUAPO Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 420 05 42; Nieuwe Nieuwstraat 32
Sorta Latin, sorta caveman, this shop is populated by friendly people and is known for some of the best hash in town. You can bring your own music and ask them to play it – just remember to get it back when you leave.

HOMEGROWN FANTASY Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 627 56 83; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 87a
Quality Dutch-grown product, pleasant staff, good tunes and famous space cakes make this popular with backpackers from nearby hostels. Patrons make use of the 3m-long glass bongos to smoke hydroponic weed.

KANDINSKY Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 624 70 23; Rosmarijnsteeg 9
Those not into the grungy, hippy feel of most Amsterdam coffeeshops love Kandinsky for its clean, contemporary style, funky music, friendly service and infamous space cakes. Alcohol is no longer available (it's the new coffeeshop law, folks) but is readily sold at its café opposite.

BAR BEP Map pp62-5 Designer Bar

☎ 626 56 49; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 260
With its olive-green vinyl couches and ruby-red walls, Bep resembles a kitsch,

1950s Eastern European cabaret lounge. It gets groovy with filmmakers, photographers and artists. The heat is off since its heyday, and we prefer it that way.

DIEP Map pp62-5 Designer Bar

☎ 420 20 20; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 256
Located just next door to Bar Bep, Diep does first-rate quirky decorations. You might find chandeliers made of bubble wrap, a 6ft fibreglass hammerhead shark, illuminated electronic signs above the bar and a similarly creative crowd.

CAFÉ DANTE Map pp62-5 Grand Café

☎ 638 88 39; Spuistraat 320
This huge Art Deco space is quiet as auntie's back garden during the day, but after 5pm weeknights it transforms into a lively bar for the downtown business crowd. Plus, you get your choice of outside views: the busy Spui out front or the lovely Singel in the back. Upstairs is the [Herman Brood Galerie](#) (p137).

LUXEMBOURG Map pp62-5 Grand Café

☎ 620 62 64; Spui 24
Join gaggles of glam locals and tourists at this permanently busy café. Grab a paper (from the reading table or the Athenaeum newsagency across the square), procure a sunny seat on the terrace, order the 'Royale' snack platter (bread, cured meats, Dutch cheese and deep-fried croquettes) and watch the world go by. Inside are parquet floors, a marble bar and an Art Deco stained-glass skylight.

TARA Map pp62-5 Irish Pub

☎ 427 46 57; Rokin 85-89
This expat meeting place combines Irish folksiness with Amsterdam chic. In its maze

of rooms (the one-time home of German expressionist Max Beckmann) you'll find warm fireplaces, a cool bar, gorgeous wall carvings and seats salvaged from an old Irish church. Catch frequent musical happenings and sports on the telly. Meals include Irish stew, and beef and Guinness pie (mains €10.50 to €13.50).

B VAN B CAFÉ Map pp62-5 Other Café

☎ 638 39 14; Beursplein 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Wed, 10am-6pm Thu-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun
The café in the [Beurs van Berlage](#) (p69), one of the city's most spectacular buildings, boasts original brick and tilework, and murals by Jan Toorop (1903) representing past, present and future. Food includes lasagne, croquettes, steaks and the usual assortment of sandwiches and salads. Unless the main building happens to be open to the public (eg concerts), this is your only sure way to get inside.

VRANKRIJK Map pp62-5 Squat Bar

[www.vrankrijk.org](#); Spuistraat 216; ☎ from 9pm
'Boom!' says the colourful cartoon poster of a façade, till the early '80s a familiar sound in this squatters pad, once the scene of scuffles with police in riot gear. It's mel- lowed a bit but is still active, but more with social-support groups than protests. Monday is Queer Night, and on Thursdays there's 'consultation' for squatters. The interior is still suitably grubby, mainly out of solidarity.

DE BLAUWE PARADE

Map pp62-5 Tasting House

☎ 624 48 60; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 176-180
The building, now the Hotel Die Poort van Cleve, was the site of the original Heineken brewery, so it seems an appropriate place

for tastings (of *jenever*s though, not beers). While there, feast your eyes on the Delft-blue tile mural (1870s) of a parade of children bearing gifts to an emperor.

DE DRIE FLESCHJES

Map pp62-5 Tasting House

☎ 624 84 43; Gravenstraat 18
Behind the Nieuwe Kerk, the distiller Bootz's tasting room dates from 1650. It is dominated by 52 vats that are rented out to businesses that entertain clients here. It specialises in liqueurs (although you can also get *jenever*s) – the macaroon liqueur is quite nice. Take a peek at the collection of *kalkoentjes*, small bottles with hand-painted portraits of former mayors.

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

DE BUURVROUW Map pp62-5 Bar

☎ 625 96 54; St Pieterspoortsteeg 29
This grungy late-night bar is where you inevitably end up when there's nowhere else to go. Take it easy because someone's watching: above the entrance is a bust of *de Buurvrouw* (the woman next door). And yes, everyone is probably as drunk as you. Febo (p169), anyone?

CAFÉ ZILT Map pp62-5 Bar

☎ 421 54 16; Zeedijk 49; ☎ 9.30pm-3am Mon-Thu, 11.30pm-4am Fri & Sat
This classy little dive is where the corpus delicti shudders to a halt after a night of glorious excess. There's a great selection of seasonal beers (why go easy at this stage?) and bar snacks such as *gehaktbal* (spicy hamburger balls) to buoy the blood sugar.

CAFÉ LEF Map pp62-5 Bar

☎ 421 54 16; Zeedijk 23; ☎ 5pm-1am, Wed-Thu, 2pm-1am Thu-Sun
This alternative to a blackout at [Café Zilt](#) (above) has a robust wooden bar for slumped conversation and a bottomless pit of Belgian and Dutch brews. Nicholas, the congenial bartender, knows a great cure for the hiccups, and it's completely legal.

IN 'T AEPJEN Map pp62-5 Brown Café

☎ 626 84 01; Zeedijk 1
This funny little bar, one of the oldest in Amsterdam, got its name 'In the Monkey' from the lice-carrying beasts kept by the

original owner; sailors lodging here left with an itch they could scratch. The story goes that a customer couldn't pay his bill and settled the debt with a monkey. The place is stuffed with old toys and advertising signs.

BABA Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 624 14 09; [www.babashops.nl](#); Warmoes- straat 64
Not the cheapest weed in town, but word has it Mike Tyson once took a puff and immediately got walloped. Pick up a bag of Silver Haze, plant yourself at the front window and watch the colourful types all run together along Warmoesstraat. The hash brownies have mother's special touch.

GREENHOUSE Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop

☎ 627 17 39; [www.greenhouse.org](#); Oudezijds Voorburgwal 191
One of the most popular coffeeshops in town. Smokers love the funky music, multicoloured mosaics, psychedelic stained-glass windows and the high-quality weed and hash. The central location near the Dam is a plus.

BUBBLES & WINES CHAMPAGNE BAR

Map pp62-5 Designer Bar

☎ 422 33 18; Nes 37; ☎ 3.30pm-1am Mon-Sat
Ignore the silly name, this stylish wine bar is a first for Amsterdam: 54 quality wines by the glass, tasting flights (several different wines to try) and the city's most scrumptious bar food: caviar blinis, cheese plates and our favourite, 'bee stings' – parmesan drizzled with white truffle-infused honey.

LIME Map pp62-5 Designer Bar

☎ 639 30 20; Zeedijk 104
Small but perfectly formed Lime, with its ever-changing, kitsch-cool interior and upbeat grooves, is the perfect preclub pit stop. The DJs and cocktails might just keep you there till morn.

DURTY NELLY'S Map pp62-5 Irish Pub

☎ 638 01 25; Warmoesstraat 117
Huge, dark and always busy, this pub attracts foreign visitors from the cheap hotels in the area with fun, drinks, darts and pool. It serves a first-rate Irish breakfast and has internet access too.

THE ART OF BEING GEZELLIG

This particularly Dutch quality is one of the best reasons to visit Amsterdam. It's variously translated as snug, friendly, cosy, informal, companionable and convivial, but *gezelligheid* – the state of being *gezellig* – is something more easily experienced than defined. There's a sense of time stopping, an intimacy of the here and now that leaves all your troubles behind, at least until tomorrow. You can get that warm and fuzzy feeling in many places and situations:

- While nursing a brew with friends
- Over coffee and cake with neighbours (the stoop will do)
- Lingering after a meal (the Dutch call this '*natafeleen*')
- Sitting round a beach campfire (or an open hearth)
- A chatty supermarket queue (beats reading *De Telegraaf*)
- Anyplace with candles, sparklers or flashlights

MOLLY MALONE'S Map pp62-5 Irish Pub
☎ 624 11 50; Oudezijds Kolk 9

Regularly packed with Irish folk, this dark, woody pub holds spontaneous folk-music sessions. Bring your own guitar and let loose with the other Eireophiles.

Café-Restaurant Kapitein Zeppo's Map pp62-5 Other Café
☎ 624 20 57; Gebed Zonder End 5

This site, off Grimburgwal, has assumed many guises over the centuries: a cloister during the 15th, a horse-carriage storehouse in the 17th and a cigar factory in the 19th. These days it's festive, attractive and almost romantic, with a beautiful garden and Belgian beers. There's live music Sunday from 4pm (cover groups and big bands).

PROEFLOKAAL DE OUIEVAAR Map pp62-5 Tasting House
☎ 420 80 04; St Olofspoort 1; ☎ Mon-Sat

Not much bigger than a vat of *jenever*, this magnificent little tasting house has been going since 1782. On offer are spirits of the De Ooievaar distillery, still located in the Jordaan. The house was built leaning over and has not subsided, as many people wrongly assume even before a shot of Old Dutch.

PROEFLOKAAL WIJNAND FOCKINCK Map pp62-5 Tasting House
☎ 639 26 95; Pijlsteeg 31; ☎ 3-9pm

This small tasting house (dating from 1679) has scores of *jenever*s and liqueurs – some quite expensive and potent. It's in an arcade behind Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky,

HOT CONVERSATION TOPICS

You're enjoying a beer with friends at a café overlooking a canal. What are you likely to hear?

- 'It took me forever to park my bike!'
- 'What are you getting Jakob and Pieter as a wedding gift?'
- 'I wish I could afford to live in the Canal Belt, but I bought a great flat in Bos en Lommer.'
- 'Let's go for a ride on my boat on Saturday.'
- 'Where's the after-party?'
- 'Sorry, I can't hear you for all the construction noise!'
- 'I wonder if the smoking ban will really be enforced...'
- 'I hope my bike is still there.'

and although there are no seats or stools, it is an intimate place to knock back a taste or two with a friend. We particularly enjoy the *boswandeling* ('walk in the woods'), a vivacious combination of young *jenever*, herb bitters and orange liqueur – the effect is like cloves.

BLINCKER Map pp62-5 Theatre Café
☎ 627 19 38; www.nesttheaters.nl; St Barberenstraat 7-9

The high ceiling, cosy mezzanine and mel-low atmosphere make Blincker a popular theatre café. At the rear of the Frascati Theatre, it gets crammed with a young student crowd having a pre-theatre meal or post-theatre drinks.

DE BRAKKE GROND Map pp62-5 Theatre Café
☎ 626 00 44; Nes 43

Part of the Flemish Cultural Centre, this café overlooking a quiet square does an honest trade in Flemish beer (try a magnum bottle from a Belgian abbey) and homestyle food (think steak *au poivre* or salmon with Ardenens ham).

NIEUWMARKT DE BEKEERDE SUSTER Map pp62-5 Beer Café
☎ 423 01 12; Kloveniersburgwal 6-8

It's got the brew tanks, it's got the beautiful hardwood interior, it's even got the history: a 16th-century brewery-cloister run by nuns. Stop in for a meal of pub grub, or make it a start of an evening on Nieuwmarkt.

Café de Doelen Map pp62-5 Brown Café
☎ 624 90 23; Kloveniersburgwal 125

On a busy canal-side crossroads between the Amstel and the Red Light District, this café dates back to 1895 and looks it: carved wooden goat's head, leaded stained-glass lamps, sand on the floor. Still, it's far from stuffy, there's a fun, youthful atmosphere here, and during fine weather the tables spill across the street for picture-perfect canal views.

DE SLUYSWACHT Map pp62-5 Brown Café
☎ 625 76 11; Jodenbreestraat 1

Listing like a ship in a high wind, this tiny black building was once a lock-keeper's

I GET AROUND...

It was only a matter of time before someone combined two legendary Amsterdam pastimes: cycling and beer. **Het Fietscafé** (Bike Café; ☎ 06 5386 4090; www.fietscafé.nl; per hr/day €75/250, plus delivery fee €75-190, 30/50L keg €60/90) is a pedal-powered party, shaped like an open-sided trolley car with a bar down the middle and barstools on either side. Here, though, the barstools sit atop pedals, which you and up to 16 of your mates can use to go anywhere cars can (except highways). Designate a bartender and a driver (who's not allowed to drink), pop your favourite CD in the player, and you're on your way.

house on the Oude Schans. Today, the canal-side terrace is one of the nicest spots we know in town to relax and down a beer (Dommelsch is the house speciality), and it has gorgeous views of the **Montelbaanstoren** (p82).

LOKAAL 'T LOOSJE Map pp62-5 Brown Café
☎ 627 26 35; Nieuwmarkt 32-34

With its beautiful etched-glass windows and tile tableaux on the walls, this is one of the oldest and prettiest cafés in the Nieuwmarkt area. It attracts a vibrant mix of students, locals and tourists

HILL STREET BLUES Map pp62-5 Coffeeshop
www.hill-street-blues.nl; Nieuwmarkt 14

Feels more like a lounge bar than a coffee-shop, with jazz lounge music, an in-the-groove vibe and an international swathe of visitors. Firm beanbag stools and comfy benches make great stations for watching the life forms on busy Nieuwmarkt. Once you've settled in on the terrace, try a blended smoothie with yogurt or fresh fruit, or one of its phenomenal chocolate shakes, a perfect antidote to the munchies.

Café-Restaurant Dantzig Map pp62-5 Grand Café
☎ 620 90 39; Zwanenburgwal 15

Located in the Stopera building, Dantzig doesn't have the history of some of the other cafés in town, but that doesn't make it any less appealing. The great Amstel-side terrace is always busy in summer, with excellent views over the water and lots of sunlight.

Café de Jaren Map pp62-5 Grand Café
☎ 625 57 71; Nieuwe Doelenstraat 20

Watch the Amstel flow by from the balcony and waterside terraces of this

soaring, bright and *very grand* café, one of our favourites. Find a foreign publication at the great reading table and settle down for Sunday brunch (try the smoked-salmon rolls) or an afternoon snack like banana-cream pie.

Café Cuba Map pp62-5 Other Café
☎ 627 26 35; Nieuwmarkt 3

If a brown café was beamed to the tropical Atlantic, it would probably have Café Cuba's air of faded elegance. Slouch into a table with names etched into it, and quaff blender drinks like mai-tais, planter's punch and the legendary mojito. It may remind you of Hemingway or the Buena Vista Social Club, although we can't help wondering whether Café Cuba's attractive 20- and 30-something crowd has even heard of them.

WAAG CAFÉ Map pp62-5 Other Café
☎ 422 77 72; Nieuwmarkt 4

This former 15th-century *weigh house* (and later, gallows! – see p78) is now an impressive café-restaurant combining old-world accents (massive, circular wrought-iron candelabras) with new-world drinks and food, though it is rather expensive. It serves pretty good sandwiches (we suggest you try the Club) and salads as well, and there's so-not-medieval wireless internet access.

JORDAAN

Visitors who seek a typical café experience 'with the locals' will love the Jordaan, a chummy district still touted as the Amsterdam of yore. Of course, the locals may bag a remote table away from curious foreigners, but in this jolly part of town it's just as likely they'll toast your good health and break out in song.

DE KOE Map p86

Bar

☎ 625 44 82; Marnixstraat 381

'The Cow' is loved by a 25-plus crowd of locals for its *gezellig* atmosphere, fun pop quizzes, darts tournaments, good (cheap) restaurant and free performances by local rock bands.

CAFÉ 'T MONUMENTJE

Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 35 41; Westerstraat 120

Diagonally opposite Café Nol, this slightly scruffy café is always full of barflies, backgammon players and locals. It's a good spot for a beer and a snack after shopping at the Westermarkt.

CAFÉ 'T SMALLE Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 623 96 17; Egelantiersgracht 12

Take your boat and dock right on 't Smalle's pretty terrace – there's hardly a more convivial setting in the daytime or a more romantic one at night. It's equally charming inside – dating back to 1786 as a *jenever* distillery and tasting house, and restored during the 1970s with antique porcelain beer pumps and lead-framed windows. It's so gorgeous, so authentic, and so Dutch *gezellig*, that there's a reproduction of it in Japan.

CAFÉ NOL Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 53 80; Westerstraat 109; ☎ 9pm-1am (till 3am Fri & Sat)

The epitome of the old-style Jordaan café, this is sort of place where the original Jordaanese (ie before students, artists and professionals moved in) would sing oompah ballads with drunken abandon. They still do, but nowadays everyone from athletic types to drag queens joins in.

DE PIEPER Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 626 47 75; Prinsengracht 424

Considered by some customers to be the king of the brown cafés, De Pieper is small, unassuming and unmistakably old (1665). The interior features stained-glass windows, fresh sand on the floors, antique Delft beer mugs hanging from the bar and a working Belgian beer pump (1875). It's a friendly, sweet place for a late-night Wieckse Witte.

DE PRINS Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 93 82; Prinsengracht 124

Close to the *Anne Frank Huis* (p93), this pleasant and popular brown café prepares good lunch-time sandwiches, a terrific blue-cheese fondue at night, and international dishes like vegetarian wraps.

DE REIGER Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 74 26; Nieuwe Leliestraat 34

Assiduously local but highly atmospheric, this café has a quiet front bar and a noisy, more spacious dining section at the back serving a short menu (eg steaks or duck with peppercorns).

DE TUIN Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 45 59; 2e Tuindwarsstraat 13

Always a good place to start the evening. Join the youngish clientele enjoying the wide selection of Belgian beers, good food and funky soul music.

DE TWEË ZWAANTJES

Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 625 27 29; Prinsengracht 114; ☎ ring for opening hours

The small, authentic 'Two Swans' is at its hilarious best on weekend nights, when you can join some 100 people belting out torch songs and pop standards. Hours are erratic, so ring ahead first.

HET PAPENEILAND Map p86

Brown Café

☎ 624 19 89; Prinsengracht 2

You won't be the only tourist visiting this café, but that doesn't make it any less worthwhile. It's a 1642 gem with Delft-blue tiles and a central stove. The name, 'Papists' Island', goes back to the Reformation when there was a clandestine Catholic church on the north side of the canal. By some accounts you got there via a secret tunnel from the top of the stairs.

LA TERTULIA Map p86

Coffeeshop

Prinsengracht 312; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sat

A backpackers' favourite, this mother-and-daughter-run coffeeshop has a greenhouse feel. You can either sit outside by the Van Gogh-inspired murals, play some board games, or take in those Jurassic-sized crystals by the counter.

NO MORE MUD IN YOUR EYE

In Amsterdam, if you order a white beer, a soda water, or any cold drink served with a lemon slice, it will almost invariably be served with a plastic stick, like a swizzle stick on one end, with a plastic disc or clover with little spikes sticking out on the other.

The stick is called a *stamper* – sometimes they're referred to as *stampertjes* (little stampers). You use the spiked end to crush the lemon in the bottom of the glass. No more lemon juice in your partner's eye, and no wasted lemon juice either.

ROKERIJ Map p86

Coffeeshop

☎ 626 30 60; www.rokerij.net; Elandsgracht 53

The newest member of the Rokerij chain thinks it knows how an Indian living room really looks, with bright blue tiles, orange walls and religious icons. Its clientele is much less touristy than at its outlet near Leidseplein (p190).

FINCH Map p86

Designer Bar

☎ 626 24 61; Noordermarkt 5

This funkalicious bar with its retro décor (deliberately mismatched yet somehow harmonious) is just the spot to hang out and knock back a few beers after a visit to the market. It's known for an arty-designy clientele, and lipstick lesbians.

G-SPOT Map p86

Designer Bar

☎ 320 37 33; Prinsengracht 422 ☎ 11am-1am

Next door to *De Pieper* (opposite), this contemporary minimalist bar-restaurant with its bright light-filled interior couldn't be more different to its brown-café neighbour, but it's equally as appealing. While the interior is stylish, the canalside terrace with pretty views will keep you outside. Good wines available by the glass.

PROUST Map p86

Designer Bar

☎ 623 91 45; Noordermarkt 4

Next door to Finch, this bar is sleek and hip with mod colours, and the crowd changes as the hour does – families in the daytime, students (and older) at night. It's also known for its hot chocolate.

CAFÉ THIJSSSEN Map p86

Other Café

☎ 623 89 94; Brouwersgracht 107

The glowing amber, Art Deco-inspired interior with stained-glass windows and big

tables is a crowd-puller. It's busy on weekends with groups of neo-Jordanese yuppies meeting up for a late brunch and staying on until dinner.

WESTERN CANAL BELT

The cafés of this refined district tend to have a touch more polish than elsewhere – the interiors are slicker, the brass fittings shinier, the menus more elaborate. The rest of the places just steep themselves in half-lit atmosphere and hope no-one notices.

'T ARENDSNEST Map p92

Beer Café

☎ 421 20 57; Herengracht 90

This gorgeous, restyled brown café, with its glowing, copper *jenever* boilers behind the bar, specialises in Dutch beer served by helpful staff. Be sure to try the herby, powerful Jopen Kooyt, brewed from a 1407 recipe.

CAFÉ DE PELS Map p92

Brown Café

☎ 622 90 37; Huidenstraat 25; ☎ 10am-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat

The action at this appealingly shabby traditional brown café – attracting a mix of students, academics and creative types – is focused on drinking. It's also a Sunday morning breakfast fave.

CAFÉ HET MOLENPAD Map p92

Brown Café

☎ 625 96 80; Prinsengracht 653

This place attracts a nice mix of artists – some of whose work adorns the walls of this gallery-café – students and tourists. Lunch is the standard sandwich-and-salad affair, but dinner dishes are more interesting, with a mix of Dutch and Mediterranean flavours.

DE DOFFER Map p92

Brown Café

☎ 622 66 86; Prinsstraat 12-14

Writers, students and artists congregate at this popular café (with adjoining bar) for affordable food and good conversation. The dining room, with its old Heineken posters, large wooden tables and, occasionally, fresh flowers, is particularly ambient at night.

DE II PRINSEN Map p92

Brown Café

☎ 624 97 22; Prinsstraat 27

With its large windows, chandelier, mosaic floor and big terrace, this café looks

suitably restrained. You may be surprised then by the pumping disco music inside; all those students munching on tasty sandwiches don't seem to mind.

VAN PUFFELEN Map p92 Brown Café

☎ 624 62 70; Prinsengracht 377
This large café-restaurant, popular among cashed-up professionals and intellectual types, has lots of nooks and crannies for nice, cosy drinks, and big, communal tables for sharing meals like antipasto and large salads.

BARNEY'S Map p92 Coffeeshop

☎ 625 97 61; www.barneys.biz; Haarlemmerstraat 98 & 102
Ever-popular Barney's is more famous for its enormous all-day breakfasts (€5.70 to €10.50; the traditional Irish is the most popular) than its quality weed and hash. Go figure. Nonsmokers can just go for the food at its café down the block.

DUTCH FLOWERS Map p92 Coffeeshop

☎ 624 76 24; Singel 387
Were it not for this shop's main wares, you'd be hard pressed to distinguish it from a brown café, with the game on TV and a lovely view of the Singel. It all means that you needn't slum it with the college kids or feel as if you've gone to Jamaica or India in order to enjoy a toke.

GREY AREA Map p92 Coffeeshop

☎ 420 43 01; www.greyarea.nl; Oude Leliestraat 2; ☎ noon-8pm Tue-Sun
Owned by a couple of laid-back American guys, this tiny shop introduced the extra-sticky, flavoursome 'Double Bubble Gum' weed to the city's smokers. It also keeps up the wonderful American tradition of coffee

refills (it's organic). It keeps shorter hours than most coffeeshops.

SIBERIË Map p92 Coffeeshop

☎ 623 59 09; www.siberie.nl; Brouwersgracht 11
It's a comfortable, living-room-like setting and the owners are known for supplementing their wares with cultural events like poetry slams, acoustic concerts, DJ nights and even horoscope readings.

BRIX Map p92 Designer Bar

☎ 639 03 51; Wolvenstraat 16
The mod-lounge setting at this new spot makes it a great place to chill over a beer or enjoy small plates like herring and salmon carpaccio, and chicken lemongrass sticks with banana chutney. There's live jazz Sunday and Monday nights from about 9pm.

DYLAN Map p92 Designer Bar

☎ 530 20 10; Keizersgracht 384
Like the hotel surrounding it, the Dylan's lobby bar is superposh – sleek black and white with Indonesian influences, and a great place to pose...if you can get in. Restaurant patrons get seating priority. You might swear that all the beautiful people surrounding you stepped off the pages of the fashion magazines on the coffee tables.

WOLVENSTRAAT 23 Map p92 Designer Bar

☎ 320 08 43; Wolvenstraat 23; ☎ 9am-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat
This funky bar with no name – we dare you to find a sign anywhere – is especially popular with locals, who come for the good wines by the glass, great music and tasty Asian snacks. If this is your kind of place, check out their other bar, *Finch* (p187).

CAFÉ DE VERGULDE GAPER

Map p92 Grand Café

☎ 624 89 75; Prinsengracht 30
Decorated with old chemists bottles and vintage posters, this former pharmacy – popular with locals, and translated as the 'Golden Gaper', for the open-mouthed bust of a Moor traditionally posted at Dutch apothecaries – has amiable staff and a terrace with afternoon sun. It gets busy with 20- and 30-something media types meeting for after-work drinks.

DULAC Map p92 Grand Café

☎ 624 42 65; Haarlemmerstraat 118
This former bank building is outrageously decked out in a kooky, but kind of spooky, mixture of styles (think Turkish, Art Nouveau and Amsterdam School, with a few Gothic accents). There are DJs Thursday through to Saturday nights, a pool table and an amiable mix of students, older folks and Americans.

POMPADOUR Map p92 Other Café

☎ 623 95 54; Huidenstraat 12
Join society ladies sipping top-notch tea and nibbling away at homemade Belgian-style chocolates and pastries at this chichi little tearoom in the Negen Straatjes. If you just want the chocolates, they're €4.30 per 100g. Note: it's not open on Sundays, but a second branch is, at *Kerkstraat 148* (Map pp100-1; ☎ 330 09 81).

DE ADMIRAAL Map p92 Tasting House

☎ 625 43 34; Herengracht 319; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat
The grandest and largest of Amsterdam's tasting houses, De Admiraal is also a restaurant and party venue. Although some grumble that they pour only their own house brands (16 *jenever*s and 60 liqueurs made by Van Wees, an Amsterdam distiller), it's hard to quibble over the lovely setting and pleasant staff.

FELIX MERITIS CAFÉ Map p92 Theatre Café

☎ 626 23 21; Felix Meritis Bldg, Keizersgracht 324
Join performing artists from around Europe and the city's cultural cognoscenti imbibing in this high-ceilinged, quietly refined room (think theatrical lighting). Huge windows overlooking the canal make it a sunny place for breakfast (from 9am).

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT

Much of the action gravitates towards two of Amsterdam's busy pleasure centres, the shrill squares called Leidseplein and Rembrandtplein. Many locales here feel surprisingly authentic given the tacky surrounds. A more discriminating crowd hits Utrechtsestraat, where you'll find some of the city's most enticing cafes and bars.

AMSTEL BAR & BRASSERIE

Map pp100-1 Bar

☎ 622 60 60; Amstel Intercontinental Hotel, Professor Tulpplein 1
So you need to entertain a client. She's very high powered and you can't leave things to chance. The bar at the Amstel Intercontinental Hotel is dignified and appropriately clubby, and its river-view location is the power spot in town. We expect you'll get that contract you wanted and you may even rub elbows with famous financiers for your next deal.

EYLDERS Map pp100-1 Brown Café

☎ 624 27 04; Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 47
During WWII, Eylders was a meeting place for artists who refused to toe the cultural line imposed by the Nazis, and the spirit lingers on. It's still an artists café with exhibits, and makes a quiet retreat from the Leidseplein.

OOSTERLING Map pp100-1 Brown Café

☎ 623 41 40; Utrechtsestraat 140
Opened in the 1700s as a tea and coffee outlet for the United East India Company, Oosterling is as authentic as it gets – run by the same family since 1877. These days it's packed with the after-work-drinks crowd from the bank across the square and is one of the very few cafes that has a bottle-shop (liquor-store) permit.

BULLDOG Map pp100-1 Coffeeshop

☎ 625 62 78; www.bulldog.nl; Leidseplein 13-17
Amsterdam's most famous coffeeshop chain has evolved into its own empire, with multiple locations (some double as cafes), a hotel, bike rental, even its own brand of energy drink. This flagship location on the Leidseplein is in a former police station. How times have changed.

TO SPLIFF OR NOT TO SPLIFF? THAT WAS THE QUESTION

Well, not exactly, but we couldn't resist the title.

At the beginning of this century, the Dutch health ministry announced that smoking would eventually be banned in bars, cafes, restaurants and nightclubs around the country. A lively debate followed between the government and the hospitality industry, which finally agreed to a voluntary phase-in of a ban. Many places remained so smoke-friendly, however, that Health Minister Ad Klink finally lost patience and had a ban imposed effective from mid-2008 including, believe it or not, the hazy realm of the coffeeshops. Puffers needn't despair too much, for they can still light up in closed-off rooms without waiting service. Café owners will supposedly face stiff fines for violations, but for now, take a deep breath, sit back and see how (and if) the law is enforced.

GLOBAL CHILLAGE Map pp100-1 *Coffeeshop*
☎ 777 97 77; www.globalchillage.com;
Kerkstraat 51

This relaxed shop with friendly staff looks like a little forest with trippy murals and chilled-out music (from African and jazzy beats), populated by happy smokers relaxing on comfortable couches.

ROKERIJ Map pp100-1 *Coffeeshop*
☎ 622 94 42; www.rokerij.net; Lange
Leidsewarstraat 41

Behind this black hole of an entrance you'll find Eastern décor and candlelight for those tired of the Rastafarian vibe. Staff at this flagship branch have a reputation for friendliness, explaining why outlets have shot up like weed(s). Others include the Jordaan (p187).

DE HUYSCHAEMER *Designer Bar*
Map pp100-1

☎ 627 05 75; Utrechtsestraat 137
A one-time restaurant, De Huyschkaemer has made the transition to a full-time designer bar, with a mixed crowd – gay and straight, expat and local, old and young. The setting is minimalist, with spare walls and booths.

KAMER 401 Map pp100-1 *Designer Bar*
☎ 422 44 53; Marnixstraat 401; ☎ 4pm-1am
Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat

This glamorous bar glows at night, as do the gorgeous-looking cocktail-drinking young locals who pack the place till late. With DJs providing a funky soundtrack, it's perfect for preclubbing drinks.

LUX Map pp100-1 *Designer Bar*
☎ 422 14 12; Marnixstraat 403; ☎ 8pm-3am
Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat

One of several happening bars along this street, attracting beautiful young Amsterdammers and expats-in-the-know – good DJs keep the crowds happy and the bar staff very, very busy.

SUZU WONG Map pp100-1 *Designer Bar*
☎ 626 67 69; Korte Leidsewarstraat 45

This sure-to-impress bar bustles with Dutch trendsies and actors. The look? Victorian-drawing-room-on-speed, with red velvet-een wallpaper and a bamboo garden; a

photo of Andy Warhol observes. A worthy place to fortify yourself before heading across to **Jimmy Woo's** (p197).

WEBER Map pp100-1 *Designer Bar*
☎ 627 05 74; Marnixstraat 397; ☎ 8pm-3am
Mon-Thu, to 4am Fri-Sun

We love this buzzy bar for its loud indie music, retro décor and unpretentious local vibe. Cheap drinks and friendly service are an added incentive to head here on a Saturday night – if you can squeeze in!

CAFÉ AMERICAIN Map pp100-1 *Grand Café*
☎ 556 32 32; Amsterdam American Hotel,
Leidsekaade 97

This Art Deco monument, opened in 1902, was a grand café before the concept even existed, with huge stained-glass windows overlooking Leidseplein, a lovely, library-like reading table and a great terrace.

DE KROON Map pp100-1 *Grand Café*

☎ 625 20 11; Rembrandtplein 17-1
A popular venue for media events and movie-premiere parties, with high ceilings, velvet chairs, and the chance to wave at the Little People below on the Rembrandtplein. There is a lift to get up the two storeys, but climb the two flights instead and you'll be rewarded with an Art Deco tiled staircase.

MULLIGANS Map pp100-1 *Irish Pub*
☎ 622 13 30; Amstel 100

This is probably the most 'authentic' Irish pub, at least music-wise. There's a congenial atmosphere, Guinness on tap and live Irish music most nights from 9pm (no cover charge). Sunday *sesiàns* let you participate. BYOI (instrument) and T (talent).

HERBERG HOOGHOUDT *Other Café*
Map pp100-1

☎ 420 40 41; Reguliersgracht 11; Mon-Sat 4pm-midnight

Situated on lovely Reguliersgracht, this venerable café still bears the hallmarks of the Hooghoudt Distillery founded in Groningen in the late 19th century. You can try a gamut of *jenever*s, liqueurs and vodkas, or warm up with a *korenwijn* right out of a barrel on the bar. Note the earthenware pots still used to give the firewater its special flavour.

PLACES TO PLAY

You'll have ample opportunity for mind games at Amsterdam's bars and clubs, but for something more traditional, try one of the following. Some are pretty down-and-dirty. Hours vary, but these places generally open from early afternoon through the evening.

- **Snookerclub Final Touch** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 620 92 52; Prinsengracht 735) This two-storey spot with six snooker tables and five pool tables feels studenty but gets a mixed crowd. Other games include backgammon, darts and chess.
- **Snookerclub De Keizers** (Map p92; ☎ 623 15 86; Keizersgracht 256) De Keizers' five storeys feel like something out of *The Shining*; it's a once-grand 18th-century canal house whose huge rooms now contain just one or two tables each. You can get drinks and bar snacks, and it's always pretty quiet. It's bittersweet to see such faded glory; on the other hand, it's sooooo cool that it exists.
- **Café de Laurierboom** (Map p86; ☎ 623 30 15; Laurierstraat 76) The hub of the Jordaan chess circuit is one of its oldest cafés, still bearing a stone tablet labelled *tapperij en slijterij*. From 3pm the local masters test their wits over a drinkie or three.
- **Max Euweplein** (Map pp100-1) Enthusiastic chess players can play and schmooze around the oversized outdoor chessboard.

JANVIER Map pp100-1 *Other Café*
☎ 626 1199; Amstelveeld 12

There's no lovelier place to sit on a sunny afternoon than under the shady plane trees at this stylish bar-restaurant. Stick to a drink and snacks (the food can be hit and miss) and watch the kids kick a football around in this pleasant down-to-earth neighbourhood.

TWINS BACKSTAGE Map pp100-1 *Other Café*
☎ 622 36 38; Utrechtsewarstraat 67

The twins Greg and Gary Christmas once had a song-and-dance act, and in the 1970s they opened this café as a sideline. Greg passed away several years ago, and Gary keeps things going with substantial help from the neighbours. Don't expect crisp service or top-notch food, but do expect encompassing kitsch, from mannequins in crocheted shawls to flower-power decals. No matter your sexual orientation, you'll find a titillating photo on the wash-room wall.

CAFÉ SCHILLER Map pp100-1 *Theatre Café*
☎ 624 98 46; Rembrandtplein 26

Most cafés would pay a fortune to have Schiller's fabulous Deco interior, but this is original. Walls are lined with portraits of Dutch actors and cabaret artists from the 1920s and '30s. Bar stools and booths are often occupied by tipling journalists and artists, and folks tucking into pre- and post-theatre menus.

DE BALIE Map pp100-1 *Theatre Café*
☎ 623 36 73; Kleine Gartmanplantsoen 10

In the Balie performance space, lovely Deco-meets-industrial design attracts a diverse crowd of artists, politicians, journalists, actors, filmmakers and anyone else looking for a decent lunch.

DE SMOESHAAN Map pp100-1 *Theatre Café*
☎ 625 03 68; Leidsekaade 90

Theater Bellevue's café gets pretty lively, both before and after the shows, with theatre visitors and performers. During the day it's a nice place to relax by the Singelgracht. The pub food is better than it needs to be (try the *gehakt* at lunch time) and there's a good full-on restaurant upstairs too (restaurant closed July to mid-August).

OLD SOUTH

'Old anything' in a label tends to impress. The cafés in the Old South marry a 1920s social conscience with Dutch understatement that still says 'I've arrived'. The result is classic period cafés with a wonderful ambience of leisure that's taken for granted, like what cultured folk should expect anyway.

WILDSCHUT Map p110 *Brown Café*
☎ 676 82 20; Roelof Hartplein 1

A real gathering place for the Old South. When the weather's warm, pretty much everyone heads to the terrace, with views of the Amsterdam School buildings. And

when the weather's not great, soak up the atmosphere in the Art Deco interior.

VONDELPARK & AROUND

The scene here revolves around the handful of old-style cafés in the city's most popular park – wonderful places to cool your heels after a stroll round the pond-filled grounds. The spacey-looking 't Blauwe Theehuis (p171) is as famous for coffee and cake as its generous lunch and dinner mains.

HET GROOT MELKHUIS

Map p116 **Other Café**
☎ 612 96 74; **Vondelpark 2**
Kind of a Goldilocks apparition, this huge thatched house at the forest's edge invites you in. The huge dining forecourt, playground and amazing selection of chewing gum machines cater to families and all kidlike guests.

CAFÉ VERTIGO **Map p116** **Theatre Café**

☎ 612 30 21; **Vondelpark 3**
Bonus: this is both a theatre café (at the main hall of the **Filmmuseum**, p115) and, in nice weather, a great place to linger outdoors watching the cyclists and families go by in the Vondelpark. Try the *uitsmijter* Vertigo (egg sandwich with bacon, mushrooms, tomato and melted cheese, €7.50).

DE PIJP

The neighbourhood that houses the old Heineken Brewery (p118) is chock-full with watering holes that few tourists discover, being well off the beaten track. For a good solid pub crawl, start with the enthusiastic after-work crowd on Gerard Douplein and drink your way south towards Sarphatipark.

PILSVOGEL **Map p119** **Brown Café**

☎ 664 64 83; **Gerard Douplein 14**
The kitchen dispenses small plates (€2.50 to €4.50) and *dagschotels* (€11.50) to a 20-something crowd, but that's really secondary when you're sitting on De Pijp's loveliest, busiest corner. Watch the world go by, or at least its ambassadors.

SARPHAAT **Map p119** **Brown Café**

☎ 675 15 65; **Ceintuurbaan 157**
Grab an outdoor table by the Sarphatipark, tuck into a slice of Boston cheesecake and a coffee, and see if you don't feel like a local.

18 TWINTIG **Map p119** **Designer Bar**

☎ 470 06 51; **Ferdinand Bolstraat 18-20**
This bar facing Marie Heinekenplein is all pastels, mints and tiny Buddhas to make anyone look glam, not that the good-looking 20- and 30-somethings need enhancement. There's a contemporary, diverse food menu (mains €16.50 to €21.50).

BAR ÇA **Map p119** **Designer Bar**

☎ 470 41 44; **Marie Heinekenplein 30-31**
One of the hottest cafés in town, this club themed like a 'Barcelona in Amsterdam' has brought real life to Marie Heinekenplein. Hang in the posh plush-red and darkwood interior, or spread out onto the terrace.

PLANTAGE, EASTERN ISLANDS & EASTERN DOCKLANDS

In keeping with all the daring architecture out here, the Plantage, Eastern Islands and Eastern Docklands area has seen an invasion of back-lit designer bars and media-savvy cafés, and we've listed those that meld mod style with good ol' Dutch *gezelligheid*. Among the more traditional places, the venerable Brouwerij 't IJ has tasty brews that are a definite highlight.

BROUWERIJ 'T IJ **Map p122** **Beer Café**

☎ 622 83 25; **Funenakade 7**; ☎ 3-8pm **Wed-Sun**
The tasting room of Amsterdam's leading microbrewery has a cosy, down-and-dirty beer-hall feel (walls lined with dried hops and bottles from around the world) and the house brew is on tap. In nice weather you can enjoy your beer on the terrace at the foot of the De Gooyer Windmill (p124). Where better to sample a Columbus (9%), a *zatte* ('drunk') or a sweet, orange-coloured *struis* (ostrich)?

SMOKY TOWN LIVING

Peter Vloot, 45, is an artist and skipper born in Osdorp, a western suburb of Amsterdam. He now lives in the Western Islands north of the Jordaan. We asked Peter to give us the skinny on dope-smoking tourists, police searches and the arts scene, as well as his past life as a squatter.

Do you have much contact with the tourists in the city?

Well, I used to drive a water taxi in town and now I'm a skipper, taking passengers and tourists around town.

Do you find it a pain that a lot of tourists come to Amsterdam just to party, drink and smoke dope?

I'm always surprised when my friends come up from Switzerland and smoke much more in Amsterdam than they do at home. But there it's illegal. When you're born here it seems normal, so I'm used to it and it doesn't really bother me. But if it bothers you, you might as well stay away from the city centre. Most residents don't ride their bicycles along the Rokin and the Damrak anyway!

Do you think preventative frisking by police on the street is a good thing?

No. I think it's idiotic, and disappointing that it's happening in Amsterdam. It's like the issue of carrying identity cards – going back to the Second World War, we never considered ID cards until the Germans forced it upon us – and then we allow it now. And we allow preventative searches and let ourselves be fobbed off with lists of statistics on illegal weapons. When you've got a few thousand people on the street to choose from, they'll always find something.

What's special about Amsterdam for artists?

There's so much going on. The moment that you say, you want to make art your living, you've got the greatest chance of success in Amsterdam. There's an art to the way the city is constantly changing. As older neighbourhoods were being cleaned up, the buildings became a kind of breeding ground, and you could use their rooms as an artist or squatter. But these places are disappearing.

What was it like being a squatter?

Easy. Someone moved out and I moved in. When I was squatting in 1983, I lived in what was known as the most dangerous street in Amsterdam. There were clashes among the dealers and junkies, fires were set and so on. When I told my landlord I was going to pay rent, and it was a tiny amount in the '80s, he said, 'Oh, that's great!' Because I was a squatter but not aggressive, he was happy to hear it. And then I lived there for 20 years. Now it's a school, and part of a renovation project.

CAFÉ KOOSJE **Map p122** **Brown Café**

☎ 320 08 17; **Plantage Middenlaan 37**
If the three catch-words for real estate are location, location and location, then Koosje's got a lock on the market, between the **Artis Zoo** (p121) and the **Hollandsche Schouwburg** (p123). There are lots of windows to watch the action outside, a great corner vibe, and small plates and sandwiches, most under €6.

KHL **Map p122** **Other Café**

☎ 779 15 75; **Oostelijke Handelskade 44**
Proof of how far this district has come, KHL is a one-time squatter café gone legit. Next to the Lloyd Hotel, it's a historic brick building with great tilework, and the garden is worth a glass or two. There's often music on weekends – everything from Latin to pop to Klezmer.

BLOEM **Map p122** **Other Café**

☎ 330 09 29; **Entrepotdok 36**
You've always wanted to see those lovely buildings of the Entrepotdok from the inside? Now you can, at this dark and cosy café-restaurant. Amid the brick and beams, enjoy a beer or a coffee, and meals are better than they need to be (lunch around €7, three-course menus around €20).

STAR FERRY **Map p122** **Theatre Café**

☎ 788 20 90; **Piet Heinkade 1**
It's practically a commandment nowadays that any newly built performing space worth the name has to have a flash café, and the café at the new Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ is hard to beat for location and views. Several storeys of glass give you an IJ's-eye perspective.

OOSTERPARK & AROUND

As the capital of a seafaring nation, Amsterdam has no shortage of riverside cafés that remind you of the age-old Dutch bond with H2O. On gorgeous summer evenings many patrons arrive by boat, settle at a terrace table and watch the freight barges, tugs and rowing teams ply the waters of the Amstel or the IJ.

AMSTEL HAVEN Map p129

Other Café

☎ 665 26 72; Mauritskade 1

Bike or boat up to where the Amstel meets the Singelgracht, snag a canalside table under an umbrella, and have yourself a swell view of the water and skyscrapers. Daytimes, munch on *uitsmijters*, sandwiches and mains, and on weekend nights, the dining room becomes a dance floor with DJs or live music.

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