

BACKGROUND

HISTORY FROM THE BEGINNING

Originally, the region that spawned a giant trading community was an inhospitable patchwork of lakes, swamps and peat, at or below sea level; its contours shifted with the autumn storms and floods. The oldest archaeological finds here date from Roman times, when the IJ river lay along the northern border of the Roman Empire. Too busy elsewhere, and no doubt put off by the mushy conditions, the Romans left practically no evidence of settlement.

Isolated farming communities tamed the marshlands with ditches and dykes. Between 1150 and 1300 the south bank of the IJ was dyked from the Zuiderzee westwards to Haarlem. Around 1200, a fishing community known as Aemstelredamme – ‘the dam built across the Amstel’ – emerged at what is now the Dam. On 27 October 1275, the count of Holland waived tolls for those who lived around the Amstel dam, allowing locals to pass the locks and bridges of Holland free of charge, and the town of Amsterdam was born.

EARLY TRADE

Farming was tricky on the marshland, and with the sea on the doorstep, early residents turned to fishing. But it was commercial trade that would put Holland on the map. While powerful city-states focused on overland trade with Flanders and northern Italy, Amsterdam levelled its sights on the maritime routes. The big prizes were the North and Baltic seas, in the backyard of the powerful Hanseatic League, a group of German trading cities.

Ignoring the league, Amsterdam’s clever *vrijbuiters* (booty-chasers) sailed right into the Baltic, their holds full of cloth and salt to exchange for grain and timber. It was nothing short of a coup. By the late 1400s, nearly two-thirds of ships sailing to and from the Baltic Sea were from Holland, mostly based in Amsterdam.

Already strained to capacity, the original harbour on the Damrak and Rokin was extended north into the IJ river, near what is now Centraal Station. Canals were dug to the warehouses in today’s Medieval Centre. By this time sailors, merchants, artisans and opportunists from the Low Countries (roughly present-day Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) made their living here.

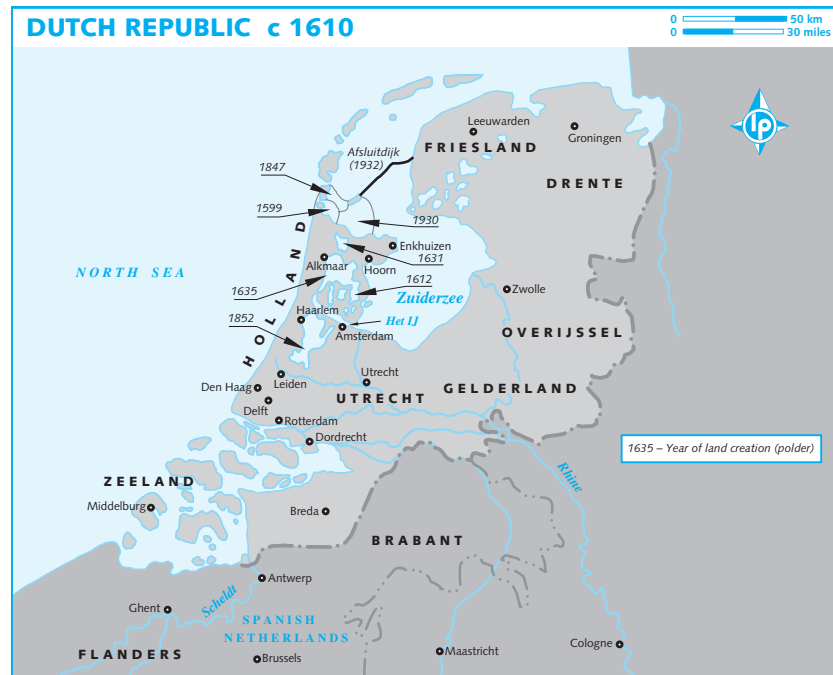
At the time, Amsterdam was unfettered by the key structures of other European societies. With no tradition of Church-sanctioned feudal relationships, no distinction between nobility and serfs, and hardly any taxation, a society of individualism and capitalism slowly took root.

INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC

More than being about religion, the Protestant Reformation was also a classic power struggle between the ‘new money’, an emerging class of merchants and artisans, and the ‘old money’, the land-owning, aristocratic order sanctioned by the established Catholic Church.

TIMELINE

1150–1300	1220	1275	1380	1452	1519
Dams are built to retain the IJ river between the Zuiderzee and Haarlem. A tiny community of herring fishermen settles on the banks of the Amstel river.	A barrier dubbed ‘the Dam’ is built at the mouth of the Amstel river to control the tidal waters of the Zuiderzee.	Amsterdam is founded after the count of Holland grants toll-free status to residents along the Amstel. The city gains its first direct access to the ocean via the Zuiderzee, now the IJsselmeer.	Canals of the present-day Medieval Centre are dug. Amsterdam flourishes, winning control over the sea trade in Scandinavia and later gaining free access to the Baltic, breaking the Hansa monopoly.	Fire devours the timber frames and thatch of central Amsterdam. New building laws decree that only brick and tile be used in future.	Spain’s Charles V is crowned Holy Roman Emperor. Treaties and dynastic marriages make Amsterdam part of the Spanish empire, with Catholicism the main faith. Protestants are tolerated in Amsterdam.



The Protestantism that took hold in the Low Countries was its most radically moralistic stream, known as Calvinism. It stressed the might of God and treated humans as sinful creatures whose duty in life was sobriety and hard work. The Calvinists stood for local decision-making – a sign of things to come in Dutch ‘polder’ society – and had a disdain for the top-down hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

Calvinism was a key to the struggle for independence from King Philip II of Spain. Philip, a fanatically devout Catholic, had acquired the Low Countries in something of a horse trade with Austria. His efforts to introduce the Spanish Inquisition, centralise government and levy taxes enraged his subjects and, even worse, awoke a sense of national pride. After 80 years of rebellion, the Spanish finally threw in the towel and signed the Peace Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

With mighty Amsterdam on their side, the seven northern provinces declared themselves to be an independent republic, led by William the Silent, the seed that grew into today’s royal family. (He was dubbed ‘the Silent’ because he wisely refused to enter into religious debate.) The Seven United Provinces became known to the outside world as the Dutch Republic – or simply ‘Holland’ because that province dominated. Within Holland, Amsterdam towered over all the other cities put together.

GOLDEN AGE (1580–1700)

Amsterdam grew rapidly. In the 1580s, land was reclaimed from the IJ and Amstel to create the present Nieuwmarkt district. Two decades later, work began on the Canal Belt that more than tripled the city's area.

By 1600, Dutch ships controlled the sea trade between England, France, Spain and the Baltic, and had a virtual monopoly on North Sea fishing and Arctic whaling. Jewish refugees taught Dutch mariners about trade routes, giving rise to the legendary United East India and West India Companies. Tiny Holland burned brightly; for a while it ran rings around the fleets of great powers, which were too slow or cumbersome to react.

Amsterdam's fortunes rose when Antwerp, its major trading rival in the Low Countries, was retaken by the Spaniards. Half the population of Antwerp fled, and merchants, skippers and artisans flocked to Amsterdam, bringing entire industries with them such as printing and silk-weaving. Persecuted Jews were welcomed from Portugal and Spain, and Germany proved a ready source of sailors and labourers. Later, a second wave of Jews arrived from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as persecuted Huguenots from France. In the absence of an overriding religion, ethnic background or political entity, money reigned supreme.

By 1620, Dutch traders were exploring the far corners of the earth. They rounded the tip of South America, naming it Cape Horn after the city of Hoorn, north of Amsterdam. They expelled the Portuguese from the Moluccas, also known as the Spice Islands, in present-day Indonesia, and set up outposts in the Pacific and Americas. By 1641 the Dutch had taken control of Formosa and garnered sole trading rights with Japan.

Their good luck continued, and in 1652, Dutch sailors captured the Cape of Good Hope and booted the Portuguese out of Ceylon soon after. They also explored the coastlines of New Zealand, named after the Dutch province of Zeeland and New Holland (now Australia), but found nothing of value there.

By this point the Dutch had more seagoing merchant vessels than England and France combined. Half of all ships sailing between Europe and Asia belonged to the *Hollanders*, and exotic products became commodities – coffee, tea, spices, tobacco, cotton, silk and porcelain. Amsterdam became home to Europe's largest ship-building industry, and as wages remained low, investment capital flowed in.

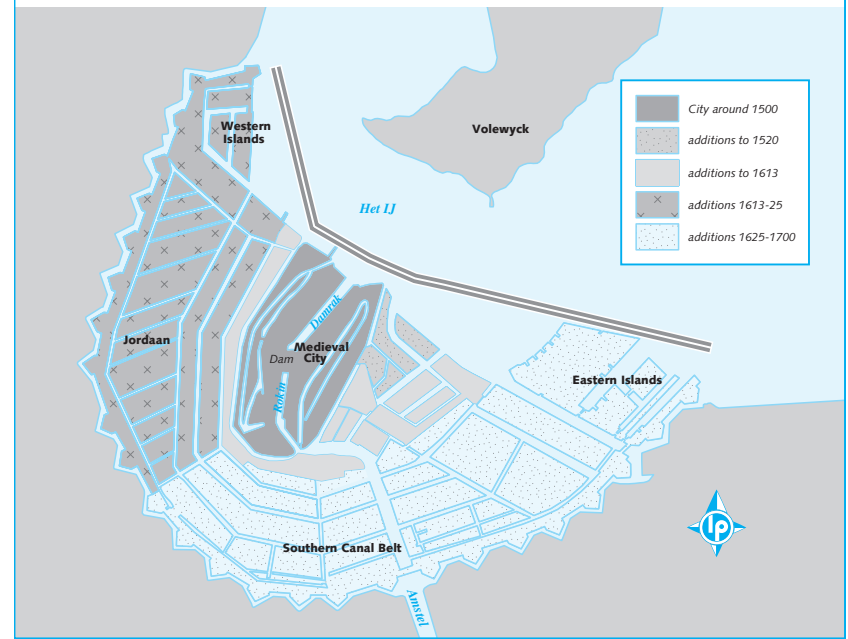
In 1651 England passed the first of several Navigation Acts that posed a serious threat to Dutch trade, leading to several thorny, inconclusive wars on the seas. Its competitors sussed out Holland's trade secrets, regrouped, and reconquered the sea routes. In one nasty encounter, the Dutch lost the colony of New Amsterdam (New York City) to the British. Louis XIV of France seized the opportunity to invade the Low Countries two decades later, and the few short decades of prosperity known as Golden Age ended.

WEALTHY DECLINE (1700–1814)

While the Dutch Republic didn't have the resources to fight France and England head-on, it had Amsterdam's money to buy them off and ensure freedom of the seas.

As the costs mounted, Amsterdam went from being a place where everything (profitable) was possible, to a lethargic community where wealth creation was a matter of interest rates. Gone were the daring sea voyages, achievements in art, science and technology, the innovations of government and finance. Ports such as London and Hamburg became powerful rivals.

17TH-CENTURY AMSTERDAM



The decline in trade brought poverty, and exceptionally cold winters hampered transport and led to serious food shortages. The winters of 1740 and 1763 were so severe that some residents froze to death.

Amsterdam's support of the American War of Independence (1776) resulted in a British blockade of the Dutch coast followed by British conquests of Dutch trading posts around the world, forcing the closure of the West India and East India Companies.

In 1794 the French revolutionary troops invaded the Low Countries. The Dutch Republic became a monarchy in 1806, when Napoleon nominated his brother Louis Napoleon as king. Two years later the grand city hall on the Dam, symbol of Dutch merchant wealth and power, was made his palace (now the Royal Palace, p67). Napoleon soon dismissed his brother and annexed Holland into the French Empire.

Britain responded by blockading the Continent and occupying the Dutch colonies. Amsterdam's great trade and fishing industries ground to a halt, and people turned increasingly to agriculture for a living. Holland's commercial hub quickly became a sleepy market town.

After Napoleon's defeat in 1813, Amsterdam's trade with the world recovered only slowly; domination of the seas now belonged to the British.

1535

A group of naked Anabaptists (motto: 'Truth is Naked') occupies Amsterdam's city hall, but are defeated by the city watch in fierce battle and brutally executed.

1566–68

The Low Countries revolt against a lack of religious freedom and the repressive acts of Philip II of Spain, launching the 80 years' war. In Friesland the rebels win their first battle, which would be immortalised in the Dutch national anthem.

1578

Amsterdam is captured in a bloodless coup by fanatic Calvinist brigands, known as *watergeuzen* (sea beggars). A Dutch republic made up of seven provinces is declared a year later, led by William the Silent.

1618

The world's first regular newspaper, the trade-oriented *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.*, is printed in Amsterdam, already a publishing centre of maps, atlases and sea charts. Catholicism is outlawed, though clandestine worship is permitted.

1688

William III of Orange repels the French with the help of Austria, Spain and Brandenburg (Prussia); William then invades England, where he and his wife, Mary Stuart, are proclaimed king and queen.

1795

French troops occupy the Netherlands and install the Batavian Republic, named after the Batavian tribe that rebelled against Roman rule in AD 69. The fragmented United Provinces become a centralised state, with Amsterdam as its capital.

HISTORY BUFFS' BIBLES

- *The Embarrassment of Riches*, by Simon Schama, is an epic account of Dutch culture in the Golden Age, using art to mirror a nation with all its neuroses and religious idiosyncrasies. Masterfully written and full of off-beat themes such as the popularity of breakfast paintings.
- *Amsterdam: The Brief Life of a City*, by Geert Mak, is an engaging, awesomely researched book that combines a broad historical narrative with anecdotes about Amsterdam's more riveting characters. One of the country's leading journalists, Mak does not shy away from showing uncomfortable truths, be it in trade, war, religion or government.
- *Tulip Fever*, by Deborah Moggach, offers a feel for Amsterdam proper around the time when Rembrandt was at his peak and tulips were worth more than their weight in gold. A nice bonus is the reproductions of Dutch paintings in some editions.
- *Max Havelaar*, by Multatuli, is written by a colonial administrator and Amsterdam native, who went by the pen name of Multatuli (see p95). This classic depicts the hypocrisy of Dutch coffee traders in Java. The book shocked Dutch society, and then the government into revising colonial policy in Indonesia.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE (1814–1918)

Amsterdam in the first half of the 19th century was an uninspiring place. Its harbour had been neglected, and the sandbanks in the IJ proved too great a barrier for modern ships. Rotterdam was set to become the country's premier port.

Things began to look up as the country's first railway, between Amsterdam and Haarlem, opened in 1839. Trade with the East Indies was the backbone of Amsterdam's economy, and a canal, later extended to the Rhine, helped the city to benefit from the Industrial Revolution underway in Europe.

The diamond industry boomed after the discovery of diamonds in South Africa. Amsterdam again attracted immigrants, and its population doubled in the second half of the 19th century. Speculators hastily erected new housing beyond the Canal Belt – dreary, shoddily built tenement blocks.

In 1889 the Centraal Station was built on several artificial islands in the IJ, seen as a symbolic severing of Amsterdam's historical ties with the sea. Towards the end of the 19th century, some of the city's waterways and canals were filled in for hygienic reasons (such as cholera epidemics) and to create roads.

The Netherlands remained neutral in WWI, but Amsterdam's trade with the East Indies suffered from naval blockades. There were riots over food shortages. An attempt to bring the socialist revolution to the Netherlands was put down by loyalist troops.

BOOM & DEPRESSION (1918–40)

After the war, Amsterdam remained the country's industrial centre. The Dutch Shipbuilding Company operated the world's second-largest wharf and helped carry a large steel and diesel-motor industry. The harbour handled tropical produce that was processed locally, such as tobacco and cocoa; today, Amsterdam is still the world's biggest centre for cocoa distribution.

BENDING THE GOLDEN RULES

No mistake, Amsterdam has always been short of building space. When the authorities embarked on their expensive Canal Belt project, they drew up detailed laws to ensure this scarce commodity would return a maximum profit.

On the outer bank of Herengracht, plots were limited to a width of 30ft and a depth of 190ft (in pre-metric days). There were no limits on building height at the front of each plot, but the rear could not be higher than 10ft to preserve the atmosphere of the luxury gardens beyond. Buyers also had to pay for the brick quayside in front of their plots. Subdivisions were prohibited to maintain the value of the properties.

So much for the theory. In practice, the very wealthiest Amsterdammers got dispensation, as can be seen in the towering palaces along the 'Golden Bend' of Herengracht, between Leidsestraat and Vijzelstraat. Elsewhere, regulations were a matter of creative interpretation – for instance, by buying two adjacent plots and building one house with two fronts.

The 1920s were boom years. KLM (Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij; Royal Aviation Company) began the world's first regular air service in 1920 between Amsterdam and London, from an airstrip south of the city, and bought many of its planes from Anthony Fokker's factory north of the IJ. There were two huge breweries, a sizable clothing industry and even a local car factory. The city hosted the Olympic Games in 1928.

The world Depression in the 1930s hit Amsterdam hard. Make-work projects did little to defuse the mounting tensions between socialists, communists and a small but vocal party of Dutch fascists. The city took in 25,000 Jewish refugees fleeing Germany; a shamefully large number were turned back at the border because of the country's neutrality policy.

WWII (1940–45)

The Netherlands tried to remain neutral in WWII, but Germany invaded in May 1940. For the first time in almost 400 years, Amsterdammers experienced war first-hand.

Few wanted to believe that things would turn really nasty (the Germans, after all, had trumpeted that the Dutch were of the 'Aryan brotherhood'). However, in February 1941, dockworkers led a protest strike over the treatment of Jews, commemorated as the 'February Strike' (see p16). By then, however, it was already too late. Only one in every 16 of Amsterdam's 90,000 Jews survived the war – one in seven in the Netherlands – the lowest proportion of anywhere in Western Europe.

The Dutch Resistance, set up by an unlikely alliance of Calvinists and Communists, only became large-scale when the increasingly desperate Germans began to round up able-bodied men to work in Germany.

Towards the end of the war, the situation in Amsterdam was dire. Coal shipments ceased, many men aged between 17 and 50 had gone into hiding or to work in Germany, public utilities halted, and the Germans began to plunder anything that could assist their war effort. Thousands of lives were lost to severe cold and famine. Canadian troops finally liberated the city in May 1945, in the final days of the war in Europe.

1813–14

The French are overthrown, and William VI of Orange is crowned as Dutch king William I. The Austrians relinquish their claims to the southern provinces, and the north and south are joined as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

1830

With French help the southern provinces secede to form the Kingdom of Belgium. The country is not formally recognised by the Dutch government until 1839.

1865–76

A period of rapid economic and social change. The North Sea Canal is dug, the Dutch railway system expanded and socialist principles of government are established.

1914–20

The Netherlands remains neutral in WWI. Food shortages cripple the country, leading to strikes, unrest and growing support for the Dutch Communist Party.

1940

Germany invades the Netherlands. Rotterdam is destroyed by the Luftwaffe, but Amsterdam suffers only minor damage before capitulating. Queen Wilhelmina sets up a Dutch exile government in London.

1944–45

The Allies liberate the southern Netherlands, but the north and west of the country are cut off from supplies. Thousands of Dutch perish in the bitter 'Hunger Winter'.

POST-WAR GROWTH (1945–62)

The city's growth resumed after the war, with US aid through the Marshall Plan. Newly discovered fields of natural gas compensated for the loss of the East Indies, which became independent Indonesia after a four-year fight. The focus of the harbour moved west towards the widened North Sea Canal. The long-awaited Amsterdam–Rhine Canal opened in 1952.

Massive apartment blocks arose in areas annexed west of the city to meet the continued demand for housing, made more acute by the demographic shift away from extended families. The massive Bijlmermeer housing project (now called the Bijlmer) southeast of the city, begun in the mid-1960s and finished in the 1970s, was built in a similar vein.

CULTURAL REVOLUTION (1962–82)

Over the 80 years leading to the 1960s, Dutch society had become characterised by *verzuiling* (pillarisation), a social order in which each religion and political persuasion achieved the right to do its own thing, with its own institutions. Each persuasion represented a pillar that supported the status quo in a general 'agreement to disagree'. In the 1960s the old divisions were increasingly irrelevant, and the pillars came tumbling down, but not the philosophy that it spawned (see p30).

Amsterdam became Europe's 'Magic Centre', an exciting place where almost anything was possible. The late 1960s saw an influx of hippies smoking dope on the Dam, sleeping in the Vondelpark and tripping in the nightlife hot spots. At the universities, students demanded a greater say and, in 1969, occupied the administrative centre of the University of Amsterdam. The women's movement began a campaign that fuelled the abortion debate.

In the 1970s a housing shortage fuelled speculation. Free-market rents – and purchase prices – shot out of reach of the average citizen. Many young people turned to squatting in buildings left empty by (assumed) speculators. Legislation made eviction difficult, giving rise to *knokploegen* (fighting groups) of tracksuited heavies sent by owners to evict squatters by force. These new squatters, however, defended themselves with barricades and a well-organised support network.

'Ordinary' Amsterdammers, initially sympathetic towards the housing shortage, became fed up with the squatters, and by the mid-1980s, the movement was all but dead. Squatting still takes place now, but the rules are clear and the mood is far less confrontational.

NEW CONSENSUS (1982–2000)

Twenty years after the cultural revolution began, a new consensus, epitomised by the amiable mayor, Ed van Thijn, emphasised a decentralised government. Neighbourhood councils were established with the goal of creating a more liveable city: integrating work, schools and shops within walking or cycling distance; decreased traffic; renovation rather than demolition; friendly neighbourhood police; a practical, nonmoralistic approach towards drugs; and legal recognition of homosexual couples. Social-housing construction peaked, with 40,000 affordable apartments easing the plight of 100,000 house hunters.

A combined city hall and opera house opened in 1986 on Waterlooplein, although opinions remain divided on its architectural success. Today it's known as the Stopera (p79) – a contraction of *stadhuis* (city hall) and opera, or of 'Stop the Opera' to its detractors.

JEWISH AMSTERDAM

It's hard to overstate the role that Jews played in the evolution of civic and commercial life of Amsterdam. The first documented Jewish presence goes back to the 12th century, but it was expulsion from Spain and Portugal in the 1580s that brought a flood of Sephardic (Jews of Spanish, Middle Eastern or North African heritage) refugees.

As in much of Europe, Jews in Amsterdam were barred from many professions. Monopolistic guilds kept most trades firmly closed. But some Sephardim were diamond cutters, for which there was no guild. Other Sephardic Jews introduced printing and tobacco processing, or worked in similarly unrestricted trades such as retail on the streets, finance, medicine and the garment industry. The majority, however, eked out a meagre living as labourers and small-time traders, and lived in the Nieuwmarkt area, which developed into the Jewish quarter.

Yet Amsterdam's Jews enjoyed freedoms unheard of elsewhere in Europe. They were not confined to a ghetto and, with some restrictions, could buy property. Although the Protestant establishment sought to impose restrictions, civic authorities were reluctant to restrict such productive members of society.

The 17th century saw another influx of Jewish refugees, this time Ashkenazim (Jews from Europe outside of Iberia), fleeing pogroms in Central and Eastern Europe. Amsterdam became the largest Jewish centre in Europe, some 10,000 strong by Napoleonic times.

The guilds and all remaining restrictions on Jews were abolished during the French occupation, and Amsterdam's Jewish community thrived in the 19th century.

All that came to an end, however, with WWII. The Nazis brought about the nearly complete annihilation of Amsterdam's Jewish community. Before the war, about 140,000 Jews lived in the Netherlands, of which about 90,000 lived in Amsterdam, comprising 13% of the city's population. Only about 5500 of these Amsterdam Jews survived the war, barely one in 16.

Today there are roughly 41,000 to 45,000 Jews in the Netherlands; nearly half of them live in Amsterdam. Among Dutch Jews, the vast majority identify themselves as Jewish, although only about one-quarter belong to synagogues. More than half are nonpractising.

Amsterdam slang incorporates many terms of Hebrew or Yiddish origin, such as the alternative name for Amsterdam, Mokum (from *makom aleph*, the best city of all); the cheery goodbye, *de mazzel* (good luck); *gabber* (friend, 'mate') from the Yiddish *chaver*, companion; and the put-down *kapsones maken* (to make unnecessary fuss, from *kapshones*, which means self-importance).

By the early 1990s, families and small manufacturers, which dominated inner-city neighbourhoods in the early 1960s, had been replaced by professionals and a service industry of pubs, 'coffeeshops', restaurants and hotels. The ethnic make-up had changed too, with non-Dutch nationalities comprising over 45% of the population. The city's success in attracting large foreign businesses resulted in an influx of higher-income expats.

TESTING TIMES (2001–PRESENT)

The first years of the new century have been ones of darkness and light for Amsterdam. After smouldering for years, a noisy debate erupted over the Netherlands' policy towards newcomers, which quickly led to a tightening of immigration laws. The limits of tolerance, a core value of Dutch identity, were called into question. Pim Fortuyn, a right-wing politician, declared the country 'full' before being assassinated in 2002 (see p44).

Social tensions flared in the wake of the Fortuyn murder, and the atmosphere darkened further as the Netherlands slid into recession following 9/11. The number of people leaving

1975

The Netherlands' drugs laws distinguish soft from hard drugs; possession of small amounts of marijuana is decriminalised. The Nieuwmarkt district becomes a battleground for squatters and police over the construction of the metro.

1980

Queen Beatrix marries German diplomat Claus von Arnsberg; the coronation is disrupted by a smoke bomb and riot on the Dam. The term 'proletarian shopping' (ie looting) enters the national lexicon.

2001

Same-sex marriage is legalised in the Netherlands, the first country in the world to do so. In the next few years Belgium, Spain, Canada and South Africa follow suit.

2002

Leading politician Pim Fortuyn, a hard-liner on immigration and integration, is assassinated. The ruling Dutch parties shift to the right after suffering major losses in the national election.

2004

Activist filmmaker Theo van Gogh, a fierce critic of Islam, is assassinated, touching off intense debate over the limits of Dutch multicultural society.

2006

The ruling coalition falls on a no-confidence motion against the immigration minister. After a see-saw election campaign the CDA is confirmed as the largest party, and Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende forms his fourth cabinet.

the country reached a 50-year high, albeit most departed for economic and family reasons. The mood was edgy, like a cauldron about to boil over.

It finally did in the autumn of 2004, when the filmmaker Theo van Gogh – known for his anti-Muslim views – was brutally murdered on an Amsterdam street (see the boxed text, p34). In a city famous for tolerance of other cultures, what did it mean that a native Amsterdammer, albeit of foreign descent, was behind this crime?

The leading political parties in the Netherlands responded with a big shift to the right. Many Dutch pondered whether immigrants were trying to force the traditions of their home countries onto the Netherlands. A poll in 2005 found that a majority of Dutch citizens favoured the banning of Islamic head scarves for public servants. The flow of immigrants has slowed to a trickle, yet more than 4% of the national population is still without Dutch nationality.

The clouds began to part in 2006. With immigration slowed, a sense of normalcy returned to everyday life, and the Dutch turned their sights to familiar issues such as health care and social services. Tourism and the economy have picked up, flashy new developments have sprung up around the perimeters of the city, and a new metro (underground) line is under construction from Amsterdam-Noord to the city's World Trade Centre. For the first time in years, according to local polls, the majority of Amsterdam's residents are happy with their jobs and have cause for optimism.

CULTURE

Make no mistake, the Dutch have a flair for social engineering. The same nation that built its living rooms on a drained seabed also invented *verzuijing* (see p28). This meant not only more churches, but also separate radio stations, newspapers, unions, political parties, sport clubs and so on. The idea got a bit out of hand with pillarised bakeries, but it did promote social harmony by giving everyone a voice.

Although the pillars are less distinct today, they left a legacy of tolerance. Eccentric conduct in public might go without comment, hence the Dutch saying: 'Act normal, that's crazy enough.' Then, in a period of heightened social tensions a few years ago, two high-profile murders seemed to spell an end to a libertarian society (see the boxed text, p44). Amsterdam – the liberal city *par excellence* – was deeply troubled for a while.

But let's face it, tolerance is as Dutch as herring and ice skating, and what's more it's good for business. The same applies to its *gezelligheid*, that easy intimacy that comes out at the drop of a hat (see the boxed text, p182). Where other nations struggle to get the words out, the Dutch are irrepressibly sociable. Flight attendants leaving Amsterdam brace for garrulous Dutch congregating in the back of the plane, drinking and talking up a storm. Yet most people also value their privacy, and prefer to entertain friends at home.

The Dutch also have a moralistic streak (coming from the Calvinists) and a tendency to wag the finger in disapproval. The Dutch may seem stunningly blunt, but the impulse comes from the desire to be direct and honest. Yet even criticism can be dished out with a sense of humour. Amsterdammers, for instance, are quick to complain about their little city and their 'irrelevant' country, but always with a smile.

Dutch women are remarkably confident; on a social level, equality is taken for granted. Women are almost as likely to initiate contact with the opposite sex, although they can also be surprisingly old-fashioned (see the boxed text, *opposite*). It's still a different story in the workplace; relatively few women are employed full-time, and fewer still hold positions in senior management.

Gay and lesbians enjoy considerable freedom in Amsterdam. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not only illegal, but morally unacceptable; the police advertise in the gay media for applicants; the armed forces admit homosexuals on an equal footing. Most significantly, in 2001 the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriages, although this is a privilege reserved for local couples (see the boxed text, p207). Amsterdam was one of the first cities to court lesbian and gay travellers, hosting the Gay Games – the Olympics of the gay and lesbian world – back in 1988. Not that the welcome is universal: the last few years have seen a rise in gay-bashing incidents.

Now then, on to the sex and drugs. The ever-practical Dutch argue that vice is not going to go away, so you might as well control it. Sex is discussed openly (such as newspaper coverage of breast enhancement or genital piercing, with full-on photos). The Dutch parliament

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DUTCH WOMEN

Marije, 30, is a doctor at one of Amsterdam's leading hospitals. Originally from the southern province of Brabant, she moved to Amsterdam recently after her studies at the University of Utrecht. We picked her brains for a profile of the Dutch female (listen up guys).

How are Dutch women different from women in other industrialised countries?

There is a lot of emancipation. Many women in Holland try to combine a family with working life. But if you compare it with the Belgians, though, I think the Belgians do a nicer job, in sharing their family tasks. In Holland there somehow is still a strong tradition of the woman looking after the family, whereas the man works more.

How do Dutch women dress? What is Dutch-specific?

I think Dutch women do not really like to dress up. If you go out in Amsterdam, you see that people dress nicely, but it's nothing really fancy. We're really down to earth in that sense, more into leisure wear – no high heels all day because they're uncomfortable. Having bicycle-friendly clothes is part of it. But on ball nights for students, you have to dress up and ride a bicycle, so it's really funny to see a guy in a white tie and a girl in evening dress on a bicycle.

What do Dutch women like in men?

What some Dutch women daydream of is someone like Casanova, who really treats them like a woman and makes them feel special. But if you do that as a man, you're a macho type. I think Dutch women will find out they can't take it because they're way too emancipated for that. It's really hard to find a balance. They want macho but they can't be with a macho, because women have strong opinions of their own, how to organise their lives and so on. I think that's what Dutch women prefer. What they want in the end is someone to share the tasks at home. A really macho type is perhaps good for a short time, but not for life. It's hard for Dutch women to have a man who tells them what they can and cannot do.

Is a Dutch woman likely to ask a man out?

Most Dutch women are rather traditional in that respect. It's still part of the game that most women prefer being asked out, though it's not forbidden to ask a guy out. Most Dutch women wait for men to take the first step.

Are women here materialistic?

I don't think so. For example, if you look at Dutch housing, it's not so good compared to other countries because the supply of nice and affordable places to live is very small. We've just kind of accepted it. For example, I rent a 25 square metre bedroom-living room, and share the bathroom and kitchen. I'm all right with that. I don't need a lot of space or a lot of fancy stuff.

Do Dutch women spend more than they used to on personal care?

I think it depends on the era. In the '90s we had a grunge period, and there wasn't so much make-up around. There were a lot of *spinnenvrouwen* (literally 'weaving women') with knitted sweaters and big boots. But now it's back in fashion to look nice and wear make-up, so it may just be a fashion thing. I think you also see that people dress up more in the south of Holland. In Amsterdam, it's less so; more down to earth.

How equal are women to men in the business sphere?

It's true, in management it's still a man's world. Maybe because it's hard to get into higher management working part-time, as many Dutch women do. But in Dutch medicine there's a big change underway. The majority of the doctors are still men, but among medical students the ratio of female to male students is something like 70:30.

once held a debate on whether to ban a TV show called *How to Screw* (but decided to allow the broadcast). But promiscuity is the last thing on Dutch minds. It is perhaps revealing that only about 5% of Red Light District customers are Dutch. (The biggest group, by far, is the Brits.)

By the same token, marijuana and hashish are legal. You want to get high? Go ahead. Yet if you think everyone here gets stoned, you're wrong. Only a fraction of the population smokes dope, fewer people than in Britain, the USA and France, where drug policies are much stricter. On the other hand, the 'harder' drugs such as heroin, LSD, cocaine and ecstasy are outlawed, and dealers are prosecuted.

If you've seen workmen lay cobblestones in Amsterdam, you'll appreciate the Dutch have a great love of detail. Statistics on the most trivial subjects make the paper (eg the number of

pigeons on the Dam this year, incidence of rubbish being put out early), and somewhere down the line it feeds mountains of bureaucracy. That said, when the system breaks down the Dutch are happy to improvise a solution; this has to do with their history of juggling diverse interests.

Last but not least, the Dutch are famously thrifty with their money – and they often don't know what to think of this. In one breath they might joke about how copper wire was invented by two Dutchmen fighting over a penny – and in the next, tell you that they don't like being called cheap.

ARTS

Strange how some of the world's best-known artists get by on just one name, like Rembrandt and Van Gogh. Even without this duo, the Netherlands have contributed more than their fair share of famous painters to the world's pantheons of art. The influence of these masters runs like a red thread through Dutch history and along the way, fostered a huge respect for artistic expression – music, the performing arts, graphics, photography and multimedia, for starters.

So in Amsterdam, it comes as little surprise to find the fine-arts scene is second to none, with an astounding 40,000 performances and events every year. This is a creative centre rather than just a caretaker of past traditions, and the enthusiasm shows on a daily basis.

In other cities, streets are named for political leaders or wealthy landowners, but Amsterdam has an entire section of town with streets named for artists and musicians. You only need to see the crowds at the concert halls, arts festivals, theatres and museums to gauge how much the arts matter to the everyday resident.

PAINTING

With a line-up that includes Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Jan Vermeer, the Dutch Masters are some of world's best-known painters. Understanding them requires a bit of history, with roots going back to a time when Italy was the centre of the art world and painters would go there to study.

Flemish & Dutch Schools

Prior to the late 16th century, when Belgium was still part of the Low Countries, art focused on the Flemish cities of Ghent, Bruges and Antwerp. Paintings of the Flemish School featured biblical and allegorical subject matter popular with the Church, the court and to a lesser extent the nobility, who, after all, paid the bills and called the shots.

Among the most famous names of the era are Jan van Eyck (1385/90–1441), the founder of the Flemish School who was the first to perfect the technique of oil painting; Rogier van der Weyden (1400–64), whose religious portraits showed the personalities of his subjects; and Hieronymus (also known as Jeroen) Bosch (1450–1516), with macabre allegorical paintings full of religious topics. Pieter Breugel the Elder (1525–69) used Flemish landscapes and peasant life in his allegorical scenes.

In the northern Low Countries, artists began to develop a style of their own. Although the artists of the day never achieved the level of recognition of their Flemish counterparts, the Dutch School, as it came to be called, was known for favouring realism over allegory. Haarlem was the centre of this movement, with artists such as Jan Mostaert (1475–1555), Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533) and Jan van Scorel (1494–1562). Painters in the city of Utrecht were famous for using chiaroscuro (deep contrast of light and shade), a technique associated with the Italian master Caravaggio.

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Figures are for Amsterdam unless otherwise noted.

- Population: 743,000
- Netherlands population: 16,370,000
- Population aged 34 and younger: 47%
- Single-person households: 55%
- Households of couples without children: 20%
- Households of couples with children: 15%
- Single-parent households: 10%
- Number of nationalities in Amsterdam: 174
- Non-Western foreigners: 34%
- Western foreigners: 14%
- First generation with non-Dutch backgrounds: 28%
- Ethnic Moroccans: 65,000
- Ethnic Surinamese: 70,000
- Ethnic Turks: 38,000
- Native Dutch: 383,000

Golden Age (17th Century)

When the Spanish were expelled from the Low Countries, the character of the art market changed. There was no longer the Church to buy artworks and no court to speak of, so art became a business, and artists were forced to survive in a free market – how very Dutch. In place of Church and court emerged a new, bourgeois society of merchants, artisans and shopkeepers who didn't mind spending money to brighten up their houses and workplaces. The key: they had to be pictures the buyers could relate to.

Painters became entrepreneurs in their own right, churning out banal works, copies and masterpieces in factory-like studios. Paintings were mass-produced, sold at markets alongside furniture and chickens. Soon the wealthiest households were covered in paintings from top to bottom. Foreign visitors commented that even bakeries and butcher shops seemed to have a painting or two on the wall. Most painters specialised in one of the main genres of the day.

Then there was Rembrandt van Rijn (see the boxed text, [below](#)), who defied easy classification. The greatest and most versatile of 17th-century artists, he excelled in all artistic categories. Sometimes he was centuries ahead of his time, particularly with the emotive brush strokes of his later works.

Another great painter of this period, Frans Hals (1581/85–1666), was born in Antwerp but lived in Haarlem, just west of Amsterdam. He devoted most of his career to portraits, dabbling in occasional genre scenes with dramatic chiaroscuro. His ability to capture his

REMBRANDT: LAUDED, REVILED, GENIUS

The 17th century's greatest artist, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) grew up a miller's son in Leiden, but had become an accomplished painter by his early twenties.

In 1631 he came to Amsterdam to run the painting studio of the wealthy art dealer Hendrick van Uylenburgh. Portraits were the studio's cash cow, and Rembrandt and his staff (or 'pupils') churned out scores of them, including group portraits such as *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*. In 1634 he married Van Uylenburgh's niece Saskia, who often modelled for him.

Rembrandt fell out with his boss, but his wife's capital helped him buy the sumptuous house next door to Van Uylenburgh's studio (the current Museum Het Rembrandthuis, [p78](#)). There Rembrandt set up his own studio, with staff who worked in a warehouse in the Jordaan. These were happy years: his paintings were a success and his studio became the largest in Holland, though his gruff manner and open agnosticism didn't win him dinner-party invitations from the elite.

Rembrandt became one of the city's biggest art collectors; a master manipulator not only of images, the painter was also known to have his own pictures bid up at auctions. He often sketched and painted for himself, urging his staff to do likewise. Residents of the surrounding Jewish quarter provided perfect material for his dramatic biblical scenes.

In 1642, a year after the birth of their son Titus, Saskia died and business went downhill. Although Rembrandt's majestic group portrait *The Nightwatch* (1642) was hailed by art critics (it's now the Rijksmuseum's prize exhibit), some of the influential people he depicted were not pleased. Each subject had paid 100 guilders, and some were unhappy at being shoved to the background. In response, Rembrandt told them where they could shove their complaints. Suddenly he received far fewer orders.

Rembrandt began an affair with his son's governess but kicked her out a few years later when he fell for the new maid, Hendrickje Stoffels, who bore him a daughter, Cornelia. The public didn't take kindly to the man's lifestyle and his spiralling debts, and in 1656 he went bankrupt. His house and rich art collection were sold and he moved to the Rozenegracht in the Jordaan.

No longer the darling of the wealthy, Rembrandt continued to paint, draw and etch – his etchings on display in the Rembrandthuis are some of the finest ever produced. He also received the occasional commission, including the monumental *Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* (1661) for the City Hall, although authorities disliked it and had it removed. In 1662 he completed the *Staalmeesters* (the 'Syndics') for the drapers' guild and ensured that everybody remained clearly visible, though it ended up being his last group portrait.

The works of his later period show that Rembrandt had lost none of his touch. No longer constrained by the wishes of clients, he enjoyed new-found freedom; his works became more unconventional yet showed an ever-stronger empathy with their subject matter, as for instance in *A Couple: The Jewish Bride* (1665). The many portraits of Titus and Hendrickje, and his ever-gloomier self-portraits, are among the most stirring in the history of art.

A plague epidemic in 1663–64 killed one in seven Amsterdammers, including Hendrickje. Titus died in 1668, aged 27 and just married, and Rembrandt died a year later, a broken man.

THEO VAN GOGH

Obituaries for Theo van Gogh, famously murdered on an Amsterdam street in November 2004, refer to him as a filmmaker, but that's too simple. He was a provocateur, personality, gadabout and, above all, deeply charismatic.

Van Gogh was born in Den Haag in 1957 (a distant relative of that *other* Theo van Gogh – the painter's brother) but made his home in Amsterdam. When, as a young man, he applied for admission to the Dutch Film Academy, he was rejected and advised to see a psychologist. His first film, *Lüger* (1980), included images of a pistol being inserted into a woman's vagina and (faked) footage of kittens in a clothes dryer. After the premiere, one audience member spat in Van Gogh's face.

He made 25 films over the years, some of little distinction, although his greatest box-office success *06* (also called *1-900* in some territories; 1994), about a phone-sex relationship, was the top-grossing Dutch film of the year.

Van Gogh seemed to enjoy spending as much time in front of the camera as behind it, especially the act of tweaking others about the nose. He appeared on a 'VIP' version of *Big Brother*. In articles and speeches and on his website *The Happy Smoker* (he chain-smoked), he took positions at odds with most people in the Netherlands – in favour of cruise missiles, George W Bush, the war in Iraq – and predicted the assassination of Pim Fortuyn (p44). He enraged the local Jewish community by saying that they made too much of Auschwitz.

But his most famous diatribes – which ultimately did him in – were reserved for Muslim immigrants, regularly referring to Moroccans as 'goatf**kers'. His last book, *Allah weet het beter* ('Allah knows best'; 2003), was as cynical as the title implies.

Submission: Part 1 was Van Gogh's last film, four stories in 11 unflinching minutes showing how verses from the Koran could be used to justify violence against women.

Yet for all Van Gogh's biting and bluster, the moments immediately before his death were telling. After he was knocked off his bike by the first bullet, he is quoted as saying to his attacker: 'We can still talk about it.' For details of the murder, see p44.

subjects' expressions was equal to Rembrandt's, though he didn't explore their characters as much. Both masters used the same expressive, unpolished brush strokes and their styles went from bright exuberance in their early careers to dark and solemn later on. Hals' work was also admired by the 19th-century Impressionists. In fact, his *The Merry Drinker* (1630) in the Rijksmuseum's collection, with its bold brush strokes, could almost have been painted by an Impressionist.

Hals also specialised in beautiful group portraits in which the participants were depicted in almost natural poses, unlike the rigid line-ups produced by lesser contemporaries – though he wasn't as cavalier as Rembrandt in subordinating faces to the composition. A good example is the pair of paintings known collectively as *The Regents & the Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House* (1664) in the Frans Hals Museum (p229) in Haarlem. It was a space Hals knew intimately; he lived in that almshouse, and now it's the museum.

The grand trio of 17th-century masters is completed by Johannes (also known as Jan) Vermeer (1632–75) of Delft. He produced only 35 meticulously crafted paintings in his career and died poor with 10 children; his baker accepted two paintings from his wife as payment for a debt of more than 600 guilders. Yet Vermeer mastered genre painting like no other artist. His paintings include historical and biblical scenes from his earlier career, his famous *View of Delft* (1661) in the Mauritshuis in Den Haag, and some tender portraits of unknown women, such as the stunningly beautiful *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1666), also in the Mauritshuis.

Vermeer's work is known for serene light pouring through tall windows. The calm, spiritual effect is enhanced by dark blues, deep reds, warm yellows and supremely balanced composition. Good examples include the Rijksmuseum's *The Kitchen Maid* (also known as *The Milkmaid*, 1658) and *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (1664), or, for his use of perspective, *The Love Letter* (1670). *The Little Street* (1658) in the Rijksmuseum's collection is Vermeer's only street scene.

Around the middle of the century, the focus on mood and subtle play of light began to make way for the splendour of the baroque. Jacob van Ruysdael (c 1628–82) went for dramatic skies and Albert Cuyp (1620–91) for Italianate landscapes. Van Ruysdael's pupil Meindert Hobbema preferred less heroic, more playful scenes full of pretty bucolic detail. (Note that Cuyp, Hobbema and Ruysdael all have main streets named after them in the Old South and De Pijp districts, and many smaller streets here are named after other Dutch artists.)

The genre paintings of Jan Steen (1626–79) show the almost frivolous aspect of baroque. Steen was also a tavern-keeper, and his depictions of domestic chaos led to the Dutch expression 'a Jan Steen household'. A good example is the animated revelry of *The Merry Family* (1668) in the Rijksmuseum; it shows adults having a good time around the dinner table, oblivious to the children in the foreground pouring themselves a drink.

18th & 19th Centuries

The Golden Age of Dutch painting ended almost as suddenly as it began, when the French invaded the Low Countries in 1672. The economy collapsed and the market for paintings went south with it. Painters who stayed in business concentrated on 'safe' works that repeated earlier successes. In the 18th century they copied French styles, pandering to the awe for anything French.

The results were competent but not ground-breaking. Cornelis Troost (1697–1750) was one of the best genre painters, sometimes compared to the British artist William Hogarth (1697–1764) for his satirical as well as sensitive portraits of ordinary people; Troost, too, introduced scenes of domestic revelry into his pastels.

Gerard de Lairesse (1640–1711) and Jacob de Wit (1695–1754) specialised in decorating the walls and ceilings of buildings – de Wit's *trompe l'oeil* decorations (painted illusions that look real) in the Theater Instituut Nederland (p93) and Bijbels Museum (p95) are worth seeing.

The late 18th century and most of the 19th century produced little of note, save for the landscapes and seascapes of Johan Barthold Jongkind (1819–91) and the gritty, almost photographic Amsterdam scenes of George Hendrik Breitner (1857–1923). They appear to have inspired French Impressionists, many of whom visited Amsterdam.

Jongkind and Breitner reinvented 17th-century realism and influenced the Hague School of the last decades of the 19th century. Painters such as Hendrik Mesdag (1831–1915), Jozef Israëls (1824–1911) and the three Maris brothers (Jacob, Matthijs and Willem) created landscapes, seascapes and genre works, including the impressive *Panorama Mesdag* (1881), a gigantic, 360-degree cylindrical painting of the seaside town of Scheveningen viewed from a dune.

Without a doubt, the greatest 19th-century Dutch painter was Vincent van Gogh (1853–90), whose convulsive patterns and furious colours were in a world of their own and still defy comfortable categorisation. (A post-Impressionist? A forerunner of Expressionism?) For more about his life and works, see the Van Gogh Museum (p109).

De Stijl

In his early career, Piet Mondriaan (1872–1944) – he dropped the second 'a' in his name when he moved to Paris in 1910 – painted in the Hague School tradition, but after flirting with Cubism he began working with bold rectangular patterns, using only the three primary colours (yellow, blue and red) set against the three neutrals (white, grey and black). He named this style 'neoplasticism' and viewed it as an undistorted expression of reality in pure form and pure colour. His *Composition in Red, Black, Blue, Yellow & Grey* (1920), in the Stedelijk Museum's collection, is an elaborate example.

Mondriaan's later works were more stark (or 'pure') and became dynamic again when he moved to New York in 1940. The world's largest collection of his paintings resides in the Gemeentemuseum (Municipal Museum) in his native Den Haag.

The famously strict artist was one of the leading exponents of De Stijl (The Style), a Dutch design movement that aimed to harmonise all the arts by bringing artistic expressions back to their essence. Its advocate was the magazine of the same name, first published in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931). Van Doesburg produced works similar to Mondriaan's, though he dispensed with the thick, black lines and later tilted his rectangles at 45 degrees, departures serious enough for Mondriaan to call off the friendship.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, De Stijl also attracted sculptors, poets, architects and designers. One of these was Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964), designer of the Van Gogh Museum and several other buildings, but best known internationally for his furniture, such as the *Red Blue Chair* (1918) and his range of uncomfortable zigzag seats that, viewed side-on, formed a 'Z' with a backrest.

One of the most remarkable graphic artists of the 20th century was Maurits Cornelis Escher (1902–72). His drawings, lithos and woodcuts of blatantly impossible images continue to fascinate mathematicians: a waterfall feeds itself; people go up and down a staircase that ends where it starts; a pair of hands draw each other. You can see his work at Escher in het Paleis in Den Haag.

CoBrA & Beyond

After WWII, artists rebelled against artistic conventions and vented their rage in abstract expressionism. In Amsterdam, Karel Appel (1921–) and Constant (Constant Nieuwenhuis, 1920–2005) drew on styles pioneered by Paul Klee and Joan Miró, and exploited bright colours and ‘uncorrupted’ children’s art to produce lively works that leap off the canvas. In Paris in 1945 they met up with the Danish Asger Jorn (1914–73) and the Belgian Corneille (Cornelis van Beverloo, 1922–), and together with several other artists and writers formed a group known as CoBrA (COpenhagen, BRussels, Amsterdam). It’s been called the last great avant-garde movement.

Their first major exhibition, in the Stedelijk Museum in 1949, aroused a storm of protest (‘My child paints like that too’). Still, the CoBrA artists exerted a strong influence in their respective countries even after they disbanded in 1951. The CoBrA Museum (p131) in Amstelveen displays a good range of their works, including colourful ceramics.

Contemporary Dutch artists are usually well represented at international events such as the Biennale in Venice and the Documenta in Kassel. Look out for the installations of Jan Dibbets (1941–) and Ger van Elk (1941–), who mix photography, painting and sculpture, as well as the wry graphic illustrations of Marthe Röling (1939–). Among the younger generation, the artist duo Liet Heringa (1966–) and Van Kalsbeek (1962–) are known for their moody, free-form sculptures, Michael Raedecker (1963–) for his dreamy, radiant still lifes, Roger Braun (1972–) for industrial realism and Melvin Moti (1977–) for films of spookily lit objects (think exploding soap bubbles).

PHOTOGRAPHY

For obvious reasons photography does not have the history of painting in Amsterdam, but what it lacks in longitude it makes up for in latitude. The area of the Jordaan around the Elandsgracht brims with photography studios and small galleries, while the museums FOAM (p99) and Huis Marseille (p95) specialise in photography.

Portraiture is a major theme of contemporary Dutch photography. The most famous living photographer from the Netherlands is probably Anton Corbijn (1955–), known for his portraits of celebrities and musicians such as Naomi Campbell, Mick Jagger and Martin Scorsese, often in his trademark grainy black-and-white.

Rineke Dijkstra (1959–) creates unflinching head-on portraits, both analytical and empathetic, of common people such as soldiers carrying rifles and folks in bathing suits on the beach. Hellen van Meene’s (1972–) portraits are more intimate, such as a series commissioned by the *New York Times* featuring pubescent Japanese girls, innocent with a tinge of eroticism. Inez van Lamsweerde (1963–) and Vinoodh Matadin (1961–), both born and educated in Amsterdam, create shots for exhibitions and advertising campaigns, at turns grim and glamorous.

Amsterdam-based Aernout Mik (1962–) has exhibited in Europe and North America with film installations known for their combining of studies in group dynamics with a sculptor’s sense of space. Marijke van Warmerdam (1959–), based in Amsterdam and New York, creates absurdist loops of everyday life in repeating sequences – eg the Japanese technique of bowing.

MUSIC

The dour church elders began to allow organ music in churches in the 17th century, as it kept people out of pubs. With the possible exception of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621), an organ player in the Oude Kerk with an international reputation as a composer and a strong following in Germany, Amsterdam has contributed relatively little to the world’s music heritage.

Today, however, the world’s top acts appear here regularly and local musicians excel in (modern) classical music, jazz and techno/dance. In summer, free jazz, classical and world-music performances are staged in the Vondelpark, and free lunch-time concerts are held at various

venues throughout the year. The Uitmarkt festival (p18) at the end of August also provides lots of free music. For more about music venues see p197, and check the free entertainment papers for details.

Classical

The Netherlands has orchestras in cities throughout the country, but Amsterdam’s Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest (Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, p199) towers over them all, not least because of the near-perfect acoustics of its winning concert hall, the Concertgebouw (p111). The orchestra’s director since 2004 is Mariss Jansons, whose long list of credentials includes the Pittsburgh Symphony. The orchestra also frequently performs abroad, matching works by famous composers with little-known gems of the modern era. If you’re looking to catch one of the top-flight soloists in the world, head here first.

The Concertgebouw is only one of several venues in town for classical music. Chamber music plays in the Beurs van Berlage, and very often the city’s extant or converted churches host concerts. Check listings.

If you’re looking for Dutch home-grown talent, you can hardly do better than the mop-topped pianist Ronald Brautigam, who has performed around the country and all over the world. Violinist-violist Isabelle van Keulen founded her own chamber music festival in Delft, and brings in the crowds wherever she appears. The country’s leading cellist is Pieter Wispelwey, known for his fiery temperament and a challenging repertoire.

Pianist Wibi Soerjadi is one of the country’s most successful classical musicians, famous for his sparkling interpretations of romantic works and his Javanese-prince looks. Soerjadi recently played a concert during a state visit of Queen Beatrix to Slovakia. Soprano Charlotte Margiono is known for her interpretations of *Le Nozze de Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*. Mezzo-soprano Jard van Nes has a giant reputation for her solo parts in Mahler’s symphonies.

For ‘old music’ you shouldn’t miss the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam, concentrating on the music of the 17th and 18th centuries (Bach, Vivaldi and Handel; venues vary). The Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra (ABO) and Choir, conducted by Ton Koopman, tackled an enormous task of recording all existing cantatas of JS Bach. The ABO tours internationally but, when home, can often be seen performing at the Concertgebouw. Koopman also conducts the Radio Chamber Orchestra and guest conducts with orchestras worldwide.

Performances by the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra are often recorded for radio and TV; one of its former artistic directors, Frans Brüggen, also works with the Orchestra on 18th-century pieces.

The Nederlandse Opera is based in the Stopera (officially called the Muziektheater; p200), where it stages world-class performances, though its forays into experimental fare stir up the inevitable controversy.

Modern Classical & Experimental

The new Muziekgebouw aan ‘t IJ (p125) is the venue for this sort of work which seems to thrive in Amsterdam. This iconic building occupies a prime spot on the waterside, near the Passenger Ship Terminal.

Dutch modern composers include Michel van der Aa, Louis Andriessen, Theo Loevendie, Merlijn Twaalfhoven, Klaas de Vries and the late Ton de Leeuw. Worthwhile performers include the Trio, Asko Ensemble, Ives Ensemble, Nederlands Kamerkoor, Nieuw Ensemble, the Mondriaan Kwartet and the Schönberg Quartet.

Jazz

The Dutch jazz scene has produced some mainstream artists in recent years. Among gifted young chanteuses are Fleurine, Ilse Huizinga and the Suriname-born Denise Jannah, who records for Blue Note and is widely recognised as the country’s best jazz singer. Jannah’s repertoire consists of American standards with elements of Surinamese music.

Astrid Seriese and Carmen Gomez operate in the crossover field, where jazz verges on, or blends with, pop. Father and daughter Hans and Candy Dulfer, tenor and alto saxophonists respectively, are a bit more daring. Dad, in particular, constantly extends his musical boundaries

by experimenting with sampling techniques drawn from the hip-hop genre. Candy is better known internationally, thanks to her performances with Prince, Van Morrison and Pink Floyd, among others, which have introduced her to a wide audience.

Trumpeter and Jorjaan native Saskia Laroo mixes jazz with dance, but still earns respect in traditional circles. Other leading jazzers are bass player Hein van de Geyn, guitarist Jesse van Ruller and pianist Michiel Borstlap, winner of the Thelonius Monk award. Borstlap was commissioned by the Emir of Qatar to write the world's first opera in Arabic.

An effervescent soloist on the flute is Peter Guidi, who set up the jazz programme at the Muziekschool Amsterdam and leads its big band, Jazzmania. Other big bands of renown are the Willem Breuker Kollektief and Contraband, both enjoying a reputation for experimentation.

The most important jazz venue is Bimhuis (p197) in the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ. A number of smaller clubs congregate in the streets east of the Leidseplein. For the biggest party with the biggest names in tow, check out the North Sea Jazz Festival (p18) every summer in Rotterdam.

Pop & Rock

Chances are you've heard oldie hits by Dutch bands such as 'Radar Love' by Golden Earring, 'Venus' by Shocking Blue or 'Hocus Pocus' by Jan Akkerman's Focus. The highest-profile Dutch rock star, Herman Brood, captured punk hearts with *His Wild Romance* at the end of the '70s. Later, the Dutch became pioneers in club music, fusing techno and industrial into the dark, hyperactive beat that became known as 'gabber'.

Nowadays Amsterdam is the pop capital of the Netherlands, and talent is drawn to the city like moths to a flame. It is a major hub of the DJ trade, not just for the Netherlands but for the world. Top names on the international circuit include Tiësto, Armin van Buuren, Marco V and Ferry Corsten. You can find them at venues large and small in town, although tickets sell out fast.

Hot new stars of the pop scene include the Britpop-inspired Moke, singer-songwriter Marique Jäger, the punk-jazz group Malkovich as well as those dance-rock mavens, the Melomanics. Among rappers, the popular Moroccan-Dutch artist Ali B has recently teamed up with top-40 singer Marco Borsato, a fixture at pop festivals. Also look out for the Dutch-rapping Osdorp Posse, Brainpower, and Blaxtar.

Some oldie bands still on the circuit include the garagerock outfit Claw Boys Claw, and the pop legends Doe Maar and Tröckener Kecks, who were among the first to break through with lyrics in Dutch, rather than English.

Pop festivals come out of the woodwork in the warmer months: Pinkpop (p17) in Landgraaf and the gargantuan Parkpop (p17), which draws around 350,000 ravers to Den Haag. Dance Valley (p18) in Spaarnwoude near Amsterdam pulls up to 100 live acts and DJs.

World Music

Cosmopolitan Amsterdam offers a wealth of world music. Suriname-born Ronald Snijders, a top jazz flautist, is a frequent highlight as is the venerable Chris Hinze, another flautist with an eclectic repertoire that ranges from New Age to Tibetan music.

The bulk of world repertoire from Amsterdam is Latin, ranging from Cuban salsa to Dominican merengue and Argentinean tango. But Fra-Fra-Sound plays jazz and 'paramaribop', a contraction of Paramaribo (the capital of Suriname) and bebop. What you'll hear is traditional Surinamese *kaseko*, itself a banquet of African, European and American music.

Another intriguing band is Zuco 103, a Dutch-Brazilian outfit that combines bossa nova and samba with DJ rubs on the turntable. It has strong ties with the equally eclectic New Cool Collective, a 19-piece big band that blends jazz with drum'n'bass and '60s Go-Go. It recorded a soundtrack for the live-action version of the film *The Jungle Book* to rave reviews.

Sources to check out while you are in Amsterdam include the foundation [Marmoucha](http://www.marmoucha.nl) (www.marmoucha.nl), which organises 60-odd Moroccan performances a year; Laziz (for Arabian dance music, often at Paradiso), Que Pasa (Spanish ska, reggae and more, often at Melkweg) and Club Mahsen (Turkish dance music, at various locations). See p196 for details of club venues.

The Amsterdam Roots Festival of world music happens at different locations every year in June, but centres on the Oosterpark – see www.amsterdamroots.nl for details. The Tropeninstituut Theater (p199) often hosts non-Western music concerts.

CINEMA

Dutch films haven't exactly set the world on fire, though this has more to do with the language barrier and funding problems in a modest distribution area than with lack of talent.

In the mid-1990s, the Dutch government introduced tax shelters to encourage private investment in Dutch film, which led to a mini-boom in the industry. Lightweight fare such as *Costa!* (2001), about Dutch teenagers on holiday in a Spanish resort, recently proved that Dutch films crafted for the domestic audience could be commercially viable. The film spawned copycat films such as *Volle Maan (Full Moon)* and a TV sitcom.

The best-known Dutch director is Amsterdam-born Paul Verhoeven, who was famous at home long before making Hollywood blockbusters such as *Total Recall*, *Basic Instinct* and *Starship Troopers*. Lately Verhoeven returned to the Netherlands to shoot *Black Book*, the highest-grossing Dutch film ever (see p40 for an interview with him).

Look out for screenings at the key film festivals: the Rotterdam International Film Festival in February, Utrecht's Netherlands Film Festival in September (with the Golden Calf awards, the 'Dutch Oscars'), and Amsterdam's excellent International Documentary Film Festival in November. Handily for foreign visitors, movies are rarely ever dubbed into Dutch, but subtitled (see p200 for cinema venues).

The following is a shortlist of critically acclaimed Dutch films, both contemporary and historical, that afford insights into Dutch society.

Amsterdamned, directed by Dick Maas, 1987. A skin-diving serial killer is chased through Amsterdam's canals by a detective hampered by his fear of water. Essentially a B-grade thriller pepped up by great shots of Amsterdam.

Antonia (Antonia's Line), directed by Marleen Gorris, 1995. A strong-willed Dutch woman recalls life in a colourful village where men become increasingly irrelevant. Won an Oscar for best foreign film.

De Aanslag (The Assault), directed by Fons Rademakers, 1986. A physician spends his adult life investigating why his neighbours betrayed his family in WWII. Based on a best-selling novel by renowned author Harry Mulisch, it was nominated for an Academy Award.

De Tweeling (Twin Sisters), directed by Ben Sombogaart, 2004. A touching story of twins separated in the Netherlands and Germany during WWII; nominated for an Oscar.

Fanfare, directed by Bert Haanstra, 1958. Made by one of the greats of Dutch documentary film, this classic satire is about two amateur brass bands vying for a government grant in a small Dutch town.

Interview, directed by Theo van Gogh, 2003. Low-key account of a war correspondent conducting an interview with a soap opera actress. Attracted little attention until after the filmmaker's death (see the boxed text, p34); an American remake was released in 2007.

Shouf Shouf Habibi (Hush Hush Baby), directed by Albert ter Heerdt, 2004. Comedy about a Moroccan family finding its way in Dutch society. Takes a cynical look at the integration issue without taking sides.

Simon, directed by Eddy Terstall, 2004. A complicated friendship develops when a hetero hash dealer hits a gay man with his car. A Golden Calf winner.

Turks Fruit (Turkish Delight), directed by Paul Verhoeven, 1973. A distressed sculptor (Rutger Hauer) picks up numerous women to forget the loss of his wife. The most successful Dutch film of the '70s, it's regarded as a modern classic.

Zus & So, directed by Paula van der Oest, 2001. Comedy about three sisters who plot to sabotage the engagement of their gay brother for material gain. Also Oscar-nominated.

Zwartboek (Black Book), directed by Paul Verhoeven, 2006. This action-packed story explores some of the less heroic aspects of the Dutch resistance in WWII. Launched the international career of today's hottest Dutch actor, Carice van Houten.

THEATRE

Amsterdam has a rich theatrical tradition dating back to medieval times. In the Golden Age, when Dutch was the language of trade, local companies toured the theatres of Europe with the tragedies of Vondel, the comedies of Bredero and verses of PC Hooft. They're still performed locally, even if there's precious little in English translation.

When it's not touring abroad, De Dogtroep stages fancy and unpredictable 'happenings' in quirky venues such as the Passenger Ship Terminal. Each show is supported by flashy multimedia effects and technical gadgetry, with every set specially developed by a team of designers and

BEHIND THE BLACK BOOK: THE PAUL VERHOEVEN INTERVIEW

Before he traded Holland for Hollywood in the mid-1980s, Paul Verhoeven left his mark on Dutch cinema with acclaimed films such as *Turkish Fruit* and *Soldier of Orange*, his first wartime drama. In an interview with Lonely Planet, the director of *Robocop* and *Basic Instinct* talks about his fascination with the Dutch resistance and his 2006 hit movie, *Black Book*.

Why was there so much time between the making of *Soldier of Orange* and *Black Book*?

When it's about realistic movies, I try to do a lot of research. I look at photos, documentaries, newsreels and hundreds of books. I did the same this time, together with my scriptwriter, Gerard Souteman. We co-wrote *Soldier of Orange* and *Black Book*. We're both history buffs, and it was a pleasure to dive into the archives at the Institute of War Documentation in Amsterdam. We did that very thoroughly in the late '70s, for the *Soldier of Orange*.

A lot of the details in *Black Book* happened in 1944–45. But our hero in *Soldier of Orange* was the author of the autobiography, Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema, portrayed by Rutger Hauer. He left Holland in 1941–42 and only came back after the war. So basically that period, that strange, dark, shadowy period of betrayal, collaboration and executions left and right, where Den Haag – where I was living at the time – was the centre of the German occupying government and the Dutch National Socialist Party in Holland.

What did you do with all the research that you weren't able to use?

I couldn't use a lot of things I knew for *Soldier of Orange*, simply because they hadn't happened yet. In 1941–42 there wasn't much violent confrontation between the Dutch and the Germans. A lot of Dutch felt, 'Let's see how it goes.' Many people weren't too upset by the occupation, were thinking, 'Well maybe Holland will become a part of Germany, perhaps that's fine.' Also they were trying to see whether it would all be combined into a kind of European Union. In fact, the Dutch National Socialist Party tried to do that at the time.

But the fireworks happened later, when the Germans realised they were losing the war. The Resistance in Holland became a really powerful force and was continuously sabotaging and shooting Germans. But that started only after the German defeat at Stalingrad. Only then did people in Holland start to think, the Germans can be defeated, and asked for weapons from London and became more violent and confrontational. That period is *Black Book*.

You have described *Black Book* as a correction to the *Soldier of Orange*. In what sense?

I would say it's more the other side of the story. *Soldier of Orange* is based on historical biographical material; there aren't enormous lies there. *Soldier of Orange* is pretty much the reality of that person at that time. But it was more a correction historically, because *Soldier of Orange* wasn't the entire war. *Soldier of Orange* is the beginning of the war, *Black Book* is the end of the war.

Different things happened at the end than at the beginning. The character in *Soldier of Orange*, who is basically Roelfzema, is the man who did all these things. He's treated in Holland today as a genuine war hero, a Resistance hero like Jean Moulin in France. He is very respected. But all that he wrote is just one side of the coin. There are two ways to look at the war: in the heroic way, or in the subversive way, not so heroic, where people are not so reliable, where there is a lot of cheating and opportunism.

painters. A spin-off, Warner & Consorten, stages dialogue-free shows that inject humour into everyday situations and objects, while music is generated with weird materials.

Cosmic (p202) deserves special mention for productions reflecting the city's multicultural communities (Surinamese, Indonesian etc). The comedy scene is led by English-language outfits such as Boom Chicago (p201).

English-language companies often visit Amsterdam, especially in summer. Glitzy musicals play to full houses in the Koninklijk Theater Carré (p105) or other large venues.

The Dutch also produce some of the world's best youth theatre. The delightful puppets of the Marionetten Theater (p201) provide classic operas from Mozart, Haydn and Offenbach a fairytale charm.

The Holland Festival (p17), Over Het IJ (p18) and the Uitmarkt (p18) are big theatre events. Also worth catching is the International Theatre School Festival (p18) at the end of June, in the theatres around Nes (Frascati, Brakke Grond etc).

Those who wish to dig deeper can visit the Theatre Museum in the Theater Instituut Nederland (p93).

Do you feel that *Black Book* fills a gap in the Dutch educational system?

Clearly. The movie is used in high schools together with an educational book for young people who know nothing about the war, to tell people in Holland what kind of things happened, what the background and political situation was; which parties combined with others and so on. I think the movie provoked a lot of interest among the Dutch about what happened 60 years ago. That was not the sole purpose of the movie, which I wanted to make because it's a great story. I like it because so much is based on real events. I wanted to get away from science fiction in Hollywood, and this served the purpose really well. We were aware that there would be interest from the educational system, and we were asked if there could be a book to go with the movie to instruct people about the Second World War.

After the film came out, were you surprised that the Dutch did not react more negatively to the way they were portrayed?

Yes, because provocation and problems with the audience have pursued me in my career. *Spetters* in Holland, or *Showgirls*, *Basic Instinct* or even *Starship Troopers*. There has always been some turmoil in the reception of my movies. *Black Book* was really revealing, like putting your dog's nose in the shit, showing the Dutch in a harsh way what kind of things happened in Holland at the end of the war and even worse, after the war. There was always the possibility that people would not accept it, be violently against it or say, 'This is all a lie, we never did this' or 'We were much nicer people, you make us look filthy and unreliable and collaborating and treacherous'. But the Dutch were educated or adult enough to accept the movie and the historical elements I used.

Has there been a change in how the Dutch see their role in WWII?

Over the last 10 to 15 years there have been a lot of scholarly publications about these years of the war, and these things have been discussed in the newspapers. Much had been absorbed by the Dutch audience by the time the film came out. They were surprised to see these things, but I don't think it was shocking to them. I think they knew the Dutch didn't behave wonderfully in the last few years of the war, especially as regards the Jewish population. Holland let many Jews go without much protest, or an attempt to keep them in Holland. The Dutch handed over a bigger percentage of the Jewish population than anywhere else in Europe. This has been acknowledged, that we didn't do much for the Jewish population. Queen Beatrix even apologised in Israel for Dutch behaviour towards the Jewish population. The Dutch accepted it completely, and the film was an enormous success in Holland.

What do you miss most about the Netherlands, as you live in Los Angeles?

After I shot the film and lived in Holland again for 1½ years, I feel there is clearly a contrast between life in the United States and Holland. The fact is that access to people socially is much easier in Europe than in the United States. I think it's much easier to get in touch with people without announcing it, you don't have to prepare a visit. Of course I have an enormous number of friends in Holland, much more than in the United States and an enormous social network. And in Holland there is a lot of laughing, you know?

DANCE

Amsterdam's **National Ballet** (www.het-nationale-ballet.nl) performs mainly classical ballets, but also presents 20th-century works by Dutch choreographers such as Rudi van Dantzig and Toer van Schayk. The Ballet has helped launch the careers of promising dancemasters such as John Wisman and Ted Brandsen, now the artistic director.

The Netherlands is also a world leader in modern dance, and many innovative performances can be seen throughout the year. The troupe of the Nederlands Dans Theater in Den Haag leaps and pirouettes to international audiences.

There are also many smaller modern-dance companies such as Introdans, which can truly be described as poetry in motion. The Holland Festival in June is the main platform for premieres of new shows by top choreographers, while Amsterdam's Julidans festival (p18) in July brings dancers together from all over the world. The International School Festival held in June is devoting more of its programme to dance, and performances are often held in one of the theatres along Nes (p77).

LITERATURE

The following books are written by local authors or are set in or near Amsterdam. Of these books originally written in Dutch, all are available in English thanks to the [Dutch Literary Production and Translation Fund](#) (www.nlpvf.nl), which propagates Dutch literature abroad.

Amsterdam Cops is a series of detective novels by Janwillem van de Wetering, with tongue firmly in cheek. The author writes every novel such as *The Perfidious Parrot* twice, in Dutch and English, in order to peg his target audience.

The Diary of Anne Frank is a moving account of a young girl's thoughts and yearnings while in hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam (see [p94](#)). The book has been translated into 60 languages, and is a fixture of school curricula across the globe.

A Dutchman's Slight Adventures, by Simon Carmiggelt, is an amusing collection of vignettes about De Pijp from the author's column in the newspaper *Het Parool*. Carmiggelt was a master of local colour, often writing his observations from pubs and park benches in Amsterdam.

Girl with a Pearl Earring, by Tracy Chevalier, explores the conflicts between duty and sexuality. Set in Delft, the story was made into a Hollywood movie starring Colin Firth (as Jan Vermeer) and Scarlett Johansson (as a maid in his employ), and offers insights into a painter's life in the Golden Age.

The Happy Hooker, by Xaviera Hollander, is a revealing snapshot of the ins and outs of the sex trade. Though it may seem tame now, in the '70s some countries banned the book for its graphic content.

Lost Paradise, by Cees Nootboom, is an allegorical tale of angels and humans, of Brazilians in Australia and a literary critic in Austria. One of the Netherlands' most prolific writers, Nootboom also wrote *The Following Story*, winner of the Aristeion European Prize for Literature in 1991.

Parents Worry, by Gerard Reve, is a contemporary classic, a tragicomic novel about a day in the ravaged life of a singer and poet with one hell of a case of writer's block. Reve, who passed away in 2006, was acknowledged as one of the great 20th-century Dutch authors.

The UnDutchables, by Colin White and Laurie Boucke, is a point of reference for virtually anyone who goes to live in the Netherlands. These two Americans have discovered foibles that many Dutch themselves seem not to recognise.

RED-LIGHT READS

American author John Irving (*The World According to Garp*, *The Cider House Rules*) set his novel *A Widow for One Year* in Amsterdam's Red Light District, and the British novelist Irvine Welsh (*Trainspotting*, *Porno*) wrote *The Acid House*, a short-story collection about Amsterdam's drug underworld.

Recycling & Waste

The Netherlands is well known for being forward-thinking with recycling. It was one of the first countries to ban the import of electronic equipment with components that degrade and cause environmental harm. In a similar vein, buyers of appliances pay an upfront fee that takes care of recycling later. The environmental group Stichting Milieunet organises the cost-free pick-up of recyclable materials, covering everything from retired boats, caravans and construction materials to crashed-out bicycles – of which Amsterdam has an endless supply.

However, if you're walking around looking for a place to recycle your half-litre bottle of water you'll be looking for a long time. There are recycling bins for *papier* (paper) and *glas* (glass), but the rest goes into the bin conveniently marked 'rest'. Metal cans, on the other hand, are extracted from rubbish by separation techniques. In theory, plastic bottles are supposed to be either biodegradable or (like glass receptacles) are sold on deposit and returned for refund. (Bottles don't need to be returned to the same point of sale.) To cut down on waste, most supermarkets charge a small fee for grocery bags, though you're free to bring your own.

In residential areas, nifty garbage receptacles are built right in to the sidewalk. A truck comes along, the receptacles rise out of the ground and are replaced.

The system of portable *urinoirs* is about as clever. During peak periods, trucks drop off the tall plastic stands (with four open niches) and pick them up when full. The idea is to stop *wildplassen* ('wild peeing'), but it's also cheaper than paying €0.50 to use a public toilet. Major drawback? There's no women's equivalent.

URBAN PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

For many people, the dream of a cosy home with a canal view remains just that: a dream. Amsterdam's rents are the fourth-highest in Europe; only London, Paris and Rome are more expensive. A cramped, reasonably central one-bedroom apartment will cost €450 or more a month, and although cheaper options are available through housing corporations, residents face a wait of up to five years.

No wonder Amsterdam's urban planners are constantly looking for extra space. Millions are being invested to renovate housing in older districts such as Amsterdam-Oost, but this alone won't be enough: by 2030 the city's population is expected to swell by 100,000.

Help is on the way. The shores along the IJ river are becoming the city's new dormitories. Thousands of homes have emerged in the Eastern Docklands, a former industrial area. Northwest of Centraal Station – itself getting a big makeover (see [p70](#)) – lies the Westerdokeiland, an imposing clutch of flats, offices and cafés embracing a pleasure harbour; to the northeast is Oosterdokeiland, an A1 office location with housing and a home to the new Openbare Bibliotheek (Amsterdam public library; [p71](#)). Across the river in Amsterdam-Noord there's Overhoeks, a housing estate on the old Shell Oil compound that will soon border the future Filmmuseum ([p115](#)). Long shunned by Amsterdammers and city planners alike, Amsterdam-Noord may be the urban hot spot of tomorrow, especially once the new metro line is completed.

This is a departure from not so long ago, when satellite communities such as Almere and Purmerend were seen as the solution. Residents are now being lured no further than the outskirts for fresh, open-layout designs, with all the mod cons and public transport links.

The *Noord/Zuidlijn* (north-south metro line) neatly ties into these plans. When completed in 2013, the extension will cut travel times between Amsterdam-Noord and the southern districts, changing the way many people live and work. The route also runs through the Zuidas ('south axis'), a minimetropolis that is the city's answer to London's Canary Wharf.

HEAD & SHOULDERS ABOVE

The Dutch are the tallest people in the world, averaging 1.855m (6ft, 1in) for men and almost 1.73m (5ft, 8in) for women. Copious intake of milk proteins, smaller families and superior prenatal care are cited as likely causes, but researchers also suspect there is some magic fertiliser in the Dutch gene pool. Whatever the reason, the Dutch keep growing, as do their doorways. Today, the minimum required height for doors in new homes and businesses is 2.315m (7ft, 6in).

ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING

Much of the Amsterdam region is polder, land that once lay at the bottom of lakes or the sea. It was reclaimed by building dykes across sea inlets and rivers, and pumping the water out with windmills (later with steam and diesel pumps). Without these techniques the Netherlands would be a much smaller, and certainly wetter, place than it is today.

Polders were created on a massive scale: in the 20th century, huge portions of the former Zuiderzee (now the IJsselmeer, a lake closed off from the sea by a dyke) were surrounded by dykes and the water was pumped out to create vast swaths of flat and fertile agricultural land. Opened in 1986, the province of Flevoland, northeast of Amsterdam, would be the last province to be reclaimed from the sea.

GREEN AMSTERDAM

The city centre is both very green and very much not. The central streets of Damrak, Rokin and Spuistraat, for example, feel like brick jungles, but virtually any canal is a lush green belt. Another place to spot greenery is through the rear window: many homes in the Canal Belt back onto gardens or courtyards.

To let loose, your best bet is the large open field of Museumplein ([p111](#)), or the lovely Vondelpark ([p115](#)) nearby, both just south of the city centre. A short ride away is the Amsterdamse Bos ([p131](#)). Don't neglect the large and lovely Artis Zoo ([p121](#)), the city's first park, in the Plantage district. You can also seek out the leafy refuges called *hofjes* (inner courtyards), especially in the Jordaan district (see the boxed text, [p85](#)).

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Amsterdam is the capital city, and it certainly looks and feels like one. But due to a quirk of history, the functions of state are actually 60km away in Den Haag (The Hague).

The national government is presided over by the prime minister, currently Jan Peter Balkenende, in a coalition of the conservative Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Christian Union (CU) parties, and the labour party (PvdA). Regarded as squeaky clean in Amsterdam, Balkenende has seen the political landscape shift markedly but managed to form a fourth cabinet (in as many years) following a surprise re-election in November 2006. A previous cabinet was brought down earlier that year by a crisis surrounding Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a parliamentary member and critic of Islam (see the boxed text, [below](#)). Ali, who was born in Somalia, resigned after it was revealed she provided false information to the Dutch authorities when applying for asylum.

The opposition is made up of seven parties including the centre-right, market-friendly People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), as well as two vocal right-wing parties, the Socialist Party (SP) and the PVV (Party for Freedom). The head of the PVV, Geert Wilders, is considered by many to carry the torch of Pim Fortuyn, the right-wing populist assassinated in 2002.

The national government has made some conciliatory noises on immigration recently, for example by granting an amnesty in 2007 to 30,000 immigrants without papers to give them a chance to be registered legally. Still, the admission of immigrants is now restricted to a few narrow categories, such as people whose skills serves the 'national interest'.

Other key issues include a new smoking ban in restaurants, bars and cafés, due to come into force in mid-2008 ([p188](#)) as well as the ongoing containment of coffeeshops. The city of Rotterdam is closing over one-third of its coffeeshops, saying they are too close to schools; Amsterdam, with 200 coffeeshops of its own, has decided not to follow suit – for now.

Amsterdam's mayor, currently Job Cohen, is appointed by the monarchy. The 45-member city council is elected to four-year terms by the city's 15 boroughs. Since the 2006 election, which showed a strong shift back to the left, the government is run by a coalition of the PvdA and GroenLinks (Green Left Party), with four parties holding seats in opposition. Council

THE LEGACY OF THEO & PIM

If the 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh rocked Amsterdam, it was the assassination of Pim Fortuyn two years earlier that gave the initial push.

The political career of the charismatic Fortuyn (pronounced fore-town) lasted a mere five months, yet his impact on the Netherlands has proved indelible. His campaign for parliament in 2002 is best remembered for his speeches on immigration: particularly that the Netherlands was 'full' and that immigrants should not be allowed to stay without learning the language or integrating. Thousands of white, low-income earners in Fortuyn's home base of Rotterdam and other cities rallied round the gay, dandyish former university professor. Fortuyn was feted as the next prime minister, even as his opponents accused him of pursuing right-wing, racist policies.

Just days before the general election in May 2002, Fortuyn was assassinated by an animal-rights activist in Hilversum, some 20km from Amsterdam. Riots erupted outside parliament, and for a brief instant the threat of anarchy hung in the air. His political party, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), had a number of members elected to parliament and was included in the next coalition, but without the dynamic Fortuyn it sputtered in search of a leader; in the 2003 election, voters all but deserted the LPF, which voted itself out of existence in 2007.

Enter Theo van Gogh ([p34](#)), a filmmaker whose 11-minute documentary *Submission Part 1* featured four short stories about Koranic verses that could be interpreted as justifying violence against women. The film was a collaboration with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Muslim-born woman who had emigrated from Somalia to escape an arranged marriage and eventually became a member of parliament. Hirsi Ali had become an outspoken critic of Islamic law and declared herself an atheist.

The documentary aired on Dutch TV in 2004, and Van Gogh was shot and his throat slashed as he was cycling down an Amsterdam street in rush hour. A letter threatening the nation, politicians and Hirsi Ali in particular, was impaled on a knife stuck in Van Gogh's chest. Hirsi Ali went into hiding. The killing was all the more shocking to locals because the 27-year-old killer, while of Moroccan descent, was born and raised in Amsterdam. He proclaimed that he was acting in the defence of Islam and would do the same thing again if given the chance, and he was sentenced to life imprisonment (one of only a few dozen life sentences in the Netherlands since WWII).

If Fortuyn and his assassination set minds thinking in this city, Van Gogh's murder was a blow to the heart. It also galvanised politicians to require immigrants to know something about Dutch culture before moving to the land of tolerance.

(Continued on page 53)

(Continued from page 44)

members receive an allowance for their work and not a salary, as it is performed on a volunteer basis. The council meets every second Wednesday in public session.

The city is further divided into boroughs, each with its own council and its own political flavour. Frequently, the locals create informal councils to solve problems of mutual concern, even without any government input. A good example is the Night Mayors, a board of volunteers organised by a city-centre councilman to promote Amsterdam's nightlife and mediate between the entertainment industry and the authorities.

MEDIA

It makes sense that the world's first museum devoted to news photography, News Photo ([p94](#)) opened here. Amsterdammers are media savvy and voracious readers. All you need to do is go to a café with a reading table to see. Whether it's a newspaper picked up on their commute or the latest hot blog, people are, above all else, aware. It makes this small city seem even smaller.

Of the 35 or so daily newspapers published in the Netherlands, some of the most important are based or have bureaus in Amsterdam. *De Telegraaf* is the country's biggest-selling newspaper and the closest thing to a tabloid you'll find. The *NRC Handelsblad* is the intellectual paper, while readers of the *Volkskrant* are decidedly left of centre.

Het Parool is Amsterdam's afternoon newspaper, the one to grab to know what's happening in town. Its Saturday *PS* supplement has a great entertainment section. And if you want to impress an Amsterdammer, say the restaurant you've chosen for dinner was rated nine out of 10 by Johannes van Dam, the paper's food critic.

The fastest-growing sector belongs to four free daily papers: *Metro*, *Spits*, *De Pers* and *Dag*, all of which are distributed from train-station stands. With a circulation of over half a million copies daily, *Metro* alone is a force to contend with. Visitors will have little trouble finding English-language publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *International Herald Tribune* and many UK-based dailies. Many are also popular among Dutch readers. See [p248](#) for further info.

Dutch TV tends not to travel well abroad, mostly due to the language, but foreign-language remakes of Dutch shows are enormously popular. Many visitors expect Dutch TV to be stuffed to the gills with porn, but it just ain't the case. The reality-TV craze began here with *Big Brother*, produced by Endemol, now based in Amsterdam. *Big Brother* was swiftly copied in the UK, Germany and the USA – and has spread to places as diverse as Brazil, Mexico and Africa. Its latest creation is the controversial *Gouden Kooi* (Golden Cage), a tempestuous soap opera cum reality show where participants are locked up together in a house for year. One resident regularly ordered the services of prostitutes. Endemol is also behind such international hits as *Fear Factor*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and *Ready, Steady, Cook*.

Of the local TV stations, AT5 is the putative leader thanks to its wall-to-wall coverage of local news. For a dose of Amsterdam attitude, tune in to low-budget MokumTV, on the air with local documentaries and unvarnished opinions since 1982. The state-owned networks are Ned 1, Ned 2 and Ned 3, who battle it out with commercial channels such as NET5, the loud 'n' sassy Yorin and Veronica, and the RTL empire. You can also find plenty of foreign channels on cable, including the BBC and CNN, and the sky's the limit via the satellite services at many hotels.

LANGUAGE

When you come from a tiny country with a long history of trade, you learn to adapt or wither.

Amsterdam has always looked outward, and as a result most people you will encounter

THE DONOR SHOW HOAX

In the summer of 2007, BNN, a TV station aimed at the youth audience, took the reality-show concept a step further with *The Big Donor Show*. The programme involved a woman, supposedly terminally ill, who was to donate a kidney to one of three worthy recipients, with the decision left up to the viewing audience. The whole thing turned out to be a hoax and there was a storm of criticism, including from Dutch prime minister, Jan Peter Balkenende. BNN agreed the show was in bad taste, but argued it wanted to highlight the lack of donors. Within days of the airing, the producers emerged victorious as tens of thousands of viewers requested a donor form.

LEARNING THE LINGO

Originally from Bolivia, Sonia Sanchez has lived in Amsterdam for over seven years and works for the city council's section on immigration affairs. We asked about her views on the immigration law passed in 2005, which requires competency in the Dutch language and culture before newcomers can get a residency permit.

Tell us what it was like for you when you first arrived in Amsterdam.

When I first arrived my Dutch wasn't very good, so I took several language courses. It was difficult, but I managed, and that helped me get my university diploma, a residency permit and a job offer. Now it's very different. Apart from the language, you have to take an orientation course in Dutch culture, and for that you have to study an awful lot.

What percentage of people pass the Dutch language test?

I don't know exactly, but last year 4000 immigrants came to Amsterdam to live. Of those who enrol in the standard 1½-year language course, typically something like 70% don't make it to the second level. A lot of immigrants work and study at the same time, and it's more difficult than a lot of them expect. But that was still under the old system. There's a new test in force from this year.

Is it demeaning for immigrants who've lived here for some time to prove they speak Dutch?

Those who already have a Dutch passport aren't required to take the test. But people without a Dutch passport do have to, and I think it's a good idea. I know people who have lived here for 30 years and don't speak a word of Dutch. How does that happen? They live separate from the rest of society, and think, why should they learn Dutch if they don't use it every day? The problem is, their children don't perform well at school. There are special language programmes for the parents, which help to motivate the children to learn the language too.

Have the courses in Amsterdam been successful so far?

Under the new immigration law, Amsterdam and other Dutch cities were given time to prepare their administration, so the courses here only started in April 2007. So we won't see any concrete test results until late 2008.

Is it so necessary to speak Dutch in Amsterdam, when so many Dutch are polyglot?

I think when you move to another country, you should learn the language or you'll miss out on a lot. When I arrived in Amsterdam I noticed that everyone here speaks English, even the greengrocers. When I was learning Dutch at first and I tried to speak it, everyone answered back in English, but I had to convince them I wanted to improve my Dutch.

How many people in Amsterdam need to improve their Dutch?

In Amsterdam there are about 50,000 people with substandard Dutch. Not just foreigners, mind you – there are also some Dutch who are technically illiterate.

What happens if a prospective immigrant fails the language and culture test?

Those already in the Netherlands can retake it, but have to pass within five years of arrival. For immigrants who haven't moved here yet, it's tougher. They have to contact the Dutch embassy in their homeland and take the test *before* they come, which means learning all the language and culture stuff abroad. Not easy.

in the city speak English very well. Foreign films and TV are shown with Dutch subtitles, and the Dutch have long used other languages in their dealings overseas. Many websites (especially tourist publications) are published in English, with the occasional publication in German, French, Italian and, increasingly, Turkish and Arabic.

Part of the reason for this outward focus may be that the Dutch language is confounding. Many linguists believe that Dutch is a close relative to English, but it won't be apparent to the uninitiated. If you've studied German, Dutch will make sense grammatically, and once you get past some spelling differences you'll probably be able to get the gist of it, especially written. Spoken Dutch is another matter entirely – its pronunciation is a minefield of diphthongs (vowel combinations), throat-clearing *g*'s and *ch*'s, roiling, rolling *r*'s and *v*'s that sound like *f*'s.

The Dutch speak English so well that visitors will rarely have the opportunity to practice Dutch. When they do, the most valiant attempts at pronunciation will probably be met with quizzical looks. Nevertheless, a few words in Dutch are always appreciated, especially the phrase *Spreekt u Engels?* (Do you speak English?) with older people. Foreigners who have settled in the Netherlands report that speaking Dutch, while hardly compulsory, warms their Dutch friends and colleagues.

For a brief guide to Dutch and some useful words and phrases, see the Language chapter (p258), and check language courses on p245. For more extensive coverage of the language, pick up Lonely Planet's *Western Europe Phrasebook*.



ARCHITECTURE



Arcam (p70), the comely architecture centre at the harbour's edge

ARCHITECTURE IN AMSTERDAM



The peaceful Begijnhof (p68)

top picks SEEWORTHY BUILDINGS

- Oude Kerk (p75)
- Nieuwe Kerk (p66)
- Royal Palace (p67)
- Rijksmuseum (p111)
- Het Schip (p130)
- Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (p125)

It is difficult not to be struck by Amsterdam's well-preserved beauty; the lovely canalscapes depicted in centuries-old paintings are remarkably unchanged. Historian Geert Mak once described Amsterdam as 'a Cinderella under glass', spared as it was from wartime destruction and ham-fisted developers. The comely old centre has no fewer than 7000 historical monuments, more humpback bridges than Venice and more trees per capita than Paris.

Unlike many capitals, Amsterdam has few grand edifices to trumpet. There is hardly the space for a Louvre or Westminster Abbey, which anyway would be out of keeping with Calvinist modesty. But you'll be pressed to find another city with such a wealth of residential architecture, and with an appeal that owes more to understated elegance than to power and pomp.

Amsterdam's beauty was built on freedoms – of trade, religion and aesthetics. Many of its gabled mansions and warehouses were erected by merchants in the Golden Age, with little meddling by city hall. Thus its leading citizens determined the look of the city, an early urban experiment.

Dutch architecture today is one of the country's most successful exports, with names such as Rem Koolhaas and Lars Spuybroek popping up on blueprints from Shanghai to Stuttgart. Back home, rivalry can be intensely local as talents in Amsterdam and Rotterdam jostle for a spot in the architectural pantheon.

MIDDLE AGES

Around the year 1200, Amsterdam was a muddy little trading post on the Amstel river. The soft marshland couldn't support brick, so the earliest houses were made of timber, often with clay and thatched roofs – similar, actually, to ones still standing in Amsterdam-Noord. Even these modest abodes would list into the soggy ground.

A disastrous fire burnt down much of the city centre in the 15th century, and wood was sensibly outlawed as a main building material. There was plenty of clay to make brick, but this was too heavy, let alone stone.

The engineers solved the problem by driving piles into the peat. So timber gave way to heavier brick, and thatched roofs were replaced by sturdier tile. Eventually brick and sandstone became *de rigueur* for everything.

Only two early houses with timber façades have survived to this day. In a lovely courtyard near the Spui, the house at [Begijnhof 34](#) (Map pp62–5) is the oldest preserved wooden house in the country, dating from 1465. The other specimen can be found at Zeedijk 1, home of the [In 't Aepjen café](#) (p183), from the mid-16th century.

The city's oldest surviving building is the [Oude Kerk](#) (Old Church, 1340; p75), a fine specimen of Dutch brick Gothic style. The second-oldest is the [Nieuwe Kerk](#) (New Church; p66), a late-Gothic masterpiece from the early 15th century. You can clearly see how, over time, the Catholic choir and altar ceded ground to the Protestant pulpit. In both churches, notice the wooden roof frames.

Another classic of the era is the [Montelbaanstoren](#) (p82), one of the city's signature buildings and a Rembrandt favourite. The octagonal steeple was designed by master architect Hendrick de Keyser to house a clock that's still in use today.



The Gothic-style Oude Kerk (p75)

GABLES, HOISTS & HOUSES THAT TIP

Among Amsterdam's great treasures are the magnificent gables, the façades at roof level that adorn the elegant houses along the canals. The gables hid the roof from public view and helped to identify the house until 1795, when the French occupiers introduced house numbers. Gables then became more of a fashion accessory.

There are four main types: the simple [spout gable](#), with diagonal outline and semicircular windows or shutters, that was used mainly for warehouses from the 1580s to the early 1700s; the [step gable](#), a late-Gothic design favoured by Dutch Renaissance architects; the [neck gable](#), also known as the bottle gable, a durable design introduced in the 1640s; and the [bell gable](#), which appeared in the 1660s and became popular in the 18th century.

Many canal houses deliberately tip forward. Given the narrowness of staircases, owners needed an easy way to move large goods and furniture to the upper floors. The solution: a hoist built into the gable, to lift objects up and in through the windows. The tilt allowed loading without bumping into the house front. Some properties even have huge hoist-wheels in the attic with a rope and hook that run through the hoist beam.

The forward lean also makes the houses seem larger, which makes it easier to admire the façade and gable – a fortunate coincidence for everyone. Other house features included wall tablets; see the boxed text, [p48](#).



Gabled buildings

DUTCH RENAISSANCE

As the Italian Renaissance filtered north, Dutch architects developed a rich ornamental style that merged the classical and the traditional, with their own brand of subtle humour. They inserted mock columns, known as pilasters, into the façades and replaced the old spout gables with step gables (see the boxed text, p47). Sculptures, columns and little obelisks suddenly appeared all over the Canal Belt. Red brick and horizontal bands of white were all the rage too.

The best-known talent of this period was Hendrick de Keyser (1565–1621), the city sculptor. He worked with Hendrick Staets, a Canal Belt planner, and Cornelis Danckerts, the city bricklayer, to produce some of the city's finest masterpieces.

Every student of Dutch architecture knows the **Bartolotti House** (p94), a design by De Keyser, who also put his stamp on three 'directional churches': the **Zuiderkerk** (Southern Church; p80) and **Westerkerk** (Western Church; p93), both Gothic in flavour, and the **Noorderkerk** (Northern Church; p85), built for poor Jordaanders, and laid out like a Greek cross inside, a veritable revolution at the time.

De Keyser also created the landmark **Munttoren** (Mint Tower; Map pp62-5; cnr Rokin & Singel). The national mint was moved here ahead of advancing French troops in 1673, but had little time to print any currency.

Also attributed to De Keyser is the **Rasphuis Gate** (p73). Halfway along Heiligeweg, it once led to the Rasphuis, a model penitentiary where inmates would 'rasp' (scrape) Brazil wood for the dye industry.

WALL TABLETS

Before street numbers were introduced in 1795, many Amsterdam homes were identified by their wall tablets. These painted or carved stone plaques were practical decorations that earmarked the origin, religion or profession of the inhabitants.

Beautiful examples of these stones are still found on many buildings along the main canals. Occupations are a frequent theme: tobacconists, milliners, merchants, skippers, undertakers, even grass-mowers.

The tablets also provide hints about the city's past. A stone depicting a mail wagon at Singel 74 commemorates the start of postal services between Amsterdam and Den Haag in 1660. Further down the street, there's one portraying the scene of Eve tempting Adam with an apple, harking back to a fruit market of yesteryear.

Many plaques celebrate the lives of famous citizens, such as maritime hero Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter and biologist Jan Swammerdam. The most appealing, however, recall the domestic life and vocations of the age; for examples, see www.amsterdamsegevelstenen.nl.



Wall tablets were used to identify houses

Key commercial buildings include the **Greenland Warehouses** (Map pp62-5; Keizersgracht 40-44). Whale oil was a sought-after ingredient for soap, lamp oil and paint, and wells in these warehouses held 100,000L of the precious stuff. Nowadays they're chic apartments, the façade is well maintained.

The wonderful **Huis aan de Drie Grachten** (House on the Three Canals, 1609; Map pp62-5; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 329) marks where the three *burgwallen* (fortified embankments) meet. Note the house's steep gables, leaded glass windows and handsome shutters.

DUTCH CLASSICISM

During the Golden Age of art in the 17th century, architects such as Jacob van Campen, Philips Vingboons and his brother Justus decided to stick to Greek and Roman classical design, dropping many of De Keyser's playful decorations.

Influenced by Italian architects, the Dutch made façades look like temples and pilasters like columns. All revolved around clever deception. Neck gables with decorative scrolls came into fashion, often crowned by a temple-like roof. Garlands appeared under windows, and red brick, which was prone to crumbling, was hardened with dark paint.

The most impressive example of Dutch Classicism is Van Campen's city hall (now the **Royal Palace**, p67). The largest city hall in Europe, it was given a precious shell of Bentheim sandstone and a marble interior inspired by the Roman palaces.

The Vingboons designed the **Bijbels Museum** (p95), the **White House** (now also part of the Theater Instituut Nederland, p93) and the fine example at **Keizersgracht 319** (Map p92).

Justus Vingboons' **Trippenhuis** (p79) is about as austere as it gets. Built in 1660–64 for the wealthy Tripp brothers, who made their fortune in metals, artillery and ammunition, the most striking hallmarks are up at roof level – chimneys shaped like mortars.

Later in the 17th century, façades became plainer as the pendulum shifted to sumptuous interiors. Adriaan Dortsman, a mathematician by training, was a leader of this austere style. Dortsman's greatest hits include the **Ronde Lutherse Kerk** (Round Lutheran Church; p73) and the **Museum Van Loon** (p99).

18TH-CENTURY 'LOUIS STYLES'

As Holland's trading might faded, the wealthy fell back on fortunes amassed in the mercantile era. Many invested or turned to banking, and conducted business from their opulent homes. Traders no longer stored goods in the attic because they could afford warehouses elsewhere.

The Gallic culture craze proved a godsend for architect and designer Daniel Marot, a Huguenot refugee who introduced matching French interiors and exteriors to Amsterdam. Living areas were bathed in light that fell through sash windows on white stuccoed ceilings. As the elegant bell gable became a must, many architects opted for the next big thing, a horizontal cornice.

The dignified façades and statuary of the Louis XIV style hung on until about 1750. In rapid succession it was followed by Louis XV style – rococo rocks, swirls and waves – and Louis XVI designs, with pilasters and pillars making a comeback.



The towering Westerkerk (p93)

Magna Plaza (p72), with the Royal Palace (p67) in the background





Ornate archway of the Rijksmuseum (p111), the gateway to the Museum Quarter

Standing in front of the late-Louis-style [Felix Meritis Building](#) (p94), step back and note the enormous Corinthian half-columns, with a pomp that architect Jacob Otten Husly was skilled in imparting.

The [Maagdenhuis](#) (Map pp62–5) on the Spui, designed by city architect Abraham van der Hart, is a more sober brand of this classicism. Built in 1787 as a Catholic orphanage for girls, the building is now the administrative seat of the University of Amsterdam.

19TH-CENTURY NEOSTYLES

After the Napoleonic era, the Dutch economy stagnated, merchants closed their pocketbooks and architecture ground to a halt. Seen as safe and saleable, neoclassicism held sway until the more prosperous 1860s, when planners again felt free to rediscover the past.

The late 19th century was all about neo-Gothic, harking back to the grand Gothic cathedrals, and the neo-Renaissance. It was around this time that Catholics regained their freedom to worship openly, and built churches like mad in neo-Gothic style.

A leading architect of the period was Pierre Cuypers, the man known for skilful design blur on several neo-Gothic churches, something he had in common with CH Peters. Their contemporary AC Bleijs created some of the greatest commercial buildings of the era.

Pierre Cuypers designed two of Amsterdam's iconic buildings: [Centraal Station](#) (p70) and the [Rijksmuseum](#) (p111), which both display Gothic forms and Dutch Renaissance brickwork. A similar melange is CH Peters' general post office, now [Magna Plaza](#) (p72).

The ebullient neo-Renaissance façade of the [former milk factory](#) (Map pp100-1; Prinsengracht 739-741) was built in 1876 to a design by Eduard Cuypers (Pierre's nephew).

Bleijs designed the high-profile [St Nicolaaskerk](#) (p71) as well as the intimate [PC Hooft Store](#) (1881; Map pp100-1; Keizersgracht 508). The latter, a Dutch-Renaissance throwback with a Germanic tower, was built to commemorate the 300th birthday of the poet and playwright Pieter Cornelisz Hooft.

The façade of AL van Gend's [Concertgebouw](#) (p111) is neoclassical, but its red brick and white sandstone are all Dutch Renaissance.

Around the turn of the century, the neo-Goths suddenly fell out of favour as Art Nouveau spread its curvy plant-like shapes across Europe.

Art Nouveau's influence can be seen in the [Greenpeace Building](#) (Map p92; Keizersgracht 174-176). The towering edifice was built in 1905 for an insurance company, and its tiled façade shows a guardian angel who seems to be peddling a life policy.

Other Art Nouveau structures are the [Amsterdam American Hotel](#) (p99) and the riotous [Tuschinski theater](#) (p200).

BERLAGE & THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

The father of modern Dutch architecture was Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934). He criticised the lavish neostyles and their reliance on the past, instead favouring simplicity and a rational use of materials.

In Berlage's view, residential blocks were a holistic concept rather than a collection of individual homes. Not always popular with city elders, Berlage influenced what became known as the Amsterdam School and its leading exponents Michel de Klerk, Piet Kramer and Johan van der Mey.

The titans of the Amsterdam School designed buildings of 'Plan South', an ambitious project mapped out by Berlage. Humble housing blocks became brick sculptures with curved corners, odd windows and rocket-shaped towers, to the marvel (or disgust) of traditionalists.

It was a productive period that ushered in a new philosophy of city planning, given a boost by the 1928 Olympic Games held in Amsterdam.

The [Beurs van Berlage](#) (p69) displayed the master's ideals to the full, with exposed inner struts and striking but simple brick accents.

Johan van der Mey's remarkable [Scheepvaarthus](#) (p71) was the first building in the Amsterdam School style. It draws on the street layout to reproduce a ship's bow.

De Klerk's [Het Schip](#) (p130) in the Haarlem Quarter and Kramer's [De Dageraad](#) (p120) in the De Pijp neighbourhood are like fairy-tale fortresses rendered in a Dutch version of Art Deco. Their eccentric details are charming, but the 'form over function' ethic meant these places were not always fantastic to live in.



The tiled façade of the Greenpeace Building (opposite)

Museumplein, with view of the Concertgebouw (p111)



FUNCTIONALISM

As the Amsterdam School built, a new generation began to rebel against the movement's impractical and expensive methods. In 1927 they formed a group called 'de 8', influenced by the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier.

Architects such as Ben Merkelbach and Gerrit Rietveld believed that form should follow function and advocated steel, glass and concrete. The Committee of Aesthetics Control didn't agree, however, which is why you'll see little functionalism in the Canal Belt.

After WWII, entire suburbs such as the sprawling Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam-Zuidoost were designed along functionalist lines. By the late 1960s, however, resistance would grow to such impersonal, large-scale projects.

Rietveld left Amsterdam the [Van Gogh Museum \(p109\)](#), where the minimalist, open space allows the artist's works to shine. You can enjoy coffee inside his [M Café \(p169\)](#). Aldo van Eyck's work also remains controversial, with critics arguing it looks out of place against the 17th- and 18th-century surrounds; his designs include the [Moederhuis \(Map p122; Plantage Middenlaan 33\)](#), built for 'fallen women'.

THE PRESENT

Since the 1970s, designers have lent human scale to the suburbs by integrating low- and medium-rise apartments with shops, schools and offices. In the Plantage district, a must-see is the enormous [Entrepotdok \(p123\)](#). Sprawling half a kilometre along the former loading dock, the crusty shipping warehouses have been recast as desirable apartments, studios and commercial spaces. Nearby, the Eastern Docklands was full of derelict industrial buildings until the 1980s and early '90s, when they got a new lease on life.

Looking southeast from Centraal Station, you can't overlook the green copper snout of [NEMO \(p69\)](#), a science museum designed by Renzo Piano that resembles the prow of a ship. The cube-like glass shell of the [Muziekgebouw \(p125\)](#) stands not far to the north, on the IJ waterfront. Clad in a voluptuous body of aluminium and glass, [Arcam \(Architectuur Centrum Amsterdam; p70\)](#) is a tribute to the city's architectural prowess.

The Eastern Harbour District is home to the innovative community called [IJburg \(Map p58-9\)](#), which will eventually house many thousands of residents on a string of artificial islands. It's linked to the mainland by the curvaceous [Enneüs Heerma Brug](#), now dubbed Dolly Parton Bridge by locals. Amsterdam-Zuidoost prides itself on the [Living Tomorrow Pavilion \(p131\)](#), a 'smart' building with talking appliances by star architect Ben van Berkel.

Sweeping new projects are underway outside the old centre. On the shores of the IJ stands the [Oosterdokseiland](#), a row of landmark buildings that includes the new city library, and the [Westerdokeiland](#), a harbour that has been repurposed for work, play and sleep. On a former industrial estate across the IJ river, smart housing blocks and office towers are springing up at the Overhoeks development.

On the southern ringway, the hi-tech business district of Zuidas ('south axis') is positioning itself as a rival to London's Canary Wharf. One of the more intriguing sights out here is the [ING House \(Map p58-9; Amstelveenseweg 500\)](#), a shoe-shaped, glass-clad complex on stilts – truly a bank with a sole.

Striking architecture of the NEMO science museum (p69)



The Van Gogh Museum (p109)



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