

Morgen

#03

Vastgoed met een hart

AHAM
VASTGOED

The development of Amsterdam





Interior: The Modern	4
AHAM and urban development	6
Going East in Oostenburg	14
Expats in Amsterdam	16
Room with a view	24
Middenweg manager	26
Pioneer tenants on Oostenburgermiddenstraat	29
Scandinavian coffee culture	34
A tour of Amsterdam East	36
The story of De Prael	38
A green heart for Bos en Lommer	41
Happy tenants	46
Sint Antonius Stichting: Ghana and Kenya	48
The possibilities of DeepSpace	53
The oak AHAM floor	54
Starters at Valeriusplein	56
Eleven questions for Studio Hudson	58
Interview: estate agent Michiel Verbeek	62

Welcome

Six minutes and no more. In that time, we received 20 requests for a viewing and quickly took the property listing offline. All 20 of the people who signed up wanted to rent the property; we had to disappoint 19 good candidates. This is AHAM reality in early 2023. How can it be? The simple answer is that the demand for homes has grown faster than the supply.

AHAM Vastgoed rents out and refurbishes attractive homes in good locations. For its part, Amsterdam is experiencing a surge in popularity. Since the Golden Age, the city has been built up, altered and enlarged to become the small world city it is today. Its national and international appeal is huge, and the number of jobs on offer continues to grow. How is the economy developing? That's not our field. But the way in which the built environment is changing is, and that is the focus of this bulletin.

Over the last ten years we have made almost 1000 homes more sustainable, as well as investing in their exteriors. We have bought dozens of properties and restored them to their former glory. This is how we do our part to ensure comfortable living and the city's amenity value. Our shops are attractive because we choose entrepreneurs who enrich the neighbourhood and radiate that to the outside world. Our residential tenants are happy to frequent them. The city is rich in initiatives by young entrepreneurs and there is a lot of willingness to invest. This has been the case across the centuries with inevitable peaks and troughs. The good times have given rise to beautiful neighbourhoods, nowadays represented in our properties, many of which are more than 100 years old. This tangible history makes it clear that talent and application during the design phase results in a sustainable quality of life. We use the knowledge that we are gifted every day to provide for the needs of tomorrow while preserving what is good. When we transform a monument, we do it with respect for its history and we carry out renovations and maintenance with care. A committed heir who recently sold us a beautiful canal house told us explicitly that they'd chosen us because we treat our properties with love. We were lost for words and extremely proud.

In this bulletin, tenants, business contacts and colleagues tell us about their involvement with the changing built environment. They enjoy playing their part and joining us in making the city that little bit more beautiful. The only "drawback" is that so many people want to live here as a result. Meanwhile, we are expanding so that the other 19 candidates get to turn their residential dreams into reality.

Tim van Schijndel
director AHAM Vastgoed



The Modern by The Modern

Since late last year, Staringplein has been home to specialists in modern vintage furniture The Modern, who have now expanded to become consultants and designers for your entire interior.

4

Owner Martijn Krijnzen: ‘About twelve years ago we started selling vintage furniture under the name Modern Vintage. As we began selling more and more contemporary furniture, rugs, curtains and that sort of thing, the name was no longer fit for purpose, so we continued as The Modern. We provide the entire interior for houses,

including kitchens, we have our own curtain brand, Rustico, and we supply art. So you can buy a single chair or lamp, but you can also have your whole house redesigned.’

Passion
Martijn studied business administration and then got a job at an online auction house. ‘I had a passion for buying

‘You can buy a single chair or lamp from us, but you can also have your whole house redesigned.’



and selling vintage furniture, which I did from my little attic room. My business partner was doing the same thing. When he came to my house once to purchase something, he saw my home was full of items I had collected through my wheeling and dealing and that’s when we decided to pool our resources and continue as a team.’

Ibiza
‘About ten years ago, we started the business out of a former garage on Tweede Helmersstraat. I was still working full-time, and I was doing this on the side. Our next step was a move to a premises on Jacob Obrechtstraat, next door to the church. And that’s how we steadily expanded. At a certain point – about eight years ago – my business partner decided to relocate to Ibiza. Since then he has run a shop there too, called Ibiza Interiors. Together, we own The Modern Ibiza, which supplies everything to the shop in Amsterdam.’

Expats
Since December of last year, The Modern has been located on Staringplein, just behind Overtoom. Krijnzen: ‘The location was offered as two separate properties or as a single unit. That was in



the summer of 2021. AHAM subsequently refurbished the premises. This is a great place for us for the foreseeable

future. We don’t cater to hundreds of passers-by, but rather to people who are really looking for something

stylish for their homes. Lots of creative people and expats live in this neighbourhood, so for us it’s an amazing location.’





Morgen

6

Architectural historian Jeroen Schilt talks about the urban development of Amsterdam where the architectural greats Berlage and Van Eesteren played a leading role.

Agglomeratie Amsterdam

Amsterdam is a magnet; the pressure on the city is huge. ‘That’s simply the magic of this city,’ says Jeroen Schilt, an architectural historian at the municipality of Amsterdam: ‘Everyone wants to live here.’ He believes that it is such a pleasant city to live in because tradi-

tionally a lot of thought has been given to its urban development. ‘Amsterdam is pre-eminently a city of planned urban planning. Its core is the seventeenth-century canal belt and the centre around the Waag. The modern city is built around that.’

At the beginning of the last century, a veritable building explosion took place to provide the fast-growing population of Amsterdam with housing. Following the Housing Act of 1901, affordable social housing was built for workers in the new Staatsliedenbuurt. People could

At the beginning of the last century, a veritable building explosion took place.

rent there providing they joined a housing corporation. To do this they needed to have a permanent job so they could pay the weekly rent.

The city council asked architect H.P. Berlage to design an urban plan for the area to the south of the city, between the Amstel and the Schinkel rivers. Berlage’s Plan Zuid, with its dead straight streets and elongated blocks of houses, encompasses the Rivierenbuurt, the Apollobuurt, the Stadionbuurt and the Nieuwe Pijp. From 1917, many beautiful brick housing blocks were built here in the undulating forms of the Amsterdam School with its typical windows. They were mainly intended for the middle classes and affluent citizens, but housing was also built in the Stadionbuurt and the Nieuwe Pijp for workers.

Visions of urban planning changed in the 1930s. In 1935, architect Cornelis van Eesteren designed the General Expansion Plan (AUP) for the south and west of the city. His design started from very different principles to those of Berlage: instead of closed building blocks and monumental façades, there came open buildings. Shortly after the war, the excavation of the Sloterpolder began. The Western Garden Cities were built around it, including Sloterpolder, Osdorp and Geuzenveld, says Schilt. ‘The Garden Cities were 95 percent occupied by social housing. The idea that prevailed at that time was that every worker should have the right to a family home.’ Van Eesteren paid a lot of attention to the public and green spaces. The Amsterdamse Bos, which was built in 1935, was also part of his expansion plan, as was the Buitenveldert district.

Utopian thinking

The 1960s were the start of a new era. In 1966, Mayor Gijs van Hall drove the first pile into the ground of one of the ten-storey high blocks of flats in the Bijlmermeer. ‘This was a time of utopian thinking,’ explains Schilt. A district with only high-rise buildings elaborated upon Van Eesteren’s background ideas about the functional city in which work, living and

7





nature were kept strictly separate. All of the Bijlmer's traffic was routed around the flats. 'For a long time we thought that we'd be able to survive with the Western Garden Cities, Buitenveldert and the Bijlmer until the end of the twentieth century,' says Schilt. But that had neglected to take the decline in population density into account. In the past, four people used to live in one house. Now it's only 1.4. In the 1970s, divorce stopped being taboo and became more common. An increasing number of Amsterdammers, including students, were single. And everyone wanted their own home. Nowadays, 20.000 people live in the Jordaan where once there were 100.000. Schilt has seen with his own eyes how the street scene has changed: 'I remember from my childhood how the Jordaan used to be teeming with people. The streets were busy. There was a lot going on. Nowadays, the neighborhood is almost residential.' It's become almost impossible to imagine, but about fifty years ago, the living situation in working-class neighborhoods like the Jordaan and the Staatsliedenbuurt was very different, says Schilt. 'In the seventies and eighties, lots of houses were poorly maintained; a lot were empty and the squatting movement was very active. The Staatsliedenbuurt was a squatter's stronghold.' At that time, the city council's focus was mostly on the economic function of the city, not the housing. The housing policy assumed that half of Amsterdam would move out to Almere, Hoorn or Purmerend, the so-called 'spillover municipalities'. About 200.000 of Amsterdam's 880.000 inhabitants left between 1959 and 1980. But over time, the residents of the old Amsterdam city districts began to object to the poor maintenance of their homes. The city as a meeting place and breeding ground for ideas, with its theatres, cinemas, universities and cafés, spoke to the imagination. Amsterdammers did not want to leave; they wanted to continue living in the city. At the end of the 1970s, the municipality took a decision and chose to make the city a place for living, in addition to its economic role. Old



houses were renovated and there was a lot urban renewal work. From 1984, the number of inhabitants, which had fallen to 680.000, began to rise again to the current number of about 875.000.

Blue is green

Schilt tells us how modern Amsterdam, as we know it today, developed from the nineties onwards. The economy was on the up. There was a turnaround in the city centre. Where once there'd been lots of offices and businesses, a centre for recreation and consumption came into being. Traffic flows were diverted away from the centre. The Zuidas, the main transport artery between the city and Schiphol, was set to become the driver of the 21st century urban economy. Offices and companies



such as the Amsteltoeren and the WTC were built. In Sloterdijk, the Teleport complex went up, a business centre that focuses on telecommunications. It became clear that many new homes were needed if all of Amsterdam's inhabitants were to be accommodated; the newcomers from Turkey and Morocco also need to live somewhere. In the 1990s, the Nieuw Sloten and De Aker districts appeared on former agricultural lands. Around the same time, work began on the development of the Eastern Docklands neighbourhood. The buildings on Java, KNSM and Borneo islands and Sporenburg needed to be urban, which meant that many homes were built in a small area. The time of social housing only, where there was meant to be a family home for every worker within abundant public green space was over, according to Schilt. The slogan of urban development was 'blue is green': the water of the ports was to take the place of public parks and gardens. The modern, glass and steel apartments on the Eastern Docklands, reminiscent of London's Docklands, were occupied predominantly by wealthy buyers.

Schilt observes with regret that land operators and project developers in the Amsterdam housing market have increasingly set the tone at the expense of housing corporations and

'Nowadays, the Amsterdam housing market is almost inaccessible to people without capital.'

the 'public interest'. Since corporations have to keep financially afloat, they sell off many rental homes to private individuals. Nowadays, the Amsterdam housing market is almost inaccessible to people without capital, those very people for whom Amsterdam's urban planners and architects traditionally showed such care. But Schilt also draws attention to some hopeful developments. Other parties, beyond the municipality, feel that they too are responsible for urban development and public housing. Such as in Amsterdam Oost, where AHAM has bought the former telephone exchange on the Middenweg. The Amsterdam School-style building, which according to Schilt is of architectural value, won't be demolished but will be thoroughly restored and two additional storeys will be added. This was a considered choice made in consultation with local residents. Therefore, there will be no catering in the building, but offices, workshops and homes. They will all be rental properties, not only for wealthy tenants, but also for social tenants and the middle segment. Financial yield is not the main concern. 'It's great that AHAM is approaching it this way,' says Schilt.



Jeroen Schilt:
'Amsterdam is pre-eminently a city of planned urban planning.'

Top: Lijnbaansgracht
Middle: Hoofdkantoor van het GEB aan de Tesselschadestraat
Below: Suikerhofje, Lindengracht



Historic buildings

10

AHAM recently bought the canal house at Keizersgracht 284 and it has owned Singel 270-272 for decades. These two historic houses fit nicely within AHAMs portfolio which includes twenty national monuments in the city centre. Project leader Cors van Duijvenbode is responsible for the ‘shell’ of all of AHAM’s real estate, for maintenance and renovation of façades and roofs of approximately 2,100 homes and 500 business complexes. He loves this work because it contributes to preserving the beauty of Amsterdam’s unique architecture. Van Duijvenbode explains how he goes about managing and maintaining the buildings.

Keizersgracht 284

‘This is a classic eighteenth-century house built in 1756. Characteristic of this canal house is its raised and arched cornice with two corner sculptures at the top of the façade. Furthermore, the natural stone plinth and front steps are striking. Just like at the Singel house, the entrance hall has a marble floor and wall panelling. The building is divided up into three homes in the front house and three in the back house, separated by a patio. There are another two homes in the attic and basement. This canal house was offered to us by the heirs of a private owner who had passed away. They wanted the property to land in good hands. Before the purchase, I made a tour of the property with the estate agent to estimate what the greatest structural risks might be. We only work out a maintenance plan in detail after purchase, because it is such a time-consuming process. In the Keizersgracht case, we are going to have the inspection carried out in an innovative way: by an inspection agency that works with drones. During the inspection, the drone pilot will even be in contact

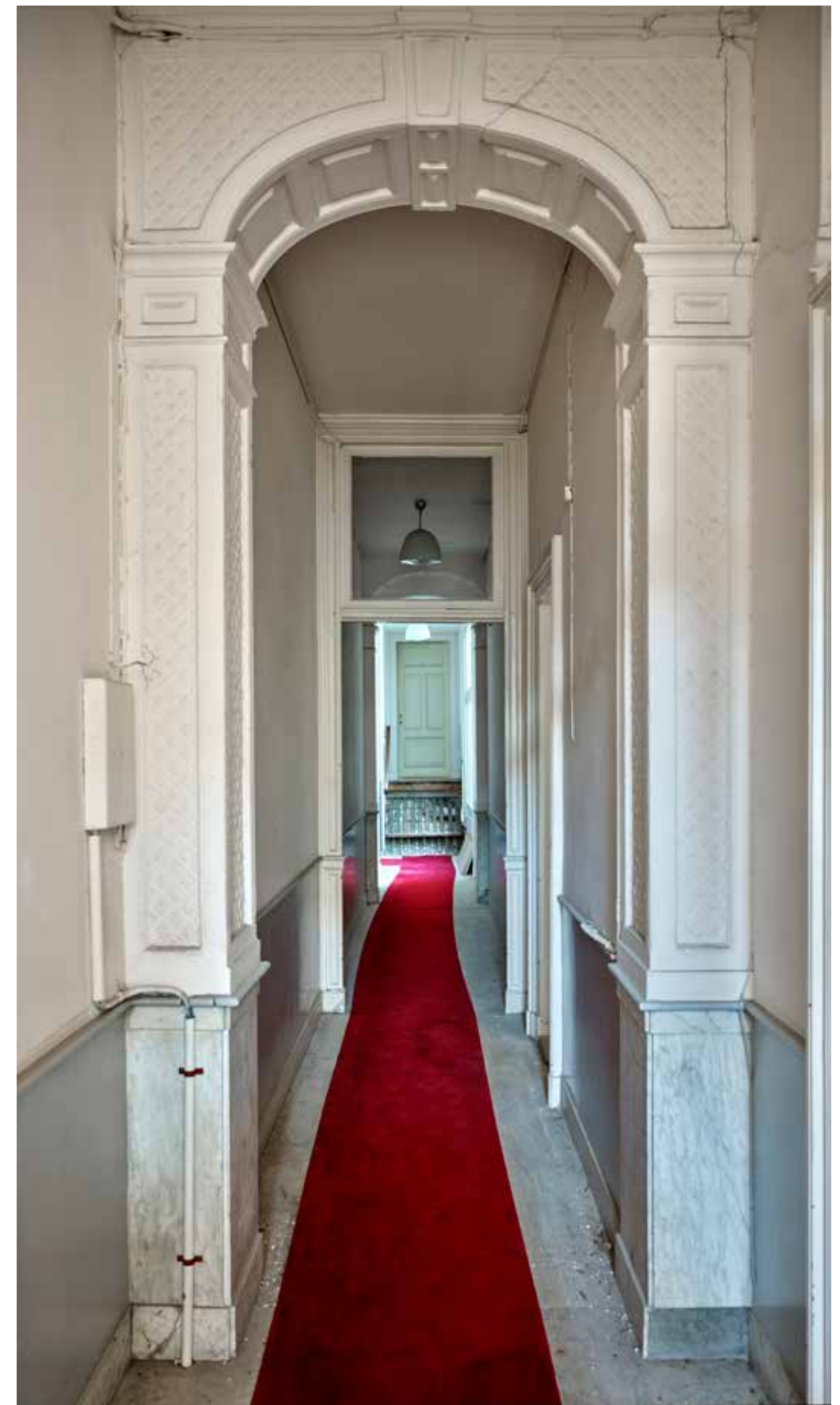
with air traffic control at the control tower at Schiphol. When the drone hovers over the roof, it quickly reaches a height of 20 to 25 metres. In Amsterdam, there are, of course, many roofs and façades that are difficult of access. The drone camera takes pictures of every square centimetre, down to the last millimetre. This will allow us to visualise every part of the building properly in detail. I think that drone inspections are the future, especially in the inner city of Amsterdam.’

Singel 270-272

‘This is a house from 1800, built on a double plot. We painted the rear façade with mineral paint after repairing its cracks in 2020. Mineral paint has a chalky look and is often used for older façades, like for example at the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. It’s a breathable paint and gives façades a really lovely, even appearance. As well as restoring the rear façade, we’ve also made the building more sustainable. Various windows have been fitted with insulating monumental glass. It is important to get the necessary permits for changes to national monuments like these. Regulations have increased and got considerably tighter in recent years. For example, in the field of flora and fauna and particularly of protected animals and plants; creatures like bats and sparrows. We have to carry out nature surveys as much as two years in advance of renovating in some areas if we are to start the project on schedule. Sometimes, we have to take specific measures, like providing nesting boxes for birds.’

‘We have to carry out nature surveys as much as two years in advance.’





Going East in Oostenburg

Michiel Mertens is cofounder of Going East. This Belgian design agency drafted the interior of an AHAM office project in Amsterdam’s Oostenburg district.

Following his travels across Europe and Asia, Michiel was inspired to set up his own design agency. Initially he focussed on small projects such as restaurants. The media soon got wind of his work and the exposure led organically to his current agency. Going East’s website describes their work as: ‘A process of dialogue, crazy imagination, sketches, materials studies and traditional skills.’

Going East has six permanent staff, including the company’s other founder Anaïs Torfs. In addition, they work with an extensive team of freelancers and drafting services. Anyone who visits their website will have to agree that they create very distinctive designs. Mertens: ‘We take care of the entire process, from finishings to furniture design, decoration and art. We do this for private homes as well as for office buildings. This yields crosspollination for us, too. We use the knowledge we gain working on private homes in offices, and vice versa, we apply the things we learn working on office buildings in private homes. We construct as few new buildings as possible. Our main focus is refurbishing and reconstructing. We design along with the client, is how you should see it. We also develop numerous products, such as furniture and lighting fixtures. We try to design as much as possible

ourselves, in accordance with the client’s wishes. So we have a broad portfolio. This cross-pollination is very important for us. The ideal spread of assignments for us – and this is what we aim for – is one third private homes, one third offices and one third shops and restaurants.’

Balance

When asked what distinguishes Going East, Mertens says: ‘We allude to the East in our name. That doesn’t mean we design in an eastern style, or anything like that, but rather that we follow the philosophy of building and designing in balance with the environment, with a focus on materials and a focus on the environment. So, honest materials and respect for craftsmanship. We work with the best craftspeople, great welders and carpenters, that’s a high priority for us. It also matters that all the elements in a space are aligned. An ugly chair in a beautiful room is still an ugly chair and, conversely, you can design a beautiful piece of furniture, but if the space in which you

‘We follow the philosophy of building and designing in balance with the environment.’

place it is ugly, it still doesn’t make sense. Everything has to fit together. Our keywords are “honest and sustainable”. So concrete is concrete and wood is wood, preferably sourced in Europe.’ Still, there is an element of the East in the agency’s name, according to Mertens: ‘After I graduated in interior architecture, I travelled the world, primarily in the East, and I think that’s where I found my inspiration.’

Timeless

Belgium-based Going East is an international company: they have recently had assignments in Spain, France and Capo Verde. They also frequently work in the Netherlands, where they have currently been commissioned by AHAM to work on an office project in Oostenburg. Mertens explains: ‘We are going to further finish a new office building in Oostenburg. Our challenge is to create an atmosphere that is neither old nor young, but contemporary and yet sustainable too. A timeless design.’ The building in Oostenburg was designed by the architect Bastiaan Jongerius. Mertens has the following to say about their collaboration: ‘We sat together a few times to talk about whether our proposals were suited to the parameters of the building, and whether it all aligned properly. This is obviously very important.’



Expats in Amsterdam



Amsterdam’s growth is driven mainly by the influx of expats. How do they find their way, and what is life like for them as residents of the capital?

Expats are people from another country, usually well-educated and enterprising. Most of Amsterdam’s expats come from other European countries, the US and India. Amsterdam has always been

an international city and there are currently people of no fewer than 88 different nationalities in the city. It’s also a city that is growing again. With the exception of the Covid years, the city’s population

has been increasing by 10.000 annually. At the moment there are roughly 875.000 residents, of whom an estimated ten percent are expats. The expectation is that the city’s population will pass the

one million mark in 2030. This growth is largely driven by the immigration of expats and the influx of students. Various studies have shown that people relocate to

Amsterdam because its large IT and financial services sector make it an attractive fintech hub. The city is highly appealing to expats, who end up filling vacancies for which

there isn’t enough qualified local manpower. There are several reasons why the Netherlands is attractive to expats: it is perceived as having a good



work-life balance, commute times are short and the cost of living is lower than, say, in London, Dubai or Shanghai. And of course there's the enticing fiscal benefit: for the first five years of their residence here, expats only pay 30 percent income tax.

Contact with locals

Many Dutch people perceive expats as employees who only stay

here for a brief period and therefore don't really connect with the local population. However, this isn't really accurate. This is also what Erica Ackerman and Tara Alapiessa of Orange Homes Relocation have found. Both expats themselves, they say: 'When people talk about expats, they more or less imagine these are people stopping over on their way to somewhere else. But nume-

rous expats have been living here for a long time. Their children go to school here and they have no plans to leave.'

Confidence

Expats sometimes find it tough to connect with Dutch people. But what do Dutch people themselves think of expats? According to UvA urban geographer Willem Boterman, the term expat has

become a shorthand for numerous grievances people have about the city. In an interview with Het Parool he says: 'Affordability, of course, but also the sense of alienation people experience as the city changes. The expat is a convenient scapegoat, because there is always the underlying issue of loyalty. The expat's motherland is always somewhere else.'

Over the centuries, Amsterdam has always been a city of immigrants, although the DNA of these immigrants has changed over time. Boterman: 'I think we should have more confidence in the city's ability to retain its own identity. People who settle here, ultimately learn the language and learn to cycle. And many people have children. That is often the key to integration.'

Amsterdam ranks number 9 on the list of world 'most liveable cities' of the World Economic Forum



Nick and Francesca Hobbs: 'We'll stay here anywhere between two and twenty years.'

18 Nick and Francesca Hobbs and their three-year-old son Jack have only been living in Amsterdam for a little while. Before they moved to Amsterdam, they lived in Oxfordshire, England.

Nick was offered a job with a commercial real estate investment company, similar to the work that he did in England. Nick: 'I was able to

get a great job here and we thought it would be good to come and live in Amsterdam.' At the time of this interview, they'd only been here a week,

but they were already sure that they were going to like it. They found an AHAM apartment on the Overtoom with the help of Orange Homes. Francesca: 'I saw a recommendation for this agency on the 'Amsterdam Mamas' Facebook page. I hit it off with Erica from Orange Homes immediately. She set to work for us, visiting apartments and sending us videos. We viewed this apartment over FaceTime and immediately knew it was exactly what we were looking for.' Nick: 'The location is amazing. We're really close to the shops and the Vondelpark. We've got a large

space with three bedrooms so we can host guests overnight. The apartment has high ceilings and big windows, but we barely hear the noise of the city: this is a great place in every way.'



'Amsterdam is a much better place to raise a child than London.'



Safe

How long do they think they'll live in Amsterdam? Francesca: 'Anywhere between two and twenty years. We'll see what happens. We both think Amsterdam is a much better

place to raise a child than London.' Nick: 'London is so big and it's also much less safe than Amsterdam.' Francesca: 'I think it's wonderful that everyone cycles here. We're going to join in, of course.' When we

ask Francesca and Nick if they know their neighbours yet, they answer: 'Only one, but we've just got here. We are sure that we will meet them.' They were very impressed by the fact that AHAM's profits

go to the developing world. 'Erica mentioned it, and we thought it was really special. As was the fact that there was no bidding war with other tenants. It was simply, this is the price. That doesn't happen often these days.'





Orange Homes Relocation

‘We help people build new lives’

Tara (left on the picture) was born in Kenya, moved to England with her parents, then lived in Finland before coming to the Netherlands with her Finnish husband. Erica used to work for the Diplomatic Service and has lived in no fewer than fourteen different countries. They both initially worked for the same relocation company and then decided to start their own agency four and a half years ago.

Erica has this to say about the name Orange Homes: ‘We’re both British but we really love the

Erica Ackerman and Tara Alapiessa started Orange Homes Relocation four years ago. Both are real globetrotters.

Netherlands and we were looking for a name that would do justice to that feeling. We both came up with orange at more or less the same time.’ When asked what they wanted to do differently to existing agencies, they both came up with the words ‘friendliness and integrity’. There are a number of major players in this market, but according to Erica and Tara, they don’t all offer a

full package of immigration and housing services. Orange Homes takes care not only of residence and work permits, but also of finding a home.

Passing through

We usually think of expats as people who are not going to stay in the Netherlands for more than a few years and are therefore more or less passing through. But there’s a large group of expats who’ve been living here for a long time, who have children at school here and who have no plans to leave. Tara: ‘Many expats don’t come

with the intention of staying for a long time, but then they experience the quality of life here and decide to stay anyway. Look at me: I never thought I would stay, but I’ve been living here for 23 years now and I’m not leaving.’ Erica: ‘Quality of life here is very high.’ Tara: ‘It’s safe and clean and the quality of housing has improved hugely. And because you can do nearly everything by bike, a lot of people here have a healthy lifestyle.’ Erica: ‘For people with children, there aren’t many places in the world that can compete with Amsterdam.’ The origins of groups of expats changes over time. Erica: ‘During the Trump era many U.S. citizens came over here because they no longer felt at ease in their own country. In the run-up to Brexit a lot of English people arrived, before the start of the global pandemic we saw Italians coming because there weren’t many job opportunities in their own country for young people with a good education, and now

‘The Netherlands are considered as a place with a good balance between work en private life.’

it’s Russians and people from Ukraine.’ Tara: ‘The Netherlands is really regarded as a land of opportunities.’ Erica: ‘But that’s changing. The costs of living here are becoming very high. You need a good income to live comfortably.’ The idea that expat housing costs are typically paid by the employer is a misconception. Tara: ‘That all disappeared with the 2008/2009 financial crisis. Before that time there often were housing and school allowances, but the tide has turned. In some cases, when children are thirteen or fourteen years old, your only choice is to send them to international school, which is very expensive.’

Baltic countries

Last year we saw a big increase in expat arrivals and they came mostly from India, South Africa

and the Baltic countries. Erica: ‘When a country has political tensions or economic problems, it provokes an immediate exodus of people looking for a better life elsewhere.’ Tara: ‘The Netherlands has a long tradition in this regard. People have been coming here from all over the world for centuries and that’s never really changed.’ When asked how expats get on with locals, Tara provides an example from her own experience: ‘When we came to live here, the neighbours said to us that they weren’t going to make too much effort to get to know us, because we’d be leaving soon enough. I was a bit taken aback. But over the course of the years, as we stayed on, it became very different.’ Erica: ‘I always tell my clients to introduce themselves when they meet their neighbours in the street or anywhere else. Make sure they know who you are. That surprises some people. Introduce yourself to your neighbours? It’s not the done thing in London or New York. It is par for the course here, but new arrivals are not used to it. In some countries, it’s often neighbours who approach newcomers with a cake or suchlike, to welcome them. These are cultural differences.’ Tara: ‘We advise our new tenants to put a card through their neighbours’ letter box and suggest meeting soon. You may never hear back, we tell them, but you never know – they may become your best friends.’



Stairs
Erica: ‘I always say to foreigners who come and live here: walk on the right – on the stairs, on the pavement – because Dutch people always walk on the right. Then you distinguish yourself from tourists who walk all over the place.’ When asked what problems foreigners coming to live here tend to run into, Tara says: ‘When it comes to housing, many expats find the steep stairs difficult. When it comes to people, the directness of

the Dutch raises some eyebrows. Dutch people say things as they are. If you are from a culture where people tend to beat about the bush, that can be difficult.’ Erica and Tara have only got good things to say about working with AHAM. Tara: ‘The accommodation that AHAM provides is always good quality for a fair price. And the houses are well maintained. That’s why we’re always happy to work with AHAM. It’s a completely different story with some of the greedy

landlords who are also active in the housing market. We always tell expat tenants about AHAM’s social mission too, and they find that really special.’ ‘Care and friendliness are what is most important in our work,’ says Erica. ‘That’s what we said to each other when we started. You have no idea how stressed people often are when they come to us. They have children and pets but can’t find a house. In the pandemic we also did grocery shopping for some

tenants who’d just arrived, and we made appointments for them to get tested and vaccinated.’
Social media
Expats house hunting here find Orange Homes through the grapevine, or through recommendations shared on social media. Erica: ‘We also advertise through Google, but most clients, whether business or private, find us through social media. We actually received dozens of referrals from just one business.’

Tara: ‘What we do is really such a personal service that you want to look for personal recommendations. It’s not like getting your car repaired; this is about your life.’ Erica: ‘The best compliment we get is when people say: you changed our life. Because that’s what we do. We help people build new lives.’ Have they noticed any major changes in Amsterdam life? Erica: ‘Something we hear from our clients is that everything is getting so expensive.’ Tara: ‘I think there’s

a lot of change in local culture. A sort of social democracy used to prevail in the Netherlands and Amsterdam. There always have been people with a lot of money, but they didn’t flaunt it. For some time now another culture has been emerging where people show off how rich they are with expensive cars and possessions. It’s heading in the same direction as London; that’s a big change and not necessarily a good one.’

22 Yevhenii Kalashnikov:
‘We feel we’ve landed
in the right city.’

Yevhenii Kalashnikov arrived in Amsterdam in October last year with his wife Tetiana and their cat Manya. He is a technical artist at a large IT company.

Yevhenii: ‘The company I work for offered me the option to come and work here and we jumped at the opportunity. We already

started to try and get an idea of the Amsterdam real estate market before we got here. The Netherlands is a very attractive place to live and

work in and so there’s a lot of demand for places to live, especially in Amsterdam. I asked around in my social network and that’s how I

came upon Orange Homes Relocation and ultimately AHAM. And I have to say, I would’ve never imagined that everything could have gone so smoothly in a country we didn’t know. We found a fantastic apartment on Kanaalstraat and we now feel totally at home.’

Busy cafés

When asked about his initial experiences, he says: ‘We really love the atmosphere here. People work hard, but there’s clearly space to have a life alongside. I see busy cafés and restaurants all around me with people enjoying themselves. It’s great to see. And it may sound strange to people who’ve always lived in the Netherlands, but the



weather here makes me happy too. I love the rain and the wet streets where suddenly the sun will break through; you sometimes get rain and sunshine and snow in a single day. I love this wonderful nature.’

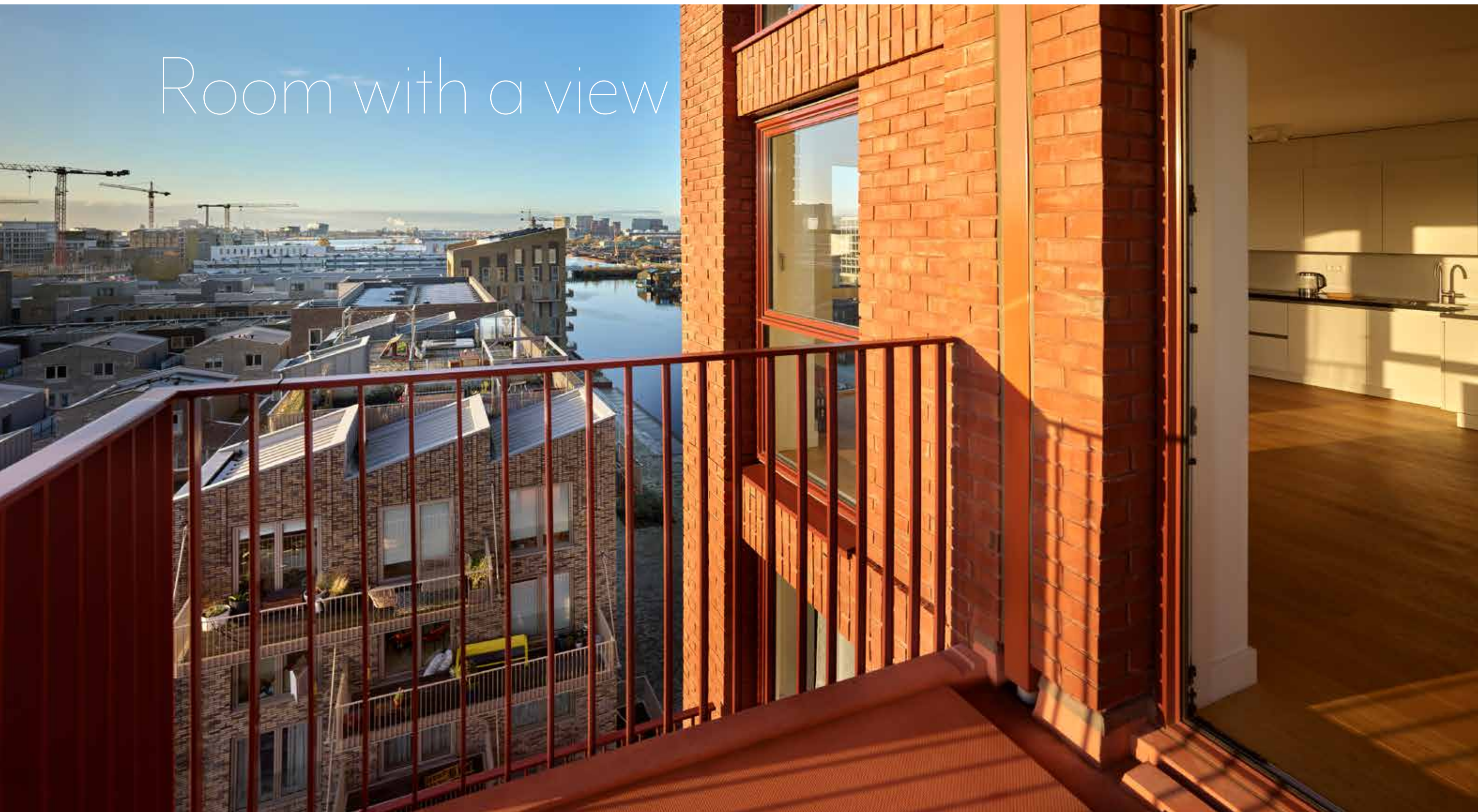
The couple thinks they’ll stay in Amsterdam as long as work keeps them here. ‘We try to live in the moment and enjoy it.’ Yevhenii thinks it’s really amazing that the Dutch cycle so much. ‘It’s an easy and healthy means of

transport, but not so many countries have taken to it in such a major way.’ As they haven’t lived here very long, they haven’t got to know all their neighbours yet. ‘But the neighbours we have already met are quick to offer help

with translating and sharing information about the city. It really gives us the feeling that we’ve landed in the right place.’



Room with a view



Adres: Melkdistelstraat 76. **Oppervlakte:** 75 m² (807 sq. ft.), two bedrooms **Beautiful natural light:** the sun comes into the living room almost all day long as it's a corner property, which makes this room very light.

Most distinctive feature: unique view over Amsterdam North and the IJ from nearly every room. A very light and comfortable modern residence.



‘Making it cleaner and nicer and creating community’

26

Bianca Gravemaker is the shopping street manager for the Middenweg area. She maintains contact with the municipality of behalf of all the shopkeepers. The question that drives her: what makes the Middenweg unique and what do we need to do to make it even better?

Bianca Gravemaker was born and raised in Amsterdam. She and her husband run Alexander Hairsty-
lers on Middenweg. She’s also been actively involved in the Middenweg business association for several years. ‘I took up the baton from the previous board ten years ago. I had rather outspoken ideas about how business should be conducted and that means you can’t stay on the sidelines.’ A lot of streets have associations which entrepreneurs can join on a voluntary basis and that organise all sorts of activi-
ties, like holiday lighting. But the Middenweg business association wanted to become a BIZ.

Co-partnership

BIZ stands for Business Investment Zone (Bedrijven Investeringszone). Bianca: ‘It’s a co-partnership with the municipality. I call it a business association 2.0. You define an area and form a collective with all the entrepreneurs from that area. To do this you need a level of support with strong conditions attached.’ BIZ status is always granted for a

five-year period. Bianca: ‘In our case that was 2017 to 2022. We now have to go through the whole process again for the next period which starts in 2023.’ The Middenweg and area BIZ covers the area from Kamerlingh Onneslaan to the Linnaeuskade bridge and part of the Ringdijk and Linnaeuskade. Currently the Middenweg BIZ has 56 members. Bianca: ‘The importance of a BIZ like this lies mostly in the fact that all the entrepreneurs collaborate. That way you’re a serious party at the table with the municipality and it makes closing contracts easier for things like Christmas lighting or graffiti and waste removal. These are mostly multi-year contracts. As a BIZ your income for the next five years is guaranteed and therefore parties like the municipality know you can meet your obligations.’ According to Bianca, the advantage of this sort of organisation is that it eliminates the free riders: shop-keepers who benefit from a busi-ness association without paying their dues.



Highly educated

Bianca describes the population of this neighbourhood as ‘highly educated with a lot of dual income households’. There are a lot of children in the neighbourhood and the Middenweg is an affluent street. ‘Because it’s close to the Science

‘As a BIZ you’re a serious party at the table with the municipality.’

Park, a lot of well-to-do people, expats and students live here. It’s a very nice neighbourhood, which has undergone a lot of rejuvenation over the last twenty years.’ Bianca explains that her tasks as shopping street manager mostly consist of taking care of the communication between entre-preneurs and the municipa-
lity. As shopping street manager, she also deals with all sorts of ad hoc things like subsidy requests for shared business activities, for example holiday lighting in winter and planters in summer. ‘We also develop activities to get locals more

involved in the street. ‘Making it cleaner and nicer and creating community,’ is how Bianca sums up her role as shopping street manager. A characteristic of Middenweg is that nearly all the shopkeepers are still independent entrepreneurs, and not managers working for big chains. ‘We don’t have those here and we’d like to keep it that way. Therefore, we have started working with the municipality on a project called “Street-oriented Approach Attractive Shopping Areas” (Straat-gerichte Aanpak Aantrekkelijke Winkelgebieden). We’d like to have more contact with the owners of the buildings. We started out by identifying them all because most of the owners are invisible. Fortunately, AHAM is an exception; not long ago they sent someone to our annual general meeting.’ AHAM was the only building owner to get involved on their own initiative.

27

Retail space

Bianca: ‘We’d like to move towards a system where a property owner, with say three potential tenants for their retail space, would get in touch with the shopping street manager and ask: who would you like to see as a shopkeeper in this building? In which case we could say: not the fourth optician’s, or the sixth hairdresser’s. But it’s very difficult to get in touch with the property owners, even though it is obviously in their interest, too, to have the street flourish. And we’d also like to collaborate more with the other BIZs in Amsterdam East, so that we can coordinate our plans together – whether for organising the Sinterklaas party or getting refuse collected.’ They have noticed that shop premises are staying vacant for





28

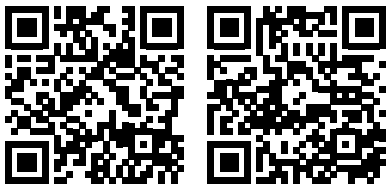
somewhat longer this year. ‘There are currently quite a few holes in our streetscape and that’s a shame. Some shopkeepers didn’t survive the effects of the pandemic. That’s why we’re working on the street’s identity. We may well have an idea of how we want the street to look,

‘I had rather outspoken ideas about how business should be conducted.’

but visitors may experience it very differently. The question is: what makes Middenweg unique and

what do we need to do to make it even better? We sit down with the municipality every month to discuss how things are going and to see what we can do together. For example, we were recently informed that ten of our seventeen current parking spots must go. As you can imagine, we’d like to discuss that in more detail because how it’ll be done is of course very important for us.’

For further information see:



Pioneer tenants: ‘It’s Amsterdam’s version of Brooklyn’

Oostenburgermiddenstraat is still a construction site, but anyone visiting this part of the Amsterdam-Oost district will immediately see how dynamic this street in the trendy Czaar Peter neighbourhood is going to be. Among the comings and goings of trucks, a few promising businesses have already opened, run by what AHAM calls ‘pioneer tenants’. AHAM is one of the developers of the area.



The building with the glass façade at number 156 is home to Le Sublime, a wellness studio where Virginie Benichou offers LED light therapy, among other things. 'I was the very first business to open on this street,' says the French-born proprietor. She already moved into the commercial property in the spring of 2022. The property has a view of the distinctive, monumental Van Gendthallen premises on the opposite side of the road.

Fashion industry

Virginie loves the light, tall space, partially divided across two floors. The ground floor displays colourful, unique clothing and includes a corner offering face creams and hair products by the Apivita brand. But Virginie's core business takes place in the adjoining studios, where she provides LED light therapy. 'It's by far the best method for improving and rejuvenating the quality of your skin.'

The stairs lead up to three stylish treatment rooms, hosting a Tibetan masseuse, a Japanese acupuncturist and an osteopath. 'In spite of the chaotic situation outside, our first customers have already found their way to Le Sublime,' says Virginie.

Luxury accessories

Mid-January, number 126 also opened its doors to the public. This corner building is home to the DOUXE Hotel Luxury concept store. Here you'll find complete hotel beds, bed linen made of Egyptian cotton and other luxury accessories. 'It's the first hotel lifestyle store in the Netherlands and Europe,' relates Liselotte Koenders. She established the DOUX label in 2010 together with her husband, Bart Kleiman. 'Initially we only sold our brand to hotels and the upmarket segment, but since then we have expanded to become a brand for consumers who want to bring the luxury of a hotel into their homes.'



Virginie Benichou:
'I already greeted the first costumers in Le Sublime'



Liselotte Koenders:
'A brand for those who want to take the luxury of a hotel home'



They have a showroom in The Hague, but Liselotte and her husband felt that their first concept store had to be in Amsterdam. ‘When we heard about this location, we immediately made enquiries,’ says Liselotte. She is convinced Oostenburgermiddenstraat is going to be successful. ‘The Van Gendthallen are going to house enterprises dealing in art, technology, innovation and sustainability, and I have also understood there is going to be a food hall and a shipyard too.’ She also knows that the Roest creative zone annex restaurant and urban beach, which was closed for a while, has been purchased by AHAM who have plans to regenerate it and create something vibrant. ‘This is a wonderful area, where old and new are converging,’ Liselotte concludes.

Brooklyn
Brother and sister Heuver call the neighbourhood around Oostenburgermiddenstraat, ‘Amsterdam’s version of Brooklyn’. ‘There are fun establishments

opening up all over the place. Mid-January, they opened their own business at number 140. It’s a daylight photography studio, consisting of two spaces: a multi-functional basic space and a living room with varying atmospheres. The spaces can be booked together or separately for photo shoots, film recordings and exclusive events. The name I’M Studio alludes to the initials of their first names: Imke, formerly an executive producer on several TV shows, who runs the business side of the studio, and Maarten, a fashion and portrait photographer who came up with the idea of studio rental because he never spends five days a week behind the camera himself. The ongoing construction work is quite a challenge, says Maarten. ‘There is still a lot of work to do on the Van Gendthallen complex, but I’m convinced that this is going to be a vibrant location. Easily accessible too, by car as well as on public transport, and of course by bike.’



*Imke en Maarten Heuver:
'This is going to be a vibrant spot'*



Scandinavian coffee culture

Both at the Sarphatipark and the Europaplein you'll find a delicious piece of Sweden in Amsterdam. Sweet and savoury rolls, but especially: coffee, meticulously roasted and brewed.

'We want to introduce Scandinavian coffee culture to Amsterdam,' says Daniella Nyström from behind the counter at the Scandinavian Embassy Bakery on Amsterdam's Europaplein. There

is an assortment of freshly baked sweet Swedish products on display, which combine perfectly with the lightly roasted coffee they serve here. 'The lighter the roast, the more intense the aroma

from the beans,' explains the thirty-year-old native of Stockholm. It was barista Nicolas Castagno, twelve years her senior, who deepened her prior interest in coffee. She met him in 2013 in a café in Amsterdam, shortly after having relocated to the Netherlands. He turned out to be an Argentinian who had lived in Sweden, where he had been crowned 'Brewers Cup Champion of Sweden'. Three

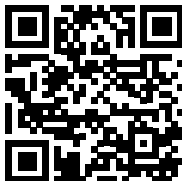
years later, it was Daniella who placed first at the Dutch coffee championships. While she serves up a double espresso, she says: 'Once I get into something, I become really fanatical.' By now, the Scandinavian Embassy Bakery is the second

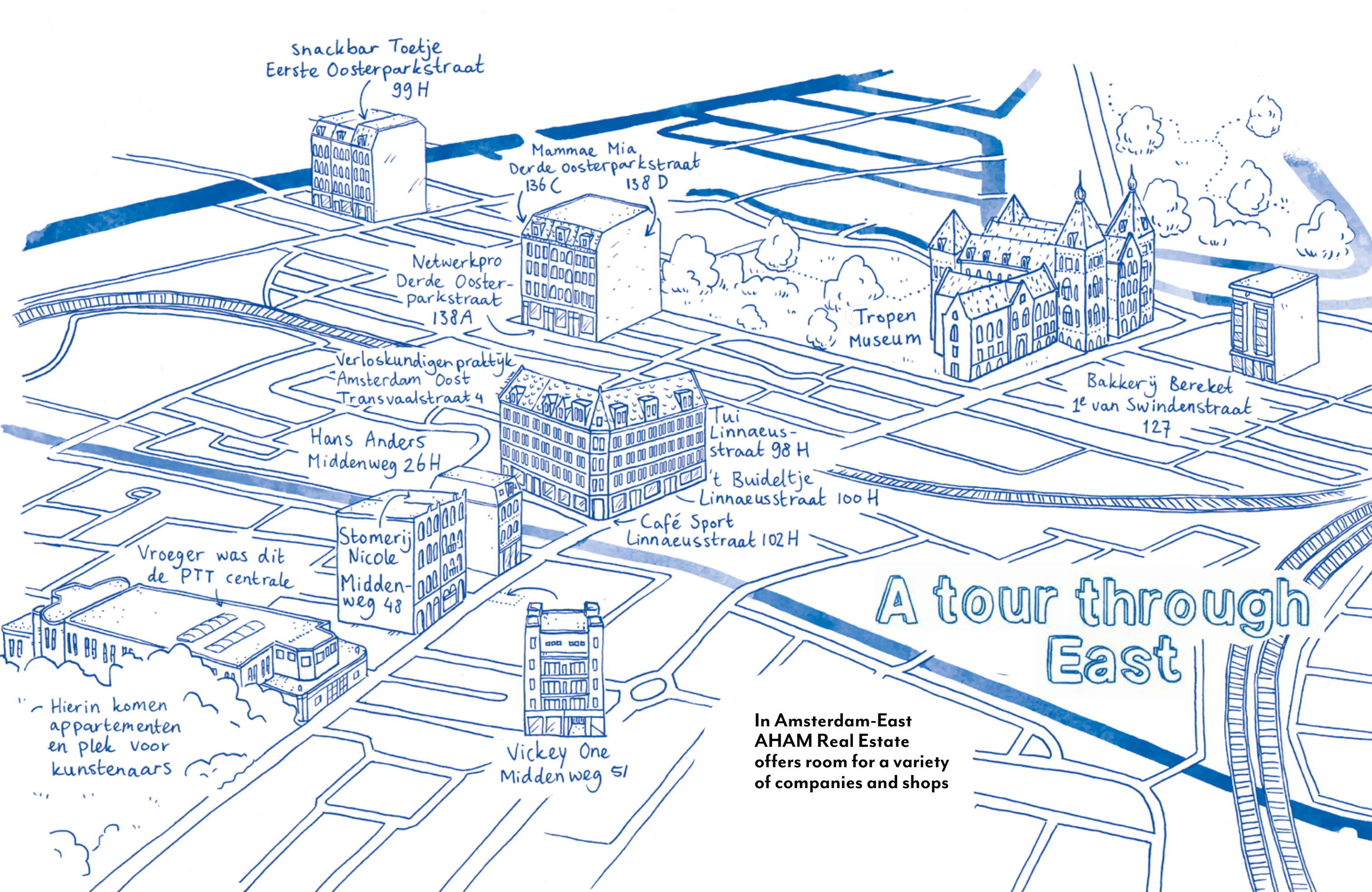
establishment the couple operates. Earlier, in 2014, they opened the Scandinavian Embassy on Amsterdam's Sarphatipark. It was a huge success: it's always packed. The outfit is not only popular because of its coffee and sweet pastries, but also thanks to its savoury lunch

'Once I get into something, I become really fanatical.'

dishes, like their gravadlax with poached egg on Danish rye bread, served with coffee. In March 2022 Daniella and Nicolas found the perfect location for their bakery annex coffee bar in a bright property belonging to AHAM, near RAI conference centre. Relaxing on the windowsill, you can enjoy a super fresh Swedish cinnamon, cardamom or sourdough pastry. With a perfectly brewed cup of coffee, obviously.

**Scandinavian Embassy Bakery, Europaplein 87
Scandinavian Embassy, Sarphatipark 34**





Snackbar Toetje
Eerste Oosterparkstraat
99 H

Mammae Mia
Derde Oosterparkstraat
136 C 138 D

Netwerkpro
Derde Ooster-
parkstraat
138 A

Verloskundigen praktijk
Amsterdam Oost
Transvaalstraat 4

Hans Anders
Middenweg 26 H

Stomerij Nicole
Midden-
weg 48

Vroeger was dit
de PTT centrale

Vickey One
Middenweg 51

Tropen
Museum

Bakkerij Bereket
1^e van Swindenstraat
127

Tui
Linnaeus-
straat 98 H

t Buideltje
Linnaeusstraat 100 H

Café Sport
Linnaeusstraat 102 H

A tour through East

" Hierin komen
appartementen
en plek voor
kunstenaars

In Amsterdam-East
AHAM Real Estate
offers room for a variety
of companies and shops

De Prael brews craft beer for AHAM

De Prael microbrewery provides work for 150 people whose job prospects would otherwise be poor. On the occasion of the launch of the Huys&Werf project in Oostenburg, De Prael supplied beers with custom AHAM labels.

38

Brouwerij De Prael – a household name among craft beer enthusiasts – was founded as an employment initiative for people with psychiatric problems. Nowadays it employs about 150 people, across four locations, whose work prospects would otherwise be limited. It also has a hugely popular tasting room, and the brewery is flourishing. Fer Kok, co-founder of Brouwerij De Prael, is responsible for the brewing process, beer quality and staff care. Kok: ‘In

about 1990, Arno Kooy and I were working as psychiatric nurses. And we were both enthusiastic home brewers. Then as now there was a huge need for jobs for people who required psychiatric care, people with schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and suchlike. Just like anyone else these people wanted three things: their own home, a job and preferably a partner. We were already engaged in finding homes for these people, but once they had

them, they were soon climbing the walls because they had nothing to do. Fully fledged jobs, in the sense of having the feeling of making a genuine contribution, just weren’t there for them.’

Part-time

‘We were working with people in part-time care, alongside which they needed something meaningful to do. We sometimes put our hobby to use brewing beer for special occasions and at some point,

we came up with the idea of doing it commercially. Initially, this concept was frowned upon: psychiatry and alcohol. From time to time we got comments along the lines of: perhaps you should start up a drugs laboratory as well. In the year 2000 we decided to try and get the project off the ground professionally. We wrote to all sorts of funds and the hospital joined in too. At the outset, our main concern was creating work. Incidentally, there wasn’t much of a beer culture at the time. What we nowadays consider craft beers were then drunk by old tree huggers, but young people, like students, just drank lager, lager and more lager! The Brouwerij ‘t IJ and Maximiliaan breweries were

already around by then and there were a few beer cafés, but that was about it.

Brewing installation

‘So, then we needed to look for business premises and a brewing installation. A new installation was much too expensive for us. We chanced upon a business that worked with milk tanks and they built us a stainless steel installation. That’s how we started out at the Schinkelhaven industrial park. At first, we called it Brouwerij De Parel (The Pearl Brewery). It didn’t take long for us to get fifteen, twenty employees and in under two years we were at fifty. At that time, we didn’t actually make our money from selling beer but from the activities we organized for patients in the care sector, for which we could charge healthcare providers.’

As it turned out, the name De Parel had been registered by another brewery, so we had to come up with another name. We chose the anagram Prael. Kok: ‘In the end we



were happy with the name. We also started thinking about broadening our activities, for example with a tasting room. Then we got our space on Oudezijds Voorburgwal through heritage conserva-

‘In the beginning people sometimes looked at it askance: psychiatry and alcohol.’





but we've always had a lot of support. We've had a tasting room since 2011 which now provides our income.' Kok has the following to say about the collaboration with AHAM: 'One of our employees put us in touch with them. I think that as a social enterprise our business really appealed to them. They came here and we clicked. I think that the social side that AHAM shares brought us together. They wanted us to brew a package of four beers to give to new tenants of their Huys&Werf project.' This is how Isabel, a bitter blonde made with filtered Amsterdam rainwater, and De Fabrieksraad, an IPA with a hint of grapefruit, got their AHAM labels designed by Studio Hudson. 'The AHAM people came here from time to time to taste what we were brewing. These were fun gatherings. At one point we even brought out a wooden barrel. I can tell you: it didn't take long before it was empty.'

The AHAM beers.

tion organisation Stadsherstel. In 2005 there were two craft beer breweries in Amsterdam; now there are about fifty. So, this market has grown hugely. Perhaps we weren't the trend-setters, but we were among the vanguard.'

Branches

De Prael now has branches in Utrecht, Groningen and The Hague and employs about 150 people. Kok: 'I actually believe that every city in the Netherlands should have a De Prael brewery, not because we want

to sell masses of beer, but to provide work for people who might otherwise struggle to find employment. We have found that, providing you make a bit of an effort, these people can still be functional employees.' De Prael has been located in Amsterdam's Red Light District since 2007. 'We have invested heavily in the meantime. It's always been a balance for us between financial and social returns. In the first few years we didn't have a tasting room, and those were lean years,



'In the beginning people sometimes looked at it askance: psychiatry and alcohol.'

Ever since it was constructed, the block on Bos en Lommerweg has been owned by AHAM Real Estate's parent company J.H.F. Schopman and Sons. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a plan emerged to make the green oasis in the courtyard garden accessible to residents.

A green heart for Bos en Lommer



The block on Bos en Lommerweg was built during the time of the Amsterdam School style of architecture, and consists of classical residential units with covered stairwell entrances. The building hosts 295 apartments. Part of the ground floor is taken up by retail units and other commercial spaces, the rest is residences. Some residential units have gardens, most have balconies. There is a huge, 4000 m² / 43,000 square foot garden between the buildings. It is completely unkempt and has tall trees and shrubs. It's paradise for hedgehogs, bees, birds and other flora and fauna, but the garden has one major drawback: it is inaccessible for the residents. So it's more like a garden just to look at. During the Covid period, when everyone was trapped between their own four

walls, people felt this lack of accessibility as a great loss.

Sustainability

'Even before Covid, our sustainability team was thinking about what we could do with the garden,' explains Tim van Schijndel, managing director of AHAM. 'We were also considering roof gardens, and then the pandemic hit. Initially, most people were afraid to go outside. You weren't allowed out after ten in the evening anyway. What a luxury it would be if you could simply go for a walk in your own courtyard garden, without any law enforcers to stop you. That's when we came up with a plan for an accessible courtyard garden. We approached De Gezonde Stad (The Healthy City), a foundation committed to creating a greener

Amsterdam. We had previously had good experiences working with them on a greening project. First of all, De Groene Stad organised a meeting of residents. After all, it was ultimately going to be their garden. We had presented a list of general requirements and we wanted to flesh this out together with the residents. Personally, I was thinking of garden plots for growing vegetables and that people would want to exercise in their gardens, maybe they would like to have some fitness equipment. The latter was not greeted with much enthusiasm. The residents wanted to maintain peace and quiet, and didn't want, say, a busy playground. They did want a place to meet each other, a vegetable garden and footpaths. We listened carefully to them. De Gezonde Stad played a key role in this process. Of course, it was a nice question for the residents: "Tell us what you want to do with this green area." By the way, if no one

'They wanted a place to meet each other, a vegetable garden and footpaths.'

had wanted anything to change, we wouldn't have done anything.'

Liveable

For De Gezonde Stad, greening is a major component of keeping the city sustainable, climate-proof and liveable. The foundation's objective is that by 2025 the city will have twice as much green as it had in 2015. This can be accomplished in all sorts of ways: on roofs and frontages, on paved squares, in forgotten parts of the city and on neglected vacant lots.

On behalf of De Gezonde Stad, Aukje Ypma was responsible for developing the courtyard garden in Bos en Lommer: 'Our role in the project was primarily to involve the residents and to ensure that it would become their garden. During the meetings, which were online because of Covid, it quickly became clear that the residents wanted a landscaped garden rather than an ornamental garden. They wanted the view to remain as it was, but they wanted more usage value from the garden. They wanted a meeting place and allotments for gardening, and most of all no noise or commotion. These were the guiding principles. Ultimately we engaged LANDLAB landscape architects to create a design for the garden.'

Design

'In the summer of 2021 we were asked to create a design for this courtyard garden,' says Ed Joosting Bunk, managing director of LANDLAB, who designed the garden together with Kim Kogelman. 'AHAM had already explored the courtyard garden at the Merkelbach block elsewhere in town, and that certainly gave them some ideas. Together with De Gezonde Stad, we immediately





Kim Kogelman, Ed Joosting Bunk, Michell Hamelijnc

decided to involve the residents in the design process. So the assignment became: create a design which takes into account the 300 people who live there and who will be using the garden. Involve residents in the plans. Create a garden design which will enable De Gezonde Stad to support residents who want to do something green. Create a garden that doesn't require too much maintenance and use sustainable materials. Initially, we presented three proposals to De Gezonde Stad and AHAM, after which we approached the residents with our first sketches.' 'Meanwhile, we started thinking about organising a workshop for the residents, to help them work out the details of the garden,' adds De Gezonde Stad's Ympa. 'Because the residents wanted a landscaped garden,' says Joosting Bunk, 'we kept as many trees as we could. Some of the trees here are 60, 70 years old. We only applied for felling licences for trees that would

otherwise have fallen down soon anyway.'

Machete

'The trees are important in the design,' according to Kogelman. 'The garden was a jungle when we first set foot in it. You literally needed a machete. But it had a distinct atmosphere from the get-go. We wanted to retain its rough character, but that's impossible if you also want the garden to be more accessible. That's why, in the design, we created new areas in the wooded section where you can spend leisurely time and go for a peaceful, short walk. Over on the other side of the garden, where there's more space, you can meet others and do some gardening. So there's more activity on that side, and there's a central section where people can sit and chat on circular benches. This part of the courtyard is fine for that, because that's where the residents' gardens are too. Residents with gardens also liked what was happening, because until then the courtyard had been completely inaccessible. Now there will be a place that people will use, with gardening containers and a

'The garden was a jungle, you literally needed a machete.'



Aukje Ypma

shed for tools.'

Aukje Ypma of De Gezonde Stad is in charge of the vegetable garden, and she assists residents when they need help. 'Along the residents' gardens, we will plant leafy, mixed hedges which offer privacy and produce the odd berry for colour and for the birds,' Kogelman continues. 'You can walk from there to the other side along meandering footpaths to the narrow section that is more landscaped. We're planting additional trees: a new tree for every old tree we chop down. The garden is and remains an oasis for animals and plants, for hedgehogs and bees. Moreover, we're upping biodiversity even more by planting undergrowth in the garden, including herbs like wild garlic and semi-wild plants which can spread by themselves.' If the implementation goes according to plan, the garden will be ready by spring 2023. It will be a courtyard garden that not only complies with sustainability requirements, but also brings all the residents together and gives them a sense of community. They have been involved in the project from its inception, and it is absolutely going to be their garden.



'It quickly became clear that the residents wanted a landscaped garden.'

‘We’re very happy here’

46 Since 1 August 2022, sociology undergraduate Floor den Boer (22), and final year cultural anthropology and developmental sociology student Veronique Bon (25), have been renting a second-floor apartment on Kijkduinstraat in Amsterdam’s Bos en Lommer district.

Floor: ‘We were both living in student digs in different neighbourhoods. I lived in Czaar Peterbuurt and Veronique in Staatsliedenbuurt. As life partners, we had already been



discussing moving in together. When Veronique had to leave her student accommodation, it seemed like a natural next step to make our plans concrete. We started looking for a place in May 2022. Once we contacted AHAM, we found a house within three days!’

Ceilings

Veronique: ‘Our flat is 55 m² (180 sq. ft.) and is very conveniently arranged. Besides the living room there are three more rooms: a bedroom, a guest room which also has a desk, and a room in which we can store all our clothes. The ceilings are higher here than in other houses, about 2.5 metres (8 ft.). That makes the rooms feel bigger.

Floor: ‘Our living room faces south, so we always have plenty of sunlight shining in. Wonderful. This is my favourite spot.’

Veronique: ‘There’s a weird diagonal alcove where the fireplace used to be. If you were to see it on a floorplan, you’d think: that’s strange. But it gives the living room something special.’

Floor: ‘Another benefit: the flat is well-insulated. Such a difference compared with my



‘A wooden plank floor was always my dream.’

previous student accommodation. There, the heat escaped straight out of the windows. Not only that, the floor was covered in creaky lino too. This place has wooden plank floors in every room. I always dreamed of something like this.’

Veronique: ‘The kitchen is fitted with lots of stylish SMEG equipment. If anything breaks, like the fridge door recently did, then someone from AHAM comes straight away to fix it. For example, the oven no longer works properly, so we’re getting a new one.’

Coffee hangout

Floor: ‘The location is amazing. We live a five-minute bike ride

from Bos en Lommerplein, where there are loads of supermarkets and shops.’

Veronique: ‘In the spring we drank coffee at the No Man’s Art Gallery on Bos en Lommerweg. We said to each other back then that this was such a great neighbourhood. Two months later we heard we would be living around the corner from there. Now the Gallery is our favourite coffee hangout.’

Floor: ‘The neighbourhood is diverse and trendy.’

Veronique: ‘Plus we’re close to Westerpark with its little eateries, and near Spaarndammerstraat – which has become really cool in recent years.’

Floor: ‘We’re very happy here!’

Recently, we even got a letter from AHAM that we will soon be able to access the courtyard garden.’

Veronique: ‘That’s just super blissful. We do have a little balcony of our own, which is lovely, but a courtyard garden

is fantastic. I love plants, I’ve collected them my whole life. As you can see, the entire house is full of them.’

Floor: ‘You won’t hear anything but praise from us. We’re really getting our money’s worth.’



Meaningful

Sint Antonius Stichting Projecten (SAS-P) supports millions of people living in poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa with financial aid. SAS-P provides financial support to promising and proven initiatives that offer people with no or low incomes the chance of a good education, good health and decent living conditions. Social entrepreneur Aart van den Beukel's Safisana initiative collects disease-causing human waste in slum districts and processes it to make gas, electricity and fertiliser. And the Kenyan nutritionist Wawira Njiru supports millions of children by tackling educational disadvantages, early school dropouts and poor academic performance through Food4Education. In this edition we would like to introduce you to the special stories behind Safisana and Food4Education. They are part of a meaningful portfolio of sixty charities partly supported by the contributions you make through your rent.

Suzanne van der Velden,
General Manager
Effective Filanthropy SAS-P



Kenyan nutritionist Wawira Njiru (32) is an entrepreneur and the founder and director of Food4Education. This social enterprise started out by providing nutritious meals to 25 schoolchildren who sat in class with rumbling tummies. Nowadays the organization supplies nutritious school meals to 100.000 Kenyan school children every day.



Eating for growing and learning

Wawira Njiru: 'I started Food4Education ten years ago, while I was studying nutrition at university in Australia. As a student I became very aware of the impact of a healthy diet on the performance and development of children. Far too many children go to school hungry in Kenya. This has demonstrably negative consequences for their growth and ability to learn. I decided that after graduating, I wanted to do my part in finding a solution to this issue.'

School meals

'I asked my parents and friends if they could identify the biggest problem in Kenyan public schools. Teachers said that many children had nothing to eat for lunch. That's when I realised what I needed to do: provide school meals. I started to collect money while I was still studying. We started out with 1.250,- dollar. We used it to set up a kitchen and hire a cook who prepared lunches for 25 school children. These consisted of corn or rice with beans and

fresh vegetables, which is a standard meal in Kenya. It was a resounding success: the children performed better and there were fewer dropouts. It was great to see; it kept me going. Once again it made me think, I must find a way to do this for everyone. I soon began to search for suitable board members for Food4Education. I had graduated in nutrition, but I didn't know how to run an organization. I was 21 years old, really young. But I listened to advice and was open to learning everything other people could teach me.'

Journey

'The growth of Food4Education was a journey; I had to convince a lot of people of the importance of a healthy diet, and that it is a real problem that a lot of children go to school hungry. I have had many conversations, made media appearances, given interviews and posted on Facebook. I had to generate a lot of



‘Far too many children go to school hungry in Kenya.’

interest to convey my passion for school meals. The main message has always been that there is a solution to the issues of school dropouts, poor school results and hungry schoolchildren. Many people doubted whether anything could be done at all about such an intractable problem. But subsidised school meals pay for themselves many times over. The World Food Programme has calculated that for every euro invested in healthy food, the socio-economic return is more than 9 euros per child. So the chance that a child grows up healthy and develops into an economically independent adult is considerably increased by Food4Education.’

Self-sustaining

‘After the initial success, I wanted to expand, because the initiative would only become self-sustaining if we could feed a million children every day. Food4Education’s greatest priority was scaling up. I found a kitchen in India where they prepared thousands of meals. In 2006 we built a new centralised kitchen based on that model, in which 3000 meals a day could be prepared. Initially, meals were paid for with cash, but in 2019 we started to use Tap2Eat and thanks to this mobile digital payment platform, we were able to take a giant

leap forward. We now have eight kitchens and a team of 600 people. We provide and distribute 100.000 meals a day. A school meal costs 15 cents. Parents pay half through the mobile Tap2Eat app, and the other half is subsidised with money from funds like the Sint Antonius Stichting. Parents who cannot afford the meals – about 10% – get them entirely paid for.’

The future

‘At the moment I am trying to get the Kenyan government to increase what it contributes to school meals, as a good investment in the next generation’s future. It has not been an easy path. It doesn’t help that I’m a young woman either. Policy makers don’t think: “Wow, what an inspiring young lady”, but rather: “What’s this naïve little girl doing here?” It’s thanks to my tenacity and focus that Food4Focus still hasn’t exhausted its limits. The problem may seem insurmountable – there are 10 million children in Kenya – but it can be solved and the results will exceed all the costs. If Kenyan children stay in school, perform better and don’t drop out because of hunger, that will be an amazing result which will pay off in the future. We have even noticed it at Food4Education: a number of children who we helped ten years ago with school meals have completed their education and are now working for us.’ www.food4education.org



Circular waste recycling

Entrepreneur Aart van den Beukel (52) is the founder and director of Safisana. This social enterprise recycles human waste from slum districts in Ghana to make gas and electricity. Organic fertiliser is made from the leftovers of this waste with added green waste, which farmers use to fertilise their land. Even wastewater is partly reused to irrigate the African soil.

Aart van den Beukel: ‘I had never been to Ghana before I started Safisana twelve years ago. I was planning to set up a circular enterprise before I got the idea of doing something in Africa. Entrepreneurship was my priority; the good cause came later. For ten years I had a bagel and espresso bar in Amsterdam. Then I joined Ecofys, a start-up focussed on sustainable energy. That’s where I learned about biogas. We wanted to come up with ways to use biogas, which is released by fermenting waste, to aid families in rural parts of Asia.’

Biogas

‘The 2008 financial crisis threw a spanner in the works of that project, but the biogas idea stuck. During my search for new investors, I came across people who were working on a concept for recycling human waste from African slums to make biogas. Waste processing is a big problem in Africa. The overcrowded cities lack good sewerage and sanitary facilities. This causes environmental pollution and contributes to the spread of diseases. The idea was to use the income from the biogas to finance the processing of residual waste streams. I was asked to execute this recycling concept as a

business in Africa. Rabobank and engineering HaskoningDHV were willing to invest.’

Viability

‘I gave myself two years to see if the plan was viable. Then I set up Safisana. We chose Ghana because it’s a safe country without too much corruption. First, I went to the Ghanaian capital Accra. I immediately hired a competent guy who could step in as manager in my place, because I was going to commute back and forth from the Netherlands. We found a suitable site for the project in the suburb of Ashaiman. We thought a pilot plant



‘Waste processing is a big problem in Africa.’





‘Our employees need the confidence to do it themselves.’

was the best way to show the locals how the circular economy waste recycling concept works. On this site we built a public toilet and a mini factory that ran on human excreta. Once it was built, we organised an opening ceremony with the district ‘mayor’ and the Dutch ambassador. We fried a local dish using biogas we’d generated. The people who’d come to watch reacted exuberantly with lots of laughter and whooping. They found it very funny that they were having this meal thanks to their poo.’

Enthusiastic

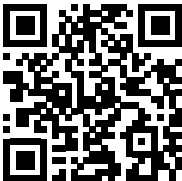
‘We had already made the locals enthusiastic. This was essential, as the Ghanaians are quite wary of Westerners with all their promises and development projects. I then went and calculated how much it would cost to build a large-scale factory. To ensure adequate supply we’d need a lorry to drive human waste from another neighbourhood. What would that cost? How much biogas would we need to generate and convert into electricity to sell as kilowatts per hour to the energy company? How much organic fertiliser would we need to produce to cover our costs? In 2013 I went to the African Development Bank with my busi-



ness plan. Together with the money I got from the Dutch government, I raised a total of 2.5 million. This was enough for us to finance the factory. But acquiring the necessary permits went at a snail’s pace. It drove me crazy. The factory was finally built in 2017.’

Business model

‘We are now funded by a permanent group of investors, including the Sint Antonius Stichting. They help us roll out our business model in other countries. Our primary goal is to contribute to the health of people in poor, over-populated communities. But you need many more Safisana factories to do that. We are doubling our capacity in Accra. And we are building a second factory in the city of Kumasi. I’ve noticed that it is much easier now than at the start of the Accra project. Safisana has put sustainable waste processing on the map in Ghana. The Russia-Ukraine war has provoked a shortage of synthetic fertilisers in Ghana; our organic fertiliser provides an alternative. In the meantime, I have had three children. We have considered as a family to go and live in Ghana, but it’s best if Ghanaians run the factory. When I’m there, everyone looks to me as director to make decisions. Our employees need the confidence to do it themselves. And that will only happen if we give them that confidence.’



Room for potential

DeepSpace is housed in a basement in the Jordaan district. It’s a space that is available to rent for creative and corporate meetings.

On the vibrant Tweede Goudsbloemdwarstraat in the Jordaan district, a side street off Lindengracht, diagonally opposite the famous De Kat in de Wijngaert pub, there is a conspicuous door. Behind the door, a staircase leads down to a room which no one expects would even be there, according to Mitchel Bakker.

Tongue in cheek

Mitchel Bakker and his friend Nigel Schat give guitar lessons in this room, which is known as DeepSpace. Bakker says the name is a reference to it being underground. ‘In addition, it’s a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the universe, in which anything is possible, and the path to the unknown which leads to creativity.’ DeepSpace is a venue that is available to rent for workshops, meetings, creative activities and receptions. The 50 m2 (165 sq. ft.) space has a wooden floor, potted plants, art, a conference table, a sofa, a small bar and a video projector. It is also possible to order (vegetarian) lunch.



Covid lockdowns forced the two guitar teachers, who had been friends for twenty years, to abandon their original teaching location and switch to online lessons, says Bakker. When tutoring in person became possible again, this basement became their new teaching base. After a root-and-branch refurbishment, the space turned out far more attractive than they had envisaged.

It was then they realised that DeepSpace had more potential than just as a location for guitar lessons. And so, they decided to rent the space out for meetings. Guests can stay for a drink at the bar afterwards, or repair to De Kat in de Wijngaert over the road.

DeepSpace, Tweede Goudsbloemdwarstraat 25



An oak floor, finished with transparent oil

Riga Vloeren is AHAM’s regular floor supplier.

Riga Vloeren en Kozijnen (Riga Floors and Frames) has been around for twenty years now and they always have some 80.000 m² (260.000 sq. ft.) of floors in stock. That’s enough to lay floors in a lot of houses, which is what Riga does. Riga is the wholesaler and Ramon van Leer is commercially responsible for existing customers as well as acquisition of new business. ‘Riga is a very well-known brand in and around greater Amsterdam,’ he says when we speak to him one afternoon in their warehouse on an industrial estate. ‘We don’t really advertise per se. I look on LinkedIn a lot, where you see lots of new properties and things like that. Establishing contact that way is not difficult. The most important thing is that we finish every job with full marks. Listen carefully to what your customer wants and always do the very best job you can. That works best.’

AHAM floors

AHAM has purchased floors from Riga for about five years now. Riga even speaks of an ‘AHAM floor’: the specific type of floor they lay in AHAM properties. Van Leer: ‘An oak floor, finished with uncoloured oil. A very classic floor with a rich feel. It’s a good choice, because

‘Listen carefully to what your customer wants and always do the very best job you can. That works best.’

AHAM has numerous classic properties to which this sensibility is suited. AHAM invests more time and energy in their residential premises than the average landlord, so it would be strange to fit these houses with a white PVC floor.’ In some historical buildings – such as canal townhouses – they prefer herringbone floors. ‘A normal plank style wooden floor wouldn’t look right there. As our standard, we supply oak plank wooden floors, and in special cases, we sit down to discuss what other type of floor would be more suitable.’ Riga doesn’t only supply floors, they lay them too. Van Leer: ‘We also do maintenance. If a floor no longer looks good when a tenant leaves, we replace it. We also have to be flexible: you can’t leave a house vacant for long because there’s no floor, so that requires efficient coordination.’



Room for starters

56

‘How do you like it? How do you feel about the result of the renovations?’ Linda Roggeband, asset manager at AHAM, asks the tenants on site. For her it’s the first time she is seeing all the floors in their completed state. A year ago, the then dilapidated 430 m2 (5000 sq. ft.) building was refurbished and made sustainable. She looks around, upbeat and satisfied. The original doors and all the other woodwork have been sanded and neatly painted white. The high walls have a fresh look and the black stair carpet matches the painted black banisters. ‘Magnificent, right?’ says Linda, pointing at the stained glass windows. ‘Many of the original details have been retained. And look, the entire building has herringbone parquet.’ Tom Kneepkens of JKR Advocaten, shares her enthusiasm. The six-strong social law firm that serves private and corporate clients, has been renting the ground-floor offices since January 2020. ‘We’re certainly very happy here,’ says Kneepkens. ‘This distinctive building has been beautifully refurbished and it’s an excellent location. We are easily

Number 20 on leafy Valeriusplein in Amsterdam’s Oud-Zuid district, is a property AHAM thoroughly refurbished and made sustainable a year ago. The building hosts four new enterprises.

accessible for our clients and we’re just a short bike ride away from the courts.’

Single glazing

AHAM had owned the building for decades, Linda tells us. ‘It had been in use for a long time for residential and work purposes, but when the tenants left in 2019, we decided to turn it into an office space for young, beginning entrepreneurs.

They were able to set up their offices here for a relatively low rent. That’s because the building was outdated and not insulated. All the windows had single glazing.’ But according to her, a few years ago, the property required serious refurbishment and needed to be made sustainable. ‘We asked the then tenants whether they wanted to continue renting the premises after the renovations, at an attrac-

tive initial rent, which would gradually increase to current market rates over a period of five years. We felt that was a fitting proposal, because these young entrepreneurs were still establishing themselves.’

Basement

The five-floor building hosts four smaller companies. JKR Advocaten now occupies two 75m2 (800 sq. ft.) floors. Following the refurbishment, they also rented the basement. ‘In terms of noise and dust, the lawyers suffered most from the renovations,’ says Linda. ‘Construction workers constantly passed by their floor. But just take a look at how lovely it has turned out, and how nicely they have arranged it themselves.’ In the corridor, their robes hang on the coat rack. In the room at the rear of the basement, adjoining the garden, the lawyers have built a small wine bar, equipped

with a well-stocked climate-controlled wine cabinet. ‘Feel free to open a bottle of natural wine if you fancy. If I didn’t have another session today, I would have had a glass with you,’ Tom Kneepkens calls out with a wink.

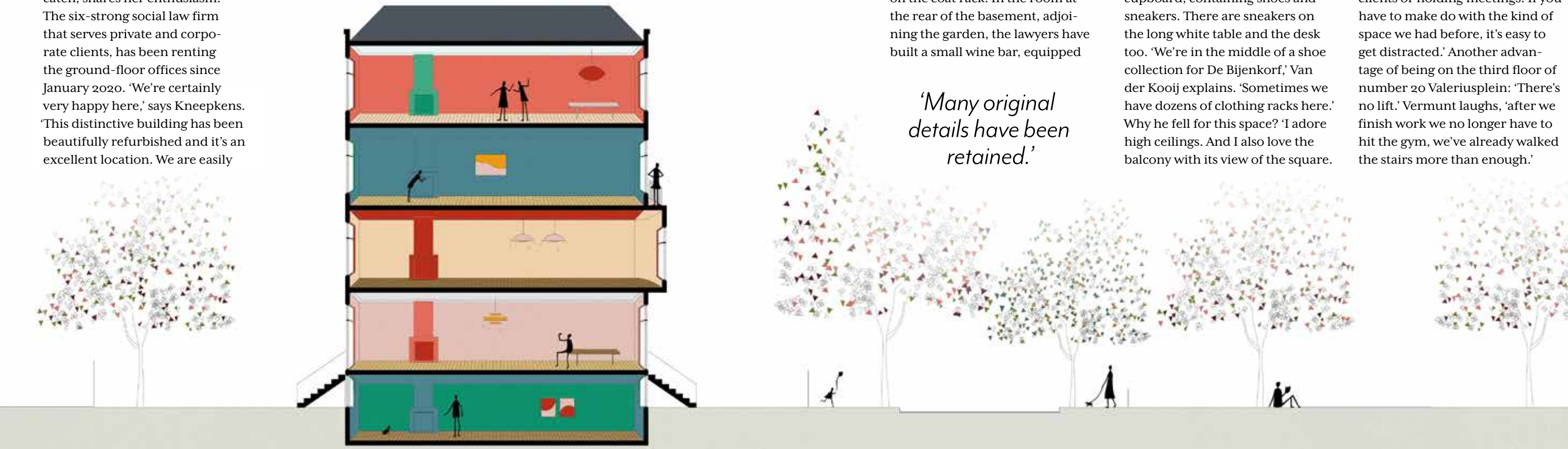
Neighbours

The lawyers have since been joined by three new neighbours. According to Linda, it was a very painful decision for the former tenant of the two top floors to relocate to a different city. Ingmar van der Kooij and his Plan B Agency, a fashion agency, have occupied the first floor since 1 October 2022. The double room with French doors is high and spacious. The front windows look out on leafy Valeriusplein. The right-hand wall is adorned with a tall fitted cupboard, containing shoes and sneakers. There are sneakers on the long white table and the desk too. ‘We’re in the middle of a shoe collection for De Bijenkorf,’ Van der Kooij explains. ‘Sometimes we have dozens of clothing racks here.’ Why he fell for this space? ‘I adore high ceilings. And I also love the balcony with its view of the square.

I can receive my customers in style here.’ On the second floor is a marketing agency with a focus on sports. Software company KeyWI has been renting the floor above that since mid-March. ‘We specialise in marketing tools,’ says one of the company’s founders, Daan Vermunt. ‘We help our clients attract more visitors to their online platforms, for example.’ These twenty-something tenants also have nothing but praise for their professional premises. ‘Previously, we rented a basement on Herengracht,’ says Vermunt. ‘It was dark and cramped there. This is a wonderfully bright space and the layout is perfect for us. We have three rooms which we can seal off, so we don’t bother each other when we’re on calls with clients or holding meetings. If you have to make do with the kind of space we had before, it’s easy to get distracted.’ Another advantage of being on the third floor of number 20 Valeriusplein: ‘There’s no lift.’ Vermunt laughs, ‘after we finish work we no longer have to hit the gym, we’ve already walked the stairs more than enough.’

‘Many original details have been retained.’

57



Eleven questions for Studio Hudson

Studio Hudson is a graphic design agency specialised in creating house styles, stationery and creative campaigns. It is also AHAM’s regular agency. The following is a conversation with founders Rosan Dekker and Joost Abbel.

58



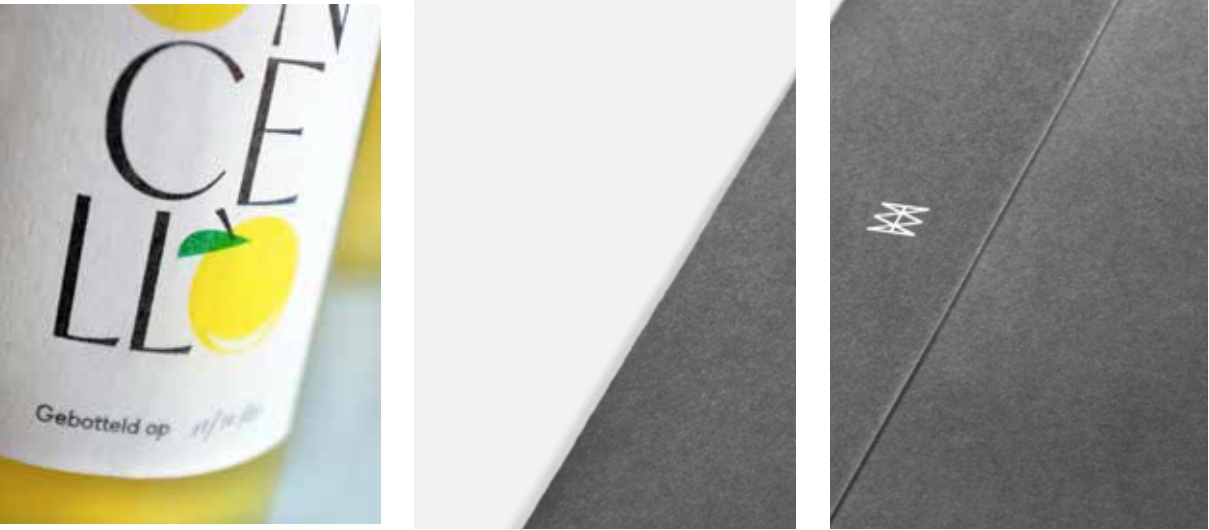
1 How did it all start?

J: ‘My career path has been somewhat unusual. I graduated in sociology and I’ve always been involved in music. After I graduated, I worked part-time for a communication agency and continued playing music. At that agency we produced posters, illustrations, magazines, that sort of thing. Initially I was a kind of project leader there. At some point, because we were outsourcing so many small

design jobs, my boss said: can’t we do that ourselves? So we bought a computer with Photoshop on it and I got started. I learned the trade mostly on the job, in other words. Plus I learned a huge amount from Rosan.’
R: ‘I graduated from the Rietveld School of Art and Design, specialising in graphic design. Joost was more involved in animations and that sort of thing, whereas I focussed more on stationery. So at a certain point we thought, why not join forces? We started in 2014 on Hudsonstraat, in De Baarsjes

2 How did you go about finding clients?

district, and thought it was cool to derive our name from there.’
R: ‘Someone we knew had set up a company providing training courses for lawyers. He needed a house style: letter paper, business cards, a PowerPoint presentation, that sort of thing. They were just starting out too, so that was great, we were able to grow along with



‘We’re not looking for designs that cry out for attention.’

59



them as it were. That works really well if you're both at a similar stage of development.'

3 Who do you admire in your professional field?

R: 'Linda van Deursen. Together with Armand Mevis she operates the Mevis & Van Deursen design agency. She was also my mentor at the Rietveld academy. She was an incredibly fun and enthusiastic supervisor. I admired the way she approached things: critically but cheerfully. One of the things she designed was Stedelijk Museum's house style. On the one hand their work is simple, but it's also very sophisticated and in particular it's ahead of its time. When the Stedelijk Museum presented its new house style, it initially received a lot of criticism. People said: Is that it? It's much too simple.'

J: 'But it was really well thought-out. Within that house style you can go in all sorts of directions, it offers you lots of room to play around.'

R: 'And it's also a subservient design. In a museum like that, there are exhibitions with very powerful images. This design doesn't compete with them. You don't want a house style that upstages your exhibits, they understood that extremely well.'

4 In your field, are there classic examples of designs that are almost iconic?

R: 'What Sandberg did was very innovative. Of course after that there was Wim Crouwel and his Total Design agency. Just look at

all the things they designed, so many logos that have stood the test of time. What they did was highly specific, but they worked for huge clients and their work literally shaped the Netherlands.'

J: 'The modernism of that era appeals to us enormously.'

R: 'The Dutch design style is inherently rather sparse, not overly expressive or exuberant. But it is a very interesting style, which has huge international appeal too. A person like Dick Bruna contributed significantly to this too. This design language doesn't contain many

5 Is that style – few frills – also recognisable in your design work?

R: 'People who come to us often say they don't want any bells and whistles. Most clients don't like excessive embellishments, instead they want clear visual language.'

J: 'It could be partly a matter of parsimony. Like they reason that if they commission more it will also be more expensive.'

R: 'Haha, as if each additional curl costs more money.'

J: 'Of course we take inspiration from various sources, not just from existing design work. But it is handy as a reference, or if you're stuck, it helps to look at how great designers in the past approached the work.'

6 What is the secret of good design?

R: 'For us it starts with listening carefully to what is actually required. So, a client approaches you and says: "I want such and such, can you make that?" They



often already have an idea in their mind's eye. But you try understand what the underlying problem is by looking closely at the content and what the client wants to convey, and by listening carefully.'

J: 'Many people present things they're familiar with, but it's always a question whether that will work for them too. Or they might have an idea, but they don't know how to articulate it. They just know it when they see it. Discovering that is very important. And the way to discover it is by examining the content.'

R: 'It's like you have to listen out for what is hidden behind their words. Clients often present things they've seen somewhere. An example from a small assignment: we were recently asked to design a card announcing the birth of a new baby. We had images of the clients' house, and we got to work with them. But it turned into more of a relocation card. These clients are both writers, one is left-handed and the other right-handed. So we created a design in which the name of the baby was being written by two hands, as it were. The woman burst into tears when she saw it. Fortunately, the man assured us this was a good sign.'

J: 'This was another case of, you know it when you see it.' He laughs, 'this doesn't always happen, obviously, that clients cry when they see our solutions.'

7 What do you consider bad design?

R: 'What often goes wrong is that work is far too trendy for something that doesn't need to be. If you're making an invitation for a one-off party, say, then it's fine to come up with something totally hip and outspoken and contemporary. But if you extrapolate that kind of style to stationery or a website which is going to be online for years to come, then it won't work because it's going to feel outdated pretty soon.'

8 How would you describe the Hudson-style?

R: 'The main thing is the content and we don't want to drown that out. We're not looking for designs that cry out for attention. That's too easy and it doesn't last. You can't say about yourself that you create timeless designs, but we do always strive to make things that will stand the test of time. At the same time, I wouldn't call our designs businesslike. There's certainly room for playfulness, as long as it's without too much embellishment.'

9 What sort of assignments are your forte?

J: 'House styles, I think. This is where you most have to develop a vision together with the client, so



in terms of content that's the most rewarding for us. You're not only thinking about the resources you can use, but also about the brand strategy. That really plays to our strengths.'

10 How did your partnership with AHAM start?

R: 'AHAM first contacted us in 2016. They had seen a booklet we had designed. They invited us to pitch, along with two other agencies. We proposed a design for a logo and an initial sketch of how we envisioned the house style. And they loved it. Tim, AHAM's managing director, said: "It's great that you're not the happy type of creatives." I think he meant he was glad we hadn't presented something trendy, that maybe looked flashy but didn't suit them.'

J: 'As far as I'm aware, they didn't really have a consistent house style. The fun thing is that although we won the pitch, the house style we ultimately designed turned out very differently from our original proposal.'

R: 'And in subsequent years, the



house style has been implemented in all of AHAM's manifestations.'

11 What will the Hudson agency look like in five years' time?

J: 'We definitely don't want to grow too large. We currently have a great network of freelancers with whom we do a lot of work. We want to design, not manage. We'd like to do some larger assignments. A company like AHAM is actually the ideal size for us. You're still in direct contact with the person taking the decisions.'

R: 'But we don't frequent networking events and we're certainly not pitching. So far, customers have come to us.'



‘I tell tenants that by renting this house they are also contributing to charity.’

Michiel Verbeek (44) is partner and co-namesake of Westeneng Verbeek Estate Agents, which has branches in Hilversum, Bussum and Wijdmeren. They also let AHAM’s properties in the Gooi region.

62 Michiel’s father worked for AT&T. As it was an international company, he frequently had to relocate. Consequently, moving house became second nature to the Verbeek family. They often received estate agents, and according to Michiel, this is how the idea was planted in him for the profession he would later take up. ‘I watched the man doing his thing and thought: that seems like a fun occupation.’ Following secondary school he studied management, economics and law, specialising in real estate. This gave him enough back-up options in case being an estate agent didn’t meet his expectations.

Three branches

In 2003 he began his career at an estate agents office in Het Gooi. In 2006 he moved to the big real estate brokers Meeüs, where he met his current business partner Arwin Westeneng. Three years later

they decided to establish their own company. ‘On 11 November 2009, to be precise. November Fool’s Day,’ says Michiel with a wink. They now operate three branches and have a staff of nine. Assessing the real estate market, he says: ‘Each region has its own market. Amsterdam is always in the lead. That’s true for all sorts of developments, including residential property prices. In Het Gooi you get more square metres for your money. Given that Amsterdam is becoming increasingly expensive, you’re seeing more and more families coming this way. The same is true both for people looking to buy and those who want to rent.’

Apartments

Westeneng Verbeek Estate Agents let forty of AHAM’s two-room apartments on Koningstraat in Hilversum, and ten larger, more luxuriously fitted apartments elsewhere in the centre of town. ‘The

units on Koningstraat have 50m2 (165 sq. ft.) of floor space and they have all been refurbished, fitted with quality kitchens, bathrooms, wooden floors and underfloor heating. The more luxurious apartments are 140-150 m2 (460-500 sq.ft) and include a roof garden.’ Michiel: ‘Obviously, you can’t compare the rental market here with Amsterdam, partly because the capital is home to lots of expats. We do have some international companies here, such as Nike. Lots of expats left there during the Covid pandemic, but you see them returning now. As this all kicks in again, we are seeing the rental market stabilising, also because some people can no longer afford to buy due to high prices and rising interest rates.’

Fulfilment

Being an estate agent is a great, satisfying occupation, says Michiel. ‘When you manage to find the perfect house, whether it’s rental or purchase, you really make people

‘In Het Gooi you get more square metres for your money.’



‘When you manage to find the perfect house, you really make people happy.’

happy. That’s the fulfilment this work offers. It’s also fun to meet people from all walks of life – from CEOs of banks to farmers – and to help them with what is essential in their lives. ‘Along the way you learn that appearances are meaningless,’ says Michiel. ‘A wealthy person might turn up in a little old car, and the opposite happens too. Every day is different, and that makes the job interesting.’ He always tells tenants who rent AHAM apartments that in doing so they are contributing to charity. ‘I tell them about the Sint Antonius Stichting and what it facilitates in developing nations. You can tell

that makes the tenants feel good. We also like working for AHAM, because there’s more to it than merely turning a profit. That’s not a common occurrence nowadays.’

The future

Michiel is not overly concerned about the future for estate agents. ‘You hear people saying that estate agents will become superfluous in the future, because all the necessary information is digitally available and distributed online, but I don’t believe a word of it. Yes, you can find plenty of houses and compare them online, but in our view, people will always want to

deal with someone who has expertise and experience, who can tell what’s wrong with a property, what work potentially needs to be done and who knows the market. So I’m not worried about our profession dying out.’ As regards the future of Westeneng Verbeek Estate Agents: ‘We recently opened our branch in Kortenhoef (Wijdmeren), but we continue to keep our eyes open. We’re not just estate agents, we’re entrepreneurs too, so we’re always on the lookout for new opportunities. At the moment, however, we’re more than happy with how things are going.’



Morgen

Morgen is published by AHAM Vastgoed, Sarphatistraat 370, Amsterdam, www.aham.nl and is sent twice a year to AHAM Vastgoed's tenants and business contacts

Concept and realisation

Editio, contact@editio.nl

Editor-in-chief

Bob van der Burg

Managing editor

Emma Laura Schouten

Project management

Juliëtte van Rees

Coordination AHAM Vastgoed

Annita Schuiten

Editorial staff AHAM Vastgoed

Chelly Blok

Michelle Oudhuis

Freek Tames

Lisa Duin

Art direction

Hein van Putten

Text

Marlies Bonnike

Alies Pegtel

Astrid Theunissen

Photography

Kees Hummel

Stadsarchief Amsterdam

Illustration

Franka Wiggers

Nina Kwakkernaat

Translation

Het Vertaalcollectief

Printing

Wilco BV, Amersfoort

