



DISPATCHES
ABOUT TOWN—AMSTERDAM



SHOP TALK From left: Alexander Six at his concept store and coffee bar Six & Sons; a detail from microbrewery Butcher's Tears.

DUTCH TOUCH

One of Europe's most walkable cities is anything but pedestrian these days, with a fresh crop of young entrepreneurs reenergizing the local scene. From a garage-turned-microbrewery to a single-cookie bakery, here are four standouts

BY BRIAN SPENCER

At the end of a brick road running through an industrial area in Amsterdam's Oud-Zuid, Eric Nordin shuffles into a former garage building. He's dressed all in black—black sweatshirt, black jeans, black nose ring—standing a stark contrast to the interior of the nondescript garage. Swathed in white tiles and white brickwork, the space is clean, clinical, like an exhibition-less art gallery or hospital operating room. “It’s a bit different than most places,”

Nordin says. “I didn’t know what to expect, and I actually don’t know how people find their way here. It attracts lots of neighbors, though, which is cool.” He’d worked until 3 a.m. that day; his friends call him The Butcher.

There’s something different about Amsterdam these days. At first loving glance little seems changed in the Netherlands’ handsome capital, a deceptively small city of fewer than 800,000. Through rain and snow, locals still collectively pedal upwards of two million kilometers a day, mostly on classic Dutch roadsters whose wheels rattle and chain-locks clatter on the zigzagging brick

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES STOKES



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TASTEMAKERS Clockwise from left: Baker Vera van Stapela in front of her namesake cookie shop; fried chicken with waffles, a poached egg, and maple syrup, at Staring at Jacob; brewmaster Eric Nordin behind the taps in the tasting room at Butcher's Tears.



paths that line splendid 17th-century canals. The timeless chorus of church bells still echoes across the canal belt, mingling with the maniac ticking of crosswalk signals and soothing whirl of trams dutifully gliding through vibrant pedestrian streets. Amsterdam is still Amsterdam: moderate, meticulously organized, quieter than you might think, and eminently cool.

Yet just below the surface, a wave of youthful entrepreneurs are reshaping the city's identity one new bar, restaurant, and shop at a time. Nordin is one of them, a lanky, long-haired Swede with a shaggy beard who plays

drums in a "strangely progressive dark metal" band called Våld. It was along with fellow bandmate Felicia von Zweigbergk and business partner Herbert Nelissen that he started the microbrewery-cum-outsider-art-space called Butcher's Tears. Heineken this is not.

Opened in late 2013, a year in which some 60 new breweries were launched across the Netherlands, Butcher's Tears' blinding-white *proeflokaal*—tasting room—is a marvel of stripped-down simplicity. Picnic table-style seating designed by local craftsman Jair Straschnow is fashioned from metal and bamboo, while a menu of unfiltered, unpasteurized

beers is scrawled in erasable marker on walls otherwise adorned only with arm lamps and von Zweigbergk's abstract sketches. Behind the bar is a hidden room for art shows, live music, and monthly photo-book swaps.

Nordin is one of just a handful of Dutch brewmasters who make their own beers on-site. Until recently, when Butcher's Tears installed its own brewing equipment, all of its beers were concocted at host breweries in Belgium. "We have brewed a lot of Belgian-style beers, saisons, and some pale ales, which all work with the hard water in Belgium," he says. "But I think it's going to be a lot more experimental here. Ideally it will be an extension of my home brewing, when I just do stuff because I feel like it. I think the real Butcher's Tears has yet to come."

Butcher's Tears distributes to more than 100 bars, restaurants, and bottle shops across the country and in Europe. One of them is buzzy beer-and-brunch hot spot Staring at

Jacob, a cozy neighborhood restaurant in up-and-coming Oud-West that takes its name from its location on the corner of Staringstraat and Jacob van Lennepkade streets. It debuted last August as the second collaboration between chefs Anthony Joseph and Noah Tucker, who for the past three years have run the kitchen at acclaimed Amsterdam bistro Restaurant Fraîche.

The pair keeps things simple at Staring at Jacob, where a small seasonal menu features gourmet twists on classic brunch standards.

• FROM TAXIDERMIED ANIMALS AND GUMBALL MACHINES TO WEARABLE SLEEPING BAGS, ARCHERY SUPPLIES, AND SOPHISTICATED LINGERIE, SIX & SONS IS A WINSOME COLLAGE OF VINTAGE AND HANDCRAFTED GOODS PRESENTED LIKE POP-UP ART INSTALLATIONS •

The Tree Hugger, for example, adds Yorkshire pudding, braised kale, and ratatouille to the greasy-spoon mix of home fries and cheese eggs; batter for fish and chips is made with a roasted stout from another new Amsterdam microbrewery, Oedipus Brewing.

"We thought we could keep it reasonable if we didn't overcomplicate the standards that bring people out for brunch," says Turner, a transplanted New Yorker whose résumé includes a stint at San Francisco's Michelin-starred Michael Mina restaurant. "As chefs we approached it as sort of a dinner restaurant in a weird way, by having a main menu instead just a sling fest where you can order, you know, as many eggs as you want however you want them."

Turner says the restaurant's design was in part inspired by the Brooklyn-style eateries back home. Furnishings and flooring are made from reclaimed wood, a large chalkboard menu hangs on exposed brick, and a custom

Wood Art Museum



The Wood Art Museum is surrounded by the spectacular river and golf putting green. It is housed in a century-old Shanghai-style mansion which was previously owned by Mr Du Yue-sheng (a 20th century Chinese icon). The museum can accommodate up to 40 persons for any small wedding, corporate event, private party or exhibition. It has been the choice for past events including world-class wedding designer Preston Bailey for his first private event in China during the first Sanya International Wedding Week and the secret dating place for China's A-List actor Oscar Sun and singer Fei in the famous variety show <Perhaps Love>.

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wallpaper installation by Israeli-born artist Itamar Gilboa plasters the wall behind the bar. “I just wanted it to feel like a neighborhood spot,” he explains. “Comfortable and easy and accessible, not just for customers but for myself, too.”

Back amid the city’s historic canals, former film and television art director Alexander Six flaunts his flair for cinematic style and meticulous attention to detail at Six & Sons, the eye-catching concept store he opened last December. From taxidermied animals and gumball machines to archery supplies, wearable sleeping bags, and sophisticated unmentionables from Dutch lingerie brand LoveStories, the mise-en-scène here is a winsome collage of vintage and handcrafted goods presented like pop-up art installations. Don’t be fooled by the intricate nature of the displays—everything here is for sale, including all the furnishings in the second-floor café. “It’s nice to see how a piece of furniture can look in a real environment,” Six says. “I’ve been telling visual stories for more than 10 years, and now I tell stories in the shop. It’s a little hard to describe—we are just a little department store selling beautiful and unique products.”

Taking the spare approach favored at Butcher’s Tears and Staring at Jacob to an extreme is Vera van Stapele, the twentysomething owner and head baker at Van Stapele Koekmakerij. A psychology graduate with no baking experience, van Stapele found herself obsessing over a chocolate-chip cookie she tasted while vacationing in London, so she decided to recreate and improve it. Five months of baking experiments and countless batches of cookies later, she taste-tested the winning recipe on friends and family, quit her job, and last winter set up shop in a small space previously occupied by an antiques store.

On the menu? Artisanal loose-leaf Kusmi Tea, organic coffees from Amsterdam-based importer Trabocca, van Stapele’s cookie—and that’s it.

“I really liked the concept of a store with just one thing,” she says. “If I had two ice cream shops in front of me, and one was selling one kind of flavor and the other was selling 20 flavors, I would always go to the shop with one flavor because I would think that it must be a very good one.”

Baked for exactly nine minutes and cooled for no less than 15, the signature cookie is an

CAPITAL ASSETS The cozy interior of brunch spot Staring at Jacob, below. Bottom: Vera van Stapele’s signature chocolate cookies.



THE DETAILS

AMSTERDAM ADDRESSES

Butcher’s Tears

45 Karperweg; 31-65/390-9777; butchers-tears.com

Staring at Jacob

215 Jakob van Lennepkade; 31-20/223-7498; staringatjacob.tumblr.com

Six & Sons

31 Haarlemmerdijk; 31-20/223-0092; sixandsons.com

Van Stapele Koekmakerij

Heisteeg 4, 31-65/424-1497; vanstapele.com

As for where to stay, consider **The Dylan** (384 Keizersgracht; 31-20/530-2010; dylanamsterdam.com; doubles from US\$360). Set in the heart of Amsterdam’s 17th-century city center, it has an ideal canal-side address, 40 stylish rooms and suites, a pleasant courtyard garden, and a Michelin-starred French restaurant, Vinkeles.



ambrosial mix of dark, delicately crisped Valrhona chocolate dough that shrouds magma of creamy white chocolate in the middle. Van Stapele calls it “the world’s tastiest chocolate cookie,” and it’s hard to disagree. She’s already baking more than 350 cookies during busy days, with some orders packaged in cute, handcrafted gift boxes shaped like Amsterdam’s old canal houses.

Van Stapele also gutted and renovated the shop herself. The result, with its handmade wooden appointments, vintage crystal chandeliers, lazy-Sunday-afternoon jazz soundtrack, and toasty scent of baking cookies, is the convivial embodiment of *gezelligheid*, a Dutch term for what you might translate as a state of complete coziness. And in Amsterdam, be it at home or around town, *gezelligheid* is a guiding principle—that much will never change. ☺