

## THE TASTEMAKER: MARCEL WANDERS' GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM

BY Jennifer Parker | January 26, 2016



Fresh from launching Louis Vuitton and Maison & Objet collections, Marcel Wanders is in his prime.

“Free-spirited” and “elegantly casual” aptly describe Marcel Wanders, one of Amsterdam’s most prolific designers. The same words could apply to Amsterdam itself, a city that nurtures creativity. As Wanders will proudly tell you, he is both the product of his environment and a prominent actor in it.

Over the past 25 years, the Dutch designer’s works have become part of the permanent collections of some of the most prestigious museums in the world, such as Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum, New York’s Museum of Modern Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. And he’s just hitting his stride. In the last three months alone, Wanders launched a luxury tableware collection at Maison & Objet in Paris, designed luxury travel products for Louis Vuitton, and announced his first solo exhibition at Friedman Benda gallery in New York.

Wanders attributes his inventive energy to Amsterdam. In a recent interview with Blouin ArtInfo, he explains, “It is a city that is near and dear to me, that has facilitated my growth as a designer. Amsterdam lives and breathes creativity. One moment you walk into a building from the 17th century, and the next you find yourself in a hub of creative start-up companies.” The designer’s passion for the city pervades his

Parker, Jennifer. “The Tastemaker: Marcel Wanders’ Guide To Amsterdam,” *Blouin Artinfo*, January 26, 2016.

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book *Amsterdam Creative Capital* (2009), an ode to its vibrant culture, as well as its intellectual and political history.

If you've yet to experience this bicycling, espresso-drinking city of artists and entrepreneurs, spring is a beautiful time to go. The culturally inclined might want to time their visit to coincide with National Museum Week (April 16 through 24), when hundreds of museums in and around Amsterdam, from the grand Rijksmuseum to the niche Foam Fotografiemuseum, give visitors access to the best of Dutch art through free tours, reduced ticket prices, and special events.

In particular, Wanders recommends the Rijksmuseum's Gallery of Honor, where masterpieces from Rembrandt van Rijn and Johannes Vermeer are on permanent display: "It is a sacred hall celebrating the timeless quality of ambitious creativity. It reminds me why it is so essential to respect the past. These works have endured because they elevate the human spirit, and they elicit in me a powerful drive to create."

He pays tribute to the gallery in a new book, *Rijks, Masters of the Golden Age*, to be released this year. Focusing on 60 of the historic museum's masterpieces, it contains quotes and passages from contemporary leaders in philosophy, the arts, film, and design discussing the influence of these works on the modern world.

Those whose tastes are more modern needn't travel far. For contemporary art, Wanders recommends Reflex Amsterdam, located across from the Rijksmuseum. Displaying works by both established and emerging artists it is currently showing Andrew Moore's *Dirt Meridian* exhibition, which explores the heartland of America from the air.

Another must-see for Wanders is the Stedelijk Museum, which in 2014 presented his 25-year design retrospective. Home to one of the largest art libraries in Europe, with more than 190,000 titles, the Stedelijk is a place to consider contemporary designers and immerse oneself in the study of the field. For photographic inspiration, and a bit of fun, Wanders recommends the Foam Fotografiemuseum, which faces an inky canal in the historic Grachtengordel neighborhood. "Visits to Foam play a big part in my own Art Direction," he says.

### **Culinary Adventures**

Beyond museums, Amsterdam offers a wealth of world-class dining within its historic 17th-century canal ring (a Unesco World Heritage site). And that's just the city center. On the outskirts, such as in the bohemian Amsterdam Noord neighborhood, quirky restaurants and trendy beer halls may entice foodies to discover new territory.

For Wanders, of course, the first consideration when choosing a restaurant is the design. "Interiors should reinvigorate the building and respect its history while being bold and inspiring," he says, mulling over his three favorite venues.

His first choice is the Duchess, which opened last year in the W Hotel Amsterdam. Housed in the former KAS Bank, the "style harkens back to the Belle Époque, so it is an impressive site in which to enjoy

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exquisite European dishes,” says Wanders. With a grand Viennese dining room and throwback cocktail bar, this is arguably the hottest new restaurant in town.

For Asian cuisine, Wanders heads to Taiko, at the Conservatorium Hotel in the city’s historic museum district. The hotel occupies the 19th-century Sweelinck Music Conservatorium, given new life by Milan-based architect Piero Lissoni’s design, in which the original structure remains visible. “Lissoni’s austere, modern aesthetic forms the perfect backdrop for Japanese food whose quality is matched only by its presentation,” he says.

For authentic Dutch fare, Wanders recommends the Bluespoon, in the boutique hotel Andaz overlooking the picturesque Prinsengracht canal. Helmed by chef Kasper Stiekema, the open-plan kitchen uses ingredients picked fresh from an on-property garden to help create dishes that are served with Dutch wines in a space filled with references to and symbols of Dutch history. Not surprisingly, since his design studio is responsible for the property’s eye-catching aesthetic, Wanders also commends the Andaz as “a terrific local hotel that reflects the surrounding neighborhood.” For fans of Wanders’ work, this modern little inn housed in a former public library, with 122 rooms and suites, dramatic gold chandeliers, and royal blue walls, is the place to stay.

If pampering is on your agenda, Wanders says the best place in the city is Sauna Deco. On the Herengracht, in the middle of Amsterdam, the health spa boasts a Parisian-style Art Deco interior. “It is one of the oldest and most beloved saunas in the city. After you’ve spent the morning shopping, it offers a private getaway from the busy streets,” says Wanders.

Of course, he spends most of his time inside his design studio. On the third floor of the Westerhuis, a former vocational school, in the heart of the now-trendy Jordaan neighborhood, 50 international designers work together to develop products and interiors. To keep inspirations fresh, the studio contains a gallery space — the Moooi showroom — which exhibits items by renowned designers. The building embodies what Wanders sees as the future of his city. “Amsterdam is a breeding ground for new creative pursuits in many areas fueled by a tolerance and openness to ideas unlike any world city I’ve been to,” he says. “There is something for everyone here, especially when you dare to go off the beaten path.”

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