

Old Dutch, forever young

Traditional Rotterdam restaurant, **Old Dutch**, is one of only a handful offering genuine Dutch fare. Some dishes are still even prepared at the table. Old Dutch is all about good, old-fashioned, cosy comfort.

WORDS ELLEN SCHOLTENS PHOTO'S EMMA GROENENBOOM

As soon as the darker winter days set in, Rotterdammers set out for Old Dutch, a restaurant as comforting as a warm bath. Especially at this time of year when the dark brown interior with its old beams, stained-glass windows and bronze statues is decked out with thousands of shiny baubles and other Christmas decorations. The minute you walk through the revolving door and pass the cloakroom to be greeted by a veteran waiter sporting a suit and bow tie, you feel as though you have been transported back to another time.

Old Dutch, resembling an old farmhouse on the outside and a large hunting lodge on the inside, began its life in 1932 as a bodega. It soon became a favourite eatery for Rotterdam's well-to-do. Burned down during the bombardment of the city in 1940, the white "farmhouse" was quickly rebuilt. In the 1960s it was a popular haunt for harbour barons, entrepreneurs and captains of industry.

It's still a popular dining place for business people, but owner Aad van der Stel says the restaurant has been revitalised and more diners from the technical and IT sectors have started coming in: "Our guest base has broadened, happily. In the past, Old Dutch tended to be a male-dominated dining establishment, so we are really happy to see more women coming in as well these days for business lunches and dinner."

What exactly is the attraction of this monumental building? Van der Stel laughs: "The bar is an irresistible attraction, but people also come in for the classics. As early as June, they are already asking when the pheasant and



sauerkraut will be back on the menu. It's one of our top drawcards, as is our hare saddle and leg dish with red cabbage, purée and truffle."

The owner has a great deal of experience working in the Rotterdam hospitality industry: "We are one of only a few Dutch restaurants that still prepares meals at the table," he says. "A three-star restaurant from Zeeland brings its staff here every year to watch how à la minute lobster soup, steak tartare and stroganoff are made and how sole is filleted. There is a resurgence of interest in this sort of dining experience. We've shifted from being an old fogies establishment to one that is hip."

What has brought about this change? "People nowadays opt for quality, and that includes an appreciation for the way we still prepare meals at the table. Guests like to see how a dish is made. It also has to do with slowing down. Nowadays it's all go, go, go, but there's a counter-movement to our modern, fast-paced lifestyle as well," Van der Stel says. He adds that people dining three or four times a week for work might also want to eat something different now and then. "Instead of turbot, sirloin or sole, they might just want a satay or

a croquette. We serve these simple dishes as well, on white plates, with white table linen and silver cutlery."

Speaking of croquettes, Old Dutch's croquette is so famous in Rotterdam that it has been given number of affectionate nicknames. The snack, a veal ragout that is crumbed and deep-fried, is called "De Duikboot" (submarine) by some, for example. Van der Stel's favourite name for the XL croquette is "De Trapleuning" (bannister rail). "Our croquette has taken on a life of its own," he says. "People who have immigrated to America and are back for a visit come in and ask if we still have it on the menu!"

According to Van der Stel, the most traditional dish on Old Dutch's heavy leather-covered menu is stamppot (hotchpot) made with raw endive and served with a meatball and braised meat. "Tourists think that shrimp, eel and fried sole are typically Dutch, but stamppot is the ultimate traditional Dutch food. As is pea soup with rye bread and bacon, or a brown bread sandwich with thinly sliced smoked sausage and mustard. Real Dutch comfort food."

» **Old Dutch**
Rochussenstraat 20
Open Mon to Fri for lunch and dinner

De Pijp

Any talk of long-standing Rotterdam institutions and chances are you will hear 'Bierhandel' De Pijp mentioned in the conversation. This establishment originally opened in 1898 and, after being damaged in the Rotterdam bombardment, was rebuilt in 1940 in a former garage and bicycle parking building. Inside, the decor is old and brown, and peanut shells are strewn across the floor: It has a central open kitchen and more than 200 ties hang from the walls. De Pijp is Rotterdam's oldest restaurant and has been a popular meeting place for many years. It is located down a side street off Nieuwe Binnenweg, behind a metal sign and weathered wooden entrance door. On the other side of the door, it's party time! Seated at long dining tables, you can enjoy eating, drinking and chatting with fellow guests. There's no menu card – meal options are chalked on blackboards. Fried liver with onions, sweetbreads and the captain's dinner are specialties at this restaurant "of the eternal student".

» **Gaffelstraat 90**
Open Mon, Tue and Sat for dinner
Wed, Thurs and Fri for lunch and dinner



De Pijp



Courzand



Courzand

Courzand

Another golden oldie, this one a little further from the city centre. Tip: get there by watertaxi or the Waterbus, getting off at the Heijplaat stop. Between the Eem- and Waalhaven container terminals lies a residential area originally built for Rotterdamse Droogdok Maatschappij (RDM) employees. Nowadays there's a school campus there and the old industrial buildings, including one that was once used as a launching site for submarines, are now used for events venues. The nearby Courzand café was originally set up as a "relaxation area" where dock workers could go for a cup of coffee or a glass of jenever after a hard day's work. The former harbour café has since been transformed into a grand café and restaurant with art deco features, black-and-white photos of ships that were once the pride of the RDM shipyard and a few heavy-duty authentic portholes. The menu consists of classics such as "havenuitsmijter" (ham and eggs), horse steak, meatballs and more contemporary dishes such as poké bowl and flammkuchen.

» **Courzandseweg 40**
Mon to Fri from 11:30 AM
Kitchen open until 9 PM



Courzand