

## TRAVEL

# The Noord District's Hip Rebirth

## How One Amsterdam Neighborhood Became Trendy, Drawing Artists, Musicians and Eateries

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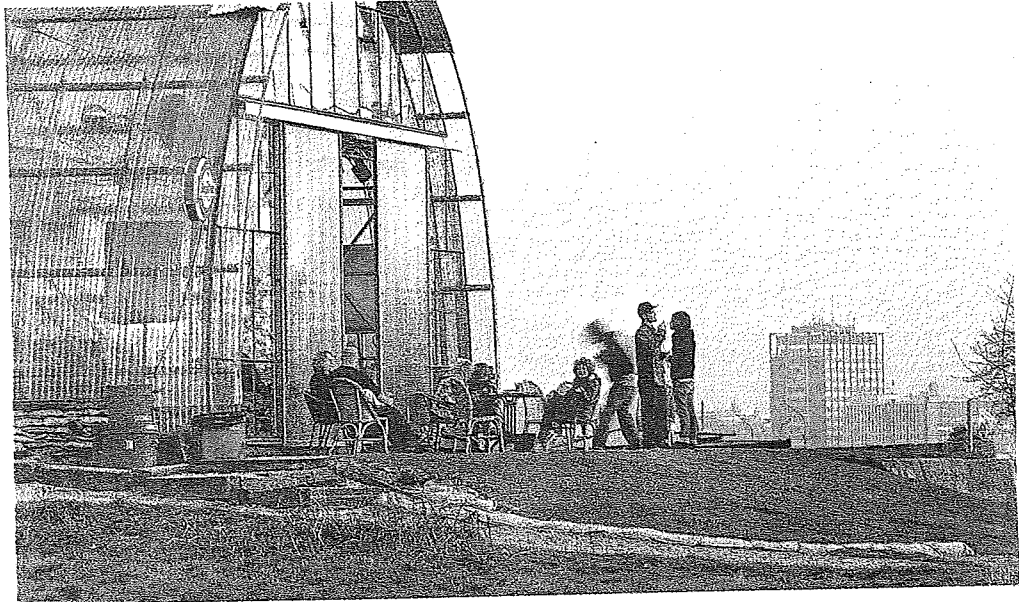
**W**hen Amsterdammers speak with pride of their city, they aren't in the habit of facing north.

The sprawling Noord district has always felt a world apart. Its physical separation—Amsterdam's IJ harbor sits between Noord and the rest of the city—isn't the only reason residents have a historic tendency to turn their noses up at the district.

"Noord used to be to Amsterdam what Australia used to be to England," explains Chris Keulemans, artistic director of the Tolhuistuin, a complex of buildings and parks in Noord hosting artists and musical events. "The city sent their criminals, their alcoholics, their homeless, their general outcasts [there]," in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A better analogy now might posit Noord as Amsterdam's Berlin: still poor in parts perhaps, but sexier all the time. Noord still carries a

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fiercely independent spirit; everything else about the district, though, is changing. In the past decade, defunct factories have been converted into studio spaces for artists; old warehouses have been flipped for use as dining hotspots. MTV moved onto the docks in 2007. Artists, music festivals and galleries have followed.

An evolution is afoot, and there are more reasons than ever to leave Central Station from the IJ side and hop one of the three ferries carrying passengers to Noord. Summer is the best season—venues such as the Tolhuistuin (Tolhuistweg 2; [www.tolhuistuin.nl](http://www.tolhuistuin.nl)), which is affiliated with the famous Paradiso music club, recently kicked off their summer programming, while the Over Het IJ Festival ([www.overhetij.nl](http://www.overhetij.nl)), which began Thursday, is showcasing artists and performers from throughout the city through July 17.

"This is kind of like moving to Williamsburg, [Brooklyn]," says David Lindberg, an American artist, whose studio sits on a former loading dock on the NDSM ([www.ndsm.nl](http://www.ndsm.nl)), a former shipyard. "There's a lot of space. When I came here in 2000, there was not too much at all. I thought, well, this is like the next stop on the L [subway line in New York]."

There is no subway to Noord yet, though a metro line is in the works. But a 15-minute ferry ride from Central Station will bring you to NDSM, one of the hippest—and certainly oddest—junctions of the city. On the shipyards, a haphazard collection of converted industrial structures have been re-purposed.

The 20,000-square-meter construction hangar now holds the "arts city" a warren of makeshift arts studios, under its roof. The MTV Networks Benelux headquarters sits in an adjacent building. Across the gravel-strewn lot, creative residents have left their mark, giving the place a post-apocalyptic charm. Decommissioned tram cars stuffed with plastic dolls sit before



Clockwise from top, Café Noorderlicht at NDSM; the Eye Film Institute's new headquarters under construction; and the Stork restaurant at De Overkant.

the water; a sculpture made of rebar mimics a tree twisting in the wind.

The NDSM's ample open space—a rarity in Amsterdam—has made it the ideal venue for a number of single-day events and festivals. The first full-time exhibition spaces opened in 2010.

The Nieuw Dakota contemporary-art gallery (Ms. Van Riemsdijkweg 41b; ☎ 31 20 3318311; [www.nieuwdakota.com](http://www.nieuwdakota.com)) aims to present modern art to a wider audience by organizing exhibitions and art fairs in cooperation with local collectors. Located next to the Motive Gallery (Ms. Van Riemsdijkweg 41a; ☎ 31 20 3303668; [www.motivegallery.nl](http://www.motivegallery.nl)), Nieuw Dakota now hopes to bridge the artists who work and live on NDSM with the visiting public. "We work with artists throughout the world, but this is really the first time we're working with an artist who's been living here, working here for a really long time," gallery project director Pieter Sanders says of an exhibition featuring Mr. Lindberg's work.

After visiting the galleries, a stop at one of the wharf's eateries is a must—not so much for the food as for the atmosphere. The IJ-Kantine's

open dining room (Mt. Ondinaweg 15-17; ☎ 31 20 6337162; [www.ijkantine.nl](http://www.ijkantine.nl)), set in a landmark building and decked floor-to-ceiling with picture windows, offers a relaxing alternative to cramped spaces in the city. The five-year-old Café Noorderlicht (T.T. Neveritaweg 33; ☎ 31 20 4922770; [www.noorderlichtcafe.nl](http://www.noorderlichtcafe.nl)) located on the other end of the wharf is one of Amsterdam's hidden gems: a neon-decked Quonset hut-like structure on the waterfront, where bands and DJs perform on a stage set between the harbor and a large, open fireplace.

The NDSM is worth a visit on its own. But a three-minute ride on the Bulksloterweg ferry offers a deeper look at Noord's offerings along the waterfront. Begun in 2007, the Tolhuistuin project has set about creating a public use for hectares of parks and buildings that belonged to Royal Dutch Shell Group until 2007 and were purchased by the municipality. The project is expanding—the Tolhuistuin last week inaugurated a new waterfront area developed with the help of local residents and later this year plans to open a new performance hall focusing on world music, and a restaurant. Highlights

this summer include a performance by Vancouver-based band Destroyer and a concert by Niger's Bombino.

Meanwhile, the Eye Film Institute (Vondelpark 3, ☎ 31 20 5891400, [www.eyefilm.nl](http://www.eyefilm.nl)) is set to open its new headquarters (IJ Promenade 1) next spring. Towering over Amsterdam's harbor, the building will host a museum with three to four exhibitions per year, and four cinema halls with a total seating capacity of 620.

"The new Eye building is part of whole new living and working area of Amsterdam called Overhoeks, which is currently being established," says Eye spokesman Marix Van Wijk. "It will grow over the next five to 10 years to become a major area of the center of Amsterdam."

The longstanding appeal of Noord, though, is that it links city to countryside. Rent a bike at Central Station before taking the ferry, then head northeast. Pass along the bucolic Bulksloterdijk (a handy map replete with Noord's architectural highlights can be ordered at [www.arcam.nl](http://www.arcam.nl)) on your way to Ransdorp. Just one kilometer outside the city, the hamlet is a perfectly preserved snapshot of 16th-century Holland. On your way back

in, bike across the long, winding Nieuwendammerdijk. The street boasts one of Amsterdam's most impressive collections of traditional architecture, yet is inexplicably left off the city's tourist itineraries.

Between Nieuwendammerdijk and the IJplein ferry to Central Station, a couple of the district's best restaurants have occupied buildings formerly dedicated to industry. Hotel de Goudfazant (Aambeelstraat 10H, ☎ 31 20 6365170, [www.hoteldegoudfazant.nl](http://www.hoteldegoudfazant.nl)) serves French fare in a former car garage. A three-course meal runs €30.50. Down the road in the new De Overkant complex—a re-purposed former factory that hosts artist and designer studios as well as a dance company—the newly opened Stork (Gedempt Hamerkanaal 96, ☎ 31 20 6344000, [www.restaurantstork.nl](http://www.restaurantstork.nl)) specializes in fish. The *fruits de mer* platter is well worth the €32 price tag. Both venues feature modern décor, a relaxed vibe and uncommonly good service. To top it off, you can enjoy some of the best across-the-river views of downtown Amsterdam.

For the first time in a long while, folks on the other side of the harbor just might be looking back.