

# If you lived in... Het Museumkwartier



Style



The famous, wealthy and glamorous call the Museum Quarter home

From VIP spotting and haute couture shopping to savouring fine music and art, the pricey Museum Quarter has it all – even a bit of English countryside, reports **Sophia Komienko**. Photography by **Sujata Majumdar**

Conceived as an alternative to Amsterdam's congested city centre, the eminently respectable *Museumkwartier*, or Museum Quarter, and the adjacent Willemspark were built at the end of the belle époque to slow the emigration of rich Amsterdammers to the nearby wealthy suburban towns of Het Gooi. The area stretches south from the Rijksmuseum and along Vondelpark, both relative newcomers to the neighbourhood at the time.

After falling into relative disrepair in the 1970s, today the neighbourhood once again boasts that it's Amsterdam's rich enclave. The per capita disposable income in the Museum Quarter and Willemspark is €20,400, compared with €13,300 for Amsterdam overall. For an insider's look at how

the other half lives, visit Brasserie de Joffers on the corner of Cornelis Schuytstraat and Willemsparkweg. At lunch it fills with mobile phoning, deal-making estate agents, and sometimes even a royal from the House of Orange.

'It hasn't always been glamorous here,' recalls social care manager Lidwien Verbeek, proud owner of a picturesque art nouveau house facing Vondelpark. 'Twenty-five years ago, the surrounding buildings housed a psychiatric clinic and inexpensive rooms for *gastarbeiders* (guest workers).'

Vondelpark survived a hippie campground period during the financial turmoil of the 1970s, when many of its architectural monuments were used as squats and barely escaped demolition.

**Property prices** Verbeek bought his house in 1973 for 915 guilders (roughly €416) per square metre. Today, the average price per square metre is €5,000 to €7,000. Three-bedroom apartments rent at €3,000 to €6,000 a month, says Marylou Roelfzema of the estate agency Ing. Roelfzema Vastgoed.

'It is the safest neighbourhood in the whole of Amsterdam, which many famous people have made home,' she adds.

Willemspark resident and tour guide Vladimir Riabokon agrees, despite having his bike stolen recently from in front of his house (okay... it was unlocked).

'It's funny to see 1970s football legend Johan Cruyff bike by my window

every now and then,' says Riabokon. Other stars who call the 'hood home: actor and director Jeroen Krabbé, singer Trijntje Oosterhuis, Princess Marilène and Prince Maurits, the Albert Heijn family and, soon, Ajax coach Marco van Basten.

**Good for: quality connoisseurs** For music lovers, there's the Concertgebouw, whose superior acoustics render it one of the world's top three venues for symphonic music. For haute couture boutiques, just stroll down PC Hooftstraat, the Museum Quarter's main (elite) shopping street, where you'll find Dolce & Gabbana, Valentino and Chanel.

Intersecting it is the slightly more democratic Van Baerlestraat, which offers original Dutch design shops such as Pauw and Laundry Industry. Neighbourhood residents remain divided into two groups that rarely overlap: high-end shoppers and the culturati who head for the Concertgebouw and the Stedelijk Museum (which is under renovation for the foreseeable future).

**Fascinating fact** Local old-timer and actor Flip van Duijn remembers getting accidentally caught in a police raid against the squatters on Jan Luijkenstraat, together with his mother, Annie MG Schmidt, Holland's most famous children's book author (think Jip and Janneke). 'We hid on someone's porch and were lucky to come out without our clothes torn,' Van Duijn says. 'It was very exciting.'

## FIGURES

**Number of properties** 8,990  
**Primary schools** 6  
**Dentists** 41  
**General practitioners** 12  
**Pharmacists** 4  
**Cafes** over 100

**Transport** Ten minutes' walk to Leidseplein. The Museum Quarter can be reached from Central Station by trams 3, 5, 12, 16 and 24; tram 2 stops in Willemspark. Vondelpark is a five-minute walk from tram 1 via Station Lelylaan and close to the A10.

**Addresses** Café Vertigo, *Vondelpark 3*  
Café 't Blauwe Theehuis, *Vondelpark 5*  
Brasserie de Joffers, *Willemsparkweg 163*

Estate agency Ing. Roelfzema Vastgoed BV, *Willemsparkweg 135a*  
Rijksmuseum *Jan Luijkenstraat 1*

**Notable architecture** The Museum Quarter's street grid was designed by Rijksmuseum creator Pierre Cuypers, the first Dutch architect who dared to reintroduce French Gothic architecture into modern Dutch constructions. The museum's neo-Gothic façade that irritated his contemporaries as 'too Catholic' is now symbolic of the Dutch capital. For some off-the-beaten-track views, admire the quaint art nouveau houses at *Van Eeghenstraat 66-68* and also those on *Jacob Obrechtstraat*. On *Oranje Nassaulaan* in Willemspark, peer at the villas reflected in the serene ponds just off Emmaplein.

## Pros

Vondelpark may be Amsterdam's most-visited park, but hardly any other green space in the country can boast such a fine combination of wilderness and style. The jewel in its crown is the Italian Renaissance-inspired Vondelpark Pavilion, home to the Netherlands Filmmuseum. In its café Vertigo, you can enjoy salads and mint teas under the century-old trees – all *gezellig* with their hanging lamps. Challenge yourself to find Vondelpark's hidden Blue Tea House ('t Blauwe Theehuis), a bright blue, round construction resembling an English seaside pub in the midst of this English-landscaped park.

## Cons

Glamour invades everyday life as the simpler shops are replaced by boutiques, says Flip van Duijn. 'I don't need a new suit every day,' he says. 'What I need is meat, fresh vegetables, bread, milk and a dessert.' The nouveau riche has turned the Museum Quarter into a white ghetto, adds Jop te Kieffe. 'Now our only dark-skinned neighbour is Edsilia Rombley, a Eurovision Song Contest finalist.' Indeed, the number of whites in the neighbourhood exceeds the number of dark-skinned residents by more than ten times – far higher than Amsterdam's average 2:1 ratio.