



Eind-Where

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Everybody knows Amsterdam, heck even The Hague, but who thinks of Eindhoven when we say the Netherlands? Little do you know, says Robin McKelvie.

When a number of my Dutch friends ask why I'm visiting Eindhoven I start to worry. What exactly have I let myself in for? Is this one of the Netherlands' dullest cities compared with Amsterdam or The Hague? Where is it again?

Trying to remain undeterred I listen to the one friend I have who is actually from Eindhoven. He insists I forget the doubters and go immediately to the real City of Light where, he proclaims enthusiastically, a revolution in architecture and design is taking place and the city is in the midst of total reinvention.

My weekend doesn't start too promisingly. The only things I know about the Netherlands' fifth largest city (with 240,000 inhabitants) are that it's the home of global electronics giant Philips and that its football team PSV Eindhoven are masters of Dutch football. The first person I meet on the airport bus into town is student Claus van Bommel, who lowers my expectations further. "Philips actually moved their headquarters to Amsterdam in the 1990s and PSV are now running fifth in the Eredivisie," he says. Things are not looking good so far.

But when I arrive it seems the architectural wasteland my Amsterdam friends had dismissed could not be more different. I find an urban centre buzzing with new and bold architecture, with shards of steel and glass reaching for the heavens all around and a volley of cranes heralding more new development.

Competing for attention are the imposing Kennedy Tower, the vaulting De Admirant skyscraper and the remarkable Vesteda. Created by Eindhoven-educated architect Jo Coenen, the Vesteda is the 21st-century, glass-and-steel equivalent of Manhattan's Flatiron skyscraper, an award-winning optical illusion with three sleek sides. A large swathe of the city centre is also being reborn thanks to Italian architect Massimiliano Fuksas's recession-defying 18 Septemberplein project, which will see the city's core connected to two state-of-the-art shopping malls, Piazza and de Bijenkorf, to create a new pedestrianised oasis.

My first stop is at the Designhuis (www.designhuis.com) where the reasons behind Eindhoven's rebirth become clearer. Creative co-ordinator Fatima Roos says: "Philips literally brought us light, but also a sense of creativity that ripples through us. We don't rely on a scenic setting like Amsterdam or even these days Philips. Instead we have focused on making something of our city through art, design and architecture." And focus



they have, as the Designhuis itself testifies.

Housed in an old magistrates' court, the founding of the place was all very Eindhoven. When the local authorities tried to demolish the building artists and designers staged a sit in and eventually the place re-opened as their space in 2007. It is now the only dedicated design museum in the Netherlands, a cultural oasis that stages half a dozen exhibitions a year.



And this is where Philips comes back into the picture. In a city overflowing with the technical and creative talent they helped to attract, the Academy for Industrial Design Eindhoven was set up in 1947. In 1997, the renamed Design Academy moved into one of their old factories, known as the "White Lady". The Academy and its students put design at the forefront of Eindhoven and helped it win the coveted title of European Design Capital in 2006. The White Lady is also home to a design-focused library (www.bibliotheekeindhoven.nl), and a restaurant run by local catering students (see Sleep and Eat in Eindhoven below).

From my window table I can appreciate the old and new cities merging together. This cutting-edge hub lies just across the street from the original Philips factory, now a museum (www.philipsfabriek1891.nl) telling the story of the company's early days in the late 19th-century. Just next door is the Centrum Kunstlicht in de Kunst, or Artificial Light in Art Centre (www.kunstlichtkunst.nl). Here the ground floor holds temporary exhibitions whose common theme is light, while the permanent exhibits challenge the senses upstairs.

Today the company still has a presence in Eindhoven and fittingly it is mainly in research, design and development, much of it out at the High Tech Campus, a leafy oasis that's home to over 90 companies and workers from over 50 countries. Such is the concentration of brilliant minds and the strength of the city's creative output that the rest of the Netherlands has nicknamed Eindhoven "Brainport". This influx of multinational companies has helped continue the history of immigration kicked off by Philips, making Eindhoven one of the country's most cosmopolitan cities.

The tolerant, anything-goes nature is on show when I venture back outside for a Friday night out. The hub of the nocturnal action is on the nefarious Stratumseind, famous for being the longest street of bars in the Netherlands, with no fewer than 64 drinking dens. It is fuelled by the large student community and things get increasingly riotous as the night tumbles on towards the decadent 4am closing time. These guys know their drink.



The next day I somehow make it up early pushing on to Strijp-S. This was once a giant Philips manufacturing complex. Again the local authorities tried to smash it down, but charmingly those pesky artists held sway and it was saved. It is now being reinvented as a multi-use arts and leisure space.

In place of factories there are restaurants and bars, and even a skate park, AreaFiftyOne (www.area51skatepark.nl). Where once workers laboured over light fittings the city's youth pull skate moves in a building whose factory superstructure is still very much intact. As

Georgi, one of the skaters, puts it: “My parents used to work here and I wondered what it was all about. I think they are glad we are now using it for something new.”

The highlight of the Strijp-S cultural calendar is in spring when this 27ha postindustrial zone blossoms with the art and technology festival Strp (www.strp.nl), which has become an essential way of continuing to breathe life into the area. The April 2009 event included performances by Aphex Twin and Laurent Garnier to name but a few.

Eindhoven is all about pioneering and making the best of what you have. This is a city that constantly confounds expectation. I head on to the football stadium, which is, of course, sponsored by Philips. Unlike most modern stadiums it is not hidden away in the suburbs, but bang in the centre and its design again shows a talent for innovation. The problem of light pollution from huge overhead floodlights is cut out by lighting the pitch from within.



Saturday night is as big as Friday in Eindhoven, but this time I forgo the Stratumseind bars and hit Dommelstraat, home to more relaxed restaurants and many charmingly named *eet* cafés, literally “eating cafés”. In these places you can enjoy a caffeine fix and something light, while Markt square around the corner is essentially one giant throbbing pavement café. My favourite discovery is the De Bergen district, one of the oldest quarters of the city. Incredibly, this neighbourhood survived World War II bombing almost unscathed and the decades peel back as an older, more moneyed crowd enjoy an experience a world away from the Stratumseind.

De Bergen demonstrates that while Eindhoven is a thoroughly modern city it is also respectful of its past. Due to a storm of protest at the cutting-edge looks of the Van Abbemuseum (www.vanabbemuseum.nl), architects had to make sure a large chunk of the original building was left intact. Overlooking the Dommel river, this perfectly lit labyrinthine gallery now hosts a superb collection of works by artists such as Picasso, Kandinsky and Beuys.

In October, the city becomes home to Dutch Design Week (www.dutchdesignweek.nl), a major annual extravaganza attracting over 80,000 visitors from around the world. This year sees extra impetus behind the festival as the city authorities have declared the whole of 2009 “Eindhoven Design – Leading in Technology”.

As my plane finally swoops up and away from this vibrant Dutch city, I remember my meeting at the Designhuis with Fatima Roos. She had been rushing around preparing for her manager’s visit to the new exhibition, *Archaeology of the Future* (runs until 31 May). She was, appropriately enough, fretting about the lighting. But she needn’t have worried. Like the Designhuis, the city that surrounds it is a shining beacon of modern design and architecture that deserves a more prominent place on the European map.

So much for my Amsterdam friends and their naysaying. As far as I’m concerned they can stuff it up their proverbial backsides!

Sleep and Eat in Eindhoven

INFO: Contact the extremely proactive tourist board (17 Stationsplein, tel: +31 (0)40 297 9100, www.vvveindhoven.nl) for all you need to know about Eindhoven. It also sells the Art & Design Card (€12.50), which enables you to visit many of the city’s cultural attractions for a fraction of the cost.

SLEEP: Many hotels in Eindhoven slash rates at weekends, so check for the best price when booking. Boutique Hotel Lumiere (31a Hooghuisstraat, tel: +31 (0)40 239 4950, www.hotellumiere.nl) has rooms that are bright and modern, with an edgy design and lots of comfort. Doubles during the week from €149.50, including breakfast.

Alternatively, try the chic, four-star Eden Crown Hotel (14–16 Vestdijk, tel: +31 (0)40 844 4000, www.edencrownhotel.com), opened in 2007. The seven-storey tower’s best rooms boast wraparound windows that open up sweeping views of the city. Doubles during the week from €138, including breakfast.

EAT: The highlight of the fashionable eateries on Dommelstraat, New York Café, (9 Dommelstraat, tel: +31 (0)40 293 9227) is an old bank reinvented as a fusion restaurant and serves incredible lobster and rib-eye steak. Wear black, black and black to blend in with the local fashion crowd. One of the city’s funkiest little eet cafés is Eetcafé Ons (16 Kerkstraat, tel: +31 (0)40 293 8917), serving up lots of homemade organic dishes, including delicious fresh breads.

Meanwhile, the hip Brasserie Restaurant de Witte Tafel (2 Clausplein, tel: +31 (0)40 236 7328, www.dewittetafel.nl) in the Design Academy building is fittingly run by students, features an open kitchen and a stylish dining room. To those in the know, restaurant Luz (7 Bleekweg, tel: +31 (0)40 294 0271, www.luz-restaurant-bar.nl) is arguably the sleekest and

sexiest dining spot in town. Enjoy a smooth cocktail upstairs before descending to the post-industrial basement, where the likes of beef carpaccio infused with black truffle and seared scallops await.

Then there's the best Italian eatery in town, Mangiare (67a Kleine Berg, tel: +31 (0)40 236 7088, www.trattoriamangiare.nl), sitting on a picturesque spot in the charming De Bergen area. The décor is all style bar, but the cooking is solidly Italian, built on fresh ingredients with all the usual classics on offer.

