

TRAVEL

This Charming Hotel Outside Amsterdam Is An Old Master Painting Made New

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One way to arrive at the small fishing town of Durgerdam – just 20 minutes from Amsterdam's city centre – is by car. In the final moments of the journey, the dual carriageways slip away to reveal a wide slice of sea against pure sky; to the left, rows of quaint clapboard houses unfurl, lining the crest of a dyke that overlooks a sweeping landscape of wetlands.

But that's not the way you *should* arrive. If you're looking to experience the chocolate box charm of the town at its fullest, you'll need to make the journey by boat – preferably, the boat belonging to De Durgerdam, the new 14-room hotel that just opened in one of the historic buildings that sit atop the ridge of the shoreline. On a misty spring afternoon, the town appeared through the briny air like a hallucination. (As one of my hosts later explains, the houses are all painted either a bracing shade of white or various other pale colours to serve as informal lighthouses.) As I stepped off the dock and walked along the cobbled lane to the front of the hotel, the tall windows overlooking the water glowed with warm orange light like an old shipping inn from a period novel – the convivial warmth presumably generated by the flow of vigorous conversation, and the just as vigorous pouring of drinks.



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Step inside, though, and the hotel's altogether more contemporary design scheme makes it evident De Durgerdam has a few surprises up its sleeve. The long, central room houses a lounge area for arriving guests, a bar topped with sinewy pink marble, and seating that looks something like a velvet-covered church pew – offering an object lesson in how to take the design codes of decades past and make them feel entirely fresh. A 17th-century still life is hung on one of the putty-yellow walls, while the furniture includes a mix of weathered wooden farmhouse chairs and sleeker midcentury pieces. Downstairs, in a subterranean snug area, a fireplace crackles in the centre of a room painted a muddy red (a nod to the colour of the tanned sails of old Dutch ships), while a wall of exposed brickwork reveals the near-invisible seams between the original structure of the building and its meticulously refurbished second skin.

This bijou property, which features three suites among the individually designed rooms, might seem modest at first, but how it came into existence tells a very different story. De Durgerdam opened just a few weeks ago under the aegis of Paul Geertman, founder of the Amsterdam-based investor and hospitality company [Aedes](#), which specialises in finding and restoring historic buildings in the city for redevelopment as

hotels. (Previous projects have included the Amsterdam branches of Soho House, The Hoxton, and Andaz.) After setting his sights on running a hotel all his own, he stumbled across a property in the town of Durgerdam, whose 500 inhabitants are mostly either those who've been here for generations, or young families who've moved out of the city centre in search of a little more outdoor space.

It would be handy, one imagines, to have observed the challenges of establishing a hotel in a historic building before launching into your first project. But when it came to executing his exacting vision for the interiors, Geertman decided to hand over the reins to the design studio Buro Belén, whose thoughtful updates of the building's historical features are rooted in a balance between the public spaces, which deliberately foster a sense of relaxed sociability, and the private quarters of the bedrooms, which place the emphasis firmly on seclusion and tranquillity. (There are plenty of 21st-century mod cons here, too: rainfall showers, TVs hidden away in sliding panels, and even custom sky-blue raincoats designed by the cult Amsterdam brand Kassl Editions.)



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The other illustrious string to the property's bow is the top-notch food offering, which is headed up by chefs Richard van Oostenbrugge and Thomas Groot, the culinary

masterminds behind the two-Michelin-starred Amsterdam restaurant 212 that overlooks the Amstel river. At De Durgerdam, the duo has taken their cues from the fields and waters surrounding them, crafting a menu that leans heavily on seasonal vegetables – a gorgeously earthy leek roasted on an open fire and topped with a crisp puff of tempura, or glossy slow-cooked onions and shallots accompanied by a zingy scoop of mustard ice cream – and is accented with sustainably sourced seafood, such as slow-roasted cod or the prawns that decorate the delicate bitterness of local white asparagus. (Don't skimp on ordering a side of fries either: not only do they have the perfect amount of crunch, but they come with a side of some of the most delicious, freshly made mayonnaise you will ever try.) Ask nicely, and the kitchen will even pack you a gourmet picnic for a day trip on their historic salon boat, which was built in 1905 and has been painstakingly restored and retrofitted with an electric engine so you can glide lazily around the city's canals for an afternoon.

What makes De Durgerdam special is that, yes, there's the accessibility of the nearby city, with its endless list of shops and cultural attractions (anyone travelling in the next few months will inevitably be trying to score a ticket to the sold-out Vermeer show at the Rijksmuseum), but when you're ensconced in its cosy four walls, you feel entirely apart from it. The atmosphere the hotel cultivates is one conducive to lighting a fire, putting your feet up on a stool, and reading a book; helpfully, there's a well-stocked library and reading chairs in every room for exactly that.



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It makes sense, then, that this is a project that has been long in the making – at least in that it's the product of the many lifetimes of expertise acquired by Geertman and his team through their previous hotels at Aedes. Every detail – from freshly baked cookies in a tin each morning next to your coffee machine, to the fact that every staff member down to the last waiter is trained to be able to check you in – has been carefully thought through, and the efficiency of everything from the turn-down service to the booking system speaks to a property many times its size.

One possible reason for that? This may not be the first in Geertman's nascent hotel portfolio, with a significantly larger property, Amstel 111, set to open next year in the heart of the city. If De Durgerdam is anything to go by, they're set to have an even bigger hit on their hands.



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