

# EUROPE NOW

simon schama's

## favorite place

BY DANI SHAPIRO

Crossing Amsterdam's Herengracht canal.



### LOCAL TIPS

#### CANALSIDE SLEEPS

"The **Ambassade** (341 Herengracht; 31-20/555-0222; [ambassade-hotel.nl](http://ambassade-hotel.nl); doubles from \$339) is a wonderful fifty-nine-room hotel where writers often stay."

#### SHOES FOR WALKING

"**Hester Van Eeghen** (1 and 37 Hartenstraat; 31-20/626-9212; [hestervaneeghen.com](http://hestervaneeghen.com)) is my favorite shoemaker and bag designer in the world. Her leather goods collection is developed in Amsterdam, made in Italy, and sold at two showrooms in town."

#### CAFÉ CULTURE

"For croquettes and beer, **Café Luxembourg** (24 Spui; 31-20/620-6264; dinner for two \$80) is a fantastic place. But don't go if you want to avoid lateral smoke. It's difficult to imagine Amsterdam without the smell of hand-rolled cigarettes and pipes."

## AMSTERDAM THE NETHERLANDS

"IT'S SUCH A PLACE OF NOISY JUBILATION—A CITY THAT COMBINES THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE. Amsterdam always seems to be wrestling with itself. There's this sense that being there means rubbing shoulders with danger. To clean it up, the way New York's Times Square has been cleaned up, would be untrue to its character. But you also don't want it to be squalid, because one walks and walks in Amsterdam. It is a city of perambulation. You pass the railroad station with its neo-Gothic architecture, and then you look down to the Oude Kerk, a 13th-century church with such a strong sense of the city's beginnings.

"In Amsterdam, neighborhoods are intertwined; there are roads that lead both to the university and the red-light district. Whether I'm exploring the Nine Little Streets area, with its cafés and shops, or the Oud Zuid, south of the museums, which is not quite Art Nouveau, not quite Art Deco, there is a sense of what the Dutch call *gezellig*: a cozy, comfortable, convivial feeling—never smothering. A painting by the great Dutch landscape artist Jacob van Ruisdael, *A Panoramic View of Amsterdam Looking Toward the IJ* [on display at London's National Gallery], captures these contradictions. It's a bird's-eye view of the wrong side of Amsterdam. He didn't want to showcase the grandest building; instead, he looked back toward the city's emotional and economic fountainhead. That's what one still sees in the city's fishing boats, docks, the oldest churches—Amsterdam's simple origins."

Simon Schama is a professor of art history and history at Columbia University. His newest collection of essays, *Scribble, Scribble, Scribble* (Ecco; \$28), is in bookstores now.

Jacob van Ruisdael's *A Panoramic View of Amsterdam Looking Toward the IJ* (1665–70).



### READ IT

LOOK FOR THE T+L EUROPE EDITION FOR iPad® TO READ AN EXCERPT FROM SCHAMA'S NEW ESSAY, *AMSTERDAM*.

Illustrated by Andy Friedman

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