

4

R E T S AND SQUARES



# STREETS

## AMSTERDAM

*The Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Streets in Amsterdam vary according to the period when they were developed, the changing needs of users, and the part of the city in which they are located. Particularly, many streets built after the 1950's accommodated vehicles with their considerably larger width. Several important streets were cleared to accommodate the new automobile. Other streets were closed down to automobile use, and remain pedestrian-oriented to this day.

The widespread dependence upon the bicycle has affected signage and right of way rules on streets in Amsterdam. The vast majority of streets include some space for automobiles, a designated slice for bicycles, and another channel for pedestrians. Several streets are limited to bicycles and pedestrians, while a handful of streets in the center allow for pedestrian use only.

Canals can be considered a type of street in Amsterdam; buildings front the canals similar to the street, and both goods and people move along these waterways. The canals in

Amsterdam were developed as a response to the low water level and flooding of this city, but these routes quickly became important social structures of themselves. Since their inception, several canals have been filled in to become streets;

these lanes are generally identifiable by their extreme width; occasionally a median space delineates these spaces.

Many of the street names reflect their use, or some particularly

important historical event relating to that place. For example, pig street is a place where pigs were once sold, and beer street sold beers. These lasting names link Amsterdammers to their shared history.

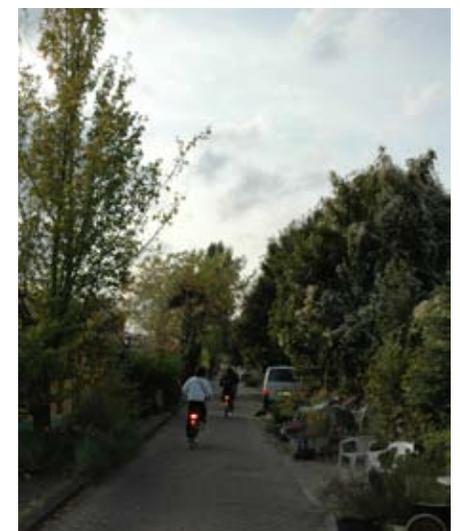
Today, Amsterdam streets are a variety of widths, ranging from 12 feet to sixty feet or more, and host a variety of different activities. Shoppers, cafes, and street musicians form the colorful street scene in Amsterdam today.



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Squares in Amsterdam lack the formal structure that most streets and canals follow. Moreover, these squares vary greatly in terms of size, shape, context and character. While Amsterdam can be easily understood through its infrastructure network, a study of this city's squares results in few commonalities.

In Amsterdam, squares offer residents and tourists a place to experience a reprieve from the movement of the city. Streets typically feed into squares, and here pedestrians and cyclists collect. Squares can be destinations, offering activities such as fairs and markets, or they can be used more informally, as a place to stop and sit, where cafes spill out into the public space and street performers set up shop.

In terms of variety and character, Amsterdam can be understood by looking at a collection of different squares. While each square is radically different, each offers a perspective of the city through the context that it exists. Both formal and informal planning phases have yielded squares in this city, though



# SQUARES

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their character differs considerably.

Squares are shaped by the streets around them, resulting in irregular spaces bounded by buildings. In Amsterdam, the squares are generally used as open civic space; accommodating café tables, benches for people to sit, street musicians, performers and collective meeting space.

Typical characteristics of squares include flat hard surfaces, usually cobblestone or brick. Seating is provided, and often a water fountain or memorial statue will provide a central focus.

Other public open spaces have been delineated in Amsterdam. A large amount of parks and open green space exists within the city, providing places for people to walk, bike, and collect to play games.

### OUTDOOR SPACE

Large tracts of public open space exist within the city of Amsterdam. Because the city was not entirely divided into blocks and canals during the third expansion, and yet this land was surrounded by the infrastructure of a growing city, great expanses of flat lands were designated by the government for public outdoor use. Today, some of these parcels have been consumed by blocks and streets, and yet a large portions remains the open space of parks, zoos, sports fields and community gardens. These outdoor spaces have become important civic space similar to the city's squares and streets.

### MUSEUM PLEIN

The Museum plein borders many of the most important museums of Amsterdam, including the Stedelijk, the van Gogh and the Rijksmuseum. It looks out on the Concertgebouw, and has become an important daytime place of interest.

### MAX EEUWE PLEIN

The Max Eeuwe plein was once a former jail and has since been redeveloped into a semi-Jerde square. While this area is quite commercial, the square functions to combine the inner city and the area around Vondel park.

## DAM PLEIN

Located at the historic city center, and at the hub of today's downtown core, Dam plein is one of the most important cultural squares for Amsterdam. This square borders important public buildings such as the former city hall, now a city palace, and the new kerk (New Church.) In this square, it is common to see street vendors and performers, as well as tourists collecting for a respite from the busy streets that surround it.



# SQUARES

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### MARIE HEINEKEN PLEIN

Named after the wife of Heineken founder, Marie Heineken plein is located in 'de Pijp' neighbourhood. This area was initially established to house workers, but has since become gentrified by an influx in student and young professionals looking for housing.



### SPUI

In Spui, cafés and the bookshop line this square. It has become a primary hangout for students and visitors, as it borders the main building of the University of Amsterdam.

### LEIDSEPLEIN

Tourists gather around the popular neighbourhood of Leidse plein. This area is also frequented by residents, and locals visiting the main theatre.



### WATERLOO PLEIN

Waterloo plein was once the heart of the old Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam. Today, it sits next to the new city hall and opera building. You can buy all kind of used goods there from second hand clothes to bicycles.



## VICTORIE PLEIN

Victorieplein, was built by van Eesteren as a key part of Berlage's Plan Zuid. It is an example of a more formal plan structure and resultant square, built to highlight both the monumental and social. Some of the first high rises in Amsterdam border this square.



## OLYMPIA PLEIN

Near the stadium, Olympia plein is made up of the residual space from the development of this public space. This square is a large and important one for the southern part of Amsterdam. It sits next to the old Ajax stadium and is on the border of the old South Quarter.



## MINERVA PLEIN

Considered both a posh and well-designed square by AMsterdamers, Minerva plein attracts tourists and locals alike. This square is a part of Berlage's Plan Zuid, and serves as a good example of the Amsterdam school of designing.



## ROELOF HART PLEIN

The Roelof Hart plein is a small and simple square in Amsterdam. It is flanked by famous Wilschut cafe, the most Parisian of Amsterdam cafes.

