

THE NETHERLANDS

# CULTURE FEED

*Cartoons, architecture, tattooists, techno music, Damien Hirst ... chef Sergio Herman takes his cues from far more than just food*

BY JAY CHESHES

**MOST CHEFS LOOK FOR INSPIRATION** in the ingredients around them; others, in the traditional foods of world cultures. Sergio Herman, the Netherlands' first "rock-star chef," seeks his in fashion, architecture, electronic dance music, modern art and design. And if his three-Michelin-star destination restaurant, Oud Sluis, and his recent book, *Sergiology*, are any indication, he's found plenty.

Located in the quaint market town of Sluis, in southwest Holland, the traditional shingled building that houses Oud Sluis belies the modern cultural treasury it holds. Inside,

**IF IT AIN'T BROKE ...**  
Food presented on artfully shattered dishes at Sergio Herman's Oud Sluis

specially commissioned mixes by Dutch DJ Sander Kleinenberg accompany the 15-course tasting menu. One dish arrives on a plate illustrated by a famous cartoonist; another comes in fractured cups and saucers imagined by top Belgian designer Sofie Lachaert. Ingredients are arranged in conceptual landscapes and seascapes in an homage to a stroll along the windswept Dutch coast, where Herman's second restaurant, Pure-C, opened three years ago. ➤



**AUDIO, BOOK** Sergio Herman's *Sergiology*, complete with digital audio of interviews he conducted

➤ Miniature chocolate skulls, conceived with leading Dutch design firm Studio Job, evoke the work of renegade British artist Damien Hirst. A few years back, Herman served dessert “tattoos” designed by Hanky Panky, a well-known tattoo artist who once inked Kurt Cobain.

These inspirations, and many more, are showcased in Herman's book, which explores the complicated question of where ideas come from by profiling musicians, chefs, visual artists and architects who have influenced him. The lavish, photo-filled volume comes with its own audio player, containing interviews with several of the book's big names as well as narration by Herman himself. “When you go to a museum, you hear stories through a headset that take you deeper into the artist's world,” he says. “I wanted to do the same thing for my food.”

In maintaining all these varied interests and funneling them into cuisine, Herman, 42, appears to have an almost superhuman drive. Last summer he signed on with the Tomorrowland festival, an electronic music blowout in Belgium, where he cooked under a tent for eight lucky winners who, like Willy Wonka's potential protégés, had snagged “golden tickets.” He's developing his first city restaurant, in an old military hospital chapel in Antwerp, and is in talks to open an eatery on Ibiza. He has a string of cookbooks in the works and recently published a magazine with his name and face on the cover. And somehow he still finds time to cook at Oud Sluis, showing up in the kitchen for just about every service.

“I work 17, 18 hours a day. I don't really need sleep,” Herman says, but adds that he's not planning to keep that pace up forever. “I've got a date in my head when I'll shut the door at Oud Sluis. I want to stop while I'm at my peak.” Many wonder how much further that can possibly be from where he is right now.



## A GIN BLOSSOMS

Holland's famous malt spirit makes a comeback

Genever, a type of gin created in the 16th century by blending malt wine, neutral alcohol and botanicals, is Holland's most distinctive home-grown spirit. By the late 20th century, however, it had fallen out of fashion among young Dutch drinkers, who'd moved on to cocktails made with vodka and rum (mojitos have been huge for a while now). But in recent years Bols, the country's largest genever producer, has been spearheading a revival, encouraging students at its bartending academy in Amsterdam to start playing with the stuff. At Door 74—Amsterdam's first speakeasy-style bar—head barkeep **Timo Janse** gets creative with his stash.



TONY LE DUC/COURTESY SERGIO HERMAN (BOOK)



## HOPSCOTCH TO HOLLAND

- › 1½ oz. genever
- › 1½ oz. Lillet Blanc
- › ¾ oz. green Chartreuse
- › 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- › 2 dashes grapefruit bitters

1. Mix all ingredients in a shaker and shake vigorously.
2. Strain into a martini glass and garnish with a grapefruit peel.



## MANSE MACABRE

This Amsterdam eatery offers an arty take on a grim history

Opening restaurants in old commercial, institutional and industrial spaces is big everywhere these days, but nowhere more so than in Amsterdam, where former factories, warehouses, schools and banks have all been transformed into places to eat. And among these recycled venues, none is quite as off-beat as Lab 111, a café, bar and restaurant in a decommissioned pathology lab.

"The bodies used to come in through tunnels," says restaurateur Otto Groeneveld, who opened the place a few years ago as a for-profit arm of the nonprofit arts group that holds screenings and performances elsewhere in the building (dinner customers help offset artist rents).

Lab 111's décor puts a playful spin on the space's ghoulish past. Metal cabinets that once housed specimens in jars now stock bottles of wine. Vintage operating-room lamps hang above the enormous green table where dishes like braised lamb with savoy cabbage, pancetta and veal-oregano sauce,

and quinoa with pumpkin, mushrooms, beets and chickpeas are served.

Groeneveld didn't extend the theme much beyond the décor, though. "We didn't want to take it too far," he says. "We don't want to be a circus act." —J.C.



**THE LURID LARDER**  
Old medical paraphernalia is juxtaposed with fake-pantry wallpaper at Lab 111

### BOARDING PASS

Foodie alert: Sergio Herman's hypercreative Oud Sluis is just a quick jaunt from Brussels, to which United offers nonstop service from its U.S. hubs in Chicago, New York/Newark and Washington Dulles. Or, if a culinary trip to Amsterdam is what you have in mind, fly United nonstop to the Netherlands' capital from Chicago, Houston, New York/Newark and Washington Dulles. **For detailed schedule information or to book your flight, go to [united.com](http://united.com).**



## Star Craft

Seattle's coffee giant does the indie thing in Holland

**HOW DOES THE WORLD'S** largest coffee chain shake off its one-size-fits-all image? For Seattle-based Starbucks—which is looking to move into new markets in Europe and Asia—the answer is to replace its gangbusters Starbucks-upon-Starbucks expansion model with a hyperlocal approach. The company's new flagship in Amsterdam is the ultimate expression of this corporate about-face. "Just because you have a huge footprint on the planet doesn't mean you have to do the exact same thing wherever you go," says Liz Muller, Starbucks' Dutch-born concept design director.

Built in the former vault of the historic *Amsterdamsche Bank* on Rembrandt Square, the Amsterdam Starbucks is the company's first European concept café and its largest outpost on the continent. "This is the most iconic Starbucks in the world right now," says Muller. The 4,500-square-foot space features the work of some 35 local artists and artisans, as well as some ingenious recycled design elements. Old bicycle inner tubes function as soundproofing along one wall. Stools crafted like bike seats, with worn leather stretched over springs, line the counter at the "slow coffee theater," where reserve

## FARAWAY, SO CLOSE

A colonial feast that brings everything to the table

The *rijsttafel*, or "rice table," is Amsterdam's most famous feast, as emblematic of the city as bike-riding grannies. Yet its foods don't come from the Netherlands at all. The concept is a holdover from the Dutch colonial era, when plantation honchos in Indonesia, eager to impress visiting

dignitaries, would introduce the many exotic tastes of their adopted home in one fell swoop. The spread included a mound of rice and up to 40 small dishes to go with it—iconic recipes from across the islands such as *gado gado* (vegetables with peanut sauce), *sates* (skewered meats), *sambals* (chutneys) and *rendangs* (coconut beef).

These days most of Amsterdam's many Indonesian restaurants, catering to a Dutch audience, serve some



**SPREAD 'EM**  
Puri Mas' take on the *rijsttafel*



**DUTCH TREAT** Starbucks' flagship coffeehouse in Amsterdam offers spacious digs

beans are brewed using the Clover vacuum system—a first for Starbucks in Europe. Chairs rescued from a nearby public school surround tables made from oak stumps. The blue and white tiles found in every kitchen in Amsterdam cling to the bank's concrete pillars, and hundreds of intricate *speculaas* molds—for making the traditional Dutch cookies—have been transformed into wall art.

The whole space has been designed with lingering in mind. “The Dutch don’t run around with a cup in the street,” says Muller. “They want their coffee in a ceramic mug. And they want to sit down and enjoy it with a cookie.” —J.C.

version of the *rijsttafel*. Puri Mas, one of the more lavish such eateries, offers a *royaal* rendition with around 20 dishes. Blauw, a sleek, mood-lit spot that counts goat *sate* and cinnamon-dusted roast lamb among its rotation of dishes, prepares the whole thing to go if you’re hosting a banquet at home. Most *rijsttafels* are a major commitment—you need a big group, a huge appetite and a few hours to kill—but at Café Kadijk, you can slip in solo for a miniature take that features six or seven items on a single plate. It’s the city’s fastest and cheapest version of the classic feast, worth trying even if your only experience with colonies has been ant-related. —J.C.

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