

RESTAURANT DE KAS  
AMSTERDAM  
PLANT TO PLATE



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# JOS AND WIM

As culinary double acts go, we are pretty well-matched. “I look after the creative side of things,” Jos says. “I plan the menus, come up with new dishes and discuss combinations and flavours with the kitchen and waiting staff. Wim is the more practical one. He is precise and a great organiser. We both started in a part-time job as dishwashers.” Wim graduated to the kitchen and followed a classic Michelin star training in restaurants like Parkheuvel, la Rive and Bolenius. Jos returned to the catering business at Jamie Oliver’s Fifteen in Amsterdam and also worked in the kitchen at Vermeer and Ron Gastrobar.

We got to know each other when we were appointed head chefs at the new RIJKS restaurant in Amsterdam in 2014. “It was quite odd – a duo job for chefs is not very common in the catering industry – but we clicked straight away,” Wim adds. We have the same vision regarding the kitchen: making good food without fuss, having fun and working hard. We learned a lot at the RIJKS: how to design a kitchen, build a team, create a menu and work together with internationally renowned chefs.

Two years later we won a Michelin star, together with executive chef Joris Bijsendijk. In many ways our careers were flying, but there’s a formality and structure to fine dining

that also felt quite restrictive to us at the time. We wanted something more spontaneous that involved less fuss. And of course we wanted to be our own bosses too.

We would swim together before work and talk about our plans for a restaurant that we could run together in the future – a cosy little place, vegetable-oriented, back-to-basics, with high quality food and a bar where our customers could enjoy a glass of wine while we cooked the freshest local food right in front of their noses. Little did we know that a few weeks later we would be sitting down with Gert Jan to discuss taking over his restaurant, De Kas.

So how did we go from that simple dream to a unique, world-famous restaurant that now welcomes more than 50,000 guests each year? Looking back, it was perhaps less of a coincidence than we often think. We don’t really believe in fate, but maybe it was just meant to be. We both know how to cook, of course, and we also had the good fortune of working in restaurants where grown-on-site produce was an essential part of the menu – Bolenius has its own little garden and Vermeer has a roof-top nursery. So when we heard that Gert Jan Hageman was looking for new head chefs at De Kas, we were immediately interested. And while we didn’t know everything about creating and maintaining a



# THE STORY OF DE KAS

Tucked away in the east of the city is Amsterdam's elegant and leafy Frankendael Park. It hasn't always been a hidden gem, however, and over the years the park has had several uses. It was drained for the first time in 1630 and became a popular location for wealthy city dwellers to build their country houses.

At the end of the 19th century the last country manor, called Frankendael, was purchased by the municipality of Amsterdam. After this the park was used for a variety of purposes. In 1927 an enormous greenhouse was built with the aim of supplying exotic plants and palm trees to other parks in the city. Other

and was longing for something simpler," he recalls. "A greenhouse setting for a restaurant seemed like a brilliant idea to me: the produce could be grown onsite and so couldn't be any fresher. The guy at the council suggested I might like to check out the old greenhouse at Frankendael before the demolition team moved in. The first time I went to have a look at the building I knew for sure: this was the greenhouse I'd dreamt of finding."

The old city nursery was saved from demolition and even offered a future. However, restoring it cost Gert Jan more than he had bargained for in terms of both effort and

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## "THIS WAS THE GREENHOUSE I'D DREAMT OF FINDING."

trees were cultivated too, including exotics like banana trees and native varieties. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, demand had waned to a point where the greenhouse was essentially redundant. No longer needed and unloved, demolition seemed the only answer. And that's when Gert Jan Hageman got an unexpected phone call from a man at the Amsterdam city council. "I'd reached a point in my career where I was feeling disillusioned

money. "I was naïve," he says, "but I was also convinced the building could work as a restaurant, and I wasn't going to stop working on the project until I had achieved my goal."

And so, against all the odds, construction work began in earnest. In early 2000 the old greenhouse, now beyond repair, was razed. The original girders were salvaged but the enormous chimney that was part of the

few acres of vegetable garden, we did have a general idea. The feeling of growing your own veggies, picking them fresh and serving them immediately, you really don't want anything else once you've done that.

At De Kas the philosophy has always been to use ingredients that are as fresh and as local as possible. When it first opened, the restaurant was way ahead of its time, but by the time we arrived it had become a little bit complacent in its ways. It was time to breathe new life into this culinary institution, with more focus on sustainability and creating surprising

just another run-of-the-mill restaurant at the end of the street – but we managed to convince him during our first year that he had picked the right guys for the job!

Ever since, we've been involved in every aspect of life at De Kas; not just creating the menu and the wine list, but also maintaining the nuts and bolts of this historic building, devising a sowing and planting schedule for the greenhouse and nursery on the Beemster polder and keeping in touch with the growers. Each morning we collect fresh produce from the garden and we are also responsible for a

## “THERE'S NO ROOM FOR EGOS, THE INGREDIENTS ARE THE STARS AROUND HERE”

and inspiring flavours. Basically, good food that makes you want to lick your plate.

Local, seasonal and fresh ingredients have always played a leading role at De Kas, where they are simply woven into the DNA. When we started we didn't set out to work exclusively with bananas or mangoes or anything like that, but we did want to do things very differently. That first year in the kitchen we made several changes, not only because of our style of cooking but also because of our approach to structuring the menu, wine list and service. The idea was to make the harvest from the garden the star during lunch and dinner. Eventually, in 2018, we approached Gert Jan with the idea of taking over the restaurant from him full-time. We were quite nervous during that conversation – after all, it wasn't

staff of over sixty people. We're not just there to run a restaurant; as chefs we have a story to tell too.

We set ourselves a number of goals at the start. Everything had to be tastier, better, more sustainable – guests should leave the place feeling inspired; we would use vegetables that are in season and harvested locally; and we should encourage our guests to use our ideas regarding flavours and combinations at home in their own kitchen.

Our emphasis is now even more on creating predominantly plant-based dishes using locally-grown fruit and veg from our own nursery and our neighbours' land. Not only did it make sense from a sustainability angle to keep things plant-based, fresh and local, it also felt







# HARVESTED IN THE MORNING, ON YOUR PLATE BY LUNCHTIME

When we talk about the harvest that comes from De Kas, essentially it's supplied via a three-pronged operation that forms the basis for our kitchen and keeps us in touch with the seasons and close to nature. The closest component in terms of actual distance is the indoor growing area in De Kas itself, which is used for growing herbs and edible flowers and for cultivating plants for the Beemster. We now have a hydroponics system, which ensures that we can harvest watercress, various types of basil and other leafy vegetables as freshly as possibly all year round. We also grow all kinds of herbs in our backyard in Amsterdam; everything from oyster leaves to purslane and wild flowers to horseradish. In addition to these two locations, we also have a garden in the Beemster, only 20 kilometres from Amsterdam, where we grow fruit and vegetables in the greenhouse and out on the polder. We often drive back to Amsterdam with clods of soil still hanging from the tubers and the tomatoes still warm from the greenhouse. And that's how we start our day every morning.

## FRESH FROM THE BEEMSTER

Just half an hour's drive from central Amsterdam, but a world away in terms of green space and tranquillity, is the Beemster polder. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it was reclaimed from the sea in the 17th century

and its fertile soil produces much of the fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers that we use in our kitchen. The nursery we have there stands on land that originally belonged to one of our strawberry farmers, but when he reached retirement age we asked if we could take it over. He said yes, and along with a large greenhouse and a few acres of land we also acquired the remarkable skills of Johan, who is now our gardener. Now at the kind of age when many would be thinking of retiring (don't even suggest the idea to Johan – the man never even takes a holiday!), he has worked tirelessly on virtually the same spot since he was a teenager. No one knows that strip of land and the vagaries of its heavy clay soil better and Johan is at the very heart of the De Kas operation – if he produces it, we use it. Over the years we've had our fair share of gluts and we sometimes wonder if Johan can even face growing another strawberry. And then there was the season when a surplus led to every type of gherkin-related dish, pickle and sauce you can think of emerging from the kitchen at De Kas...

Gluts aside, in many ways Johan is a master of control: the edible pumpkins he produces really are – seemingly miraculously – all the same size, as are his miniature courgettes. Of course, it's easier to control what we produce in the Beemster greenhouse because it's a covered area; outside is trickier given



# SNOWBALL TURNIPS WITH PICCALILLI AND POPPY SEED

You can make your own piccalilli, of course, but we always like to use the mustard piccalilli made by De Leeuw in Amsterdam. Owner Fred tweaks his recipe slightly for us but he still refuses to reveal the secret. Someday we may find out what magic lies behind it, but until then we will continue to visit the shop, where they still make their unique Jewish pickles. Their mustard piccalilli is great with all kinds of vegetables – radishes and carrots in particular – but we like to enjoy it with turnip. Below you will find a recipe for piccalilli mayonnaise that we like using too.

In the restaurant we puff all our grain ourselves, but there are lots of puffed varieties available to buy as well. Not as tasty, perhaps, but probably the safer option if you don't like working with hot oil in the kitchen.

8 snowball turnips, tops still attached

## PICCALILLI MAYONNAISE

1 tbsp lemon juice  
10 g Dijon mustard  
30 g pasteurised egg yolk  
10 g brown sugar  
25 g ketchup  
30 g piccalilli  
5 drops tabasco  
200 ml grapeseed oil

## POPPY SEED CRUMBLE

500 ml oil  
50 g Canadian wild rice  
75 g cassava crackers  
1 sachet sushi vinegar powder  
50 g poppy seeds

Remove the outer leaves from the turnips, chop off the ends and wash in ice water to keep them nice and crunchy.

To make the piccalilli mayonnaise, mix all the ingredients, except for the grapeseed oil, in a food processor or with a hand blender, slowly adding the oil as you go along.

To make the poppy seed crumble, heat the oil in a high-sided saucepan to around 200 °C. It is important that the saucepan is not too shallow, as the rice will swell as soon as it hits the oil. Add the rice to a deep sieve and lower gently into the oil. Remove immediately when all the rice has puffed and leave to cool to room temperature so that it won't stick when added to the food processor. Briefly mix the cooled rice with the crackers and vinegar in the food processor before adding the poppy seeds.

Dip the turnips in the piccalilli and sprinkle with the crumble.



# FRIED CHICKEN THIGHS WITH WHITE ASPARAGUS, JUS BÉCASSE AND CHIPOTLE

We like to use 'jus bécasse' as a sauce for both poultry and vegetables. In this case it is made with the liver of the chicken, which gives it a rich and full flavour.

Adding the chipotle – a smoked jalapeño pepper – makes the dish much more pungent and exciting. You can buy the peppers dried, but they are also available in adobo sauce, in which they are softened and pureed so that they are easier to use.

Curing salt is used to preserve the colour of meat. You can buy it from your butcher or wholesalers.

If you have enough time, it's really worth your while making your own chicken gravy. At De Kas we obviously make our own sauces and stocks, but there are also good quality ones available to buy.

4 chicken thighs, boned  
1 bundle of white asparagus, peeled  
a few leaves of butterhead lettuce or young oxheart cabbage

## CHICKEN LIVER CRÈME

1 onion, finely chopped  
1 clove of garlic, finely chopped  
200 g organic chicken liver  
50 g sherry  
10 g miso  
100 g cream  
8 g curing salt  
450 g chicken gravy  
100 g butter

## CHIPOTLE CRÈME

45 g pasteurised egg white  
75 g sushi vinegar  
2 tbsp chipotle in adobo sauce  
350 ml l sunflower oil

First, make the chicken liver crème. Fry the onion and garlic until soft and remove from the pan. Then fry the chicken livers until brown and pour in the sherry. Transfer to a food processor. Add the miso, garlic and onion mix, cream, curing salt, 50 g of chicken gravy and the butter and blend until you have a crème. Cover with clingfilm – to prevent it from drying out – and place in the fridge.

Bring the rest of the gravy to the boil. Add half of the chicken liver crème to the sauce while stirring continuously with a hand blender. Freeze the rest for the next time. Set the sauce aside.

Fry the chicken thighs skin side down in a frying pan. Place a heavy object like another frying pan on top, with a sheet of baking paper in between, to keep the chicken pressed down onto the pan. Fry for around 20 minutes on a low heat, after which the thighs should be golden brown and crispy. Check halfway to see whether they are cooking too fast or too slow. If necessary, you can drain off some of the fat and slice the chicken thighs in half with a sharp knife.

In the meantime, make the chipotle crème. Mix the egg white and sushi vinegar with the chipotle. Slowly add the oil until you have a crème with the consistency of yoghurt.

Fry or grill the asparagus in a little oil. Trim the ends so that they are all the same length.

Spoon the two sauces onto a plate. Place the asparagus on top, followed by the chicken thighs. Garnish with a few leaves of butterhead lettuce or young oxheart cabbage. Rocket also goes well with the chicken and asparagus.



# AJO BLANCO WITH GREEN BEANS, WILD PEACH AND BASIL

For this recipe, make sure you use very ripe peaches because it will make all the difference. We grow all kinds of green beans in our garden in the Beemster, including green and purple butter beans. Kees Klopper also grows a variety of bean in his garden that is fatter and has much more flavour than the skinny kinds you usually get these days.

500 g green beans, trimmed  
2 wild peaches, pits removed, sliced as thinly as possible  
25 g white almonds  
almond oil

## BASIL CRÈME

45 g pasteurised egg white  
1 bunch of basil (set some leaves and flowers aside)  
75 ml sushi vinegar  
200 ml sunflower oil

## AJO BLANCO (ALMOND SOUP)

145 g blanched almonds  
1 clove of garlic, peeled  
50 g sourdough bread, crust removed  
300 ml almond milk  
olive oil, sherry vinegar

To make the ajo blanco, add all of the ingredients to a food processor and blend until smooth. Season with olive oil, sherry vinegar and salt and pepper. Blanch the green beans in water with a pinch of salt. This takes about 5 minutes, but check them anyway to make sure they are done. Drain and rinse in cold (ice) water.

## BASIL CRÈME

Blend the egg white, basil and sushi vinegar in the food processor, adding the sunflower oil as you go along until you have a runny crème. Pass through a fine-meshed sieve if you wish.

Pour the almond soup into bowls and add the basil crème, followed by the green beans and peach. Garnish with basil leaves and flowers and the white almonds and sprinkle with almond oil.







# RHUBARB WITH CRUNCHY CROISSANT, FENNEL ICE CREAM, YOGHURT AND CINNAMON SUGAR

When rhubarb season comes around, we always turn to Johan and his plentiful supply in the Beemster. We don't harvest it anymore after the longest day of the year because that's when the stalks start to become more fibrous and less tasty.

500 g sugar  
1 cinnamon stick  
2 small croissants  
2 tbsp melted butter  
1 lemon  
1 kg rhubarb, fibrous strings removed,  
chopped into 2 cm pieces  
1 bulb of fennel with fronds, bulb sliced as  
thinly as possible using a mandoline  
250 g Greek yoghurt  
fennel ice cream or good quality vanilla ice  
cream  
a little olive oil

Add the sugar and the cinnamon stick to a food processor and blend until fine. You will have too much for this recipe, but you can keep the rest in a sealed jar and use it to make granola, for example.

Tear the croissants into small pieces. Brush with the melted butter, sprinkle with 2 tbsp cinnamon sugar and bake for around 10 minutes in the oven at 160 °C until the croutons are brown and crunchy.

Bring 200 ml water, 150 g cinnamon sugar and the juice of 1 lemon to the boil in a saucepan. Add the rhubarb and leave to simmer for 10 minutes until soft.

Place the slices of fennel in ice water to keep them nice and crispy.

Whip the Greek yoghurt briefly with a whisk and add a large spoonful to a plate. Then add a spoon of rhubarb and some croutons. Finish with a generous spoonful of fennel ice cream, slices of raw fennel and the fennel fronds.

Make a vinaigrette from the rhubarb cooking juices by adding a little olive oil and sprinkle it over the dish.

In the centre of Amsterdam lies a unique oasis: Restaurant De Kas. The most famous vegetable restaurant in The Netherlands is one of the world's first farm-to-table restaurants and welcomes guests from all over the world.

Since 2017 chefs Jos Timmer and Wim de Beer have been serving beautiful produce grown in their Amsterdam greenhouse and their gardens in De Beemster.

Take a look behind the scenes of Restaurant De Kas and get inspired by over 80 recipes putting vegetables in the spotlight.

'Fresh, beautiful, delicate recipes from the wonderful team at De Kas. Jos and Wim's cooking and De Kas are a joy – this is a beautiful book.'

Jamie Oliver



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