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PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

Rotterdam's new Markthal is the most stunning public market in the world. It's curved walls and Sistine Chapel-like murals of produce make it the most unique on the planet but the Dutch treats offered inside, above and opposite page, are still the best part.



Rotterdam's *Market* *Economy* Gets A Big Boost

Ultra-modern Markthal is city's latest architectural masterpiece

By Marc Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands — Public markets in Europe are as common as grains of sand on a beach.

So what's the big deal when a new one opens? Well, there has never been one quite like Rotterdam's new Markthal, a super-sized food hall shaped like an upside down fruit basket that cost 175 million euros (\$246 million Cdn) to build and has the rest of Europe green with envy.

The "Horn of Plenty" as the Markthal is known, opened to much fanfare in 2014 and was an instant success, attracting millions of visitors in its first few weeks of operation alone.

"People have come from all over Europe to see our new market and we couldn't be happier," says one of the Rotterdam farmers selling vegetables from his stall in the 36,000-square-foot hall that has been dubbed the "Sistine Chapel of Produce" thanks to the giant titled murals that cascade down from the ceiling and walls.

The unique design of Rotterdam's first indoor market — some compare it to an airplane hangar while others say it reminds them of a giant pencil sharpener — is the brainchild of the famed Dutch design firm MVRDV.

Anton Wubben, MVRDV's project architect, says the Markthal was "10 years





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in the planning" and it took "five years to construct." The arched exterior design of the building is its most striking feature, but it's the Jolly Green Giant-sized produce painted on the inside that has everyone gawking when they first enter the massive structure.

"More than 4,000 tiles make up this painting — I guess it's the largest painting in the Netherlands," laughs the likeable Wubben, whose eyes light up like a proud papa when we enter Rotterdam's newest landmark.

The super-sized painting is called "Cornucopia" and its perforated aluminum panels were painted by Dutch artists Arno Coenen and Iris Roskam. The flowers and insects depicted in the giant mural were based on those found in 17th century Dutch paintings.

But why do some of the fruits and vegetables have eyes?

"They're not eyes but windows to the apartments above the market," says Wubben.

Oh, I forgot to mention that a condominium complex was integrated into the Markthal's design — 228 apartments in all now look down on the market floor and the suites have become the hottest properties in this remarkable city that is unquestionably Europe's most modern.

The Markthal dominates Rotterdam's Blaak Market Square, which is ringed by some of Europe's most creative modern architecture.

Piet Blom's colourful Kubuswoningen cube homes, a throw-back to Europe's 1970s architectural revolution, sit directly across from the new indoor market while next door stands Blom's iconic Hexagonal Tower which looks like a giant pencil.

"I guess that's why some people refer to the Markthal as a pencil sharpener," smiles Wubben.

Once inside the Markthal, you're greeted by the delicious smells of Holland — treats like *kroketten* (croquettes), *poffertjes* (mini-pancakes), *moorkop* (a dessert made of whipped cream and chocolate), *haring* (herring) and *patat* (french fries dipped in mayonnaise) are being made at some of the 100 stalls throughout the hall.

Fishmongers attract customers with their songs, and the smell of freshly baked bread is intoxicating.

Wubben is excited to see so many people.

"It has given new life to this part of Rotterdam just as the art hanging above us has given life to the market," he says gleefully.

Above the market floor hang terraces where shoppers can dine at some amazing restaurants — eight in all — before heading off to one of the 15 food shops in the market to pick up their groceries.

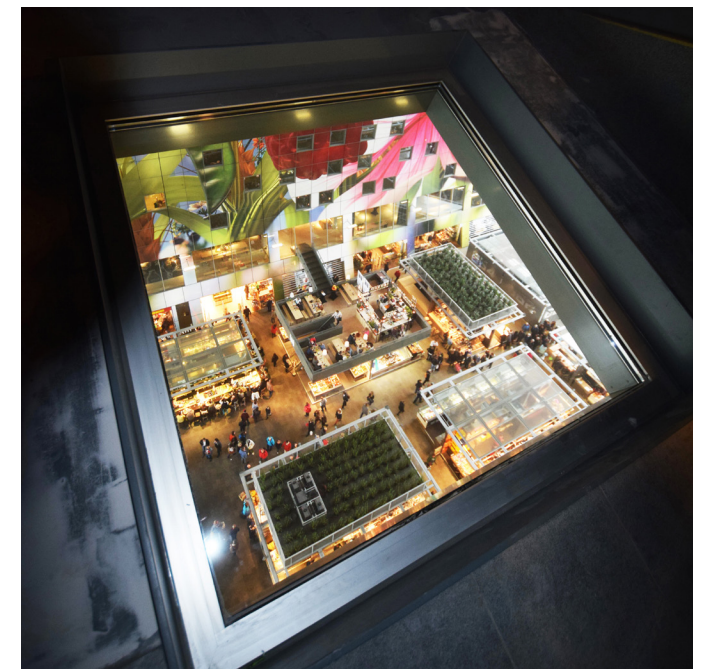
While tourists are overwhelmed by the Markthal's impressive size and good looks, many locals prefer to shop at the outdoor market that sits in the shadow of this behemoth.

"It's very beautiful and I like to come inside and look around but the prices here are too high, so I go to the fishmonger across the square to get my fish," says one elderly Rotterdam resident with a hearty laugh.

Wubben admits the rents inside the Markthal are higher than other shopping areas in Rotterdam but says that with everything under one roof "that cuts down on shopping stress."

The luxury apartments above the market have glass floors so occupants can be connected to the Markthal at all times. The spectacular properties come in various sizes and the most expensive is about \$1 million Cdn.

Markthal has quickly taken its place among the great food markets of the world and besides being Rotterdam's biggest market, it's now the city's biggest tourist attraction. •



The view residents get of the market and its lovely murals from the apartment units incorporated into the Markthal design are stunning.

Information

- The Markthal is open seven days a week until 8 p.m.
- KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) offers daily direct flights from Toronto to Amsterdam and Rotterdam is just a quick train ride away.
- Rotterdam offers some excellent hotel deals — The Mainport Hotel, which looks out on the River Maas, is the city's newest property and its sleek modern design fits in well with the city's skyline. The 5-star property is one of the best deals in Europe and visitors to Holland would be wise to base themselves in Rotterdam's Mainport and take day trips to Amsterdam, the Hague and other more expensive areas. For information of the Mainport Hotel, go to <http://www.mainporthotel.com>
- If you're looking for a great place to eat in Rotterdam, may we suggest Las Palmas, which is owned by Dutch celebrity chef Herman den Blijker. The fish and meat dishes here are divine and the restaurant's decor is fabulous. For information: <https://restaurantlaspalmas.nl/>
- For more information on Rotterdam or Holland go to <http://www.holland.com>