# Historic Amsterdam tea shop ’t Zonnetje to close amid soaring rents



In a historic neighbourhood of Amsterdam, a tea shop with roots tracing back to 1642 is preparing to close its doors, marking the end of an era for one of the city's oldest independent retailers. The establishment, named ‘t Zonnetje (The Sun), has for centuries provided residents and visitors with an assortment of loose leaf teas and freshly roasted coffee beans, all served in a setting that evokes a bygone age.

Located on Haarlemmerdijk, a street known for its traditional shops, ‘t Zonnetje has become a cherished local institution. Its owner, Marie-Louise Velder, 76, who has run the business for 26 years after inheriting it from an English family, lamented the impact of rising commercial rents on independent businesses. Velder’s rent, once 975 guilders (equivalent to about €440 or £376) per month in 1999, has ballooned to an expected €4,500 a month, with charges backdated to the previous September following a legal dispute with her landlord. This figure had initially been higher at €6,000 but was reduced through arbitration.

Reflecting on the scale of the increase, Velder told The Guardian, “It makes me sick, that’s all I can say.” She spoke also of the broader difficulty faced by traditional shops, stating, “Traditional shops are all dying because of soaring rents.” Despite the forthcoming closure, her customers have shown an outpouring of support since the news was made public by local newspaper Het Parool. “Love, only love,” she said, describing the heartfelt reactions she has received.

The closure of ‘t Zonnetje has raised concerns among Amsterdam’s residents and business community about the growing dominance of chain stores and tourist-oriented outlets in the city centre. Johannes Wilhelm, a 63-year-old local businessman who frequented the shop, expressed regret over its imminent disappearance. “There are a lot of cheese and Nutella-pancakes and all kinds of tourist shops. Tourists are fine [and] good. But this should be here as well,” he told The Guardian.

Market analysts in the Netherlands have noted the steady rise in rents in prime retail locations, which often makes it difficult for independent traders to remain viable. Karel Loeff, director of the heritage organisation Heemschut, highlighted the long-term impact of this trend on the character of the city. “Higher rents tend to mean bigger companies with more standardised offers move in when sole traders move out,” he explained. Loeff observed that while the physical fabric of the city, such as wooden shop beams and shelves, can be preserved, safeguarding the continuity of historic retail functions proved far more challenging.

Founded during the Dutch Golden Age, the shop originally dealt in herbs, coal, and buckets of water but evolved alongside the empire to specialise in tea and coffee. Velder has continued this legacy, crafting her own Earl Grey blend in the chilly basement of the shop by steeping Assam leaves in bergamot oil for three days— a recipe perfected over two and a half years. The business once boasted a stock of 350 varieties of tea, though selections have been reduced in recent times as she prepares to wind down operations.

Amsterdam’s local government has grappled with maintaining the city’s distinctive retail profile amid the surge of tourism-focused enterprises. In 2017, efforts were made to restrict the opening of tourist-centric shops, such as bike rental outlets and certain cheese sellers, in parts of the city centre to avoid further loss of diversity.

Urban geographer Iris Hagemans from Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences provides context on the situation, warning against sweeping generalisations about the city’s retail landscape. She noted that while some areas, such as the congested Damstraat, have indeed developed into tourist monocultures, others nearby benefit from visitor footfall without losing their character. Importantly, Hagemans suggested that tourist demand helps support diminishing resident-based trade in some places, maintaining a more dynamic retail ecosystem.

On the matter of government intervention, she commented, “There can be quite a big gap between the type of shops that people claim to want to see in their neighbourhood and … the kind of shop that they actually frequent.” She favours focusing support on essential services, such as food and healthcare access, cautioning against the state acting as an arbiter of "taste" in retail. “The retail landscape should be able to respond to the market and be dynamic. And it’s democratic in the way that you vote with your wallet,” she told The Guardian.

Amid these changes and challenges, a banner celebrating Amsterdam’s upcoming 750th anniversary is displayed down the road from ‘t Zonnetje, an emblem of the city’s rich history. Though there are rumours of planned support for small businesses in connection with this milestone, Velder expressed that such efforts had come too late for her and her longstanding tea shop. With the expected closure set for within two months, the future of the site remains uncertain, emblematic of the ongoing transformation of Amsterdam’s historic shopping districts.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DIza3uyIq4Z/> - Supports the detail that 't Zonnetje is a very old and beloved tea shop in Amsterdam that is closing at the end of May 2025.
3. <https://www.spottedbylocals.com/amsterdam/t-zonnetje/> - Corroborates the shop's focus on organic coffee beans and tea leaves, its cozy and traditional atmosphere, and its location on Haarlemmerdijk.
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