

Hall of Knights *De Ridderzaal*

The origins of The Hague lie in the development of a settlement around a hunting lodge dating from the 13th century, built by order of the Count of Holland. The Ridderzaal was the reception and party hall of this lodge. In the 15th century, Philips the Good held meetings here with the knights of the Golden Fleece. The son of Philip the Good, Charles the Bold, resided here for some time in order to administer justice. In the course of time the hall fulfilled a wide range of functions; during the Napoleonic days it was used as an exercise hall.

Since the restoration that was carried out around 1900, the hall has been used for ceremonial occasions at a national and international level. The most important annual ceremony traditionally takes place on the third Tuesday of September. That day, called 'Prinsjesdag', the queen presents the speech from the throne; thus the government officially announces her policies for the coming year. The speech will be addressed to the members of both Houses of Parliament (Senate and House of Representatives). Also present during the ceremony are members of the Royal House, Ministers, State Secretaries, members of the Council of State, diplomats and persons invited.

The Queen's throne is located on a small dais. At the top of the throne you see a carved letter B. It is the first letter of the queen's name: Beatrix. The coat of arms of The Netherlands is embroidered on the back of the throne.

The hall is almost 26 metres high and the roof is a true copy of the medieval one. It has the shape of a ship turned upside down and is made of Irish oak-wood. No nails were used for its construction, but wooden pins, so-called dowels. Wooden heads with big ears are installed on either side of the beams of the roof. The presence of these 'eavesdroppers' used to ensure effective administration of justice: witnesses felt they were being overheard by possible divine ears and would thus be inclined to tell the truth during trials that once took place here.

In the stained glass windows you can see the coat of arms of a number of Dutch cities. In the large rose window, above the gallery, coats of arms are depicted of the House of Bavaria, Burgundy, Habsburg and others. Members of these noble houses have played a role in the history of the Netherlands.

During a recent renovation some elements of the hall were replaced and some were added. A new carpet was brought in. The throne was provided with a new covering by French upholstery. The province flags were replaced with tapestries representing the Dutch provinces and the Caribbean part of the Dutch monarchy. Finally the words of the first part of the 1848 Constitution of the Dutch Monarchy were put up above the fireplace. At the top you see the stars of the European Union, thus linking the Dutch parliamentary democracy with the latest European cooperation.



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The Senate *De Eerste Kamer*

The assembly hall was designed by Pieter Post as a conference room for the States of Holland and West Friesland. The room was completed in 1655 and work was begun on finishing the interior. The ceiling was painted by two pupils of Rubens, Wielingh and De Haen. Between 1663 and 1665, lying on a high scaffolding, they painted the people of the various nations Holland conducted trade with. It is as though these people are looking through a window into the conference room. In the centre the painting depicts the Poles; further to the right, the Persians, the Turks, the Spanish with the Mexicans, the French, the Italians, the Germans, and the Russians. Located in the centre Holland is represented by the children of the State.

All around the room in the wall recesses you will find pictures of the 'raadpensionarissen', the former presidents of the States of Holland. Looking from the window side you will find: Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Adriaan Pauw, Johan de Witt, Gasper Fagel, Antonie Heinsius, Simon van Slingelandt, Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, and Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck.

The larger-than-life portrait of King William II was a gift from this king to the Senate 'so that I will always be with you'. This was because in 1848, during King William II's reign, the constitution had been amended, whereby members of the Senate would no longer be appointed by the king, but would now be chosen by the members of the Provincial Council. The big painting behind the public tribune depicts 'Peace', painted by Adriaan Hanneman; the painting on the right depicts 'War' (Mars, the god of war), painted by Jan Lievens.

Originally the walls were covered by tapestries showing Italian landscapes; during the French period, this room was taken over by King Louis Napoleon for his War Ministry. The tapestries were removed from the wall and disappeared, probably to Paris. They have never been seen again. The original unity of walls and ceiling has since been lost. The present tapestry was hung during the most recent restoration (July 1994 – September 1995). For the patterns and colours, the ceiling formed the starting point. Using advanced computer technology, the 'Tissage de Lyon' mill in Grenoble was able to design a fabric for the 600 meters long tapestry. This allowed the walls and ceiling to be attuned to each other once again.

Underneath the portrait of King William II is the chair belonging to the chairman of the Senate, with room on both sides for the clerks. The slightly bowed table on the window side is used by the ministers. In the middle of the room you can see the places for the stenographers. The members of the Senate are elected indirectly by the Dutch people for a four years' term: the Dutch people choose the members of the Provincial Council; the members of the Provincial Council in turn elect the members of the Senate. The Senate usually meets once a week, on Tuesdays.



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House of Representatives *De Tweede Kamer*

The covered central passageway Statenpassage

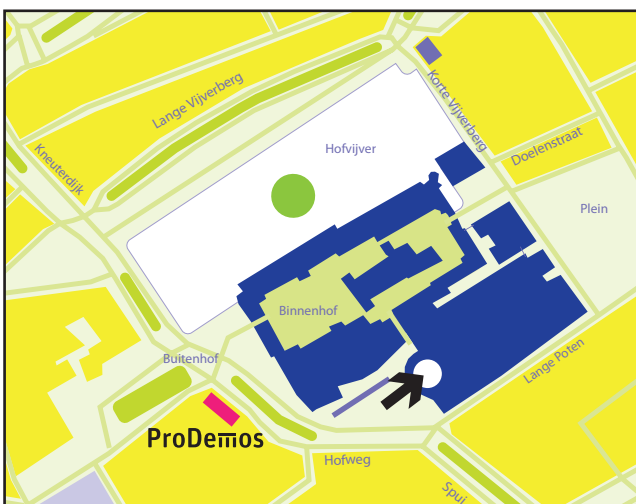
This is the central part of the building, the Statenpassage. All meeting rooms open into this hall. When designing this part of the new building, the Dutch architect Pi de Bruijn wanted to emphasise the open character of the building, to stress spaciousness and light, therefore the roof is made of glass. The open construction also has a metaphorical meaning: the parliament of a democracy should be transparent and accessible to the public. Several old buildings have been renovated to house the offices of the House of Representatives' personnel and the offices of the different political parties represented. The newly constructed part contains only meeting rooms. It was built in between the renovated buildings of the Ministry of Justice and of the former 'Hotel Central', the first building in The Hague made of concrete. At various levels, passages are connecting the old buildings with the new one.

The floors are made of natural stone from Brazil and Sardinia (Italy). This granite was also used for the inner and outer walls of the House of Representatives. All in all 18,000 m² of granite were used in the whole building.

The work of art

The four marble panels originally came from the session hall of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands. The building of the Supreme Court had to be pulled down to make room for one of the entrances of the new House of Representatives. The panels were preserved and put together into a new work of art by the Dutch artist Lex Wegchelaar. The four panels depict four historic legislators: Moses, Solon (the greek politician of the 6th century B.C.), Justinianus (the Byzantine emperor, 500 A.D.) and Napoleon. The Latin text around the sculpture reads, translated into English: 'When the administration of justice fails, war begins'.

The tour will continue on the second floor. The first floor is not accessible to the public. It is only accessible to the members of Parliament and staff. To ensure this, the escalator goes directly from the ground floor to the second floor.



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The assembly hall

The colours of the plenary hall, also designed by the Dutch architect Pi de Bruijn, reflect the Dutch landscape: grey skies, blue waters and green for the countryside. In contrast with the other parts of the building, you will notice a relative absence of daylight, thus ensuring that political decisions are made in a neutral atmosphere free of any meteorological influence. The parliamentary seats can be recognized by the presence of an emblem on the back, the emblem of the House of Representatives.

The repartition of the hall: on the right side, the 'government desk'. The three-cornered table in the middle. On the left side of the rostrum you see the 'Chamber desk', where the chairman of Parliament and the clerks are seated. In front of the government desk is a table facilitating parliamentary protocols to be made. In front of these tables you see four intervention microphones. Behind the seats of the representatives you can see the officials' galleries. These are intended for the Chairman's guests, the civil servants, etc. Behind the officials' galleries are the 'Corridors of Parliament'. These are said to be the place where the newest rumours are heard and where cunning strategies are devised.

The public gallery contains 230 seats. The first row has been reserved for the parliamentary press. To the right, behind the glass screen, you can see the control room of the Dutch Broadcasting Company. The cameras in the hall are operated by computer. The oil paintings on the wall were made by Rudi van de Wint, a Dutch painter. He spent a year and a half in a studio in the dunes working on them. Walking along the paintings you will sense the movement they evoke because of the different sizes and positions of the panels. The wall behind you is made of very thin threads of stainless steel and enhances the acoustics in this hall.

The Dutch parliament, the States General, is composed of two Chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives consists of 150 members and is directly elected by the Dutch people for a four year's term. The 75 members of the Senate are not elected directly, but chosen by the members of the 12 Provincial Councils. These members are elected by the Dutch people every four years.

A system of proportional representation is used in all Dutch elections, so that the distribution of seats represents as closely as possible the distribution of votes. Up to now in the Netherlands no single party has ever achieved absolute majority to form a government. Dutch political history therefore is a history of coalition governments.