

The Sentinel

Integrity, heart, humour



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Fair rent
for all



Housing rights advisor, Guido Zijlstra, provides an easy guide to the Netherlands' accommodation laws and gives advice on how to get your rent reduced.

Fair rent for all



Is this the most helpful man in Amsterdam? If you are being ripped off by an unscrupulous landlord then, yes.

At one time or another, all residents of Amsterdam – especially expats – will have been involved in heated discussions about the seemingly impossible task of finding reasonable and affordable accommodation in the city. For some, the solution is to buy their own apartment, but at the housing market's current inflated price levels, this option is open to fewer and fewer people. For students, short-term residents and those on average salaries, or below, there is only the rental market.

As a member of the Wijksteunpunt Wonen (District Housing Support Group), Guido Zijlstra advises tenants on a daily basis about their rights and entitlements. In this issue, he provides some invaluable guidelines to expats: the universal 'suckers' of the rental market.

Expats often tend to compare rental prices in Amsterdam with those in their home countries. They consider a monthly rent of €800, or more, for a two- or three-room apartment 'reasonable' and are not aware that their Dutch neighbours probably pay no more than €300. This is why all the housing rental agencies love expats so much: they are ignorant to the local laws and some of them think that those laws only apply to locals or to apartments that belong to the city council.

Tenants' rights

As a tenant in the Netherlands, you are protected by the law in several ways. First of all, once you agree to rent an apartment (either verbally or through a written contract), this agreement can only be terminated by the tenant; not by the landlord, except in extreme circumstances (e.g. failure to

pay the rent, in which case, the landlord must start a court case against the tenant). A contract that states 'temporary' or 'one-year lease' does not automatically end after the expiry date. A temporary contract is only allowed in very rare and specific situations. So if you think you have a temporary contract, you most likely don't!

The second protection a tenant has is that the landlord cannot simply charge what he likes for an apartment. Every apartment has a maximum rent, which is calculated using a points system. Every square metre and all the facilities in the apartment score points, and the total number of points equates to a certain maximum rent. Anyone can ask a Huurteam (via www.wswonen.nl) to visit their apartment and perform the calculation at no cost.

If you pay more than the maximum rent according to this points system, you are entitled to have your rent reduced by the Huurcommissie. This is like a civil court that deals solely with housing rental cases. It is very easy to start a re-evaluation process and the Huurteam can also help you with this, free of charge.

There is only one situation in which your rent cannot be reduced and that is if you pay more than €630 a month 'kale huur' (flat rent) and you have paid that amount for more than six months. In such cases, the law considers that the protection it has offered for six months is not required. So, always start a process within the first six months of the contract. The exception to this rule is all-inclusive rents, for which you can start a process at any time.



Typical Amsterdam fair-rent apartment: 60m² for €532 per month (all-inclusive)

Fair rent for all

Taking on the agencies

Many apartments that are rented out to expats are found via agencies. These agencies will try to make you pay as much as possible, because they normally receive one month's rent as a fee. This is illegal. Firstly because all agencies need a permit from the city council and if they have one, they are not allowed to rent out apartments for more than the maximum rent according to the points system. Moreover, in May of this year the highest civil court in the country decided that agencies must work in tenants' interests. This means that if you pay too much and you have rented the apartment through an agency, you can start a process against the agency. One tenant who did this was awarded compensation by the courts. She was actually too late to lower the rent through the Huurcommissie (having lived there for more than six months), but she successfully sued the agency for not informing her about this law.

Many expats I have spoken to consider using the system to get their rent reduced unfair, or even immoral, to the landlord with whom they have signed a contract. This is ridiculous and they obviously don't understand the Dutch politics behind the legislation. Rental prices in the Netherlands are regulated precisely because the authorities do not want the inner city of Amsterdam and the surrounding neighbourhoods to be turned into yuppie zones, even more than they already have done, and so become more like London, Paris or New York. If the rental system had been liberalised, as the government proposed around two years ago, most locals would have already left areas like the Centre, De Pijp and the Oud-West, and the apartments would have been rented out

solely to expats, who are willing to spend half, or more, of their income on rent.

The Netherlands' rental laws are intended to keep cities and their inhabitants diverse, lively, colourful and cosmopolitan. Surely these are exactly the reasons why most expats chose Amsterdam as their new home in the first place! So, consider your circumstances and, if possible, please do get your rent reduced. It's your duty as a resident and it makes perfect economical sense.

by Guido Zijlstra

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What tenants need to know

- There is no such thing as a temporary contract*
- Only a tenant (not a landlord) can terminate a contract*
- Anyone can ask a Huurteam to visit their apartment and calculate the maximum rent, at no cost
- Make sure you contact the Huurteam within the first six months of your rental contract
- Try to get your rent reduced, if possible – it's your duty to the city
- Visit www.wswonen.nl for further information

* except in very rare and/or particular circumstances.

THATCH IN DA HOUSE

HEY JOE, DIDN'T I HEAR THAT YOU'D APPLIED FOR THE MAN CITY MANAGERS JOB?

WHEN THEY SAW ON MY CV THAT I'D WON THE FFL, THEY TOLD ME I WAS OVER QUALIFIED!

THAT'S RIGHT, JOHN, BUT THEY TURNED ME DOWN

IF YOU WOULD ALSO LIKE TO BE TURNED DOWN BY MAN CITY, WHY NOT ENTER THE FFL THIS SEASON?

Opinion



On the box

Bionic is back!

The new series of *The Bionic Woman* finally reached Dutch TV last week (Thursdays, 8.30pm CET, RTL 5), but was it really worth the wait?



In this 2007 're-imagining' of the classic 1970s series, Jaime Sommers (played by former *EastEnders* actress, Michelle Ryan) is a bartender, struggling to make ends meet in San Francisco, while acting as a surrogate mum to her troublesome teenage sister. When Jaime is nearly killed in a car accident, she is saved by a cutting-edge operation – performed by her boyfriend (handy) – that leaves her with advanced bionic prosthetics and implants with extraordinary new strength, speed and sight.

Implausible is the first word that springs to mind. Not that super-powered prosthetic limbs, eyes and ears are implausible to a sci-fi audience, but that a struggling bartender would have a relationship with a 'cutting-edge' prosthetic surgeon.

Roots



Singularly the most exciting television series for boys especially in it's time and maybe since.

The original series of *The Bionic Woman* was a spin-off from the hugely popular *Six Million Dollar Man*, starring Lee Majors as Steve Austin – a man barely alive, until he was rebuilt to be better and stronger. The original Jaime Som-

mers (played by Lindsay Wagner) was a tennis professional who was nearly killed in a skydiving accident, and was rebuilt by the same team that rebuilt Steve Austin. In the 1970s, it was *The Six Million Dollar Man* who had the bionic eye (among other enhancements), while the bionic woman had amplified hearing, a greatly strengthened right arm, and enhanced legs, enabling her to run at 60mph (100kph).

The original series of *The Bionic Woman* ran for just three seasons and was never as successful as *The Six Million Dollar Man*. So, why revisit it now? It's a bit like remaking *Joanie Loves Chachi* instead of *Happy Days*. The answer could be a rights ownership issue, since the rights to *The Six Million Dollar Man* and the novel *Cyborg* by Martin Caidin, which provided the premise and various characters for both of the original series, are held by other parties.

Nostalgia

If you are looking for nostalgia, the new series of *The Bionic Woman* will be a disappointment, I'm afraid. Other than her name and most of her abilities, there is no resemblance to the original series. For those of us who remember the original series, however, this is probably a good thing, since it was never as good as *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

On the other hand, if the 2007 series is your first taste of *The Bionic Woman*, it does stand comparison with similar, recent series, such as *Alias*, for example. Jaime Sommers has an interesting arch enemy, in the form of Sarah Corvus, who calls herself the original bionic woman. She was 'built' by (Jaime's boyfriend) Will's father, whose unknown (as yet) crimes led to him being locked away 300 metres below ground.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this series is that a relatively minor character actress from *EastEnders* has landed the starring role in a major US TV series and she even manages to pull off the accent quite convincingly. So, well done to Michelle Ryan, whether she gets a second series, or not.

by Gary Rudland

Readers with projects - Tina Altieri

<http://educationforhope.blogspot.com/>



Viva España!



Torres takes to the wing and punctures the last line of German defence with an exquisite execution of finishing technique. The Championship winning goal.

Euro 2008 must have been among the most exciting, entertaining and successful football tournaments ever staged. It had everything: upsets, goals galore, attacking football and a worthy, if slightly surprising, winner. After 44 years of waiting, this was finally Spain's tournament. They were the better team in every match they played, beating the holders, Greece, Sweden, Italy (admittedly on penalties) and Russia (twice) on their way to the final, where they also outplayed Germany.

The Netherlands were very impressive during the group stage, but fell at the first knockout hurdle. France were poor from start to early finish. Turkey gave everyone they played a run for their money and may be a team to watch at the next World Cup. Russia showed massive improvement and potential, as did Croatia, and the home nations, Switzerland and Austria, never stood a chance in the first place. Portugal did a Spain: looking good during the early stages but failing to make it past the quarter final. And all of this just added to the entertainment.

Given the success of Euro 2008, perhaps England should try to stay away from all future tournaments.

Euro 2008 competition

As many of you know by now, Linda Eijssen won the Sentinel's Euro 2008 competition. With a 19-point lead over second place, O'Donnell's employee, Linda, stood head and

shoulders above the rest of the competition to take the first prize of €122.50. Below her, the competition was much closer, with three competitors – Guido Zijlstra, Jason Parrish and Steve (Don) Dixon – sharing second prize (€41 each).

Well done to all of the winners and thanks to the other 45 competitors for taking part in an exciting competition with several changes of leader along the way.



Linda Eijssen (second from right), winner of The Sentinel Euro 2008 competition, tells 'old school' tactician Jock Erskinstein what she thinks about his football advice.

Fantasy Football League (FFL)

In the next issue of The Sentinel (out on 29 July), we will announce details of our own Fantasy Football League (FFL) for next season, which will run alongside the FFG competition (see back page). Watch this space...





The Gold Room

Fantasy Football Gold 2008-2009



Denson Pierre (left) & Gijs Smeets the defending champion (right)



Samantha Rich (nearest camera) & James Evans (centre in grey T-shirt)



Nigel McKenny

Today we launch the new FFG logo and present to you the first wave of top-line managers who have been invited to compete for the honour of the Golden Ball in the competition's third season.

An entire season of bruising fantasy management has now begun, with managers already fully attuned to scouting Premier League transfer activity, to be aware of where the better players are likely to remain or move to. Worthy initial selections are the first competitive standard in this master game.

by Denson Pierre



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