

HOME IN AMSTERDAM

IN THIS PHOTO-ESSAY SERIES KATHERINE MATTHEWS EXPLORES THE CONCEPT OF 'HOME' IN AMSTERDAM - WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MOVED TO AMSTERDAM FROM ABROAD, FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO MAKE A HOME HERE, FOR THOSE WHO ARE FEELING THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR HOMELESSNESS AND FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO REDEFINE THE ACTUAL MEANING OF 'HOME'.

SUZY, United Kingdom

I was born in Wellingborough, which is a town in Northamptonshire, a really shit town in a shit county. I lived there with my parents from childbirth until I was old enough to get out. It's kind of quaint on the surface, but areas of it are a real shithole. It has redneck guys driving around in souped-up fast cars and it has quite a big drug problem. People from around that area, the ones with any brains, get out. Most people move to London or go off to university and never come back.

My parents and I never had much of a deep connection. We've grown closer, but back then it was like them against me. I was a fucking nightmare. They were always trying to put some sort of controls in my life but I'd just find a way around it. Uncontrollable.

I left when I was 17 and I flitted back and forth between Northampton and London. I was always going from random job to random job, or trying university again.

I was living in London when I met a woman who offered me a job in Amsterdam. I thought I'd be an absolute wimp to say no, I'd constantly wonder "what if." It's not like I had a career in London, or a reason to stay. So I took the job, and I was here within a month.



But then, I moved two things in my house, my sofa and the table. Suddenly I felt inspired, and I realized, I hadn't given this house a chance.

I had even been scared to put up pictures in my house, because the holes would ruin the wall. Ridiculous.

I haven't really known how to claim this house as my own.

If I had more possessions in this place, I think it would be cozier, but it's not the possessions themselves, it's why you've got them.

It's the history, the layers that get built up, like the layers of paint and wallpaper in old houses. It can't be a blank canvas.

Maybe there's a scuff on the door, and you know that's from when you were piss-drunk and changing a light bulb and you fell. The scars and the marks make it home.



I feel homesick for my granny's house, maybe just my granny's presence. My parents' house feels like home because I spent so much bloody time there and they've never moved, but my granny's house is the most at-home place in the world. She always had the fire on and if you sat close to it you'd just melt, but that was nice. She'd stuff me full of food, I'd pass out, and when I'd wake up, I'd see that she had put a blanket on me.

I only really feel homesick when things aren't going well in my life. Like there was one period around February... I had become single so I was going out, shagging people, just generally being sociable and doing loads of shit. I had been working on my house and was spending my weekends doing manual labour. Then it all stopped, and we had just been through a massive fucking winter, and I couldn't take any more of it. I was at my lowest ebb. One night I just cried my eyes out in bed, and I thought it was time to go home, this has gone on long enough -- even though I was sitting in this flat that I had bought and worked on all these months.



I think that's why I almost went back, because I had this house which I had made livable, but it wasn't a home yet. But now... I'm thinking more about what to do with it, and thinking I'm going to make it mine, because I need that for my sanity. It's got nothing to do with being in Amsterdam, I've been here long enough, but I've got a great chance now to make it on my own, whatever that means, to run my own life.



Katherine Oktober Matthews is a writer and photographer originally from the United States but living and working in Amsterdam. She specializes in portraiture, reportage and storytelling.

If you'd like to be involved in the Home project, or want photographs taken for your own ideas or events, see more of her work online at www.oktobernight.com and get in touch!