

Victor Milton van Doorn

THE EXPERIENCE-BUILDER OF AMSTERDAM

“We love to create a magical story”

When visiting the city of Amsterdam, it's not uncommon to encounter rain. Luckily, there are some great places to find shelter from the rain and take part in a magical story. Meet Victor Milton van Doorn, co-founder of the first escape room in Amsterdam, Sherlocked.

Victor Milton van Doorn loved to escape the rules even at an early age. With his buddies in high school he once found out the school had these old-fashioned air vents in the ceiling. Victor: “It was so exciting, I went in and crawled through to reach a locked classroom. I found a text we were going to have and quickly went to the library to make a copy. When the bell rang, I was still in the air vent trying to return to class. I just made it underneath the teacher's desk in time. My buddy understood what was happening so he made some noise to distract the teacher, so I could get out of there. That kind of cinematic lifestyle is what I really love. I still do some roof climbing every now and then, but more importantly, I now make these kinds of experiences for a living. I just love to look at the world this way. In a way, it's a form of escapism, which we all need at certain times, but it's also a way to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking and train people to have courage.”

“I don't sit at an office. I love the creative buzz of sitting in cafés in Amsterdam to work”

Friends and Fools

“When my friend Tristan returned from a holiday in South-Africa with a flyer in his hand of an early version of an escape room, we knew we had stumbled upon something powerful. It was in 2014, right before the big hype of the escape rooms started. We walked

past this building de Beurs van Berlage, right on Damrak. Not even a five-minute walk from Central Station and decided it was perfect. With Friends and Fools and a humble but successful Kickstarter campaign, we raised 21,000 euros to build our first escape room.

The Architect & The Vault

The story of the building really fits with the experience we created there. The architect of the Beurs van Berlage, Hendrik Petrus Berlage, was part of a secret society of freemasons in the city. He was a socialist and didn't believe in capitalism at all. Ironically, he built the stock market of Amsterdam, which was the origin of the building. He's a fascinating figure, so one of our two stories, The Architect, is based on him. The other adventure is called The Vault. It's a break-in experience about four families who together hold the secrets to opening the 120-year-old vault complex.

“Our ultimate goal is to really enchant the world around us – to take our adventures out of the room and into the street”

Originally, our inspiration was a kind of anti-inspiration. We saw the flaws in other escape rooms and so we knew what we wanted to do differently. We want the story to be right and to make it look and feel perfect as well. Our ultimate goal is to truly enchant the world around us – to take our adventures out of the room and into the street. I also get inspiration from reading books, watching films and by taking spinning classes to clear my head, in order to have space for new thoughts. I don't know exactly what it is about spinning, but the repetitive movement and the simple focus of giving it everything you've got for an hour gives me fresh ideas.”

An offline Google Experience

“Recently we won a tender to create an experience for Google, called Google Backstage. It was quite an honour to work with Google, but it was also a difficult challenge to make an educational experience both fun and attainable for everyone. In the experience, the players take on the role of Google's algorithm. They become Google in a way, to experience how YouTube, Ads, Maps and Search actually work.”

“As kids we climbed through air vents; now we create escape experiences”

Entrepreneur in Amsterdam

“I love working in Amsterdam. Everyone is literally a handshake away and is generally very open to new ideas. When you have a good idea, people will help you get in touch with the right people. There is competition of course, but most people will love to help you out. I do have an office, but I'm only there for meetings. I prefer the buzz and focus of working in a café. It gets my creative juices flowing. I love to work at cafes like Dwaze Zaken (Prins Hendrikkade 50) Friends (Nassaukade 121) and Zoku on Weesperstraat.”

Oh, and hot off the press: Sherlocked just started renting the lower of de Beurs van Berlage too. Word is they might have an experience room there soon as well... ■

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