



THE LOVE NETHERLANDS GUIDE N. 009

Wooden Clogs (Klompen)

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Walk into a working clog shop and the first thing you notice is the smell: fresh, damp wood, because a good klomp is carved from a tree that was alive weeks earlier, not from a dry plank. Poplar and willow are soft and wet enough to cut like firm cheese, which is exactly why generations of Dutch makers chose them. This is Guide 009 in The Love Netherlands Guide series.

From Living Tree to Finished Shoe

A clog starts as a block of green (freshly felled) poplar or willow, split to roughly the size of a foot. Traditionally the maker roughed out the shape with a long-handled chopping knife hinged to the bench, then hollowed the inside with a spoon-shaped bit - two completely separate skills, one for the outside and one for the hole your foot goes into. From the early twentieth century most workshops switched to paired copying lathes: one machine traces a master clog to shape the outside, a second drills out the interior, cutting what

once took an hour down to minutes.

The carving is only half the job. Because the wood is still wet, a finished pair has to dry for several weeks before it can be worn, shrinking and hardening as it goes. Only then is it sanded, sometimes lacquered, and often painted. We think the single most useful thing to understand about clogs is this order of operations - wet to carve, dry to wear - because it explains why the craft was always slow and why demonstrations draw a crowd.

A Working Shoe, Not a Costume

Clogs were everyday footwear for farmers, fishermen, factory hands and gardeners across the Low Countries for centuries, valued because wood is warm, dry and cheap, and because a solid wooden toe shrugs off a dropped spade or a stepped-on fork. Archaeological finds of wooden-soled footwear in Dutch cities go back to the medieval period, so this is a genuinely old tradition rather than a tourist invention.

That protective quality is not nostalgia. Dutch wooden shoes can be manufactured and tested to European safety-footwear standards and carry a CE safety mark, which makes them the only wooden safety shoe officially recognised for workplaces - you will still see them worn by some Dutch farmers, horticulturalists and bulb-field workers today, not as dress-up but as kit.

Where to Watch Them Being Made

The easiest place for a visitor to see a live demonstration is the Wooden Shoe Workshop at [De Zaanse Schans](#) near Zaandam, a clog-making operation set in an old warehouse with a large antique collection and a shop; entry to the workshop is free. For the deepest dive, the [Internationaal Klompenmuseum](#) in Eelde holds thousands of pairs of wooden and wooden-soled footwear gathered from dozens of countries, which quickly cures any idea that clogs are a purely Dutch object.

For clogs in their social setting, the open-air museums are strong: the [Nederlands Openluchtmuseum](#) in Arnhem reconstructs rural workshops and homes where clogs belonged, while the [Zuiderzeemuseum](#) in Enkhuizen shows the fishing-village world in which heavy, upturned clogs were daily wear. All three pair the carving demonstration with the context that makes it mean something.

Regional Styles, Colour and Courtship

There was never one Dutch clog. Shapes varied by region and trade: fishermen's clogs were often higher and more sealed against water, farmers' versions sturdier, and "Sunday" pairs finer and more decorated. The familiar bright-yellow clog with a red or blue tip is a relatively standardised modern form; plain, unpainted working clogs were far more common historically.

Decoration also carried meaning. In several regions a young man would carve and paint an elaborate pair of courting or wedding clogs for his intended, turning a work shoe into a love token - the more intricate the chip-carving and colour, the clearer the message. That tradition is why heavily ornamented "bruidsklompen" (bridal clogs) turn up in museum collections far more decorated than anything a farmer would take into a

muddy field.

Clogs in Dutch Art and Identity

Wooden shoes recur throughout Dutch and Flemish painting as shorthand for rural, working life, and you can find them in the genre scenes and still lifes held at the [Rijksmuseum](#) in Amsterdam. Vincent van Gogh, drawn to peasant subjects, painted wooden footwear more than once; several of his shoe studies hang at the [Van Gogh Museum](#), also in Amsterdam.

Today the clog functions partly as a national emblem, alongside tulips and windmills, and the official tourism board [Holland.com](#) leans on exactly that imagery. We would gently note the gap between symbol and reality: the painted souvenir pair on a shelf and the scuffed working clog by a Dutch back door are not quite the same object, and the second one is the more interesting of the two.

Myths Worth Retiring

Myth: The Dutch wear clogs around the house and city every day. In reality, daily clog-wearing has largely faded from urban life. They survive mainly as practical outdoor and work footwear in farming and horticulture, and as a craft and souvenir item - not as ordinary city shoes.

Myth: Clogs are uncomfortable blocks you can barely walk in. A correctly sized, well-shaped clog is worn with a thick sock, carries the foot rather than gripping it, and flexes at the step because it is not laced on. People who wore them all day for decades walked, worked and cycled in them.

Myth: Wooden shoes are uniquely Dutch. Wooden and wooden-soled footwear existed across much of rural Europe - France, Belgium, Scandinavia and beyond. The Netherlands is strongly associated with the klomp, but it did not invent the idea of a shoe carved from a log.

Frequently Asked Questions

What wood are clogs made from?

Almost always fast-growing softwoods - poplar (populier) or willow (wilg) - chosen because they are light, split cleanly and, crucially, are soft enough to carve while still green and wet. The wood is then dried before the clogs are worn.

Can you actually buy a pair to wear, not just as a souvenir?

Yes. Working clogs in real foot sizes are still made and sold, including versions certified as safety footwear. If you want wearable ones rather than decorative miniatures, ask specifically for your size and for an unpainted or work model, and wear them with thick socks.

Where can I see clogs being carved?

Live demonstrations run daily at the Wooden Shoe Workshop at De Zaanse Schans, and the open-air museums in Arnhem and Enkhuizen show clog-making in its wider rural context. The clog museum in Eelde

is the best stop for the history and the international picture.

Official websites mentioned

De Zaanse Schans: zaanseschans.com

Internationaal Klompenmuseum: klompenmuseum.nl

Nederlands Openluchtmuseum: openluchtmuseum.nl

Zuiderzeemuseum: zuiderzeemuseum.nl

Rijksmuseum: rijksmuseum.nl

Van Gogh Museum: vangoghmuseum.nl

Holland.com: holland.com