home front

THE ULTIMATE DUTCH TREAT

Insatiable coffee drinkers find Nirvana in an Amsterdam kitchen.

WHEN MY HUSBAND, DAUGHTER and I spent two weeks in Amsterdam, I expected that things we saw and did would entrance me, and they did. We visited museums and parks, and wandered through old streets looking at quirky shops. We rode bicycles everywhere. What I *didn't* expect was that what was in a kitchen would also capture my fancy.

Our two-week trip to Amsterdam was a home exchange, and we swapped our vacation house in Hood River, Ore., for a five-story home overlooking one of the city's main canals. Like most canal houses, it was tall and narrow, a legacy of Amsterdam's old taxation system, which taxed buildings based on their width rather than their height. Building tall and narrow was a guaranteed tax dodge.

From a narrow entry hall, a steep staircase led to the home's four floors of living space. The two rooms where we spent the most time were the sunlight-filled living room and the kitchen.

The kitchen was warm and bright with a counter-height table pushed against a wall. It was on wheels, so if you were preparing something on a counter and needed more space, you could just roll it over. The oven was a bit of a conundrum, not only because the temperatures were in Celsius, but also because we couldn't figure out how to work it. To cook some fish, we had to go online and download the English-language owner's manual. Then there was the almost two-foot-tall wall-mounted wine bottle opener, a work of art in itself. You pushed the bottle into a clamp and pulled down a lever to easily lift the cork out of a bottle.

However, the gadget we enjoyed and talked about the most was, of all things, the coffee maker. Technically, it wasn't a coffee maker, but a Nespresso machine, which makes individual cups of espresso in small or large sizes. A sleek and compact machine, it stood on the counter just begging for us to use it. My husband and I are constant coffee drinkers, so the ability to have coffee at any time without worrying about messy filters, press pots or carafes was a treat in and of itself. To use it, we made sure a reservoir at the back was filled with water, inserted a capsule with the kind of espresso we wanted and pushed a button. Within minutes, we had piping hot drinks, and if we wanted another one, we repeated the easy process, which we did many, many times.

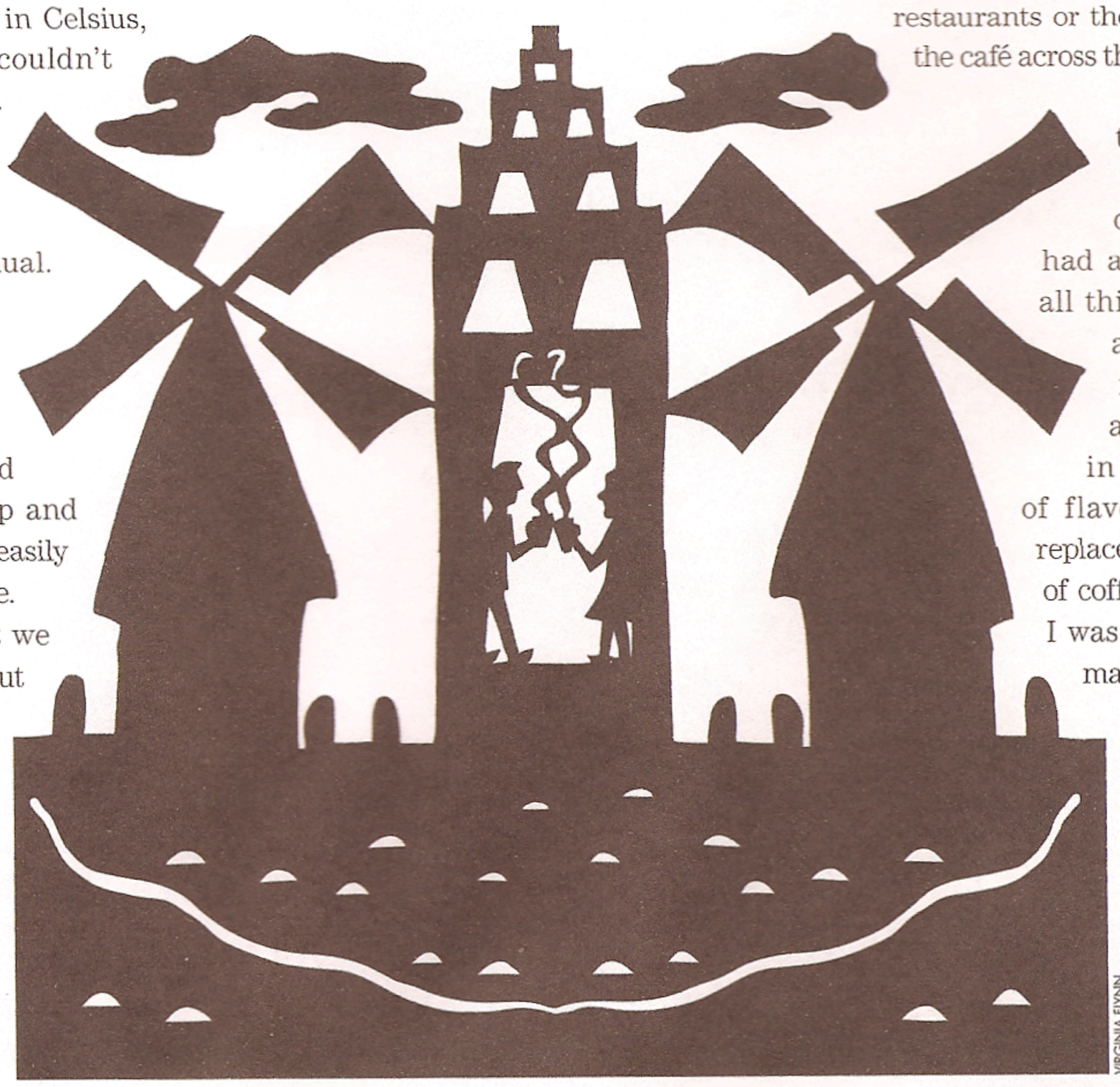
A couple of days before we returned to Oregon, I did a quick inventory of what we'd used in the kitchen to see if there were food or pantry items I thought we should replace. While we had no agreement about replacing food we'd eaten, if we'd made excessive use of something, I didn't want the home-exchange family to come home to find an empty container of something they'd expect to find.

As I was sitting at the table, drinking my second cup of espresso, my eyes fell on a shelf between the refrigerator and the window. It was where the family stored the boxes that held the Nespresso capsules. There had been 10 boxes; now there were three. Each box held 10 capsules. Doing the math, I realized that we'd drank *a lot* of coffee in two weeks—and that didn't include coffee we drank at restaurants or the lattes we'd bought at the café across the canal.

I decided that I needed to replace the capsules. I dashed off to a nearby department store that had a boutique devoted to all things Nespresso. There among a display of machines, accessories and coffee capsules in a bewildering array of flavors, I purchased my replacement boxes. The scent of coffee intoxicated me, and I was eager to go home and make myself a cup.

As I turned to leave the cash register, the salesman uttered some magic words. "Excuse me," he said. "Could I make you a sample of one of our flavors before you go?"

—Margaret Foley



VIRGINIA FLYNN