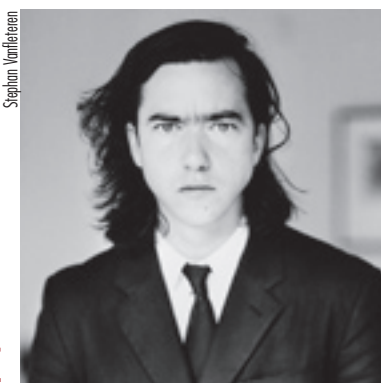




# FLANDERS TODAY

THE AMERICA ISSUE



Jan De Cock, p.2

FEBRUARY 06 2008

N°15

INDEPENDENT NEWSWEEKLY

WWW.FLANDERSTODAY.EU

Erkenningsnummer P708816

Royal Museum of Fine Arts



Saul Steinberg's "Main Street - Small Town"

## Happy to be here

Over here, but are they overjoyed? We find out what Americans think about living and working in Flanders

Marc Maes

Thomas Moore, 28, arrived in Belgium three years ago to study. He grew up in Easton, Pennsylvania, just 45 minutes from New York City, and travelled to Mexico after leaving college. That's where he met a solo

horn player in the Belgian National Symphony Orchestra. "He introduced me to the principal trombonist at De Munt theatre in Brussels," explains Moore. "I took a couple of lessons from him and decided to move to Belgium to do my masters."

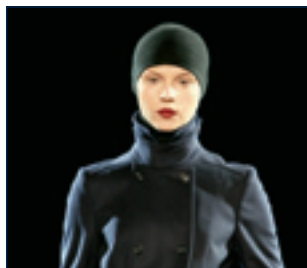
Moore obtained a postgraduate degree in trombone from the Antwerp Conservatory – "and that's where I met my wife, Stéphanie," he says. Within two years, Moore was working full-time as a freelance musician, even though he was still studying. "There's

enough work here and enough variety of work; I can play classical, jazz, commercial music, chamber music and really make my living just by playing trombone. So I decided to stay in Flanders."

The American says that the lifestyle here allows him to live better

on less money than in New York. "We would pay three times more over there for the same size of living space," he says. "And I probably wouldn't be able to play trombone for a living."

Continued on page 3



### Business

Flemish designer Bruno Pieters showed his first collection for Hugo Boss at Berlin's historic Tempelhof Airport. The clothes were muted, but the critics went wild.

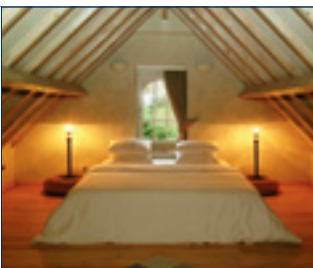
7



### Living

Several waves of Flemish emigrants have left their mark on America. Monique Philips traces one family from Limburg province that made a big impression in a remote corner of Nebraska.

10-11



### Active

It's coming up to Valentine's Day, so where can you go in Flanders for a romantic getaway? Lisa Bradshaw has found some secret bed and breakfasts that make the perfect escape.

12-13

## Flanders Technology gets a second life

New technology plan aims to boost innovation

Alan Hope

The Flemish regional government is to relaunch a 25-year-old initiative, Flanders Technology (FT), economy minister Patricia Ceysens announced last week. The plan, which aims to stimulate innovation in the technology sector, coincides with the release of grim figures showing that the technology industry faces zero growth this year.

The decision follows a report for the Flemish parliament by Professor Luc Soete, a Flemish economist at Maastricht University, which criticised the current regional technology policy as complicated and lacking transparency. Ceysens, who took over the

portfolio only recently, described the system of subsidies for innovative technology projects as "an unimaginable labyrinth of rules, projects and programmes".

The new system will focus on six "technology clusters" – areas in which Flanders considers itself in the forefront of developments. Selected by the Flemish Council for Scientific Policy (VRWB), they are: transport and logistics, IT and health care, food, new materials and nanotechnology, energy and the environment and social and economic innovation.

Continued on page 5

Feature 1, 3

News 5-6

Business 7

Arts 8

Living 9-11, 16

Active 12-13

Agenda 14-15

FREE WEEKLY



## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## Nottebohmzaal

Antwerp has a lot of secret places, but the Nottebohmzaal is one that hardly anyone knows about. You go through a small door, past a bust of the writer Hendrik Conscience, climb a flight of stairs, and there it is – a mysterious library filled with globes and old books, like something out of a 19th-century mystery.

What is this place? Well, it's not the *openbare bibliotheek*, the public library. That is located in an old Ford garage on the De Coninckplein. This is the Stadsbibliotheek, the city library, located in the Conscienceplein.

The Stadsbibliotheek is one of the oldest libraries in the world. It was founded in 1481, not long after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. The original collection ran to 41 volumes presented to the city of Antwerp by a lawyer called Willem Pauwels. The library moved to the city hall in 1505, where it stayed for a few centuries until they ran out of space to shelve an expanding collection. In the 19th century, the city solved the problem by moving everything into an old building owned by the Jesuits.

The collection kept on growing until the situation became desperate in the 1930s. The city closed the library for several years, added three floors of shelf space and converted the old read-

ing room into a beautiful two-tier space with curving iron staircases and metal gangways.

It was named the Nottebohmzaal after Oscar Nottebohm, a German businessman who left a large bequest to the city in 1935. The Nottebohmzaal contains some of the oldest books in the library, along with two globes made by Blaeu of Amsterdam and a pioneering study by the Prussian Egyptologist Richard Lepsius.

So how do you get to see inside? Here's how. The city library has just launched a season of monthly Nottebohmzaal readings on Sunday mornings at 11.00. The aim is to invite artists, writers, collectors and exhibition organisers to talk about contemporary art. The next one features American calligrapher Brody Neuen-schwander, but it's already fully booked. So you should not waste time if you want to reserve a place for one of the talks. Space is still free, for instance, for 2 March, when gallery owner Adriaan Raemdonck and exhibition curator Koen Broucke talk about the legendary Antwerp art gallery De Zwarte Panter, now 40 years old.

DB

online

www.stadsbibliotheek.antwerpen.be



Nottebohmzaal, Stadsbibliotheek Antwerpen

## Cover illustration

Long before Saul Steinberg drew his famous *New Yorker* cover, "View of the World from 9th Avenue", he was commissioned to produce a series of eight panels measuring a total of 80 metres for the American pavilion at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. The cover image is one of the line drawings of misfits, oddballs and other assorted weird folk that he came up with. Hardly suitable for the pavilion of the world's most powerful nation, you might argue, but those were different times. The panels were acquired by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels and hung for a time in the cafeteria. But now they've disappeared into the cellars, forgotten by everyone. Some of the panels (no one can say which ones) will be exhibited later this year at the Museum of Fine Arts, beginning 16 May.

## FACE OF FLANDERS

## Jan De Cock

Appearing more like a jailed gangster than a modern artist, Jan De Cock looks every bit the New York where he is currently enjoying his first exhibition in the US. *Denkmal 11* is being hailed by the city's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as a show that is breathing new life into the country's art Mecca. De Cock is the only living Belgian artist to ever have a show at MOMA.



Stephan Vanlaere

The show is one in a series of *Denkmal* installations. De Cock's *Denkmal 53* was in London's Tate Modern two years ago, and *Denkmal 23* in Brussels the year before that. The numbers refer to the addresses of the museums occupied by each exhibition, emphasising the site-specific qualities of each – you'll never see the same *Denkmal* twice.

*Denkmal 11* incorporates some of De Cock's photographs from home (there's no mistaking those Flemish brick houses) with influential images from film, architecture and photography. These find a place in the floor-to-ceiling installation with photos and photo montages of MoMA itself – its exhibitions, architecture, conservation labs, theatre and other work areas – which places the museum in the history of art, both renowned and deeply personal to the artist.

Not only are there framed photo montages, there are photos of photo montages, which suggests a fractured history. Yet the placement of the works, some very near the ceiling and some actually touching the floor, create the sense of one work – a whole made from the sum of its parts, like any work of art. Thus, the white space between each piece is as important as the pieces themselves.

"Once you place the camera in front of the eye, it constructs the world," De Cock told the exhibition curator Roxana Marcoci in a published interview. "You could say that what I do is create frameworks. I frame the space within each image but also within the installation space." The Flemish artist also creates wooden plywood sculptures, which also hang in *Denkmal 11*, and is heavily influenced by film and film technique. "It is true that in film you see 24 images per second," he told Marcoci, "but the remembrance of the image persists. In this sense, it's very interesting to work with one image as if it were a film image. What I am most intrigued by are the transitions that seem to be there but are not there. My photographs are made up of such seemingly inconsequential transitions."

De Cock's MoMA show, which will run through mid-April, is a springboard to a bigger project: American Odyssey will find him on an ambitious year-long trek through the country to document its monuments – both natural and artistic. He will photograph his own installation at sites such as Jackson Pollock's studio in East Hampton and the Grand Canyon. *Denkmal* is the German word for "monument" but also a combination of two Dutch words: "think" and "mould". A mould, or framework, for thinking about the work, then – or maybe even forms that think.

Approaching work differently is in fact at the heart of De Cock's work, which is evident from his embrace of modernism. "Modernism is the most important period in art history" he told Marcoci, even going so far as to deny the existent of post-modernism. "Modernism started with romanticism and continues into our time."

De Cock, who spoke to the public about his work last week at MoMA, offered a more personal reflection to Flemish journalist Tom Ronse, who lives and works in New York. It's "crazy work," he said in an interview, published recently in *De Morgen*. "Only a Belgian could dream this up. Don't get me wrong, [Belgians] make really great art. But, still, don't you have to be a maniac to balance your work to the very millimetre?"

The exacting visual artist also revealed to Ronse how he feels about working in New York and about MOMA's infamous authority. "There were specific questions about each work that had to be addressed," he said. "I thought that Belgium was bureaucratic, but in New York, it's 10 times worse."

The museum may well be taking De Cock's ultimate questions to much to heart: what's more important, the image itself or how we see it?

Lisa Bradshaw

online

www.moma.org

## TALKING DUTCH

## notes on language



Shutterstock

## Allochtoon

Boundaries in most places often take the form of mountain ranges or wide rivers. In Belgium, boundaries are so discreet that the foreigner will probably cross them without knowing. I was reminded of this the other day when I read an article which opened with "Ik ben een allochtoon van West-Vlaanderen", zegt jeugdauteur Brigitte Minne.

As I read on, I discovered that youth author Brigitte lives in East Flanders in Ronse, a town which nestles up against the border with Wallonia. Yet she claims to be an *allochtoon*, a foreigner, from West Flanders, which begins a short distance away at the river Schelde. Most of the words in the Dutch sentence above are probably within the grasp of most learners, but what is this word *allochtoon*? It does look a bit out of place. In fact, it's two Greek words meaning "from another country". Surely there's a Dutch word for Johnny Foreigner. Well there is: *een immigrant* or *een vreemdeling*. You'll probably see the sign *Vreemdelingendienst* if you have to go to your town hall for a residence permit. In this case, *vreemdeling* covers all foreigners.

*Allochtoon*, first used in the Netherlands in the 1970s as a euphemism, has a more restrictive meaning. Today, the Flemish authorities even define it: *een allochtoon* is a person from a country outside the European Union or someone who has one parent or two grandparents from a country outside the European Union. The word has gone the way of most euphemisms and collected various negative connotations: now it's almost exclusively used for people who come from places whose culture or religion is different from those of Flanders.

And what if you are not *een allochtoon*? Well, there is the word *autochtoon* to describe those born here – again from Greek. But if you are, say, from Germany, what are you then? And what if you were born here but your parents are *allochtonen*; when do you cease to be an *allochtoon*? Perhaps the answer is when you want to be.

Or so it would seem if you follow the practice of the Belgian Civil Service, which uses the terms in a mutually exclusive way. It classifies everyone born in Belgium as *autochtoon* and those born outside the country as *allochtoon*, but job applicants have the option of indicating their non-Belgian origins by completing the sentence *Ik ben Belg van ..... afkomst* on their application forms.

Both *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* seem to be administrative inventions, which may serve some purpose but don't add any beauty to the language in the eyes of this beholder. But to return to Brigitte. Is Ronse really a foreign land for her? Does she need to travel the 30-odd kilometres to relax in Kortrijk? Perhaps this calls for a visit to explore both towns, to see how many boundaries I can spot.

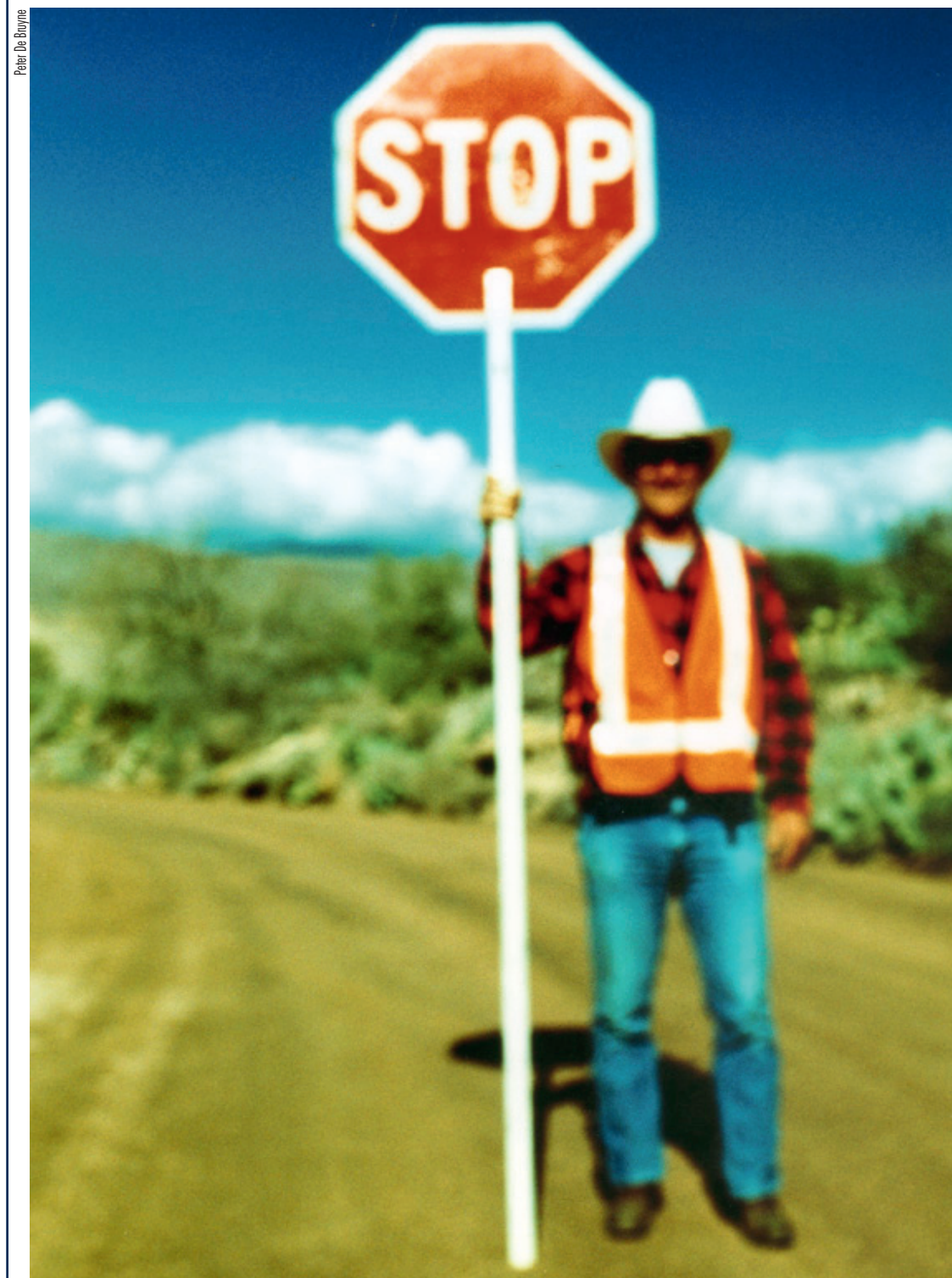
Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be



## FEATURE



## On the Road

Flemish photographer Peter De Bruyne drove the highways of America looking for images that caught his eye. His photographs of motels, abandoned gas stations and windblown ranches evoke the old American movies that he used to watch in the local cinema on a Saturday afternoon. His latest exhibition, *Stills*, is at De Velinx cultural centre in Tongeren.

online  
www.develinx.be

offers free language and culture lessons," he concludes.

Mike Sherick arrived here 16 months ago to head the Antwerp 3M plant as manufacturing and site manager. A chemical engineer by training, Sherick gained his bachelor's degree from Montana State University and a master's degree from the University of Idaho.

"I'm from the northwest United States, growing up in the state of Idaho and later moving to Montana," Sherick says. "After leaving college in 1986, I got a job with 3M and have spent most of my career in materials manufacturing facilities."

Sherick applied for a job at the company's Antwerp plant in Zwijndrecht; he had already worked in the same division at another plant. "We came one month in advance to find a home in Brasschaat, but much of the paperwork was done through the company. 3M is good at helping expatriates – getting them integrated in the community and assisting with Belgian identity cards, driving licences and insurance."

Still, he admits moving his family over was not an easy process. "The world changed after 9/11. We needed security clearance, and there was a lot of paperwork. It wasn't a barrier, but I was surprised how much was required."

Now that he is settled, Sherick considers Flanders a very English-friendly region. "Belgian people are excellent at many languages, including English, which makes it easier for us," he says. "We try to learn Flemish, but, in the meantime, we're able to do everything we need to do using English. We feel very welcome, and people are very cooperative and friendly towards us."

Yet he's been surprised by some cultural differences. People in the US generally work longer hours than the Flemish and shops certainly don't close down for lunch. "Also, local people here take better advantage of their holidays and free time – and do more travelling," he says. "You don't get as much vacation in the US. Over here, people take two or three holidays every year and usually in big chunks, at least a week."

With a wife running the household and two children enrolled in the International School in Ekeren, Sherick knows a good deal about the pros and cons of living in Flanders. "One of the inconveniences for my wife is the size of the washing machines and the length of the cycle," he says. "It takes 15 hours or more to do all of our laundry here, while in the US this would take three hours. Also, some elements of daily life are explained in Flemish or French, like setting up a new phone. You feel like a child again; you need to relearn how to do even the basic tasks."

Sherick also sees differences between Flemish and American people in everyday life. "Flemish people have a lot of patience in shops; they don't mind waiting

in queues, which is quite different from the US where we always feel rushed. But once on the road, they seem to lose their patience. They drive more aggressively, which causes a lot of accidents resulting in long queues and traffic jams."

His company performed well in 2007, but Sherick says it is becoming much more challenging to remain competitive and attract future investment. "We have potential here, but there's a lot of pressure in the market that is not going to go away." Competitiveness is made more challenging by high labour costs and generous working conditions. "I'm convinced that there is opportunity to grow, despite the fact that we have to compete against companies in countries where the government offers more attractive tax advantages or incentives. However, we need all the help we can get to continue to be successful in this area."

Sherick and his family see the move to Flanders as a positive experience. "We love Antwerp, and we also make trips to Bruges, Brussels and neighbouring countries. The history here is so rich and interesting – such as the world war sites. We are now able to see first-hand what we read about in books."

AMERICA  
IN FIGURES

12,298

Americans living in Belgium, according to the official Belgian population records, although the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium (AmCham) gives the much higher figure of 35,000. The largest concentration is in Brussels (3,300), followed by Antwerp (1,269), Leuven (1,200) and Ghent (202), with Diksmuide home to just two US citizens at the latest count.

1,200

Number of US companies based in Belgium.

\$6.5 billion (€4.4 billion)

Level of direct US investment in Belgium, according to a 2007 AmCham survey. The figure is down on previous years but still puts Belgium in a respectable 5th place worldwide.

8%

Percentage of Belgian employment provided by US companies.

130,000

Number of people employed by US companies in Belgium.

6%

Percentage of Belgian gross domestic product attributed to US companies.

14%

Percentage of Belgian research and development costs incurred by US companies.

15%

Percentage of Belgium's exports generated by US companies.

## Happy to be here

Continued from page 1

When Moore arrived in Flanders, he struggled to learn Dutch. One year later he could speak the language fluently – albeit with a heavy American accent – and that has helped him to integrate. "The bureaucracy appreciates that you speak their language," he notes.

Moore now has a part in the stage musical *Grease*, where he plays in a seven-piece band, and later this month he joins the prestigious *Champ d'Action* ensemble in the deSingel concert hall for the third

performance in a series featuring modern experimental music. His latest project is an 18-month stint playing in the orchestra in a production of *Les Misérables*, which is touring in Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Antwerp.

As a freelance musician, working both in Belgium and the Netherlands, mobility is a key factor for Moore. He has had to learn to drive without the familiar US grid of street designs and deal with aggressive driving habits. "I used to think that Belgian traffic was bad, but it's far worse in the

Netherlands. The people there are aggressive, and there's not so much room on the roads."

Moore and his wife live in Berendrecht, one of Antwerp's nine districts. "I'm pleased to be here, and I like the Belgian lifestyle – along with the beer. The Flemish community is very small, but I like the way we all work together. The economy is growing, unemployment is down, and the Belgian government is, at present, very friendly to foreigners. It's unfortunate that some immigrants choose not to participate because Flanders



# CLEARLY NOT MOVED BY GOSSELIN



The items you treasure most deserve the greatest attention when you move. They are treated with the utmost care by those meticulous men sent by Gosselin, who wrap them in that specific Gosselin paper and move them in accordance with the Gosselin master plan specially drawn up for you. Gosselin has over 70 years' experience in VIP treatment. Their service is so impeccable that you will be moved when you see their specialists at work.

Gosselin was the first moving company in Belgium to have achieved FAIM/ISO, the international moving industry's most prestigious accreditation. With their 32 own branches across Europe, Central-Asia and the Caucasus, you will no doubt receive the service you have always been looking for.



## WE KNOW HOW TO MOVE PEOPLE

Belcrownlaan 23 | B-2100 Antwerp - Belgium  
T +32-3-360 55 00 | T +32-2-772 34 87 | F +32-3-360 55 79

[WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU](http://WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU) | [INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU](mailto:INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU)



## GOSSELIN MOVING

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP



## Technology plan aims to boost innovation

Continued from page 1

"It is a dangerous exercise for a minister to favour some sectors over others, but a small region cannot do everything. We have to make clear choices," Ceysens said.

Flanders Technology was launched 25 years ago by Gaston Geens, the first Flemish minister-president. It formed part of the so-called Third Flemish Industrial Revolution and covered three main areas: nanotechnology, biotechnology and new materials.

Flanders Technology helped Flemish academic institutions and private companies to achieve an international reputation in all three key areas, but especially nanotechnology and biotechnology. One major success was Photovolttech, which recently invested €20 million in its solar-cell factory in Tienen to boost production to 140 mW and bring employment up to 180 jobs. FT also nurtured companies involved in sectors such as in satellite navigation, plant protection and biopharmaceuticals.

Meanwhile figures from Agoria, the Belgian federation for the technology industry, suggest a fall in growth this year to only 2%, down from 4.7% in 2007. The figures exclude the car industry, which if included would bring growth down to -0.2% – the first negative rate since 2003.

The main causes of the downturn are a strong euro, which makes products less competitive on world markets, a slowdown in growth in the economy as a whole, increased costs, particularly in energy (up 16%), reduced consumer confidence and a lack of trained personnel – "a factor for one in five technology businesses and one in two IT businesses," according to Agoria. Business income will also fall, from 5% last year – "the absolute minimum profitability to keep jobs," according to Agoria – to only 4.4% this year. Some 2,700 jobs are due to be lost in the car industry this year, but restructuring is likely to be postponed in other sectors, Agoria argues.



Some 80,000 people turned up last weekend for the traditional Carnival procession in Aalst. Now in its 80th year, the Carnival is famous for its political caricatures, which this year lampoon the efforts to form a federal government.

## Flemish lawyers criticise "misuse" of terror alert

The Order of the Flemish Bar, which represents more than 8,500 Flemish advocates, has attacked what it calls the "misuse" of terror alerts by police and intelligence services to keep the population in a state of panic. The organisation chairman, Jo Stevens, last week criticised "shadowy figures from State Security" who decide on the laws on terrorism in the place of the elected legislator. Lawyers are unable to determine whether magistrates are acting lawfully because they are using "exceptional investigative techniques," he said, which are not revealed. The terror alert over the Christmas and New Year period was provoked by intelligence from the US, and politicians here declined to state the reasons for applying it. Mr Stevens called on defence lawyers to take a stand against secret evidence by pushing cases to a higher jurisdiction, all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, if necessary.

## Aanrijding already first at box office

After an opening weekend of 23,000 viewers, *Aanrijding in Moskou*, the new film by first-time director Christophe van Rompaey, is the number one film in Flanders. The romantic comedy is about a young truck driver with a patchy background who falls for a middle-aged mother of three. Filmed in an area of Ghent, it was feared that the film may not do well at the box office because of its frequent use of local dialect.

## Six Flemish scientists win EU backing to push back frontiers

Six of Flanders' brightest young scientists have come out on top in a major competition that pitted them against 8,794 of the best brains in Europe. Each of the winners will be awarded up to €2 million to spend as they like on research projects that push beyond the frontiers of knowledge.

The Flemish scientists are: Eva Benkova and Jan Cools from the Flanders Institute for Biotechnology; Ann Heylighen, Christian Clasen and Aernout Lutun from the Catholic University of Leuven; and Gilles Pourtois from the University of Ghent.

An overall jackpot of €3 billion was put up by the European Research Council, an independent body set up last year by all

27 governments of the European Union to be Europe's flagship for innovative research funding. Its aim is to fund the most original ideas that it believes will lead to new products and services that will keep Europe's economy globally competitive.

A total of 200 winners have been chosen from the 8,794 eligible entries received. The only criterion for success was the quality of each entrant's research project. In order to qualify for the competition, scientists had to have a place at a European university and have been awarded a PhD not more than nine years ago. The competition was judged by worldwide panels of scientists regarded as the best in their fields.

## Computer games are good, says Ghent professor

Playing computer games is as important to children's education as learning to read and write, according to a professor in education at Ghent University.

"They are so prevalent in our society that we have to teach young people how to cope at school," said Professor Ronald Soetart. He suggested integrating computer games into lessons so that children could master the technical aspects. He also said that teachers should compile lists of required games alongside reading-lists and expect children to write games-reports. But he admitted that many schools do not have the equipment required and that not all children have games consoles at home.



## Kortrijk, Tournai and Lille join mega-metropolis

The three cities of Kortrijk, Tournai and Lille – one Flemish, one Walloon and one French – last week signed a cooperation agreement to create Eurometropole, the first cross-border Eurodistrict in the European Union. The plan, which covers some two million inhabitants, aims to improve cooperation between the various different authorities and resolve border problems. The Eurodistrict, which brings together at least 14 administrative authorities, is the work of a special commission of six Belgian parliamentarians and six French. The members took a year of meetings to work out the terms of what Kortrijk burgomaster Stefaan De Clerck calls "this new political structure".

The final agreement on the Belgian side was one of the first decisions passed by the acting Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt following six months of political deadlock in creating a federal government. Last week De Clerck was joined by foreign minister Karel De Gucht at a ceremony to launch the Eurometropole, together with Lille's honorary mayor (and former French Prime Minister) Pierre Mauroy, who conceived the idea, and Tournai's mayor Christian Massy.

## Leuven researchers discover new anti-anaemia drug

Researchers from Leuven University have discovered a new medication capable of improving the body's production of red blood cells to combat anaemia in cases where existing medicines have failed. The team, led by Professor Diether Lambrechts and attached to the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology, tested the hormone Gas6, which the body produces naturally, on anaemic mice. They found that red blood-cell production increased even in mice that failed to respond to EPO – the most common anti-anaemia agent. Gas6 also produced fewer side-effects than EPO (which is widely used in cases of illegal doping in cycling because of its ability to increase the transport of oxygen by red blood-cells to the muscles). But further tests are required, and commercial production of Gas6 could take another decade.

## NEWS FLASH



### New TV programmes for over-50s

Two former VRT personalities – presenter Jan Van Rompaey and news journalist Dirk Tieleman – are to make a series of new programmes aimed specifically at people over age 50. Van Rompaey cited research showing that the over-50s are looking for something slower and more restful from their TV programmes, with "more information and less entertainment". The new enterprise is convinced that the age group is an attractive one for advertisers, but they will not be venturing into digital TV or internet broadcasting. "We want to make it as easy as possible for our public, and we start from the idea that they're not so much at home with the internet or digital TV," Van Rompaey said.

### Koksijde buys Warhol portrait of Delvaux for €900,000

The CD&V party has criticised a decision by the town of Koksijde to pay €900,000 for a print by Andy Warhol of Belgian artist Paul Delvaux. The two painters met in 1981, when Warhol made a series of eight silkscreen print portraits of Delvaux, who spent many summers in Koksijde. The painting, which was exhibited in the Delvaux Museum in Koksijde for almost a year, is owned by a private collector in Knokke. According to CD&V, there are better things for the town to spend money on, such as affordable building land for residents, or flats for old people. A final decision will be taken at a council meeting next month.

### Employers' organisation calls for "Brussels Guggenheim"

The Flemish employers' organisation Voka has called for Brussels to construct its own "Guggenheim" – a reference to the landmark museum built in Bilbao which gave a new lease of life to the ailing Spanish city. "Fifty years after the Atomium, it's high time that we had a new symbol for Brussels," said incoming chairman Karel Lowette. He plans to push ahead with plans for a cultural centre, built as a public-private collaboration, situated near the site of the future national stadium in Schaerbeek. Lowette, a former member of the cabinet of Brussels minister-president Charles Picqué, now chairs the board of concert hall Ancienne Belgique.





Renaissance man: EC President José Manuel Barroso

## Ghent University welcomes EC President

European Commission president José Manuel Barroso went to Ghent last week to deliver a lecture on the future of Europe. Barroso noted the importance of compromise in European politics and added that the job of a European Commissioner was fraught with difficulties. "There are only two jobs more difficult," he said. "Prime minister of Italy and prime minister of Belgium."

## Plan to ban trade in blood copper and cobalt from Congo

The foreign affairs ministry is to study ways of checking the origin of cobalt and copper from Congo, to prevent trade being used to finance fighting in the troubled region of Katanga. The working group will follow the system of certificates of origin used in the diamond industry to prevent trade in so-called "blood diamonds" from war-torn areas. That measure, introduced in 2000, has led to a drop of 0.2% in conflict diamonds worldwide, according to the Antwerp World Diamond Center.

## Politician jailed for violence

Former police commissioner Bart Debie, now security adviser and municipal council member for the Vlaams Belang in Antwerp, has been sentenced to one year in prison on appeal, on charges of assault, falsifying documents and racism. He was also stripped of his political rights for five years, effectively bringing his political career to an end. Debie was previously found guilty of assaulting at least 27 prisoners and given a suspended sentence. The appeal court added a charge of racism and increased the sentence.

## Government plans image makeover

The federal government is planning a major charm-offensive to improve Belgium's international image, following the difficult latter half of 2007 when the country struggled through a political crisis. The campaign will include TV ads and a website aimed at attracting foreign investors. There will also be a media campaign on CNN, BBC World, Deutsche Welle and CNBC, as well as in *The Economist* and *The Financial Times*. The effort starts in March with an initial budget of €1 million. The basic message is that Belgium is not about to fall apart. There is no cause for uncertainty. And tax breaks for investors are still in place.

## Campaign against fake universities

Flanders' educational institutions are drawing up a list of so-called universities that sell worthless degrees on the internet. The list will be drawn up by the National Recognition Information Centre (Naric), which governs the recognition of foreign qualifications in Flanders. At present, Belgian law does not define the English term "university," which allows diploma-mills to operate without controls. Two institutions set up in Brussels have already been labeled as "untrustworthy".

## SPORT

# Diamonds are a girl's best friend

## The bling trophy is up for grabs

Leo Cendrowicz

As sporting prizes go, there is no trophy more bling than the one up for grabs in Antwerp next week. Football's World Cup may be the most famous, sailing's America's Cup the oldest, and golf's Ryder Cup the most elegant, but the diamond-studded gold tennis racket on offer at the Proximus Diamond Games stands out as the glitziest award on offer.

This is a reward so special that it cannot be won after a single victory: only three wins within a five-year span can secure the twinkling racket. And it is only available for women tennis players – and in recent years this is a group that has seen a few Belgians muscle in on the action.

France's Amelie Mauresmo took the ostentatious trophy home last year after she won the WTA tournament for the third year in succession. Her 4kg gold racket is studded with 1,702 diamonds and worth around €1 million (and it is the real thing: the much-reported 2006 theft in an Amsterdam hotel involved a replica of the racket). The gleaming racket amounted to one-tenth of the tour earnings Mauresmo amassed in her 12-year pro career.

This year, the organisers have produced a new trophy with even more sparkle: the stylized, 4.5 kilo racket and ball has 2,008 diamonds – 1,611 on the ball and 397 on the rim – and is worth €1 million. It should help ensure that the Games remain one of the most popular indoor tennis tournaments – some 14,500 fans gathered for the final last year, and organisers expect the overall visitor numbers to hit a new record this time round.

Mauresmo is skipping the tournament this year, but Justine Henin returns to compete after a five-year absence in which the world number one had opted for competitions in Doha and Dubai instead of playing on home soil.

Henin played in the final of the first edition of the Diamond Games in 2002 and lost to Venus Williams. In 2003, she was beaten by Kim Clijsters in the semi-final, and in 2004 Henin withdrew from the competition at the last moment. But on her website, she said that it was the Belgian crowd – which had bombarded her with requests to take part – that convinced her to return to Antwerp. Although her competitors are big names, the tournament organisers say that without Henin it would have moved from the Sportpaleis to the nearby Lotto Arena.

Indeed, seven of the women's top 20 ranked players will battle at the Sportpaleis: Russian Anna Chakvetadze ranked six in the world, American hard hitter – and recent Australian Open champion – Serena Williams (ranked number 7), Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova (9), Tatiana Golovin of France (13), Swiss Patty Schnyder (15) and Hungarian Agnes Szavay (20) have also confirmed their participation in the event that takes place from 11-17 February.

A clutch of young Belgian talents will also be competing: Kirsten Flipkens, Debbrih Feys, Soetkin Van Deun and Davinia Lobbingier were given wild cards for the qualifying draw, while Yanina Wickmayer and Caroline Maes were given wild cards for the main draw (from next year onwards, the games will skip qualifiers and will be a four-day invitation-only tournament involving just 12 to 16 players).



Kim Clijsters (left) is honoured, but Amelie Mauresmo (right) is in the final

There will be music too: the evening matches will be preceded by short sets featuring bands like Ozark Henry, Brahim, Ester, Udo and Tom Helsen.

The Diamond Games were only launched in 2002 featuring, but are related to the European Community Championship (ECC), an Antwerp men's event that ran from 1982 until 1998. That tournament was held as a special exhibition event run outside the Grand Prix series and did not earn any ATP ranking points until 1992, when it became part of the ATP tour.

The inaugural ECC event, in December 1982, offered a \$700,000 purse for the 24-player field, and it also promised a diamond-studded, gold racket for anyone who won it three times in five years. At 6kg, with 1,420 diamonds, it was valued at \$1 million, but it was claimed just once, in 1985, by Ivan Lendl.

A word, finally, for someone else who

will be absent from Antwerp this year. As a Flemish heroine – and winner in 2004 – Kim Clijsters has been the top draw over the past few years. Last year, at 23 years old, was her final appearance as she had already announced her imminent retirement.

It was a poignant week: the Diamond Games organisers had honoured Clijsters with a small 'Kimmuseum' exhibition of memorabilia in the Sportpaleis entrance hall, displaying her Flushing Meadows cup, her five awards for being Belgian Sportswoman of the Year, the Number 1 ranking trophy, and her Masters cup. But Mauresmo was there to deny the Belgian in the final, for the second year running, despite raucous booing from Clijsters fans. Without Clijsters, this year's event will miss a local shine, but the organisers hope that the sparkle of the new trophy will continue to bring stars and crowds to Antwerp.



## THE AMERICA ISSUE

### Cheering news for Belgian beer

### Big bucks for "Brewed in Belgium"



Steven Tate

The weakened dollar has left many Americans crying into their beer – which is, more and more, Belgian beer. American sales are close to doubling over the last year, according to stock analysts Credit Suisse. "Belgian suppliers are hard-pressed to keep up with the demand," says Darius Debski of D & V International, the Florida-based importers of Belgian and French beers. "Even larger brewers like InBev are having problems filling orders."

While sales of German, Dutch and Mexican beers are flat (if not falling), Belgian beer has an edge – particularly over the Germans. Long enshrined in German law was the Reinheitsgebot, or "Beer Purity Law", dating back to 1516. The Reinheitsgebot for centuries forbade beer to be composed of anything but water, barley and hops. This law was replaced in 1987 with the Provisional German Beer Law which allows more ingredients, but the Germans still have years to go to catch up with

the Belgians, who have not been so restrictive in banning flavours from their brews.

American beers are more in the German tradition, leaving the market open for Belgians. "Add to that the craft beer craze that took hold of the States in the 80s and is now finally coming to a head," says Stu Stuart, Belgian beer specialist. The growth in micro-breweries led Americans to become more interested in what was out there beyond Budweiser, a US top-selling beer. "The variations in Belgian beer – the spices, fruits and flavours used, the barrels – all these things make Belgian beer more attractive to people who drink wine, but normally shy away from beer," says Stuart.

Indeed, Belgian beers average six to 14% alcohol content – close to that of wine – compared with the American standard of 5%. The higher alcohol content makes for a creamier texture and stronger aroma. Belgian beers are also bottle conditioned – meaning they continue to ferment in the bottle and can last for years, while American beer begins to decline after six months. Finally, American beer has a working class profile – but Belgian beer, with its wide range of tastes and higher price tag, appeals to the gourmand.

Belgian beers took off in the US in the early 90s, with nightspots like Monk's Café & Beer Emporium in Philadelphia becoming a mecca for beer connoisseurs wanting to sample Belgian brew. Americans have since tried to transplant Belgian traditions: Belgian

brewer Pierre Celis has decamped for Texas, where he uses age-old Belgian techniques to produce his Celis White. A "Belgian-style" ale called Ommegang is being brewed in New York by Belgian brewer Bert De Wit and American partners. Add to that the inclusion of Belgian brews on menus of smart restaurants from New York to LA, and a niche is born.

But while some think that imitation is the highest form of flattery, some find it fraud. The Confederation of Belgian Brewers filed suit against America's third largest brewer, Coors, for allegedly misleading the American public into believing that Coors' Blue Moon Brewing Co "Belgian White" beer was brewed in Belgium. The suit was settled when Coors agreed to make clear on labels that it was a "Belgian-Style Wheat Ale". Like Champagne, "brewed in Belgium" has become a brand in itself that brings bucks to Belgian brewers.

Stu Stuart has turned his passion for Belgian beer into profit by driving his fellow Americans to drink – or rather guiding them to drink on Belgian beer tours that he coordinates four times a year. His website, [www.belgianbeerme.com](http://www.belgianbeerme.com), has developed a serious following among beer cognoscenti, and he is in high demand for tastings and beer seminars. The strong euro might have diminished demand for some European goods state-side, but beer lovers are a special breed. "And Belgian beers are in a class by themselves," says Stuart.

### Vlerick wins place in prestigious FT list

Vlerick Management School, a Flemish business school with campuses in Ghent and Leuven, has won a place in the *Financial Times* Global MBA Ranking. The management school was ranked in 97th place in the newspaper's list of the 100 best schools to study a full-time MBA programme. The *Financial Times* list is widely regarded as the definitive guide to MBAs, although some criticise it

for placing a too heavy emphasis on salaries in assessing a school's ranking.

Vlerick, which comes 26th in Europe in the *FT* survey, has about 50 students from 30 countries. "Now that we have just entered the top league, there remains a lot of work to be done to secure this level," said Peter Rafferty, director of MBA studies at Vlerick.

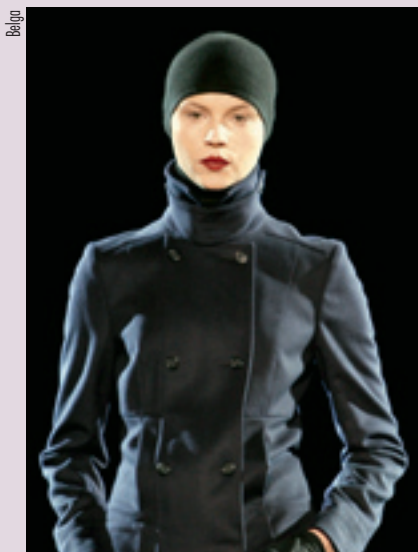
Meanwhile, Anders Aspling,

dean of Vlerick, stepped down from his post last week, citing "personal reasons". Aspling was the first foreigner to occupy the top post, which he took over in September 2007. "We have a lot of exciting plans," he told *Flanders Today* last October. "We want to differentiate ourselves in the future so that we really have a presence on the international scene."

## FASHION

### Berlin airlift: Bruno Pieters takes Hugo Boss to new heights

Berlin's historic Tempelhof Airport provided the backdrop for Flemish designer Bruno Pieters' first collection as head of Hugo Boss. Pieters, 30, who took over as art director of the German fashion house in June 2007, admitted he was nervous before the show, held at the airport used for the 1948 Berlin Airlift. The collection launched the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Berlin, a quieter-than-normal fashion event squeezed between Paris and New York shows. Snuggling into the front row seats were celebrities like fashion photographer Mario Testino, former tennis heart-throb Boris Becker and Finnish Formula 1 driver Mika Häkkinen. They were treated to a show involving clean sharp lines and muted colours.



## BUSINESS FLASH



### Alken-Maes

Alken-Maes, the Waarloos-based brewer of the ubiquitous Maes lager beer, is to be taken over by the Dutch Heineken group as part of an elaborate take-over of the Edinburgh-based Scottish and Newcastle beer group by a consortium led by the Danish Carlsberg brewery. Grimbergen beer will be owned by the Danes, while the Affligem and Postel abbey beers will be distributed by Heineken. No job losses are expected.

### Mol

Mol, the Hoogdele-based automotive products and bodywork company, is to supply 116 armored vehicles for Saudi-Arabia's national guard. The contract is part of a €56 million subcontracting deal with Britain's BAE.

### Real

The Kontich-based software company Real is to take over Dolmen computers, an affiliate of discount retailer Colruyt, for some €133 million. Real, previously known as Real Software, is recovering from several difficult years, and the move marks the company's return to better trading conditions.

### Sabena Technics

Sabena Technics, the Zaventem-based maintenance and aircraft repair company, is to renovate 14 of the French Army's C130 transport aircraft. The contract, worth some €43 million, is a major achievement for the Belgian firm, which was an affiliate of the bankrupt Sabena airline before being taken over by the French TAT group.

### Henderson Global Investor

The Henderson Global Investor property fund is to acquire the Hedera retail park in Roeselare, along with the Hydron retail park in Arlon, providing it with an additional 38,000 square metres of retail space.

### Mitsui

Mitsui, the Japanese trading group, is to build a chemical, petroleum products and gas terminal in the Port of Antwerp area. The new facilities will begin operations in 2009.

### Reynaers Aluminium

Reynaers Aluminium, the Duffel-based aluminum building materials producer, is to take over Portugal's Alupol company for €9 million. The move strengthens Reynaers' leading position in the Portuguese market. Family-owned Reynaers is one of the world leaders in transforming aluminum products for the building sector and has activities in 27 countries.

### Het Anker

Het Anker, the Mechelen-based brewery, is to launch its own whisky, the Gouden Carolus Single Malt. Some 2,500 bottles are expected to be produced this year by the brewery, one of the oldest in the country.

### Electrabel

The electricity supplier Electrabel has applied for planning permission to build a wind turbine park near Sint-Truiden, Limburg province. The complex will have 22 turbines capable of supplying the electricity needs of 40,000 families. The wind park is expected to become operational in 2010.





## CLASSICAL NOTES

## Bl!nd faith

This is not your parents' sax quartet



Celebrating 20 years of mystical madness: Bl!ndman plays three anniversary concerts in Flanders

The acclaimed Flemish sax quartet Bl!ndman has always kept a few beats ahead of its listeners. When it hit stages in 1988, few people even suspected that the saxophone could be used to play music that wasn't jazz or muzak.

But Eric Sleichim and his three friends kept concert-goers on their toes with jolting performances of music by John Cage, Stockhausen and other avant-garde composers that explored the instrument's infinite realm of possibilities.

In the late 1990s, came Bl!ndman's break into early music, which developed from the Bach chorales they would play at the start of each rehearsal. "The chorales are perfect for warming up or to test the acoustics of a new venue," Sleichim tells

me at one of their recent rehearsals in Flagey. "Because they're so tonal, they require you to be perfectly in tune. Gradually, these chorales became little concerts in their own right – almost mystical experiences – and we decided to construct programmes around them."

Bl!ndman started appearing in baroque festivals alongside the Collegium Vocale and Huelgas Ensemble playing Bach and Buxtehude, then Johannes Ockeghem and other Renaissance composers from the Franco-Flemish school. Baroque buffs had never heard anything like it.

Now, after 20 years, Sleichim and his mates have ventured into new territory again: just when we thought their distinctive feature was the gorgeous, polished sounds of saxophones, the quartet has grown to include 16 young musicians, including singers, percussionists and string players. You'll find a few new sax players, too, and everyone shares the four-some's inquisitive nature and ready taste for provocation. "Bl!ndman is more than a sound," Sleichim says. "It's an attitude." All 20 musicians will be on stage for a series of three anniversary concerts, which kick off this Saturday in Brussels and then move on to Antwerp and Bruges.

The name Bl!ndman (pronounced with a short "i" as in "blip") is derived from *The Blind Man*, a New York magazine launched in 1917 by Dada artist Marcel Duchamp. Its founding was based on the metaphor of a blind man guiding visitors around an exhibition and learning to see through their eyes. The exclamation mark is a

hint at Maximalist!, the avant-garde music outfit which Sleichim co-founded in the early 1980s in a bid, he remembers, to "strip musical practice from classical clichés and conventions."

The same spirit of exploration and discovery will certainly inform the anniversary concerts, which Sleichim describes as a "memory landscape" and a "large ritual with a logic of its own." The music, composed by Sleichim himself, blends various pieces that have made up the group's repertoire for the past two decades, from Purcell to Stravinsky to Philip Glass, and even a curious performance thought up by contemporary Belgian composer Thierry De Mey. Musicians slap and stroke a table with their hands, inspired by a scene in Fellini's *La dolce vita*.

The staging, by visual artists Anouk De Clercq and Kris Verdonck, promises to be a strange, spectacular affair on the theme of breathing. As Sleichim says: "We've blown a lot of air in 20 years."

**Marie Dumont**

9 February, Kaaitheater, Sainctelettesquare 20, Brussels, 02.201.59.59, [www.kaaitheater.be](http://www.kaaitheater.be);  
22 February, deSingel, Desguinlei 5, Antwerp, 03.248.28.28, [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be);  
1 March, Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34, Bruges, 070.22.33.02, [www.concertgebouw.be](http://www.concertgebouw.be)

online  
[www.blindman.be](http://www.blindman.be)



## Get Flanders Today in your letterbox each week

Want to keep in touch with Flanders?

Simply fill in the subscription form below and send it to:

**Flanders Today**

**Subscription Department**

**Waterloosesteenweg 1038 – 1180 Brussels – Belgium**

**Fax: 00.32.2.375.98.22**

**Email: [subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu)**

The newspaper version will be mailed to subscribers living in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and France. Residents of others countries will receive a weekly ezine.

Name: .....  
Street: .....  
City: .....  
Postcode: .....  
Country: .....  
e-mail: .....

Privacy policy: We fully respect Belgian legislation on the protection of personal information. The data we collect will only be used for distribution of publications and will not be disclosed to any third parties without express consent.

## Flanders Today

independent newsweekly

Editor: Derek Blyth  
Deputy editor: Lisa Bradshaw  
Agenda: Sarah Crew  
Picture research: Esther Bourrée  
Prepress: Nancy Temmerman  
Contributors: Marie Dumont, An Gydé, Alan Hope, Alistair MacLean, Katharine Mill, Monique Philips, Steven Tate, Rory Watson  
Project manager: Pascale Zoetaert  
Publisher: VUM  
NV Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij  
Gossetlaan 28, 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden  
Editorial address: Waterloosesteenweg 1038 – 1180 Brussels  
Tel.: 02.373.99.09 – Fax: 02.375.98.22  
E-mail: [editorial@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:editorial@flanderstoday.eu)  
Subscriptions  
France Lycops  
Tel: 02.373.83.59  
E-mail: [subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu)  
Advertising:  
Evelyne Fregonese  
Tel. 02.373.83.57  
E-mail: [advertising@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:advertising@flanderstoday.eu)  
Verantwoordelijke uitgever: Derek Blyth



## THE AMERICA ISSUE

## Notes from home

The Detroit newspaper that has a feel for Flanders



Gazette van Detroit's editor-in-chief Elisabeth Khan-Van den Hove introduces the Boy Scouts to the Flemish press

## Steven Tate

The Motor City has long had a Flemish connection, dating back to Our Lady of Sorrows Church, founded on the city's east side by a Belgian bishop. Since then, Detroit and the State of Michigan have become home to the second largest population of people of Flemish descent in the world outside Belgium – a fact that is proved by the *Gazette van Detroit*.

This modest Flemish broadsheet has been keeping Belgians abroad

in touch with what's happening in the mother country since 1914. Editor-in-chief Elisabeth Khan-Van den Hove plans to build on the paper's heritage to make it a must-read for the internet generation.

Eighteen years ago, Ninove-born Khan-Van den Hove never thought she would be following in the footsteps of so many Flemish immigrants to the US. "Having married an Indian, I knew life would take me beyond Belgium," she says, "but I was not thinking

Michigan." If she had to move, Khan-Van den Hove would have preferred the more exotic land of her husband's birth. Michigan – with its flat landscapes, various wetlands and potato crops – was too similar to the Flanders she left. "I met my husband when he came to study in vitro embryology at the University of Ghent – and he'd always had his eye on working in the US," she explains. "When a great position in his field opened up outside Detroit, he couldn't say no."

So former software specialist Khan-Van den Hove went to the US, did her stint as a desperate housewife until her work papers came through and dived into a career teaching Indian culture at area universities. She also did freelance translation work while raising three children.

In early 2006, advertising manager Leen Cleymans-De Doncker, another Flemish expatriate, recruited Khan-Van den Hove for the *Gazette van Detroit*. Over the years, sales had dwindled due to competition from various other media and entertainment sources, and the staff was demoralised. Even today, the paper's circulation is only 1,000. But, Khan-Van den Hove notes, "we have a lot of 'pass along' readers," meaning each copy is read by more than just the subscriber. "Part of the problem in reaching a larger audience is that many say they would subscribe, but they can't read Flemish." Getting the word out that the paper is published in English, too, is a battle that should see subscriptions rise.

Recruited just 18 months ago, Khan-Van den Hove faces a difficult challenge. Working with an all-volunteer staff and a shoestring budget, she has made it her priority to bring the *Gazette* into the 21st century. "When I got here, there wasn't even any internet or voicemail," she sighs. "There just wasn't the budget." Making it to the paper's 100th anniversary in six years' time is Khan-Van den Hove's primary mission at the moment. "After that, we want to make our website the main version of the *Gazette* so that people can access it from anywhere," she says.

Khan-Van den Hove's personal experience with moving to America mirrors a predicament for all Flemings living abroad: how to stay connected with her roots while adapting to the new environment. To help her children adjust to life in the US, she only spoke English to them from the moment they arrived in 1990. "My eldest was 10 at the time, so he brought books with him and kept his Flemish up," she concedes. "He has an accent, but he can still speak it. The other two, unfortunately, can't."

Children of the first generation of immigrants will be able to speak Flemish – if both parents speak it in the home. But as Flemings intermarry with other cultures, and children adapt to their environment, the language is the first casualty. "I often meet people who say, 'Oh, I'm one-quarter Flemish,'" Khan-Van den Hove says. "But they never speak the language."

The *Gazette van Detroit* helps younger generations keep in touch with their heritage. Each bi-weekly issue covers features news, sports and profiles of famous personalities from Flanders. Veteran Flemish journalist Paula Marckx is a correspondent, contributing provocative articles such as an interview with Delphine Boël, the illegitimate daughter of King Albert. "Ms Marckx is in her 80s and does not shy away from any subject," notes Khan-Van den Hove.

The recent government crisis also got major play on the newspaper's pages, with the readers split on how Flanders and Wallonia should sort out their differences. "There is a small group of Flemish immigrants who came to America before World War Two," Khan-Van den Hove says. "They still have memories of how the Flemish were mistreated by the francophones – and they think the regions should go their separate ways. But more recent immigrants think, 'Why can't we all just get along?'"

For years, the *Gazette van Detroit* has been just getting along – but Khan-Van den Hove is poised to help it get ahead. At one point in history, Flemish immigrants turned to the paper to get news because they couldn't read English. Now the battle is to get those who read English but have lost the connection to the Flemish language. Americans are renowned for embracing their roots – as Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans and African-Americans, to name just a few. If the *Gazette van Detroit* has anything to do with it, you'll soon be hearing more about Flemish-Americans.

online

www.gazettevandetroit.com

## George Bush has Flemish roots?

It sounds a little far-fetched, and might even be defined as unpatriotic, but there is a growing body of evidence that George Bush has distant Flemish roots. It seems that he is descended from a certain Willem Baudaert (or Baudartius), born in Deinze, west of Ghent, in 1560.

Baudartius came from a Protestant family at a time of growing religious intolerance and finally fled north to the Netherlands, where he became a strict Dutch Reformed preacher. He spoke fluent Hebrew and played a role in translating the first Dutch edition of the Bible.

His daughter, Maria Baudartius, born in 1600, married a Dutchman called Hendrik Beekman. They had a son called Willem, born in 1623, who sailed with Pieter Stuyvesant to America and settled in the colony of New Amsterdam (later New York).

Willem Beekman became one of the most prosperous citizens in Manhattan. Even today his name strikes a vague resonance with New Yorkers: just a couple of blocks from

the Brooklyn Bridge runs a Beekman Street, named in honour of the Dutch immigrant.

But we're still a bit of a way from the leader of the free world. Cornelia Beekman, granddaughter of Willem, married Gilbert Livingston, the son of a Scottish minister. And Cornelia's great-granddaughter, Judith Livingstone, married a Samuel Herrick Butler. Their grandchild married Robert Emmet Sheldon, a wealthy arms dealer. And his daughter Flora Sheldon married Prescott Bush, great-grandfather of the president of the United States. So there you have it. George Bush has Flemish roots. But, to quote a familiar Bushism, "I think we all agree, the past is over."

Derek Blyth

Don't underestimate him:  
George Bush's distant Flemish ancestor





## THE AMERICA ISSUE

# The road to Broken Bow

With sod castles, Dutch phrases and sawn-off antlers, the Flemish have left their mark on Mid-west America



"The French Table": Isidore Haumont (sitting) with his wife, Elisabeth François, and their son (behind). Walter and Jean François are on the left. People came from all over Nebraska to see the family's "sod castle"

## Monique Philips

The American story of the Flemish Haumont family starts in 1875. Joseph Severyns, aged 21, boarded a two-master Red Star Line bound for New York. He was soon followed by his cousin Jules Haumont and his older brother and sister, Thomas and Mina Severyns.

Their grandfather, Joseph Haumont, was a philosopher (follower of Etienne Bonnot de Condillac), an engineer and a prolific author of both books and letters. When he married the daughter of the tenant farmer of the huge Monnikenhof estate in Vechmaal in 1814, he was tentative about the match, describing his fiancée to his family: "She isn't pretty." He wrote in French as, in those days, all public life and education in Flanders was conducted in French.

Joseph Haumont then built a home – "Big Haumont" – in Lanklaar and started a family in which literature and culture played a vital role. His two sons took up farming in Vechmaal, while his daughter remained in Lanklaar, where she married and gave birth to Joseph Severyns.

After Joseph's father died in 1872, his mother remarried a farmer who didn't care for books at all. Most likely due to this culture clash and attracted by the free land offered by Nebraska's Homestead Act, the young man and his siblings decided to emigrate and leave the lush village of Vechmaal, Limburg, behind. Emigration to America was highly topical, and many advertisements and agents talked about that "tree" on the other side of the world "on which money grew".

But first they had to earn their money in the coal mines of Moin-gona, Iowa. It took them two years before they had enough to move on. They first went to Wood River, but by 1879 were ready to claim their piece of land near Broken Bow, a town in Custer County, Nebraska – the heart of the American Midwest. Old maps show clearly the simple grid of squares superimposed on the land. You received 80 acres (.32 square kilometres) – and 80 acres more if you planted trees. To claim your land, all you needed to do was build a house on it.

The Haumont family built themselves several smaller houses and a large communal one. They used sod because there weren't any trees yet and, thus, no timber. They had to travel 100 miles to buy a stove, only to realise that the pipe was too short to go through their high European-style roof. (They built a little sod platform to put the stove on.)

## Settlements in America

### Care to visit Belgium, Wisconsin or Ghent, Minnesota?

In the 60 years between 1870 and 1930, approximately 150,000 Belgian emigrants left for America and Canada – and another 28,000 to Brazil, Argentina and even to one of King Leopold I's colonial schemes in Vera Paz and Santo Tomas, Guatemala. This export of the unemployed seemed ideal to Belgian politicians, and soon free trips were offered to ex-convicts – and a few who still needed to serve out their terms, truth be told. Two settlements were set up for these cast-outs – in Kansas City, Missouri and in Saint-Mary, Pennsylvania. After the arrival of 630 such criminal types, though, American authorities started to complain, and the settlements were abandoned within two years.

Other Belgian settlements, though, exist in name to this very day: Belgium, Wisconsin; Ghent, Minnesota and, due to a drunk

clerk, Luxemburg, Wisconsin. There's also Belgique, Missouri – a ghost town since 1993. Nineteenth-century newspaper clippings from Green Bay, Wisconsin, report on the strange Belgian habit of using red bricks instead of lumber, not quite believing the immigrants when they referred to brick houses that were 200 years old in Belgium.

Other traditions didn't change much either. In Robinsonville, Mississippi, the clergy opposed a young girl who saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary between two trees in 1858. Nevertheless, a little chapel was built that attracted many pilgrims. Newspapers further relate that even if beer, wine and brandy are served abundantly throughout the year, the best time to visit a Belgian settlement is when they celebrate "kermis" in the autumn. "For some obscure reason," one news-

paper reported, "it's important that two kermises don't coincide on the same date."

And when, in 1928, the city of Brussels, Wisconsin, celebrated the 50th anniversary of its church "a generous chicken dinner is assured." By then the typically

Belgian "sound of the wooden shoe is seldom heard." Integration was a reality.

MP

online  
<http://belgium.rootsweb.com>



More than 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island before its closure in 1954





Painter Eugeen van Mieghem produced many works inspired by Flemish emigration

Meanwhile, encouraged by their adventures, the four pioneers were followed by another brother, Edmond, who married his cousin Mina in 1879. Then the floodgates opened: about 40 members from the interlinked families Haumont, Severyns, Francois, Govaerts and Smets set sail on the steamboat Plantijn (of the short-lived Engels Line) in 1883. They arrived through Castle Garden (now Battery Park), as Ellis island was only opened 10 years later. They all slept in a hostel run by Walloons and the next day walked (quite a fair distance) to the railway station and boarded the train that, after a three days' journey, took them via Chicago to Grand Island – the terminus on

the Nebraskan frontier.

All of these Flemish-born extended families made claims around Broken Bow, and together they owned about 700 hectares. As they all spoke French, the area became known as "French Table".

One of them was uncle Isidore Haumont. Aged 60, he was a true adventurer and a gifted engineer. Back in Vechmaal, he had once moved a barn by putting it on rollers, and he's the one who built Nebraska's famous "sod castle". People from all over Nebraska came to see this unique sod house with its two stories. On the internet you can watch a professor visit the house, while in the background you see the walls papered

with *Le Peuple*, a Belgian newspaper sent over by the family. Isidore's sod castle was unfortunately demolished in the 1960s, but visiting Americans to Flanders who remember the Nebraska castle sometimes see a resemblance to Uncle Isidore's old house in Vechmaal.

Once a year, Isidore would write a letter to his brother Louis back in Limburg and explain in detail about the techniques he used, the crops he grew, his impressions on the way over (houses with porches) and so on. In the photo opposite you can see Isidore, his (much younger) wife Elisabeth François and her two brothers, Walter and Jean. Her two sisters and their families, Govaerts and Smets, were also part of the French Table.

Lots of letters and photos of every new born child crossed the ocean. Visitors came and went, taking along a bride, new emigrants or coming back for good. When Thomas Severyns returned to Lanklaar in 1886 and wanted to become town clerk, the whole community was in uproar. Could they trust an American citizen?

Isidore's brothers-in-law, Walter and Jean, both returned to Belgium around 1900, after Walter swapped his sod house for Isidore's Vechmaal farm (now a B&B). When Walter died of the Spanish Flu after the First World War, his brother returned to the US and died a couple of years later.

Names changed from Jean into John, Marie into Mary, Isidore into Isadore. But some common Flemish vocabulary survived: Midwesterners still refer to white bread as "mik" and to their aunts as "tan". On a picture of Catherine Dement, visiting her mother's birthplace in the early 1960s, is written in mangled Flemish-French "alte village kirk".

On 25 October, 1934, a woman named Sylvie wrote to her "Chère Tante Sophie" and cousins: "The letter you wrote to Uncle Jules came a few hours after his death... Uncle Jules died very suddenly. I do wish that I could write French or that you could write English, for with the passing of Uncle Jules, our last link with Belgium is broken... Embraces de Coeur".

That turned out to be true until 1980, when a new link was forged. "Someone from Belgium sent a letter to a hotel in Broken Bow asking for information on the Smets," says Peter Vanbrabant. "Fortunately, a reply came." A descendant of the Smets family, Vanbrabant has reconstructed the family history from his home in Limburg. "It's so rewarding to be able to confirm all those stories passed down in our family and in the village," he says. "I was sceptical about stories of the Flemish emigrants who built a steam plough in America, and then I find a picture of it!"

The story of his ancestor Sophie Severyns (Chère Tante Sophie in

the letter) is even more compelling. She fled from an abusive husband to the US. He followed her there, and she soon returned to Limburg to obtain a divorce, telling the court: "I've moved from the biggest house in Lanklaar to the smallest, but I'm free. Every morning I open my door and think: 'I'm free.'"

"I've found the sad letters of the pining mother of Jules [Haumont], one of the first pioneers to arrive," says Vanbrabant. "I found a picture of Joseph's [Severyns] headstone in San Diego, where he moved on to." Vanbrabant and his family have created a genealogy website with letters and life stories in both English and Dutch, including one of Vanbrabant's favourites: "There was a story about how they went hunting in Nebraska for prairie chicken, deer and elk. Supposedly, when they wanted to bring a set of antlers to Belgium, and it didn't fit in their trunk, they sawed a piece off. When later I visited an old lady Haumont, who lives alone in a small castle in the middle of the woods, what do I see on the wall? Elk antlers with a piece cut off!"

Any descendants of the families mentioned are welcome to email [peter.vanbrabant@blackdecker.com](mailto:peter.vanbrabant@blackdecker.com).

online

[www.nebraskahistory.org](http://www.nebraskahistory.org)

## The Red Star Line

### One shipping company carried tens of thousands to a new world

From 1873 until 1934 the Red Star Line, an American company sailing under the Belgian flag, transported about 2.5 million emigrants to the United States. They travelled to Antwerp by horse and cart or by train on the newly-built Iron Rhine Route. Most of them were middle and eastern Europeans – desperate refugees from pogroms and hunger.

Upon their arrival, other ordeals awaited them. Dodging con artists and thieves, they had to make their way to the shabby hotels around the station or the port. Once an official complaint was lodged by a Bavarian family after being mocked by locals for their traditional attire. Jews were accused of spreading cholera, and it was legal to turn them away. Soon Antwerp had such a bad reputation, travellers started to prefer other ports, like Liverpool, even though it was further away.

To stop losing business, the Red Star Line company had to step in to guarantee travellers a safe passage from Antwerp station to the ships. Charity organisations helped by offering guidelines to Flemish emigrants:

"Don't take ploughs, but take as many shoes and hats as you can." *Landverhuizers*, literally "country movers", had to undergo open-air medical tests because the Red Star was responsible for bringing back any emigrants that America wouldn't allow in. (Among the reasons for refusal were tuberculosis, pregnancy and polygamy.)

Passengers patiently awaited their turn in the Montevideostraat, while a young Eugeen van Mieghem sketched them from the opposite window of his mother's café (leading to works such as the painting). Later he would be thrown out of the academy by the same teacher as Van Gogh. But soon emigration became a theme in Belgian art.

Meanwhile, tragedies occurred in the docks when sick relatives, including children, had to be left behind. Often the refused had spent their last cent on the boat ticket, so they – along with 25% of the emigrants who returned from America, disappointed and broke – had a miserable time on the Antwerp streets. Train tickets out were sold at reduced prices just to get rid of them.

The voices of those who did make the crossing, on their

appointed one square metre of space and after 10 days of seasickness, rang out in relief: "Hail, Statue of Liberty".

On 22 March, Antwerp's National Maritime Museum will launch an extensive exhibition on the Red Star Line, after which the entire collection will be stored away until the Red Star Line Memorial Museum opens in the former company warehouses on the Rijnkaai in 2010. In the meantime, visit locals Jacky and Monique at the stylish Info Point near the Maritime Museum for a cupper and further info.

A new Flemish play, *The Red Star Line*, takes the stage at Antwerp's historical Theater Zeemanshuis (currently under threat of demolition) from 21 February to 26 April. Based on historical facts, a 75-year-old man tells the story of his grandparents who emigrated to America on the Red Star Line.

MP

online

[museum.antwerpen.be/scheepvaart-museum](http://museum.antwerpen.be/scheepvaart-museum)  
[www.redstarlinememorial.be](http://www.redstarlinememorial.be)  
[www.theaterzeemanshuis.be](http://www.theaterzeemanshuis.be)





## BED &amp; BREAKFAST

# Serene hibernation

Cosy up during the remaining weeks of winter in one of Flanders' best rooms for rent



Up a different flight of stairs is a room framed by its ceiling, which tilts protectively on both sides of another pure white bed. There is a hint of Africa here, too, reflected in the furnishings and the chess set. Again, the little window is above the bed – a futon this time, set close to the floor. You can curl up under the duvet and stare out at the rain and the wind, which blows through the trees lining this quiet country road on the outskirts of the little village of Lissewege.

Carpentier and his wife, Axel Coppens, live in the 10,000 square-metre farmhouse with their two children, dogs, horses, ferrets and cat. They will happily show you the stables attached to the house – with two horses as gorgeous as the rooms. Coppens is an accomplished horsewoman, and her love of the animal is reflected in the third guest room, where 19th-century style drawings of horse-drawn carriages decorate the walls that surround the cast iron four-poster bed. That's for the adults – upstairs there is an additional room that comfortably sleeps four. Children are more than welcome at Pronkenburg, despite the wealth of delicate art pieces that decorate the home.

The couple are avid collectors of Flemish art, from paintings to drawings to glasswork and sculpture, both in the house and in the garden. Coppens herself is an art restorer and portraitist; you'll find a couple of her drawings among the collection, as well as boxes painted in a specialised marble technique that took her five years of study to perfect. You'll also see her talent shine through in the rooms, which are perfectly appointed down to the smallest detail. Plush robes and shampoo in Art Deco bottles make you feel well cared for.

Coppens and Carpentier bought the early 18th-century house and grounds near Bruges six years ago and opened it to guests a year later. Open beams and hardwood floors are a staple, and there are a few charming surprises – you have to step off half way up the staircase in the family room to enter the bathroom, and in the “Moroccan room” there is a completely empty space behind a wall. You could throw down an extra mattress – or do a little yoga.

Though it's easy to stay holed up in your room, you won't really be able to resist the massive open-hearth fireplace in the living room. Buy a little bottle of wine



The attic room offers shelter from a rainy winter (top); the bright blues of the Morocco room (above); Guy and Axel relax in their 18th-century farmhouse (above, right)

Lisa Bradshaw

**It might be too cold outside for city trips, but it's perfect for a bit of hibernating in a snug guest room. Book a weekend (Valentine's Day perhaps) in one of Flanders' best bed & breakfasts – with rooms so luxurious, you won't feel like leaving them**

“Welcome to Morocco!” exclaims Guy Carpentier, as he whips open the door to one of three luscious rooms in the Pronkenburg bed & breakfast. I knew I was really in chilly West Flanders, but I didn't care. The winter sunlight burst

through the window and beamed off the bright blue walls onto a luxurious, white-clothed bed. At the head of it, an Arabic-style tea set perched on a window seat. You'll want to sit at that window because the view of the garden below is magnificent.



## Once breakfast is over

Bed & breakfasts feed you in the morning – but then it's up to you. When staying at the Pronkenburg, you're spoiled for choice for lunch or dinner. Just down the street is the two-star 't Molentje, where chef Danny Horseele offers a contemporary menu. In the other direction is the Ter Doest, with its famed giant cuts of perfectly-cooked beef. Further into Lissewege, the friendly bistro Huyze Saeftinghe's unique sauces accompany tender slices of white fish. Huge drugstore-style candy jars that sit atop the piano are plunked right on your table after your meal.



in the adjoining cellar and curl up in one of the two-seater chairs in front of the fire – plenty of art books are available to flip through. You might find Carpentier in front of the fireplace some evenings, and he's a good talker. Ask him about the very first time they tried to light a fire here or about their horseback honeymoon safari with the guide who provided the sets for the film *Out of Africa*.

In the daylight, bundle up and take a stroll in the garden, with 250 trees that stretch outwards towards a field with a little stream and a wooden bench sitting conveniently by. I won't tease you with the summertime Pronkenburg garden – its 160 rose bushes, bread oven and late-night parties – but did I mention there is a secluded Jacuzzi out there?

The B&B is extremely quiet, which will help you sleep until your breakfast of jam, pastries, breads, cheeses, meats, assorted drinks and an egg cooked any way you like it. Half of the Pronkenburg's guests return within the same year, and it's easy to see why. €80-€110/double, 050.544.540, [www.pronkenburg.be](http://www.pronkenburg.be)

Whether you live in Antwerp or have to travel many kilometres to get there, it's worth it to experience the Camesina. When the owners, Greetje Aerts and Hugo Gypens, bought the house in Mozartstraat near Koning Albertpark, they decided to play up the street name in style. They named their new bed & breakfast after one of a flurry of homes Mozart inhabited in Vienna (it was in his Camesinahauss that he wrote *The Marriage of Figaro*). One of the rooms is christened Konstanze, after the composer's wife – the others are named after two of her sisters.

Little bottles of Mozart liqueur welcome you into the rooms, which are defined by deep reds and purples, velvety pillows and drap-



Greetings by Greetje: the Camesina's breakfast outshines the rest

ing curtains. The couple decorated themselves, and there are plenty of unique artworks and glassware – our room included a collection of quartz and other stones and minerals. And the bathrooms are islands unto themselves: large rooms with plush chairs and big tubs lined with opulent bottles of lotions and potions. In the Josepha, you'll find a tree trunk holding up one side of the vanity.

The Camesina's rooms have touches you don't realise you love until you have them: Senseo coffee makers, chocolates, loose tea. There are DVD players and a small but excellent selection of DVDs on the hall table. "It's important to me to offer a little bit of the comforts of home," says Aerts.

Breakfast at the Camesina is a cut above most bed & breakfasts. Along with the breads and pastries, yoghurt, cheeses, meats drinks and

cereal, Aerts prepares one hot dish daily. My guest and I enjoyed her own recipe of cooked egg, sunny-side up in a bowl of spicy cream, melted cheese and warm tomatoes. Champagne starts your meal off, and a bowl of chocolates waits for you at the end.

In the cellar dining room, you'll also find a rack of products available for sale, including Mozart liqueurs, Antwerp's own Elixir d'Anvers and Aerts home-made dandelion jelly.

€120/double, 03.257.20.38, [www.camesina.be](http://www.camesina.be)

B&B Oases confirms two things about Flanders' best guestrooms: they are not too expensive, and the owners have a passion for decorating, doing it all themselves. So it is with Nancy Boulpaep and Kris Verhasselt, who opened their intimate two-room establishment

just two years ago. Yet it's already one of the most heavily booked B&Bs in Flanders. Its location in the Brabantse Kouters, a gorgeous green belt in Flemish Brabant, doesn't hurt, but it's the wellness proposition that keeps the customers flowing in.

The Oases lives and breathes water. "We try to bring in natural elements out of respect for the nature all around us," explains Boulpaep. They recycle rainwater in the toilets and have constructed the rooms with ecological materials, including the paint. Solar panels heat the water. There is a Jacuzzi in the garden, and both guest rooms are equipped with saunas: the H room has a steam room (part of an open bathroom design), the O room has a dry sauna.

For a really idyllic weekend, you can choose to rent both rooms, making full use of the sauna facilities. If you only need one room, though, keep in mind that H has a king-size water bed, heavily draped on all sides. Through the sheer curtain over your heads shine twinkly lights, like stars. Impossibly romantic.

When Boulpaep and Verhasselt converted their home into a bed & breakfast, they chose to go with just two rooms so they could both be spacious. The light wood interior and exposed beams are softly lit in open and airy spaces. The couple incorporate antiques with modern designs, achieving a classic but comfortable feel. "We try to give a new soul to old elements," Boulpaep says.

€95/double, 0475.48.82.59, [www.kriancy.be](http://www.kriancy.be)



A spa, exposed beams and a ceiling of stars await in the wildly romantic B&B Oase

## And for dinner...

Fortunately, you don't have to venture *too* far from the elegant interior of Antwerp's Camesina to grab some dinner – just a few minutes along the nearby Mechelsesteenweg is Greens, a French restaurant, all 19th-century marble and antique staircases. Close by is Le Boudoir café, which is part of an Aveda centre but has surprisingly good soups, salads and tapas-style plates of meat, fish and vegetarian options.

Near B&B Oases, meanwhile, De Poort van Cyriel in Opdorp-Buggenhout serves excellent Belgian food under its beautifully-appointed archways, while in Londerzeel 't Notenhof, located in a breathtaking 18th-century mansion, you'll find inspiring and deliciously modern interpretations of classic dishes.



## Classical & new music

### Brussels

#### Astoria Hôtel

Koningstraat 103; 0900.28.877

**FEB 10** 11.00 Trio Van Neste: Haydn, D Capelleti, Schubert, Beethoven

#### Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

**FEB 9** 20.00 La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kazushi Ono with Beatrice Uria-Monzon, mezzo-soprano, Luk Nielandt, oboe, Letizia Belmondo, harp; Berlioz, Schnittke  
**FEB 10** 11.00 Prizewinners of the Chapelle Musicale Reine Elisabeth Award: Nicholas Van de Velde, piano; Tatiana Trenogina, soprano, Nicolas Zielinski, counter-tenor; Dana Protopopescu, piano: Schubert, Handel  
**FEB 14** 20.00 deFilharmonie, conducted by Jaap Van Zweden, with Mikhail Rudy, piano; Joris Van den Brande, actor: Martinu's The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca, Bartok's Concerto No 3, Berlioz' Symphony fantastique op 14

#### Kaaithheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59

**FEB 9** 20.30 Blindman 20x20, 20th anniversary concert (see article in this issue, page 8)

#### Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11

**FEB 6** 12.40-13.30 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Theodor Guschlbauer, with Olga Pasichnyk, soprano: Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven (60th anniversary of Concerts de Midi)  
**FEB 13** 12.40-13.30 Baudoin Giaux, flute; Therese-Marie Gilissen, viola; Annie Lavoisier, harp: Bax, Marais, Donizetti, Debussy

#### Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00

**FEB 7** 20.00 Onverwachte Ontmoetingen: Prometheus Ensemble with Hubert Damen: Beethoven, Holliger (tickets 052.30.22.23)  
**FEB 9** 20.00 BCO@conservatory: from classic to jazz, Brussels Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Nana Kawamura: Haydn, Vileundas, Anckaert  
**FEB 11** 20.00 Skampa Quartet: Mozart, Krejci, Smetana  
**FEB 13** 20.00 La Divina Armonia, conducted by Lorenzo Ghielmi: Handel, Boyce, Geminiani

#### Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30

**FEB 12** 20.00 A la rencontre de Franz Schubert with Les XXI: Schubert's Sonata No 1, Quintet for Piano and Strings (The Trout) and songs

### Antwerp

#### Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28

**FEB 8** 20.00 Onverwachte Ontmoetingen: Prometheus Ensemble with Mark Eyskens, narrator: Beethoven, Holliger (052.30.22.23)

#### deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

Concerts at 20.00:

**FEB 7** The Monnaie Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kazushi Ono, with Letizia Belmondo, harp; Béatrice Uria-Monzon, mezzo; Luk Nielandt, oboe: Berlioz' La Mort de Cléopâtre, Symphonie fantastique op 14, Schnittke's concerto for oboe, harp and string orchestra  
**FEB 13** 20.00 Nederlandse Bach vereniging Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Jos van Veldhoven: Bach's St John Passion BWV 245

#### Queen Elisabeth Hall

Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060

**FEB 14** 20.00 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by James Gaffigan, with Marie Hallynk, cello: Ravel, Lutoslawski, Prokofiev ([www.onb.be](http://www.onb.be))

### Bruges

#### Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, [www.concertgebouw.be](http://www.concertgebouw.be)

**FEB 9-17** Bay Boys II Festival: concerts with music by John Case, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and other musicians from the New York School of the 1950s, plus performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company Joseph Ryelandtzaal  
Achiel Van Ackerplein 1; 052.30.22.23  
**FEB 10** 11.00 Onverwachte Ontmoetingen: Prometheus Ensemble with Hubert Damen, narrator: Beethoven, Holliger

### Ghent

#### Vlaamse Opera

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, [www.vlaamseopera.be](http://www.vlaamseopera.be)

**FEB 7** 19.00 Flanders Opera Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Dirk Brosse, with Olga Pasichnyk, soprano: in honour of the 200th anniversary of the famous Ghent Floraliën  
**FEB 8** 12.30 In Dialogue, third in the series of lunchtime concerts, conducted by Daniel Gazon, with Geert Callaert, piano: Louis Spohr, Luc Van Hove, Jean Delouvroy's Eisberge for solo piano

### Ninove

#### De Plomblom Cultuurcentrum

Graanmarkt 12; 054.34.10.01

**FEB 7** 20.30 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Theodor Guschlbauer, with Hendrickje Van Kerckhove, soprano: Mozart, Beethoven

### Ostend

#### Ostend Kursaal (Casino)

Monacoplein; 070.22.56.00, [www.sherpa.be](http://www.sherpa.be)

**FEB 14** 20.00 Valentine concert: Orkest der Lage Landen, conducted by Walter Proost, Jose Van Dam, bass-baritone: opera arias by Rossini, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini

## Opera

### Brussels

#### De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39

**Until FEB 7** Freiburger Baroque Orchestra in Giulio Cesare in Egitto, conducted by René Jacobs, with Lawrence Zazzo, counter-tenor; Marijana Mijanovic, alto

### Antwerp

#### Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02

**Until FEB 9** La Strada, adapted from the Fellini film, conducted by Koen Kessels, staged by Waut Koeken, with Jeannette Fischer, soprano; Richard Salter, baritone; Yves Saelens, tenor

## Jazz & blues

### Brussels

#### Archiduc

Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52

**FEB 9** 17.00 Jazzfact + Jean-Paul Estiévenart

#### Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, [www.beursschouwburg.be](http://www.beursschouwburg.be)

**FEB 7** 20.30 Määks Spirit with Kgafela + Samantha 7: Stroke  
**FEB 13** 19.30 Buscemi (Dirk Swartenbroeckx, film and 1960s jazz music

#### Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78

Concerts at 20.30:  
**FEB 6** Gare au Jazz: Funk Sinatra  
**FEB 7** Jazz Station Big Band  
**FEB 10** Tintamarre: Le Festival des Juniors - Ixhor  
**FEB 13** 4 in 1 with Jean-Paul Estiévenart, Lorenzo Di Maio, Gerstmans, Toon Van Dionant

#### Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, [www.soundsjazzclub.be](http://www.soundsjazzclub.be)

Concerts at 22.00:  
**FEB 7** Jean-Francois Maljean invite...  
**FEB 8** Eve Beuvers Trio and guest  
**FEB 9** IOM trio + Noamir  
**FEB 11** Master session  
**FEB 12** De Romeo Band  
**FEB 13** Chamaquiando, salsa

#### Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, [www.stekerlapatte.be](http://www.stekerlapatte.be)

**FEB 7** 21.30 Hintanoi

#### The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

Concerts at 20.30:  
**FEB 6** Oliver Nelson Project  
**FEB 7** Fabrizio Graceffa Quartet  
**FEB 8** Jérôme Baudart Sextet  
**FEB 9** The Swing Dealers

### Antwerp

#### Cultuurcentrum Luchtbal

Columbiastraat 8; 03.543.90.30

**FEB 9** 20.30 Stroke + Määk's Spirit

### Borgerhout

#### De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

**FEB 14** 20.30 Savina Yannatou & Primavera and Salonica

### Bruges

#### De Werf

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29

**FEB 9** 20.30 t-unit 7

### Ghent

#### Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01

**FEB 13** 20.00 Lady Linn and her Magnificent Seven

#### Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

**FEB 8** 20.00 Maaks Spirit with Kgafela + Samatha 7

## Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

### Brussels

#### Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

**FEB 7** 20.00 Delavega

#### Café Central

Borgval 14; 02.513.73.08

**FEB 7** Central Electric/Trap a Roach presents Sunday Festival Live Acts: LL321 & Elephant Power + DJ Roachbugincan

#### DNA

Plattesteen 18-20; 02.512.59.92

**FEB 7** No Brain

#### Espace Delvaux

Gratèsstraat 3; 02.663.85.50

**FEB 8** 20.30 Kleptomania

#### Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

**FEB 12** 20.00 The Australian Pink Floyd Show

**FEB 14** 20.30 One Night of Queen

#### Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

**FEB 10** Idaho

#### Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34

**FEB 14** 20.00 Cibelle + Polar Bear + Leafcutter John

#### VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07

**FEB 14** 20.00 Skindred + Still Remains

### Antwerp

#### Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum

Columbiastraat 8; 03.543.90.30

**FEB 9** 20.30 Stroke + Maak's Spirit

#### Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39

**FEB 11-12** 20.00 Neil Young

### Bruges

#### Cactus Muziekcentrum

St.-Jacobsstraat 33; 050.33.20.14, [www.cactusmusic.be](http://www.cactusmusic.be)

**FEB 9** 19.00 (doors) Humo's Rock Rally '08 preselection  
**FEB 10** 20.00 (doors) My voice/A song: Johnny Parry Trio + Dez Mona

### Ghent

#### Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01

**FEB 14** 20.00 Hooverphonic

#### Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

**FEB 7** 20.30 The Go Find + Mintzkov

**FEB 13** 22.00 Blood Red Shoes

**FEB 14** 20.00 Arno

### Leuven

#### Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03

**FEB 6** 20.00 Milow

## World, folk

### Brussels

#### Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

**FEB 6** 20.00 Shantel/Bucovina Club

**FEB 13** 20.00 Saint Amour

#### Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

**FEB 9** 20.00 Seb Martel, Jim

Yamouridis & Conway Savage: The

Travelling Blind Tour

**FEB 10** 20.00 Idaho

#### Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, [www.soundsjazzclub.be](http://www.soundsjazzclub.be)

**FEB 6** 22.00 Caribe Con K (Caribbean)

**FEB 13** 22.00 Chamaquiando (Salsa)

### Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00, [www.muziekpublieke.be](http://www.muziekpublieke.be)

**FEB 8** 20.00 Noche de Flamenco: Dos

**FEB 9** 20.00 Noche de Flamenco:

Andres Pena & Pilar Ogalla "A Fuego

Lento"

### Antwerp

#### Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28

**FEB 10** 15.00 Kudsi Erguner Ensemble,

17th-century Ottoman music

### Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, [www.zuiderpershuis.be](http://www.zuiderpershuis.be)

**FEB 7** 20.30 Eneida Marta (Guinea-

Bissau)

**FEB 8** 20.30 Taksim Trio (Turkey)

### Borgerhout

#### De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

**FEB 14** 20.30 Savina Yannatou &

Primavera and Salonico (Greece)

### Leuven

#### Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

**FEB 7** 20.30 Okkervil River + Sleeping

Dog

## Dance

### Brussels

#### Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, [www.beursschouwburg.be](http://www.beursschouwburg.be)

**FEB 8-9** 20.30 The Neverstarting Story,

choreographed and performed by

Amaia Urrea and others (Spain)

Cultural Centre of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre

Charles Thielemanslaan 93;

02.773.05.80, [www.art-culture.be](http://www.art-culture.be)

**FEB 9** 20.15 Quand les étoiles se

rencontrent/Noujoum Sawa, Oriental

dance choreographed by Farah Bakkali

with Bozenka

### Théâtre Varia

Scepterstraat 78; 02.640.82.58

**FEB 14-23** 20.00 CReHAM-Bxl in C'est

vrai, choreographed by Jeroen Baeyens

### Hasselt

#### Cultuurcentrum

Kunstlaan 5; 011.22.99.33

**FEB 8** 20.00 Ultima Vez in Menske,

choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus

### Leuven

#### Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

**FEB 6** 20.30 Still Live, choreography by

Salva Sanchis

## Theatre

### Brussels

#### KVS Bol

Lakensstraat 146; 02.210.11.12

**FEB 12** 20.00 Toneelhuis in De

Geruchten, staged by Guy Cassiers (in

Dutch)

**FEB 13** 20.00 Toneelhuis + Walpurgis

in Winterverblijf, staged by Lotte van

den Berg (in Dutch)

#### KVS Box

Arduinkaai 9; 02.210.11.12, [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)

</



cello; Marlies Heuer, improvisation, based on Marguerite Duras' L'Homme atlantique (in Dutch)

Leuven

**Stuk**  
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20  
**FEB 12-13** Make Me Stop Smoking, lecture/performance by Rabih Mroue (in Dutch)

Turnhout

**De Warande**  
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91  
**FEB 6** 20.15 Kretakor company in Blackland: theatre/circus/music (in Hungarian with French and Dutch surtitles, part of Europalia)

Visual arts

Brussels

**Algemeen Rijksarchief**  
Ruisbroekstraat 8; 02.513.76.80  
**Until FEB 16** Congo S.A./N.V., documents and photographs about Belgian enterprises in the Congo in the 19th and 20th centuries

Arts en Marge

Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11  
**Until FEB 16** Anarchitecte, constructions by outsider artist Richard Greaves pictured by Swiss photographer Mario del Curto (see also Brussels' CIVA)

Baronian-Francey Gallery

Isidore Verheydenstraat 2; 02.512.92.95  
**Until MAR 1** Landscape photography by Florian Maier-Aichen

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44  
**Until MAR 30** The Unreal Image: Emblems, Symbols and Metaphors, photographs by Charles Nègre, Achille Quinet, Julia Margaret Cameron, Henry Peach Robinson, James Craig Annan and many others  
**Until MAR 31** Image/Construction, photographs of architecture by Filip Dujardin

CIVA

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71, www.civa.be  
**Until FEB 16** Anarchitecte, installation by outsider artist Richard Greaves (see Art en Marge related listing)  
**Until MAR 9** MAXXI Museum Rome: Zaha Hadid Architects, models, photographs and video presenting Rome's future Museum of Art for the 21st century

deBuren

Leopoldstraat 6, www.deburen.be  
**Until FEB 8** 90dagenrotterdam: Exhibition of photographer Friederike von Rauch's work in Brussels and Rotterdam

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25  
**Until FEB 17** Home, works by Marc

De Blicq and Initia vzw exploring the inner worlds of four elderly people

Dieleghem Abbey

Jan Tiebackstraat 14; 02.428.71.03  
**Until FEB 17** Vikings! Les rois de la mer, reproductions and maquettes illustrating three centuries of the Vikings  
Espace Architecture La Cambre Flageyplein 19; 02.642.24.50  
**Until FEB 24** European Supermarket: 50 Years, from the opening of the first self-service store in Belgium in 1957 to the construction of supermarkets all over Europe

Espace Culturel ING

Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92  
**Until FEB 17** Brilliant Europe, 800 years of jewellery in Europe, with paintings, miniatures, engravings and 200 pieces of jewellery

Espace Photographique Contretype

Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20  
**Until MAR 9** Oog in oog, photographs by Andreas Weinand

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be  
**Until APR 20** Landscapes of Architecture: 150 years of Belgian architects' drawings, with work by Joseph Bascourt, Albert Bontridder, Victor Bourgeois, Renaat Braem, Gaston et Maxime Brunfaut, Peter Callebout, Alban Chambon and many others

Gallery Garden

Stevinstraat 206; 02.734.64.38, 0479.01.69.47, www.tonymclerkson.com  
**Until FEB 22** In the City, images of Brussels, Paris, London, Glasgow and Budapest by Scottish photographer Tony Clerkson

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70  
**Until MAR 22** Rue de la Comtesse de Flandre, paintings by Bernard Gaube  
**Until APR 5** Ceramics by Laurence Deweer and textiles by Delphine Grand'Ry  
**Until APR 5** Serre les dents, works by François Jacob

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63  
**Until FEB 24** Sarah and her Brothers, history through the eyes of the Kaliskis family of artists

Jonas Gallery

Vlaanderenstraat 35; 02.503.50.55  
**Until FEB 23** Photographs on canvas by Christian d'Hoir

Koekelberg Basilica

Basiliekvoorplein 1; 02.420.55.05  
**Until MAR 15** Leonardo Da Vinci: The European Genius, paintings, mechanical models, original drawings and manuscripts

La Fonderie - Brussels Museum of Work and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50  
**Until MAY 4** Tout feu, tout flamme! La révolution du chauffage, history and evolution of home heating

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32  
**Until MAR 2** Un certain regard, works by artists from CRÉHAM (creativity and mental handicap)

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73  
**Until FEB 8** Formatting Europe: Mapping a Continent, maps from the Middle-Ages to the 20th century

Royal Museums of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11  
**Until MAR 2** Beauty Singular-Plural, 5th Design Triennial, on the theme of beauty, its criteria, diversity and subjectivity  
**Until APR 20** Onder dak in China, 2,000 years of funerary architecture and furniture from China's Henan museum  
**Until APR 27** From Gilgamesh to Zenobia, highlights from the museum's collection of ancient art from the Middle East and Iran plus 12 masterpieces from the Louvre

Royal Museums of Fine Arts

Regentschapstraat 3; 02.508.32.11  
**Until MAR 30** Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of work by the Belgian artist on the occasion of his 80th birthday  
**Until MAR 30** Quadrum: International Magazine of Modern Art, tribute to Ernst Goldschmidt, curator and publisher

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24  
**Until FEB 29** Photography & the Changing Cityscape: Brussels 1850-1880, urban development and the evolution of early photography in 19th-century Brussels

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49  
**Until FEB 15** The Building of Europe: a Vision on Heritage, photographs of past winners of the Europa Nostra Award for restoration and preservation of cultural heritage (part of Europalia)  
**Until MAR 23** It's our History!, multi-media exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of European citizens since 1945

Young Gallery/Hotel Conrad

Louisalaan 75b; 02.374.07.04  
**Until FEB 16** A.N.A.T.O.L.E and Inside, photographs by Katya Legendre with texts by Yann Quéfellec

Antwerp

**Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)**  
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60  
**Until FEB 10** Collection presentation XXL, with works by Charif Benhelima,

Suchan Kinoshita, Sergei Bratkov and many others

**Until MAR 9** Lonely at the top: Seamus Harahan, video works by the contemporary Irish artist  
**Until MAY 4** Santhal Family: Positions around an Indian Sculpture, group show of contemporary art relating to a sculpture made in 1938 by Ramkinkar Baij, with works by Santanu Bose, Matti Braun, Calcutta Art Research, Ritwik Ghatak, Sheela Gowda, Boran Handsa, N.S. Harsha and many others

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70  
**Until MAR 30** Mimétisme, group show of contemporary art, with work by Pawel Althamer & Artur Zmijewski, Elisabetta Benassi, Charif Benhelima, Lieven de Boeck and many others

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58  
**Until MAR 8** Interiors, photographs evoking a love for interior spaces by James Casebere, Lucinda Devlin, Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Abelardo Morell and others

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09  
**Until MAR 2** Didactic show on the newly restored Rubens painting The Prodigal Son

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470 .27.70  
**Until FEB 10** Exuberant fashion designs by Bernhard Willhelm

Rockox House

Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50  
**Until FEB 10** Samson and Delilah: A Rubens Painting Returns, the famous painting shown along with other works of art originally owned by Antwerp mayor Nicolaas Rockox

Ghent

**Design Museum**  
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99  
**FEB 9** Architecture photographs by Henry van de Velde

Galerie Jan Dhaese

Ajuinlei 15B; www.jandhaese.be  
**Until FEB 23** Dolores Bouckaert: foto/video

Maaltebruggekasteel

Kortrijksesteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22  
**Until APR 27** Het DNA van de kunst (The DNA of Art), works by Tjok Dessauvage and Katy De Bock

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be  
**Until APR 27** Sick: Between Body and Mind, multimedia exhibition showcasing the links between mental and physical pain, with work by Félicien Rops, Patrik Vermeulen, Dana Wyse, Léon Spilliaert and many others

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03  
**Until FEB 17** Head Shop/Shop Head, Paul McCarthy retrospective 1966-2007

Hasselt

**Z33**  
Zuivelmarkt 33 (in begijnhof); 011.29.59.60  
**Until FEB 10** Nr17 Slow: Looking at things differently, video installations by designer Marina Yee and work by artists who have inspired her, including Léon Spilliaert, Luc Tuymans and Erik Verdonck

Lier

**Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen & Baron Caroly**  
Florent Van Cauwenberghstraat 14; 03.480.11.96  
**Until MAR 2** New Collection, works by 40 contemporary artists in dialogue with old master paintings

Mechelen

**De Noker**  
Nokerstraat 4; 015.29.06.60  
**Until FEB 10** The Engineers of the Final Solution, the role of Topf und Söhne, the German firm that designed the ovens at Auschwitz

Tongeren

**CC De Velin**  
Dijk 111; 012.39.38.00  
**Until FEB 17** Decors + Stills, photographs by Peter De Bruyne

Ypres

**In Flanders Fields Museum**  
Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75  
**Until MAR 30** Oorlogsgetuige: 1914-1918 (War Witness: 1914-1918), drawings by Henry De Groux

Festivals & special events

**Festival Pays de Danses:** new dance festival  
**Until MAR 1** at venues across Belgium 04.342.00.00, www.theatredelaplace.be

Brussels

**Anima:** film festival celebrating all forms of animation  
**Until FEB 9** at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein 02.641.10.20, www.anima2008.be

**Brussels Holiday Show:** international tourism fair  
**FEB 7-11** Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein 1 02.474.89.81, www.uwvakantie.be

**Dimanches de la danse:** dance festival featuring short works by artists living and working in Brussels  
**Until FEB 24** at Halles de Schaerbeek, Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22 02.218.21.07, www.halles.be

**Festival of poetry and French chanson:** from the Middle Ages to the present day, includes exhibitions, workshops, concerts and a competition  
**Until APR 19** at La Maison du Livre, Romestraat 28, and other venues 02.543.12.20, www.lamaisondulivre.be

**Miouzz.com:** comedy/music/improvisation by the Extincteurs Monthly until JUNE 24 at Espace Delvaux, Grâtèsstraat 3; 02.663.85.50

Other towns

**Dedonderdagen #15:** evening exploring new artistic fields in a crossover programme of performance, dance, music and visual arts  
**FEB 14** from 19.30 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25, Antwerp 03.248.28.28, www.dedonderdagen.be

**Artefact Festival:** Multidisciplinary programme focusing on capturing time and mapping moments. Installations, concerts and performances by artists recording a moment in time or space, plus works analysing the power of the media and public perception of world events  
**FEB 12-17** at Stuk, Naamsestraat 96, Leuven www.artefact-festival.be



American clubs

Belgium is home to several clubs for Americans (and their friends and families) with regular meetings and activities.

**The American Club of Brussels:** An international social club for more than 80 years, the ACB offers unique opportunities for social and business friendships in Brussels. Members organise regular activities, including a monthly Final Friday Drinks Night, and maintain a clubhouse at the Renaissance Brussels Hotel. 02.219.58.08, www.americanclubbrussels.org

**American Women's Club of Brussels:** Founded in 1949 by 36 American women, the AWCB now counts more than 1,000 members in Belgium. Members organise philanthropic, social and cultural activities and promote closer Belgo-American understanding. The club publishes a monthly magazine and maintains a clubhouse in Sint-Genesius-Rode. 02.358.47.53, www.awcb.org

**American Women's Club of Antwerp:** A centre for social, cultural and philanthropic activities for American women in the Antwerp area <http://awcantwerp.org/xoops/index.php>

Democrats Abroad Belgium

The Belgian section of the official overseas branch of the US Democratic party, which represents Democrats living outside of the US. www.democratsabroad.org

Republicans Abroad Belgium

Same as above, but for the other party. www.republicansabroad.org

International groups

Aside from these, there are many international, English-speaking groups with American members, most notably the women's groups **Antwerp British and International Women** (www.abiw.org) and **The Ghent Group** (www.geocities.com/gentgroup) and the Brussels' guys-only group **Belgium Studs** (www.belgiumstuds.com)



## MY FLANDERS

## Robyn Boyle

Robyn Boyle is an American from Michigan who moved to Flanders after falling in love with the city of Ghent

**Did you always want to emigrate?**

No, but I always had an affinity for learning about other cultures and languages. For example, I chose to study French at the age of 12. During college, I took a semester off to live in Bordeaux, which turned out to be a wonderful experience. Since then, I kept looking for an opportunity to return to Europe.

**Why did you choose Flanders?**

I came to Ghent by train a few years ago on a Sunday in September and visited the cathedral, belfry, castle and a few cafe terraces. I just couldn't leave! I fell in love with the city and found it the perfect place for a young person to start out on a new adventure. Flanders is such a unique place – surreal, random and contradictory at times but equally charming, international and full of life.

**What was the biggest culture shock?**

The reserved culture in Belgium – where it is uncommon to chat with strangers – was difficult to get used to. Also, learning to speak Dutch, a language I had never even heard before. There is also the fact that you can find bars everywhere – even in the public library or a gym.

**What do you like – or dislike – about the America?**

I dislike politics, chain stores, consumerism and excessive rules. I like nature and open spaces, friendly people and optimism.

**What do you like – or, again, dislike – about Flanders?**

I dislike the lack of customer service on many levels and the fact that it is over-crowded. I like very much the cosiness, brown pubs, festivals, rebellious spirit and gastronomic lifestyle (fries and mayo, chocolate and by far the



best beer in the world).

**What are the biggest differences between Flanders and America?**

In Flanders, people work very hard, but they also value their free time. Compared to the US, people here generally work fewer hours and get more holidays per year. This provides for a healthy balan-

ce. Also, Flemish people are fanatical when it comes to saving money and, for the most part, avoid using credit or taking out loans. In the US, debt is almost inevitable.

**What do you miss most about America?**

My family, of course! It's even hard to visit them because, in typical American fashion, they are spread out across the country, from Michi-

gan to Colorado to California.

**Have you put on weight living in Flanders?**

I have lost weight, probably from walking and biking everywhere. Plus, the food here is more fresh and natural. There is still a strong market culture and a connection with the land where our food comes from.

## MY AMERICA

## Els Debbaut

Els Debbaut lived in Oregon on America's west coast for six years before moving back to her birthplace in East Flanders three years ago



**Have you always wanted to emigrate?**

No, I never planned to emigrate anywhere. I did a postgraduate degree in England. I remember my mother was worried I'd come home with a Brit. I laughed hard at her silliness – but then I came home with an American.

**What was the biggest culture shock for you in the US?**

The social security system. For example, I worked for a non-profit organisation that couldn't offer health insurance. In America, health insurance is tied to your work, and medical costs are outrageous. One visit to the dentist could cost \$400 (€270).

**What do you like – or dislike – about America?**

I love its majestic nature – the national parks, the river water you can actually see through, the vastness of it all. They also have outstanding customer service compared to the treatment you get in the US. Getting help in a Flemish post office or train station is a nightmare. In addition, Americans are trusting, spontaneous, generous

and warm. For example, the week before I moved back to Belgium, I sold my car to complete strangers, and they let me drive it another week after they had bought and paid for it. I can't imagine this happening in Flanders. My dislikes: the current president, the over air-conditioned rooms in the summer (bikini outside, wool sweater inside!) and the discriminatory immigration laws.

**What do you like – or dislike – about Flanders?**

Our superior eating culture, our *terrasjescultuur*, and when people give you their word, you can completely rely on them. If an American says "let's have lunch," for instance, or "let's get together sometime", they don't necessarily mean it literally, and they don't mean to follow up on it. It takes a while to learn to interpret such phrases to mean "I like you". As far as Flanders goes, I dislike the Flemish attitude of superiority based on their (mainstream) knowledge and intellect. Americans are not condescending when they know something somebody else doesn't.

**What are the biggest differences between Flanders and the US?**

People are not as close to their families in the US. They move to other states – often really far away and from an early age. Also, going to college is so expensive that it puts students in major debt for many years. Compared to the American state and school system, we really live in the land of milk and honey.

**What did you miss most about Flanders when you lived in the US?**

My family, my close friends and the chocolate.

**What do you miss most about the US?**

The positive mindset of the American people – their "everything's possible" attitude.

**Did you gain weight living in America?**

I'm not much into junk food, and the chocolate was terrible – so no extra pounds!

Interviews by Monique Philips