

SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

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weekly!

NEWS ♦ BUSINESS ♦ ARTS ♦ ACTIVE ♦ LIVING ♦ AGENDA ♦ INTERVIEW

Back to school 6

An OECD report highlights the best and worst in teaching statistics across Europe. Flemish teachers have very little education compared to their counterparts in other countries but are remarkably adept at performing their jobs with a serious lack of resources



Hot, hot, hot 9

The branch of yoga that is performed in 36-degree heat is attracting politicians and famous Flemings to both the Brussels and Antwerp Bikram Yoga College of India. Its instructor tells us why we should get on the waiting list



Behind closed doors 10

Both Flanders and Brussels present an Open Monument Day this month, where you can peek inside normally shut buildings to witness the past, marvel at the architecture and gaze at the opulence



She's having a baby

While debate rages in the US on health-care reform, we look at how Belgium uses its high taxes to make the birth process a positive experience for both locals and foreigners

COURTNEY DAVIS

Getting married or buying a home: these are life's big-ticket items. But it is having a baby that can be the most daunting. With no tests to pass or loans to apply for, one can easily become a parent. Lack of experience doesn't seem to stop us. Add being in another country with different cultural and logistical approaches to pregnancy and birth, and it can be downright scary.

Not to fear! Here in front of you is a guide to having a baby in Flanders.

First things first: If you want to get pregnant or are pregnant, the first step is finding a gynaecologist. The hospital you go to is directly

tied to your gynaecologist, so if you want to give birth in a certain place, make sure you choose one associated with that hospital. Your normal family doctor, who will do the blood analysis and sonograms, can refer you to a gynaecologist.

Next: the *sociaal assistent*, or social worker, will be your new best friend. This person's entire function is to answer your questions – about pregnancy, symptoms, giving birth, breastfeeding and more. Plus, they can also explain the intricacies of the Belgian health-care system in terms of benefits, maternity leave, etc.

→ *Continued on page 5*

Driver who sued his victim's parents sentenced

ALAN HOPE

An elderly driver who ran a give-way sign and hit a car, killing two children, was last week given a three-month suspended sentence and a driving ban by a court in Mechelen. At the same time, a case brought by the defendant against the parents of the victims was thrown out by the court.

The 77-year-old man, known only as Eduard VdW, did not follow priority rules at a junction where the lights were out of order. In the accident, one-year-old Ina and nine-year-old Thibo were killed. Two other children, as well as the parents, Danny Vermeiren and Lesley Cornand, escaped with minor injuries.

When the case came to court, the parents of the victims found they were being counter-sued for negligence in the death of their children. According to VdW, the clasp holding Ina's child seat was faulty, and Thibo was too tall to be using a booster cushion.

"It was inhuman to have to answer as parents for the death of Ina and Thibo," the couple said. "It was as if we had murdered our own children."

Last week, the court threw out the counter-suit. The slight damage to the seat belt clasp was not even

visible to the naked eye, the judge said. And there was no evidence that Thibo had been using a booster seat. Eduard VdW was also fined €1,375 and banned from driving for three months. Before he is allowed to drive again, he will have to take theory and practical tests and undergo a medical and psychological evaluation. In addition, he will have to pay damages to the victims, to be determined later.

"As far as we're concerned, there was no need to send this man to prison," Danny Vermeiren said after the verdict. "That wouldn't bring Ina and Thibo back."

Disaster averted in church fire

Rapid response saved priceless art

ALAN HOPE

A number of priceless Flemish Baroque artworks were saved from destruction by the rapid action of emergency services and the implementation of the disaster plan when fire broke out in the Carolus Borromeus church in Antwerp city centre.

Overheating caused by concert spotlights appears to have been the cause of the fire, which broke out in two places at around 6.45 on Sunday morning. The fire service was immediately alerted, and the fire was under control by 8.30. For a brief period, damage to roof beams in one gallery led to fears

of a collapse, and the evacuation of artwork was stopped.

The disaster plan was drawn up in 2005 for the protection of five major churches in Antwerp: St-Paulus, Sint-Jacob, Sint-Andries, Carolus Borromeus and the Cathedral. The plan lays out the most important aspects of the five churches regarding safety and the protection of important heritage artefacts. The head of collections for the museums of Antwerp set up a crisis centre in the sacristy to establish priorities for the rescue of artworks, if required.

→ *Continued on page 3*

CONTENTS

News	2-3
♦ Permitted pets list "absurd"	
♦ News in brief	
♦ Back to school bad news for small businesses	
Feature	5
♦ Having a baby in Flanders explained	
Focus	6
♦ Who is teaching your kids? A new study gives the answers	
Business	7
♦ Minister ready to rebut his own complaint	
♦ Belgium "gets medicines free" says drug industry	
Arts	8
♦ An exhibition displays the faces of war	
♦ Culture news in brief	
Active	9
♦ Bikram yoga is hot – literally	
♦ Barbecue champions are Healthy People	
Living	10-11
♦ Open Monument Day in Flanders and Brussels	
♦ How small businesses are fighting to stay afloat	
Agenda	13-15
♦ Three pages of arts and events	
Back page	16
♦ Face of Flanders: John Vermeulen	
♦ bite: Café des Spores	
♦ Talking Dutch: our language expert sees the kids go back to school	
♦ The Last Word: what they're saying in Flanders	



FLANDERS TODAY

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FLANDERS TODAY
SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

News in brief

Another **plague of wasps** is on its way, experts from Ghent University warned last week. The fine spring brought the insects out earlier than usual, and the continuing warm weather means queens carry on laying eggs, so that September could see the arrival of a new generation of the stripey pests. "One queen could even produce as many as double the number of young. We're talking about 40,000 eggs instead of 20,000," said Frans Jacobs, professor of zoo physiology.

Police in Brecht in Antwerp province have arrested a member of a gang suspected of having committed at least three **thefts of valuable pigeons** in recent weeks. A Romanian driving a German-registered car, the suspect was attempting, with an accomplice, to break into the loft of a man who had already been robbed some days previously. In another incident near Mol, 14 pigeons were stolen and later recovered with their feet chopped off and their rings – which will later be used to increase the value of inferior birds – stolen. Belgian racing pigeons are highly prized on the international market, fetching prices as high as €30,000.

Belgian employees are happy with their jobs, but not so happy with their pay, according to a poll carried out by services group HDP-Arista and *Trends* magazine. Workers surveyed gave a 7.5 score (out of a possible 10) for "job content", 6.9 for company culture and environment, 6.6 for pay and 6.5 for work/private balance. Pay increases received only a 5.1 score.

The family of a **young Ghent woman** killed in the street when a concrete block fell from a Brussels building has demanded a complete investigation into the incident. Nathalie Beauval, 27, worked for Pag-Asa, the organisation for the victims of human trafficking. She was brain-dead when she arrived in hospital, but was maintained on life support until organ donation could be arranged. The socialist union BBTK, which owns the building, promised a full inspection and a judicial investigation if necessary.

Diabetics and other chronically sick people are overpaying for insurance premiums, sometimes as high as three times as much as other clients, according to the consumer organisation Test-Aankoop. The insurance industry organisation Assuralia said the higher premiums were justified by the higher risk, but the Flemish Diabetes Association (VDV) called for compensatory

List of permitted pets is "absurd," say animal lovers



© Shutterstock

The Eastern chipmunk is in, but the sugar glider is out

A list of permitted pets is "fundamentally unfair", the National Council for Animal Lovers (NRD) said last week. "In the Netherlands, Germany and France you're allowed to keep a muntjac but not in Belgium," a spokesman lamented.

Last week the government's official journal published a list of species which may be kept by *Homo sapiens belgicus*. It includes Bennett's wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus rufogriseus*), Campbell's dwarf hamster (*Phodopus campbelli*), the Roborovski dwarf hamster (*Phodopus roborovskii*), the African pygmy mouse (*Mus minutoides*) and the Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*). But no muntjac, which is a type of deer.

Cervophiles, however, can content themselves with the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), the Sika deer (*Cervus nippon*), the chital (*Axis axis* or *Cervus axis*) or the fallow deer (*Dama dama*).

Animals on the list of 42 permitted species may be kept as companion animals, as well as bred and traded. In addition to the exotic species above, the list also includes the cat, dog, rabbit and horse, pig, hamster and guinea-pig. For all others, a permit is required.

The last list produced by the public health ministry was struck down by the Council of State on an application by the NRD, and the latest list is a replacement. Unusually, it consists of precisely the same 44 species. The difference, according to the ministry, is that members of the public may now petition to have their favourite species added to the white list.

"The list was and is drawn up arbitrarily," said Roger Van Look of the NRD, which has been battling the white list since it was introduced in 2001. "Someone with no experience can keep an Asian buffalo [*Bubalus bubalis*] on his balcony, but breeding Sugar gliders [*Petaurus breviceps*] is forbidden. The whole situation is absurd."

"solidarity" measures to make health insurance affordable for all.

The Dutch government has no firm plan to get itself out of the legal problem that is holding up the dredging of the Westerschelde approaches to Antwerp harbour and make good a promise to complete the work by next year's deadline, it was reported. Two nature-protection organisations in the Netherlands brought a case to the Council of State which suspended the dredging, despite the existence of a treaty signed by Belgium and the Netherlands.

An envelope containing €37,000 in €500 notes found in the street in Kalmthout and handed in to police has become the property of the municipality, after lying unclaimed for six months. The finder is not entitled to a reward but, according to the town's mayor, is delighted at the decision to spend the money on a new minibus for the handicapped.

Correction

In last week's issue, we wrote that the ozone limit of 180 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ had been exceeded. The correct figure is 180 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

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Disaster plan for churches shows its worth

Continued from page 1

In the end, that was not required, as the fire service, whose station is barely 100 metres from the church, had the fire rapidly under control. A series of drawings made by Jan Pieter Baurscheit in the 1720s for a possible restoration of the church, which are listed among the city's art treasures, was removed from the church and taken to the city archive.

"The climatic circumstances after the fire were far from ideal," said Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens. "The relatively high humidity is damaging to paper artefacts." One painting of the Madonna suffered slight damage, and a wooden pulpit was drenched by hoses.

Even after the fire was extinguished, there remained the danger of damage from soot, water or smoke in the air. According to standard procedure, air purifiers should be brought in, but the church is too large. "The summer climate and the circulation of air through the open doors will have to do the job of keeping mould from developing," Janssens said. "Antwerp has escaped a major



Firefighters had the fire rapidly under control

disaster."

The church on Hendrik Conscienceplein was built in the Baroque style between 1615 and 1621 by the Jesuit order, based on the façade of the Gesù church in Rome, the headquarters of the

order. It was originally dedicated to St Ignatius Loyola, the order's founder. When the Jesuits were suppressed by a papal bull of Pope Clement XIV in 1773, the church was rededicated to Carlo Borromeo, an archbishop of Milan

and major church reformer.

For a time it was a veritable treasure-house of the work of Rubens, who provided 39 ceiling paintings for the decoration of the church. These were destroyed, however, in a fire in 1718. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€7.6 m

paid out for ADHD medication Ritalin (known in Belgium as Rilatine) in 2008, up from €4.2 million in 2005

€3.5 m

reimbursed by medical insurers, which means that more than half of the prescriptions issued for the drug are for cases outside the reimbursement guidelines



2,816

speeding tickets given out by police around the roadworks on the E40 near Affligem in one week

63,000

cars in total had their speed checked, giving a ratio of offenders of one in 22

9,958

prisoners in cells in Belgium last week

25%

increase in the prison population in the last 10 years, or 2,000 more prisoners than before

959

decisions taken in asylum cases in July, in most cases a refusal; seven months is the average time taken for a decision

1,363

asylum applications filed in the same month; 14 months is the average stay in an asylum centre, taking appeals into account

19.7°

average temperature in August. "Exceptionally warm," according to the Royal Meteorological Institute

248,000

visitors to this year's Summer of Antwerp festival, about the same as last year

53,000

visitors went for a ride on the 18 metre-wide carousel designed by François Delarozière, a three-minute experience costing €1

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Mama Green

It is one of the most memorable scenes in Belgian politics. Standing at the front of the House of Representatives, where only the most serious behaviour is tolerated, a young woman puts on an apron, accusing Jean-Luc Dehaene, then-minister of social affairs, of wanting women to stay in their homes. The Speaker thanks the young lady for putting on an extra layer of clothing, rather than taking off one. That was 1987, and the young woman was Mieke Vogels. She has been a household name ever since.

Vogels has been the face of the green party in Flanders for decades. Even people who abhor ecologists find it hard to dislike her. She has remained just as cheeky as she was in the 1980s. She oozes politics, yet people see her as a cheerful neighbour, a jolly auntie, a favourite drinking pal. She stands out in her party, which attracts the brainier sort, as anything but intellectual. At the same time, she has more political gut-feeling than the rest of them put together.

Her name has contributed to her slightly frivolous reputation. Mieke – short for Maria – is Flemish dialect for "girl", which suits her fine. Vogels means "birds" in Dutch. Has there ever been a better name for a green politician?

Vogels was there during all the ups and downs of the Flemish greens. Her biggest triumph was in 1999, when the green party Groen! entered both the Flemish and federal governments. As Flemish minister for Welfare, she reached an agreement with the care workers, who had been asking for higher wages and better working conditions for years. In celebration, she danced with the strikers on the streets.

Four years later, the greens were all but wiped out in the elections. Vogels decided to step back. But it was too soon to write her off. In a dozing Flemish parliament, she stood out as an opposition speaker. When she decided to run for party president in 2007, she was called a dinosaur. An attention junkie, too. But, of course, she won.

At this point, Vogels is often called *moe*, which means Mum or Granny – just one of the reasons she has decided to step back as president of Groen! and let the younger generation take over. At last, some say. But there's still a lot of cheeky Mieke in her.

11,000 dance for the climate

More than 11,000 people gathered last on 29 August on the beach at Ostend to take part in the filming of a video clip by Flemish TV personality Nic Balthazar calling for action on climate change. The action, a repeat of last year's The Big Ask campaign, was timed to take place exactly 100 days before the climate summit in Copenhagen. The crowds danced Bollywood-style to the music of U2, who

had waived the rights to the song "Magnificent" for the occasion.

"In December the world leaders will have to take the most important decisions of this century: they have to agree a follow-up to the Kyoto protocol," Balthazar said. "Will this solve all the problems? Of course not. But staying silent is pointless. We have shown that many people are concerned about global warming." ♦



© Boga

Flanders House boss under investigation

The board of Flanders House in New York, which represents the region's interests in the United States, is due to meet this week to discuss allegations of irregularities by the House's director, Philip Fontaine.

management company with his partner, is alleged to have billed Flanders House for more than \$30,000 via the company, which his partner runs. LDD party leader Jean-Marie Dedecker, who revealed the situation after a visit to New York, was this week due to question Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters on the matter. ♦

Fontaine, who owns a travel and events-

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Cost-cutting panic or investments in human capital?

In times like these, where we have to do more with less, there are two types of managers. **Those who cut costs** across the board, and **those who even now choose to continue to invest** prudently. Which type are you? The financial crisis and the uncertain economic situation are confronting managers with new challenges, but all too often they are also driving them to take decisions that are infused with panic and doom-and-gloom. But the ones who are forward-thinking and keep to their own course don't slam on the brakes – instead, they invest in the future.

Knowledge determines your competitive power

An organisation that wants to maintain and strengthen its competitive position in the global economy must be powered by a well-oiled knowledge engine. Your workforce is your greatest capital and lifelong learning is an absolute necessity. The acquired knowledge flows back into your company and your knowledge capital grows larger and larger, increasing your competitiveness. This will keep you competitive in the rapidly changing economic context. We call this 'learning with impact'.

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She's having a baby

New parents can take advantage of Belgium's child allowances

→ Continued from page 1

This fantastic service is provided to expectant parents, both before and after birth, by Kind & Gezin (Child and Family), a Flemish government agency. From home visits by an area nurse to informational evenings, there is no lack of support.

Another person included in the pregnancy process is a physiotherapist, who can be available at the birth to help with pain relief. Belgium also supports using physiotherapy in the following weeks to ensure the body recovers fully after the stress of childbirth.

Kind & Gezin also issues a maternity booklet called *Mother's Notebook* for the mother to take with her to all doctor and hospital visits. They record vital information in it so that the same information is relayed to the various people involved in your pregnancy.

Pre-natal visits closely monitor the expectant mother's health and minimise the likelihood of premature or underweight babies. Your health insurance will also send a brochure to explain the pre-natal aspects of having a baby.

Hospital stay

You can choose to have a hospital or home birth. Both are cool by

Belgian standards and are covered by insurance. If you opt for a home birth, a number of mitigating factors apply in relation to the mother and child's health. If choosing a hospital birth, the average stay for mothers is five days – a full day more than the European average.

Diana Albiol, an English expat who lives in Lochristi, East Flanders, recently had a baby and was thrilled with Belgium's policy of five days at the hospital. "I was so exhausted and overwhelmed with just how constant the needs of my son were – feeding, changing, burping. I slept a half hour here, an hour there, only when he slept," she explains. "But my body really needed more sleep. On one night, the nurses held the baby for me, and I was able to sleep for five hours uninterrupted. It was wonderful and helped me cope so much better."

Once the baby is born, along comes another book from Kind & Gezin called *Boekje van het kind* (Book for Your Child) in which all-important medical details are recorded. It is here that a number of vaccinations are listed detailing at what age the baby should have which shot. Much like a coupon, you just give a slip to the doctor to receive the baby's vaccination free of charge.

Money, money, money

Speaking of free, when people



© Medicimage/Reporters

With good hospitalisation insurance, health care for pregnancy and childbirth is free in Belgium

think about having a baby, one of their first concerns is the costs involved. And this is where Belgium is almost excessive in its support. Having a baby in Flanders is financially less of a strain due to a number of factors.

Services provided by Kind & Gezin are free of charge. Most other costs associated with the pregnancy, such as the hospital stay, doctors visits and the birth itself, are all covered by health insurance, which every legal resident has the right to. If you have good hospitalisation insurance, your care is covered in full. However, in Belgium, no pregnant woman is ever denied health care. And pre-natal classes, available in local hospitals in Dutch, are also free. (English-language pre-natal classes are available in Brussels; see Resources.)

Aside from that, all parents receive a cash allowance to help with the shocking costs of raising a baby. Have you ever seen the price of diapers?

Carine Van den Borre of Euromut has been in the insurance industry for 25 years. "The moment

you can prove you are pregnant, usually with a doctor's form, you get a birth premium worth a few hundred euros," she says. In fact, depending on your insurance company and whether this is a first or subsequent child, it can be in excess of €1,000.

"Upon delivery," continues Van den Borre, "you get the birth certificate and register the baby at a city hall. Once this happens, then there are the benefits both from the insurance companies and the government."

That would be the *kinderbijslag*, or child allowance, in the form of a monthly stipend of about €75 for the first child to help cover costs. Provided by the OCMW, Belgium's

public social welfare centre, this is paid from six months pregnancy until the child is 18. Exactly what kind of benefits you receive depends on a number of factors such as if you are self employed, an employee or unemployed.

You also receive, of course, a big reprieve from work. Women may take up to 15 weeks maternity leave. In fact, the legal phrase is: "At least eight weeks must be taken after the birth and at least one week must be taken before the date when the baby is due." Unfortunately, not quite the same is allowed for the father: following the birth, the father has a right to just 10 days of paternity leave. ♦

The culture question

Have your baby the Flemish way

There are other aspects to having a baby in Flanders that are less technical but sometimes no less complicated. Diana Albiol from England recently had a baby in her home in East Flanders, where it's common for families to visit the hospital in large groups.

"This was one tradition I could not embrace," she explains. "The thought of eight people piled into my room while I'm tired and dealing with a newborn just seemed too stressful."

One tradition she did embrace was the birth announcement. In Flanders, parents send everyone they know a card with birth date, gender and name immediately after the child is born. It usually also includes the names of the all-important godmother and godfather, as well as the gift registry location.

The birth announcement is not unique to Flanders, but the time and energy put into it here is impressive. Young people look to out-do each other in the creativity department, designing their own announcements to be as hip and

cool as possible – mothers naked in bathtubs, Barbie dolls showing the birth process, ships at sea passing by islands that bear the baby's vital statistics. They still need to be printed after the birth to get the date right, and yet you often receive them three days after the blessed event – Flemish efficiency at its most obvious.

In the United States, the baby shower is a long-held tradition that is now being repeated in some European countries. A family member or close friend throws a party for the pregnant mom, with food, drinks and gifts from the registry. The crowd oohs and ahs as each little sock or bib is held up.

In Belgium, there is a gift registry but presents are brought to the hospital or home after the baby is born. In return, Belgium has a unique tradition of giving a small token of appreciation back to the gift-givers, often in the form of sweets. But the Flemish get creative here, too: I've seen gorgeous little boxes filled with pralines and even little bottles of jenever. ♦

Resources for new parents

Kind & Gezin Free advice to expectant and new parents – from pre-natal care to breastfeeding to manoeuvring Belgium's social services. Also a number of free or low-cost booklets on pregnancy, birth and baby care

→ www.kindengezin.be

National Social Security Office Information on the monthly child allowance, which parents receive until the child is 18

→ www.onssrszls.fgov.be

Brussels Childbirth Trust This organisation in the capital hosts English-language support groups and both pre- and post-natal classes. A wealth of information for expats from expats

→ www.bctbelgium.com

Community Help Service Another Brussels-based organisation, this English-language counselling service publishes *Having Your Baby in Belgium*, a free informational booklet

and handy translations of pregnancy-related Dutch and French vocabulary

→ www.chsbelgium.org



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Testing the teachers

A revealing study by the OECD shows just how Flemish teachers measure up

ALAN HOPE

As the children of Flanders go back to school, they can expect to be met by teachers with plenty of professional experience, most of it gained in their current school, but with lower academic qualifications than their counterparts in other countries. The teacher will be a woman in more than two-thirds of cases, and her class will be unusually small. She will have modern ideas but use mainly old-fashioned techniques.

That's the profile of the typical teacher in Flanders, based on information from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to provide periodic insight into teaching and learning across the continent. The intention is not to criticise the performances of teachers, administration or schools but, rather, to build a platform on which policy can be based.

The study looks specifically at those who teach the first grade of secondary school students in ordinary education, which covers 13- and 14-year-olds in the majority of schools in the region. Two hundred and sixty schools each with 20 teachers were chosen at random in Flanders (3,500 teachers in all), and the same number in countries across the OECD.

Schools in Brussels and Wallonia did not take part this time around. Not enough schools in the Netherlands responded, so their results do not figure in the survey.

Perhaps the most striking revelation is the level of qualifications of Flemish teachers compared to other countries. Fully 84% of teachers have a qualification

obtained after only one year of higher education and a one-year professional teacher-training diploma.

In the rest of the countries studied, 52% of teachers have a bachelor's degree, and 31% have a master's degree in education. The figures for Flanders are, respectively, 4% and 8%. The number of teachers with a doctorate – 1% on average across the OECD – is in Flanders so low as to be statistically insignificant.

The teaching profession across the TALIS map is dominated by women, ranging from 57% in Spain to 85% in Lithuania. In Flanders, 69% of teachers are women – more than in Norway and Denmark, but fewer than in Poland and Hungary. However, despite that total, only 38% of school heads in Flanders are women. A similar sort of discrepancy is seen in many other countries.

Most Flemish teachers in the survey say that their educational ideology places active student learning at the centre of importance. Active learning is constructivist: the teacher is a helper in the process, with the student constructing his own learning with the teacher's assistance. This philosophy is widespread: only in Italy did teachers describe their role as "the transmission of knowledge".

However, in practice, that ideology is not always adhered to, says Frank Vandenbroucke. The education minister in the previous Flemish government, Vandenbroucke gave a speech reacting to the survey when it was first released early in the summer – just as schools were about to close and people's attention began to drift elsewhere.

"Flemish teachers use mainly classic structured lesson techniques and resemble Italian teachers more than might be expected," Vandenbroucke said. Active learning techniques, he added, are much less common here than in many other TALIS countries.

Flanders, however, boasts the smallest class sizes in the TALIS



group, at only 17 students on average. Ireland has the largest, at 22 students. On the other hand, the region has the second-worst staff support for teachers within schools, with one teaching support (for example, a language assistant) for every 21 teachers (the TALIS average is 1:13) and one administrative support staff for every 12 teachers (average 1:8). Only Austria does worse.

Flemish teachers do not complain, however, of major shortages of materials, resources or even the lack of support staff. Table 1 shows that the number of Flemish teachers who perceive shortages to be a problem is significantly lower than the TALIS average.

Perhaps as a result, "Flemish teachers declare themselves happy in their jobs," Vandenbroucke said back in June. "They have the feeling that they make a difference to their students. These findings confirm the results of other recent research: our teachers do their job willingly and well."

Consequently, teachers tend to stick around. Table 2 shows the length of experience of teachers in Flanders, with well more than half having in excess of 11 years experience. Only about one in four had previous experience in another school prior to arriving in their current job. (That figure is slightly higher for teachers working part-time and markedly higher for those working less than half time.)

When it comes to school autonomy, schools in Flanders score higher than the TALIS average in most areas, except in the matter of teacher salaries, in which individual schools have no autonomy at all (see Table 3).

Finally, Flemish teachers fail to sparkle in the matter of profes-

Table 3:

Autonomy of schools

Responsible for:	TALIS	Flanders
Hiring teachers	68%	99%
Firing teachers	61	96
Deciding starting salary	24	0
Deciding salary levels	26	0
Drawing up school budget	75	80
Determining budget priorities	88	94
Choice of textbooks	90	100
Content of syllabus	66	76
Courses offered	72	76
Financial decisions on professional development	60	74

sional development, an area that includes courses, seminars and the study of professional literature. While 90% of teachers reported having taken part in some form of professional development over the previous 18 months, the average amount of time spent on those endeavours was short: only eight days, a figure lower than every country but Ireland.

Teachers in Flanders rated the usefulness of their ongoing professional development lower than in any other country, giving marks as low as 43% for educational conferences and seminars, to a maxi-

mum of 72% for informal discussions with colleagues. Only 31% would have liked to spend more time on development. ♦

Countries in the TALIS research project: Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Slovakia, Australia, Brazil, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Turkey

Table 1:

Shortage of:	TALIS average	Flanders
Qualified teachers	38%	32%
Lab technicians	33	7
Educational support staff	48	37
Other support staff	46	36
Lesson materials	34	14
Classroom computers	43	33
Other material	50	30
Library material	41	24



New minister under fire – from his own guns

Incoming minister of urban planning Philippe Muyters is facing a legal problem the moment he arrives in office following the holidays – and the challenge comes from himself.

Muyters (*pictured*) was, until selected by Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters to join the government, head of the employers' organisation Voka. In that capacity, he worked to bring a legal action in the Constitutional Court against a housing law introduced at the end of the first Peeters administration and due to come into force this week (1 September).

The housing decree, as it is known, obliges all major development projects to include a proportion reserved for social housing. The aim is to fulfil a promise to provide 63,000 new social homes by 2020, tackling long waiting lists at the same time as battling slum landlords who exploit those who have nowhere but the private rental sector to turn. There are at present 58,000 on a waiting list for a social home, with an average waiting time of 2.5 years, according to housing minister Freya Van den Bossche. The 2020 target will cost an estimated €6.5 billion.

Property developers oppose the decree, predictably, because of the burden it places on them to tackle a problem that does not concern them. Providing a proportion of so-

cial houses will increase the prices of other homes on the same site, they argue, forcing home-owners to subsidise tenants and pushing the responsibility of the government onto ordinary families.

Voka gathered the complaints of contractors and developers and bundled them into a case for the Constitutional Court. Technically, the complaint has still to be officially lodged, but Voka last week confirmed that would "in all likelihood" be done.

It will then be up to Muyters to fight on the government's side against a case he was instrumental in bringing. "Philippe Muyters at present fulfils the function of Flemish minister for urban planning, and in that capacity will faithfully carry out the governing agreement," his office said last week in a statement.

- Meanwhile the price of property went down in Flanders by 3% in the second quarter. The average price of a family home is now under €180,000. In the same period, prices in Wallonia rose. Figures for Brussels are not calculated on a quarterly basis.

Pepingen is the most expensive municipality in the region, with an average price of €324,500. Communes around Brussels hold five of the top 10 slots, while Mesen in West



© belga

Flanders, Belgium's tiniest city with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, is the cheapest place to buy a house; the average price stands at €101,000, though the properties available on the Immoweb website as *Flanders Today* went to press ranged from €367,500 (four beds, 4.05 ares) down to €73,500 (two beds, garden). ♦

Most workers in Wingene, most jobs in Zaventem

Just 15 municipalities in Flanders account for 40% of the region's unemployed, according to figures released last week by the government's employment agency VDAB. The communes concerned are in Ghent and Antwerp, as well as in the former mining areas of Limburg.

Brussels is not included in the survey, which helps to explain why Flanders' supply of jobs is equivalent to 69% of the adult workforce: tens of thousands of workers commute every day from Flanders to Brussels, although the region is now importing workers from Wallonia and French-speaking Brussels (see *Flanders Today*, last week).

Kraainem is the least hard-working municipality, with just over half of the inhabitants working. Wingene, on the other hand, has the most workers, with 76.7% of the population in employment. Antwerp has the highest rate of unemployment, at 12% of the workforce, compared to only 2.4% among the inhabi-

ants of Gooik in Flemish Brabant. Zaventem offers the most opportunity to work: there are 2.5 times as many jobs in the municipality than there are people living there. Mesen in West Flanders, a commune with only 10% of its area not agricultural land, scores lowest, with only one job for every four of its barely 1,000 inhabitants.

- In another study, the VDAB found that obliging jobseekers to apply for a particular vacancy made them 2.6 times more likely to get the job than if the choice is left open. Newly unemployed people who received orders to apply for jobs for which they had been screened were 26% more likely to be in employment after two years, compared to the group that still applied for jobs, but did so without screening and without being obliged to. In addition, the effect was seen across all groups, including the long-term unemployed, immigrants and those with low educational qualifications. ♦

Belgium "gets medicines free" says industry

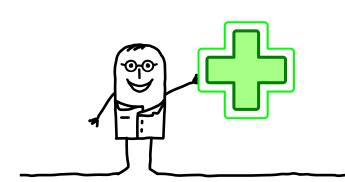
Belgium takes more in tax and social security contributions from pharmaceutical companies on its territory than it spends on medicines, the industry's umbrella organisation claimed.

The drugs industry now employs about 30,000 people across the country, according to Pharma.be, or 50% more than in 1995. The sector contributes some €2 billion towards the total cost of private research and development, a share of 50%, and more than any other single industry. R&D employs 6,000 people, including 2,800 qualified researchers, while 350 jobs remain open for the lack of suitable candidates.

Perhaps surprisingly, Belgium can claim to be the world's most prolific developer of new medicines, measured by the number of new products in development per million inhabitants, as follows:

Belgium	16.2
UK	14.2
Netherlands	11.7
US	10.5
France	7.6

Over the last decade, Pharma.be said, the difference between the contributions of the drugs industry and their sales to the health-care sector has ranged from €10m to €140m a year in the government's favour. In 2007, the sector paid €830 million in social security contributions alone, while in the past five years, it has paid €1.4 billion to the medical insurance agency Riziv. "Belgium is getting its medicines for free," said Leo Neels, director-general of the organisation. ♦



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air • Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines, the main Belgian carrier, will increase weekly flights to Milan to 12 starting in October. The company recently distributed its first dividend to shareholders since it was created in 2001.

Banking • Fortis

Fortis Holding has sold its Cessna Citation Excel business jet for some €4 million. The company owned Fortis Bank until its controversial rescue by the Belgian state late last year.

Banking • KBC

The largest bank in Flanders is rumoured to be considering the sale of its affiliate KBC Clearing Nederland. The move is seen as part of the bank's restructuring after its rescue by the Flemish and federal governments earlier this year.

Chemicals • Solvay

Chemical and pharmaceutical products group Solvay plans to invest \$12 million in the US-based Plextronics company, which specialises in organic electronics for use in solar cells and OLED screens.

Economy • Consumer confidence

Consumer confidence in the economy is growing again according to Belgian National Bank. The consumer confidence index is at its highest level since August 2008, while the bank's indicator of future business trends is up for the fifth consecutive month.

Property • Anspach Centre

The landmark Anspach Centre in downtown Brussels opens on 3 September following more than 20 years of neglect and 10 years of renovation. The 31,000 square-metre building will house the Brussels Casino, a hotel, shops and luxury apartments.

Property • EPRA

The European Public Real Estate Association, which lobbies on behalf of real estate investment trusts, has transferred its activities from the Netherlands to Brussels to be closer to the EU institutions, where key decisions are taken.

Telecom • Telenet

Telenet has acquired 65 shops, along with the Mechelen headquarters of Belcompany. The Dutch-owned Belcompany is the Netherlands' second largest distributor of mobile telephone equipment.

Urban survey • Brussels

Brussels is ranked as the world's 20th most expensive city in which to live, 30% cheaper than New York, Zurich or Tokyo but slightly more expensive than London, following the steep decline in the value of the pound.

Faces of war

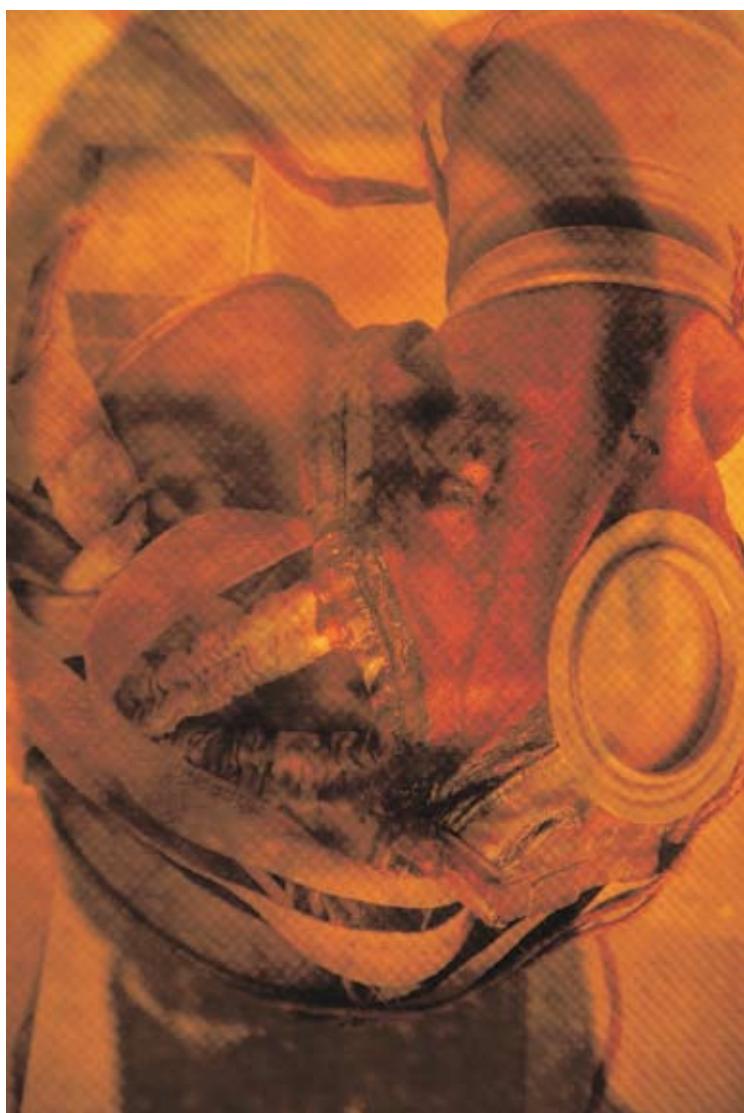
Brussels' artist combines old and new photographs in a haunting exhibition of human suffering

Nobody wants to be confronted with horrible suffering; I run from it, too," says Brussels artist Virginie Cornet. "So my images witness the horror of the Great War, but they don't shock." Her photographic collages at the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces in Brussels shows mutilated soldiers of the First World War through poetic but powerful images.

Oorlogs(ge)zichten (War Faces) isn't the next clichéd exhibition about the atrocities of a war so horrific that, though it ended 91 years ago, still affects Flanders today. At the entrance to the exhibition: cold facts written on the wall (9.4 million cut down in battle, 6 million mutilated), information about the subjects in the photographs ("André Blum, seriously injured by a shell fragment"), heart-breaking letters from dying soldiers to their loved ones. No extensive texts or conquering heroes – just thoughtfully chosen objects, documents, pictures and harrowing facts.

Before the idea of an exhibition even occurred to her, Cornet had already taken many pictures of gas masks in the armed forces museum. "The collection of masks shows the horrible reality behind the first chemical and biological warfare in world history," she explains. "These objects are mute witnesses of unspeakable fear and suffering."

On another occasion, she photographed moulds of gas masks made in Belgium's oldest plaster cast studio at Brussels' Jubelpark – just because she felt attracted to



witness the real story: they were shell-shocked survivors of an ongoing war, with amputated limbs and smashed bodies."

Back home, the artist projected those images on her wall, took pictures of them and mingled them with the pictures she took

Brussels, like what Jacques Brel sang about."

The 36-year-old says she feels "nostalgic" when it comes to Brussels. "I can't stand the unpleasant sight of this once magnificent city that has been neglected for too long. I don't want to be confronted with the scars of my city; that's why I only very seldom come to the city centre."

There is a certain denial to confront pain and loss in

"It was the first time in history that soldiers fought against industrial war machines and suffered from previously unknown injuries provoked by biological and chemical weapons"

them. And one day while browsing through a pile of old magazines in a Brussels' bookshop, her eye fell on a picture of soldiers in a copy of the French newsweekly *L'Illustration* from 1916.

One of the most prestigious periodicals reporting on the First World War, *L'Illustration* took part in the mass propaganda churned out to influence public opinion. "Those young soldiers posed for these pictures – all dressed up in their military uniforms – as quiet heroes. But the photo captions

earlier of the gas masks and the plaster casts. The result is a series of images that focuses on individual suffering rather than presenting people with statistics of massive numbers of casualties often too huge to comprehend or digest.

Cornet is a fan of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces, which she calls an "old-school, a bit dusty, but solid museum". She's also fond of Jubelpark, where the museum is located. "It radiates the faded glory of a long-gone

CULTURE NEWS

Two Flemish men and a concert hall made history last week when the men took off all their clothes and sat naked through the performance. It wasn't a publicity stunt – in fact rather the opposite. "We are defending the right to be naked," explained Philippe Schamp, one of the nudists, "and we want to take naturalism out of the confines of the beach." Theatre hall Logos in Ghent approved of the act, which was requested in advance. "There are often people naked in the performances we host," said Godfried-Willem Raes of Logos. "Who am I to forbid it?" None of the audience members objected, said Schamp, "even during the intermission when we stood naked to drink a pint."

In other naked men news, Polish artist Paweł Althamer's 20-meter long balloon of a naked man will float in the breezes above Bruges during the Bruges Central Festival next year. The international arts festival will focus on Central Europe and also includes the major exhibition *Van Eyck to Dürer*, which looks at the relationship between the Low Countries and Middle Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. Whatever those areas may reflect in each other, Althamer's piece apparently reflects his own body.



Paweł Althamer and his self-portrait

Until 20 September

Royal Museum of the Armed Forces
Jubelpark 3, Brussels
► www.klm-mra.be



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Coming as no real surprise, *Daens* has topped the nominations for the Flemish Musical Prizes this year, which will be awarded in a ceremony on 28 September in Antwerp's Stadsschouwburg. The annual event honours the best in Dutch-language musical theatre, including nominations for Best Female and Male performer, Best Musical and Best Director. *Daens* received nominations in all of those categories, plus filled all three slots in the Best Supporting Male Performance, for a total of 13 nominations. Other productions nominated are the Dutch productions *Sunset Boulevard* and *Ciske the Rat*.

Since opening four months ago, the Magritte Museum in Brussels has sold 120,000 entries, convincing visitors to buy their tickets online in order to avoid the long queues seen all summer. Much to the museum's delight, it will break even this year, which was beyond what it hoped. The museum is under the administration of Brussels' Fine Art Museum and is part of its building on Koningsplein.

The heat is on

Bikram yoga is now as hot in Antwerp as it is everywhere else

MARTIN BANKS

Ever thought of what it would be like to do your daily routine of yoga in a sauna?

Well, a growing number of fitness-seekers in Flanders are doing just that. They have joined up to a type of yoga that has fast become all the rage in Brussels and Antwerp.

This is yoga, but not the type associated with candles burning in the background, gentle stretching and meditation. In fact – a young practice by yoga standards – it couldn't be much further removed from the traditional image of yoga.

For a start, Bikram, or "hot yoga", as it's come to be called, is performed for 90 minutes in a room with the temperature set at...wait for it...36 degrees.

Bikram yoga's 26 postures and two breathing exercises aim to stretch and pull just about every muscle and joint in your body. The first classes in Belgium started in Brussels, where former EU commissioner Peter Mandelson was among the attendees. In fact, Mandelson, now a member of the UK government, recently asked instructor Feroze Khan to go to London to resume classes with him.

Originally from the Indian city of Puna, Khan first came to Belgium after he was invited by the Indian ambassador here to give lessons at the embassy. Mandelson says the secret of Khan's success is his "incredible mixture of discipline and enthusiasm." Khan also gives private les-

sons to European commission vice-president Margot Wallstrom.

The Brussels Bikram Yoga College of India became so popular (it now has a waiting list) that a similar Bikram yoga studio opened in Antwerp, where Khan lives. "Quite a lot of our clients were travelling from Flanders to attend the Brussels classes and wondered why we didn't have a similar studio closer to where they lived," says Khan, 37, who now runs both the Brussels and Antwerp locations.

Over 2,000 people now regularly attend the Antwerp centre, which, like Brussels has an official certification from the Bikram home-base in Los Angeles. Khan studied the yoga form from living yogi master Bikram Choudhury, who developed the Bikram method in the 1970s. Khan studied under him during a stay in the United States, where Choudhury lives and still teaches in his schools in California.

Bikram yoga is essentially a series of yoga poses – some invented by Choudhury and some not – performed in a specific sequence in a very hot room. The temperature helps increase flexibility. "The heat combined with the sequence of postures is what makes Bikram yoga genuinely unique," explains Khan. "The class is conducted in such a hot room in order to warm the muscles, which facilitates deeper stretching and helps prevent injuries."

Antwerp boasts an eclectic mix of clients, including tennis star Kim Clijsters; Geike Arnaert,



© Fredrik Aslesen

Feroze Khan, owner of Bikram Yoga College, with another instructor and a student in Antwerp

former lead singer of the rock band Hooverphonic; Noel Colpin, head of Belgian customs administration; and Patsy Sorensen, a former MEP and Alderman of Antwerp. This reflects the trendiness of Bikram yoga world-wide, which has pulled in famous people like Madonna and Bill Clinton.

"Bikram yoga is a complete system of wellness, restoration and rejuvenation," says Khan. "It was designed to systematically stimulate and restore health to every muscle, joint and organ of the body. Bringing Bikram yoga into your life cleanses the body and calms the mind."

Although it sounds daunting, even for those who have practiced yoga sans heat, all classes at the Bikram Yoga College are open to beginners. "Participants are guided through a series of 26 postures, each increasing in physical challenge," explains Khan. "Participants of all ages notice an increase in strength, balance, flexibility and mental focus. The body is flushed of toxins, leaving a deep sense of relaxation and well-being."

Having attended one of his Antwerp classes recently, I can certainly testify to that. At the end, I felt physically drained but also totally refreshed and cleansed.

In September, to mark the second anniversary of the Antwerp studio, Khan will launch a Bikram yoga workshop and teacher-training programme. "I run the Antwerp class with my brother, but it has proven so popular with Flemish people, who travel from all over the region to attend, that we really need to train more people in the art of Bikram yoga so we can run more classes," he explains. "We are looking, of course, for people who are already fairly physically fit but who are also willing to learn about Bikram yoga and want, like us, to help others enjoy it."

For anyone interested in giving it a go, a word of warning: be prepared for a hard work-out and to sweat an awful lot. ♦

► www.bikramyogabrussels.com

Barbecue brigade

National championship brings out the best grillers in Belgium

ROBYN BOYLE

Barbecue. One simple word conjures up so many positive associations – warm weather, the company of friends and, of course, great food. Gathered around the fire, searing and smoking our dinner on it... perhaps we're satisfying some primordial instinct.

But the way we go about it varies greatly from one person to the next. There are those for whom throwing a few hot dogs on the grill constitutes a good barbie, but there are just as many who take the art of grilling to a whole new level. If you happened to be in the centre of Torhout, West Flanders, last weekend, these barbecue aficionados were present *en masse*. The occasion was the Belgian Barbecue Championship, and it drew a crowd of more than 10,000 visitors on 30 August to the small

town about 15 kilometres south of Bruges.

In total, 34 teams were present at the two-day event, each with their own unique stand and approach to grilling. Most had big Smoker Joes and Oklahoma barbecues set up, or the more classic Webers. One creative team was using a grill made out of a beer keg that they had sliced in half. I was being shown around by a most inspired team, the Belgian Egg Heads from Merelbeke, outside of Ghent.

"Eggheads", as they call themselves, cook on Big Green Egg grills. Invented in the United States over 30 years ago, Big Green Eggs are essentially the modern version of ancient clay ovens. You cook kamado style: close the lid, and hot air from the flames circulates around the food. Moisture is

retained, resulting in tender, juicy pieces of meat.

Brothers Kris and Glenn Vandorp are grill masters who help Belgian Michelin star restaurants get set up with Big Green Eggs in their kitchens. "We recently took an entire chicken, placed it over a can of white beer and let it roast for about an hour," Glenn says. The chicken came out succulent and full of flavour. "But it's no longer just about meat," he says. The Egg has transformed the way people think about barbecuing because they can be used for pizzas, veggies, slow-cooked stews and even desserts like pies and cookies.

Each team at the Barbecue Championship prepared five different dishes using fish, chicken, pork, beef and a fruit dessert. More than



© Stillimation.com

80 jury members, mostly top chefs and culinary gurus, then made a decision based on the quality of the dishes. Meanwhile, visitors could meander from stand to stand, tasting the grilled goodies and gaining inspiration for their own backyard barbecues.

Special guest this year was Herr Seele, Flemish cartoonist and promoter of macrobiotic foods. "When it comes to barbecue, a lot of people automatically picture a

guy flipping burgers on his patio," he says. "Now, however, people are realizing that grilling outside can in fact be a very natural way of cooking and good for you."

So who is Belgian Champion 2009? Appropriately enough, a team called Healthy People from Rijmenam-Bonheiden, Antwerp province. Their prize was an Oklahoma smoker-barbecue.

► www.defielesoofen.com

Monumental

Flanders' biggest, best and most beautiful buildings bare all

Have you ever wondered what lies behind the tall gates of that castle, just outside of town? Or what happened in that old abbey, years and years ago?

Flanders is filled with mediaeval buildings and huge, old estates that are hidden away from public view. But once a year, these uncovered gems are allowed to show you the glory of their refined or industrious – or unsettling – pasts. Open Monument Day – 13 September – is the Flemish solution to losing its legacy and becoming forgotten.

Every year has a theme, and this year it's *zorgmonumenten*, or care monuments – buildings and sites associated with medical and social care throughout the ages in Flanders.

This year is the 21st anniversary of this surprisingly exhilarating event that both the Flemish and foreigners embrace as if it was some kind of merry travelling circus rather than a celebration of old buildings. Embracing the idea of poking around in spaces usually off limits, they come out in droves, and lines for the more popular sites snake around the corner.

Some are well known, like the Benedictine abbey in Sint-Truiden, and others are just waiting to be discovered like the LJJ Somers Foundation in Antwerp with its beautiful courtyards and neoclassical architecture.

This year's topic tends towards the universal experience, as we all need to visit a hospital or be looked after once in awhile. The care sector has always been a flourishing part of society filled with hope and sorrow, leaving its mark on our cities and towns. In the distant past you would visit a chapel to be taken care of, and over time these tiny sanctuaries have evolved into big hospitals visited by hundreds each day. This evolution, not only in terms of care but also in architecture, will be highlighted during Open Monument Day.

Besides hospitals and chapels, you'll also find countless gardens filled with medicinal herbs, schools designed to

Monument prize

One week after Flanders Open Monument day comes the announcement of this year's Flemish Monument Prize, chosen from a shortlist of one nominee from each province. This year's field includes the restored sacristy of the Basilica of Grimbergen (Flemish Brabant); a 1,000-year-old oak tree in Lummen and the surrounding site, including 500 historic pollard oaks (Limburg). The other nominees are De Hoge Wal, a man-made hill on which a castle once stood in Evergem (East Flanders); archaeological prospection from the air in Zedelgem (West Flanders) and an Art Deco swimming pool in Antwerp (see *Flanders Today*, 12 August).

create the perfect housewife, peaceful cemeteries, comforting churches and even majestic castles that are happy to show you how they have made a difference to the general well-being of the public. You can either roam around on your own or join one of the many guided tours, depending on your monument of choice.

There are literally hundreds of participating monuments spread across all five provinces. One of the highlights, however, is the old Military Hospital in Antwerp, which is undergoing a complete renovation in order to become a residential area after years of neglect. This enormous turn-of-the-last-century estate, tucked away in a residential neighbourhood, immediately arouses curiosity with its ominous iron gate. Now, we finally get to take a peek at what is hidden behind it.

Inside includes a chapel, an old infirmary and the former officer's quarters. After being restored to its original glory, this domain will be equipped

with numerous new facilities, houses and naturally, lush greenery.

If you are in Limburg, on the other hand, be sure to stop by the old cemetery in Hasselt. The only official burial ground in the area from 1796 to 1930, the cemetery is just outside the Kempische Poort and exudes the wealth of the 19th-century *bourgeoisie* with its sumptuous – often bombastic – tombstones and chapels. Each grave is more elaborate and intricately decorated than the next, all embraced by giant weeping willows and cypresses: a peaceful yet melancholy atmosphere in a rich oasis just outside of the city.

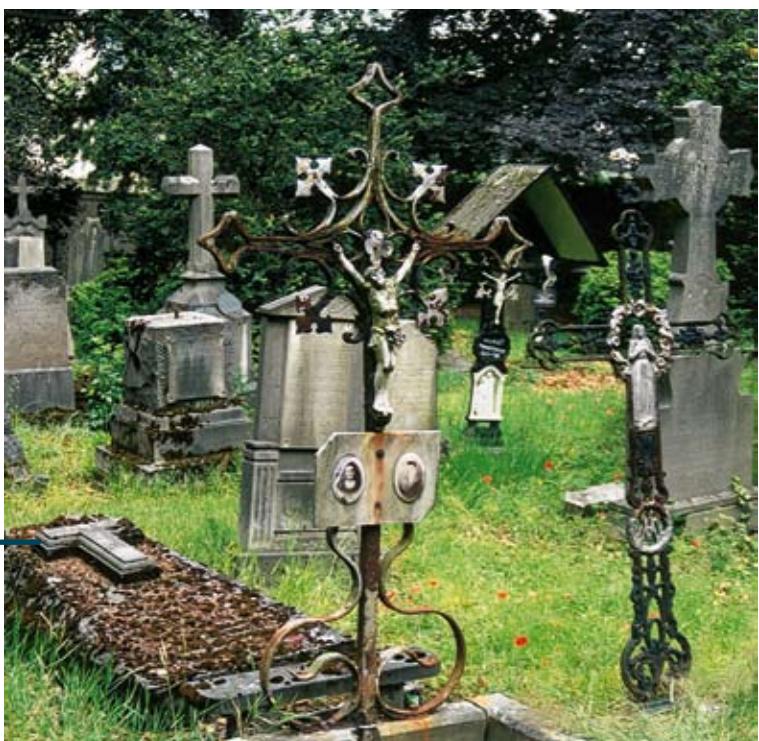
The Streekhuis in Eeklo (East Flanders) is also definitely worth a visit. When Hermann Enke built his grand home in 1894, he had no idea what kind of impact it would have. It became a gorgeous castle-like structure that mixes various styles but was predominantly inspired by Art Nouveau. In 1952, this splendid piece of architecture became the property of the small town. Now restored, it houses the local health board, among others organisations.

An exhibit especially designed for the occasion will tell the tale of the Enke family, their number of impressive house and their heavy influence on 19th and 20th century Eeklo. ♦

REBECCA BENOOT



Social housing, Limburg style: The former hospital for men in Sint-Truiden is now residential (above); the old Hasselt cemetery (right); the official residence of the Governor of the National Bank in Brussels (below)



© Anemone America



Brussels' own

Or, rather two days. Brussels spreads its Open Monument Day over the weekend of 19 and 20 September, due to the abundance of its patrimony. Their theme will be something completely different: *Van Andere Oorden*, or *From Other Places*, which will focus on all the exotic and

imported influences that have left their mark on the capital's gardens, architecture and decorative elements. Ranging from Japanese details to Art Deco and from English cottage style to Moorish influences and back, it's all here.

Survival of the smartest

How small Flemish businesses are surviving the recession

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

At first glance, an art gallery in Antwerp, a corner shop in Elsene and a new restaurant in Evere do not have much in common. But, when it comes to their attitudes towards surviving the recession, similarities emerge that shed light on what is making and breaking small businesses during the economic crisis.

Gallery: the art of communication

"Our sector went through a rough time when the financial world hit rock bottom in late 2008" says François Verlinden, director of Koraalberg, a contemporary art gallery in Antwerp. "The outlook has improved a little since then, but we're still feeling the consequences of the recession."

Sales at the gallery in the formerly decayed, now-trendy 't Zuid district have never been lower than in the first half of 2009, despite customer interest in artworks staying the same. Koraalberg, in business now for nine years, has always emphasised the importance of the quality of the pieces and the close relationship between the artists and the gallery. This commitment and improving direct contact with customers – potential and returning – rather than relying on walk-ins are keeping the company aloft this year.

"We invested heavily in automating the contact management with our clients; keeping them informed on what is going on in the gallery became crucial. The internet is playing a growing role in this," Verlinden explains. We made sure our website was professional and up to date and encouraged all of our artists to do the same."

The image of the gallery and reputation of its artists are as critical when it comes to sales as what is actually hanging on the walls. "Nobody buys art without thinking it through, but knowing that what they are buying is quality convinces most buyers," Verlinden adds. "After all, art is an investment, whether we're in a recession or not."

Koraalberg Gallery
Pourbusstraat 5, Antwerp
→ www.koraalberg.be

Shop: price matters

Local corner shops usually don't have their own website. They don't have a budget for advertising or weekly promotional brochures. So how do they communicate with their customers? The answer is simple and obvious: the corner shop is its own billboard.

"The visual aspect is crucial. How we arrange our fruit, vegetables and flowers outside will decide whether a passer-by will stop here for his grocery or walk a bit further to the big supermarket," says Alexandre Vanderhovstadt, the owner of Joly-Frais in the Elsene district of Brussels. The family-owned shop is on a corner just off the ever-noisy Louizalaan. The bright colours and sweet smells have acted like a magnet in the middle of the busy traffic for the last 60 years.

Of course price matters, too – to the customer, but as much to the corner shop itself. Competing with big supermarkets is difficult. That's why Joly-Frais offers its clients one fruit and one vegetable at an unbeatable price every day. "We still have a busy corner shop, but we do notice that people are more



Luring in the customers: the Joly-Frais near Louizalaan

© Katrien Lindemans

cautious about prices," Vanderhovstadt explains. "Whereas before a customer would buy a bottle of expensive bubbly, he would now rather get two or more bottles of wine for the same price."

Joly-Frais
Broussartstraat 121, Brussels

Restaurant: pay what you want

A Brussels brasserie, on the other hand, is going for the drastic "all or nothing" idea, allowing its customers to choose what they will pay for their meal.

A month ago, the owner of The Come Back in the Evere district took matters into his own hands to beat the crisis. By offering his clients the ability to pay what-

ever they wanted for their meals, he hopes to attract more customers. Although there are a smattering of restaurants in Europe and North America where this appealing strategy is the norm, there have been more cropping up lately – temporarily allowing customers to pay what they want in the face of the credit crisis.

Because people are too embarrassed to risk underpaying, they usually overpay. Some restaurants are claiming to be making up to 30% more income.

Although, predictably, many colleagues from the restaurant sector thought he was crazy, Rudy Debruyne firmly believes he's got it right. The Come Back only offers a three-course meal that you create from choices in the menu. Although its actual value is about €8, customers are paying an average of €15. "We once had a couple that only paid €5 for both of their meals," says Debruyne. "It's a risk we take, but luckily, that never happened again."

Debruyne says that the new menu plan helps him cut costs in other ways: "It allows us to work with fresh, seasonal products from the market and avoid a waste of ingredients."

Thanks to a lot of media attention, the concept is indeed bringing in more clientele. During the lunch hour, the brasserie is frequented by business people from the neighbouring offices, and dinner time brings the locals – and now the curious – to the tables. Business is so good, they recently added a kids' menu.

Debruyne plans to carry on with the scheme until interest begins to fade. But even then, he plans to keep the "pay what you want" for

lunch, and offer a different menu for dinner with set prices.

After the success of the first month, the owner already has plans for the future: "We have a big garden that I would like to turn into an 80 square-meter terrace by next summer, and the façade could do with some upgrading, too."

The Come Back
Sint-Vincentiusstraat 106
→ www.thecomeback.over-blog.com

Talk or be talked about

Make your product talk to the people (with or without the help of the internet), or make people talk about your product. That's what these businesses all have in common, and that's what keeps small businesses afloat during difficult times.

The recession made business owners reconsider their strategies and brought them back to the very essence of sales: excellent customer communications and the best possible presentation of your product. The Come Back's strategy may seem like a gimmick – but if they keep it up, this little nondescript brasserie will get written up in every tourist book on Brussels.

Another thing these businesses all agree on: the economical revival can't start soon enough.



"Warsubec", a large-scale wood and iron construction, now sits atop the Liedts-Meesen Foundation in Ghent's Zeistraat. Artist Nick Ervinck, who is represented by Koraalberg Gallery, was commissioned to create the piece, both architecture and art

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35 Years of Playmobil

ALAN HOPE

Parents everywhere recognise their happy, smiling faces and know the feeling of stepping barefoot on a Viking's tankard, say, or a mediaeval cannon. Playmobil is 35 years old this year, and, in recognition, the Toy Museum in Mechelen is staging a major retrospective.

The Playmobil figures were the brainchild of Hans Beck, a German cabinetmaker who liked making model aircraft. He approached the toy company Geobra Brandstätter in his hometown of Zirndorf, hoping to interest them in some of his planes. They showed more interest in the toy humans he had made for his brothers and sisters. Beck then spent three years developing what was to become Playmobil, which received a lukewarm reception when first displayed to visitors to Brandstätter, but took off later in 1974 at the Nürnberg toy fair. The little people would never look back.

That 1974 range was limited but also somehow typical: Indians, knights and construction workers, complete with their tiny but

perfectly-formed accessories (which in the case of the workers included three miniature crates containing 18 bottles of beer).

In the years since, Playmobil has been remarkably true to that original vision: its figures centre on working people (doctors, policemen, farmers, even a street sweeper) and on people from history: cowboys and Indians, knights in armour, pirates and Romans. There's not much from other historical periods, unfortunately; it would have been interesting to see what they would make of the Cavaliers and Roundheads, for example.

The design is, like all great design, simplicity itself: each figure consists of five pieces: upper body, legs, arms and head, with two hands added later (they were originally part of the arm). The hand is a masterpiece of engineering: a C-shaped piece of plastic with just enough elasticity to open, then grasp something (a sword, a tankard, a gun). The faces were based on drawings done by children themselves: two big dots for eyes,

a happy smile, no nose or ears.

In the Toy Museum (we ought to agree not to reveal this to the children just for the pleasure of seeing their eyes pop out), you can meet some of these creations in life size – 160 cm tall, and correct in every Playmobil detail.

Playmobil figures are aimed at children from four to about nine. This exhibition is for everyone.

If travelling to Mechelen by train, ask for the B-Trip, which includes a train ticket and entrance to the museum at a reduced rate

Until 3 January 2010

Nekkerspoelstraat 21
Mechelen

→ www.speelgoedmuseum.be



MORE KIDS' STUFF THIS WEEK

New Space Travel Zone → *Technopolis, Mechelen* →
Bozar Sundays begins! → *Bozar, Brussels*
The Smithy: Boss of Iron and Fire → *MOT, Grimbergen*



Antwerp

Café Capital
Rubenslei 37 – Stadspark,
www.cafecapital.be
SEP 3 18.00 Bar Jeudi
SEP 4 22.00 Martyn + Subbreachers +
Escalators
SEP 5 22.00 4Hero + Kwak + K'Bonus

Queen Elisabeth Hall

Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060,
www.fccc.be
SEP 4 20.00 Paul Potts

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.musichall.be
SEP 5 20.00 Natalia

Brussels

Fuse
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89,
www.fuse.be
SEP 5 23.00 Resident night: Deg and
Pierre

Le Bar du Matin

Alsembergsesteenweg 172;
02.537.71.59, <http://bardumatin.blogspot.com>
SEP 3 21.00 My TV is Dead
SEP 4 21.00 DJ Piiit
SEP 5 21.00 DJ Gozalo

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57,
www.botanique.be
SEP 8 20.00 Wye Oak + The Dodos.
We Were Promised Jetpacks
SEP 9 20.00 Matt Elliott

Deurne

Openluchttheater Rivierenhof
Turnhoutsebaan 232; 070.222.192,
www.openluchttheater.be
SEP 9 20.30 Explosions in the Sky

Ghent

Frontline
Overpoortstraat 37; 09.223.22.27 www.thefrontline.be
SEP 5 19.00 Switchblade + Kongh +
The Black Heart Rebellion

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,
www.vooruit.be
SEP 10 20.00 Krakow + Shearwater

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03,
www.hetdepot.be
SEP 5 20.00 Spizzenergi: 30 jaar Radio
Scorpio



Borgerhout

Trix
Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00,
www.trixonline.be
SEP 6 20.00 Franco Saint De Bakker

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29,
www.ccdewerf.be
SEP 4-6 Flemish Jazz Meeting:
showcase of 12 bands

Brussels

Sazz'n Jazz
Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
Concerts at 21.00:
SEP 2 Harptallica SEP 3 Qu'une tête
SEP 4 Coco Royal SEP 9 Soho Grant

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino
Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66,
www.gcb.be
SEP 5 22.00 Ginkgo Family

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45,
www.themusicvillage.com
Concerts at 20.30:
SEP 2 The Elements SEP 3 Mahé
Parker SEP 4 Peter Hertmans Quartet
SEP 5 The Jeggpap Jazz Band SEP 9
The Green Dolphins

Mol

Muziekcafé Meulenberg
Milostraat 1; 014.32.11.54,
www.cafemeulenberg.be
SEP 5 21.30 Lightnin'Guy and The
Mighty Gators

**GET YOUR
TICKETS NOW!**

Pixies

14 October, 20.00

Vorst Nationaal Brussels

Pixies: a timeless reference in the history of alternative rock. Although it didn't hurt that they broke up angry and bitter after a seven-year run or that band members have cool names like Joey Santiago and Black Francis (*pictured*), their legend is driven by their screaming abandon, their ability to diversify between rock genres and their ever-loving sound one rock critic describes as "the beat that throbs like a hangover". Back together since 2004, they're older and possibly wiser – but don't worry, it doesn't show.

→ www.vorstnationaal.be



Brussels

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20,
www.art-base.be
SEP 4 21.00 Aisha and Victor, tango
dance
SEP 9 Takis Mendis and Sergiani
(Greece)

♦ Agenda ♦

FLANDERS TODAY
SEPTEMBER 2, 2009



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
SEP 3 20.00 B'Rock & Innsbrucker Festivalchor conducted by Timothy Brown, with Judith van Wanroij, soprano; Maarten Engeltjes and Christopher Ainslie, altos; Tom Raskin and Stephen Varcoe, tenors; Giles Underwood, narrator and bass: John Blow, Purcell, Jeremiah Clarke, Handel
SEP 4 20.00 La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken, with Gerlinde Sämann, soprano; Petra Noskaiova, alto; Christoph Genz, tenor; Jan Van der Crabben, bass: Bach cantatas

Bruges

Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02,
www.concertgebouw.be
SEP 4 20.00 Summer Classics 2009: Flemish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Martin Yates, with Francis Mourey, cello: Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, Ginastera, Borodin

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24,
www.abconcerts.be
SEP 9 20.00 Franco Saint De Baker

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30,
www.mim.fgov.be
SEP 6 11.00 Monnaie Wind Quintet: Haydn, Debussy, Albert Huybrechts, Arnold



Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,
www.demunt.be
SEP 8-29 15.00/19.30 Handel's Semele staged by Zhang Huan. Christophe Rousset conducts Les Talens Lyriques



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
Until SEP 5 20.00 NTGent and De Veenfabriek in Kasimir en Karoline by Ödön von Horváth, directed by Johan Simons and Paul Koek (in Dutch)

Fakkelteater

Reyndersstraat 7; 03.232.14.69,
www.fakkelteater.be

Until SEP 26 20.00 De leraar (The Teacher), directed by Peter and Stefan Perceval (in Dutch)

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.musichall.be
Until OCT 25 The Sound of Music, musical (in Dutch)

Theater aan de Stroom

Ijzerenwaag 6; 03.290.60.63,
www.theateraandestroom.be

Until SEP 27 20.30 de fluistercompagnie in Blankenberge, written by Tom Lanoye (in Dutch)

Brussels

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.548.25.80,
www.tour-taxis.com

Until SEP 5 20.30 Peter Pan, adapted from Régis Loisel's comic strip, directed by Emmanuel Dekoninck (ages eight and up; in French with Dutch and English surtitles)



Antwerp

Cathedral of Our Lady

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and De Munt Chorus, with singers Jeremy Ovenden, Nathan Berg
Handschoenmarkt; 03.213.99.51,
www.dekathedraal.be
Until NOV 15 Reunion: From Quinten Metsys to Peter Paul Rubens, masterpieces from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts return to the cathedral

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00,
www.fotomuseum.be

Until SEP 13 Fotografie in België tijdens het Interbellum (Photography in Belgium Between the Wars)

Until SEP 13 Theatres of the Real, contemporary British photography

Until SEP 13 Geert van Kesteren: Baghdad Calling + Why Mister, Why?, photos from the Iraq war

Until SEP 13 Nick Hennes: Red Journey, photographs from Russia

Until SEP 13 De film van mijn leven (The Film of My Life), prize-winners of the Canvas photography contest, plus work by Flemish photographer Lieve Blancquaert

Mekanik

Sint-Jacobsmarkt 73; 0495.48.74.50,
www.art-trek.be

Until SEP 12 Art Trek 6, work by 14 of the most promising young graphic artists from around the world

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34,
www.middelheimmuseum.be

Until SEP 27 Chris Burden, videos, sculpture and installations by the contemporary American artist

Rockox House

Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50,
www.rockoxhuis.be

Until NOV 15 A Gift to God, private patronage of religious art during Antwerp's Golden Age

Blankenberge

Cultuurcentrum Casino

Zeedijk 150; 050.43.20.43, <http://cultuur.blankenberge.be>

Until OCT 4 Masereel en de zee (Masereel and the Sea), retrospective on the 120th birthday of the Blankenberge-born Franz Masereel, with drawings, wood cuts, paintings and ceramics

Bruges

Arentshuis

Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11,
www.brugge.be

Until SEP 27 The Museum of Museums 2009, intervention by

contemporary artist Johan van Geluwe

Damse Vaart Zuid

Damse Vaart Zuid 42; 050.67.09.10

SEP 5-13 African shapes, photographs by Koen De Vaere + American stills, photographs by Peter De Bruyne

Brussels

Atomium

Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be

Until SEP 20 Atomium 58: 14 visions, the Brussels landmark seen by Belgian and international illustrators (part of Brussels BD Comic Strip Festival)

Belvue Museum

Paleizenplein 7; 02.511.44.25,
www.belvue.be

Until SEPT 20 Be-Arts, works by Félicien Rops, Hugo Claus, Henri Blès and Rik Wouters

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

Until SEP 13 Sophie Calle, photographs, audio and video works by the contemporary French artist

Until SEP 13 Disorder, sculptures and paintings by French conceptual artist Bernar Venet and comic strips about Venet and the art world by Belgian artist Jacques Charlier

Until SEP 13 Portraits of Artists: 80 Years of the Centre for Fine Arts in Pictures

Until SEP 13 Young Belgian Painters Award 2009, works by the finalists

Until SEP 13 100 Sex d'Artistes, imaginative illustrations by Belgian artist Jacques Charlier depicting the genitals of 100 internationally known artists

Until SEP 13 Repromotion, installation of sculptures and photographs by Belgian contemporary artist Jan De Cock

City Hall

Grote Markt; 02.279.64.35,
www.brussel.be/artdet.cfm/4440

Until SEP 27 The Brussels Epic of Willy Vandersteen, works by the Flemish comic-strip artist (part of Brussels BD Comic Strip Festival)

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50,
www.brucity.be

Until SEP 29 stoffen & +, textile works

Czech Centre

MIVB Headquarters

Koloniënstraat 62; 02.515.20.52

Until SEP 26 Metro Art Memory, retrospective and genesis of 80 works in the Brussels metro, with models, drawings and sketches by Pierre Alechinsky, Paul Delvaux and Hergé, among others

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30,
www.mim.fgov.be

Until OCT 11 Alan Lomax in Italy '54-'55, photo exhibition honouring the late American ethno-musicologist

Free subscription!

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until SEP 6 Art and Finance in Europe: 16th-Century Masterworks in a new light, works from the museum's collection

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33,
www.wiels.org

Until SEP 13 Ben Cain: The Making of the Means, large-scale installation by the former artist-in-residence

World Bank Brussels

Marnixlaan 17; 02.552.00.32

Until OCT 31 In the Eyes of a Woman: Roma Portraits, the lives of various Roma communities seen through the eyes of female photographers.

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23,
www.museumdd.be

Until SEP 13 When the mood strikes... Wilfried & Yannick Cooreman's collection of contemporary art, with works by Franz West, Thomas Schütte, Jean-Marc Bustamante and Jan Verheyen among others

Until SEP 13 Robert Devriendt, paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10, www.caermersklooster.be
Until SEP 13 Deftig vermaak, ijdel vertier (Distinguished Leisure, Vain Diversion), paintings and photographs of Ghent's bourgeoisie from the mid-19th century to the Belle Epoque

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99, <http://design.museum.gent.be/>
Until OCT 11 Yrjö Kukkapuro, retrospective of the Finnish designer from the late 1950s to the present day
Until OCT 11 Ceramics by Raoul Dufy (1877-1904)
Until OCT 11 Schoonhoven Silver Award: Poetry in Silver, competition with 55 international artists

Dr Guislain Museum

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be
Until SEP 13 Burland Toyland, works made from recycled materials by Swiss outsider artist François Burland
Until SEP 13 Unknown Secrets, paintings by Serbian artist Goran Djurović
Until SEP 13 De Tentoongestelde Mens: Andere culturen als amusement (Exhibited People: Other Cultures as Entertainment), posters and photographs from carnival shows and asylums that put the physically or mentally handicapped on display

MIAT

Minnemeers 9; 09.269.42.00, www.miat.gent.be
Until OCT 18 Ghent on porcelain cards from 1840-1865

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be
Until SEP 20 Raoul de Keyser, 1960s and 1970s works on paper by the contemporary Belgian artist

Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30, www.gent.be/spa
Until SEPT 6 Walder De Mulder, photos of conductors, photographers and other artists from the 1960s to the 1990s by the Ghent-based photojournalist
Until SEPT 6 Walter De Buck Verbeeldt (Represents), sculpture and drawings by the Ghent artist, singer and founder of the legendary Gentse Feesten

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21, www.modemuseumhasselt.be
Until OCT 31 In Her Shoes, trends and evolution of women's shoe design, from 1900 to contemporary designers
Until AUG 31 Ti + Hann, temporary shop II, installation/pop-up store

Z33

33 Zuivelmarkt (Béguinage) (011.29.59.60)
Until SEP 27 Werk nu (Work Now), group show on the world of work by 20 international contemporary artists

Kemzeke

Verbeke Foundation

Westakkers; 03.789.22.07, www.verbekefoundation.com
Until NOV 15 Artificial Nature, outdoor sculpture and installations by contemporary Belgian and European artists

Leuven

M-Leuven

Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28; 016.20.09.09, www.mleuven.be
SEP 20-DEC 6 Rogier van der Weyden 1400 | 1464: Master of Passions, work

by the 15th-century Brussels city painter, the first exhibition in Leuven's new museum

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum) Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75, www.speelgoedmuseum.be
Until JAN 3 Thirty-five years of Playmobil

Overijse

Den Blank

Begijnhof 11; 02.687.59.59, www.denblank.be
Until SEP 13 Afgedankt (Discarded), photos of abandoned spaces by Flemish photographer Henk van Rensbergen

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa

Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11, www.africamuseum.be
Until JAN 3 Persona: Ritual Masks and Contemporary Art, masks from the museum's and other collections, shown alongside works by contemporary African artists

Ypres

CC Ieper - Lakenhallen

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.94.80, www.acci.be
Until OCT 4 Wat overblijft (What remains), recycled assemblages by Flemish artist Camiel Van Breedam

Zwalm

PNEC De Kaaihoeve

Oude Scheldestraat 16, Meilegem-Zwalm; 055.49.67.96, www.kunst-en-zwalm.be
Until SEP 13 Kunst & Zwalm, nine-kilometre art circuit in the Flemish Ardennes, navigable on foot or bike



Aida, Outdoor Opera: Verdi's Aida performed outdoors; conducted by Giuliano Betta and Eric Lederhander and staged by François de Carpentries
Until SEP 19 at Bruges Stadhuis and Ooidonk Castle in Deinze www.ideefixe.be

Beaufort 03 - Art by the Sea: Third edition of the contemporary art triennial, with works by 29 Belgian and international artists

Until OCT 4 at outdoor locations up and down the Belgian coast as well as in Ostend's Kunstmuseum aan zee 070.22.50.05, www.beaufort03.be

Festival of Flanders: Major classical and contemporary music event encompassing seven festivals across Flanders, with dozens of cities staging hundreds of performances and workshops

Until OCT 30 across Flanders www.festivalvanyvlaanderen.be

Roller Bike Parade: Four months of rollerblading in the streets with technical staff on hand to help with equipment rental and maintenance
Until SEP 26 in Brussels (Friday), Antwerp (Saturday), Koksijde (Sunday) and Hasselt (Monday); all parades confirmed or cancelled by 16.00 www.belgiumrollers.com

Antwerp

Classics in the City: Free outdoor concerts to mark the start of the classical season, featuring Flanders Opera Symphony Orchestra and Choir conducted by Yannis Pouspourikas performing highlights from the coming season
SEP 5-6 at Sint-Jansplein www.klassiekinstad.be

Bruxellons 2009: Annual festival featuring popular theatre, music, cabaret and a children's programme, plus buffet and bar
Until SEP 26 at Château du Karreveld,

DON'T MISS

DocScapes

7-11 September

Beursschouwburg, Brussels

Just as Brussels screens its last open-air film of the summer season, this event begins in the city's ultimate chilled-out arts centre, the Beursschouwburg. As any local cinephile can tell you, its director, Cis Bierinckx, is a film aficionado, and he has curated this series of offbeat documentaries, which are part of a larger conference focusing on new media. You'll find Portuguese filmmaker Manuel Mozos fragmented images of abandoned spaces in *Ruinas*, and Liverpool-born director Terence Davies' look at the history and changes of his hometown in *Of time and the city (photo)*. (If it all sounds a bit heady for you, *The September Issue* and *Humpday* are on over at Brussels Movie Days in Wolubilis.)

► www.europeanmediaevent.com



European Day of Jewish Culture: 10th edition of the day celebrating Jewish cultural and historical heritage across 28 European countries with open doors in museums, walks, exhibitions, concerts and more. This year's theme is Festivals and Traditions

SEP 6 in Antwerp 0478.449.264, www.jewishheritage.org

Jackyland: Concerts every Thursday by local talent followed by after-parties

Until SEP 10 at Magiq Spiegelteat, Oosterweelsteenweg (Noordkasteel) www.jackyland.be

Open Day at The Open University: Information session at The Open University Business School for developing your career or studying for personal interest
SEP 8 18.00-20.00 at Hotel Residence, Molenbergstraat 9-11 02.644.33.73, www.open.ac.uk/europe

Brussels

Briggittines International Festival: Contemporary theatre and dance festival
Until SEP 5 at Les Briggittines, Korte Briggittenstraat 1 02.213.86.10, www.briggittines.be

Brussels 2009 BD Comic Strip: City-wide festival celebrating Brussels-based comic strip artists and the rich history of the Belgian comic

Until DEC 31 across Brussels www.brusselscomics.com

Bruxellons 2009: Annual festival featuring popular theatre, music, cabaret and a children's programme, plus buffet and bar
Until SEP 26 at Château du Karreveld,

Jean de la Hoeselaan 3 02.724.24.24, www.bruxellons.net

Folklore September: Folkloric activities with local groups collaborating with Bolivia, Ecuador, Poland and Catalonia to provide a colourful programme, including gastronomic delights on the Grote Markt
SEP 3-20 in the city centre www.brupass.be

Het Theater Festival: Festival focusing on the state of the performing arts in Flanders and the Netherlands. Includes dance, theatre, text and children's theatre, mime and theatrical installations
Until SEP 5 at Kaaitheteater, Kaaistudio's and Bronkstheater www.theaterfestival.be

Marni Jazz: Annual festival showcasing creative jazz with an infusion of Latin, bebop, hip-hop and contemporary music
SEP 9-17 at Théâtre Marni, Vergniestraat 25 02.639.09.80, www.theatremarni.com

Evere

Rock Oasis: Free outdoor concerts with music by Tex Machine, Mixed-Up, Daddy's Girl, Asphalt, MM&The Soundmachine and Rescue. Includes exhibition of photos by Paul Coerten.
SEP 5 15.00 on Léopold III-laan 02.705.44.92, www.rockoasis.be

Ghent

Jazz in 't Park: 15th edition of the free open-air jazz festival with afternoon and evening concerts, plus jazz films
Until SEP 6 at Zuidpark 09.269.46.00, www.gent.be/jazzintpark

Knokke-Heist

International Cartoon Festival: Annual event this year highlights the increasing role of internet and television in cartoons. Includes Press Cartoon Belgium, featuring guest cartoonist Kevin Kallaugh
Until SEP 27 at Lagunahall, Krommedijk 57 050.630.430, www.cartoonfestival.be

Mechelen

Contour 2009: Fourth biennial of the moving image, featuring film media installations by Belgian and international artists. This year's theme is Hidden in Remembrance is the Silent Memory of Our Future
Until OCT 18 on a walking circuit of 12 special venues in the historic city centre 070.22.28.00, www.contour2009.be

Watou

Watou 2009: Annual festival of contemporary art, architecture and poetry. This year's title is *Tussen Taal en Beeld: Verzamelde Verhalen (Between Language and Image: Collected Stories)*, which looks at the relationship between image and language
Until SEP 6 in indoor and outdoor venues across Watou (West Flanders) 059.56.45.98, www.watou2009.be

But, as Betty's regulars will tell you, the absolute best time to visit Rococo is on a cold – preferably snowy or rainy – winter's night. That's when logs are thrown on the fire, and the roaring flames from the open hearth – centre-piece of the room – make it impossible to leave. So order up a Rococo coffee, home-made with Grand Marnier, and enjoy the embrace. *On Saturdays: live piano music by Rudy de Sutter*

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

ROBYN BOYLE

Rococo

Corduwaniersstraat 57 Ghent

After roaming the maze of narrow cobbled streets that make up the historic Patershol neighbourhood in Ghent, my friend and I are glad to see the soft glow of candlelight coming from the windows of Rococo. We are barely seated at one of the long wooden tables before two tiny glasses of pink liqueur appear – a true honour.

Owner Betty, said to have a sixth sense about people, only offers her specialty *liqueur d'amour* on the house to certain guests. She makes it herself “with lots of love” by potting almonds, spices and Patershol jenever, then allowing it all to mellow for about a month. The drink is small, sweet and romantic – just like the café.

Looking around, you get the feeling you're in Betty's living room. The high ceiling, the regal candelabras (proudly emitting the only source of light), the piano notes floating through the air... cosiness and warmth are so tangible here, just entering the place is comparable to a nice big hug.

You see it on the faces of the guests, who are happily crammed around the six or so tables, talking loudly, laughing and enjoying their drinks. Betty, who opened the place 22 years ago, is always among them. She only opens at 22.00, but the atmosphere is such that you easily still spend several hours chatting with strangers who happen to share a table with you. In the summer, you can sit out back on the pretty courtyard terrace.

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On Saturdays: live piano music by Rudy de Sutter

► www.patershol.be



FACE OF FLANDERS

John Vermeulen

It's a fact of life in book circles that genre writers – those who deal with science fiction, crime, romance and so on – are generally looked down on by those of a more literary persuasion. For those lofty types, John Vermeulen, who died last week at age 68, must have been a nightmare.

Some writers cross the borderlines of genre: Vermeulen took an eraser and wiped them out.

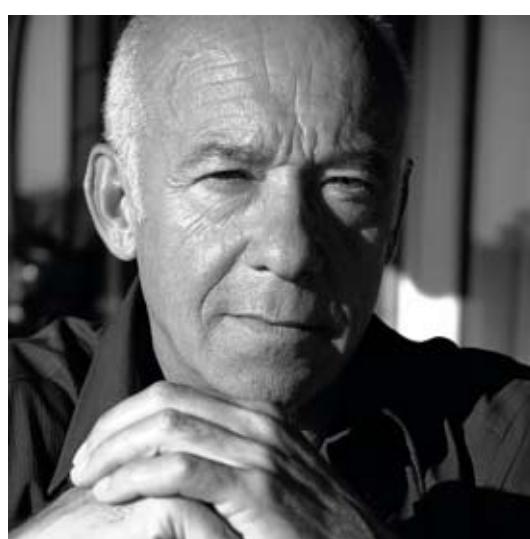
It may be a result of his first novel: he wrote it when he was either 14 or 15 (he said). At that age, most people don't know what pigeonhole to sort themselves into. Perhaps it's because he started with science fiction, which in many ways is the one genre that contains all others.

That first book, *The Accursed Planet*, is (thanks to the internet) forever with us. That and other works represent the oeuvre of someone who is either a genius or a hack.

Mozart wrote everything from a clarinet quintet to operas like *The Magic Flute*. Vermeulen wrote everything from thrillers to sci-fi to historical romance to scripts for children's films to books on sailing to theatre scripts to short stories.

Born in Antwerp, his books were written in Dutch and, like most novels in Dutch, stayed in Dutch. Too bad, because he stretched himself with work based on the lives of great Flemish figures, like Jerome Bosch (*De tuin der lusten* – *The Garden of Appetites*), Mercator (*Tussen god en de zee* – *Between God and the Sea*), Brueghel (*De ekster op de galg* – *The Magpie on the Gallows*) and two examples slightly less Flemish: Nostradamus (*De rivier van de tijd* – *The River of Time*) and Leonardo da Vinci (*Het genie in de rattenval* – *The Genius in the Rat-Trap*).

He also published in magazines like *Playboy* and



ALAN HOPE

Pulp, was a long-time editor of sailing magazines and wrote books on skiing, gardening, TV watching and men who go out with younger women. He was someone who could not stop writing and who could write about anything.

He also contributed to the series *Vlaamse Filmmpjes*, which were not films, but books, and which involved a veritable Who's Who of Flemish children's authors.

What else? Who knows. He might have made a name for himself on TV or in the movies. According to a good friend, writing in *Knack* magazine, he had plans to write the libretto for an opera. Mozart would hardly have blinked.

John Vermeulen is one of a number of Flemish crime writers whose work will be explored in next week's issue of Flanders Today, published on 9 September

→ www.crime.nl

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



terug naar school →

While I was reading under my oak tree last weekend, an acorn on my page reminded me that the summer was almost over, or rather that the school holidays were fast coming to an end. For Flemish schools *de zomervakantie* is an immovable feast: the full months of July and August.

Terug naar school – back to school signs in shops hang over *boekentassen* – schoolbags and *pennenzakken* – pencil cases, and parents are stocking up on *notitieblokken* – notepads and *potloden* – pencils.

Next Tuesday sees *de hervatting van de lessen* – resumption of classes, and for the youngest the first day at *de lagere school* – primary school. This tends to be much less traumatic than in some other countries since most of the kids will have spent the past three years together in *kleuterschool* – kindergarten.

One expense parents don't have here – with a handful of exceptions – is school uniforms. The colour of your shoes or tights is never an issue, nor are there any signs that anyone wants to start up a debate on introducing badges and blazers. (The downside to this is that tying a tie is a mystery to most teenage lads.)

The most important thing about a school year is the holidays. The *herfstvakantie* – autumn mid-term holiday begins on 2 November; *de kerstvakantie* – the Christmas holiday begins on 21 December.

My favouritely-named break is *de krokusvakantie* – the one-week holiday starting on 15 February, when the crocuses may just be out. Then comes *de paasvakantie* – Easter holidays on 5 April for two weeks.

You can enrol your child in whichever school has a place; there are no catchment areas. Equally, you can move your child out of one school and into another. In secondary school, the tests at the end of the first year come as a reality check, and many children will move to other streams. Once you leave the Latin stream (yes, Latin and Greek are taught) you can't move back up later.

School is compulsory to the age of 18. To go on to higher education you need your *diploma* – leaving certificate, which the school awards on the basis of results of exams set by the individual teachers; there are no central exams. Whether you have studied in the Latin stream or the science stream, you will have to pass a range of subjects including physical education and geography. Most university studies are open to any student with a leaving certificate.

The recent shortage of teachers has become less severe with numbers being bolstered by some of those who have lost their jobs in industry in the past year. Let's hope they make the grade.

→ www.ond.vlaanderen.be

bite

SHARON LIGHT

Café des Spores

Café des Spores is probably my favourite restaurant in Brussels, and not just because it happens to be the place where my husband proposed. Long before that, it was my default choice for any special occasion, celebration or nice meal with out-of-towners. The spores of the title refers to mushrooms, the feature of nearly every dish on their fairly small menu (even some of the desserts). However, this Sint-Gilles restaurant is even more specialised in wine. Their vast collection features many Mediterranean options, and every bottle they have recommended to me has been truly enjoyable alongside my meal.

But back to the menu: although you can order particular dishes, the recommended format is a tapas-style surprise menu. You let them know of any dietary restrictions or preferences, and then the food starts rolling out of the kitchen, one dish at a time.

The kitchen itself is worth a mention, as it is an open one, taking up about one-third of the already small ground floor. Every table has a view on it, and from the upstairs seating, you can get a fun aerial perspective (although watch out for these



seats as it does get warm up there). Seating is also available in the wine cellar, minus the kitchen view.

Their menu is based on the mushrooms available on the market and has been different on every visit, but certain of my favourite dishes seem to be more or less permanent fixtures. One is the *blondes aux herbes*, blonde mushrooms cooked up with a fresh herb selection; it's so simple and yet wonderfully elegant. Equally high on my list is the *oeuf cocotte*, a soft-cooked egg in a small cup, with cream and porcini mushrooms mixed in, spooned over bread and (in my case) gobbled up in one minute or less. Order two.

The décor goes a step farther than just the open kitchen concept; the walls, seats and tables are all dark, with sufficient – and sufficiently romantic – lighting. Very chic. The wait staff has always been friendly and helpful, yet another Brussels rarity. With so much going for it, it can be hard to find a seat, so book ahead.

→ www.cafedesspores.be

The last word → → →

Cold front

"People say it was a better summer, but in fact that's bad news. Warmer temperatures mean that the earth is warming up."

Weatherwoman Jill Peeters reveals the bitter truth behind the summer sunshine

Living in hope

"The case of Jaycee Lee Dugard has given new hope to parents. However small the chance may be, this story shows that a happy ending is not impossible."

Bruno Depoer of Child Focus, which lists 11 children in Belgium still missing after a year, the oldest case going back to 1985

The dark side

"Ghent is not the Bronx, but it's not Lotenhulle either. It's a city that lives by day and by night. We shouldn't be afraid to show that side of us."

Ghent mayor Daniel Termont on the new TV series *Code 37*, which shows his city's underbelly

Dishing the dirt

"New York is great, for a little while. But I always want to take a shower after I've been outside, as if every kind of filth is hanging in the air."

Kim Clijsters, Flemish tennis star, as she prepares to play in the US Open at Flushing Meadows Park in Queens