

Drink it in

How safe is the water coming out of the taps?

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The new spread in town

Speculoos bread spread hits American supermarkets

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Young and in love

Flanders' first gay adolescent film

p9



Built to order

Flanders is imposing tougher energy-efficiency requirements for new homes

ALAN HOPE

This month, customers of Flanders' main power supply company Electrabel will be receiving a letter warning them that price increases are coming and advising them to avoid nasty shocks by paying more now to avoid paying more later. Like death and taxes, rising energy prices have become one of the few certainties of life. The only option left to pay less is to use less.

The construction industry this year dedicated its recent annual trade fair, Batibouw, to energy-efficient building and renovation. Flanders is running ahead of the rest of Belgium (but not the rest of Europe) in implementing new rules on energy performance for new houses.

There are numerous interesting pilot projects, like the construction of 700 green social houses in Sint-Niklaas

planned for 2012. And the banks have been asked to bring forward ideas on how to make it easier for homeowners to finance the building of lower-energy homes. *Flanders Today* takes a look at the latest hot subject in housing.

 ➤ *continued on page 5*

West Fleming is boxing champion

Delfine Persoon is the new European lightweight women's boxing champion, after defeating the Swiss Nicole Boss last weekend in Lichtervelde, West Flanders, to take the vacant title on a points decision after 10 rounds.

Persoon (pictured) started out by following her older sister to ballet class, where she says she got on well, but couldn't really get into the whole feel of the thing. At the age of six, she took up judo, going on to win medals at the national level, narrowly missing a medal at the Youth Olympics in Murcia, Spain, in 2001. There, she lost her semi-final match after a contested decision by a Spanish referee. After qualifying as a sports teacher, Persoon trained for a year at the West Flanders police academy, where she entered a boxing ring for the first time. "That sport clicked with me immediately," she says. She turned professional in 2009, and her record stands at 12 wins out of 13 matches, five with a knock-out, including four in the second round.

"For me, boxing is mainly a hobby," the new champion said. "Although I still want to reach as high as my abilities will take me in the sport." ♦


 ➤ www.boxingdelfine.be

Headscarf row re-surfaces

Hema employee refused contract for wearing hijab

ALAN HOPE

After being refused an extension of her contract because she wore a headscarf to work, an employee of Hema last week turned down a new job offered by the Dutch-owned retail chain. Antwerp-born Joyce Van op den Bosch, 20, said the new offer was not satisfactory.

"This is not my old job as a saleswoman; here I have to stay in the warehouse. I won't be accepting their offer," she said. In addition, the contract was temporary and part time, while Van op den Bosch had been promised a full-time job. Van op den Bosch had been employed by Randstad as temporary staff in the Hema store in Genk, where she lives.

When her contract reached its end and was not renewed, she was told there had been customer complaints about her headscarf. According to a spokesman for Randstad, wearing a headscarf was "not in conformity with Hema's company dress code". Her contract was not renewed, he said, because she had declined to comply.

 ➤ *continued on page 3*

FACE OF FLANDERS



Luc Cortebeeck

Mark Twain described published reports of his demise as "greatly exaggerated". For trade union leader Luc Cortebeeck, they were merely slightly premature. Cortebeeck, president of the Christian trade union ACV, announced last week that he will be retiring from his post at the end of the year.

The news might normally be of only limited interest, had Cortebeeck not, as recently as last month, filed a legal complaint after an unknown person sent out an email purporting to be from him, announcing his imminent retirement.

The news then was picked up by the VRT and *De Standaard*, which both ran the item on their websites. Both were suitably apologetic as soon as the truth came out. Cortebeeck, meanwhile, considered the fake email as part of a campaign against him.

Described by *De Standaard* as "the most important union leader in the country," Cortebeeck has been prominent in the news as the voice of moderation in the dispute between workers, employers and government over the interprofessional accord (IPA). Cortebeeck's union was the only one of the three main blocs (Christian, socialist and liberal) whose membership endorsed the accord he helped

negotiate. Its rejection by the other two led to a day of protest actions earlier this month, with a promise of more to come.

Cortebeeck was born in 1950 and studied as a social worker in Leuven. In 1972 he made his entry into the trade union world as a youth leader in Mechelen. He went on to join the national staff and became national secretary for Flemish affairs in 1987, then national president in 1999. He has become known as a strong negotiator with an impressive command of his material, and not without a sense of humour. When the king visited the national headquarters in February to mark the union's 125th anniversary, Cortebeeck made a short speech: "Sire, the concerns of the country over recent years have cost you many hours of overtime and weekend work, demanded great flexibility and caused a great deal of stress. All of which we at the ACV oppose, because we are in favour of decent jobs." The king was amused.

Cortebeeck may be stepping down from the ACV, but he retains his positions with the European Trade Union Confederation and the International Trade Union Confederation, where he is deputy president.

→ www.acv-online.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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FLANDERS TODAY

MARCH 16, 2011

News in brief

Belgian customs officers have stepped up surveillance on **freight arriving from Egypt**, as the unstable situation there poses an increased risk of illegal art objects being shipped to Europe. Belgium is already considered a hub of the illegal art trade from around the world, in particular from Africa. During recent protests in Cairo, various valuable objects were reported missing from the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities.

department. When appeals are taken into account, the number rises to 38%. One in eight first-years (12.5%) **end the year with no passes** at all. "We're seeing a tragic erosion of the pass figures," commented Ludo Melis, vice rector of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL). In the last report for 2007-2008, 40% passed all subjects.

A new member has joined the ranks of Belgian beers. Microbrewery Hof ten Dormaal in Tildonk, near Leuven, last week announced a **beer made with witloof** (Belgian endive). The blond beer, with an alcohol content of 8%, was inspired by brewer André Janssens' childhood in the area of Kampenhout, a rich producer of *witloof*.

Four out of five planned flights by helicopters of the **Air Support unit of the federal police** in March and April will cover cycle races and car rallies, according to figures obtained by parliament member Leen Dierick. Last year the helicopters spent 125 flying hours covering cycling, 40 hours on rallies and 79 hours on football matches.

The Catholic University of Leuven (KUL) has squeezed into the top **90 of universities worldwide** based on overall reputation, according to the latest rankings from British education authority *Times Higher Education*. The table is headed by Harvard, MIT and Cambridge; Leuven comes in the 81-90 block (specific rankings are not given after number 50). Within Europe, the KUL took 34th place, followed by Ghent at number 37.

Fewer than one in three students in their first year of higher education (28%) pass all subjects, according to figures from the Flemish education

A 17th-century gatehouse to a former Dominican **monastery in Vilvoorde collapsed** last week as building workers tried to attach scaffolding to the facade. The Mattenkot was being renovated to house some of the town's administrative services. No-one was reported injured. The building was named after it was sold in 1797 to become a factory making coconut fibre mats. Later it was home to part of the Vilvoorde technical school.

One of the world's largest (and stinkiest) flowers, the **titan arum** (*Amorphophallus titanum*), was expected to bloom this week at the National Botanical Gardens in Meise, just outside Brussels. It would be the first time the flower has bloomed since August 2008, when the rare event attracted 8,000 visitors. The Botanical Garden has set up a Facebook page to monitor progress, where it was reported the flower has now passed two metres in height. When it blooms, the gardens will stay open late for three nights. Experts have described the scent of the flower as a mixture of rotting meat and putrid cheese. The Latin name for the arum means "giant misshapen phallus".

Equal Pay Day falls this year on 25 March, the women's section of the ABVV trade union announced. Equal Pay Day is the day until which women must work to make up the difference between their average pay and that of men – currently 22.93% in Belgium. In other words, if men worked for nothing until 25 March, their annual pay would be the same as women's. This year's focus is on pensions. "Earning less means working longer, as pensions depend on salaries," the union said. "Women need to work longer than men to build up a decent pension."

Correction

In our article on Antwerp as the European Youth Capital ("Tell us your wildest dreams", 2 March), we incorrectly stated that the city is selected by "a jury of young people". The selection is in fact made through the European Youth Forum by a jury of youth policy experts and representatives from the private sector, the media and regional authorities. We also incorrectly referred to the European Youth Forum as an advocacy group. It is a European platform of youth organisations.

OFFSIDE

Labour pains

The working classes may think they've got things tough nowadays, leading to Days of Action and lightning strikes, but, according to a document in Dutch recently unearthed called Working Orders for Employees, they've never had it so good.

The paper was issued in 1870, nearly 30 years after Belgium's first-ever union (of typographers) was formed in Brussels and more than a decade after the move across Europe for workers' rights had led to the creation of weavers' and spinners' unions in Ghent. The orders it contains would make the hair of even the most rabid free-marketeer stand on end:

Workers are ordered to begin the day by **cleaning** offices and workspaces thoroughly, as well as stoking boilers with coal (which they had to bring themselves)

The **12-hour day** is a matter of course. If overtime is required, it will be worked without pay

The involvement of any worker in **politics** is a matter for summary dismissal

Wives and daughters of bosses and senior executives must be greeted with respect

Workers are advised to read the **Bible**. Other works may be read, providing they are not morally damaging

There is no such thing as **sick pay**: workers should remain healthy, as days off because



© Wasal Local History Centre

ALAN HOPE

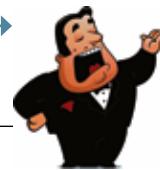
of illness will not be paid. Deductions will be made from wages to fund possible future sick days

Female employees must endeavour to lead a **virtuous life**

Talking back to the boss shows a lack of respect, and will be punished

Anything a worker hears **spoken of his boss**, inside and outside the workplace, must be reported immediately

Every worker should be **grateful** to his employer, because he keeps you alive. There are many other people who would be glad to take over your job



Hema admits treatment of worker was "unfair"

→ *continued from page 1*

At the beginning of her employment, Van op den Bosch had asked if wearing a headscarf was acceptable, and she was told it was. She was even provided with a Hema headscarf, as worn by staff in the Netherlands. That went on for two months, then came "many negative reactions" from customers, according to Hema spokesperson Inge Van Baarsen. The company declined to say how many complaints were received. In a statement, the company made an unusual claim: "Since in Belgium is it not customary to wear a headscarf in a public place," Hema decided to ask Van op den Bosch to stop wearing the headscarf, which she declined to do. "We wish to stress that this decision is not connected to the wearing of a headscarf as such, but that it applies to any outward appearance which is not in keeping with the neutral and discreet image of Hema," the statement said. However, Jozef De Witte, director of the Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism, said that the case appears to be discrimination. The

temp agency cannot discriminate among their staff on the basis of the complaints or prejudices of a client – in this case Hema. Unless the store cancelled its contract with Randstad as a whole, it would be guilty of discriminating against one member of staff. Randstad later admitted it had misgivings about the question of discrimination against the wearing of a headscarf and had applied earlier this month to the Centre for Equal Opportunities for advice. The centre said a headscarf was in most cases not a significant item of business clothing and so could not be grounds for dismissal. Randstad later said it could not take the centre's advice, since a number of employment law experts disagreed.

Last weekend, Hema issued the statement: "By permitting the wearing of a headscarf and later withdrawing permission, Hema behaved unfairly towards the temporary employee. Internal rules for work clothing have now been refined, central to which is that staff should be as neutral as possible in the view of the public."



© Belga

For Van op den Bosch (pictured), nothing is decided. "This week on Wednesday I have an appointment with my lawyer," she said. "Then we'll know where everything stands." Also last weekend, about 300 people took part in a demonstration organised by supporters of the right to wear a headscarf.

- Meanwhile, the controversy over the headscarf was also revived again at the federal level after a member of staff of the socialists appeared in parliament wearing one. N-VA called for a ban on the display of all religious symbols in parliament, a position supported by French-speaking liberals and the far-right Vlaams Belang. Last year

Jan Peumans, N-VA speaker of the Flemish parliament, reprimanded Vlaams Belang's Filip Dewinter after he called for the expulsion of a woman wearing a headscarf in the public gallery. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



51,994
Belgian men took paternal leave in 2010, an increase of more than 500% over the year 2000. Seven out of 10 were in Flanders, and only 6.3% in Brussels

13,891
men in Belgium are stay-at-home dads

4.2 million
contacts by phone, email and web visits to the Flemish government helplines last year, including 707,000 calls to the information line 1700, and 1.77 million visits to the website www.vlaanderen.be

1,768
people in Flanders turned in their licence plates for a free season ticket on De Lijn in the first two months of the year. Last year the number was 11,095, compared to 1,429 takers for a similar scheme in Brussels

224km
of new cycle paths inaugurated in Flanders in 2010, at a cost of €71 million, or €315,000 per km

Top job for ex-police chief

Four days after resigning his post as commissioner-general of the federal police because of the questionable expenses of a lobbying trip, Fernand Koekelberg was promised a new top function by interior minister Annemie Turtelboom. Koekelberg – described by the minister as "a fantastic cop" – will act as liaison between the regions and the federal police, a new job that has apparently been created for him specifically. Before Koekelberg can take up the post, the review of the recent trip by the P Committee, which supervises police matters, must be completed. During the trip to Qatar, where Koekelberg (pictured) was lobbying for

a post as vice-president of Interpol, €92,000 was spent for a delegation of seven people on top hotels, business class flights, a reception for 800 people, gifts for those attending and three Delvaux suitcases, each costing €400. Total expenditures exceeded €92,000. In an interview with *De Morgen*, Turtelboom described the former commissioner as "a very hard-working policeman" with "a great deal of expertise". She praised Koekelberg for resigning rather than dragging the matter through the courts and suggested he wasn't responsible for the extravagant costs. "He didn't book the trip to Qatar, he didn't order the tickets, he didn't

organise the reception; but he is responsible because he is the head of the federal police." Meanwhile, Koekelberg has filed a legal complaint against the person who sent an anonymous letter to the judicial authorities bringing the circumstances of the Qatar trip to light. It was also revealed last week that the administrator general of the Customs and Excise department received authorisation from finance minister Didier Reynders in 2008 to spend €147,000 to lobby for a post as secretary-general of the World Customs Union. The final bill, however, came to only €59,300. ♦



New time-frame for road works

The Flemish government last week agreed a plan to speed up the repair of the region's road works to achieve completion of most projects by 2015 and of major roads by 2020. There are currently about 200 ongoing works projects, large and small. The plan also involves better information for motorists to help reduce congestion. The revamped website provides up-to-date information on works for any itinerary selected by the user, as well as providing an email alert to warn of problems on any road. This summer sees a number of major road works that are

expected to cause disruption, principally on the E19, the E313 and the Vilvoorde viaduct. On the E19 Brussels-Antwerp, the fork dividing traffic by the Kontich exit will be removed on the Brussels-bound carriageway. On the E313 Antwerp-Hasselt, the hard shoulder will be turned into a new lane. And the joints in the surface of the Vilvoorde viaduct will be resurfaced. There will also be major works on the E17 Deinze-Zwijnaarde.

→ www.wegwerken.be

Parents of Belgian children may not be deported, court rules

A Colombian couple who were living in Belgium illegally cannot be deported because they have two children with Belgian nationality, the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled last week. The case was brought by Gerardo Ruiz Zambrano, who had come to Belgium with his wife and child in 1999, seeking asylum from the drug wars in their homeland. Their application was refused, and they were ordered to leave Belgium but not to be sent forcibly back to Colombia, given the situation there. The family stayed on in

Belgium, and Ruiz found work despite not having a residency or work permit. In the meantime, the couple had two more children, who were eligible for Belgian nationality. Ruiz lost his job and applied for benefits, which were refused. He appealed to the employment tribunal, which addressed the case to the European Court. The court's ruling went further than that question and declared that a member state must "allow third country nationals who are parents of a child who is a national of that Member State to reside and

work there, where a refusal to do so would deprive that child of the genuine enjoyment of the substance of the rights attaching to the status of citizen of the Union". The case has implications for other countries, which are now obliged to deliver residency permits to the parents of children born into citizenship. It also has wider implications: the same parents, now legally resident in the EU, have the same rights as anyone else to move freely within the Union. ♦

WIN A BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR OF DE MUNT!



As the geographical centre of Europe, Brussels quickly embraced opera performances, but it was not until the end of the 17th century that a true auditorium was built. From that point, **De Munt** played a key role in the cultural life of Flanders, presenting the most famous composers, the most beautiful voices, the most recent plays and the greatest choreographers and dance companies.

With its 1,150 seats, **De Munt Nationale Opera** is the largest opera house in Belgium and one of Europe's most wonderful theatres. The sobriety of its beautiful neoclassical façade hides a fully restored rich interior decor typical of the 19th century. The theatre is home to works of art such as the fresco by Rube and Chaperon decorating the central cupola, the fine ceramic by Pierre Alechinski, large-scale paintings by Emile Fabry and works by Sam Francis, Sol Lewitt, Daniel Buren and Giulio Paolini, making it an essential part of the artistic heritage of the Belgian capital.



The scenery and costume workshops – construction, ironwork, sculpture, painting, decoration and costumes, including hats, shoes and embroidery – are located since 1999 in a building behind the theatre, sharing close to 20,000 square metres of installations with several work studios and two large rehearsal rooms. The opera offers the chance to benefit from its experience with artistic creations as well as from its relationships with renowned artists. A tour of the opera and its workshops takes you to the heart of the most beautiful opera performances.



A tour of **De Munt** allows you to discover rich cultural heritage – both historical and contemporary – as well as architectural and artistic works, costumes, scenery, crafts and “Les Machines du Rêve”, a fabulous baroque opera model designed and built by Michel Dumont and Thierry Bosquet.

Theme-based tours provide you with a special view of the opera:

The making of an opera today: How does an opera come to fruition? What is a theatre distagjone? How does the collaboration between stage director, scenographer and costume designer unfold? When do rehearsals begin?

Scenery and costumes: Discover centuries-old crafts of stagehands and technicians as well as shoemakers, hatters, ornamental blacksmiths and more. **De Munt** provides you with a chance to discover these ancestral crafts in a modern setting with professionals from each field. Each tour is organised according to the participants' wishes..

Brussels Unlimited, De Munt & KBC



This joint venture is an initiative between Brussels Unlimited, KBC and **De Munt**.

We have **15 pairs of tickets** for a visit of the opera on **9 April from 11.30 to 13.00**, followed by a reception. To win tickets, simply answer these questions and send them to competitions@ackroyd.be before noon on 31 March

1. In what year did a fire destroy the opera? (tip: www.demunt.be)
2. How many movies are the on the KBC website explaining the use of ATMs? (tip: www.kbc.be/expats)
3. Who did The Bulletin magazine have lunch with in the March 2011 issue?

Good luck!



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© Julian Jacobs (2006)

© Robert Marchand, Ruijbroek, collection particulière

© Herman Sorgeloos

© Joseph Rentmeesters, Ruijbroek, collection particulière

Built to order

Contractors and architects struggle to keep up with new technology and methods

→ *continued from page 1*

The energy level of a building is calculated according to the Energy Performance and Interior Climate (EPB) index, which calculates the effects of a number of factors – insulation, ventilation, solar heating, the efficiency of central heating, etc – to give an E-number. The lower the E-number, the more efficient the building. Each new house construction has to stay below a certain maximum E-number, which varies between regions.

In Flanders, all new homes have since 2010 been required to conform to an E-number of 80 or lower. In 2014, the limit goes down to E-60. In Brussels, an E-90 limit came into force in 2009 and will fall to E-70 in July this year. How the E-number is reached is a matter for the owner, the contractor and the architect, who may prefer to give preference to one or other aspect of the house's performance, as long as the final E-number is within the limit. There are also specific maximum values for insulation (the K-number) and for ventilation. There are various levels of energy efficiency, reflected in the net amount of energy a house consumes. Existing properties, not subject to the E-limits, use about 270 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy per year for every square metre of surface area, with 200 of that accounted for by heating. The E-80 standard applied in Flanders comes with an annual consumption of 160 kWh per square metre, including 120 for heating. While an energy-saving house uses a maximum of 30 kWh per square metre, a so-called "passive" house has a consumption of only 15 kWh.

Keeping up with the neighbours?

On the whole, Belgium does less well on the energy efficiency of its homes, compared to other countries. The Scandinavian countries are far ahead on this score; in Norway, homes will have to come in at E-40 by next year. In the Netherlands, all new constructions from this year have to conform to a maximum of E-45, and the aim is to cut the energy consumption of existing houses in half by 2020. To achieve the same level as that, Belgium would have to cut consumption by 75%.

There are three main reasons why Belgium falls behind: a large number of old, badly insulated houses; a much higher proportion of detached houses; and a tendency to build large houses. Aside from the demands of the new E-level requirements, architects are receiving more and more requests for houses that are more energy-efficient, according to architect Anja Vissers, who has a practice in Herentals. "People want low-energy houses, though we don't usually go as far as passive constructions yet," she says. "The trouble is, people haven't got the budget; it costs more to build a low-energy house, and the time it takes to recoup the cost depends on many elements."

Many architects, too, are just not up to date on the latest techniques and technologies. "Some architect organisations have arranged courses, but the training is limited. You basically have to make sure you keep yourself up to date," explains Vissers. "There's also the problem of contractors who aren't aware of new developments."



A natural water purification system cleans and filters the swimming pool at this house in Turnhout designed by Anja Vissers

Paying the bill

Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche has asked the banks for proposals on offering energy-friendly mortgages to homeowners to cover the extra investment required by low-energy construction. According to her office, stricter requirements on energy consumption (see box) could increase the initial cost of building a house by 10 to 20%. But that cost will be recouped over time by the savings made on fuel.

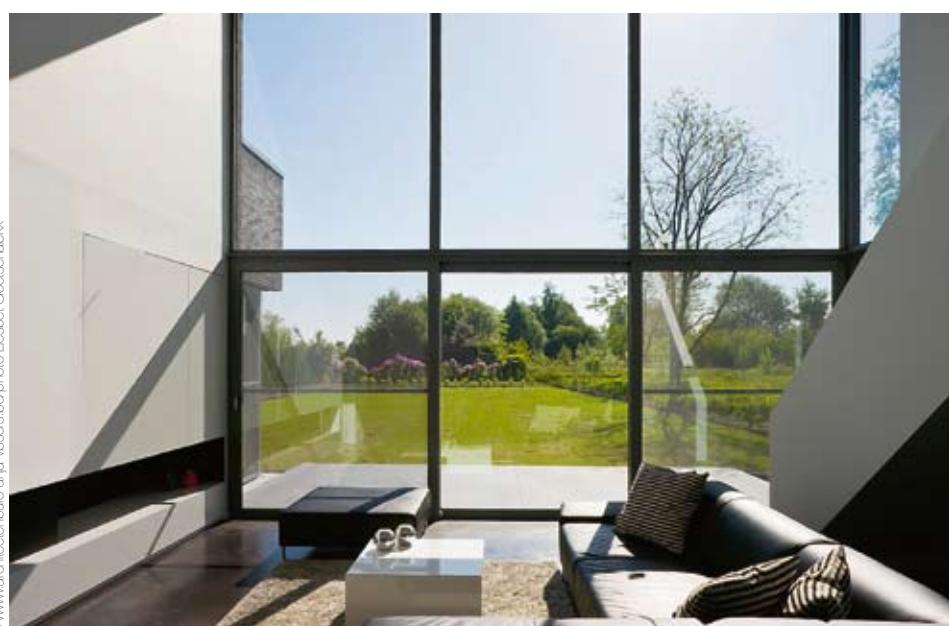
"The total living cost is the sum of the mortgage and the energy bill," says Van den Bossche. "Anyone who spends more on an energy-efficient house at the outset will pay less on energy bills for the rest of their lives. So it makes sense to allow a larger mortgage for houses like that." After receiving proposals, Van den Bossche will bring the matter up with her counterparts from the other two regions, with a view to a system that covers the whole country.

In addition, The Brussels Region has set aside €5.3 million for training in the construction of low-energy houses. The region requires 70,000 new houses between now and 2020 to cope with population growth, and reckons the building programme could provide more than 2,500 new jobs.

Improving energy efficiency

Aside from technological contributions to efficiency such as boilers, solar panels and heat-exchange systems, a few simple principles go a long way to cutting the energy consumption of a house.

- Adopt a compact construction, where the ratio of interior volume to surface area is higher, thus reducing heat loss. One striking feature of the design of new low-energy houses is the recurrence of the cube form, which is a more efficient design compared to a rectangular form of the same volume (see sidebar). The absolute ideal shape, incidentally, is the hemisphere, the form of the igloo and the Mongolian yurt, ancient designs based on a perfect – and essential – understanding of energy efficiency.
- A semi-detached house loses less heat than a detached house, and a row-house less still.
- South-facing walls should include a large area of glass to take in sunlight, while north walls need to be properly insulated
- Some building materials are better than others at absorbing and retaining heat, such as brick, sandstone and granite ♦



Using nature to your advantage: large south-facing windows provide light as well as warmth

Getting help

To help you find your way through the thicket of new legal requirements and technologies, various websites point the way to experienced professionals.

www.ecobouwers.be has a database of hundreds of architects, advisers and suppliers across Flanders. Ecobouwers is an initiative of the Better Environment Union (BBL) and is supported by the Flemish Region.

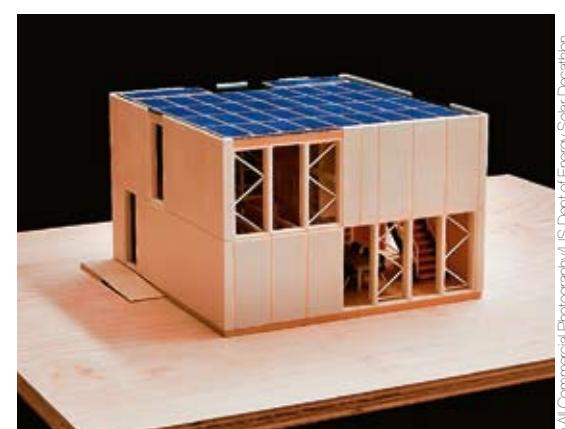
www.energiebewustarchitect.be also allows you to search for a trained architect according to postcode. The site was created by the architect federations NAV and BVA and the Flemish Energy Agency.

www.lne.be/bouwgezond was launched last month by Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege and offers advice on everything from building materials, paints and floor coverings to how best to ventilate your home.

The E-Cube takes on the world

The E-Cube was developed by students at the University of Ghent for the Solar Decathlon organised by the US Department of Energy, a contest that brings together teams from schools across the world. The Solar Decathlon's purpose is to develop ideas for cost-effective, energy-efficient and visually appealing solar-powered houses. The E-Cube meets "passive house" standards and comes in the form of a DIY kit, which can be put together without special skills or tools. The basic kit can be extended and upgraded according to the client's wishes, which makes it possible for a young couple, for example, to start off with the basic minimum and add to it as time goes on. "The E-Cube is more affordable because the costs can be spread over time," explains the team, "allowing the client to finish off the house according to his or her own timing and budget."

→ www.solardecathlon.ugent.be



E-Cube, the house of the future

Care for a drink?

As the Flemish environment minister unveils measures to tackle lead pollution in drinking water, the question arises: Just how safe is the water in our taps?

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

Turning on the tap in our kitchen, we expect to see clean, fresh water. After all, we are living in a developed country: surely there are no nasty substances in that water to contaminate our food or have a damaging effect on our health?

Rather disturbing then is the news that Flanders would, if it takes no action, fail to meet the norms for lead pollution in drinking water that European Union legislation imposes as of 2013. At present, the allowed maximum is 25 micrograms per litre; in 2013, that will be cut to 10 micrograms.

That's in line with the World Health Organization's recommendation, which highlights health risks – particularly to children and pregnant women – of exposure to lead pollution. Among other dangers, it can have an impact on the development of a child's nervous system.

"We would have a 3 to 4% non-compliance rate," explains Kris Van Den Belt of Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij (VMM), Flanders' environment agency. "This is a very high rate compared to other health-related parameters, which typically have more like a 1% non-compliance."

Lurking in the pipes

Although the use of lead in construction of water conduits was pretty much phased out during the 1970s, and the mains have all been replaced, any buildings or homes that predate this change could have lead pipes, creating a risk of pollution in the water coming out of the tap.

According to TMVW, the water company that services Ghent, Ostend and Bruges, there are two danger points: the connection between the mains and your water meter (which is the responsibility of the water company) and the pipes that run inside the building.

All Flemish water companies are engaged in a programme to replace the connections, says TMVW spokesperson Bruno Pessendorffer: "We are looking at making about 40,000 replacements."

For the pipes inside a building, it's less clear. Those are the responsibility of the owner, and no official statistics exist as to how many buildings could be affected. Even in buildings that have been supposedly renovated or were built after the 1960s, there is no guarantee.

"The safety of tap water depends on how you handle it in your own house"

"Even during renovations, removal of lead pipes was not always considered or was only done partially since, in many cases, the pipes are hard to reach," says Van Den Belt.

Pessendorffer adds: "All buildings constructed after the 1970s should not have any lead, but you can never be sure."

Worryingly, this might include public buildings such as schools and hospitals. "There, the health impact can be really significant," notes Van Den Belt; adds Pessendorffer: "As a rule of thumb, we treat all city centre buildings and housing as suspect."

Action stations

As tighter regulations loom, the Flemish government has launched an action plan to take stock of and to replace lead connections through water companies and to inform the population about the importance of replacing pipes.

"The current non-compliance percentage for lead would increase when the 10 micrograms per litre standard is applied," says Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege. "The action plan has been set up to strengthen and accelerate current efforts for compliance by 2013."

Explaining to the public the risks of lead pollution will be crucial to improving the quality and meeting regulatory requirements. With that in mind, VMM has published an

information booklet telling people how to ascertain if their pipes contain lead or not.

Are they grey? Do they have bends without joints? Do they make a dull thudding noise when struck with a metal object such as a coin? A yes to any of these probably means that the pipes are made of lead. Time to call a plumber and perhaps seek a subsidy from the government to cover the cost of replacement.

In the meantime

Given that in Flanders we each use about five litres of drinking water per day, in one way or another, the idea that it could contain unhealthy levels of lead is alarming. We have known about the dangers of lead in drinking water for a long time, so why wasn't something done sooner?

"Unfortunately, dealing with the issue is very complex, labour intensive and costly," says Schauvliege.

"The European legislation acknowledges this in the phased approach in the standards for lead.... Most of the drinking water suppliers in Flanders started in 2003 with a systematic removal of the lead house connection. So measures have already been taken."

There are precautions that can be taken while waiting for pipes to be changed. According to TMVW, calcium in our water could provide some level of protection as it may coat the inside of the pipes, providing a barrier between the lead and the water.

Failing that, the government recommends that households do not use tap water after stagnation of more than six hours to prepare drinks or food, that they do not use hot water to prepare drinks or food (hot water absorbs lead more easily) and that they use bottled water to prepare baby food.

While using water softeners and filters might seem like a good approach, these can actually reduce the safety of our water by removing the calcium. If they are not carefully maintained, they could also provide a breeding ground for bacteria.

Microbes

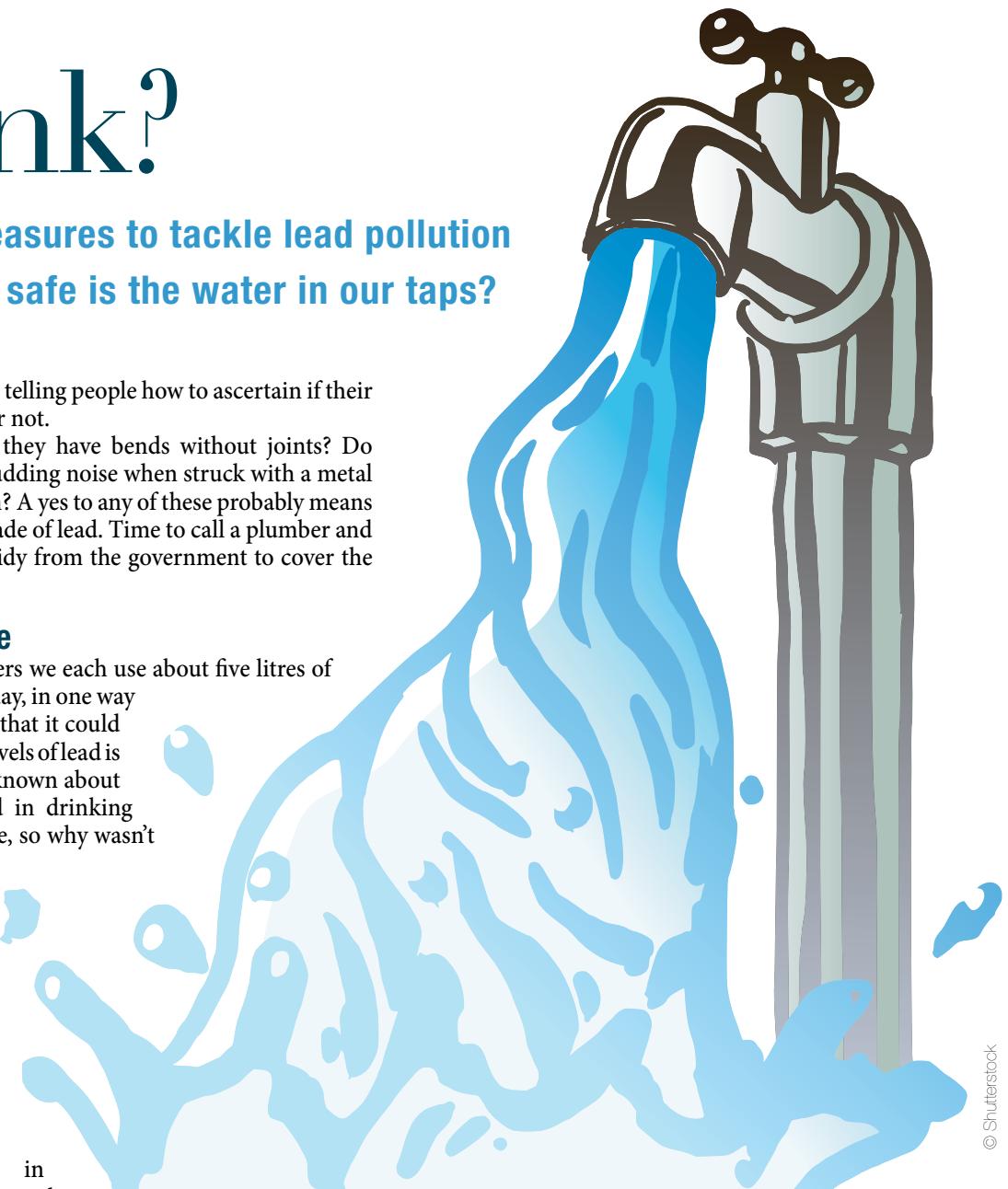
Aside from lead, the ministry is considering how to tackle other health risks in our drinking water, such as pharmaceuticals and substances known as endocrine disruptors, which interfere with our production of hormones.

The topic is a tough one, according to VMM's Van Den Belt, due to the lack of research. "It's a fact that there are a number of compounds out there. Are they capable of ending up in our drinking water? That's a field of knowledge that still has to grow."

Schauvliege says the topic is nevertheless on the agenda and that a study is being carried out to determine the impact such substances could have. "The outcome of this study will be used to develop the future policy on drinking water quality," she says.

Should we just consume more bottled water? Already, Belgium features high up the league table, exceeded only by France, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates and Italy in terms of litres of bottled water consumed per capita. But tap water, with no plastic packaging, is far more environmentally friendly.

Van Den Belt says tap water is still safe to drink as long as you



© Shutterstock

know your pipes are safe. "This campaign does not mean that tap water is unsafe," she assures. "These are precautionary principles. The safety of tap water depends on how you handle it in your own house."

The Flemish Region hopes to have completed the replacement of lead connections by the end of this year. As for the information campaign, that will be implemented on a continuing basis in the hope that building owners will do their bit in time to clean up the water by the EU deadline. ♦

» www.ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-drink

Keeping it clean

Tips for healthier water in your house

- Let the water run for a few minutes first thing in the morning
- Use cold water for preparing food, cooking and making drinks, even hot drinks
- Ensure water softeners and filters are well-maintained and clean
- Use bottled water to prepare baby food and formula
- Don't hang dishcloths, which invariably are a cosy home for bacteria, over the tap



© Belinda Pretorius/Shutterstock

Lotus takes on US market

Speculoos spread to challenge peanut butter supremacy

ALAN HOPE

Speculoos spread – a paste version of the famous sweet biscuit designed to smear on bread – went on open sale last week in the United States, as manufacturers Lotus Bakeries of Lembreke, East Flanders, began an assault on the world's biggest market for confectionery products.

The product will be known in the US as Biscoff Spread, which matches the name (a pairing of "biscuit" and "coffee") of the speculoos biscuits given to passengers of Delta Airlines with their coffee. The spread faces an ambitious challenge – to steal some of the market share held by old favourite peanut butter, by offering an alternative aimed at those allergic to peanuts.

"Apart from the name, this is exactly the same product," as the speculoos spread sold in Belgium, said Lotus CEO Matthieu Boone. "It is produced here in Lembreke and shipped to the United States."

Lotus has high expectations, Boone continued. "The Americans are huge consumers of peanut butter, but there's been nothing new in that segment of the market for years. Our biscuits have been successful for some time in the States, so we thought the time was ripe to bring our spread to the market."

Peanut butter, with or without its traditional accompaniment of jelly, has been a staple of American sandwiches almost since it was first developed in 1894 by the Kellogg brothers (of breakfast cereal fame), who described it as a "pasty adhesive substance" they called "nut butter".

Allergy to peanuts, however, is on the increase, affecting some 3.3 million Americans and leading to such public concern that warnings

are now standard on the packaging of any food that may contain minute traces of peanut. Whether such concern is valid is a matter of discussion, with some experts pointing out that about three times as many people are allergic to seafood and that most peanut allergy sufferers are children, who have been found to grow out of it. Indeed, according to one British survey, early exposure to peanuts was more likely to protect against the allergy than cause it. The climate of concern, however, is something Lotus aims to take advantage of, by positioning its Biscoff Spread as a nut-free alternative. But it's an uphill struggle, admits Marco De Leeuw, in charge of marketing the spread in the US. "Peanut butter is an icon," he said. "The last thing we want to do is say to the customer, drop that and buy this. We aim to create our own niche, an extra pot in the cupboard – the kind of position Nutella has achieved in recent years." Lotus currently makes about €25 million from American sales of its biscuits; Nutella sells about €50 million worth of its spread (which contains nuts); while the peanut butter market is worth about \$1 billion (€720 million).

- Lotus meanwhile has decided not to appeal the decision of a court in Ghent in January that **overturned the company's patent** in speculoos spread (*Flanders Today*, 26 January). The ruling did nothing to stop Lotus' production but did permit other companies to bring out their own versions of the spread, which the court said had been invented prior to 2002, when the recipe appeared on a Dutch website. "The unique taste experience of Lotus speculoos spread backs up the company's opinion that the



cancellation of the patent will have next to no effect on our market position," the company said in a statement. According to some estimates, sales of the product in Belgium alone are worth around €10 million a year.

- Former prime minister **Jean-Luc Dehaene** announced last week that he is stepping down as director of the boards of Lotus Bakeries, materials group Umicore and Leuven-based brewers InBev. He has reached the 70-year age limit for board members of the three companies but remains chairman of the board of Dexia bank and of biotechnology group Thrombogenics.♦

No need to repay state aid, says Peeters

The Ostend Vismijn, or fish market, no longer has to repay aid it received from the city of Ostend, which the EU Commission had decided was illegal, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said last week.

The aid from the city consisted of rent-free land and buildings, loan guarantees and €6 million of start-up capital. There were also benefits for fishing companies that brought their business to Ostend. The aid was contested by the *vismijn* at Zeebrugge and by the Dutch concern Visafslag, who said it was a distortion of fair competition.

The Commission agreed and ordered the aid to be repaid in April last year. However, since then, the Ostend *vismijn* has merged with its Zeebrugge counterpart. Since the merger answers the question of competition, the Commission decided the aid no longer needed to be repaid. Peeters said he was "delighted" when informed of the decision last week. "Any uncertainty that remained has now been removed," he said. "Nothing now stands in the way of the crucial extension of the new fish market."

- The crocus vacation for schools, which ended on Sunday, was the year's first good news for **businesses at the coast**, with occupancy rates climbing to above 80%. "Hotels and restaurants weren't full, but it's still winter, and there's still a lot of competition from the snow," said Linda De Mey of Tourism Blankenberge. "The sunny weather did us a lot of good. Cafes with a terrace will have felt the effects of the sun. The weather can stay like this, as far as we're concerned."♦



Petrol hits record price

The price of petrol hit a record high in Belgium last week, with Euro 95 selling for €1.624 a litre, more than a cent higher than the previous record of €1.61 set in July 2008. The increase of €03.3 is a consequence of the rise of oil prices on international markets. Euro 98 rose by €02.2 to €1.637.

Instability in some countries of the Arab world, meanwhile, means further price rises could be on the way. Diesel now stands at €1.443 a litre, flirting with the record set in May 2008 of €1.469. Last week, budget minister Guy Vanhengel proposed a system for the new budget which would allow excise duty on petrol to be reduced as prices rise. Since higher prices bring in more VAT, he said, the measure would be budget-neutral, while holding prices down for consumers.♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air travel • Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines is launching a Saturday service to Marrakech and Agadir in Morocco next month. Meanwhile, the airline is to acquire four new medium-haul Airbus A319 aircraft and two A320s expected to enter operation later this year.

Autos • Audi

The Brussels-based assembling unit of the successful Audi A1 car is investing a further €270 million over the next five years to develop capacity. Sales of the A1 model, launched last September, have exceeded expectations, with 45,000 vehicles assembled over the last six months. The company expects total sales for the model this year will reach 120,000 vehicles.

Banking • Centea

Centea, an affiliate of Flanders leading financial institution KBC, has been acquired by Landbouwkrediet, the bank specialised in the financing of the agricultural sector, for some €527 million. The deal is a further step in KBC's restructuring required by European authorities following its rescue two years ago. It also doubles the size of Landbouwkrediet, following recent acquisitions of Europabank, the on-line Keytrade bank and the local assets and customer base of the failed Icelandic Kaupthing bank.

Dredging • Deme

Antwerp-based Deme, one of the world's leading dredging firms, has won a €190 million contract for its part in the building of an LNG terminal in Gladstone, Australia, in partnership with the Dutch Van Oord company. The Flemish firm also set up Oceanflore, a joint venture with the Dutch IHC ship building and underwater technology company, to mine the sea bed for minerals and metals off the coast of New Zealand.

Insurance • Apra Leven

Antwerp-based life insurance company Apra Leven has lost its business licence after the country's financial markets regulator CBFA suspended its activities. Contracts of the company's 2,000 clients have been blocked and will be secured by the state-controlled guarantee fund for a maximum of €100,000 each. Apra Leven had made dubious investments in the Spanish and Rumanian property markets.

Technology • Option

Leuven-based wireless technology company Option has further extended its software licensing agreement with the Chinese Huawei, netting some €22 million. A potential further extension of the license worth about €33 million is also included in the deal.

From radio to stage

After spending more than a decade re-inventing itself, the Flemish Radio Choir is taking another leap forward

PATRICE LIEBERMAN

Ask anybody with the faintest interest in music whether they can name a Flemish choir, and chances are they will mention Philippe Herreweghe's hugely successful Collegium Vocale, the world-class Ghent-based chamber choir that celebrated its 40th anniversary last year.

But there is another outstanding Flemish vocal ensemble, even if it until relatively recently shunned the limelight somewhat, confining itself for too long to its historic recording studios at Flagey in Brussels. There is no doubt that the Vlaams Radio Koor, or Flemish Radio Choir, has come a long way these few last years, joining the ranks of Europe's finest chamber vocal ensembles – as their 2009 recording on the Glossa Music label of Kurt Weill's *Berliner Requiem* together with choral works by Hindemith and Milhaud so eloquently attests.

The story of the Vlaams Radio Koor (VRK) is actually a long and distinguished one. Its origins go back as far as 1937 when it was created by the then Belgian National Broadcasting Corporation (now VRT). "The choir had a prestigious past, with a conductor the calibre of Vic Nees, who led it for close to 30 years," says VRK artistic manager Alain De Ley.

But the real turning point came with the appointment of Johan Duijck in 1998, the year in which both the choir and the affiliated orchestra (now Brussels Philharmonic) gained their

independence from the public broadcaster. Duijck's merits are enormous: he gave the VRK the confidence it lacked before and raised the technical level, making them ready to perform before audiences and not just microphones. He was succeeded in 2008 by the Danish Bo Holten, a great musician, composer and conductor, besides being an authority on Renaissance polyphony. An ensemble used to making studio recordings offers many assets to the choir. They are highly flexible and able to tackle any kind of repertoire; they give performances of high quality thanks to ample rehearsal time and are freed of box-office constraints. The choir's programming now rests on two pillars. The a capella repertoire, with five or six programmes per season, is performed mainly in Brussels and Flanders – but also in Wallonia. "We're actually thinking of performing together with the excellent Namur Chamber Choir", notes De Ley. Collaboration increases VRK's opportunities to perform with foreign orchestras.

Now it's time for another change: French composer Hervé Niquet has been named VRK's new chief conductor. "Frankly, it's a match made in heaven," says De Ley. "We toured twice with his Le Concert Spirituel orchestra, and you could feel this chemistry right from the beginning. Hervé is crazy about the choir, and it's reciprocal."

From next season, Niquet will lead the VRK and be the Brussels Philharmonic's first guest



The Vlaams Radio Koor performs James MacMillan's *St John Passion* on 18 March in Brussels and on 19 March in Ghent

conductor. His three-year contract should see him spend eight to 10 weeks per year with the choir. He will continue to lead the 24-member ensemble in a capella, as well as vocal-orchestral repertoire, focusing especially on Classical and early Romantic, not to mention the Prix de Rome series of which at least five double CDs are planned.

"What we won't do", insists De Ley, "is cover Baroque repertoire. We don't want to enter into a competition with Hervé's own Concert Spirituel choir for the French repertoire, nor with Collegium Vocale in Bach and the German

repertoire. Besides, our first mission is to perform contemporary and Flemish music." This was confirmed by Gunther Broucke, general manager of both the Brussels Philharmonic and the VRK: "One of the reasons we opted for a French conductor is that we want to position ourselves on the international stage. Whereas the Austro-German repertoire is largely represented, there are huge stretches of early Romantic French choral-orchestral repertoire that demand to be rediscovered." ♦

→ www.vlaamsradiokoor.be

Long day's journey into literature

Biennial festival Passa Porta invades Brussels

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

Passa Porta prides itself on being the biggest literary festival in the Benelux, thereby conveniently neglecting Crossing Border in The Hague, but what the heck: it is quite impressive. Thrown by the literature house of the same name, the festival collects 100 authors from 30 countries and spreads them out across 24 different locations in Brussels. And on a few trains travelling to the capital.

Those trains are more than a gimmick, since they're referring to the central theme of the festival, "On the Move". Travelling and literature seem to be intertwined, and far from only in travel literature. Writers create their own fictional world into which they invite the reader. Every good book is like going on an expedition. Travelling into someone's head is discovering new ground. Many of the guests, like Danish writers Jens Christian Grøndahl and Dutch author Connie Palmen, address this.

But "On the Move" also covers real travelling. Passa Porta has invited some frequent flyers to talk about their journeys: the Dutch Ramsey Nasr and Abdelkader Benali, for instance, and the Bosnian Saša Staničić. And the festival asked Flemish author Anne Provoost to swap houses with her Walloon colleague Alain Bertrand. They'll meet for the first time in the flesh at the festival and talk about their experiences. On the final day of the festival is a writers' parcours: 20 spots in Brussels will be filled with writers reciting, reading, debating, being interviewed and challenging

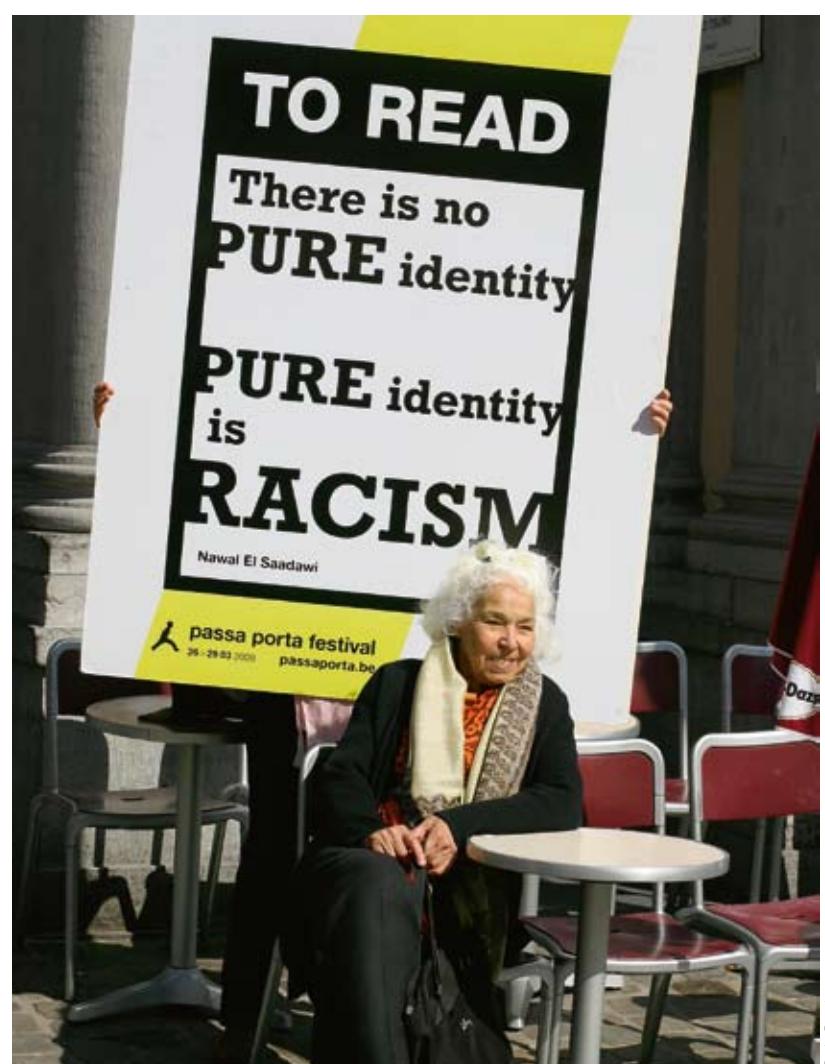
their audience. But the previous days are not merely a warm-up. *Letters to Europe*, on Friday in the KVS, is an evening with more than 20 authors from all corners of the world, who will contemplate on Fortress Europe, still seen as the continent of milk and honey. Rightfully so, or not?

And on Saturday some of the big names of the festival will gather in De Munt to tackle the main On the Move theme: Péter Esterházy, mainstay of Hungarian literature; Frenchman Philippe Claudel (also known as the director of *Il y a longtemps que je t'aime* (*I've Loved You So Long*)); Italian Sandro Veronesi (*Quiet Chaos*) and more.

It's difficult to imagine such a widely varied literature festival – more than 10 languages will be heard, translation into Dutch and French will always be offered – in a city other than Brussels, a crossroads of cultures and a multi-ethnic metropolis on a human scale. ♦

Passa Porta Festival

24-27 March
Across Brussels
→ www.passaporta.be



Egyptian author and activist Nawal El Saadawi at the previous Passa Porta Festival

New face at the podium

French conductor Hervé Niquet picks up the baton for the VRK

I met Hervé Niquet in his dressing room at Paris' Salle Pleyel, just before he returned to the stage to lead the combined forces of the Vlaams Radio Koor (VRK) and his Le Concert Spirituel ensemble for the final rehearsal of Haydn's *Creation*.

The Concert Spirituel and the VRK have been working together for several years. "It clicked right from the very beginning, and this reciprocal interest is still going strong. So, rather than live in sin why not make our relationship official?" says the flamboyant and charismatic French maestro.

"I want the VRK to have its own personality, put at the service of an artistic project," Niquet continues. "I immediately excluded performing Baroque music, but they'll be free to do that under other conductors if they so wish."

Together with VRK artistic manager Alain De Ley, Niquet has identified what the choir could do in the future, "such as 20th-century British and American music, of which they've done very little so far," explains Niquet. "I'm also interested in Romantic music for male choir with piano. Of course, French music will occupy a special place: we've already recorded two albums of Prix de Rome cantatas by Debussy and Saint-Saëns, and there's more to come. Do you know that there are literally thousands of pieces written in 19th-century France, where the choir is often just accompanied by a violin, cello, harp and harmonium? It's worth being curious and doing a little bit of research."

But Niquet – a harpsichordist, pianist, vocalist and composer – is certainly not only interested in music of the past. "I really would like to promote choral pieces by composers who've turned their backs on both serialism and minimalism."



© Nicole Bergé

A little pomp with your circumstance: new VRK conductor Hervé Niquet

As well as conducting the VRK, Niquet is also the Brussels Philharmonic's first guest conductor of the 2011-2012 season. "I would love to bring the orchestra closer to singing," he shares. "It would be great to give little-known oratorios and operas in concert, not to mention all those Prix de Rome cantatas. I'm really taken by the BP's sonority: they actually do sound like a golden age French orchestra – with a better technique!"

Niquet's approach can be best summed up when he says that "every concert should be an event. You know, audiences are curious: let's trust them!" (PL)

→ www.concertspirituel.com



Jens Christian Grøndahl

The Danish author Jens Christian Grøndahl, whose work is hardly available in English, is one of the two guests of honour of Passa Porta. On Thursday night in Passa Porta he gives the inaugural address, in which he, being not only a novelist, but also a philosopher and essayist, will reflect on the festival's theme "On the Move". He has promised to speak about the reader as a traveller gone astray, trying to find their way home by exploring the world through literature. You can also hear him in De Munt on Saturday and in Le Vaudeville on Sunday.



Orhan Pamuk

Orhan Pamuk, winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize for Literature – the only Turkish writer to receive that award – is the other guest of honour of the festival. The author of *Snow*, *The Black Book* and *The White Castle* will be closing the Passa Porta Festival on Sunday night in the big room of Bozar. He'll be talking about the relationship between Turkey and Europe, but he'll also ponder the ability of a novelist to empathise with others and the political implications of such actions. Regarding the controversy in nationalist Turkish circles about his work, this might turn out to be an explosive lecture.

A poetic youth

LISA BRADSHAW

Bavo Defurne's film debut is a first for Flanders



At the end of the new film *Noordzee, Texas* (North Sea, Texas), hidden deep in the credits, is this statement: "This film is dedicated to all the kids whose parents wouldn't let them take part in the film. It gets better."

Anyone who has seen the online "it gets better" campaigns of last year will understand what this means: successful gay adults try to convince socially ravaged gay youth that life will improve. It turns out that a number of boys who were called to audition for the parts of Pim and Gino in Bavo Defurne's feature film debut, were not allowed to go. "One boy called crying," remembers Defurne. "He said: 'my father won't allow me to kiss a boy, not even for a film.' I was shocked that such an innocent film provoked such a heavy reaction."

One person's innocence is another's taboo: *Noordzee, Texas*, which opens in cinemas this week, is the story of two adolescent boys who fall in love at the Flemish coast in a time that looks like the 1960s, amid little sisters and absent mothers, deep friers and sad cafes. Pim (Jelle Florizoone) is in wondrous awe of his friend Gino (Mathias Vergels), a couple of years older and with a family Pim wishes he had instead of his own mother (a mesmerising Yvette Bulteel), who lives in a faded beauty queen fantasy world with her accordion and revolving boyfriends.

As the years go by, the two boys discover that their attraction goes beyond friendship. Eventually, a sleep over in a tent in the dunes provides the perfect opportunity, as the camera pans away to ocean waves and curtains fluttering in the wind. Although Flemish films are very good at integrating

queer characters into their plots, I cannot recall a Flemish film about adolescent gay youth. Neither can Defurne: "I may have made the first one."

It's an adaptation of André Sollie's 2005 novella *Nooit gaat dit over* (*This Will Never Go Away*). Defurne, 39, is trained as a video artist and has made a handful of short films. "André Sollie is basically a poet and an illustrator, which makes the book very visual and poetic. Those were two reasons for me to adapt this book and be faithful to it. I liked his style."

Innocent and poetic: words that indeed describe the style of *Noordzee, Texas*, which tells its story with a great deal of respect for all of its characters and refreshingly leaves behind that so-often tragic gay finale. "I grew up in Ostend and, after living in Brussels for 15 years, I decided to go back," says Defurne. "Most people go back when they're 65. The film is about making decisions now to do what you really want to do with your life. Give yourself the opportunity to follow your dreams." Except for shots of the beach and sea, most of *Noordzee, Texas*, was not actually filmed at the coast. "The houses are in Zelzate, the cafe is in Astene, near Deinze," says Defurne with a smile. The team found the perfect 1960s houses in the former, an amazing example of 1950s modern architecture in the latter. "We are not realistic or naturalistic filmmakers," says Defurne. "I don't want to show people what they see when they look out their windows. I want to show people what they can see when they close their eyes."♦

→ www.noordzeetexas.be



David Mitchell

In his highly praised novels – *Cloud Atlas* and, most recently, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* – British author David Mitchell criss-crosses the globe (and jumps through time). He has lived in Italy and Japan, so he's close to the central theme of the festival. His books are daring constructions that never feel like merely constructions, since they engage the reader strongly on an emotional level. Mitchell will be in De Munt on Saturday and interviewed in KVS on Sunday.



Erwin Mortier

The Flemish author of amazing novels such as *Godenslaap* and *Mijn tweede huid* (*My Fellow Skin*) created the book *Niemand weet dat ik een mens ben* (*Nobody Knows That I'm Human*) – about underage refugees – together with photographer Lieve Blancquaert. On Sunday, they invite some of the book's subjects to the Begijnhofkerk. A bit earlier that day, in the nearby film school Rits, Mortier reads – in Dutch and French – from his first novel *Marcel*.

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Triumph of De Wit

Mechelen is home to one of the world's foremost tapestry makers and restorers

ANNA JENKINSON

Hidden away in a 15th-century house in the heart of Mechelen is one of the world's most important tapestry restorers, the Royal Manufacturers De Wit. Founded in 1889, the workshop today counts the Louvre, Prado and Metropolitan museums among its many clients.

De Wit has cleaned and restored famous wall tapestries in all of the top collections, including the Patrimonio Nacional of Spain, the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna and France's public collections. Among its most prestigious projects was the conservation of "The Story of David and Bathsheba" for the National Museum of the Renaissance in Ecouen, probably the most important series woven after 1500 and conserved in France.

But De Wit makes tapestries, too, carrying on a centuries-old tradition in Flanders, and passing on the craft to new workers. Though there isn't much call for new tapestries in the modern world, acquiring the skill makes it easier to carry out the conservation work, explains Ann Van Tuerenhout, my guide around the De Wit workshop.

I never doubted that weaving would be difficult, but watching one of the workers on the loom highlights just how tricky it is. For starters, the weaver is looking at the back of the tapestry, not the front where the beautiful image is being formed. For an experienced weaver, this is completely natural, explains Van Tuerenhout, and she (nowadays it is usually a she) can immediately tell from the reverse side if the weaving is progressing well.

An illustration of the image and numbers indicating particular colours to be used are placed underneath the warp (lengths of yarn held taut), and then the weft (lengths of yarn that are woven)

is passed over and under before being pushed down with a fork-like instrument to keep the threads tight. The worker presses two pedals to control the warp and the weft. Needless to say, this whole intricate procedure, which to me looked like the artistic equivalent of playing the harp, takes years of practice. The amount of time it takes to learn the craft is why De Wit is keen for prospective employees to see a job with them as something long term. Other requirements to become a tapestry weaver at De Wit are the ability to sew a button on properly, to work under stress and to be an absolute perfectionist. The work is, therefore, better suited to women, Van Tuerenhout says with a smile. That said, in the Middle Ages this craft was only done by men.

The work is also slow going, with an experienced weaver only able to cover approximately the area of one hand in a day. In earlier centuries, less work would have been done during the short, winter days because of the need to weave by daylight rather than candlelight. The speed of work also depends on which part of the tapestry is being woven, with a face clearly taking longer than a neutral area. In the past, certain weavers would become renowned for, say, animals or flowers, similar to how paintings were created in big workshops. Such fascinating titbits of information are sprinkled throughout public tours, which also provides a wonderful lesson in how to view a tapestry. The borders, colours and signatures, for example, are all features to look out for and that help date the piece.

Where that tapestry has been

In Flanders, the craft of tapestry essentially started in the mid-14th century when wall tapestries were a luxury item that the rich



Royal Manufacturers De Wit works mostly on restorations of tapestries, shipped to them from across the world

transported between their winter and summer residences. Tapestries were a symbol of wealth and also served as insulation for castle walls against both the cold of the winter and the heat of the summer.

This constant back and forth led to a design change, with plain borders being added by the end of the 15th century in order to protect the tapestries during their journeys. This design development is a key factor that helps experts determine the date of a tapestry, Van Tuerenhout notes. From the practical border, more elaborate borders developed in the 17th century, to which were added once again smaller plain borders to avoid damage. As of the 18th century, borders fell out of fashion as the tapestries were moved around much less.

Another dating feature for tapestries

is the range of colours, with early works having a much more limited palette. A further hallmark is a signature, which started to be added

in the 16th century. The signature might be in the form of a name or a coat of arms. For example, on one tapestry in the De Wit collection are the letters MRAUBUSSON, indicating the Manufactures Royales Aubusson.

Accompanying many tapestries

was a parchment acting as proof of quality and including details such as who ordered the work, its price and where it was manufactured. All this information is like a treasure trove for archivists and experts.

Among its many resources, De Wit has a specialised library and a digital databank, with more than 14,000 tapestries inventoried, for iconographic and historical research. In addition to cleaning, restoring and making tapestries, De Wit also offers expert appraisal services and technical analyses of

fibres, dyes and metal threads.

De Wit can also hang tapestries in private or public premises or in particularly difficult places, having, for instance, taken down and re-hung the largest tapestry in the world in the main entrance hall of the United Nations building in New York. It was appropriate: "Triumph of Peace" was woven by De Wit in 1952.

As I left the De Wit workshop, a former refuge of Tongerlo Abbey, and walked back across the cobbled path and past its garden of beautifully clipped shrubs, I couldn't help but feel a tinge of nostalgia for the days when making tapestries played a more important role than the present-day work of restoration.♦

→ www.dewit.be



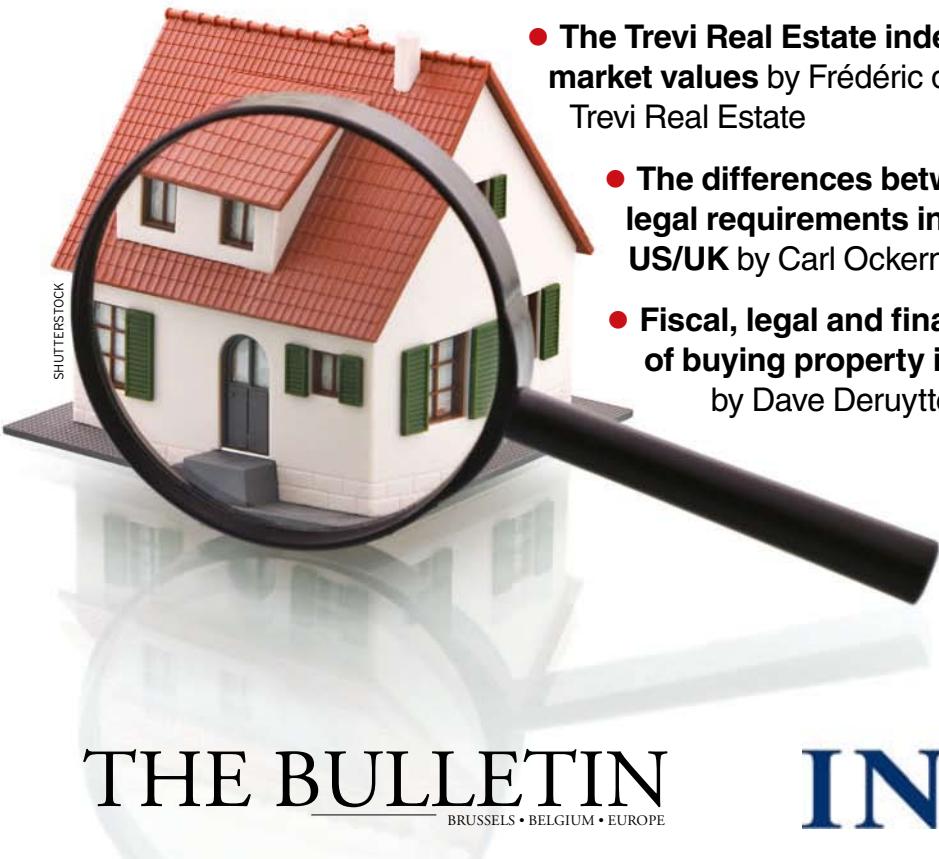
"Triumph of Peace", the world's largest tapestry, was made by De Wit in the 1950s and hangs in the entrance hall of the United Nations building in New York



A 15th-century mansion in Mechelen houses De Wit, which is open to guided tours

The Bulletin, ING Belgium and xpats.com invite you
to attend an information seminar on

the real estate market in Belgium



- The Trevi Real Estate index of property market values by Frédéric de Bueger, partner, Trevi Real Estate
- The differences between real estate legal requirements in Belgium and the US/UK by Carl Ockerman, notary
- Fiscal, legal and financial implications of buying property in Belgium by Dave Deruytter, ING

March 22 2011
Doors open at 17.30
Seminar starts at 18.00
ING Auditorium
Avenue Marnix, 24
1000 Brussels
(entrance via Rue du Trône 1)

Attendance is FREE
Register by March 18
at events@ackroyd.be

THE BULLETIN
BRUSSELS • BELGIUM • EUROPE

ING 

xpats.com



Al het stadsnieuws in 3 talen
Toute l'info régionale en 3 langues
The local news in 3 languages

 www.tvbrussel.be 

Agenda

Open Door Day

Limburg has a new state-of-the-art visitor's centre in Peer. The grand opening on 20 March offers interactive displays, films and samples of Limburg products
→ www.peer.be



FLANDERS TODAY
MARCH 16, 2011



© Wim Vandekeybus

Radical Wrong

KATY DESMOND

Radical Wrong, which premiered earlier this month as part of Hasselt's Krokus Festival, is not by Wim Vandekeybus. At least, that is what the 47-year-old choreographer says, calling it "a performance in which I no longer exist."

And so it is, to an extent. On the credits page, the talented, international cast of seven performers is listed as the show's creators, and what formerly read: "Direction, Choreography & Scenography - Wim Vandekeybus" is crossed out in red marker and replaced by a large expletive.

However, as one of Belgium's (and Europe's) top choreographers, known for creating risky and intriguing performances, *Radical Wrong* has Vandekeybus' fingerprints all over it.

Having tellingly opened at Hasselt's international festival of youth theatre, this entertaining, honest theatre/dance fusion by Vandekeybus' troupe Ultima Vez hinges on a single theme: youth - its rebellions, concessions, enthusiasms and confusions. It is at times playful, at times gruesome - just like being a teenager.

Celebrating the spirit of youth, but not really the actual experience of it, the performers enact various scenes of adolescence, set in a tent-scattered camp recognisable by anyone who has ever attended a summer musical festival.

These characters are rowdy, frustrated, profane, highly sexed

and entirely selfish - chanting "It's all about me, but you shouldn't agree." You can't help but like them.

They soliloquise about the things they would love to do - say, wear a raincoat and flash groups of schoolgirls or tell their parents they are homosexual just for fun - but are met with a taunting chorus: "So why don't you do that?" Identity is a major theme. The polyglot cast continually builds up and tears down Babels of urges, desires and complaints as they constantly run the line between conformity and rebellion. Their dance depicts youth as a (often violent) struggle as they try to examine themselves and their place in national, political, religious, sexual and familial contexts.

Vandekeybus lists his target audience between 12 and 18 years, but in many ways this show is built for an older audience, deriving much of its power and humour from the recognition of experience.

Listening to a 13-year-old behind me giggle at some of the more dramatic moments - the symbolic rape of a young girl or the birth of the resulting baby - it occurred to me that the adolescent and post-adolescent audience members were watching two different performances. What I found poignant or laughable now might have years ago left me feeling anxious - and vice versa.

One of the most refreshing

aspects of *Radical Wrong* is that Vandekeybus never imposes a larger moral on his story. "I don't start from a fixed truth," he told *Staalkaart* magazine. "If you are young, there is no truth; there is only possibility." Instead, it is left to the viewer - child or adult - to decide what they find radically right or wrong.

However, on the question of

conformity versus rebellion,

Vandekeybus does offer a hint

at his own views: "It is good to

be accepted, but it is better to be

special."

16-17 March, 20.00

Schouwburg 30CC
Brusselsestraat 63, Leuven

30 March, 20.00

MaZ
Magdalenastraat 27, Bruges

For a complete schedule of performances,
see website

→ www.ultimavez.com



MORE ON STAGE THIS WEEK

The Game is Up! → *Vooruit, Ghent*

Company Francine De Veylder → *De Werf, Aalst*

José Navas & Compagnie Flak → *Casino Koksijde*



Antwerp

Kelly's Irish Pub
Keyserlei 27; www.kellys.be
MAR 17 & 20 16.00/22.30 Pat Kelly
MAR 17-18 20.00/22.30 Steve Keane

Lotto Arena

Schijnpoortweg 119; 070.345.345
www.sportpaleis.be
MAR 18 20.00 Ozark Henry

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 070.345.345
www.sportpaleis.be
MAR 19 20.30 Kylie Minogue

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00
www.trixonline.be
MAR 17 20.00 A Clean Kitchen is a Happy Kitchen + Soldier Six
MAR 18 19.00 Overkill + Destruction + Heathen + After All
MAR 23 20.00 The Chariot + Mychildren Mybride + Campus + Doyle

Ardoorie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82
www.deschaduw.net
MAR 18 20.00 Tom Pintens + Lucas & Pieter

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
www.abconcerts.be
MAR 17 Yael Naim
MAR 18 Melingo
MAR 19 Iamx

Halles de Schaarbeek

Koninklijke Sint-Mariastraat 22;
02.218.21.07
www.halles.be
MAR 17 20.30 Rodolphe Burger

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
www.cirque-royal.org
MAR 23 20.30 Gospel pour 100 voix

La Porte Noire

Cellebroersstraat 67
www.laportenoire.be
MAR 18 21.00 St Patrick J-2 with Ceilí Moss

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
www.botanique.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 16 Tina Dico + Helgi Hrafn Jonsson. Arbouretum + JD Meatyard
MAR 18 Honest House label night featuring Traffico, Taifun & Coyote MAR 19 Gang of Four. A Hawk and a Hacksaw
MAR 22 Treefight for Sunlight. Sophie Hunger **MAR 23** The Go! Team

Piola Libri

Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91
www.piolalibri.be
MAR 18 18.00 4th anniversary party featuring Cialtroneight
MAR 19 18.30 Sergio Caputo unplugged + Gappa

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 070.660.601
www.freedomnight.be
MAR 19 10.00-6.00 Freedom Night featuring Soldout, Sander Kleinenberg & Shameboy

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
www.vkconcerts.be
MAR 17 21.00 M.O.P
MAR 18 21.00 Uzul + Brain Damage + Kaly Live Dub

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
www.forestnational.be
MAR 23 20.00 Slayer & Megadeth

Ghent

Charlatan
Vlaamsestraat 6; 09.224.24.57
www.charlatan.be
MAR 23 20.00 The Blackberry Bushes + The Grave Brothers

GET YOUR
TICKETS NOW!

The Beauty Queen of Leenane

24 March to 2 April, 20.00

The Warehouse Studio
Brussels

It's been called twisted, darkly funny, tragic and perfectly plotted; Martin McDonagh's first play is the next production of the Irish Theatre Group. Under the direction of Liz Merrill, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is the tale of a mother and daughter playing out their toxic relationship in a prison of their own making. In their bizarre battle for power, it is impossible to know who is manipulating whom. Then a man enters the scene, giving the daughter hope for a new life.



→ www.irishtheatregroup.com

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.91.65
www.handelsbeurs.be
MAR 23 20.15 Intergalactic Lovers + Faustine Hollander

Kinky Star
Vlaamsestraat 9; 09.223.48.45
www.kinkystar.com
MAR 19 21.00 Parade Ground
MAR 20 21.00 SX
MAR 22 21.00 Rat Ka Bay Bal

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Conservatoriumplein 1; 056.37.06.44
www.dekreun.be
MAR 19 20.00 Warriorz with Rustie + Free The Robots + Take, more



Antwerp

Buster
Kaastru 1; 03.232.51.53
www.busterpodium.be
MAR 16 21.30 Playtime Session **MAR 17** 22.00 The Bobby James Family
MAR 22 21.30 JazzNight **MAR 23** 21.30 Playtime Session

De Hopper

Leopold De Waelstraat 2; 03.248.49.33
www.cafehopper.be
MAR 20 16.00 Harry Happel & guests
MAR 22 21.00 Jam session

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40
www.deroma.be
MAR 18 20.30 Philip Catherine Trio: Tribute to Chet

Brussels

Atelier 210
Sint-Pieterssteenweg 210; 02.732.25.98
www.atelier210.be
MAR 21 20.00 Manuel Hermia Trio

Agenda

FLANDERS TODAY
MARCH 16, 2011

CC Jette
De Smet de Naeyerlaan; 02.426.64.39
www.tgo.be/2.htm
MAR 23 20.30 Tom Goldschmidt & Blue Heat

Charliermuseum
Kunstlaan 16; 02.218.53.82
www.charliermuseum.be
MAR 17 12.30 Nicolas Kummert Voices

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
www.jazzstation.be
MAR 16 20.30 Nicolas Kummert **MAR 18** 20.00 Sweet & Hot **MAR 19** 18.00 Phil Abraham Trio **MAR 23** 20.30 Ruby

Le Bar du Matin
Alsembergsesteenweg 172; 02.537.71.59
www.bardumatrin.be
MAR 17 21.00 Kind & Kinky Zoo

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
www.soundsjazzclub.be
MAR 17 22.00 Michel Hatzigeorgiou, 23.00 Mess Trio **MAR 18** 22.00 Phishbachers New York Electric Trio **MAR 19** 22.00 Leonardo Cesari Jazz Combo **MAR 21** 22.00 Master Session with Erik Vermeulen **MAR 22** 22.00 Borderline Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
www.themusicvillage.com
MAR 16 20.30 Winchovski Quartet **MAR 18** 21.00 Christine Flowers **MAR 19** 21.00 The Vintage Jazz Cats **MAR 23** 20.30 Myrddin De Cauter Solo

Théâtre Molière
Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00
www.muziekpubliek.be
MAR 18 20.00 Hans Mortelmans & group, Osman Martins & Pierre Gillet (Brazil) **MAR 19** 20.00 Mor Karbasi (Israel) **MAR 23** 20.00 Renato Borghetti (Brazil)

Viage
Anspachlaan 30; 070.44.34.43
www.viage.be
MAR 18 22.00 Latin Club featuring Los Bandidos Del Viage **MAR 19** 22.00 Bai Kamara Jr **MAR 23** 20.00 Recording of VTM's Anne's Vlaamse Tien



Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.292.36.80
www.amuz.be
MAR 19 21.00 Thomas Baeté & friends: concert on the theme of 'Melancholia', featuring music by Paolo Firenze, Dowland, Britten, more **MAR 20** 15.00 Le Banquet Céleste with Damien Guillot, countertenor; Céline Scheen, soprano: Pergolesi, Bach

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
www.desingel.be
MAR 16 20.00 Pentaëdre wind quintet; Christoph Prégardien, tenor: Schubert's Winterreise

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
www.concertgebouw.be
MAR 19 20.00 Marc Mauillon, voice; Vivabiancaluna Biffi, voice, vedel; Angélique Mauillon, gothic harp; Pierre Hamon, flutes, tambourines, concept, musical direction: music by Guillaume de Machaut

Brussels

Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00
www.bozar.be
MAR 16 12.40 Eva Korniszewski, piano; Adam Korniszewski, violin: Bartók, Prokofiev. 20.00 Vadim Repin, violin; Nikolai Lugansky, piano: Grieg, Elgar, Franck **MAR 18 & 20** 20.00/15.00 Belgian National Orchestra conducted by Walter Weller with: Brahms, Bruch, Beethoven **MAR 20** 20.00 De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ludovic Morlot: Dutilleux, Mozart, Britten

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20
www.flagey.be
MAR 18 20.15 Brussels Philharmonic, Octopus Chamber Choir and Flemish Radio Choir: James MacMillan's St John Passion **MAR 21** 19.30 Charlemagne Orchestra for Europe conducted by Bartholomeus-Henri Van de Velde: Chopin, Gorecki

Miniemerk

Miniemerstraat 62; 02.511.93.84
www.miniemer.net
MAR 17 20.00 Cuarteto Ariel Hernandez, instrumental tango **MAR 18** 20.30 Shoghaken Folk Ensemble (Armenia) **MAR 19** 20.30 Constantinople & guests: Paths to the summit (Iran/Canada) **MAR 20** 20.00 Ialma (Spain)

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
www.abconcerts.be
MAR 16 20.00 Estrella Morente **MAR 17** 20.00 Yael Naim

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20
www.art-base.be
MAR 18 20.00 Silvia Abalos (Mexico)

La Samaritaine
Samaritanesestraat 16; 02.511.33.95
www.lasamaritaine.be
Until MAR 19 20.30 Duo Volkanik

Maison des Musiques
Lebeaustraat 39; 02.550.13.20

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
www.kcb.be
MAR 21 20.00 Trio Avanesyan: Haydn, Shostakovich, Arno Babadjanyan

MAR 22 20.00 Collegium Vocale Gent conducted by Philippe Herreweghe: Josquin Desprez **MAR 20** 10.30 Miniemenkerk Choir and Orchestra conducted by Benoît Jacquemin: Purcell, Meder, Bach

Ghent
De Bijloke
Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2; 09.269.92.92
www.debijloke.be
MAR 19 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic, Flemish Radio Choir & Octopus Symphonic Choir conducted by James MacMillan: St John Passion

MAR 23 20.00 Isabelle Faust, violin

Jean-Guihen Queyras, cello; Alexander Melnikov, piano: Haydn, Schumann, Beethoven

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.91.65
www.handelsbeurs.be
MAR 16 20.15 De Munt Chamber Ensemble conducted by Peter Tomek: Stravinsky

Leuven
Kapel Romaanse Poort
Brusselsestraat 63; 016.23.84.27
www.30cc.be
MAR 20 11.00 Thomas Baeté, Romina Lischka, viola da gama: John Jenkins, Tobias Hume, more



Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
www.demunt.be
Until MAR 30 15.00/19.00 Mozart's La Finta Giardiniera with De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Nelson/Peter Tomek, staged by Karl-Ernst & Ursel Herrmann (in Italian with French and Dutch surtitles)



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
www.desingel.be
MAR 16 20.00 Pentaëdre wind quintet; Christoph Prégardien, tenor: Schubert's Winterreise

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
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Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900
www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

MAR 21-23 20.00 Bounce Streetdance Company in Insane in the brain, hip-hop infused performance based on One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Brussels

Kaaistudio's
Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
www.kaaistudio.be

Until MAR 19 20.00 Un Peu De Tendresse Bordel De Merde!, choreographed by Dave St-Pierre (ages 18 and up)

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900
www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

MAR 21-23 20.00 Bounce Streetdance Company in Insane in the brain, hip-hop infused performance based on One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Brussels

Kaaistudio's
Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
www.kaaistudio.be

Until MAR 19 20.30 Walk+Talk, internationally renowned Austrian choreographer Philipp Gehrmacher has compiled a new series for Kaaistudio where ten choreographers talk about their language of movement

Kaaistudio

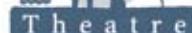
Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59
www.kaaistudio.be

MAR 22-APR 8 Rosas Early Works Festival: Four early pieces by Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker

Leuven

30CC - Schouwburg
Bondgenotenlaan 21; 016.23.84.27
www.30CC.be

MAR 16-17 20.00 Ultima Vez in Radical Wrong, choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus



Antwerp

Arenbergschouwburg
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.222.192
www.arenbergschouwburg.be

MAR 21 13.30-16.00 Krauwelenhof en Hoveberg in You'll Never Walk Alone, variety show for mentally handicapped youth (in Dutch)

MAR 21-22 20.30 David Dermez in De kudde is in aantocht (The Herd is Coming), monologue (in Dutch)

Fakkeltre Rode Zaal

Hoogstraat 12; 070.246.036

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

The Minister's Black Veil

30 March to 2 April

deSingel, Antwerp

Romeo Castellucci's elaborate and symbolic adaptations of literary and theatrical classics, such as *Julius Caesar* and Dante's "Inferno", have made him the toast of theatre festivals across Europe and of Brussels two years ago when his production of the opera *Parsifal* ran at De Munt. Now the Italian brings *The Minister's Black Veil* to deSingel. Based on a chapter in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, it takes on, as Castellucci so often does, appearance and identity in religion, when a pastor suddenly decides to hide his face from the public. There's also a chance to meet the director when he talks with Flemish artists and theatremakers, including Jan Fabre, on 2 April.



www.desingel.be

Brussels

www.fakkeltreter.be
MAR 18-26 20.30 Bart Van Avermaet and Marijke Hofkens in *Onweerstaanbaar (Irresistible)*, directed by Bert Cosemans (in Dutch)

Fakkeltre Zwarre Zaal
Reyndersstraat 7; 03.232.14.69
www.fakkeltreter.be
Until MAR 27 15.00/20.30 De Koepoort 15 by Randall Van Duytakom, directed by Hans De Munter (in Dutch)
MAR 16 20.30 De Improfeten, improvisational theatre with live music (in Dutch)

Het Paleis

Theaterplein 1; 03.202.83.11
www.hetpaleis.be
Until APR 16 20.00 Kakkewieten in Apocalyp Wauw, directed by Adriaan Van den Hoof (in Dutch)

Klokhuus Theatre

Parochiaanstraat 4; 03.231.76.87
www.vlaamsfruit.be
MAR 18 20.30 Philippe De Maertelaere in Moeder, waarom lachen wij? (Mother, Why Are We Laughing?), autobiographical monologue (in Dutch)

MAR 19 20.30 Toneelgroep Het Volk in De drie verdrietige eenzame mannen (The Three Sad, Lonely Men) (in Dutch)

Luchtbol Cultuurcentrum

Columbiestraat 8; 03.543.90.30
www.ccluchtbol.be
MAR 17 20.30 De Spelerij in *Othello* by Shakespeare, directed by Paula Bangels (in Dutch)

Monty

Montignystraat 3-5; 03.238.91.81
www.monty.be
MAR 17-19 20.30 Wunderbaum and Touki Delphine in *Songs at the End of the World*, musical theatre

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900
www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

Until MAR 19 20.00 Monty Python's Spamalot, musical (in Dutch)

MAR 17 & 19 20.00 Deborah De Ridder in *Tell Me on a Sunday* (in Dutch)

Toneelhuis/Bourla

Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44
www.toneelhuis.be

MAR

MAAC
Kartuizerstraat 26-28
www.maac.be

Until MAR 19 Drawing in an Expanded Field, group show to honour the 300th anniversary of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (also at ARBA and De Markten)

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until JUNE 5 Walter Leblanc, kinetic and optical works by the Belgian artist

Sint-Gorikshallen
Sint-Goriksplein 23; 02.502.44.24
www.sintgorikshallen.be

Until APR 31 Brussels Boutiques: from Art Nouveau to Present Day, a history of Brussels shops and window displays

WIELS
Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.340.00.50
www.wiels.org

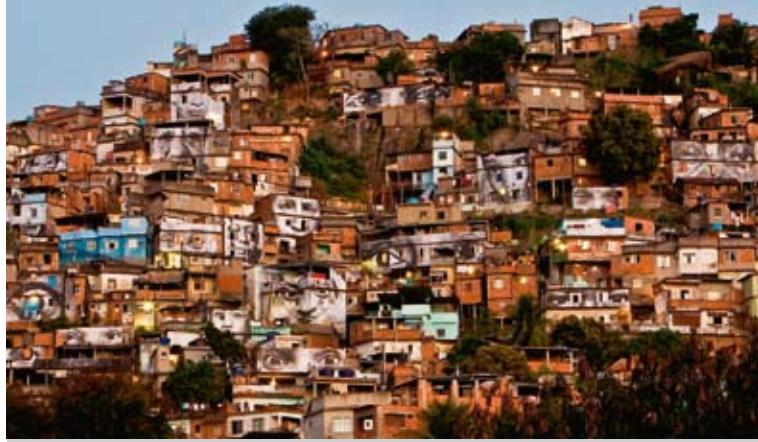
Until MAY 15 David Claerbout, photographs by the Flemish photographer

Ghent

Bank van de Arbeid
Volderstraat 1; 051.42.42.11
www.lannoevents.be

Until MAY 6 Lieve Blancquaert:

WEEK IN FILM



LISA BRADSHAW

Afrika Film Festival

25 March to 9 April

Across Leuven

Of the many film events in the next couple of weeks, Leuven's Afrika Film Festival is the star of the show. With its 50 films, debates and numerous guest stars, it's a must for anyone interested in film from the continent. It being an impossibly large and diverse continent, the festival tries to offer some guidance, with a focus this year on Mozambique, Burundi and other countries in the east of Africa.

One of these is the Oscar-nominated short film *Na Wewe*, a clever Belgian/Burundi co-production in which guards at a roadblock must separate the Hutus from the Tutsis – a task that turns out to be more difficult than expected. The genocide also figures in *Rwanda: Beyond the Deadly Pit*, in which director Gilbert Ndahayo confronts the murders of members of his own family. Ndahayo will be present to talk about his film.

The Burundi Film Centre, meanwhile, hosts a set of short films, and also from east Africa is the feature film *The Athlete*, which relates the story of Ethiopian Abebe Bikila, who stunned the world by running barefoot to win Olympic gold in 1960.

The Afrika Film Festival also includes concerts, readings and

photographer, retrospective of the Flemish photographer's work over the past 25 years

MIAT
Minnemeers 9; 09.269.42.00
www.miat.gent.be

Until APR 23 Viva Vélo, photographs from the book *Foto Vélo* by Ghent natives Steven Geirnaert and Heidi Renwa, taken during their 20,000 km bike trip from Hungary to China (www.foto-velo.be)

Stadsmuseum Gent (STAM)
Bijloke - Godshuizenlaan 2; 09.269.87.90
www.stamgent.be
Until MAY 1 Enlightened City, a study of how light affects a city through diaries, models, paintings, photographs and installations

Hasselt

Fashion museum
Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
www.modemuseumhasselt.be
Until JUNE 5 Alter Nature: The Future That Never Was, a look at the year 2000 from the point of view of designers from the 1960s and a glance at new possibilities in fashion

National Jenever Museum
Witte Nonnenstraat 19; 011.23.98.60

www.jenevermuseum.be
Until JUNE 5 De kunst van het drinken (The Art of Drinking), paintings of drinking scenes by 19th- and 20th-century Belgian artists

Kemzeke

Verbeke Foundation
Westakker; 03.789.22.07
www.verbekefoundation.com
Until APR 10 Certified Copy, works by 20 international artists on reproduction and cloning
Until APR 10 Mark Verstockt: A Portrait, an overview of the Flemish artist's work in celebration of his 80th birthday
Until APR 10 Trou de Ville, group show featuring press releases, e-mails, videos and photographs on guerilla art

Kortrijk

Benedengalerie
Hazelstraat 7; 056.23.98.50
www.cultuurcentrumkortrijk.be
MAR 18-APR 3 Fien Muller, photographs by the Flemish photographer

Schouwburg
Schouwburgplein 14; 056.23.98.50
www.cultuurcentrumkortrijk.be
Until MAR 30 Actually, I Am Someone, photographs of Palestinians by Aurélia Berthe

Leuven

Museum M
Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28; 016.27.29.29
www.mleuven.be
Until MAR 20 David Shrigley, drawings and sculptures by the British artist
Until MAY 15 Freek Wambacq, installations by the Belgian artist
Until MAY 22 Pedro Cabrita Reis: One After Another, A Few Silent Steps, sculpture, paintings, photos and installations by the Portuguese artist
Until JUN 12 Gebonden Beelden, rare books

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum
Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
www.rogerraveelmuseum.be
Until JUNE 19 Tussenruimte: Het onzichtbare zichtbaar maken (Space In-between: Making the Invisible Visible), paintings by Flemish artist Roger Raveel on white frames

Mechelen

Het Firmament
Brusselpoort; 015.34.94.36
www.hetfirmament.be
Until APR 10 Kopstukken (Protagonists), relics from the top 10 performances in the 42-year history of the now-defunct Flemish figure theatre troupe Theater Taptoe

Ostend

Kunstmuseum Aan Zee (MuZee)
Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18
www.muzee.be
Until MAR 27 The Responsive Subject, works by Flemish artist Guy Mees

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11
www.africamuseum.be
Until MAR 25 Madagascar: Meet the People, panoramic photographs of villages on the Indian Ocean island by Flemish photographer Wim De Schampelaere

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum
Grote Markt 34; 057.239.220
www.inflandersfields.be
Until NOV 13 Tribute to Donors, a wide selection of donated works, including paintings, drawings and photographs



Ars Musica: Contemporary music festival
Until APR 3 across Brussels and Flanders
www.arsmusica.be

Opera in the Cinema: Lucia di Lammermoor by Gaetano Donizetti, staged by Mary Zimmerman, live from New York's Metropolitan Opera
MAR 19 17.30 in Kinepolis cinemas across Belgium
www.kinepolis.com/opera

Restaurant Week: Enjoy three-course meals at participating restaurants for only €27.50
Until MAR 20 across Belgium
www.restaurantweek.be

Bruges

Festival Cinema Novo: 28th edition of the film festival, featuring more than 60 films from all over the world
MAR 17-27 at venues across Bruges
www.cinemanova.be

Brussels

Beirut: Festival exploring contemporary arts in the Lebanese capital, with exhibitions, performances, workshops and screenings
Until APR 12 at Halles de Schaerbeek, Koninklijke Sint-Mariastraat 22, and other Brussels venues
0900.26.060, www.halles.be

Eye on Palestine: Second edition of the Palestine-focussed film festival
Until MAR 30 at Pianofabriek, Fortstraat 35
www.eyeonpalestine.be

Festival Tziganiana: Celebration of Belgo-Roma culture with debates on current events, music and dance performances and a photography exhibition
Until MAR 19 at Arthis, Vlaanderenstraat 33
www.arthis.org

Job Day Brussels Airport Region: Fourth annual fair for airport employers and job seekers
MAR 19 20.00-4.00 at Airport North (Brucargo), Building 117 D, Melsbroek
www.jobdays.eu

Lick My Typo: Readings by Dutch artists Karl Nawrot and Lesley Moore (in English)
MAR 16 20.00 at Recyclart, Ursulinenstraat 25 02.502.57.34, www.recyclart.be

Made in Asia: Asian culture and leisure fair
MAR 19-20 10.00-19.00 at Brussels Expo, Heysel
02.474.89.81, www.madeinasia.be

On Y Danse Tout En Rond: Theatre, dance, film, art video and music festival
Until MAY 28 at Beursschouwburg, August Ortsstraat 20-28 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be

St Patrick's Day: Festivities on the day of the Irish
Until MAR 20 across Brussels
www.brussels-st-patricks-day-parade.be

Waarom Belgen niet kunnen voetballen en Nederlanders nooit wereldkampioen worden (Why Belgians can't play football and the Dutch will never become world champion): Debate on cultural differences (in Dutch)
MAR 17 20.00 at the Dutch Embassy, Kortenbergelaan 4-10
www.deburen.eu

Ghent

The game is up!: Interactive dance and theatre festival, with performances by Ontroerend Goed, Ant Hampton, Kassys, deepblue, C&H and Lundahl & Seitl
Until MAR 26 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

Ostend

De Nacht van Exclusief (The Night of Exclusive): Annual party and fashion show, this year with a Hong Kong theme and featuring former Miss Belgium Joke van de Velde
MAR 19 19.00 at Kursaal Ostend, Monacoplein 2 070.22.56.00, www.kursaalostende.be

COURTNEY DAVIS

CAFE SPOTLIGHT



De Robot

Bijlokehof 1, Ghent

The Bijloke area of Ghent is very pretty, with canals and medieval buildings, but it is sadly bereft of cosy places to sit back and take in all that scenery. Enter Robot, a small café on the corner of a cobblestone street that opened a little over a year ago. Previously a café, its opening as another café would perhaps go unnoticed if it weren't so appealing. Across the street from the art school KASK, Robot attracts a healthy amount of students, but when I last visited, there was an older woman sipping tea with her dog and a group of five businessmen having after-work drinks.

Even before entering, you know this place is a little left of centre, with its large, cartoonish, aqua blue sign or the door that doubles as a chalk board announcing the daily specials.

Inside, it is smoke free, as they serve a menu of wraps, soups and some seriously delicious burgers. For €6.50, you can get a lamb or veggie burger with a side of crisps and salad. But food isn't Robot's claim to fame. That would be the music.

Nothing but 1950s plays all day and all night. "There are a lot of jazz cafes and good bars, but we wanted ours to only play rock 'n' roll, soul and R&B from the '50s," says owner Karen Van San. "From the '60s possibly...and '70s only if it's really obscure."

The upbeat sounds are part of the whole "robot" theme – a 1950s café of quirky, hopeful, futuristic visions.

While normally closed on Sunday, occasionally they have a fun, low-key gathering such as a pub quiz or Risk board game day. On Sunday, 20 March, it is all about popcorn and pancakes, which you can enjoy in addition to their typical drinks menu featuring beer, wine, soda and cocktails.

→ www.derobot.be

ROBYN BOYLE

bite



© Robyn Boyle

Punjab Tandoori

What to do when a couple of Belgium-based Londoners voice their growing hankering for a good curry? Chicken tikka masala is, after all, the UK's national dish, and the whole country is blessed with a myriad of great curry houses. Here, pickings are slimmer, but nonetheless I take them to my personal favourite, Punjab Tandoori, in the hope that it will live up to their high standards.

Straight away, my dining companions give the nod to the Ghent restaurant's authentic interior: opulent and dramatic with vibrantly coloured carved woodwork and flamboyant wall hangings. Traditional music and candlelight add a touch of cosiness.

As is the case in most western Indian/Pakistani restaurants, the first thing on the table is a stack of crispy fried poppadoms, a round, thin spiced bread made from ground lentils. These come with three dipping sauces (all a bit of an acquired taste): the mild and sweet mango chutney, the spicy-sour chilli lime pickle and the cooling cucumber and yoghurt raita.

The three mains arrive astonishingly fast and are a feast for the eyes, each curry in its own Balti-style wok pan and sprinkled with fresh coriander. A large platter of basmati rice sits in the middle of the table, as do two orders of naan bread and a side salad.

We pass around pieces of the soft, warm naan, one filled with garlic and the other with cheese, and use it to soak up some of the sauce from our curries. There are three types of curry, all made with chicken but each distinctive.

Chicken tikka masala is a standard curry made from ginger, garlic, scallions, tomatoes, green chillies, coriander, turmeric and even more spices. It is red-orange in colour, creamy and spicy, but at Punjab Tandoori not overly so. It wins one of our curry expert's overwhelming approval.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

The other judge present remains curiously quiet throughout the meal. He later assures us that this is a sure-fire sign of appreciation. With his bowl of chicken Madras curry just about empty, he explains that the spice level – including dried coriander, ginger, garlic and chilli powder – is pleasantly tempered by the addition of yoghurt in the mix.

My traditional chicken dopiaza, a simple combination of tomatoes, ginger and heaps of onion (dopiaza meaning "two onions"), is a dark reddish curry that packs a punch. We all agree that the chunks of chicken in every dish are moist, not to mention plentiful.

A round of Indian Cobra beer provides the needed refreshment. Cobra was created specifically with curry in mind and, thanks to a low gas content, is known worldwide as *the* beer to drink with curry.

Finally, with bellies full we ask our server for the bill. It is Muhammad Munir who brings it to us with his usual smile and friendly demeanour. The total comes to less than €25 per person.

The equally amiable chef, Muhammad Iqbal, smiles at us from his post in the kitchen and waves as we make our way out the door. The three of us reply in unison: "See you again soon."

→ www.punjabtandoorigent.com

► Sleepstraat 67, Ghent; 09.225.30.25
🕒 Fri 17.30-23.00; Sat-Wed 12.00-14.00 & 17.30-23.00
💶 Mains: €13-€19
★ Full-flavoured curries and tandoori from India and Pakistan

TALKING DUTCH

PHILIP EBELS

• *Gezellig* •

I never know what to say when people ask me what the word *gezellig* means. They've heard their Flemish friends say it, even when speaking in English, for lack of a suitable translation. And that's exactly it: there isn't one. (The BBC once voted *gezellig* the sixth most difficult word to translate, after the Arab *altahham* and before the Portuguese *saudade*.)

"Well, it basically means something like cosy," I often try, but then immediately feel obliged to crush the hesitant hope I see appear in the eyes of the one who asked, "but not exactly."

It is more than that. It is a credo, a philosophy; it is the battle cry of the people of the Low Countries in the face of unfriendly elements.

Gezellig is *bij de haard*, by the fireplace, when it's cold and stormy outside, rain ticking the window sill. I remember a story of an old aristocrat with the habit of hiring a homeless person to stand outside his house during the holiday season and to holler "*wat is het koud!*", my it's cold, just so that it would be more *gezellig* inside.

Gezellig is *een spelletje spelen*, to play a board game or a card game and drink *een warme choco*, a hot cocoa. It is to have a pint

or two in your favourite local *stamcafé* (see previous "Talking Dutch") with your favourite *stamgasten*, regulars. It is to have Delftware tiles hanging on the wall, emblazoned with devices such as "*Zoals het klokje thuis tikt, tikt het nergens*". The way the clock ticks at home, it ticks nowhere else.

The word *gezellig* is derived from *gezel*, a mediaeval apprentice in one of the guilds who slept in a *zaal*, a large room, and shared it with others. From *zaal* to *gezel* to words like *vrijgezel*, bachelor, *levensgezel*, life partner, or *gezelschap*, company.

It is fair to say, therefore, that *gezelligheid* needs company. Solitude is its antonym. But, some will argue, the company doesn't always have to be people. It can be your pet, a book or some good music. As long as you're not stuck on a desert island, things can be *gezellig*. Granted, it may sound paradoxical – all this wanting to be together – coming from one of the more individualistic necks of the woods. It may even sound a bit fluffy, a bit kitsch at times. But that doesn't seem to matter much to the Flemish. Because in the end, *gezelligheid kent geen tijd*, time doesn't exist when things are *gezellig*.

THE LAST WORD . . .

Sign of the Times

"I still prefer my paper. A paper newspaper is human. You can get hold of it, roll it up and whack a fly with it. Don't try that with an iPad."

Chris De Hollander, CEO of paper producer Stora Enso in Ghent

Casting around

"Who should play me? Someone who looks like me. Koen De Bouw, for example."

Bart De Wever on news that the Antwerp city council is to be the setting for a new TV drama series

Matter of taste

"That's out of the question. A sandwich with raw meat and eggs? It'll never happen. The US doesn't want to take any risks with food safety."

A spokesman for sandwich chain Subway on adapting the menu to Belgian tastes

Shaken up

"I was in a porcelain shop in the centre of the city. Obviously, a lot of porcelain was destroyed."

Stefanie Aers from Ghent was in Tokyo when the earthquake struck

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #172

Feature

Flanders is a world leader in assessing babies for hearing problems and in cochlear implants. We take a look at the world of hearing in the region's littlest citizens

Business

Fans are paying the way for musicians to tour and record in a brilliant new investment scheme, launched in Flanders and now going global

Arts

Ancienne Belgique has taken on Dirk De Clippelair as its new director. We meet the former record company exec and see if he has any changes in store for the Flemish rock concert hall in Brussels