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Into the wild

Flemish farm-hotels have trouble keeping up with demand

ALAN HOPE

For anyone who lives in the city, the idea of enjoying the peace and quiet of the countryside is one that comes to mind fairly regularly. But only a few of us ever seriously consider moving there for real; for the rest, a quiet weekend from time to time is enough to fortify the soul.

In Flanders, finding a decent address for a temporary retreat from the hustle and bustle couldn't be simpler: They're all gathered together on one website, run by Logeren in Vlaanderen (Lodging in Flanders), where you can search by province, area, type of accommodation and level of comfort.

Logeren in Vlaanderen (LiV) used to be called the Flemish Federation for Farm and Countryside Tourism

and was originally set up in 1989 in conjunction with the Farmers' Union. The intention, explains director Marleen Vandenplas, was principally to coordinate so-called agri-tourism, which at the time was increasingly being seen as an alternative or additional source of income for farmers hit by falling food prices and reduced subsidies.

In 2004, the agency changed its name to reflect a growing demand for similar lodgings in small towns across Flanders. "Our aim was to represent small-scale businesses," says Vandenplas. "Not in the 'art cities', which are already well represented, but in more out of the way places like Diest, Aarschot and so on."

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Ronald Janssen trial begins

The first testimony of Ronald Janssen, on trial in Tongeren for the murder of three young people, lead to confusion and outrage last week.

Janssen has confessed to the murder of 18-year-old Annick Van Uytzel, who went missing from Diest in 2007 and whose body was later found in a canal, and to the murders early this year of Shana Appeltans and Kevin Paulus from Halen, Limburg province. Shana was Janssen's neighbour, and Kevin was her boyfriend.

Janssen has also confessed to a number of earlier rapes, which will be treated in a separate trial later. Janssen, who refuses to

be photographed or drawn by illustrators, and his lawyer gave a different version of the events in 2007 and 2010. The former teacher no longer says that he tied Annick up and transported her in his van. Instead he says that he was drunk, doesn't remember the event and even suggested that Annick went with him voluntarily. He also changed his story on the actual murders of both Annick and Shana and Kevin. His earlier confessions, he said, were only meant to relieve the families' pain.

Some relatives found Janssen's words unbearable and left the court in tears. The trial continues this week.

Economy growth "spectacular"

Kris Peeters delivers the September Declaration of the Flemish Region

ANJA OTTE

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters announced measures for "all Flemish, not just the happy few" in parliament on Monday, 26 September, during the traditional September Declaration.

Peeters pointed out that the Flemish economy grew by 2.6% in 2011. "All in all, that is spectacular," he said. "Now we have to avoid that this summer's political insecurity ends in a winter recession. That is the challenge for this political year."

Flanders' budget for 2012 will be one with no extra debt. "In Belgium, we are the only [region] that will manage this. Next year, there will be €230 million for new policy, while €220 million will be put away for unexpected expenses." Peeters also announced the "child bonus" for families with young children and a €30 million new jobs plan. Education is to get €30 million more, with particular attention paid to

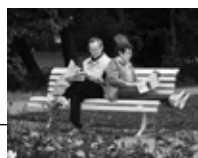
preventing overcrowding in preschool classes. Innovation, meanwhile, receives €60 million, while decisions on mobility were announced last week (see below). Life will become easier for entrepreneurs, as urban and environmental permits will be melted into one.

Peeters did not want to give "a hasty judgment" on the federal proposals for state reform. This judgment might prove divisive as N-VA is part of the Flemish government, but in the opposition federally. "Flanders is Belgium's economic motor. Federal policy should therefore support Flemish policy," Peeters reminded negotiators.

Noriant to start Oosterweel works

The Flemish government has taken another big step in solving the mobility problems in and around Antwerp.

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FACE OF FLANDERS

ANJA OTTE

© Yorick Janssens



Tomas Klein

During the Memorial Ivo Van Damme this month, one man nearly got as much attention as Usain Bolt: Oscar Pistorius, the South-African athlete known as Blade Runner. Pistorius runs on C-shaped prostheses since both his legs have been amputated. Tomas Klein, known as the "Flemish Blade Runner", was only too happy to meet his idol.

Tomas, 11, uses the same type of blades as Pistorius. Tomas was born without bones in his lower legs, and his parents had to make a tough decision: If he ever wanted to walk or run, both legs had to be amputated. "It was that or spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair," his father told *Het Nieuwsblad*. When Tomas was four, his father saw a documentary about Oscar Pistorius, the fastest man on Earth without legs. Father Klein looked for the same type of springing prostheses and found them in Eindhoven. "Before that, Tomas had only worn prostheses, with which he could walk. With the C Sprints, he could run within two minutes. As far as we know, Tomas is the only boy in Belgium with

this type of prostheses. You have to go to America to find another springing boy." With his C blades, Tomas cannot just run, but also play football, ride a bike and go kayaking. "Still, we don't push him to be an athlete," says his father. "That's what Oscar Pistorius told Tomas, too: It doesn't matter if you want to carry on with sports or not. The only thing that matters is you're having fun." Still, it's hard to hold Tomas back. His blades have been broken more than once. "I've seen Tomas fall over many times," confirms Dad. "Of course he falls, seeing how much he romps around. But I prefer that to him spending all day at the computer. He does get sad every now and then. That's why it was so important for him to meet his idol – so that he could see what is possible, even with a handicap." With Tomas still growing, the prostheses need regular adaptations. "And when the springs break, they need to be repaired. That is quite expensive, but fortunately the mutuality pays some of it," his father says.

News in brief

A 38-year-old woman from Kortemark, West Flanders, has been given a seven-month suspended sentence and a €550 fine for creating a **false profile on the social networking site Facebook**. She used the profile to suggest that her former employer was committing adultery. This is the first conviction in connection with abuse of Facebook in Belgium. Meanwhile, in Erembodegem, East Flanders, a woman and her husband have been questioned for similar actions.

Minister for Culture Joke Schauvliege (CD&V) and her Moroccan colleague Bensalem Himmich have officially opened Daarkom, a **Flemish-Moroccan culture centre** in Brussels, housed in the former Gaité Theatre. "Daarkom will be an accessible presentation spot for Flemish and Moroccan citizens who want to embrace culture, with concerts, theatre, dance and exhibitions," said Schauvliege.

Buying real estate through a public sale has become easier, as notaries in Brussels and Flanders have introduced sales by internet. These are to replace the traditional public "sale day", usually held in cafés. The new website uses e-IDs to identify buyers.

→ www.notaclick.be

Two Antwerp magistrates who **criticised Belgium's immigration policy** in their inaugural speeches were invited to the federal parliament to clarify their statements. Commentators described the hearing as a "missed chance", as many MPs preferred to air their own views on the topic rather than listen to what the magistrates had to say.

Ikea, the Swedish furniture chain with four outlets in Brussels and Flanders, has confirmed that it has become the **subject of extortion** after bombing incidents in stores across Europe. In Ghent, a small bomb went off last May, but no-one was hurt. Security has been stepped up.

Geert Dewaele last week **resigned as the editor-in-chief** of *Het Nieuwsblad*, the daily newspaper published by Corelio, which has more than one million readers, while Paul Daenen of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, Flanders' most popular newspaper, has announced his resignation for next year. Earlier this month, Sam De Graeve quit as editor-in-chief of the weekly *Humo*. According to *De Morgen*, editor-in-chief in one the Flemish media has become a job that lasts on average no more than two years; Daenen, with more than 15 years experience, is considered an exception.

Antwerp alderman **Ludo Van Campenhout** has officially joined N-VA. Van Campenhout left Open VLD last year, after an internal dispute on the Oosterweel junction. After his announcement last week, Open VLD asked for a "new balance" in the Antwerp city government, but in the end, the coalition of SPA, CD&V/N-VA and Open VLD remains unchanged.

An Antwerp man who ran a red light and **drove into a class of school children** has died two days after the accident. The man, who suffered from lung cancer, declared that a "heavy leg" caused by pulmonary oedema prevented him from letting up on the gas pedal. A teacher and a six-year-old were wounded in the accident but both are already out of hospital.

Minister for justice Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V) has refused to accept the **resignation of Wim De Troy**, examining magistrate in Brussels. De Troy had handed in his resignation because his clerk could not return to her old post after pregnancy leave. De Troy is best known for Operatie Kelk (Operation Chalice), a judiciary operation into clerical abuse for which the archbishop's palace and cathedral in Mechelen were searched.

Police have released amateur footage of the **riots in the recreational domain Hofstade**. On Easter Monday, youth attacked police after they intervened to break up a fight. They threw stones and damaged police vehicles, leaving one police officer injured. Police have asked the public to identify the culprits.

The Antwerp centre that **answers 101 alarm calls** went on strike last Thursday to protest a lack of staff. Interior Affairs called the strike understandable but stated that there are no funds to improve the situation. Calls to the 101 alarm number were answered by the police during the strike.

The number of asylum seekers that cannot be housed by Fedasil will reach 10,000 this week. Meanwhile, the Brussels commune of Schaarbeek has **expelled a number of Roma families** from North Station because the situation there was becoming unhygienic. Some of them, with Bosnian passports, will receive financial help and housing. According to aid agency Foyer, supporting Roma may lead to abuse and trafficking.

OFFSIDE

A manual for blondes

Can you learn to be blonde? Of course you can, says Lesley-Ann Poppe, who recently published a handbook for blondes. "Being blonde has nothing to do with the colour of your hair. It's a philosophy." So there.

What exactly is this philosophy about? "Being positive, looking after yourself, being sweet to others and always thinking that the glass is half full, rather than half empty," Poppe says in *Humo*. "Being chronically cheerful, that's what it's about."

A former finalist of the Mrs Belgium Globe contest, Poppe recently rose to fame after appearances in amateur cooking shows *Komen eten* and *De beste hobbykok*, in which her skimpy dresses and impressive cleavage stood out more than her cooking skills. Soon after,

she became part of a trio of blondes called B-A-B-E, who produced a song called "Ietsiebietsieboe" – renowned for being so awful that even some commercial radio stations refused to play it.

Poppe, who holds a degree in Commercial Science and runs her own beauty school, believes that blondes not only have more fun, they also make more money. "They are used to getting what they want – it's a self-fulfilling prophecy." According to Poppe, people speak differently to blondes, like they do to children or the elderly. Her book is full of tips to make the most of prejudices towards blondes. Poppe's icons are Marilyn Monroe, Barbie and especially Mae West. As for non-blond blondes, Poppe names the Flemish model Phaedra Hoste and



ex-miss Belgium Veronique De Cock. Internationally, she sees something in singer Katy Perry and reality TV star Kim Kardashian. Paris Hilton, though technically a blonde, does not qualify: "Too bitter and too full of herself."

→ lesleyannpoppe.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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Antwerp's inner-city will be "transformed"

→ continued from page 1

The building consortium Noriant has been given the go-ahead to construct part of the Oosterweel-link, which is to close the Antwerp ring road and connect both banks of the Scheldt River. The European Commission still has to approve this contract, which may take up to a year. However, this will not result in a loss of time, says Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits (CD&V), as that time is needed anyway to draw up an obligatory environmental report.

The contract concerns the building of the Scheldt tunnel and works on the left bank. All other works, including another tunnel under the docks, will become the subject of a public call to tender.

Noriant was appointed to carry out the original plans, which included the Lange Wapper bridge across the docks. However, these plans were changed as they were voted down in an Antwerp referendum. The city of Antwerp as well as the Port of Antwerp

agreed to pay some of the extra costs involved. Both will now pay €352 million, some of which is in the form of land the city is handing over to build the Oosterweel-link.

"That the port should contribute, too, is not obvious, as roads are not our core business," said port spokesperson Marc Van Peel, at a press conference with the Flemish Region last week. "But we do have a major interest, as we suffer greatly when traffic comes to a standstill, like it did after a minor incident last week",

The Oostweel-link is part of the so called Masterplan 2020 for Antwerp. Also last week, the Flemish government agreed to another part of this plan called Brabo 2. Brabo 2 includes the construction of a new Operaplein, with an underground metro station designed by De Sola Morales, a make-over for the Noorderleien and a tram extension to Ekeren. "The pedestrian Opera Square and the new Noorderleien will transform the look of Antwerp's inner city," said Patrick Janssens, mayor of Antwerp. At the same press conference, Hilde



Minister-president Kris Peeters (left) and minister of finance and employment Philippe Muyters arrive at the Flemish Parliament's first plenary session of the new political year, where Peeters delivered the annual September Declaration

Crevits announced that the Flemish government has given the green light to the Spartacus Plan: a 33-kilometer tram link between Hasselt and Maastricht, in the Netherlands. The trams, which should come online in 2017, are estimated to transport up to 6.8 billion passengers a year. "This would make it as successful as the popular Coast Tram," said Crevits.

The Flemish Parliament, meanwhile, has decided to scrap the "retirement bonuses" for MPs who leave of their own will. The wages of the president of the Flemish Parliament will be lowered by €4,000 a month. Jan Peumans (N-VA), who currently holds this function, had proposed this himself, as he declared himself "flabbergasted" by the size of his wage package. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



5.34%

Drop in value of the Bel20 at closing on Thursday, 22 September – the worst performance since October of 2008

€50

The extra cost a Hasselt family found on its mobile phone bill, after the mother rang her teenage sons about 100 times after the storm during the Pukkelpop festival. As the mobile networks were overburdened, the mother reached voice mail time after time. The operator announced they will look into the problems "case by case"

31.7

Percentage of pregnant woman who gain too much weight, according to the Study Center for Prenatal Epidemiology, which warns about health risks for both mother and baby

23

Number of football teams interested in 17-year-old Dennis Praet, including Manchester United, Ajax and Barcelona. The Flemish footballer eventually opted for Anderlecht, where he made his debut last week in a cup match against Lommel. Anderlecht won 0-4

€6,700

Average yearly cost for parents of a student who lives in student housing. If food and clothes are included, the costs rise to €12,000 a year

Another breakthrough in formation of government

Almost a year and a half after the federal elections, a new federal government is finally in sight, after two more agreements were made last week.

In the early hours of 23 September, the negotiators of eight parties (the Flemish CD&V, Open VLD, SP.A and Groen! and the French-speaking PS, MR, CDH and Ecolo) reached an agreement on the Financing Law, which regulates the division of the budget between regions and communities.

The agreement gives Belgium's three regions fiscal autonomy to the tune of €10.7 billion. This means that regions can alter policy to their own needs, within a yearly margin of €1,000 per tax payer.

The deal also puts an end to the "perverse" effect of the solidarity mechanism, which results in Wallonia obtaining more money as unemployment rises. Wallonia is compensated for the €500 it

will lose as a result of this. After 10 years, this compensation will be gradually reduced until it is phased out completely by 2032.

The Brussels Region is to receive €461 million extra every year, half of which is to be spent on well-defined policy areas such as transport, security and education.

As well as greater fiscal autonomy, responsibility for a number of areas of policy is to be transferred to the regions. These include child benefit and service checks and parts of work and health policy, as well as justice. The new competences that will be transferred to the regions currently account for around €17 billion.

Alexander De Croo of Open VLD calls this agreement "the largest state reform ever". Flanders' largest opposition party, N-VA, however, reacted sharply. In absence of any texts, Bart De Wever calls the deal "humbug". "Flanders woke up poorer," he said.

Brussels agreement

Last week another agreement was found on an "internal state reform" for Brussels. This gives the region more competences in the areas of security and mobility. The six policing zones, however, remain in place. Building permits will be easier obtained. The agreement on public cleanliness – street sweeping will be done by communes, waste collection by the regions – paralysed the city last Thursday, 22 September, as street sweepers showed their discontent by throwing up barricades on major crossroads.

With both BHV, Brussels and the finance law settled, the formation of a new federal government seems on track for October. The question remains which of the negotiating parties will be part of it. Open VLD has suggested that the greens be left out. However, that would mean that this coalition has no majority on the Flemish side. ♦

Education news: New choices for first years, preschools too loud

University officials and other specialists took the beginning of the new academic year as an opportunity to address reform and trends in Flemish education and announce a few statistics.

- From 2017, the **first year of a bachelor's degree** will consist of general subjects such as sociology, psychology, law and economics or philosophy, history, linguistics and literature in human sciences. Specialisation will only start from the second year.

- University **fees should be doubled**, says André Oosterlinck, former rector of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL). "We have been living above our means. Students will oppose this, but they should realise that what they pay now is only a fraction of what taxpayers pay for them." His successor, Mark Waer, would rather not raise fees.



- Every student **should spend some time abroad**, says Alain Verschoren, rector of the University Antwerp. "Now only the well-off can do such a thing, which is undemocratic."
- Three-quarters of secondary pupils have experienced **physical violence at school**. Verbal aggression is rife, too. The aggressors are not just pupils, but also teachers, the Flemish

commissioner for children's rights found after interviewing 2,000 pupils between the ages of 12 and 18.

- Toddlers in class produce up to 89 decibels of noise. In the sports hall, the noise level rises to 127 decibels. Almost half of preschool teachers report **hearing or voice problems** because of this, says professor Koen Godderis of KUL. ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Frankie leaves Brussels

"Frankie goes to Brussels." The catch phrase with which Frank Vandenbroucke propelled himself into national politics sounded very '80s and deceptively trendy. Vandenbroucke never was the coolest of politicians, though. In fact, he was often described as "the cleverest boy in class" or "the professor".

"If I want to be lectured to for two hours, I'll go back to university," Bart De Wever said after negotiations with Vandenbroucke. Vandenbroucke is not only intelligent, he never tires of trying to convince people, a trait many found extremely irritable and ultimately lead to his estrangement from his party SP.A.

Vandenbroucke's political career is full of tragic moments. One of these came in the early 1990s when he became party president at the age of 34. In the wake of a corruption scandal, Vandenbroucke, squeaky clean himself, stumbled onto some unaccounted for cash. He asked his collaborator to get rid of the money and is reported as saying "burn it, if that is needed". When those words became public, Vandenbroucke, federal minister for foreign affairs by then, resigned.

He left for Oxford and got inspired by Tony Blair's "third way", between socialism and economic liberalism. His views that took shape here became a binding ideology for the governments under Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD), in which Vandenbroucke, rehabilitated and widely respected by now, was a minister.

As an intellectual, he became popular with the public at large. People who worked with him, though, often found his intransigence hard to swallow. In the end, he clashed with the French-speaking socialists, which motivated him move to the Flemish government. As he became even more respected as a minister for education, the alienation with his party grew. Somehow, Vandenbroucke always seemed more popular outside SP.A than within it.

It lead to another tragic moment in 2009, as Vandenbroucke showed up for government negotiations, which had been postponed. No-one had bothered to notify him, a key negotiator. Eventually, he was left out of the Flemish government in 2009. Except for those who had seen him at work from up close, few people understood. The outrage this caused in socialist ranks ultimately destabilised Caroline Gennez as party president.

Vandenbroucke reacted with dignity and let the votes do the talking. He was elected into the Senate in 2010. This week he announced his retirement from politics. He wants to have more time on his hands for scientific research. The professor, still.

→ www.frankvande.be



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ING 



Into the wild

Countryside tourism is booming

→ continued from page 1

A lot of inspiration came from agencies like Gîtes de France and its Italian counterpart, Agriturismo. The sector has bloomed since then, she says. Today, in fact, the industry is struggling to keep up with demand.

“The public’s interest is growing in line with the overall trend in society to want to go ‘back to basics’”

Last year the agency carried out a survey of the sector that showed that the number of rooms available had risen from 1,028 in 2004 to 1,508 now – a nearly 47% increase. The number of bookings had grown in the same period from 1,318,300 overnights to 1,780,600. The total number of guests in 2009 was 674,500.

“Demand is following the growth trend in supply,” says Vandenplas. “It’s mostly due to the demand of people with enough purchasing power for short holidays close to home. Add to that the fact that

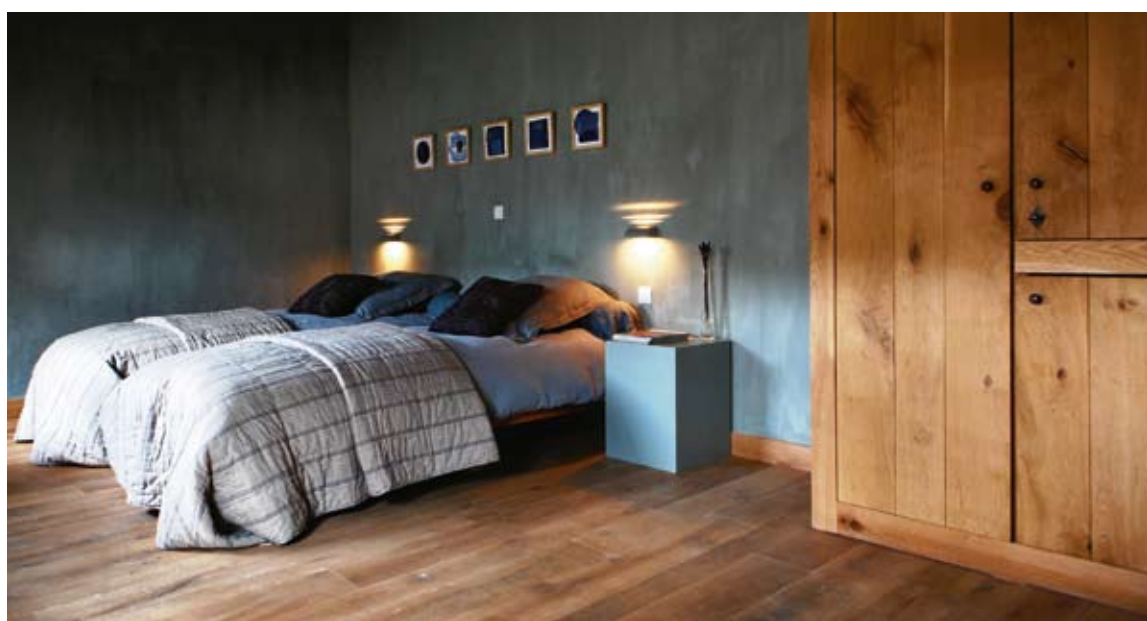
this sector is very customer-friendly, even for the most demanding clients, and that lodging in the country has a very positive image that delivers a lot of word-of-mouth advertising.”

One major difference over the years, however, is the number of lodgings on farms compared to other country properties. Working farms used to be in the majority among members signed up to the agency, but not anymore. In 2006, the proportions were even, with 159 farms and about as many other kinds of country properties. By last year the number of farms had increased to 162, while other country properties stood at 210, and the newly added village-centre properties at 14. Nevertheless, lodgings based on real, working farms continue to be enormously popular with guests.

“It’s becoming more and more difficult to find farmers who want to run lodgings,” says Vandenplas.

“The combination of [hotel] work with running a farming business is difficult, both in terms of time and effort and of the investment required. My fear is that demand will eventually outstrip supply because the public’s interest is growing in line with the overall trend in society to want to go ‘back to basics’. Supply is not keeping up. The pioneers are still active, but they won’t be around forever.” ♦

→ www.logereninvlaanderen.be



It’s easy counting sheep at 15 Inn in Balen, Antwerp province



Welcome to the country at Het Bintjeshof in Bellegem, West Flanders



You’re never too young to learn the trade at Briesland Farm Hotel in Alveringem, West Flanders

© Photos: Toon Coussement

Where to bed down • Find your perfect countryside B&B in Flanders

The options number in the hundreds, but these *Flanders Today* picks will get your countryside adventure started off right.

Antwerp province

Bed & Wine Divino in Kalmthout is one of the most luxurious farm hotels in Antwerp province. Situated on the edge of the Kalmthoutse Heide, now recovering after a disastrous fire last May, Divino offers two bedrooms, each with its own terrace, bathroom, flat-screen TV and Wifi. The area is perfect for cycling and mountain biking, followed by an in-house massage. The hotel serves breakfast and dinner, with a special emphasis on Italian wine, also available from their wine shop.

→ www.bbdivino.be

East Flanders

The so-called Flemish Ardennes in East Flanders is the pearl of the province’s tourist trade, and Hof Ter Lucht is situated in Wortegem-Petegem, a name that will be familiar to cycling enthusiasts. Daniel Demaut, who runs the accommodation with his wife Carine Michiels, worked in farming all his life and, when he retired, decided to take up another activity in agri-tourism. The property is situated on a working farm and offers half pension in four artistically decorated, modern rooms, with a fifth room in preparation. “Business is very good,” Demaut says. “It’s certainly possible to make a living from this sort of tourism alone.” Most of his weekend guests are families, and during the week he gets business people or retired couples on a mid-week break – a category that accounts for 30% of his guests.

→ www.hofterlucht.be

Flemish Brabant

Charmehotel Pluimpapaver lies in Rillaer-Aarschot, in the part of Flemish Brabant called the Hageland, famous for its gently rolling hills, its wine production and its picture-postcard sights: Diest, the abbey of Averode, the basilica of Scherpenheuvel. The hotel overlooks the valley of the Scheldt on its way to the Port of Antwerp, and according to proprietor Johan Loots, is “an oasis of silence surrounded by green; a place to rediscover yourself”. The hotel has four double rooms and one for four people, a sauna, and its own restaurant offers gastronomic dining.

→ www.pluimpapaver.eu

Limburg

De Geisterse Hei near Maaseik in the Maasland area of Limburg is run by Kees and Hanny van den Hout. She looks after the guests, and both of them run what is a middle-sized dairy farm. Having stayed there more than once, one memory abides: being greeted on arrival with freshly baked cake and milk straight from the cow. Accommodation at De Geisterse Hei is an apartment separate from the main farm buildings, with two bedrooms sleeping up to six people, a kitchen and a bathroom. The farm lies very close to the Dutch border, and all around are fields and woods, so it’s advisable to bring the bikes because there are kilometres of easy, flat countryside all around. The kids will be happy to roam around the farm bottle-feeding the suckling calves, climbing in the hay loft and feeding the pigs. If you’d so inclined, you can get up early to

watch the morning milking. Bree is close by (the hometown of Kim Clijsters), as is the picturesque village of Thorn just over the Dutch border, where every house is painted white.

→ www.maaseik.be

West Flanders

West Flanders has three major tourist draws: the coast, the city of Bruges and the battlefields and other sites of the First World War, which brings British tourists in by the hundreds every weekend. Alain Bouten, proprietor of The Protea B&B in Geluveld-Zonnebeke provides a number of different ways for visitors to explore the Ypres Salient, including a booklet for guests to take with them, a cycling tour with bikes provided and a full tour arrangement with guide, museum entry and a meal on Hill 60. Bouten has been running his three themed double rooms since 1996 and is a First World War buff himself, as are so many people from the area of the province known as the Westhoek. “I like to point people towards the lesser-known sites,” he says. “If I were a guide in Paris, I wouldn’t take people to the Eiffel Tower.”

→ www.theprotea.be

Standards of quality and comfort, including a star rating system, are operated by Toerisme Vlaanderen

In the beginning

Researchers from Ghent skim the ocean floors in search of proof of a coming ice age

LAWRENCE DE GEEST

David Van Rooij is interested in the ocean, and how it used to be. A lecturer of Marine Geology and Geophysics at Ghent University (UGent), he studies the history of ocean environments – and cold-water coral reefs in particular – in order to determine their future. And, if that future looks bleak, what can be done about it.

“In 50 years, ocean levels will have risen, and in 5,000 years, there might be another ice age,” he says. “But to be able to do anything about it, we must understand how it happens. That’s why we try to reconstruct the ocean the way it used to be in order to have a better understanding of the changes we see.”

It’s no task for one man. In fact, it’s not a task for any man. Oceanic reconstruction requires close documentation of existing coral reefs and ocean floors, and humans aren’t built to withstand the extreme pressure at such depths. So they use a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) instead.

“In five million years, the Mediterranean will have disappeared, and Europe will be mountainous, like the Himalayas.”

Enter Genesis, UGent’s resident underwater explorer and the only one belonging to an academic institute in the Low Countries. It is the size of a small car, and it’s operated by two engineers and a scientist from aboard a ship. It can only dive 1,500 meters (larger ROV’s can go as deep as 6,000), but since Van Rooij and his fellow operators are primarily interested in ocean topography along continental margins, Genesis does the job and has yielded some interesting discoveries.

What it's finding

In 2006, an exploration of the shelf of the Bay of Biscay – which, says Van Rooij, is large

enough to hold several Grand Canyons – discovered deep-water oysters 30 centimetres big that can live for over 500 years. Analysis has shown what the oysters’ environment was like back then – colder and more austere, mostly.

And just this year, Genesis, while cruising about the Palmer Deep basin along the coast of Antarctica, discovered a thriving colony of swashbuckling king crabs. Considering no such life had ever been documented there, it is believed that increasingly warm waters provide a more welcoming environment for the species.

The project Genesis was conceived when, in 1998, cold water coral – found in deep waters and the victim of an out-of-sight, out-of-mind history – was discovered. “We happened to find a series of underwater mounds 300 meters tall off the south-west coast of Ireland and saw these cold-water corals,” Van Rooij says.

Several projects were submitted to the European Commission, one of which was aimed at protecting the corals from overfishing. Coral is a breeding ground for deep-water fish. “To do the mapping, we needed an ROV, which we bought in 2005.” Since then, a bevy of European crews have found corals off the coasts of Australia, Morocco and Scotland.

“Cold-water corals are everywhere,” says Van Rooij, “but have been found mostly on the European margin simply because Europe has given more money for research. Also, European researchers are good at this. Take them to Australia and most would say that they can predict where the cold-water corals are.”

Coral and climate

Coral supports the hypothesis that ocean circulation affects global climate. Corals affected by decreasing currents are covered in sand and die out, says Van Rooij. They are composed of carbonate and can be used to pinpoint changes in circulation over the last one million years. That way, they provide useful information about the concentration of oxygen and nutrients in the ocean in earlier times.

The principal finding is that the oceans of today are increasingly acid, Van



The Genesis explorer can dive to 1,500 metres deep, where it discovers the strange and the beautiful



From left: Professor David Van Rooij and geologist Andres Rüggeberg of UGent and Brigitte Crowe of the University College Cork show off a cold-water coral and a deep-water oyster

Rooij explains, caused by rising global temperatures. The North Atlantic is getting saltier due to northward forging water from the Mediterranean. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that one day we’ll eat a saltier *maatje* (Dutch herring), or no *maatjes* at all, even though that day may still be far away.

Van Rooij and his colleagues concern themselves with non-human time intervals like, for example, between ice ages. “Changes in glacial periods coincide with changes in ocean currents during periods of 100,000 years or so,” he explains “One thousand years is short; 200 years is geologically nothing.”

At such scale, numbers are approximations. The last glacial maximum – when the surface area of ice on the planet was highest – was about 12,000 years ago, Van Rooij says, and began some 80,000 years ago. The frequency of maximums over the last one million years is believed to be about 100,000 years. Today, the earth finds itself in an interglacial, warm-climate period, not unlike it was 400,000 years ago. That period lasted 12,000 years. We are 10,000 years into this one.

Walk on ice from Norway to Scotland

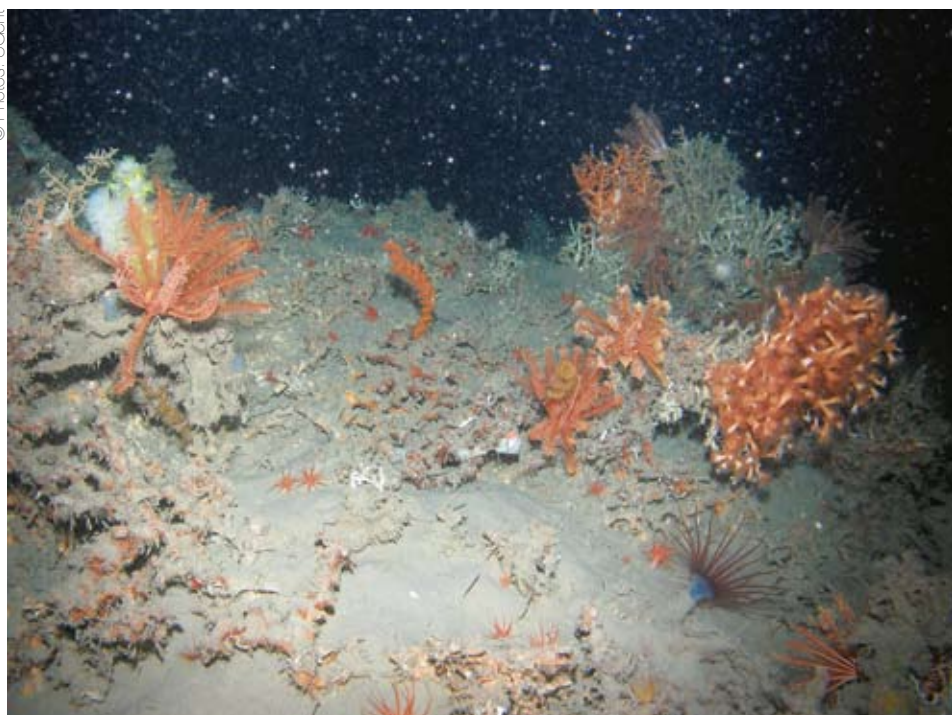
During the last ice age, the northern ice cap extended to the United Kingdom. “All Northern Europe could be destroyed in

the next one,” Van Rooij muses. “You will be able to walk from Norway to Scotland.” Just as early humans walked from Siberia to North America. “Researchers have found mammoth bones and proof of settlements in the middle of the North Sea. The core of the next ice cap will start in Canada and join that of Greenland. Then a Siberian ice cap will build over Scandinavia and go to the North Sea, which will dry up. Ice has to take its water from somewhere, so ocean volume drops.”

Van Rooij decided to become a geologist, he says, after he saw the movie Jurassic Park in 1993. Before joining the faculty in Ghent, he contributed to oceanographic missions on Russian and French ships. Earth is mostly oceanic, and nobody, alive or dead, has seen it all.

“But we first have to deal with global warming and try to reduce rising ocean levels to protect coastal cities,” says Van Rooij. “We don’t know how resilient the ocean is given such a powerful input of carbon dioxide. But, at any rate, in five million years, the Mediterranean will have disappeared, and Europe will be mountainous, like the Himalayas.” ♦

→ www.rcmg.ugent.be



It’s deep-water coral reefs like this, 800m below sea level off the coast of Ireland, that Genesis is after

Companies open doors this weekend

Open Businesses Day emphasises waste-free producing

ANDY FURNIERE

On Sunday, 2 October, visitors can take a look behind the scenes at about 400 Flemish companies. Open Businesses Day in Flanders draws around 800,000 visitors each year poking around companies from garage mechanics to event halls to producers of alternative energy. The curious can simply visit, but there are also opportunities to apply for available jobs in some firms.

This 21st edition of Openbedrijvendag, or Open Businesses Day, puts enterprises in the spotlight that have an eco-friendly approach to materials.

This year's theme is inspired by the cooperation with OVAM, the Flemish waste agency. Flanders is already a front runner in Europe for industrial recycling, but that is

only one method of preserving materials. "Businesses have to use their commodities efficiently from the start of the production process," says Open Business Day director Ann Van Doren. "That way it's much easier to limit the amount of waste." The company that succeeds best in working in accordance with the "cradle-to-cradle" principle will be the winner of the Materials in Movement award. One of the five nominees is steel giant ArcelorMittal in Ghent. "Because steel is a material that can be recycled indefinitely," explains Van Doren. "But an additional motivation is that they recycle their waste and transfer their energy surplus to an electricity outlet."

Since last year Open Businesses Day awards a special mention

to innovative enterprises in accordance with the Flanders in Action plan (ViA), which supports entrepreneurship. A surprising highlight is the family company Dingens Barometers & Clocks. Under pressure from a prohibition on mercury in barometers, Dingens developed the Innovacelli, a barometer that works on pressure systems used in aviation.

Dingens' presence at the World Expo in Shanghai has already gotten them a foot in the door in China and Japan; their barometers will soon be used in Antarctica by the Flemish arctic explorer Dixie Dansercoer, who will present his new expedition (which starts in November) at the company headquarters in Beringen, Limburg. ♦

→ www.openbedrijvendag.be



Fleming appointed chair of Thomas Cook

Flemish businessman Frank Meysman (pictured) will be the new chairman of the Thomas Cook group. He faces significant challenges at Europe's second-biggest travel company. Meysman, 59, will replace current chairman Michael Becket when Becket retires at the beginning of December. He will be the boss of about 30,000 staff, who have approximately 22 million travellers as clients. But Thomas Cook, based in Peterborough, England, is going through a rough spell; their stock has dropped three-quarters in value since the New Year, while those of arch rival TUI have only dropped

20%. Only last week, their fifth CEO in 10 years resigned.

"I know. It's a big challenge," Meysman, who also sits on the city council of Merchtem, told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "But I could not dismiss this unique opportunity. Thomas Cook is still a strong brand."

Meysman has had a long career in business, both inside and outside of Belgium. He has worked for multinational Procter & Gamble and became marketing director at coffee producer Douwe Egberts in the 1980s. Most recently, he was vice-president at the American food manufacturing enterprise Sara Lee. ♦



Temporary agreement on airport handling

The controversy surrounding aviation handling companies at Brussels Airport has been temporarily solved. Federal mobility secretary Etienne Schouppe has extended the contracts of Flightcare and Aviapartner indefinitely until a judicial decision is taken in the legal battle between Brussels Airport and Aviapartner.

The handling of luggage and cargo threatened to be in jeopardy from this November because Aviapartner has gone to court against the choice for Swissport, another handling company, to take their place.

In the month of August, Brussels Airport saw an increase in passengers of 6.7% compared to the same month last year – and that was despite cancellations of flights to and from the American east coast caused by hurricane Irene.

• The chairman of Brussels Airport, Luc Van den Bossche, meanwhile, has still not resigned despite his announcement in July that he will move to Optima, a specialist in financial planning. He is apparently awaiting an offer of a

"substantial" severance package.

Van den Bossche, an ex-politician of the socialist party SP.A, announced his resignation from Brussels Airport after news had leaked in the press that he would be earning nearly €700,000 a year. Van den Bossche denied knowledge of this financial proposal, stating that it was only meant to convince him to stay on. Meanwhile, it has become apparent that he has not yet left his seat. "There is no official resignation letter, so I have not resigned," Van den Bossche told *De Standaard*.

In principle, a chairman can be relieved of his function by the general assembly without compensation. Moreover, it is very uncommon that someone who resigns receives severance pay. Van den Bossche stated that "Brussels Airport is a private company, and the exit deal is a case between me, the stockholders and the board of directors. This is not our railway company." However, the Belgian state owns 25% percent of the airport stocks. ♦

Economic missions to China and India this autumn

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters will go on economic missions to China in October and to India in November, accompanied by the managers of key Flemish firms. Both China and India are rapidly growing economic powers and huge potential markets for Flemish expertise. In China, a special focus lies on initiatives for an eco-friendly economy, according to Peeters' spokesperson. From 22 to 24 October, Peeters will visit the Chinese capital Beijing and the cities Shanghai and Nanjing. Just as during his stay in May of 2010, the minister-president will have meetings with top officials in the automobile industry, such as Geely, a large private automobile manufacturer in China. But on this trip he will focus a great deal on action

for an environment-friendly economy. Peeters will give the opening speech at the Low Carbon Forum in Beijing and pay a visit to the Flemish enterprise Waterleau, which provides advice on waste processing.

A few weeks later, from 12 to 19 November, Peeters will recommend Flemish innovations to Indian investors in the capital Delhi, the economic capital Mumbai and the cities Bangalore and Chennai. He will also participate at the summit of the independent organisation World Economic Forum in Mumbai and look at Flemish business initiatives in India. Peeters' delegation will visit the police in Mumbai, where technology enterprises Barco en Traficon have helped develop a traffic centre. Software company LMS will cooperate with the National



Minister-president Kris Peeters on the economic mission to China last year

Aerospace Laboratory in Bangalore. There will also be contacts with the Indian airline Jet Airways and the Indian diamond sector.

Closer to home, Peeters will visit the biennial General Conference of UN-organisation Unesco in Paris on 27 October. He also has

appointments with members of the French government and executives at the European Space Agency. ♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air transport • Brussels Airport

Traffic at Brussels Airport surged by 6.7% in August compared to the same period last year. The total increase in passenger traffic for the year to date is 10.8%.

Construction • Besix

Brussels-based building group Besix is to start work next month on the King Abdullah Sports City complex in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The project, in partnership with a local operator, includes a 60,000-seat stadium, a sports hall and an athletics venue. The project is planned for completion by October 2014. It is Besix's first venture in Saudi Arabia since building hospitals in Riyadh and Jeddah some 30 years ago.

Energy • T-Power

The Japanese Tokyo Gas has acquired a 26.66% stake in the recently inaugurated Tessenderloo T-Power gas-fired power station. The move is Tokyo Gas' first investment in electricity in Europe. The other shareholders in the plant are the Tessenderloo chemical group and the German Siemens and RWE groups.

Payment services • Ogone

Brussels-based Ogone, specialised in electronic payment systems, is acquiring the Indian EBS, the sub-continent's leading on-line payment systems supplier. Ogone already operates in seven European countries.

Retail • Beter Bed

The Dutch bedroom furniture and mattresses retailer Beter Bed will open its first store in Flanders this week, in Olen, Antwerp province. The company already operates 1,000 outlets in Europe.

Retail • Ikea

The local affiliate of the Swedish home furnishings and decoration group is investing €65 million in the next year to renovate and expand its stores in Wilrijk and Anderlecht. The company also has plans to open a new outlet north of Antwerp within three years to push its share of the market to some 20%.

Retail • Metro

German retailer Metro inaugurated its renovated Makro store in Antwerp last week. The company, which operates four 25,000 square-metres outlets in Flanders, has plans to open several new stores starting next year.

Steel wire • Bekaert

The Zwevegem-based steel wire producer is expanding production in its Russian Lipetsk affiliate to meet growing demand. The new investment includes a 13,000 hall and state-of-the-art technology.

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Home of the pavement pounders

A beautifully renovated Grote Markt and an award from the European Union makes Aarschot the place to visit this autumn

ANNA JENKINSON

As I come out of the train station in Aarschot, a small town about 20 kilometres northeast of Leuven, it doesn't look all that promising. I check my directions, turn left and head past the local mineral water company. I walk through an industrial stretch, past plastic crates stacked high. Am I heading in the right direction? After all, my destination is an award-winning, 16th-century water mill complex grandly named 's Hertogenmolens, or the Duke's Mills. But for the moment, I'm not sensing much grandeur.

Isn't it amazing what a difference 200 metres can make.

After just a couple of minutes, I reach the river Demer, look to my right and there before me stands the renovated mill, its three arches majestically spanning the water.

A whole new Aarschot

's Hertogenmolens was built at the beginning of the 16th century by Willem of Croÿ, Lord of Aarschot and one of the most powerful noblemen in the Burgundian Empire. The complex has undergone a major renovation in the last few years. What had been an abandoned building has now been turned into a hotel and restaurant. Following a detailed historical study and several years of research and preparation, the original mill was restored and contemporary features added.

The restoration and its "great respect for the cultural and historical value of the monument" were rewarded this year with a European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage, or the Europa Nostra Award 2011.

The mill project is part of a wider urban development programme in the town of about 30,000. Other projects include making a footpath and cycle path along the Demer, completing the ring road around town and building a footbridge next to the train station to make a more welcoming link between the residential and commercial parts of town and the industrial estate.

While some of this work is still ongoing, other parts have been successfully completed. The renovated Grote Markt, for example, opened to the public earlier this month and is now car free.

The conversion of the water mill was carried out by the City of Aarschot in co-operation with private partners and the Flemish Region. This "intense collaboration has proven that a monument of great importance for a municipality can be saved, even though it is in a state of extreme disrepair," the award committee said earlier this year.

History in a hole

The story of 's Hertogenmolens goes that some 500 years ago there was an orchard belonging to the neighbouring *begijnhof*, whose religious community one day knocked a hole through the wall for more direct access to their fruit trees. There was a problem, however: The orchard was just outside the city walls, and it was wartime. The hole in the wall also gave the enemies of Aarschot easy access into town.

As punishment, the duke ordered the orchard to be removed and a water mill built in its place. Over the years, the mill has been used as a factory for grain, glass and leather.

Today, the mill complex is divided into three parts: a hotel, a restaurant with a riverbank terrace and a small museum of the mill's history. There are pieces of the past to be found throughout the building, such as a 500-year-old machine that was used to fill bags of flour and today sits in the middle of the hotel's breakfast room; a wooden Archimedes' Screw that now hangs from the ceiling of one of the suites; and old-fashioned scales in the lobby that were used to weigh grain. Other features include original wooden beams made of French oak.

As you walk over the covered bridge and above the mill's lock, a roar of water passes underneath. You can imagine boats floating through in bygone centuries, paying their tolls for the right to pass. The heavy central gate is manually operated and took four men to lower and six to raise, my



The 16th-century water mill 's Hertogenmolens (top) won this year's European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage; everyone thinks of Limburg when they think of Hageland (bottom left), but the picturesque region also covers the northeast of Flemish Brabant; the tower of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (bottom right) is unmistakable in Aarschot

guide tells me, adding that, theoretically, that could still be done today. It's just that the police down the river wouldn't be too happy as their station would be flooded.

Most of the hotel's customers are business people – international companies like Black & Decker and Procter & Gamble have offices in Aarschot. But the hotel aims to appeal to tourists in general and this summer launched a canoe adventure package. The trip takes you from Aarschot to Werchter, from where it continues on rental bikes back to the hotel for a three-course meal.

Statue capital of Flanders

The city of Aarschot has plenty of other history to discover, from the Grote Markt, where a weekly market has been held since around the year 1200, to the 14th-century Sint-Rochus tower and the nearby Gothic church, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk.

The town is small and easy to explore on foot. Start your day by heading to the tourist office – so new that few locals are even aware of it. Situated on the edge of the town's centre, it's located in the same building as the city museum and has lots of useful leaflets. You'll also find a shop selling local food and drink, which includes a regional sparkling wine, and a cafe where you can sample the products.

A fun way to discover the town is the so-called "statue walk", which takes you past the town's main sites and its

numerous sculptures. Every year, city hall puts up a new statue in town, so you may not be able to find them all. One not to be missed, though, is that of the *kasseistamper* (pavement pounder), the nickname given to the people of Aarschot, on the corner of Martelarenstraat and Jozef Tielemansstraat.

There's also a memorable statue of Saint Rochus, who is associated with having driven the plague out of Aarschot in the 17th century. Find it outside the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, which, incidentally is only open in the mornings and by appointment.

The culture centre is home to several statues, including the late local artist Roland Rens' bronze bust called "De Lach" ("The Laugh"). The culture centre is worth lingering in as its café and peaceful courtyard make a lovely spot to rest your weary feet and quench your thirst.

Finally, don't miss the 14th-century Orleans Tower on the southern side of town – though "tower" is a bit optimistic. It's what's left over from the ramparts of Aarschot. But, situated at one of the highest points of the region, it does offer great views of the city and the surrounding Brabant countryside. ♦

➡ www.toerismeaaarschot.be

© Photos: Clickshot

Burning down the house

Seasoned Flemish author Erik Vlamincx delivers one of his best novels ever

REBECCA BENOOT

He's been writing prose and plays since the 1970s and has a significant fan base, but Erik Vlamincx has still never reached the same level of fame as his contemporaries Tom Lanoye and Herman Brusselmans. But that is about to change.

Vlamincx (pictured) just finished a book tour in Flanders to promote *Brandlucht* (Burning Air), during which he vividly acted out several scenes from the new novel, turning an otherwise mundane book presentation into theatre.

The 57-year-old's biggest literary hits came in the last decade, with a six-part family chronicle that he wrote from 1992 until 2005, in which he portrays everyday rural Flemish life throughout the 20th century, and for *Suikerspin* (Cotton Candy), a novel about a Flemish circus.

As a former history major, Vlamincx is particularly interested in ordinary people and how they are affected by history. Born just north of Antwerp and living in the city now, he shows a great love for the Flemish vernacular. "I'll only write about what I know, and that's the Flemish community," he says. "I also believe that characters should talk in their own dialect, which is pretty uncommon in Dutch and Flemish literature, whereas characters in a Paul Auster novel, for example, naturally use New York slang."

The beginning

Vlamincx is a traditional storyteller who writes intricate family tales that exude simple, sweet sorrow with a typically Flemish feel to them. It's a genre that is now flourishing, as opposed to the 1990s. "I've never been a postmodernist," he explains. "I like stories to have a beginning, middle and an end, with a little suspense and some humour, so I wasn't that popular then. I do believe that the reason my novels are getting more attention now is that the postmodern paradigm is no longer. You are allowed to tell a simple story again." In 1992, Vlamincx went to Canada in search of a lost relative; the result would become *Wolven huilen* (Wolves Cry), part two of the series he wrote about his own family. "I was staying with an emigrated Fleming near Toronto," he says, "and she told me I had to go to Delhi because there was a big Flemish community; that was something that stuck with me."

The middle

Three years ago, he visited Delhi, which exceeded his expectations. There are a large number of Flemish living in the city, including those whose families have been there for generations. "I think it's the only place where they actually stayed together," says Vlamincx.

This little-known phenomenon would become the inspiration for *Brandlucht*. Many Flemish emigrated in the 1960s to Delhi, he says, "and what struck me is that they still hold on to their Flemish habits and customs after all these years."

Brandlucht revolves around Elly, born in Ontario to a Flemish father and a Dutch mother. She is trying to come to terms with her past and her parent's disastrous marriage before it destroys her own future. Years later, her daughter Linda also goes in search of her roots and the truth – but soon realises that truth is a fickle mistress. Identity is the torch carried by three strong and stubborn women who are all looking for their true selves. "I personally believe that you can't shake your past," Vlamincx comments. "You'll always be defined by family, the place you grew up and the era. But some people are able to suppress this better than others." The story is also told through multiple perspectives, each shedding some light. But the notion of truth remains hazy because "I don't believe in the Truth," states Vlamincx. "if you tell a story to five different people, they'll all tell the story differently later. Real truth only exists in mathematics. That is why I like to use different perspective to describe something. But ultimately, it's what the reader takes from the story that counts."

The end

A Vlamincx novel wouldn't be complete without a little history, and in *Brandlucht* he intertwines his own tale of emigration with that of the infamous elephant Jumbo, the star of PT Barnum's travelling circus in the late 19th century. "I've always been fascinated by circuses, so I was really lucky to be in a place where the one and only Jumbo, the legendary elephant after which many would be named, had died. I couldn't resist the opportunity to incorporate his story with my own because Jumbo, too, had emigrated. Just like the doves that the Flemings keep in my novel, who fly off but always return home. You'll hardly find any dovecotes in Canada, but Delhi is filled with them. To me, that reflected these emigrants' longing for home." *Brandlucht* is characteristic of a novel that appeals to both critic and audience, to those who ache for story and for those who seek style: a melancholy atmosphere, compelling events, interesting characters and smart dialogue. It's master storytelling not to be missed. ♦



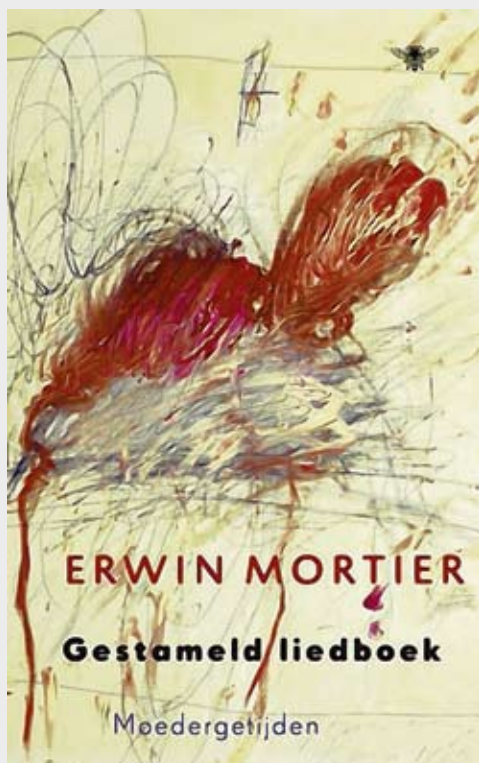
The books page



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"The postmodern paradigm is no longer. You are allowed to tell a simple story again"

Fresh fiction



De intrede van Christus in Brussel (Christ's Entry into Brussels)

by Dimitri Verhulst · Contact

Referring to the eponymous painting by James Ensor, Verhulst's second novel to publish in two months' time, is the subject of much controversy and mystery, as it's clearly a reflection of current arduous political debates, but the famously tired-of-attention author of *De helaasheid der dingen* stated that he doesn't want to talk about it. In the novel, Christ is scheduled to arrive in Brussels on 21 July, the Belgian national holiday, which results in a miraculous metamorphosis: buildings are renovated, crime drops and goodwill spreads throughout the city. But leaders can't agree on the logistics of the event. *De Intrede* is filled with irony and acidic social commentary, but Verhulst is trying too hard, which makes the book dense and contrived.

Hoed u voor namaak (Watch Out for Fakes)

by Diane van Broeckhoven & Jean-Pierre Mulders · Vrijdag

Diane van Broeckhoven and Jean-Paul Mulders are both Flemish authors and journalists who couldn't be more different. She is 65, he is 43. She is calm and contemplative, he would like to take the world by storm. She likes to spend time with her guru, he likes the latest technology. Mulders doesn't want to grow old, but van Broeckhoven reassures him that beauty really does come with age. *Hoed u voor namaak* is their correspondence and quest for authenticity in this consumer-oriented world. The result is a candid, witty and beautifully written book.

Biografie van John Muts (Biography of John Muts)

by Herman Brusselmans · Prometheus

One of Flanders' most famed authors, Herman Brusselmans clearly has no trouble keeping to his two-book-a-year minimum. Sadly, quality is often the victim of quantity. *Biography of John Muts* is a parody on the genre, focussing on a fictional character who is the embodiment of the idiosyncrasies of the inhabitants of Hamme, East Flanders, Brusselmans' birthplace. Despite being an ambitious novel that spans the 1950s to the 1970s and offers an extensive display of quirky characters, *Muts* is weakly predictable writing.

Gestameld liedboek (Stuttered Songbook)

by Erwin Mortier · De Bezige Bij

Erwin Mortier's mother has Alzheimer's. Slowly but surely, she is being overpowered by the disease. Unable to deal with the heart-wrenching prospects, this AKO prize winner has captured this cruel process in powerful and passionate prose that goes beyond the everyday suffering and tries to uncover the beauty in little fleeting moments and gestures that hide from the unseeing eye. *Gestameld liedboek* is an elegy, both raw and tender, that reflects on the relationship between parents and children, love and loss, saying goodbye and, most importantly, on the exceptional relevance of remembrance.

To sleep, perchance to dream

Gaasbeek Castle's *Sleeping Beauties* is a haunting exploration of the psyche

EMMA FIRMIN

Sitting in nearly 40 hectares of grounds about 10 kilometres west of Brussels, Gaasbeek Castle's 700-year plus history is punctuated by treason, decapitated counts, feuding dukes, marauding marquises and family rivalries. Yet upon entering the 21st-century, the castle was in danger of becoming too cosy, too weighed down and predictable in its role of historic house.

When director Luc Vanackere took over in 2003, he felt that as a museum, Gaasbeek was rather static – a place “you visited once and were not inclined to come back to”.

So he found a way to make people come back. Exhibitions – especially those that make creative use of the Flemish Brabant castle's architecture and interior – have been staged for the last several years and have reinvigorated the atmosphere.

It's one of the ways Vanackere hopes to make the monument relevant. “The castle has to relate to our lives now – here, today – and shouldn't only be a nostalgic bath in the past,” he says. “It's an approach that doesn't please everyone, but with the world of heritage as competitive as any cultural sector, how to be open to the present without alienating the past is an equation that many a historic site wrestles with.”

Flemish bare all

Sleeping Beauties is installed throughout the rooms, corridors and stairs of Gaasbeek castle – a multi-media exhibition by an array of international artists, including French artist Sophie Calle and Flemish artists David Claerbout, Hans Op de Beeck and Jan Fabre.

The theme is strategic for a castle setting, of course, but Gaasbeek went a step further, contacting American photographer Spencer Tunick, whose images of crowds of nude people amongst landscapes both urban and natural are world-famous. They asked Tunick to arrange a shoot at the castle – the first time a museum had approached the artist with a fixed concept.

Tunick visited Gaasbeek Castle one May morning at 6.00. Whatever he experienced in the dawn hours was enough to make him agree to the commission almost immediately. Tunick's provocative photographs are a cast-iron guarantee of media attention, and when hundreds of locals volunteered to take their clothes off to pose and pillow-fight on one of the many rainy July days that masqueraded this year as the Belgian summer, the results made it as far as The New York Times.

Dreams and nightmares

But Tunick's playful series, also called *Sleeping Beauties*, somewhat belies the disturbing and disorientating nature of much of the exhibition. Exploring sleep and dreams in art in a castle could have been an off-the-peg idea baked in the artistic equivalent of marzipan. Yet the assembled artworks go to darker and more ambiguous worlds than Disney ever imagined.

Sleeping Beauties takes inspiration from Hamlet's “To Be or Not To Be” soliloquy as well as from the questions provoked by unlikely yet natural bedfellows, such as Spanish baroque dramatist Pedro Calderon and British writer Lewis Carroll, who, in their individual ways, both asked whether life is but a dream. The exhibition also offers reflection on intimacy, sexuality, vulnerability and psyche in ways that range “from musing to reverie, from fantasy to nightmare”.

From the beginning, *Sleeping Beauties* offers a multiple of metaphors and readings for the restful or insomniac mind. As you enter, the sound of the hypnotic lullaby “Didn't Leave Nobody but the Baby” from the Coen Brother's film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* lures you down the rabbit hole. It's an appropriately off-kilter choice, the purity of the sirens' voices disguising their deadly intentions.

But you don't need to have a pocket guide to Freud to work your way around the exhibition. Like death, the universality and certainty of sleep and dreams are enough to give each visitor a personal experience. It's an approach that imbues Dutch artist Tobias Schalken's piece with real force, as his hyper-realistic sculpture of a little girl, asleep under the legs of a somewhat ornamental white horse, conjures up a myriad of possibilities: Is it a nightmare or a dream? Is the horse possessive or protective? Whose fantasy is this? Like “Inside” by Flemish artist Kim De Ruyscher, a stone sculpture of a sleeping bag, the form of which suggests there's a figure inside, and the late Spanish sculptor Juan Munoz's bulbous-bottomed bronze “Listening Figure”, which leans against the wall at the top of the stairs, Schalken's creation is not lost in the castle's interiors.

Revealing its roots as a fortress, Gaasbeek's architecture is introspective – what Vanackere describes as a “dark labyrinth”. It's all carved wood, reds and browns, stained glass windows, tapestries and heavy wall coverings – but a combination of the light and contrasts produces a dialogue where neither artwork nor setting



© Courtesy of the artist



© Courtesy, Galerie Majke Hüsstege



© Neue Galerie Graz, Austria; photo by UJV

From the Spencer Tunick series *Sleeping Beauties*, shot at Gaasbeek Castle in July (top); Tobias Schalken's untitled sculpture (2006) (bottom left); Austrian painter Gabriel Cornelius Ritter von Max's “Julia Capulet auf dem Ruhebett liegend” (1874) (bottom right)

threatens to overwhelm the other. It's a tension to which Vanackere is sensitive. “It would be a pity to show this kind of work in specialised, contemporary art museums. That doesn't always do justice to the work.”

The little brother of death

Sleep was once considered “the little brother of death”, and the latter certainty hovers over many of the works. Three of the most unsettling focus on death and children, with techniques that vary from the staged to the animated and quasi-documentary.

Dutch artist Desiree Dolron's “Xteriors VIII” is a meticulous photograph that was nine years in the making. Bringing Rembrandt's famous “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp” and the spirit

of the Flemish Primitives and to her staged portrait, the image of an androgynous child, drained of colour, seemingly laid out in death and overseen by darkly dressed mourning attendants, is both tragic and achingly beautiful.

Sleeping Beauties is a thoughtful exhibition, with themes that sometimes roam into uncomfortable places, yet should satisfy both the dedicated contemporary art follower keen to see works in an alternative resonance and the day-tripper who has one eye on the art and the other on a beer in one of the nearby cafes.

Unashamedly intellectual without being indulgently baffling, its dreamscape is also populated by a number of older works loaned from collections across Europe that

give a historical context to the way in which sleep has inspired art. Presented without spotlight or comment, this slumbering undercurrent is often deliberately easy to miss, but as with French artist Alphonse Eugène Lecadre's sumptuous 19th-century painting of a mother and child asleep, it provides the visual equivalent of waking up and realising: It's ok, it's just a dream. Or is it?♦

Until 13 November
Gaasbeek Castle
Kasteelstraat, 40, Gaasbeek
→ www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be



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The reunion concert of the year

EL FISH

LAURENS BOUCKAERT

El Fish was one of the great local bands that emerged during the 1990s. Critically acclaimed, perennial favourites of Studio Brussel and a dynamic live show ensured huge audiences. One would have never expected the blues-rockers to suddenly... quit. Yet that was what they did, back in 2001. Although the band never officially split – members “just stopped playing together” – their first gig in over a decade is celebrated as a reunion. We sat down with harmonica player and El Fish driving force Steven De Bruyn (far right in photo) in a – where else – blues bar in Ghent.

Why a gig after all these years?

Steven De Bruyn: “Well, a decade ago we played at our old manager’s wedding. The bride and groom celebrated their 10th anniversary this year, and we thought the best gift we could give them was to play for them again. When playing all the old songs again, we realised it still felt good – great, actually. So scheduling a show for our hardcore fans seemed like a great idea. You wouldn’t believe how many people were begging for a reunion on a weekly basis, by the way.”

Are there plans of recording an album again with El Fish?

“I don’t think so. We’re not planning that much ahead, we’ll

just see where the AB-show takes us. I’m definitely not bringing my other band, The Rhythm Junkies, to a halt.”

How did El Fish start out exactly?

“Most of us were residents of Leuven at the time. I stuck around after my days as a student were behind me. We started jammin’ and eventually found a bar that was willing to let us play. The first El Fish gigs were played in the blues bar De Blauwe Kater. We were compensated with free booze [laughs]. But we started growing from there, drawing bigger audiences every week.”

The music industry and all-round climate has changed a lot since the El Fish days. Does it affect you a lot? Do you, for instance, still care about airplay?

“Not really. You know, being a musician in Flanders has always been rough. The key ingredient of managing to pay your bills at the end of the month has always been playing live. If we’d release a new single, I’d never expect it to be instantly played on Studio Brussel or Radio 1. But, then again, we were never huge whores for media attention [smiles]. Still, the fact we’ve already sold 1,700 tickets for our reunion gig proves we must be doing something right!”



You’ve been involved with three projects with Flemish blues legend Roland Van Campenhout. Is it far-fetched to think he’ll make a guest appearance at your show?

“We made a record with Roland, too, and he filled in on the last tour for our guitar player, who quit, so it isn’t far-fetched at all. But the truth is he’s busy on the evening of our reunion gig. He’s involved in this Wim Vandekeybus project and is playing somewhere else that

night. I have a great chemistry with Roland, though. He’s one of the few musicians I had the pleasure of playing with in my life who I really feel connected to. And he’s a good friend, obviously.”

Either way, there’s going to be something special in the air on 1 October... right?

“We’re gonna have both of our drummers play at the same time. We’re gonna have a varied set list, with songs from all albums and a

lot of material from the last one. Don’t expect a lot of the earlier work though, we’re kinda done with that [laughs]. But yeah, it’s gonna be special.” ♦

1 October, 20.00

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110

→ www.abconcerts.be



DANCE

Dawson-Elo-Forsythe

Until 2 October, 15.00 & 20.00

Theater 't Eilandje, Antwerp



The Royal Ballet of Flanders kicks off its new season with an exciting mixed bill, meaning three performances in one. First, sit back as dancers flit across the stage in *The Third Light* (pictured), the latest work by young British choreographer David Dawson – an enchanting piece that presents light as something to help us find our way, help us grow and even change the way we see the world. It’s a fluid and captivating performance, enhanced by beautiful set design and music.

Next, get ready for something entirely different in *Lost by Last*, a magical journey through the mind of Finnish choreographer

Jorma Lo, a former hockey player who draws his inspiration from Hitchcock film scores, among others. Elaborate costume design and special effects with video are on the menu. Finally, finish off with William Forsythe’s *In the Middle Somewhat Elevated*, the second act from his award-winning 1988 ballet *Impressing the Czar*. The industrial-sounding score and passionate *pas de deux* from this act make it a stellar example of how to successfully push all the boundaries of classical dance. (Robyn Boyle)

→ www.koninklijkballetvanvlaanderen.be

MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Tezuka: Eastman performs this tribute to the visionary Japanese comic strip artist Osamu Tezuka, choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui
SEP 28-OCT 8 20.00-22.20
(OCT 2 16.00-22.20) at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
www.desingel.be

Ghent

Dance for the Newest Age (the triangle piece): Good Move performs this visually stimulating, often humorous dance about Archimedes, Buckminster Fuller, logic and mathematics, choreographed by Eleanor Bauer
SEP 29-OCT 1 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

Leuven

Dust: Kobalt Works presents this new piece by German choreographer Arco Renz about the paradox of seduction, featuring five dancers moving through a stunning installation by Flemish visual artist Lawrence Malstaf
OCT 5 20.00 at 30CC Schouwburg, Bondgenotenlaan 21
www.30cc.be

CLASSICAL

Cello virtuoso Gavriel Lipkind is a pretty face, all right, but not just that. The Israeli-born cellist, now based in Germany, will be the star of this concert, part of the Festival of Flanders. In a programme sponsored by the Polish presidency of the European Union, he'll be playing the concerto by Witold Lutosławski, which calls for all the pyrotechnics a cello soloist can muster. It takes five minutes for the orchestra to play a note: a single tool on the trumpet. The rest of the concert features the Agnus Dei from Krzysztof Penderecki's *Polish Requiem*, featuring the Flemish Radio Choir. Also: Henryk Mikołaj Gorecki's *Amen* (an *a cappella* piece for the choir lasting 6.5 minutes, something the Radio Choir has shown itself well capable of carrying, despite the monumental difficulty of keeping pitch for so long) and the third symphony by Karol Szymanowski, titled *Song of the Night*, with Polish tenor Pavlo Tolstoy. The conductor for the evening is Antoni Wit, musical director of the Warsaw Philharmonic, who also teaches at the city's Chopin Academy. (Alan Hope)

→ www.festivalgent.be



Gavriel Lipkind
8 October, 20.00
De Bijloke, Ghent

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Ensemble Explorations & Rudi Knoops: One must rather attend to fully understand how this works, but Knoops has built an optical machine to visualise and analyse music. A technique of distortion forces you, the spectator, to search for the ideas perspective to perceive an image. Peculiar and memorable

OCT 1 19.30 and 21.00 at AMUZ, Kammenstraat 81
www.amuz.be

Brussels

De Munt Symphony Orchestra: Patrick Davin conducts the Brussels' opera symphony in Debussy, Pierre Bartholomée and Brahms' Symphony No 1

OCT 2 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.bozar.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

Nick Hannes
Until 15 November
Huis van Alijn, Ghent

Volkskunde Vlaanderen is on a mission. The non-profit organisation for popular culture in Flanders aims to preserve and safeguard Flemish heritage and folk culture. They do so by making sure none of us forget about the deep-rooted socio-cultural elements of this region, including some of the traditions that still carry on strong to this day. *Tradities* (Traditions) is the latest initiative, a photography exhibition with very high entertainment value. Photo-journalist Nick Hannes travelled through Flanders for a year capturing the rich diversity of traditions still observed, no matter how quaint or peculiar.

My favourite photos are those taken during the Blessing of the Sea – an old ritual in the name of protecting fishermen – and the annual Egg Queen and Egg Farmer pageant, which takes place during the Golden Egg Festival in Kruishoutem. A word of warning, however, some of the centuries-old practices highlighted in this exhibition are, well, bizarre. *Gansrijden* (goose riding), for example, popular in the Antwerp polder communities, is a tad beastly. This practice, which dates back to the Middle Ages, involves riding a horse with one hand while tearing off the head of a dead goose with the other. Come take a gander at the photos if you don't believe me. (RB)



MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Saul Leiter: Solo show by the American photographer and painter featuring unpublished photographs and a selection of works on paper
Until OCT 29 at Fifty One Fine Art Photography, Zirkstraat 20
www.gallery51.com

Genk

David Cook: Overburden: First part of the trilogy *No Man's Land*, a project about the impact of industrialisation on human beings and the environment by the New Zealand photographer
Until NOV 6 at Coalface Gallery, Vennestraat 127
www.coalface.be

Leuven

Dirk Braeckman: Works by the leading Flemish art photographer
OCT 6 - JAN 8 2012 at M Museum, Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 30
www.mleuven.be

CONCERTS

Stoemp!
Until 9 November
Across Brussels

Stoemp! is back with another edition uniting 10 of Brussels' most authentic cafés through a series of free acoustic concerts. Think big names in small settings. This week, head to Het Goudblommeke in Papier – a treasure chest of old photos and the former hangout of the likes of Magritte and fellow surrealists – on 4 October, when Flemish singer-songwriter Berlaen will entertain with his strong Zulte dialect in songs like "Ge zij were zat" (You're Drunk Again) and his newest single, "Ik ben nie

schui van ui" (I'm Not Afraid of You). Tom Kestens of Lalalover will also be there to join in the fun. On 6 October, VUB Kulturkaffee is the place to be for a concert by Antwerp Gipsy-Ska Orkestra (pictured). The rowdy boys from the port city play an undefinable mix of reggae, ska, funk and gypsy rhythms. One thing we know for certain is their energy is highly contagious and their sound unavoidably danceable. (RB)

→ www.stoempive.be



MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Balaxy Orchestra: Fervent Balkan big-band with lots of brass, followed by DJs Soulshakers
SEP 30 20.30 at CC Deurne Podium, Frans Messingstraat 36
www.ccdeurne.be

Brussels

Boogie Beasts: Brussels Blues Society presents this concert by Jan Jaspers (vocals/guitar), The Goon Mat (vocals/guitar), Lord Benardo (harp) and Gert Servaes (drums)
SEP 29 20.00 at GC Essegem, Leopold I-straat 329
www.brusselsblues.eu

Wetteren & Merelbeke

Arto Mundo: World music group with a versatile repertoire of styles and original instruments from diverse continents including bouzouki, native flute, lute guitar and more
SEP 30 20.00 at Theaterzaal Overbeke, Kapellewegel 1, Wetteren
OCT 1 19.30 at Sint-Michielschool, Bergstraat 34, Merelbeke
www.artomundo.net

ACTIVE

Ezelsfeesten

30 September to 3 October
Marktplaats, Kuurne

Folklore has it that the residents of Kuurne were nicknamed *ezels* (donkeys) after the many vegetable farmers in the area who used to transport their produce to sell in nearby Kortrijk by way of donkey and cart. The city-dwellers who heard them coming would announce: "The donkeys from Kuurne are here again!" Or so it goes.



That the people of Kuurne wear their name with pride is never more obvious than during their annual donkey festival, held every year since 1960. With the entire downtown blocked off from traffic from Saturday through Monday, festival-goers take to the streets to enjoy free concerts, markets, a parade and some pretty interesting traditional activities.

On Friday, for example, there's the "quicker-than-a-donkey" half-marathon run, on Saturday a somewhat asinine parade (pardon the pun) and a high-fibre buffet for the four-legged guests of honour. Then on Sunday, prizes are distributed following the donkey toss. That's when a pile of stuffed toy donkeys gets tossed in the air, to be snatched up by a square full of eager little kids below. The festivities draw to a close on Monday with cake and coffee, a marching band and fireworks. (RB)

→ www.ezelsfeesten.be

MORE ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Pumpkin Month: October being the harvest month, activities abound for picking, carving, decorating and cooking with pumpkins

OCT in Kasterlee (Antwerp province), www.toerisme-kasterlee.be

OCT 1 in Duisburg, Tervuren (Flemish Brabant), www.bpcduisburg.be

OCT 1 in Wildert, Essen (Antwerp province), www.pompoenfeesten.be

Blankenberge

Senior Games: Free sports day for active 50-plus seniors, featuring five competitive sports and choice of more than 40 recreational sports, games and exercises

OCT 4-5 9.00-17.00 at Bloso, Koning Boudewijnlaan 15b and Floreal, Koning Albert I-laan 59

www.bloso.be/seniorgames

Brussels

Brussels Marathon 2011: Annual running event, also featuring the Half Marathon, Mini-marathon and Chiquita Kids Run. Advance registration required

OCT 2 from Jubelpark

www.ingbrusselsmarathon.be

FILM

Quichote's Eiland

Opens 28 September
Across Brussels and Flanders

Don Quixote is a legend on such a grand scale that work based on it can seem nothing but trite. That's what literary academics would have you believe, in any case, as they poo-poo the notion of putting the 17th-century Spanish anti-hero onscreen. The story of Quixote is too big and too cerebral to ever make anything satisfying from it. There have in fact been several films made from the story – a story so universally known that everyone recognises it without actually having read it – and a couple of remarkable failures, including Terry Gilliam's attempt in the 1990s, so disastrous the whole experience was the subject of one of the best American documentaries of the period.

Didier Volckaert decided to try a different approach: his feature film debut brings Quixote to modern Flanders and plants him in the mind of a troubled teenager. "I took two things from the book that nobody thinks are important, and I ignored everything that everybody thinks is important," the director tells me from his home in Ghent. "And I think it's one of the most faithful adaptations of Quixote on film."

In *Quichote's Eiland* (Quixote's Island), 16-year-old San is a loner who hides out in the toilets with his Mp3 player to avoid teachers and school bullies alike. Ignoring his father and having lost his mother, the only person



who really interests him is a girl named Isabelle (Eline Kuppens). A tough-talking wannabe punker, she's not interested in this dull guy who, quite literally, never says a word. One day from his toilet perch, San (Tiemen Van Haver) is witness to a horrible crime, and he is immediately whisked away into an odd fantasy world by a leather-clad Quixote on a motorbike. They are going to find an island on which to safely deposit the fair Isabelle.

The girl and the promise of an island are straight from Cervantes. "Everything in the book is done because of those two motivations," says Volckaert. "Quixote does everything for a woman he's never met, and Sancho does everything for the island Quixote has promised him."

By the end of the film, it becomes clear that San cannot count on Quixote (Jeroen Willems) to help him solve his problems. The man proves in fact to be more annoying than helpful, which Volckaert says is also in keeping with the character from the novel. "He's not really that nice at all. The only things he teaches Sancho is how to drink and smoke. So I've tried to stay very faithful to the book."

Quichote's Eiland is dark, fantastical and contains animated elements that recall an Eastern European tradition. "It's not a strict kind of narrative," confirms Volckaert. "It's more like how David Lynch tries to capture your attention for an hour and a half and lets you float in a certain atmosphere." (Lisa Bradshaw)

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

PM DOUTRELIGNE

Brasserie Verschueren Sint-Gillisvoorplein 11, Brussels

No two ways about it: Sint-Gillis' Voorplein is, slowly but surely, becoming insufferably trendy. Even the market, while thankfully not quite Châtelain-like, has started courting the "affluent Bohemian" set. It was inevitable I suppose, but when it happens in your own neighbourhood, well, you tend to take these things to heart.

Luckily there are shops, restaurants and bars that will never change, however much money or media interest is thrown at them. Like Brasserie Verschueren. Seasons pass, trends come and go, and "le Verschueren" remains unperturbed. Maybe it's the weight of history...

Founded in 1880 by Louis Verschueren, the café underwent a modernist/art-deco makeover in the 1930s, a deciding factor that led to the building being listed in 2002. During the Second World War, it was the (clandestine, of course) headquarters of the Sint-Gillis branch of the Resistance. That spirit of rebelliousness lives on to this day, and it would be no exaggeration to call Brasserie Verschueren a left-wing or, at the very least, a left-leaning place.

No, not in the sense that you are required to sing along to the *Internationale* or quote word-perfect from *Das Kapital*. But you will, for instance, find no cola drinks on the premises. No need to read too much into it; no point arguing that other drinks on the menu are manufactured by companies just as greedy and unethical: This Luddite stance is merely symbolic. And rest assured: not even the genial Flor, founder of the Marxist bookshop down the road and part-time waiter here, will climb on his soapbox and interrupt your conversation. In fact, whatever your political (dis)beliefs, Brasserie Verschueren is where you go for a drink among friends in a welcoming environment. I love it as a "one-for-the-road" bar at the end of a night out in Sint-Gillis, and I love it as a convenient place to chew the fat with a friend I ran into on the market. My better half loves the fact that portions of cheese are served in the wrapper from the cheesemonger. Our Labrador, Raymond, loves being looked after by friendly staff. Everyone's a winner, comrades.



© Tijl Vereenoghe/Erfgoed.be

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Brussels

Elles tournent: An excellent line-up of international features and documentaries in this annual women's film festival

SEP 29 - OCT 7 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236

www.ellestournent.be

Ghent

Adventures of Robin Hood: The 1938 swashbuckler starring Erol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland screens in the Ciné Palace, a tiny cinema constructed in the Art Deco style

OCT 9 10.15 and 14.30 at MIAT Museum, Minnemeers 9

www.miat.gent.be

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

Al Valentino Da Vito ★★☆☆

It's a dull, grey evening in late September, and my sunny, summer trip to Italy seems ages ago. Nothing left to do but look for the next best thing – a great little Italian.

Al Valentino's is a good choice because it is literally hot inside, perhaps due to the wood-burning pizza oven or the fact that it is almost a full house. Whatever the reason, it feels great to shed our fall jackets and sweaters.

It's always nice to receive a personal welcome from the chef. Vito Sorice, friends with one of our Italian-speaking dining companions, seems happy for the chance to converse in his mother tongue for a change. It doesn't bother the rest of us that we don't understand a word, as this just adds to the holiday feeling.

So, too, does the music. Every first and third Tuesday evening of the month, Nicola Vigna entertains on keyboard while singing Italian classics. He also takes requests, including a few from our table like Andrea Bocelli's tear-jerker "Con Te Partirò" and two renditions of Renato Carosone's "Tu Vuò Fa' L'Americano".

We're so busy enjoying our aperitif wines – one Marsala and two Lacrima Cristi – and complimentary cheese and salami, that we need more time to look over the menu. Not about to hurry us, Vito's Flemish wife, Nelly Mondy, comes back when we're ready.

It's a difficult decision, considering the extent of the menu, which includes meat, fish, pasta and pizza, plus the tempting suggestions on the chalkboard: ravioli with truffle, lobster flambé, grilled fillet of tuna and sautéed veal in a white wine and lemon sauce. We finally keep it simple and go with three house stalwarts: the chef's spaghetti, garlic scampis and *escalope capricciosa*.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

We add a litre of house red to the order. In no time, an adorable ceramic pitcher in the form of a chicken lands on our table. It contains quality wine – but then, as one of my fellow diners points out: "Any self-respecting Italian wouldn't serve anything less."

I often order *escalope* because I appreciate veal that has been pounded into a nice thin slice of some of the most tender meat there is. But what I don't like is when there's too much fuss about it, as is the case with my *capricciosa*. Instead of letting the meat speak for itself the *escalope*, cloaked in sliced ham and melted cheese, is covered in an overpowering tomato-cream sauce with capers, mushrooms and even more ham. I'm glad for the bit of fresh and peppery rocket salad and neutralising bowl of pasta served on the side.

My dining companion, however, contentedly twirls spaghetti onto his fork using a spoon. *Al dente* strands of pasta are still visible under just the right amount of creamy tomato sauce and hearty chunks of ham and mushroom. A light dusting of grated parmesan cheese makes the dish complete.

The shellfish is also a hit. Savoury morsels of golden scampis, are doused in melted butter, heaps of garlic and fresh parsley. I dare say that she has chosen the best dish of all.

Coffee and a limoncello finish things off nicely. And a grappa, too, as it turns out, but only because Vito pours some out for us in between his own crooning sessions. He and Nelly have been running the show here for 23 years. Pretty soon, it's up to son Alessandro, who already shares chef duties with his father, to carry on the family tradition.

→ www.alvalentinodavito.be



Chef Vito Sorice (left) pours out the grappa

- 📍 Stormestraat 91, Waregem (West Flanders)
056.60.53.36 (also take-away)
- 🕒 Fri-Tue, 12.00-14.00 & 18.30-22.00
- € Main dish: €10-€30
- 👉 Authentic Italian specialties and warm, Mediterranean hospitality

TALKING DUTCH

PHILIP EBELS

The Dutch disease

I once wrote about *tongbrekers*, tongue breakers or twisters, and how much fun they can be. Try saying *Hottentottententententoonstelling*, for example, five times in a row as fast as you can. Hilarious.

It is an artificially compounded word, meaning exhibition of tents of the Hottentots, especially invented to drive you insane. The Dutch language itself is not, but, it turns out, can be just as tongue-twisting.

The boyfriend of *Flanders Today* reader Darcia De Man, for example, a Swedish national, was delighted to find an ad in a newspaper for a *voorraaddoosset*, a set of storage boxes. "He was amazed by the fact that one word could consist of six consecutive double letters," she wrote.

It's a beautiful specimen, I must agree, of the tendency of Germanic languages to compound several smaller words to create one big word. *Voorraad*, itself an old compound, means something like stockpile; *doos* means box; and set, well, you get the picture.

Other notable examples include *arbeidsongeschiktheidsverzekering*, a word that we actually use in daily life: disability insurance. It comes from *arbeid*, labour, *ongeschiktheid*, unsuitability, and *verzekering*, insurance. But there's also the less scary *verjaardagskalender*, birthday calendar, or *universiteitsbibliotheek*, university library.

Exactly why it is the way it is I wouldn't be able to tell Margaret, who wrote me hoping to find out. Sometimes, there are no reasons. But I can imagine that "it is very difficult to know where to break up the word to decipher what it means." I guess you just have to play around a bit to find out. As long as you know that *rioolwaterzuiveringsinstallatie* is several words in English. (Linguists are annoyed by a growing trend among Dutch speakers to not



compound in writing, something they call the "English disease".

Another, tongue-twisting result of all this compounding is that sometimes there doesn't seem to be an end to the flow of consonants, like in *angstschreeuw*, cry of fear – something you might produce when you lay your eyes on the word for the first time.

That word contains eight consecutive consonants, which is rare – but not the maximum. *Hij is het slechtstschrijvend van de klas*. He is the worst writer of the class. That's nine. He or she who finds a word with more wins a prize. Don't forget to send me your questions, quirks, qualms, quarrels and quagmires.

philip.ebels@ackroyd.be

THE LAST WORD...

The poverty line

"We were different; we were bullied and humiliated. We were good for nothing. Even teachers considered us troublesome, untidy and dirty. I reacted the way I was taught: by shouting and fighting."

Danny Trimbos, a consultant on issues of poverty, recounts his own childhood

Prime demotion

"Becoming prime minister of Belgium would not be a promotion. After state reform, this country's dynamic will be in its regions. Eighty-five percent of Belgian export comes from Flanders. I am fine here."

Kris Peeters, Flemish minister-president

One for wall

"A great injustice has been done to our Wall. It hurts."

The city council of Geraardsbergen about the decision to scrap the steep hill from the parcours of the famous Tour of Flanders cycle race

No rain in Spain

"It's like academic tourism. A bit like vacation, especially when the courses are easy."

Alain Verschoren, rector of Antwerp University, about Flemish exchange students in Barcelona

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #200

Feature

Peter Paul Rubens is known mostly, of course, for his paintings – especially his sumptuous nudes, the style of which we now refer to as "Rubenesque". But Rubens was also an architect, and that is the focus of a new exhibition in Antwerp's Rubens House

Focus

This week sees the opening of Daarkom, a Flemish-Moroccan culture house in Brussels. We take a look inside to see how these two cultures are collaborating

Arts

It's October, which means the Flanders International Film Festival is running in Ghent. With a focus on film music, it's home to the World Soundtrack Awards, exhibitions and more than 100 international features and shorts. We'll tell you what not to miss