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Thinking inside the box

An award-winning showroom in Ostend brings green technology to everyday life

ANDY FURNIERE

Green technology is a booming business. There's a fair chance, say, that you have solar panels on your roof or are thinking about having them installed. It's more doubtful whether you're considering installing a combined heat and power system in your home, or that you work in an office where a LightCatcher spreads the daylight through the building. At The Energy Box, an eco-showroom in Ostend, designers are trying to open up the market to such new eco-friendly installations.

Established in early 2010, The Energy Box consists of one demonstration room, but by September of next year, an entire "house of renewable energy" will be open to showcase alternative technology. New businesses that develop green technology will receive coaching on how to find their way to the general public.

"Everybody realises that energy is becoming scarcer and more expensive, just by looking at their bills," says Marianne Martens, CEO of Greenbridge, the science park at Ghent University in Ostend, which hosts The

Energy Box. "But the solutions have not yet entered the homes and offices where people live and work."

Greenbridge also serves as an incubator for entrepreneurs developing ideas for green technology: On the 18 hectares of the science park, growing companies can set up their offices.

Multinational matchmakers

Five specialists from consultancy T2B currently coach 20 entrepreneurs to enter the market by providing them with free legal,

financial, management, technological and marketing advice for up to a year. A team of engineers from Power-Link, the energy research platform of Ghent University, monitors the projects and brings businesses into contact with interested companies.

The cost of The Energy Box amounts to about €4.7 million, of which Greenbridge covers €3.2 million for the infrastructure extension. The Energy Box receives €620,000 in grants from the Flemish government and €200,000 from West Flanders province.

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Flemish liberal Open VLD members celebrate at the party congress last Sunday. From left: Guy Vanhengel, Annemie Turtelboom, party president Alexander De Croo and Vincent Van Quickenborne

Federal government formed

Parties begin marathon discussions over ministerial posts

ALAN HOPE

After 540 days, Flemish negotiators have reached agreements with their colleagues from the other regions of Belgium to finally form a new federal government. Euphoria followed the agreement reached by the six negotiating parties announced on 5 December, followed by the nitty-gritty of deciding on ministerial posts.

On Monday afternoon, after a session of talks lasting 20 hours in the offices of the King Baudouin Foundation in Brussels, incoming prime minister Elio Di Rupo announced a breakthrough: the parties had agreed a government of 13 ministers and six secretaries of state. Di Rupo will be the country's first Walloon prime minister since the 1970s, and that novelty caused a

problem. There are normally 15 ministers in the federal government, seven Dutch speakers and seven French speakers, with the prime minister considered neutral. A Flemish prime minister, then, ensures a Flemish majority, reflecting the balance in the population.

Now, however, the 7-7 division would have brought about a French-speaking majority, which for the Flemish parties was unacceptable. This was especially the case as the three Flemish parties in the federal government do not have a majority in parliament either. At one point it was proposed that Karl-Heinz Lambert, minister-president of the German-speaking community, be installed as a minister to change the balance to 7-6-1.

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FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE



Yves Leterme

To paraphrase the words of Scot Skirving referring to Sir Thomas Peter Anderson Stuart, nothing in his time in office became him so well as the manner of his leaving it.

Last week, Yves Leterme stood up in parliament for his last question as prime minister. From this week on, the job will be handed over to French-speaking socialist Elio Di Rupo. Leterme's last session was met with applause from the floor, as well as fulsome praise from members. A fitting tribute to any departing politician, and more so for one who has carried his country through a political crisis lasting more than 530 days.

Leterme is going off to Paris to serve as deputy secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That appointment was made in September, with the condition that Leterme would serve out his term as outgoing prime minister. Back then, it must have seemed impossible that an end would ever come to his ordeal. When it did, Leterme allowed himself to be gracious. "Whatever has been," he said, "and whatever the future may bring, thank you all." The Flemish politician has had a

stormier passage in 16 Wetstraat than most of his predecessors. After successful stints as chairman of the CD&V party and as minister-president of Flanders, he stood for the Senate in the federal elections of 2007, picking up an impressive 796,521 personal preference votes. But he found it impossible to form a government and resigned. Guy Verhofstadt was sworn in as PM, with the understanding that the post would be temporary. Leterme only formed his first administration in March 2008. In December of that year he resigned over the court case around the failing Fortis bank, and Herman Van Rompuy became prime minister. After Van Rompuy went to take up the newly created post as president of the European Council, Leterme became prime minister again, from November 2009 to April 2010. In effect, then, he has been a caretaker prime minister longer than he was ever prime minister in his own right. His departure, he told VRT radio, is "not a farewell. I hope sooner or later to be able to play a role in Belgian politics again".

→ www.yvesleterme.be

News in brief

The Army's bomb disposal squad DOVO last week uncovered a cache of more than **300 illegal weapons** and five tonnes of ammunition in the premises of a munitions dealer in Ravels, Antwerp province. The premises, which also houses an illegal shooting range, was found to be inadequately protected against break-ins. The owner will appear in court this week.

The maximum amount of money parents will be asked to **contribute to school activities** in Flanders next year will increase. For pre-school, the total for four years goes up from €80 to €125; for primary school each pupil will pay €65 instead of €60. School trips of more than one day will now cost a maximum of €390 instead of €360. The maximum bill does not apply to secondary school students.

Veteran Flemish jazz guitarist **Philippe Catherine** was last week awarded the Klara Career Prize in a ceremony organised by the classical radio station in Ghent. Catherine has figured among the top jazz musicians of the world since the 1960s. Also given Klara Awards were harpist Anneleen Lenaerts (Young Hopeful); the ensemble Het Collectief (Musicians of the Year); Peter De Caluwe, director of De Munt (Music Personality); Klara4Kids (Music Event) and the recording *Cecus* by vocal polyphony group Graindelavoix (Flemish CD of the Year).

Ive Gödecke of Malle, Antwerp province, has been **reunited with his daughter** Jordan, now aged four, after a two-year search involving private detectives. Jordan was abducted by her mother,

former TV dancing star Lisa Michael, when the couple broke up, and taken to South Africa. A British detective agency recently found Jordan in the small town of Sedgfield near Cape Town. The family has now called on the Belgian government to help bring Jordan back to Flanders.

Federal justice minister Stefaan De Clerck has halted the ongoing procedure to find a new **boss for the federal police**, to allow the incoming federal government to see the selection through. In October, Christine De Bolle, chief of the local police in Ninove, emerged as a front-runner in the process, with a strong chance of becoming the country's first-ever woman police chief.

The well-known English bar **Ron's Pub in Ostend was destroyed by fire** last week. No-one was in the building at the time. Fire services say the fire may have been started by a defective connection in a ventilator. An apartment above the pub was also badly damaged.

Antwerp's parking management company this week started a pilot project that allows motorists to **pay for parking tickets by credit card**. The project covers 20 ticket machines in busy shopping and nightlife areas in Sint-Jansvliet, Ernest Van Dijkkaai, Vlasmart, Suikerrui, Frankrijklei and Quellinstraat, among others.

The Catholic University of Leuven has expelled two students from the chemistry faculty after it was discovered they were using the

university labs to manufacture drugs. The two, a masters and a doctoral student, had made small quantities of a hallucinogenic drug for their own use. A police investigation has been started.

The Flemish Community of Brussels and the Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications are to investigate a plan by Télé-Bruxelles, the French-speaking local TV station in Brussels, to **broadcast to Flemish municipalities** around Brussels using digital technology, announced Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten. Meanwhile, a number of members have called for tvbrussel, the local Flemish equivalent, to be allowed to broadcast to the periphery and the rest of Flanders.

Michelin-starred chef Luc Bellings and his wife, who run the restaurant Aan Tafel in Hasselt, have been fined €32,500 for **employing staff illegally** in the two-starred restaurant. The fine was suspended.

Entries for an **SMS poetry competition** organised by Ghent University can be submitted until 17 December. Poems on the theme "Durf denken" – Dare to Think – should consist of no more than 160 characters and be written in Dutch, English or SMS-ese. The university announced last week that the jury will include education minister Pascal Smet, culture minister Joke Schauvliege, EU council president and fervent haiku writer Herman Van Rompuy and outgoing minister and Twitter enthusiast Vincent Van Quickenborne. Entries can be SMSed free to 8690.

→ www.tinyurl.com/smspoezie

OFFSIDE

ALAN HOPE

The Hidden City

"Why do you think you see so few wheelchairs in the streets? A lot of wheelchair users would rather not come outside because they're unable to get into shops, restaurants or the cinema. Doorsteps shut us out, literally and figuratively." Brecht Provoost is a wheelchair user in Leuven, a city he's known since he arrived there to study law a decade ago. His complaints about accessibility are by no means exaggerated. A recent edition of the VRT programme *Volt* showed him trying to board a bus of De Lijn. Despite numerous attempts, only one bus driver was ready to step out of his bus and use the ramp with which most buses are equipped. The others reminded him that disabled people have to reserve

in advance if they want to take the bus. Together with his friend Diederik Ornelis, also a wheelchair user, Provoost made an inventory of the more than 40 cafés on the Grote Markt in Leuven. Only three are accessible to the disabled. "The accessible businesses in the city form an invisible network," Provoost says. Hence the name of their website: Hidden City lists addresses that are accessible to wheelchair users. Now Hidden City plans to broaden out to include Herent, Diest and Aarschot. And in the end they'd like to use their information to convince policymakers to take accessibility into account in urban planning. "It's absolutely not a question



of bad faith on the part of businesses," Ornelis stresses. "Some of them try to help us get into the shop or restaurant. But we want to be able to do it ourselves. You wouldn't want to be lifted up to the bar by someone when you wanted to drink your beer, would you?"

→ www.hiddencity.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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Trade unions protest new budget

→ continued from page 1

In the end, the solution was to give the Flemish one minister fewer, but to add four secretaries of state. In numbers, the two sides balance: 10 Flemish posts and nine French-speaking posts, with Di Rupo neutral. The politician names to fit each of the portfolios were due to be released after *Flanders Today* went to press. Trade unions, meanwhile, marched through Brussels on Friday, 2 December, in protest at the budget agreement that made government formation possible. The unions find the planned budget cuts "unjust and unbalanced", said Luc Cortebeek, president of the ACV union. "This is about our ordinary middle-class, normal young families; it's about tax relief on their homes and on solar panels. Along with those on social security, this is who will be hardest hit. We're saying, look, we want to discuss this to see if there's a way some of these measures can be adjusted." The organisers estimated 80,000 took part in the march through the capital; police gave an estimate of 52,000. A petition against the

one-day strike launched by Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, attracted more than 50,000 signatures at the weekend. Throughout Flanders services were hit by workers taking time off to attend the march or express their support. De Lijn ran only 30% of buses in Antwerp. In Ghent, three of the city's four tramlines operated on a Sunday schedule. Services were also impaired in Leuven and across Limburg and West Flanders, and the coast tram did not run at all. Postal services at the main sorting office in Antwerp were disrupted by absences, but 99% of deliveries were still made in Antwerp, Limburg and Brussels, while East and West Flanders had full deliveries. In 17 schools in Antwerp a lack of teachers meant special arrangements had to be made to oversee children, while fewer than half of the municipal crèches in Ghent were open. Rubbish collections were also hit in Antwerp and Ghent, where two-thirds of collectors were absent. One service which suffered little disruption was the railways, with trains



True to his word, Koen Fillet shaved his beard off as the government announced it had reached an agreement. The Flemish radio and TV journalist had been growing it for 324 days, promising to shave it when a new federal government formed

running "almost normally," according to an NMBS spokesman. That was because, according to the ABVV union: "Otherwise the union activists themselves wouldn't be able to make it to the protest". Voka, the Flemish chamber of commerce, reported a "limited impact" on businesses from the protest. "In 54% of businesses, no-one was absent because of the

protest, and 32% said fewer than 10% of their staff didn't turn up for work," said Voka's managing director Jo Libeer. "The number of workers who went to Brussels today was limited. It seems as if the working Fleming realises that protest brings little result, and that we'll only get through the crisis by collectively assuming our responsibilities." ♦

Concessie area of De Haan revalued

The celebrated Concessie quarter in De Haan on the coast is the subject of a new revaluation – or assessment of value – signed last week by Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois. It is the largest plan of its sort ever to be undertaken in Flanders. In 1888, King Leopold II commissioned the development of a modern villa park in the dunes between Ostend and Blankenberge, inspired by English garden cities. The area of what is now De Haan was designed by the British architect William Kidner, and the Concessie area was formed by a circular road with streets leading off along the lines of the dunes. The

area came to be valued for the various styles of architecture reflected in the villas built there – such as the Grand Hotel Bel Vue, where the plan was launched last week (*photo*). The revaluation plan covers a total of 870 buildings, which have been gathered together in a database that includes original plans, old postcards and photos, building histories and other details. The plan will be the basis on which owners can now apply for maintenance subsidies to allow the unique character of the architectural heritage of the area to be preserved, both in individual buildings and over the area as a whole. ♦

Electronic meal vouchers introduced

An electronic maaltijdcheque, or meal voucher, card to eventually replace the existing paper cheques was launched last week at the Carrefour supermarket in the Brussels commune of Oudergem. The Carrefour is the first retail outlet equipped with the electronic system required to use the card. The payment card can be used in existing payment terminals used for debit and credit cards. About 400 employers have already signed an agreement with the issuers to use the electronic system for their staff members who receive meal vouchers. So far, the electronic cards are only accepted by Carrefour, Aldi and Cora. Launching the new system, federal Enterprise minister Vincent Van Quickenborne stressed the system's potential: 1.3 million employees receive some 250 million meal vouchers a year. The electronic system, he said, brings only advantages for the consumer:

Vouchers can no longer be lost as the card can be blocked; users will be alerted by SMS when unused cheques are approaching their expiry date; and customers are no longer required to use up the whole face value of a voucher when shopping. For stores, there will be less administrative costs, and the system is simpler for employers to use. The electronic system also does away with the need for security transports when carrying cheques to employers and from shops. Unizo, the Flemish organisation that represents the self-employed and retail federation Fedis have complained that, although switching to the electronic system is free for employers, small retailers that don't already have terminals will have to equip themselves with one or risk losing customers who want to use the meal vouchers. All retailers will also have to accept both systems until the paper vouchers eventually disappear. ♦

November far from cruellest month

The month of November, it will surprise no-one to learn, was exceptional for its weather conditions, according to the monthly analysis released by the Royal Meteorological Institute in Brussels. November saw only 8.5 millimetres of precipitation, compared to a normal rainfall of 76.4mm. The previous record was a decidedly damp 22.1mm set in 1991. It rained on only 11 days last month, compared to a norm of 19. The

record stands at 10 days in 2008.

The sun appeared for almost twice as long as normal: 114 hours and 54 minutes compared to a 66-hour average. The average temperature of 8.6 degrees is described by the KMI as "abnormal". The normal average is 6.8 degrees. The average maximum was "exceptional" or to be expected once in 30 years, at 12.5 degrees compared to a norm of 9.5 degrees. ♦

→ www.kmi.be

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Steve's final stunt

Flanders said goodbye to not just one but two notable politicians last week. While acting prime minister Yves Leterme left for the OECD in Paris, Steve Stevaert announced his retirement from all public functions.

Stevaert – known as just Steve to most – was one of the most remarkable politicians of his time. He succeeded in the sheer impossible: making socialism sexy.

He was atypical in many ways. As a former pub owner with little formal education, he became one of the most powerful people in this country. And while socialists are usually associated with high taxes, Stevaert became mostly known for lowering them.

He made his name as mayor of Hasselt, where he introduced free public transport. *Gratis* – free – became Steve's mantra. As a minister in the Flemish government he abolished the TV license, making TV *gratis* as well. His critics argued that nothing comes for free: In the end, someone has to pay up. Stevaert retorted that we can all use the roads for free and the streets are lit *gratis*, too. Free simply means that the taxpayer pays for certain services, not the user. Still, people would call these "stunts", the alliteration of Steve "stunt" Stevaert thrown in for free, too.

In 2003, Stevaert's popularity reached a peak when SP.A scored over 23% at the federal elections. One newspaper even wrote "Steve is God". Stevaert was idolised like Guy Verhofstadt before him, Yves Leterme later and Bart De Wever now. The Flemish are not very committed to their gods though; once they reach their peak, the only way is down.

Aware of this, Stevaert pulled another stunt in 2005, when he left parliament to become governor of the province of Limburg, citing health reasons for the career switch. He soon left that, too, though, preferring to pursue his business interests instead.

In recent weeks, Stevaert became the victim of blackmail in a bizarre sex scandal. While most of the press does not go into the details, it has started to delve into "the Steve system". Stevaert's political communication may have been very modern, but his way of operating was not. He was at the heart of an old boys' network that controlled Limburg. As a result, everything that goes wrong in that province – from the Pukkelpop disaster to the problems within the Hasselt police – is now traced back to Stevaert. His business contacts, too, have come under scrutiny. Time for a final stunt: the great disappearing act.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

39,265

pupils in Dutch-speaking education in Brussels at the start of the school year, an increase of 810 on last year, and the highest figure ever

222

top athletes are studying at Ghent University this year, compared to 170 last year, under the university's special system for rising sports stars. Three students have taken a sabbatical from studying to concentrate on the Olympic Games in 2012

14th

place for Brussels on a list of world cities with a good reputation, according to a survey by City RepTrak Reputation Institute among members of the public in 15 countries

83.2

life expectancy for girls born in 2009 in Flanders, with boys at 78.3, an increase overall of 3% on the previous decade

100,000

letters sent by children this year to the official address of Sinterklaas operated by Bpost. The ones with a return address (bout 85,000) will receive a reply and a gift

004154
3016619



BRUSSELS

One of the nicest view over brussels, 15th floor, close to Brussels centre and european institutions by Métro, 2 minutes from Métro Yser, 2 balconies (one with south view on a farmbrussels centre, one with north view on the canal and the atomium.) quiet neighbors, surrounded by parks.



SCHAERBEEK

exceptional house at 2 min walking distance from the Rogierplace, near all type of transportation, at 5 min from the Dansaertstreet. large livingroom, 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, separate storage/laundry room, 1 toilet, fully furnished kitchen. Nice view and access to large garden.



WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT

In a very calm street, a beautiful house from 1999 with very big garden.



BRUSSELS



Centre Brussels near Dansaert area: Nice apartment DUPLEX 135m², 2008 + parking place 1 car. Livingroom +/-30m²-separate diningroom + 16m²- fitted kitchen - 3 bedrooms (20m²;12m²;12m²) bathroom - showerroom - 2wc. Individual gaz heating. Apartment with a lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops,Dansaert area, metro(Yser) and ring.

WOLUWE SAINT-LAMBERT



ANDERLECHT

Two steps away from the House of Erasme, in a commercial district, this building located on 2 a13ca proposes: commercial ground floor with workshop 143 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m²

SAINT-GILLES



luxurious 1 bedroom apartments for sale with a view over Brussels. All the apartments have been completely renovated and are equipped with a wooden floor, fully equipped kitchen

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which has been totally renovated and reconstructed and was sold to the European Commission. There are different luxurious 1 bedroom apartments for sale with a splendid view over Brussels. All the apartments have been completely renovated and are equipped with a wooden floor, fully equipped kitchen (microwave oven / dishwasher / fridge /...), videophone, complete bathroom with shower, new window frames with double glazing, security door, airconditioning.



BRUSSELS

Facing the nice Parc Cinquantenaire very spacious 4 bedroom house facing the Parc- 3 bathrooms - fully equipped kitchen - garage. One large and nice living room, 2 quiet bedrooms, kitchen is equipped, all in good conditions. Quiet neighbors, surrounded by parks. A lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops, theatre,...



Jacuzzi, 2 shower rooms, garage + space in front of the house, garden, terrace, alarm system, security door, airconditioning.



FOREST

villa 4 facades of 300m², completely renovated in 2000, living room, wooden floors, fireplace, separate dining room, fully equipped kitchen, breakfast area, laundry room, 4 bedrooms, wooden floors, office area, bathroom, shower room, cellar, garden 5acres, nice terrace, garage 2 or 3 cars, alarm system.

Thinking inside the box

The Energy Box concentrates the knowledge of green technology

→ continued from page 1

During the first two years of its activities, the EU is contributing about €600,000 to its budget via the European Regional Development Fund. “But after the end of next year, we have to find new investors,” explains Martens. “That’s one of the reasons why we are drawing multinationals such as Siemens into our network.” German electronics giant Siemens, Flemish ventilation specialist Renson and German polymer manufacturer Rehau are currently the three main sponsors. “For such companies, Greenbridge provides many chances,” Martens says. “They come into close contact with new innovations developed in the incubator, have the opportunity to judge the technology at The Energy Box and profit from the knowledge of Power-Link’s engineers.”

A chance for green growth

The smart energy meters of Siemens, the ventilation systems of Renson, and Rehau’s energy poles will all be incorporated into The Energy Box to test their efficiency. “The whole building, with its energy grid, will be a study object,” explains Professor Lieven Vandeveld, director of Power-Link and professor of energy technology at Ghent University. The infrastructure of The Energy Box will be flexible so technologies can be replaced as readily as possible. A “smart” system will adjust to the weather by switching from one power source to another – from solar to wind power, for example.

The office of Greenbridge is being extended, with a new wing of about 25 offices and a seminar room big enough for 200 people. “We want to provide room for



Nominated for the prestigious European Environmental Press Award, The Energy Box in Ostend is a showcase for eco-innovation

businesses and associations to hold conferences and other events where ideas can be exchanged,” Martens says. “We hope to concentrate the knowledge of and interest in green technology, to give the sector every chance to grow.”

There are plans to integrate the E-Cube – a prototype of an energy-efficient house designed by students in engineering and architecture at Ghent University – into the new construction as a cafeteria. The E-Cube was the only European project in the final of the recent Solar Decathlon competition, in which the American ministry of Energy rewards energy-neutral projects.

Light fantastic

The Energy Box has already proven its worth for energy company EcoNation, based in Ghent, which developed the LightCatcher. This futuristic-looking device autonomously searches for

daylight, catches it through a mirror system and spreads the light in buildings without needing electricity. The concept has been nominated as one of 10 contenders for the prestigious European Environmental Press Award, which honours the most innovative green technology. Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport already uses the system for its offices, as does the Moroccan ministry of energy.

“Everybody realises that energy is becoming scarcer and more expensive, just by looking at their bills”

“We are profiting the most from the technological expertise of The Energy Box,” says Maarten Michielssens, spokesman for EcoNation. Engineers from Power-Link helped improve the LightCatcher’s control system. “Their network also gets us in touch with potential customers,”

says Michielssens.

Other participants at The Energy Box include the West Flemish solar panel manufacturer Smartroof, which develops solar cells that are integrated into roofing tiles to make them visually attractive. Professor Vandeveld predicts that in five years combined heat and power systems from technical supplier Watts-ON will be installed in a large number of Flemish homes and companies. The Deinze company’s silent WhisperGen installation looks like a high-tech washing machine but is in fact a heating system that produces electricity at the same time, resulting in a much lower energy bill.

Harnessing the elements

The Energy Box is making a name for itself internationally. Martens was recently in the UK to collect the European Green Business Network Award. A public vote at the ceremony, part of the ANSWER project (A North Sea Way to Energy-Efficient Regions), decided The Energy Box was the greenest of more than 60 energy initiatives from Flanders, Germany, Sweden, Norway and the UK. “An international dimension is key to a networking centre,” says Martens.

The activity in Ostend has also

attracted attention in Russia. Russian energy technology developer Gimel will place, among other sustainable installations, a wind turbine at the Greenbridge park, which engineers of Ghent University will monitor.

Marketing officer Veerle Willaert, who gives tours at The Energy Box, has guided visitors from all over Europe, the US and Asia. In September, a group of reporters from India and Taiwan visited to learn about some of The Energy Box’s innovations. Every Friday afternoon is Open Box Day, when anyone can visit the technology hall.

Interactive study

The only dimension that is lacking for the moment is education, but Vandeveld is keen to fill this gap as soon as possible. “Right now only two PhD students are busy with research here, but in the near future we are planning to involve students from colleges and universities by organising tours or letting them work for a day around renewable energy at Greenbridge, so they become familiar with alternative energy and understand why it is essential to the society of tomorrow.” ♦

→ www.theenergybox.be

Energy organisations unite

Fourteen energy research institutions are joining forces in the new Belgian Energy Research Alliance (BERA) to play a more decisive role in Europe and worldwide. Universities in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia and research institutions such as the Flemish VITO and Laborelec from Brussels will be cooperating more closely around the energy programmes of the European Energy Research Alliance (EERA). The idea for BERA came from VITO; its director, Gerrit Jan Schaeffer, is president of the new federation.

“Belgian energy organisations have already individually participated in innovative projects of EERA but by working together, we have more influence in Europe,” says Peter Verboven, the vice-

president of BERA. Thanks to the coalition, the Belgian partners have been able to take the lead in a new EERA project around “smart cities”, making cities more eco-friendly while expanding their economic strength.

The coalition is partly formed on a suggestion of the European Commission. “To be able to compete with the research in the United States and Asia, Europe has to act as one bloc,” says Verboven. “It’s indispensable that smaller member states like us do not fragment our expertise.” Thematic working groups, in which every institution can participate, will meet regularly to develop common strategies.

→ www.tinyurl.com/energyalliance



The roof-top LightCatcher spreads light throughout a building without the use of electricity

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Air Transport • Jetairfly**

Charter flight operator Jetairfly will launch three new services out of Brussels Airport – to Ponta Delgada in the Azores islands and to Ohrid and Skopje in Macedonia – starting in the spring. Brussels Airlines, meanwhile, has won the right to operate a daily flight between Brussels and New York.

Banks • Citibank

Citibank Belgium, the local affiliate of the US financial services group, is close to selling its local retail operations to France's Credit Mutuel.

Banks • Dexia

The ailing Dexia Bank Belgium, which has been taken over by the state, is considering a name change as it charts a way to recovery. The institution, specialised in the financing of local authorities, was rescued from bankruptcy a few weeks ago and has posted a loss of some €1.1 billion for the first nine months of this year.

Dairy • Friesland Campina

The Friesland-Campina dairy group, owned collectively by 17,000 Dutch, Belgian and German farmers, has invested €36 million to double capacity of its milk production unit in Aalter, East Flanders. The company plans to hire an additional 90 employees.

Fashion • Van de Velde

Aalst-based lingerie producer Van de Velde, known for its Marie-Jo brand, has created a joint venture with the Hong Kong-based Getz group to manage and develop a chain of lingerie stores in China under the name Private Shop.

Pharmaceuticals • UCB

Brussels-based pharmaceutical products group UCB has presented plans for a €250 million investment in Bulle, Switzerland, to build a bio-tech drugs production unit. Work on the new facility will start early next year with the plant expected to come on stream in 2015. Meanwhile, the company has acquired the UK-based Lectus Therapeutics, specialised in the development of pain-killing drugs.

Supermarkets • Vers Centrum

The Vers Centrum Tanger supermarket group, based in the Netherlands and owned by the Moroccan Barghaoud family, will open a supermarket in Antwerp early next year.

Telecom • 4G

The licences to operate the country's fourth-generation mobile telecommunications system have been awarded for a total of €77.8 million to the three main telecom operators – Belgacom, Mobistar and KBN Base – and to a fourth surprise player, the Chinese BUCD company from Hong Kong.

Action plan for pig farmers**The long-term approach involves investing in research and promoting quality**

ALAN HOPE

The Flemish government has launched a major new action plan to support the pig farming sector, which will not only help it through the current crisis but also, in the words of agriculture minister Kris Peeters, allow it to "play for a place in the Champions' League".

The plan involves 22 measures divided across four main areas: transparency, promoting quality, investing in research and structural reform. The measures were decided after Peeters called on actors involved in the sector – farmers, government, researchers, slaughterhouses, food processors, retail and banks – to come together with ideas. Over the course of six days a plan was formulated to make the sector "competitive, profitable and sustainable," Peeters said.

Over the next two years, a premium of €100 will be paid out for every piglet of the Piétrain breed, the typical "Flemish pig", said Peeters. A code of good slaughter practice will be produced and the grading system simplified. The

"practice centre" for the pork industry, which will provide information for anyone involved in the sector, will receive a subsidy of €140,000 a year, and €2 million will be spent on extending research facilities relating to the industry. Finally, the Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund (VLIF) will see its budget increased by €2.5 million for 2012.

Cornerstone of Flemish agriculture

The parties involved have agreed to set up a permanent and ongoing negotiation arm. "This action plan is not an end to the matter, but a good beginning," Peeters said. "The pig farming industry will continue to be what it has always been: one of the cornerstones of the future of Flemish agriculture." Pig farming accounts for one-quarter of all agricultural production income in Flanders, with a value of €1.3 billion a year.

VEVA, the association representing pig farmers, criticised the plan for not paying enough attention to the farmers who have suffered most through the crisis. "Over



© Kurt Despenier / BELGA

the last four years, the heaviest burden has been carried by the first link in the chain – the farmer himself," commented Geert Wallays of VEVA. "From this wine bottle of measures, only a few drops are to go to the part of the industry that is having the most problems." Farmers have argued for price support.

The General Union of Farmers (ABS) echoes the statement. "A lot of long-term measures have been announced, but there are few points in there that will ease the burden on the suffering farmers in the short term," said a spokesperson present at the launch ceremony. ♦

Flanders hesitates to take over green subsidies

Flanders is not in a position to say immediately whether it will be able to take over the payment of subsidies for energy-saving measures dropped by the federal government under the new budget accord agreed recently. According to minister-president Kris Peeters, speaking last week on VRT television, only when the next round of budgetary audit comes in February will the government be able to see what room there is for manoeuvre.

The move is "anything but self-evident," he said, adding that "2012 is going to be a very difficult economic year. All budgets are severely limited."

The measures involved were tax relief on payments for energy-saving home renovations, such as the installation of double glazing, roof insulation or high-performance water heaters. Energy minister Freya Van den Bossche (sp.a) has called for a bridging scheme between the federal subsidy and whatever Flanders eventually decides, so that home-owners who are considering changes can be assured of some consistency.

"If we want to help bring down people's energy bills and achieve our environmental aims, Flanders has to compensate for the meaningful measures that have just been scrapped at federal level," said Flemish parliament member Bart Martens (sp.a). In Flanders, the measure would cost an estimated €333 million, and Van den Bossche admits the money would be hard to find.

The scrapping of the federal subsidy has had one positive side-effect.



Home-owners had until 28 November to order work to qualify for the subsidy. However, the bill also has to be paid this year, even if the work is carried out in 2012. Given the last-minute rush of people hoping to qualify, contractors are looking forward to a massive injection of cash-flow coming up to the New Year.

Meanwhile, the scrapping of another green subsidy has been welcomed by Komimo, the environment and mobility organisation. The cancellation of the discount offered by the federal government on the purchase of a low-emissions, "green" automobile will improve air quality in the region, according to Komimo. The reason is because in practice most of the subsidies went to smaller diesel vehicles, which have higher-than-normal emissions of nitrous oxide and fine particulates. ♦

Court cases:**Telenet fined, partial appeal for Lernout and Hauspie**

• Cable TV and internet provider Telenet has been fined €250,000 by the institute for post and telecommunications (BIPT) for failing to inform subscribers of their right to rescind their contract when the company changed the conditions. Telenet made some minor changes to the service contract in October of 2010 but neglected to tell clients they could cancel their contracts without penalty, as required by law.

• The Court of Cassation last week accepted an appeal against a part of the judgement in the case of speech technology firm Lernout and Hauspie, which went bankrupt in 2001 and was later found to have artificially inflated its performance figures. Six of those convicted in the case, including managing director Jo Lernout (pictured), appealed to the Cassation court, which accepted only an appeal regarding a package of 51,000 shares owned by Lernout and director Nico Willaert. The package had been seized from a bank in the



© Bas Bogaerts / BELGA

Netherlands and declared forfeit by the court. That ruling will now have to be revisited by the Antwerp appeals court.

• Lucien Verkest and his son Jan, whose business was at the origin of the dioxin crisis in 1999, have lost an appeal against their two year sentences. The Verkestes were found to be delivering animal feed to farmers that was contaminated by machine oil. The crisis had a severe impact on the meat industry, with seven million chickens and 60,000 pigs destroyed. It also led to the resignation of two ministers. ♦

Grand Prix for Mortierbrigade

Brussels-based ad agency Mortierbrigade last week won a Grand Prix at the industry's Eurobest Awards in Lisbon for a campaign for VRT radio's Peeters & Pichal programme, which called for more customer-friendliness from big businesses and shorter waiting times on customer help lines.

Mortierbrigade also won gold in the radio category for the campaign, and silver and bronze for two campaigns for Music for Life on Studio Brussel. Antwerp agency Duval Guillaume Modem won a total of nine awards at Eurobest, including a silver for their now famous Carlsberg bikers-in-a-cinema internet ad. In all, agencies



from Brussels and Flanders took home 35 awards for clients ranging from Amnesty International to Yarrah organic pet food. ♦

→ www.eurobest.com

Emission control

Flemish environment ministry announces action plan for 2013-2020

ALAN HOPE

The subject of climate change is once again at the top of the agenda for the nations of the world, with a United Nations conference in Durban, South Africa, which ends just as this issue of *Flanders Today* appears. Prior to the start of the conference, Flanders' environment minister, Joke Schauvliege, presented her government's proposals for a climate action plan for 2013-2020.

The period covered by the 1997 Kyoto protocol ends in 2012, and the new policy aims to carry on the work. Schauvliege is guardedly optimistic about Flanders' contribution to the global effort. "The most recent figures from 2009 show we are meeting our targets," she said, "though we can expect less positive results for the years after that, largely as a result of the economic difficulties that followed." According to the figures, more than 90% of the 120 measures set out in the climate action plan for 2005 to 2012 are on course. "Extra effort will be needed post-Kyoto, from 2013, to achieve results that are affordable and sustainable," the minister said. The new policy will concentrate on those sectors of the economy not covered by the European Union's Emission Trading Scheme (ETS): buildings and construction, transport, agriculture and forestry and some parts of industry and energy production.

"From 2012, we will be faced with tougher reduction requirements," Schauvliege explained. "In the non-ETS sectors, Belgium has to

reduce its emissions by 15% from the levels of 2005. That target has to be shared between the federal government and the regions, and the success or otherwise of achieving it will, as during the current Kyoto period, have financial consequences."

A team effort

The new policy covers mitigation of climate change – ways to prevent it happening to the extent possible. Last May, Schauvliege presented the government's plans for adaptation – the measures needed to deal with the effects that are already showing. Some of those, such as measures to cope with flooding in parts of Flanders, are already being put into place.

Mitigation efforts, according to Bob Nieuwjaers, head of the government's department for air, nuisance, risk assessment, environment and health, will require the participation of the whole Flemish government, not only the environment ministry. Policy on agriculture, for example, involves not only agriculture minister Kris Peeters but also the ministers for innovation (Ingrid Lieten), energy (Freya Van den Bossche) and the environment (Schauvliege). For policy on buildings, every minister in the government will have a share of responsibility, from economy (Kris Peeters again) to health (Jo Vandeurzen).

"In the end, we have to dare to look further than 2020 and take a long-term view in the Flanders climate plan," Schauvliege said. "In order



Flanders' climate policy addresses sectors not covered by the EU's Emission Trading Scheme, such as construction and some parts of industry production

to avoid runaway climate change, worldwide emissions have to be cut by 50% by 2050, in comparison with 1990 figures. The EU Commission in its Roadmap 2050 has set out a path to reduction with 10 annual milestones: minus 40% by 2030, minus 60% by 2040, until by 2050 European emissions are reduced by 80%. Our mitigation plan for 2013 to 2020 will help us move in the right direction towards a low-emission economy."

The next step will be the start of a series of round-table conferences for each of the sectors affected by the

plan, starting in December in Ghent with a conference on the energy performance of buildings, chaired by Van den Bossche. Conferences on agriculture, transport and non-ETS industry will follow into the spring.

Whatever the outcome in Durban, Schauvliege said, "Flanders will keep on working towards a binding multilateral climate agreement. However, we do not intend to wait for a global accord before taking action ourselves." ♦

→ www.lne.be/themas/klimaatverandering

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Scientists of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have brought **meteorites found in Antarctica** to Brussels. A Belgian-Japanese team of researchers gathered about 800 rocks, each of which provides additional information on the evolution of the solar system and planets, including Earth. Meteorites are relatively easy to find in Antarctica, because they are brought together by movements of the ice, and the dry climate is ideal for preserving them.

Katlijn Quartier, a student at Hasselt University, has received **Flanders' first doctorate in architecture**. Her thesis concentrated on the effect of lighting on consumers. For the research, she designed a lab similar to a supermarket and experimented with different light settings in a real supermarket. Reactions of experimental subjects revealed that lighting was essential for the image and the perceived atmosphere of a shop. Quartier found that light settings had no direct effect on sales figures but could improve customer loyalty significantly.

The Flemish government has pledged **grants to regional universities in the amount of €4 million annually** to help attract more young researchers. The subsidies offer them better education and guidance in their careers. Flanders hopes to attract more foreign researchers and help Flemish junior researchers to work abroad; increased cooperation with other universities is the ultimate goal. The subsidies are part of the Innovation Centre Flanders programme, which aims to turn Flanders into a knowledge-driven economy.

Flemish minister of education Pascal Smet promises to **cut the number of study courses in secondary education**. There are 343 different courses in Flanders, some attended by just a single student. Smet says about 100 courses will remain after the planned reform. Current courses with only a handful of students include plastic design techniques and developing activities for elderly people in care.

More and more young people with disabilities are enrolling in university. In Ghent, the number of disabled students has increased from 538 in 2008 to 815 this year, while the number of students who need special facilities at the University of Antwerp has multiplied by four in five years. In many cases, the students suffer from learning difficulties. The reason for the increase is improved services for disabled students, such as digitised courses and adapted exam schedules.

(Andy Furniere)

Farming and climate change

Piet Vanthemsche of the Farmers' Union says using new technologies is key

Farmers are already feeling the effects of climate change, and the agricultural sector is going to be one of those hardest hit in the future.

Climate change is going to have a huge impact on agriculture all over the world, making it harder for people to farm. The big question is going to be the availability of water. Here in western Europe there's also going to be an impact, but nothing comparable to desertification in parts of Africa and South America.

The agricultural sector is going to have to adapt to the new circumstances. We're already suffering the consequences [among them the destruction of much of this year's fruit harvest by storms]. Agriculture also has a role to play in cutting emissions of greenhouse gases, and our job will be to figure out who can do what to contribute.

What role does farming play in a global policy to fight climate change?

Technical progress will allow us to maintain productivity with less energy input. Demand for agricultural produce is going to rise. We're going to have to feed even more people. We need to look again at how we handle the soil and the use of fertilisers. In animal farming, it may be that we need to become even more intensive, and genetics could provide some answers to allow us to produce more. Those are all questions we'll be considering from January, when there will be a series of round-table discussions.

Agriculture is often seen as a source of environmental problems. Is that fair?

It's true agriculture is often seen in that light, but we have taken positive action – for example in the

area of nitrates. Water quality has improved, and there are further positive steps to come. Agriculture does have a major impact on the environment, but then so do sectors like industry and transport.

What do you see as the immediate priorities for your industry?

Water quality is going to be the absolute priority in the coming years. The conference [in Durban] was concerned with mitigation of the effects of climate change, and I think the future lies in the development of new technologies that will improve things without having a negative economic impact. I believe in technical progress and I think it offers us a number of solutions. I feel very strongly that that is where the answers are going to be found. (AH)

→ www.boerenbond.be



"Demand for agricultural produce is going to rise": Piet Vanthemsche

The Top 20

The holidays are barreling down upon us, but never fear, *Flanders Today* is here with our annual Top 20 list of gift suggestions from across the region

1 Ninja cookie cutters

Afternoon tea will never be the same again with these ninja cookie cutters. The perfect gift for a sweet tooth or a home baker. Finish them off with some icing for extra effect. They're "cut out for action!" (€16)



Buy it at:
Zao

A great shop to find a little something for almost everyone you know: funny kitchen tools, pretty china tea cups, silly magnets, witty greeting cards, little notebooks and a large selection of children's toys (*Baljuwstraat 96, Brussels, www.zaodeco.be*)



2 The largest puzzle in the world

It looks like we're facing a cold winter, so what better way to fill your evenings than by putting together the 32,256 pieces of this enormous jigsaw puzzle? Clear the table(s), as the masterpiece (depicting a Keith Haring painting) measures 544 x 192cm (€299)

Buy it at:
Puzzle Passion

Paradise for puzzle lovers! This shop is packed with big and small, 3D and double-sided puzzles. Be sure to ask owner Christian for tips on how to put the pieces together, he's been puzzling for as long as he can remember (*Belliardstraat 143, Brussels, www.puzzle-passion.be*)

3 Let's Make Some Great Art

Surprise someone with a gift that gets their creative juices flowing, or at the very least gives them an excuse to play with crayons. London illustrator Marion Deuchars' latest book is an interactive art project inviting readers to do everything from finger painting to making their own Andy Warhol Campbell's Soup can design (€20)



Buy it at:
't Stad Leest

Located in the heart of Antwerp's historic district,

't Stad Leest ("The City Reads") carries an impressive assortment of coffee-table books, a broad range of children's genres and all the latest fiction and non-fiction in both Dutch and English (*Steenhouwersvest 16, Antwerp, www.tstadleest.be*)

4 Pacman or Sesame Street belt

Retro is hot, Pacman and Elmo are even hotter. So suit up and surprise society with these flashy belts (€20)

Buy it at:
Leeloo

What started with electro, new beat, acid and house changed into fashion with a quirky yet stylish range. Leeloo is thriving among young people and sells both new brands and vintage (*St-Jakobsstraat 19, Bruges, www.leeloo.be*)

5 Macaroons

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a macaroon is just "a small cookie composed chiefly of egg whites, sugar and ground almonds or coconut". But oh boy, are these macaroons more than just "a cookie". The vibrant colours make you happy, and so do the flavours: mango, passion fruit, kiwi and more (€various)



Buy it at:

Pâtisserie Academie

Walk past the open window of Tom van Loock's atelier and you will most definitely be seduced by that white chocolate passion fruit or mango creation. Or the three textures of chocolate in a single piece of pie. This patisserie is your taste buds' best friend – at democratic prices, too (*Academiestraat 4, Bruges, www.patisserieacademie.be*)

6 Oh My God scales

The On the Move weighing scales have the right dose of irony to counter those good yet unrealistic resolutions made on New Year's Eve. Flanders' biggest *schlager* king Eddy Wally inspired the makers of the Oh my God scales (€25)

Buy it at:

Gifts at Home

Gun-shaped toilet brushes, purses in the form of chickens and frogs: This place delivers your gadgets. Very funny furniture downstairs as well; most items are designed by the Flemish brand On the Move (*Eiermarkt 4, Bruges; www.gifts-at-home.be*)

7 King and queen salt & pepper mills

You don't need to be a chess grand master to enjoy having this stylish set of salt and pepper grinders on your table. Just imagine the fun when paired with a checked tablecloth. Made of 100% natural rubber wood, this design gadget by London-based Spinning Hat is a perfect play (€59)



Buy it at:
YOUR

If there ever were such thing as a trendy one-stop-for-all shopping destination, YOUR is it. From fun gadgets, design books, fragrances and accessories to an impressive collection of contemporary fashion and even its own hairdresser, this two-storey concept store has it all (*Kloosterstraat 90, Antwerp, your-antwerp.com*)

8 Thai Coffee

Ever heard of coffee from Thailand? Or the Ethiopian bean produced by one of the very few women in the industry? Delicious (€5-10)

Buy it at:

Délisa Délices & Saveurs

Eighty years ago this was a (probably the first) English tea house in Bruges, run by a British lady. Today, the owner of the new Délisa serves coffees, teas, hot chocolates and cakes. If you tell them what coffee you like, they will give you exactly what you need (*Jan van Eyckplein 7a, Bruges, www.delisa.be*)

9 Baobab Christmas candle

Yes, Christmas decoration tends to be a bit kitschy, speaking of which, have you seen Baobab's limited-edition Christmas candles? They carry the names of Santa's reindeer (Rudolph, Prancer and Blitzen), smell of mistletoe and cloves ... and come in a furry jar (€49)



Buy it at:

Baobab flagship store

Belgian candle and home fragrance brand Baobab opened its very first shop last month. Inspired by travels to Africa and Asia, you'll find candles in all sizes and colours, with delicate scents such as "Chinese ink" or "African morning dew" (*Zavelstraat 15, Brussels, www.baobabcollection.com*)

10 TripSound Suitcase

Hands up if your bottle of olive oil from Greece or pottery from Venezuela got broken in your luggage. That's because airport handlers toss and crush your bags without a care in the world. But TravelTeq cares: They've made this sturdy suitcase to protect your precious cargo. But wait. It also has a built-in sound system and converts into a chair (€495)

But it at:

Graanmarkt

This chic spot in Antwerp somehow escapes the holiday rush, offering a contemplative gift-buying experience, preceded by lunch in its beautiful restaurant. The shop is handmade- and designer-oriented, with women's wear, ceramics and home decor (*Graanmarkt 13, Antwerp, www.graanmarkt13.be*)



11 Shaving kit

This exquisite shaving set is by Mühle, leader in shaving culture for more than six decades. Its classic safety razor and brush made of silver-tip badger hair is guaranteed to take the male grooming ritual to new heights (€191)

Buy it at:

De Messenwinkel

This local gem is chock-a-block with all things classy and sharp. Once a string business passed down over five generations, the charming shop is now a coutellerie specialising in kitchen knives, pocket knives and everything to do with shaving (*Mechelseplein 7, Antwerp, www.messenwinkel.eu*)



14 Molami headphones

For a lover of both fashion and music, indulge in a set of luxury designer headphones by recently launched Swedish brand Molami. Their headphones combine superb audio with avant-garde design in materials such as stingray, napa leather and 18-carat-gold (€300)

Buy it at:

Renaissance

There's no store in fashion capital Antwerp with a higher profile than Renaissance. This cosmopolitan haven is one-part high-end multi-brand store and one-part fine dining, fittingly located next to the Fashion Museum (*Nationalestraat 28-32, Antwerp, renaissance-antwerp.com*)



17 Pyramides Assortment

A more creative way to give chocolates is this box of pretty pyramids used to make hot chocolate. They melt smoothly and come in coffee and caramel flavours, too (€14)



Buy it at:

Leonidas

Call us old fashioned, but we still like this brand, which a Greek-American launched in Brussels nearly 100 years ago. It's perhaps less trendy than it once was, but the pralines are still good, and their gift boxes are still super fun – both to give and to get (*across Brussels and Flanders, www.leonidas.be*)

18 Tea cup

Have you ever noticed how tea drinkers can get very defensive about the obsession around coffee? We recommend you treat your favourite tea-tipper to something special, like this tipping cup by Magisso. Put the tea and water in to steep, then tip it to the left to drink. It's cute and functional – just like your tea drinker, no doubt (€19.95)



Buy it at:

Studio 59

This pretty shop carries the best in kitchen and household products, from sleek chrome toasters and trays to colourful plastic lemon squeezers. Good for cute, less-expensive items for friends and pricey impressive items for the person who actually cooks for you (*Boomstraat 59, Bornem, www.desmaakraad.be*)

12 Eve Lom cleanser

Praised by *Vogue* as the best cleanser in the world, this could be the key to flawless skin in 2012. Apply the lotion to wet skin, and massage it off with the special Eve Lom cloth (€42 for 50ml, cloth included)

Buy it at:

Senteurs d'Ailleurs

One of Europe's biggest high-end perfume and cosmetics stores, the Brussels shop recently moved and got a substantial makeover.

Use the black entrance for niche perfume brands, or the white one for luxurious lotions and potions (*Stefaniaplein 1A, Brussels, www.senteursdailleurs.be*)



15 Fake fur jacket

It can be intimidating to buy clothes as gifts, but jackets are easier because they can be a bit oversized. This adorable fake fur could be worn over a little black dress on New Year's Eve or with jeans at the movies on a Sunday afternoon (€159)



Buy it at:

Bellerose

This Flemish label is worn across the world for good reason. The clothes are just cool enough to not look like you're trying too hard. Definitely visit the menswear section for distinctive shirts and ties that defy the norm (*Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, Knokke, Leuven, www.bellerose.be*)

13 Sumida travel bag

Don't even try to argue: One can never have

too many bags. That's why they're a safe gift, and this year's jazzy new pink and green colours from Kipling will leave the recipient dreaming of sunnier days. The Sumida comes in three sizes, with an expandable zip for cramming in plenty of beach towels and tourist guides (€60-€85)



Buy it at:

Kipling

The brand launched 24 years ago by three Antwerp women just keeps on giving. Well-made and affordable, these bags – from coin purses to suitcases – are sold in shops everywhere, but the brand stores are the best for browsing (*Aalst, Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, Mechelen, www.kipling.com*)

16 Twilight ladybird

Sometimes kids

have toys that adults secretly wish they could use, and this is one of them. The Twilight comes in the shape of a ladybird or turtle that projects a starry night sky from its back on to the ceiling at bedtime. The projections have different colours, and there's an auto-shut off, too (€49.95)



But it at:

Krokodil

This chain of shops across Flanders is an irresistible place to shop for kids, from babies to pre-teens. It's packed to the rafters with toys and games of all sorts. While Krokodil gets that we live in the 21st century, it also gets that kids are still kids. Note: Each store's stock can vary. The Twilight can be found only in Turnhout (*Bruges, Houthalen, Leuven, Lier, Lommel, Schilde, Sint-Niklaas, Turnhout, www.krokodil.be*)

20 Cave

These "caves", which come in a multitude of colours, are great hideaways for kids and can be moved outside when the weather is warmer. They're made by the ultra-fun Danish designer house bObles, which also produces crazy-shaped pint-sized furniture and brightly coloured floor mats (€139)



Buy it at:

Kikker & Ko

This huge, marvellous kids' shop in the Berchem district of Antwerp is low on logos and high on creativity, stocking a never-ending supply of inventive games, puzzles, books, school supplies and little worlds to construct (*Gitschotellei 139, Antwerp, www.kikkerenko.be*)



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Chill out

The coast isn't just for summer, and De Panne gets our vote for best winter weekend on the sea

ANNA JENKINSON

I'm always on the lookout for beautiful walks in the Flemish countryside. I don't mean a pleasant stroll in the park or a hike in the forest where roads suddenly appear across your path; I mean somewhere to lose yourself and get that thrill that comes with being immersed in nature.

And last month, I found just such a place: the sand dunes around the coastal resort of De Panne.

Standing still in the middle of the dunes, I couldn't hear a human voice, a car or any other sound from the modern world. Instead my ears were treated to several different bird calls and the rustle of small creatures scurrying through the low-lying shrubs. Nor could I see any houses, bars or cafes; instead my eyes feasted on the flora and fauna of this sandy expanse. I was in heaven.

The Duinen en Bossen van De Panne (the dunes and woods of De Panne), as the nature reserve all around the town is called, cover an area of about 545 hectares. Within the reserve are several distinct areas, the largest being De Westhoek at 345 hectares. In fact, De Westhoek is the largest dune area along the entire Belgian

coastline and home to more than 500 sorts of plants and a third of Flemish flora.

Birds to look out for in the winter months include hen harriers and short-eared owls, while on the plant front, sea-buckthorn and its orange berries are plentiful.

The joy of visiting in the winter is that you have the dunes virtually to yourself. De Westhoek has more than 11 kilometres of marked paths (sandy, not tarmac or wooden pathways) twisting and turning up and down the dunes from the edge of De Panne down to the border with France. In the centre of the nature reserve is a large open expanse of sand, nicknamed the Sahara.

Sweating in December

Wrapped up in a jacket, hat, gloves and scarf, the winter layers were gradually discarded as the sun shone down (I'm convinced the sun shines more at the coast than elsewhere in the country, no matter what season it is), and the exertion of walking through the sand took its toll. By the time I emerged out of the dunes and back onto the beach, I could certainly feel my thigh muscles.



Explore the widest beach on the coast on horseback

Luckily, I had a plan up my sleeve for getting rid of aches and pains. But first there were the couple of kilometres to walk back along the seafront, a stretch where there are no high-rises or any other building until you hit the town itself.

The beach at De Panne is the widest along the coast, stretching up to 250 metres at low tide, and is a popular spot for sand-yachting. On a recent weekend, another adrenaline-fuelled sport took place: the annual mountain bike

race known as Beach-Endurance De Panne. More than 1,000 cyclists set off at noon and power the length of the beach before climbing into the near edge of the dunes and then back down on to the beach – a total of 52km.

It was quite a spectacle seeing so many cyclists in their coloured shirts speeding along the beach. Luckily the width meant there was still plenty of space for a leisurely amble on foot. If you've had enough of walking and don't fancy the high-energy options, horse-riding along the seafront is another popular pastime.

After several hours soaking up

the healthy ions in the sea air, it was time for a soak of another kind: in the hotel swimming pool. Hotel Villa Select, a 19th-century building converted into a four-star hotel, has several attractions, not least its location directly on the seafront, creating a fantastic vista both from the front guest rooms and the breakfast area.

The big pull for me, though, is its swimming pool, steam room and sauna, which are free for hotel guests. Don one of the hotel's big, white, fluffy bathrobes and relax on the loungers in-between a dip in the pool and spells in the sauna and steam room. Did I mention I was in heaven?♦

Master chef by the sea

For a gastronomic treat, De Panne is home to a two-star Michelin restaurant, Hostellerie Le Fox. Master chef Stéphane Buyens is a well-known figure in the world of cuisine, having won many awards and being president of Belgium's Order of 33 Master Cooks. He is also a familiar face to the wider Flemish public thanks to the VTM show *Chefin Nood*, in which Buyens travels to struggling restaurants to help turn them around.

As you'd expect from a Michelin-starred restaurant,

the service and the food at Hostellerie Le Fox are fantastic. From a blood-sausage mousse as an *amuse-bouche* to a turbot dish matched with a Montlouis wine to an array of small desserts, my taste buds were more than satisfied. If you fancy a visit, but can't afford the à la carte evening option, be sure to check out the fixed-price options such as the Fox lunch. After all, you can always walk it off with a hike through the dunes.

Vienna in De Panne

Kristian Yayak is a 22-year-old Indonesian who lives in De Panne, and he recommends a trip to his town's Christmas market. "It's cold, but you can drink a *glühwein* to warm up," he tells me. "I love the wintry atmosphere." The market square is filled with food and drink stalls, and there's an ice-rink if you fancy a spot of skating. Kristian works as a waiter in De Panne and likes to go to the Christmas market on his days off.

The market, whose theme this year is Vienna, starts on 17 December and lasts until 8 January. The Christmas and New Year celebrations in De Panne come to a final stop on Saturday, 14 January with the traditional burning of the town's Christmas trees on the beach, a fireworks display and complimentary *oliebollen*, fried fish, hot wine, jenever and hot chocolate.

Getting there by train

There are trains once an hour to and from De Panne (it takes an hour and a quarter from Ghent and two hours from Brussels). De Panne's station is a few kilometres outside the centre, but the coastal tram makes an easy connection. In 10 minutes, you'll be in the town centre.



© Toerisme De Panne

Useful links

De Panne tourist information

→ www.depanne.be

Flemish Visitor and Nature Education Centre

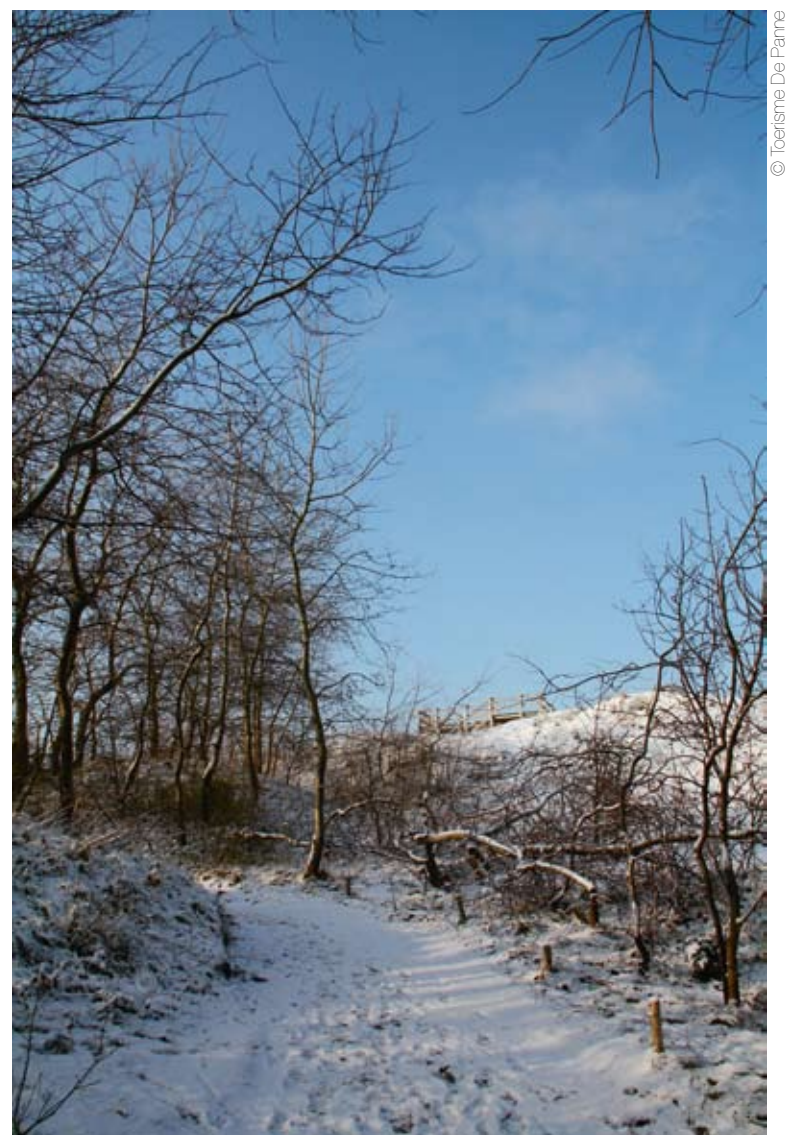
→ www.vbncdenachtegaal.be

Hostellerie Le Fox

→ www.hotelfox.org

Hotel Villa Select

→ www.hotelvillaselect.be



Winter solitude in De Panne's dunes

© Neil Evans

© Toerisme De Panne

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An ancient city brought back to life

SAGALASSOS: CITY OF DREAMS

DENZIL WALTON

The ancient city of Sagalassos in the south of Turkey is one of the most amazing archaeological sites in the Mediterranean. Flemish archaeologist Marc Waelkens of the Catholic University of Leuven has been carrying out excavation work there for more than 20 years. The results of his team's work are now finally displayed at the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren (the European Museum of the Year 2011). It's the first time the precious finds have been allowed to leave Turkish soil.

Sagalassos is high up in the mountains, some 100 kilometres to the north of the seaside resort of Antalya. The ancient city had an eventful history. Alexander the Great captured it in 333 BC, and in 25 BC Emperor Augustus made Sagalassos part of the Roman Empire. The city flourished and magnificent monuments, temples, fountains and bath houses were built. Sagalassos became a City of Dreams.

The dream didn't last. In the sixth and seventh centuries AD, an epidemic of plague followed by two powerful earthquakes heralded its decline. By the 13th century, Sagalassos had become a ghost town. Fortunately, its remote location deterred plunderers, while thick layers of debris hid the buildings from view.

Sagalassos fell into oblivion and remained that way until the beginning of the 18th century, when a French doctor described

its remains. Other explorers and scientists followed in the 19th century, but it was a Fleming who started the excavation work proper in the early 1990s. Under the leadership of Professor Waelkens, an interdisciplinary team of scientists descended on the site and have spent the last two decades systematically uncovering the ancient city in one of the largest excavations in the world.

The many items brought to the surface testify to the city's complex and fascinating history. These include monumental architectural fragments and life-size statues of Roman gods and emperors. Other intriguing objects include prehistoric tools, red-painted pottery dishes, bronze sculptures, oil lamps bearing Christian motifs and slabs depicting dancing nymphs.

Sagalassos: City of Dreams is promoted not as a classic archaeological exhibition but a total experience. Flemish opera director Guy Joosten has come up with a bold design that presents the exhibition as a dramatic event. He has lit certain exhibits from different sides, including the monumental marble portrait of the Roman emperor Hadrian and images of ancient gods and goddesses.

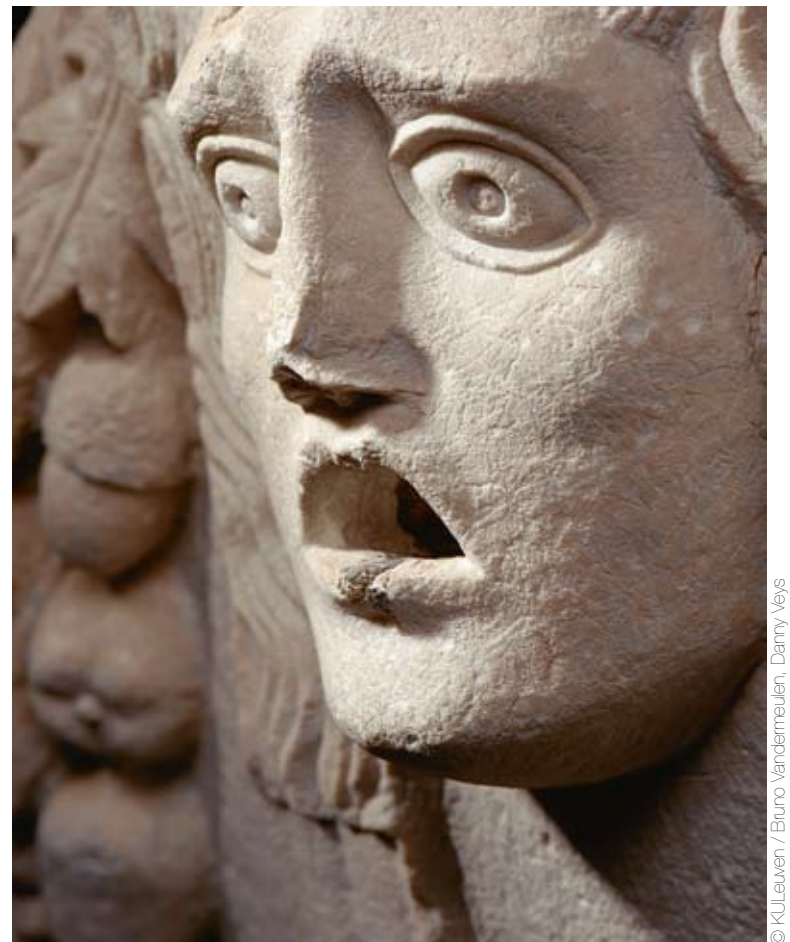
To evoke the atmosphere of the archaeological site, film shots are shown on a 270-degree panoramic screen that floats in the middle of the room above a scale model

of Sagalassos in its heyday. He also powerfully evokes the fatal earthquakes with modern-day debris surrounding Hadrian's huge marble head.

The highly original set, the clever use of media, the stimulating atmosphere and the collection of 238 *chefs-d'oeuvre* combine to make *Sagalassos: City of Dreams* a great day out for the whole family.

Pamper yourself, Roman-style

Take advantage of your stay in Tongeren, the oldest city in Flanders, to feast on Roman-style food and relax Roman-style in the public baths. During the Sagalassos exhibition, five venues in Tongeren are serving typical Roman dishes – everything from suckling pig with heirloom vegetables to a three-course menu with *pulum numidium* (chicken in a cumin, coriander, almond and date syrup sauce). And several saunas in Tongeren and the surrounding areas have given their premises a Roman touch. ♦



© KULeuven / Bruno Vandemeulen, Danny Veyts

Until 17 June 2012

Gallo-Roman Museum
Kielenstraat 15, Tongeren

→ www.galloromeinsmuseum.be



Strip Turnhout

9-11 December
Across Turnhout

Comic strip enthusiasts, you might be surprised to find out that Flanders' largest and oldest comics festival takes place not in Brussels, but in Turnhout, and only once every two years. Guests of honour this year include Flemish artists Merho (*De Kiekeboes*) and Steven Dupré (*Sarah en Robin, Kaamelott*) and several young artists from the UK. Come to the kick-off event on Friday night at de Warande for an "illustrated concert" by Arbeid Adelt!. The band, made up of Flemish musicians Marcel Vanthilt, Luc Van Acker and Jan Vanroelen, will perform their best hits from the 1980s, while 12 Dutch and Flemish illustrators draw their interpretations of the songs live on stage. Laughs guaranteed!

Saturday is a full programme of

strip-related events, from debates and interviews to signing sessions and sketch battles. There will also be several exhibitions going on at venues across town, including *Freakout in Turnhout* at Café De Wemeling, works by international artists and their take on musician Frank Zappa's life and career. At the end of the day, don't miss the concert in the same café, when Flemish musician Bart Maris belts out some striking Zappa covers. Sunday's activities are all about kids, with Japanese Manga drawing workshops, games involving comics for youngsters under 18 (*Jommeke, Flikken*) and the chance to create their own comic strip hero to take home. (Robyn Boyle)

→ www.stripturnhout.be



© Strip Turnhout

MORE COMICS THIS WEEK

Brussels

77 Years of Romanian Comics: Original illustrations and panels from the history of Romania's comic strip art
Until MAY 20 at Belgian Comic Strip Center, Zandstraat 20
www.comicscenter.net

Eeklo (East Flanders)

Brussel in de Strip (Brussels in the Comic Strip): Images of the city in famous comic strips such as *Suske en Wiske*, *Nero*, *Michel Vaillant* and more
Until DEC 30 at the City Library, Molenstraat 36
www.eeklo.be

Leuven

Charles Burns: Works by the American cartoonist and illustrator
DEC 8-MAR 11 2012 at Museum M, Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 30
www.mleuven.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

Well-judged photography contests are a blessing for both viewers and amateur photographers; we get to see work we never would have had the chance to see otherwise, and they get their big break. Both amateurs and professionals were invited to submit work to the online Picture Slovenia site for its contest Picture Slovenia: 20 Years of Independence. The results were so spectacular that a group of 30 of the winning 50 photos are now travelling Europe. The panel of judges was made up of professional photographers (and one representative of the government), and they clearly tended towards the pastoral and natural – a man cartwheels across a mountain range, a girl paddle in a huge expanse of water, a village sits below an early-morning mist. The winning photo “Two Fisherman” is by Robert Kruh, who in fact works for the Slovenia Forest Service while practicing photography on the side. With this win and other recently published work, he’s now one of the most sought-after young photogs in the small country. (Lisa Bradshaw)

→ <http://iv.vlaanderen.be>



Picture Slovenia: 20 Years of Independence

Until 22 December
Boudewijngebouw, Brussels

MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Peter Lindbergh: Two series by the acclaimed German fashion art photographer: Berlin, made for Vogue in 2009, and A Selection by Klaus Honneft from a unique combination of his world-famous images and more recent work
Until JAN 29 at FoMu, Waalsekaai 47
www.fomu.be

Urban Survivors: International photo agency Noor teamed up with the Flemish chapter of Doctors Without Borders to create this reportage of everyday life in five urban slums
Until DEC 31 at FNAC Antwerp, Groenplaats 31
www.msf-azg.be

Ostend

Vissersvrouw (Fisherwoman): Flemish photographer Wouter Rawoens show of the 26 fisherwomen he photographed for his book Fisherwomen: 26 Lives, One Story
Until JAN 31 at Amandine Museum, Vindictivelaan 35
www.museum-amandine.be

PERFORMANCE

Working Title Platform #03

15-18 December
Across Brussels

Workspacebrussels offers a platform for budding young artists in contemporary dance and theatre. During a rigorous residency programme, they get a working space, equipment and coaching, the result of which is bundled into a presentation platform, or Working Title Platform. This third edition features a varied bill of works in progress, giving the artists the chance to perform before an audience and the audience the chance to see what’s brewing in the young world of performing arts. Highlights include *Sound Bed*, a movement-sound installation by German choreographer Vera

Tussing. At the centre of this work is a willing audience member who, by passing through different sound rooms, becomes one with the unfolding dance. Pyromaniacs might want to head over to Brigittines for *Fire Experiments*, Pieter Van den Bosch’s work on light produced by combustion or explosion (pictured). The finale is undoubtedly the music and dance jam night, when dancers and musicians play off of one another with amazing improvisational skills. (RB)

→ www.workspacebrussels.be



MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Ghent

Cesena: Rosas and Grandelavoix music ensemble perform in this latest modern dance piece by Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker
DEC 9-10 20.00 at Vlaamse Opera
www.vooruit.be/nl/event/2762

Kortrijk & Tongeren

Disisit: The latest work by and with Flemish performance artist Benjamin Verdonck (in Dutch)
DEC 7 20.30 at de Velinx Tongeren, Dijk 111
DEC 14 20.15 at Arenatheater Kortrijk, Schouwburgplein 15
www.benjamin-verdonck.be

Turnhout

We Saw Monsters: A poetic performance about horror, religion, myth and reality by Icelandic dancer-choreographer Erna Ómarsdóttir, featuring dance, song, music and visual effects (including very loud music and explicit images)
DEC 14 20.15 at De Warande, Warandestraat 42
www.warande.be



MARKET

Markt van Morgen

11 December, 12.00-18.00
Kloosterstraat, Antwerp

There are Christmas markets a-plenty this time of year, but here’s one that’s really special: It’s run by young talented designers. That means that instead of the umpteenth candle or ornament, you’ll find truly unique gifts. Everything at the Markt van Morgen (Market of Tomorrow) is handmade on a small scale, from painted greeting cards and original necklaces to hip kids’ clothing and lovely interior design pieces. And there will be no lack of holiday cheer, with a live concert at 14.00 and ongoing entertainment courtesy of the Radio Centraal DJs, plus cosy fire baskets, *glühwein* and other food and drink at the Bar van Morgen. (RB)

→ www.marktvanmorgen.be



MORE MARKETS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Midwinterfeest: 10th annual artisanal Christmas and New Year market featuring hand-made gifts, lots of lace and live Christmas music
DEC 11 11.00-18.00 at Bruggemuseum Volkskunde, Balstraat 43
www.tinyurl.com/midwinterfeest-bruges

Brussels

2 Weeks Before Christmas: Unique shopping weekend inside the bookstore of the International Centre for City, Architecture and Landscape (CIVA), featuring a wide selection of new books (on architecture, gardening, design, etc), plus games, DVDs, calendars and more, an exhibition, workshops, food and drink
DEC 11-12 at CIVA, Kluisstraat 55
www.civa.be

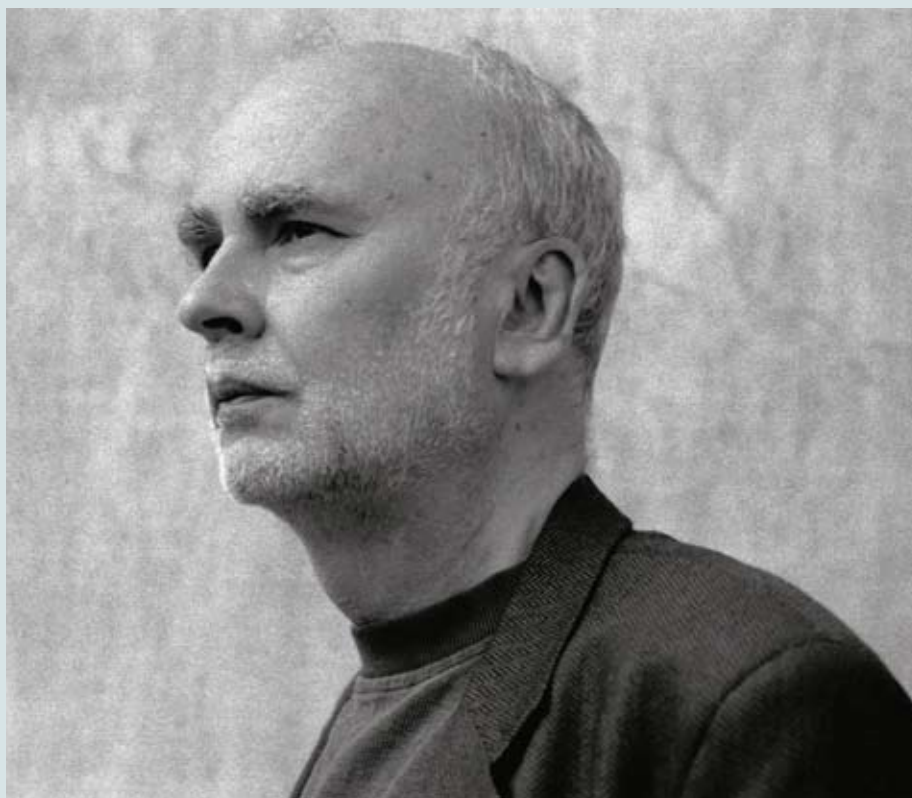
Ostend

International Christmas Market: Rows of stands featuring local products from Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Germany, Italy, Spain and more
DEC 17-19 on Koninginnelaan, near Prinses Stephanie and Prinses Clementinaplein
www.visitoostende.be



LITERATURE

His poem "Try To Praise The Mutilated World" has given hope to many since it was printed on the back page of the *New York Times* shortly after 9/11. As one of Poland's most highly regarded contemporary writers, Nobel Prize candidate Adam Zagajewski continues to produce thought-provoking books and collections of poetry. For this visit to Brussels, he will focus on his 2004 essay, *A European Citizen*, a reflection on identity and culture in which he elaborates on the idea that Europe "has become an admirable piece of fiction." Joined by Flemish poet and Poland expert, Johan de Boose, the talk is sure to offer fascinating insight – and raise a lot of questions – about what it means to be European today. Throughout the evening, photographer Agnes Moyon will present a slideshow of the author's various sources of inspiration. Later, Zagajewski will read passages from some of his works followed by a Q&A session with the audience (in English). (RB)



Adam Zagajewski

14 December, 20.30
Bozar, Brussels

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Korneel De Rynck: The Flemish historian talks about his new book *The Garden of Tito: A Journey along the Belgrade-Sarajevo Railway* with East-European literature specialist Sven Peeters (in Dutch)

DEC 10 14.00 at De Groene Waterman, Wolstraat 7
www.groenewaterman.be

Ghent

Stefan Hertmans: The Flemish writer discusses his bundle of socio-critical essays *De mobilisatie van Arcadia* (The Mobilisation of Arcadia), a reflection on humans' deep-seated longing for an utopian existence (in Dutch)

DEC 8 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

→ www.bozar.be



CLASSICAL

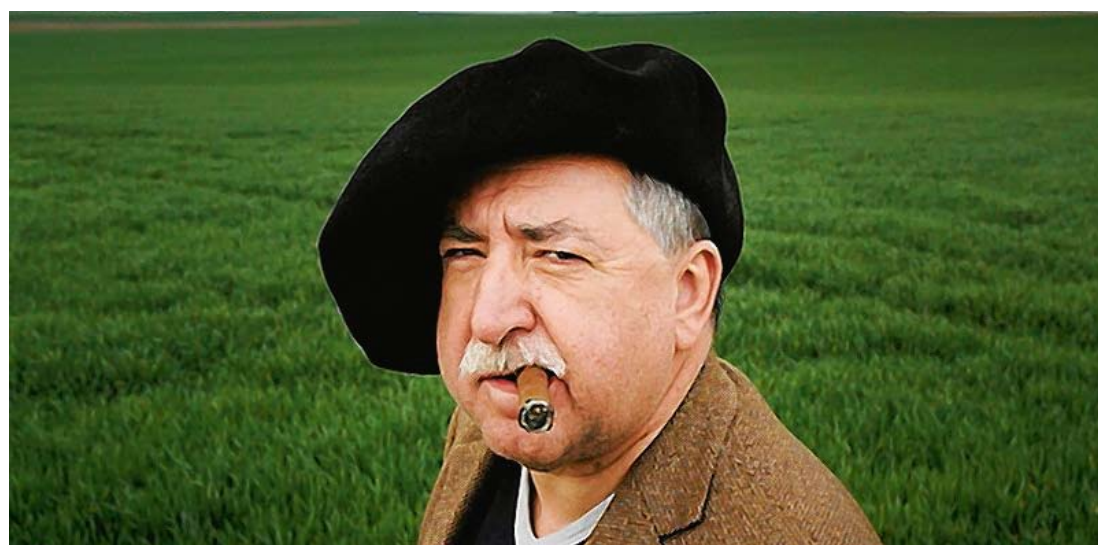
Domein Paul Van Nevel

15-18 December
Concertgebouw, Bruges

It takes only a few seconds to recognise the warm, pure sound of the Huelgas Ensemble, the marvellous choir set up 40 years ago by Hasselt-born conductor Paul Van Nevel. Its repertoire, though, is much harder to pin down, so much does Van Nevel, a maverick pioneer and trend-setter, delight in hunting down the unlikely masterpieces. This anniversary series in Bruges gives a fair overview over three concerts: the first is

devoted to Jean Richafort, a Flemish Renaissance composer Van Nevel positively worships. The second branches out into contemporary music with a contemplative requiem by Wolfgang Rihm. The third concert is a musical homage to the cigar. You read that right: Van Nevel is a devoted Havana puffer, and he'll have us believe that many classical composers were, too. Whatever he says. (Marie Dumont)

→ www.concertgebouw.be



© Michel Hendryckx

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Il Fondamento: Bach & Italy: The Flemish ensemble founded by celebrated oboist Paul Dombrecht perform Bach's Italian adaptations of Alessandro Marcello's oboe concerto to a concerto for harpsichord and of Vivaldi's concerto in A minor to a piece for the organ
DEC 11 15.00 at Amuz, Kammenstraat 81
www.amuz.be

Brussels

Ensemble Clematis: The Brussels-based ensemble founded by conductor Leonardo García Alarcón performs Georg Böhm, J.C. Bach and J.S. Bach
DEC 9 20.00 at Miniemen Church, Miniemenstraat 62
www.clematis-ensemble.be

Ghent

Brussels Philharmonic: The orchestra plays Bela Bartok, Jean Sibelius and Robert Schumann in a programme inspired by Finnish forests and Rhineland landscapes. Special guest is the young Russian violin phenom Eugene Ugorski, and the programme is conducted by Michel Tabachnik
DEC 10 20.00 at de Bijloke, Bijlokekaai 7
www.bijloke.be

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

JENNIFER JANSONS

Le Pantin

Elsensesteenweg 355
Brussels

It's not necessarily easy to find a café that provides good beer, a friendly staff, free wifi *and* an inspiring environment. Le Pantin, adjacent to Flageyplein in Brussels, is such a place. Immediately warm and relaxing, it makes you want to take your coat off and stay for a while. (This is not hard to do considering the menu includes more than 60 beers.)

After several months of renovations, Le Pantin reopened in mid-November with a new look that fortunately retained its original charms. Aside from a brand new toilet, the ground floor decor is almost untouched. They did, however, add a second floor with a cosy living room setting and an additional bar for convenience. With several plush chairs, a couch and three large wooden tables, there is now more space for the bar, which continues to grow in popularity. Each table is adorned with a candle inside an old jenever or wine bottle, adding a romantic glow to the room.

Photographs of the café's renovations can be found on the walls, and pieces of the old infrastructure have been re-used in the new interior. Le Pantin's soundtrack is always a plus. In the first 15 minutes, we heard Iggy



© Jennifer Jansons

Pop, Velvet Underground and Pink Floyd. Those into board games are generally into such tunes. Le Pantin is also a hub of gaming: A Go club meets every Monday and a chess club on Saturday.

It's likely that on any given day you will be served by owner Jean-Marie Miller. Born in the neighbourhood, Miller opened Le Pantin in 1983. Inspired by the famous 20th-century Brussels dramatist and puppeteer Michel de Ghelderode, he decorated the café with puppets, old philosophy books and original paintings. From the excellent beer selection, our table chose a Triple Karmeleit (on tap) and a Mc Chouffe. The menu sports about 20 brown beers, which, like Le Pantin, are a perfect accompaniment to a winter evening.

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

Little Asia



Quỳnh Truong Thi is an amazing woman. Yes, she runs the best Vietnamese restaurant in the country. And yes, she can count such Flemish starred chefs as Sergio Herman and Peter Goossens on her list of regular customers. These facts are, in and of themselves, impressive, but Quỳnh's life story is even more so.

As a 10-year-old in Vietnam, Quỳnh and her five siblings watched their father push off in a small boat filled with other refugees; they didn't know if they'd ever see him again. But five years later, with the help of some kind souls from the small town of Wichelen (East Flanders) where their father took up residence, the entire family was reunited for good in Flanders. And Quỳnh (pictured) hasn't sat still for a moment since.

First, she worked as cleaning help in restaurants while studying Dutch. Then she got the idea to open a comic strip shop, and later a snack bar. The Vietnamese fast food outlet in the centre of Brussels was a raging success, so in 2004 she transformed it into the sleek, popular restaurant it is today.

Quỳnh's brothers and sisters make up the bulk of the serving staff. The women wear long, elegant dresses in white and turquoise, and the men are stylish in black. All are very friendly and speak English, Dutch and French.

My fervent foodie friend and I order two aperitifs: Gin Fizz for me and a Caipirinha for her. Next to the *à la carte* menu are three set menus – Discovery, Little Asia or Vegetarian. They come with choices of main dish, so we order two different Little Asias.

The first course is *Pho Bo*, a traditional Vietnamese vermicelli soup. The steaming broth is both sweet and sour, slightly spicy

and filled with noodles and succulent strips of beef. A plate of fresh herbs and vegetables – bean sprouts, spring onions, lime wedges and pungent sweet basil – invites us to add our own texture and flavour to the soup.

Next up is an assortment of starters: a fat prawn decked with crispy puffed rice and sesame seeds, a deep-fried pork spring roll, a soft steamed roll stuffed with veg and a flavour-packed soy bean and prawn pancake. These come with two sauces.

My friend's main is a line-up of grilled prawns infused with turmeric, lemongrass and fragrant herbs. These rest on a bed of thin glass noodles and come with a plain side salad. She assures me it's delicious, although I can't help but sense a tinge of envy when my main arrives.

My duck breast is expertly cooked, with a tender, rosy centre and a buttery soft thin layer of fat that's slightly crisped on the outside. Shitake mushrooms and cashew nuts add to the earthy character of the dish, while sweet and spring onions, turmeric and ginger give it a spicy punch. Together with a side of fluffy, aromatic white rice, this dish is very healthy given all its flavour. I wash it down with a glass of rosé.

Desserts are a trio of sorbet and a duo of coconut *beignets*, fried coconut balls rolled in sesame seeds with a scoop of ice cream. Finally, after three hours, the night ends with a pot of fresh jasmine tea and a round of goodbyes to our newly made friends at the (very) nearby tables. The bill comes to about €60 per person.

⇒ www.littleasia.be



📍 Sint Katelijnestraat 8, Brussels
🕒 Mon-Tue & Thurs-Sat, 12.00-15.00 & 18.00-23.00
💶 Mains: €18-€40
👉 Refined Vietnamese cuisine in a trendy, lounge-like setting

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

TALKING DUTCH

PHILIP EBELS

Woord van het jaar

It's that time of year again when people start looking back and sizing up the events of the last 12 months. What was the biggest news of 2011? What was the most spectacular discovery? What was the best film? And, most importantly, what was *het woord van het jaar*, the word of the year. Dutch-language dictionary publisher Vandale has made it a tradition to hold a vote each year. They draw up a list of 10 new words that have found their way into everyday use in Flanders and ask you, the citizen, to vote.

One of the more easily translatable is *frietrevolutie*, or French fry revolution, born in February when students in Ghent protested against the never-ending government negotiations by getting (half) naked and making fries.

Or, to stay in the same category, *lazarusformatie*, a government formation named after the biblical character of Lazarus, whose name in the Low Countries is associated with intoxication. Just like a drunk, the formation stumbled along.

Until not very long ago, when there it was: *het vlinderakkoord*, the butterfly accord, the deal reached during government negotiations, chaired by Elio Di Rupo, who often wears a bow tie, or a *vlinderdas* (butterfly tie) in Dutch.

Something different is *knuffeldiefstal*, hug robbery. This one has only been in use for a couple of weeks, since reports began coming in of older ladies getting a warm hug on the streets from a total stranger who would then at the same time swipe their jewelleEt je le sais Alice, tu m'en a parlé ...ry.

Or *stoeproken*, pavement-smoke, something café and restaurant-goers are forced to do these days, after a smoking ban in public spaces came into force earlier this year.

Aside from the 10 contenders that were hand-picked by professionals, there are another 25



newcomers sent in by the Flemish public. They are divided into five categories: young people, lifestyle, sport/entertainment, economics and politics.

Bingelen, apparently, is a word used by elementary school pupils meaning to prepare your homework on the internet. In a sign that the English language continues to creep up on the Flemish, *swappen* nowadays is used to refer to the practice of exchanging second-hand clothes with friends.

Wildbreien seems to be not only a new word but a new pastime altogether, as it means "wild knitting", or decorating trees and buildings with knitted covers. A *citroenloopbaan*, meanwhile, is a career path that looks like a lemon: little work in the beginning, a lot of pressure in the middle when employees are squeezed, and little work at the end.

And an *obesitasregering* is a government with too many parties involved.

⇒ <http://woordvanhetjaar.vandale.be>

THE LAST WORD...

Feeling the heat

"I almost didn't make it into Johannesburg when the fever scan showed I had a fever. A doctor came to examine me."

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege, en route to the world climate change conference in South Africa, experiences her own form of global warming

Detective work

"They work according to an extremely outdated approach. It was known that if this was ever examined scientifically, the results would be pretty embarrassing."

Criminologist Bryce De Ruyver on reports that publication of a study into the provincial police schools has been postponed because the results are so poor

One small step for a man

"If you'd predicted 20 years ago that an openly gay man would become prime minister, they'd have said you were crazy. We mustn't underestimate what an enormous step forward this is."

Jozef De Witte of the Centre for Equal Opportunities on Elio Di Rupo

Old habits die hard

"I'm thinking about getting an iPad. But then you can't put one of those at the bottom of the bird cage, like you can with a newspaper."

Flemish TV presenter Mark Uytterhoeven on the limits of technology

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #210

Cover story

Have you ever done a route planner on the De Lijn website and been faced with the "belbus"? You probably shut down and decided to drive, but we'll tell you why the *belbus* is worth it on this, its 20th anniversary

Living

Last year it was a tough sell trying to get you out of the house and into the icy winds to enjoy Flanders' many December offerings. This year, the unseasonably warm weather has made our task much easier, so check to see what our correspondents have to recommend this winter

Arts

The new Flemish film *Groenten uit Balen* (a play on words, but we'll explain all that), a celebration of the working class, is set to pull in big local crowds when it opens next week. We talk to the man who wrote the original stage play in the 1970s: Walter van den Broeck