

Home sweet home

Kortrijk tests the ultimate in student accommodations



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New lock on horizon?

Ghent crosses its fingers for a Terneuzen deal



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Journey through time

Herkenrode Abbey's 600 years of powerful women



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Streams of ideas

Brussels is divided over how to integrate the canal zone into the city

Andy Furniere

Socialist party SPA has a dream for the Brussels canal district. Instead of a dividing line between the city centre and perceived "problem areas", it should become the spine of the city. The SPA wants to move industrial sites from the centre of the canal zone and replace them with greener areas, where it is more pleasant to live and work, while policymakers believe the industry can be integrated into the city scene.

In its vision text "Against the Stream", SPA-Brussels indicates that half of all the capital's inhabitants live less than two kilometres from its canal. But, it says, Brussels doesn't feel like a city by the water. Pascal Smet, Flemish minister for Brussels and the previous Brussels minister for public works, feels the current government lacks a coherent approach: "The Brussels authorities need to make a clear choice to move industrial enterprises, such as scrap recycling

companies, from the centre to the far ends of the canal region." Smet's party SPA wants to replace the industrial landscape with parks, promenades and an open-air swimming pool (*pictured*). Enterprises on the banks should fit into the city scene and have more creative and ecological activities. During his term as public works minister, Smet planned a park at the location of the Ninoofsepoort and at Tour & Taxis. Work at the Ninoofsepoort should start in 2013, while permits for the zone at Tour & Taxis are being negotiated. With play areas for children and the prospect of being able to stroll, jog and cycle along the water, Smet hopes to attract people to live there. For this purpose, new housing should be built, from luxury apartments to social residences.

"I won't give up the economic value of the inland port of Brussels"

Blending in

But Brigitte Grouwels (CD&V), the current Brussels minister for public works and the port, has no intention of forcing the industry on the banks of the canal to move. "These enterprises are important economic centres in Brussels and need to feel supported by the city government," she says. "I won't give up

the economic value of the inland port of Brussels. The supply and removal of materials via transport along the canal saves a lot of lorries on the already congested roads."

Grouwels admits, though, that companies have to be aware that they are close to the city centre. "They need to put more effort into improving the environment by installing proper fences and keeping their sites tidy."

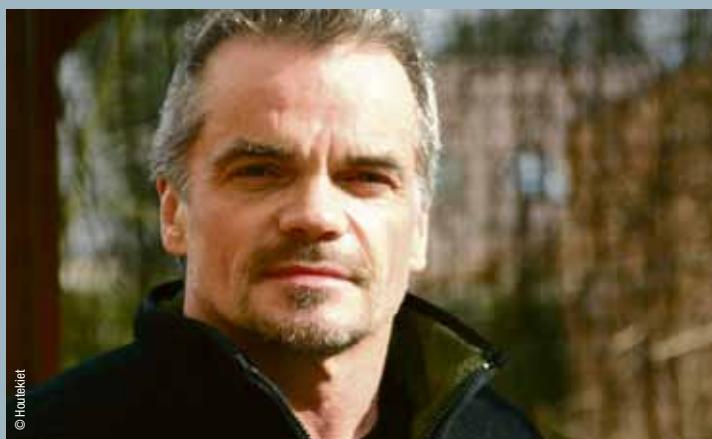
Brussels' city architect, Olivier Bastin, agrees that the strategy of the SPA to largely reconstruct the canal district is out of date: "Instead of starting over, it is better to adapt the industrial environment so that it blends into the city scene." Grouwels refers to urban planning studies currently being drawn up, which will result in a master plan that marks out different zones for industry and recreation. There are schemes for more parks and also for bridges. The bicycle route along the water is being improved, and there are contacts with the hotel and catering sector. To integrate the port into the tourism strategy, Grouwels is preparing to set up a passenger terminal in the outer harbour for cruise ships that visit Brussels.

Brussels' Boquería

To clean up industrial sites along the canal and develop them into economic territory compatible with the landscape of a capital, Brussels is supporting the regeneration of the land by companies with a sustainability strategy. The organisation

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Bob Van Laerhoven

Is it possible to find 1,100 literature enthusiasts each prepared to pay €10 to see a Flemish book translated into English in the hopes of finding a publisher? Author Bob Van Laerhoven is hoping so, as he launches an attempt to crowd-fund the translation of his novel *Terug naar Hiroshima* (Back to Hiroshima) – the first time a Flemish writer has attempted such a project.

Crowd-funding, or fan-funding, where members of the public buy a "share" in a creative work in the hope of a return later, is already well-established in the music and film worlds. Among the leading exponents is Sonic Angel, a Flemish enterprise set up by musician and producer Maurice Engelen and businessman Bart Becks.

"Two of my recent novels, *De Wraak van Baudelaire* (The Revenge of Baudelaire) and *Terug naar Hiroshima*, are regularly described as international in the press," Van Laerhoven writes on his website. "That set me to thinking."

Foreign publishers have been impressed by translated extracts, he goes on, "Having the novels translated completely is a difficult and expensive job, but one that's essential to obtain a contract with a foreign publisher."

The translation talent is available, but the cost of the English translation of *Hiroshima* alone runs to about €11,000, with *Baudelaire* costing about €8,000. So Van Laerhoven is offering anyone who wants to support the work the chance to buy one or more shares at €10 each. "This is not an investment," he warns. "It's goodwill sponsoring: the only return is a cultural bonus." If the sum needed is raised, and a contract obtained, shareholders will be repaid from net profits. If not, they get back €8 of their stake, with the rest going to website costs.

So far, about half the funds needed for *Baudelaire* have been raised, with two contributions of 200 shares from anonymous donors. But *Hiroshima* funding is dragging along at about €1,700 of the €11,000 needed. "It's a little embarrassing because it feels like begging," Van Laerhoven admits. "But there's no other way."

De Wraak van Baudelaire, a Hercule Poirot Prize winner set in 1870, and *Terug naar Hiroshima*, a Poirot Prize nominee set in Japan, are published in Dutch by Houtekiet.

► www.bobvanlaerhoven.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Joske Plas

News in brief

Cold weather caused the **deaths of three people** in Flanders last week, in Limburg, Antwerp and at the coast. Meanwhile the Missing Persons Cell was able to rescue two elderly people – one man who lost his way while driving and ran out of petrol, and an elderly woman who wandered off from a home and was found by a police helicopter, already suffering from hypothermia.

The "Muffin Man" of Ghent, who received a suspended sentence of six months for **taking two bags of muffins** from a bin outside a supermarket, has had his conviction overturned by the court of appeal in Ghent. The court ruled that Steven De Geynst had a long-standing agreement with the shop allowing him to take food that had been thrown into their bin, and that there was no question of theft, despite the arrival of a new manager. The retail federation Comeos said the judgement "sent out a bad signal" to the trade.

Police last week issued a description of 34-year-old Stijn Saelens, who **disappeared from his home** in Carpentier Castle in Wingene, West Flanders, two weeks ago, leaving behind a pool of blood and shell-casings. However, a presumption that Saelens might still be alive looked weaker when a municipal worker described seeing a suspicious car in the area on the day of the disappearance, with what may have been a body on the rear seat.

De Liereman nature reserve in Oud-Turnhout, Antwerp province, has been given the **Best Life Nature Project Award** by the EU Commission for a restoration project described as "an example for the rest of Europe". The reserve, run by conservancy organisation Natuurpunt, includes 180 hectares

of heathland, grassland and woods, all restored to its original state.

Almost three-quarters of the country's rail infrastructure is equipped with the **automatic braking system** TBL1+, according to the rail infrastructure agency Infrabel. That compares with only 24% two years ago, at the time of the train accident in Buiizingen, Flemish Brabant, in which 18 people were killed when a train ran through a red light – something the new system would prevent. By the end of this year, the coverage will be up to 87%, Infrabel said. Meanwhile, the NMBS aims to have all trains equipped for TBL1+ by the end of this year; at present 70% of trains are equipped.

Chemotherapy administered to pregnant women has no ill effects on the development of their babies, according to new research from the University of Leuven, which followed 70 children from the age of 18 months to 18 years whose mothers had been treated. The study showed no significant differences with other children, except in two cases of premature birth. The study's authors have advised pregnant women not to delay seeking treatment for cancer, as chemotherapy is safe from the 14th week.

Mobility minister Hilde Crevits responded last week to a suggestion by Brussels transport minister Brigitte Grouwels **for a toll to be applied to vehicles entering Brussels**. The money raised would help finance improvements to public transport. The proposal provoked immediate opposition from industry and politicians, who described it as an attack on the many people who commute every day from Flanders to Brussels to work. Crevits later described the idea as "premature" and explained that there is so far

only a pilot project agreed between the two regions, concerning a toll for lorries and a paid sticker for private cars.

Young people from the teens to the 30s are **insufficiently protected against diseases** like measles, mumps and rubella and should check their vaccination status, according to research from the University of Antwerp. Vaccines are available against the diseases, with 95% of the population protected, but many younger people do not keep their vaccinations up to date.

The port of Antwerp found out last week that a consortium of the six largest shipping freight companies in the world, the G6 Alliance, plans to reduce the number of times its container ships visit Antwerp from twice a week to once. An agreement between the companies marks Antwerp down to a regional port, with the three European hubs named as Rotterdam, Hamburg and Southampton. Last week Antwerp also dropped to third place in the amount of container traffic handled in 2011, losing its number two slot to Hamburg, which dealt with 9 million containers, compared to Antwerp's 8.6 million.

The roads and traffic agency has warned drivers to **expect major delays** from early April on the E313 motorway between Herentals and Massenhoven in the direction of Antwerp, as a result of planned resurfacing works. Preparatory work could also cause lesser delays starting on 24 February.

► www.wegenenverkeer.be

Alan Hope

OFFSIDE

The sad tale of a whale

The name Theofiel may not have been the most fortunate choice, given the circumstances. The name means "friend of God", from the Greek Theophilus. The author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles addressed himself to an unknown Theophilus, and the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz used the same device in his *New Essays on Human Understanding* of 1704. Last week the name popped into the headlines when it was given, by Knokke alderman Paul Geerinckx, to a sperm whale beached on the sand at Heist. Geerinckx was paying homage to a local hero, fisherman Theofiel Degroote, who fished in Icelandic waters and died in 2010. Last week his widow, Simonne Debuck, expressed the family's pride at the honour. The news for the latest Theofiel, however, was not as propitious as the career of his sea-faring namesake.

It's not clear how Theofiel came to be stranded on the Flemish beach, but he took a wrong turn on his migration to northern Atlantic waters and diverted into the shallower North Sea. He may then have been in collision with a boat, or he may simply have injured himself as he fought to avoid beaching, but there he lay, 25 tonnes of him, bleeding in a sand trench.

According to an expert from the Royal Belgian Institute of

Natural Sciences, his death was unavoidable. The weight of his own organs, no longer buoyed by seawater, slowly suffocated him. But Theofiel's demise was not without benefit. Scientists from the Institute took samples for research, and the 12.5 tonnes of blubber that was left went to the production of 50,000 kilowatt-hours of green electricity, enough to satisfy the demands of 14 families for a year.



© Kurt Isabella / BELGA

Streams of ideas

Parks, bridges, market hall and a museum are among canal zone wish-lists

► continued from page 1



One vision of how the canal area could be transformed, pictured on internet forum MyCanal

Brussels Greenfields subsidises from 50 to 75% of the regeneration costs, up to €1.5 million. Recent sponsored enterprises include Greenbizz, a development centre for green businesses, and Kanaal-Zuid, a project to install allotments that can be hired for growing fruit and vegetables. "Because the regeneration costs could deter companies, we provide financial assistance at the beginning of their set-up," explains Alexandre Van Caloen, coordinator of Brussels

Greenfields.

Abatan, the *abattoir* and markets of Anderlecht, receives about €800,000 from Brussels Greenfields. This is half the costs for the regeneration of the spot where a new market hall should stand in 2014. Brussels-Capital Region and the European Regional Development Fund carry €6 million of the total building cost of €15 million. In the covered market hall of 12,000 hectares, 50 food businesses will create jobs for local people.

Homes are also included on the new site. Joris Tiebout, CEO of Abatan, envisions a multicultural food market for and by people of all origins, inspired by the famous Boquería market in Barcelona. In March, Abatan is holding a photo expo with portraits of the

artistic projects. Their biggest event is the biennial Festival Kanal arts festival. The second edition this autumn is sponsored in part by the government of Flanders for €85,000 and will receive a still-undefined sum from the Brussels-Capital Region.

festival Brusselicious is also on the programme: the gastronomic celebration Delicious Kanal, which will include workshops about how to cook traditional meals from various cultures.

To connect the two banks of the canal, Dirk Geets, artistic director of packaging company D&P Creative Team and an inhabitant of the canal region for almost 30 years, came up with a design for a new Museum of Modern Art between Molenbeek and the centre of Brussels. He answered a call by the SPA to post ideas for the future of the canal zone on the open internet forum MyCanal.

"The museum would serve a better purpose there than in an already popular tourist area," explains Geets, who wants to spark a debate rather than make a definite proposal. Public works minister Grouwels appreciates the creative suggestion but doesn't consider it a realistic undertaking. To close the gap between the centre and Molenbeek, she instead plans an attractive pedestrian bridge.

"We want to transform these areas into must-go zones instead of no-go zones"

Musical and dance performances, a photo exhibition and literary discourses will take place in the open air along the canal. An important goal is the empowerment of the inhabitants of perceived "problem quarters" including Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht. "You cannot deny the poverty and unemployment culture," says festival coordinator Wim Embrechts, "but to change this attitude you have to stimulate self-appreciation and make things happen. We want to transform them into must-go zones instead of no-go zones."

Stimulating self-appreciation

The Abatan initiative is right up the alley of Platform Kanal, the citizen-run platform that strives to bring communities on each side of the canal closer together. Platform Kanal hopes to spark a debate with workshops, info sessions and

Musical and dance performances, a photo exhibition and literary discourses will take place in the open air along the canal. An important goal is the empowerment of the inhabitants of perceived "problem quarters" including Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht. "You cannot deny the poverty and unemployment culture," says festival coordinator Wim Embrechts, "but to change this attitude you have to stimulate self-appreciation and make things happen. We want to transform them into must-go zones instead of no-go zones."

A multicultural version of food

► www.mycanal.be
► www.platformkanal.be

FRUSTRATIONS AND DESIRES: THE CANAL ZONE IN PICTURES

Curieus, a social-cultural organisation connected to the SPA, organised a photography competition called *Against the Stream*. All participants, half of whom live in the canal district, submitted photographs that showcase their vision of the area. A selection of the pictures make up the travelling exhibition, currently at Café Etcetera in Etterbeek.

"In most of the pictures, you discover both people's frustrations and desires," says Hannes De Geest, chairman of Curieus Brussel. "On the one hand, you see the waste of land, the industrial sites, the lack of recreational places. On the other hand, you see the possibilities: promenades, lovely boats, the holiday feeling by the water."

That mixed feeling characterises the winning picture, called "Stuurloze rondvaart" ("Drifting cruise", *pictured*), by Filip Van Zandycke. "Children of different origins are playing with a toy car in the street. But you realise that they should be able to enjoy themselves in a park instead of on stone pavements. In the background you see the water and authentic little houses but also an industrial site with machines and the huge offices of the administrative centre,"

Van Zandycke explains. He is now preparing a CD of songs about the canal with his non-profit organisation HoedGekruid. The exhibition is the start of more actions

by Curieus in the region. During info sessions and workshops, the SPA's vision will be presented to local people. After, the inhabitants can draw their own designs for

the canal zone. "We need more input from the local population," says De Geest.

► www.curieus.be



Memorial Park plans unveiled

First World War commemorations taking shape for centenary

Alan Hope

Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois last week unveiled plans for the new Memorial Park in West Flanders to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. The plans were drawn up by a consortium of Flemish and Dutch designers and were chosen from among a number of projects entered in competition for the contract. The Memorial Park will join 40 battlefield sites – currently isolated from each other – together in a network telling the story of the war through the landscape of the area in West Flanders, where most of the fighting took place. Five sites are already the subject of detailed design plans: the area around the mouth of the Ijzer in Nieuwpoort; the network of sites between the Ijzerdijk and the Frontzate footpath in Diksmuide; the site of the Third Battle of Ypres; the road to Passchendaele in Zonnebeke; and the Ypres Salient around Ypres and the Wijtschate Salient in the Heuvelland region.

“Few European landscapes are so intimately connected to their history as the area of the front in 1914 to 1918,” Bourgeois said. “There are relics of the war, like bunkers and craters, and places created especially to commemorate the war and the war dead such as cemeteries, monuments, museums and tourist routes. The former front is a landscape of remembrance – a web of elements that bind us to the past. The Memorial Park’s aim is to reinforce that web.”

However, Bourgeois stressed that the intention is not to turn the area into a sort of First World War theme park. Flanders expects an upsurge in “war tourism” in the run-up to 2014, as well as during the following four years, but Bourgeois made it clear the memorial park is intended to serve even after those celebrations have passed.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

-16.2

degrees, the lowest temperature in Flanders recorded last week, in Kleine Brogel, a district of Peer in Limburg province

€2.7 million

in damage caused to farmers and growers every year in Flanders, including crows that eat fruit and wild boar, which dig up root crops, according to estimates by the Farmers’ Unions

13%

of the unemployed have a higher education qualification, a huge increase on the 7% of 10 years ago. One reason is that the supply of graduates don’t match the demands of business

€2,100

paid by a Dutch collector for a copy of the first issue of the Flemish Suske & Wiske comic album by Willy Vandersteen, published in 1946 at a price of 36 francs, or about 90 cents

3,333,333rd

visitor to Mechelen’s Technopolis recorded last week, one of a party of students from the Rosenberg school in Mol

New Tour of Flanders route official



The punishing Wall is scrapped from the Tour of Flanders route, to Geraardsbergen’s great disappointment

The famous cycle race Ronde van Vlaanderen, or Tour of Flanders, will this year finish in Oudenaarde instead of Meerbeke, skipping the race’s mythical hill, the Wall of Geraardsbergen. The new finale for the 1 April race will include the Oude Kwaremont and the Paterberg, to be covered three times on a final circuit, with the Paterberg as the last

ascent 13 kilometres before the finish in Oudenaarde. Wouter Vandenhaute, head of the tour’s organising committee, said the new route is designed to pass areas heavily surrounded by spectators. “The Oude Kwaremont could take over the role of the Wall,” Vandenhaute said, pointing out that there were far more fans in the Flemish Ardennes than in the flat, straight sections. “The decision was very difficult to take because the Wall is a tradition in the Ronde and we had to be careful changing that. The new course, including the Oude Kwaremont and the Paterberg three times, is meant to boost the sporting angle of the finale.” **LEO CENDROWICZ**

► www.rondevanvlaanderen.be

Local authorities get help to improve woodlands

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has called on municipalities and provinces to increase their efforts to buy up land for reforestation and has proposed a budget of €1 million to help subsidise the programme. Last year, during the UN’s International Year of Forests, Schauvliege put out an initial call for projects, of which 45 were received by the Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB). Ten were ultimately successful, and the money on offer went up from €500,000 to €900,000. As a result, more than 30 hectares of land was made into forest.

Development projects that involve the removal of woodland have to be compensated, either by the reforestation of land elsewhere or by a contribution to the Woodland Compensation Fund, from which the subsidy for the current programme comes. Authorities have until the end of April to submit applications for support.

Flanders counts 146,381 hectares of woodland, or 10.8% of the total surface. That makes it one of the least wooded areas of Europe, ahead of only Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK. Limburg with 20.6% has the most woods, and West Flanders (2.3%) has the least. The majority of forest is in private hands, with 13% owned by the Flemish Region and 17% by other bodies such as churches, local governments and provinces.

An internship for every student

Students of all disciplines should have the opportunity to take part in a practical internship, according to a call from the Flemish Association of Students (VVS) last week. The VVS was reacting to the latest figures on the number of graduates failing to find a job – something the association blamed on the failure of higher education to adapt itself to the needs of the labour market.

Internships, or stages, are an ideal way to gain familiarity with the workplace and start picking up the skills required, the VVS said. “But the stages have to be of a certain quality,” commented chair Michiel Horsten. “All too often interns are treated like cheap labour, which has little or no value for them. A stage is only of use if there is a link to the education. A journalism student is not going to do a stage in order to make the coffee. The aim is for students to get as many opportunities as possible to really do the things they have learned during their education.”

But higher education establishments are “missing the boat” on the value of stages, VVS said. At present, students following professional courses routinely follow stages, which even sometimes lead to jobs. But in the more academic disciplines, such as history, stages are very rare. However, the new two-year Master’s degree, which doubles the time needed for a Bachelor graduate to gain a Master’s – is the ideal chance for universities and colleges to begin offering a wider range of stages, the VVS said.

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Working longer

It took Belgium more than a year to get a new government, but once it was installed, it acted promptly. Within a month, it presented its pension plan in parliament. Federal pension minister Vincent Van Quickenborne (Open VLD) was so pleased with this that some hold him personally responsible for the strikes and industrial actions that followed.

The official retirement age remains at 65. What changes is the age for early retirement. Retiring early, something the Flemish are very good at, will now only be possible from the age of 62, instead of 60.

Last week, the pension plan was “refined” on some points, with mostly transitional measures for people close to their pensions. The plan is likely to be contested for quite some time, however, as many people still feel they are treated unfairly.

Until now, a good number of job categories enjoyed retirement exemptions. Firemen, for instance, took to the streets of Brussels last week, insisting that they could still retire at 60 as before because their job is considered particularly risky and difficult.

They are not the only ones who feel that way about their work. There are also policemen, army personnel, ship pilots, prison wardens, brick layers, road workers and nurses. Teachers, too, enjoy a special regime, which allows them to retire at 58.

When Van Quickenborne asked the government of Flanders which professions it considers to be difficult, he received a long list that included even rat catchers. (This led to an incident between the two governments, as the Flemish ministers were infuriated that Van Quickenborne wrongly suggested that they had asked exemptions for these categories.)

The ideas of which exemptions should be kept differ, depending on people’s age and beliefs. This would not be Belgium if the sensitivities north and south of the language border did not differ, too. French speakers, personified by minister for the interior Joëlle Milquet, tend to allow more exceptions.

The Flemish go for a stricter interpretation, fearing the budgetary backlash and the disapproval by the EU.

As this publication went to press, a final pension agreement was still pending. The one category of people working much longer so far are the civil servants in the pension call centre, who have to answer thousands of worried calls. Maybe they should get an exemption for early retirement, too?

Room with a view of the future

Visionary students are settling in to the next generation of university accommodation

Alan Hope

Student accommodation has come a long way since the days of *The Young Ones*, when your choice was either an institutional cell in halls of residence or a scabby bedsit where you shared a bath and kitchen with strangers prone to creating noisome odours of cooking and worse.

Katho, the West Flanders university college in Kortrijk, has been pushing the boundaries of student rooms, and this month three volunteers moved their books and bags into the most extreme examples of where the future might lie. They'll spend the rest of the academic year living in the rooms and report back on their experiences.

The living experiment began, explains Larissa Deblauwe, communications coordinator for Kot van de Toekomst (Student Room of the Future), as an exercise in getting students to think about the general question of housing by applying the principles to themselves, with no holds barred. What if you could design a room exactly as you would want it?

The three most developed answers, conceived and realised by teams of students from various disciplines together with an architect and an interior designer, are:

Gommer (minimalist): a seemingly empty room with a design that hides away its elements unless required. This room has the simplest look but probably the most intricate design

Sudoku (social, sustainable and cost-cutting): using the rawest of raw materials to create a living space that's practically cost-free

iTechno (futuristic) – incorporates cutting-edge monitoring and control systems for everything from temperature to who's calling at the door

Three Flemish companies sponsored the materials, production time, assembly and transport. They included audio and video retailer Arnout; IT company Centric; flooring manufacturer Unilin; and the Kringloopwinkel, the region-wide chain of charity shops that recycles clothes, furniture and appliances donated by the public.

"The partner companies who worked on the project were challenged to think outside the box, to go over the edge," Deblauwe says. "In the experimental phase, they were encouraged to scout out new pathways. And the students themselves were involved in realising the concepts, either directly in the case of the three residents, or indirectly via a class project or a Bachelor's thesis."

Project coordinator Hendrik Vantomme says: "We took the ideas to the extreme, to provoke reactions and to challenge the students. We want to hear from them whether these apartments are practical and liveable."

That experience will have real-life consequences. Based on the views of the guinea-pigs, Katho intends to renovate two blocks of student accommodation, for more than 100 students. "This will give us a chance to apply what we've learned," Deblauwe says.

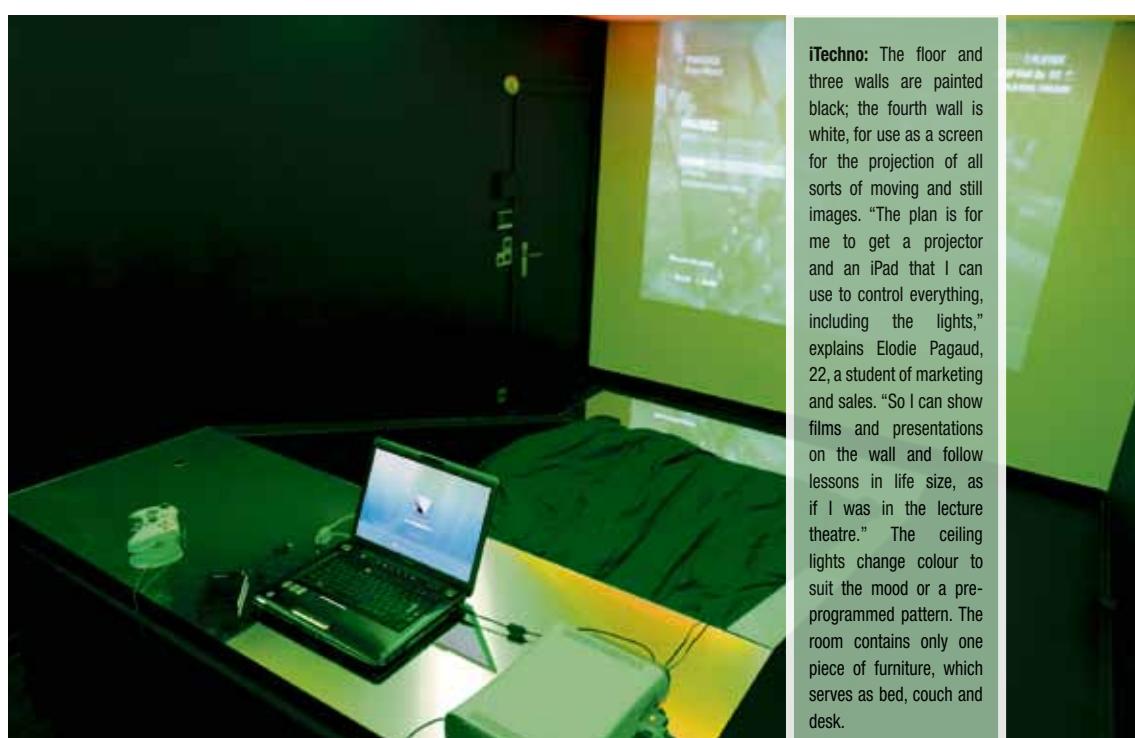
► www.kotvandetekomst.be



Gommer: In its pure state, this room is empty: All the furniture and appliances are enclosed within cabinets only to be pulled out and used when necessary. One corner opens up to form a four-seater dining area; another set of flaps opens to reveal the bed. It looks more like a sensory-deprivation module than a home-away-from-home, but events management student Emiel Cryns, 21, is impressed. "Students study these days in a different way," he says. "They've no self-discipline any more. Here there are no distractions. If I want to study, I open out the desk. If I don't want to think about my books, the study corner disappears. I'm absolutely delighted with it."



Sudoku: The inside of the room looks like it belongs in some shanty town. Walls, floor and furniture are made from rough, second-hand wooden pallets. Even the bed is no more than a mattress on three low pallets. "I slept in it for the first time last night," says 19-year-old trainee teacher Karlijn Vandermeersch. "It wasn't as hard as I expected." According to project coordinator Hendrik Vantomme, cost-cutting was the primary concern with this room. "Wood is still the cheapest material, and it doesn't even have to be new," he explains. It is, however, rough and ready. "Because my chair is made of wood, it's not adjustable," Vandermeersch says. "But there's a separate study room with ergonomic chairs, so I don't see too many disadvantages."



iTechno: The floor and three walls are painted black; the fourth wall is white, for use as a screen for the projection of all sorts of moving and still images. "The plan is for me to get a projector and an iPad that I can use to control everything, including the lights," explains Elodie Pagaud, 22, a student of marketing and sales. "So I can show films and presentations on the wall and follow lessons in life size, as if I was in the lecture theatre." The ceiling lights change colour to suit the mood or a pre-programmed pattern. The room contains only one piece of furniture, which serves as bed, couch and desk.

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Chemistry company BASF and the department of plant systems biology at the Ghent University branch of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) are developing a new technology to identify genes and networks of genes that influence the yield of crops. The project, called TopYield, examines the large variety of plant growth in different conditions, including the reaction of plants to drought. The purpose is to increase the yields of crops in sustainable agriculture.

► www.vib.be

Flemish chocolate producer Cavalier has won the award for most innovative product at the prestigious ISM trade fair with its chocolate made using the natural sweetener stevia instead of sugar. ISM, which takes place in Cologne, is the largest trade fair for sweets and chocolate producers in the world. Based in Eeklo, East Flanders, Cavalier is a family company that has been producing chocolate products with no added sugar since 1996.

► www.cavalier.be

The government of Flanders has asked the Centre for Environmental Sciences at the University of Hasselt to analyse the loss of ecosystems such as rivers, swamps and woods. The results will be used to form a Flemish policy to battle this loss. Experts in environmental law will work with environmental biologists and economists in a unique multi-disciplinary approach.

► www.uhasselt.be

Flemish MP Ludo Sannen has suggested integrating imam studies – studying to become an Islamic spiritual leader – into the theology faculties of universities. Currently, imams are often trained in Turkey and don't speak Dutch. The University of Leuven is interested in introducing the course, and Flemish minister for education Pascal Smet wants to provide a budget from 2013.

The Flemish Community and the Flemish Community Commission, which represents the Flemish community in Brussels, will annually invest €1 million to create 20 "community schools". These will be community centres that combine the educational programme with social and cultural activities such as sports, arts, day care and health care. Brussels already has one community school, but policymakers in Flanders and Brussels want to create more to provide Dutch-language social environments to children who speak a different language at home. **Andy Furniere**

Old port hopes for new lock

Ghent has been striving to connect to the sea since the Middle Ages, and now its mind is set on a larger sea lock

Marcel Schoeters



The agreement between Flanders and the Netherlands on the construction of a larger sea lock at Terneuzen could finally be signed next month

Ghent is a seaport in its own right. With a total volume of more than 50 million metric tonnes in 2011, the port has remained in the top 10 of the ranking of northern European ports, also known as the Hamburg-Le Havre range. If it looks smaller in size, this is merely due to its being dwarfed by the likes of Antwerp and Rotterdam. Like Antwerp, Ghent is a Scheldt port, even if its accessibility is limited due to its more upstream location at the confluence of the Scheldt and the Leie rivers. The port's accessibility was improved considerably, however, when – as early as 1823 – a canal was

dug connecting the port with the Scheldt estuary in Terneuzen, the Netherlands.

Over the years, the canal was deepened and widened. In 1963, two new locks were constructed at Terneuzen, one for seagoing vessels and another for inland barges. Today the lock and the canal are able to accommodate vessels up to 125,000 tonnes.

Ghent is by nature an industrial port, thanks to what is now called the Arcelor-Mittal steel mills, founded as Sidmar in 1962. The plant is dependent on bulk carriers bringing in coal. Like in all merchant shipping, ship sizes are growing. In a

few years' time, this niche may well be dominated by a type of ship no longer capable of passing through the existing lock.

Missing the boat

The fact that Ghent is already missing maritime traffic is well reflected in its traffic volumes for 2011, which showed a rise of inland navigation tonnage by 10%. According to the Port Authority of Ghent, about half of this new volume consisted of maritime cargo discharged at other, larger seaports, especially Dunkirk and Rotterdam. "With a new infrastructure and,

above all, a new lock, our maritime volume would have grown by 5%," says Daan Schalck, CEO of the Port Authority. "As a result, instead of one seagoing vessel, 60 tug-pushed lighters are coming to Ghent, adding to the congestion at the Terneuzen lock complex. Because they all have to use that same lock."

An agreement for the construction of a new lock has been long in the works, and Flemish minister for mobility, Hilde Crevits, has expressed the hope that she will be able to sign the final agreement with her Dutch counterpart on 19 March. The total cost of the project is estimated at €630 million, €140 million of which would be provided by the Dutch. The Port Authority is willing to invest another €75 million. The bulk will, therefore, be for the account of the government of Flanders. If all goes according to plan – and this plan has been subject to alteration and postponement before – construction work could start in 2014, allowing the new lock to be operational by 2020.

Short sea shipping

Apart from its role as a gateway for the steel industry, Ghent is famed for short sea shipping, a mode of transport that has been enjoying a lot of attention from the European Commission over the last few years, as it is seen as part of a Europe-wide solution to divert traffic from the roads to the waterways.

For Ghent, the main operators in this segment are DFDS Seaways,

offering six weekly sailings to Gothenburg; its subsidiary DFDS Logistics, operating a weekly service to Oslofjord; and Containerships, offering weekly sailings to Aarhus, Helsinki and Saint-Petersburg.

As for its inland navigation traffic, the Port of Ghent hopes to reap profit from the new Seine-Nord high-capacity canal currently under construction in France. Through its connection to the Belgian inland navigation network via the Leie, this canal is supposed to develop into a major inland navigation waterway between the North Sea ports and Ile-de-France. It could make Ghent one of the main gateways to a considerable consumer market. Not only modes of transport but commodity niches, too, are part of the port's development strategy. Only rivalled by neighbouring Terneuzen, Ghent can boast the status as Europe's largest bio-cluster, thanks to the investments made by Alco Bio Fuel, Bioro and Oleon in the sea canal zone. By the Kluizen Dock, Ghent's newest development zone, some 80 hectares of land have been reserved for the bio-based chemical industry.

The Kluizen Dock project, initiated in 1996 and completed in 2010, is a clear statement of the resolution of the Port Authority to diversify the functions of Ghent as far as possible. This strategy is expected to reinforce the position of Ghent as a medium-sized port and a multimodal logistics gateway to and from Europe.

► www.portofghent.be

Diamond trade announces Master Plan

Confidence-building both within and outside the industry is a main goal

Marc Maes

Last week the Antwerp diamond industry unveiled its strategic plan for the coming year and officially opened the new Diamond Pavilion at Antwerp's Museum aan de Stroom (MAS).

Backed by an impressive growth rate of 47% for the Antwerp diamond sector in 2011, Ari Epstein, CEO of the Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC) announced the "Antwerp Diamond Master plan: Diamonds love Antwerp 2020".

"The approach for the plan was 'what can diamonds do for Antwerp', rather than stressing 'what can Antwerp do for the diamond trade', said Epstein. The main objectives of the plan are to build growth and innovation opportunities and to build confidence within the industry and among external stakeholders.

To achieve the goals, "the plan includes crucial elements like job creation, community integration and emphasising Antwerp's role as the diamond trading hub," Epstein explained. "We want to attract more rough diamond business to Antwerp

and to be present more effectively in new markets for polished diamond trade. And we want to put Antwerp on the map as a diamond knowledge centre."

The ambitious plan couldn't have come at a better time, helping to temper the ongoing legal wrangling following tax evasion within the sector.

The AWDC has hired Karla Basselier as its new Business and Compliance officer to assist and support local companies in implementing rules and regulations applicable to the diamond sector. In addition she will be in charge of communications with politicians and decision-makers.

"It's a two-way street; providing adequate information is essential in both directions," Basselier said. "I will also set up seminars, provide assistance to new companies wanting to launch a business in Antwerp and follow up with the Antwerp International Training centre on corporate opportunities and promoting corporate social responsibility and UN goals."

To boost public commitment and engagement on different levels, the 2020 plan also wants to develop closer links with the broader Antwerp and Flanders communities and will organise an Antwerp Diamond Days event.

A new programme called Fusion Four, meanwhile, will bring Antwerp's four diamond exchanges together. "We're the only diamond hub in the world to have four diamond exchanges, historically justified by the huge volumes of diamonds. Fusion Four will allow a member of any Antwerp exchange to work in any of the other local exchanges."

Cathy Berx, governor of Antwerp province, thanked the sector for completing the exercise, much of which is to be implemented before the end of the year. "The 2020 master plan is an audacious but brave statement, marking the sector's commitment to continue its future in Antwerp," she said.

Together with Epstein, Berx proceeded to open the Diamond

Pavilion at the MAS museum (*pictured*), which emphasises the collaboration between AWDC and the province and explains the role of Antwerp in the world diamond industry. Among the objects

displayed are the famous diamond ECC tennis racket and the city shield of Antwerp.

► www.awdc.be



Foreign investments in Flanders on the increase

Nearly 4,000 new jobs created in 2011

Alan Hope

Flanders attracted an increased number of inward investment projects from overseas last year, good for the highest number of new jobs since 2007, according to the latest figures from Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT), the Flemish agency for international enterprise.

The agency recorded 174 new investments in 2011, responsible for the creation of 3,720 jobs. The number of projects is the highest in recent years (155 in 2010), and the number of jobs created is the highest since 2007, when the total was slightly higher on 3,766.

However the total amount of money invested was down, from €2.06 billion in 2010 to €1.79 billion last year. Part of the reason is that one-third of all the investment projects were mergers and acquisitions by foreign companies, a marked increase on previous years. New investments accounted for half of the total, and investments to extend existing projects were down. More than half of the total comes from other EU countries, but Flanders attracted most interest from the United States, which started up 37 projects. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters visited New York, Boston and Washington, DC on a trade mission in June last year. Japan was also good for 15 projects.



US Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman (left) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters during a trade visit to New York City last year

The figures were a positive response, Peeters said, to claims that the region's industrial policy was failing, in the light of recent job losses at Bekaert, among others. "Industrial activity in 2011 was the most important investment sector," Peeters told the Flemish Parliament. "With its New Industrial Policy, the government of Flanders aims to

stimulate more foreign investment in industry and research and development. The upward trend of recent years is continuing."

Peeters recently visited India and South Africa on missions, which included a trade and investment aspect. FIT, meanwhile, already has plans for reviving the interest of Asian countries and the so-called

Bric nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China), with missions planned to Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Russia, as well as maintaining a presence at conventions in Singapore, Mumbai, Tokyo and Sao Paolo.

► www.flanderstrade.be

KBC will pay back aid as soon as possible

KBC will this year try to pay off as much as possible of the remaining €3 billion it owes the federal government, the bank-insurer promised last week. KBC was announcing its results after a "difficult year" in 2011, which involved issuing a symbolic dividend to shareholders of one cent per share. KBC was severely affected by the financial crisis of 2008-2009 but, unlike Fortis Bank, managed to stay on its feet thanks to a government bailout of €7 billion – half from the federal government and half from Flanders. It has already repaid €500 million to the federal government and would like to benefit from a lower penalty rate – 15% if the loan is paid back this year. The rate goes to 20% next year.

The terms for the government of Flanders, though, are different: 50% regardless of date of payback. Last week it was reported that the government was considering leaving some of its credit in KBC for the longer term, to possibly gain some influence on the group's policy. The idea would be to monitor KBC's state of health more closely in order to avoid a repeat of the Dexia debacle. Those reports were denied by senior figures at KBC. Financial director Luc Popelier said there was "no need for extra transactions" between the bank and the government. "We are keeping strictly to the plan that was agreed with the governments and with Europe," he said. According to a condition imposed by the EU competition authorities at the time of the granting of state aid to KBC, the bank has to repay €4.7 billion of the bail-out sum by the end of next year.

Despite an "exceptionally difficult year," Popelier says KBC is confident its programme of divestment will bear fruit. In the past year, KBC Group has sold subsidiaries Centea in Belgium and Warta in Poland; Kredyt Bank in Poland is to go shortly. In addition to paying shareholders a symbolic dividend of one cent, KBC executives themselves have this year decided to forgo a bonus.

New generation fuel cell comes online

Brussels-based chemical company Solvay last week announced the success of its installation of the largest fuel battery of its type in the world. The fuel cell uses Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) technology to produce peaks on 1 megawatt of clean electricity.

The cell is in use at the chlorine plant operated by Solvay (together with Germany's BASF), located at the Port of Antwerp. According to Solvay, it has already produced 500 megawatt-hours of electricity in 800 hours of operation. That's enough to supply the power needs of 1,370 homes, said Patrick François, Sustainable Energy Platform Manager at Solvay.

PEM uses a special polymer membrane to transform the chemical energy produced when hydrogen and oxygen meet into electrical energy. The technology is seen as a leading contender to replace alkaline fuel cells. The battery consists of 12,600 individual cells combined in stacks, and the whole array is monitored by Cell Sense technology developed by VITO, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research. Efficient monitoring, VITO said, is essential for the integration of such renewable energy sources into a smart power network.

Alkaline fuel cells were mainly used in the space industry, because of their high cost. While the new generation of hydrogen fuel cells is more available, there is some doubt whether they will ever be able to be used in more domestic applications, such as car batteries.



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air

► Thai Airways

Thailand's flag carrier has inaugurated its 10-hour direct flight between Brussels and Bangkok. The flight operates three times per week.

Autos

► Beherman

The Beherman group, based in Bornem, Antwerp province, has become the importer and distributor of Mitsubishi cars for Belgium and Luxembourg. Beherman was previously Saab's exclusive local representative but has had to seek new opportunities in the wake of the Swedish car's recent bankruptcy.

Banking

► Banca Leonardo

Banca Leonardo, one of Italy's leading corporate finance and investment banks, has established its European hub in Brussels to coordinate activities of its affiliates in western Europe.

Cinema

► Barco

The Kortrijk-based digital and video screening equipment group has signed an exclusive contract worth up to €30 million to supply the Canadian Imax corporation with digital 3D projectors to be installed in nearly 600 cinemas over the next seven years.

Diamonds

► Trading

Diamond trading in Antwerp jumped 47% last year to a total of some €45 billion, compared to €30 billion in 2010. Projects for the coming years include the creation of an electronic trading platform, the merger of the four separate Antwerp-based diamond markets, the opening of a global purchasing platform in Africa and a new sales office in China.

Ports

► Antwerp

The Port of Antwerp international authority is to acquire a stake in the port development affiliate of the Indian Essar industrial conglomerate to advise in the building of a private port north of Bombay.

Telecom

► Nokia-Siemens

The German-Finnish telecommunications venture Nokia-Siemens Networks will close its facilities in Herentals, Antwerp province, and Machelen, Flemish Brabant, with the loss of some 127 jobs.

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Sister act

Herkenrode Abbey tells the story of 600 years of powerful women

Diana Goodwin



If you've ever driven past Hasselt on the motorway linking Liège and Antwerp, you might have noticed a group of stately brick buildings with an imposing gatehouse and ornate tower. Whizzing by at 120 kilometres an hour, you might not have realised that you'd glimpsed what was once the most important convent in the Low Countries and a centre of economic and political power.

The former Abbey of Herkenrode, an officially recognised Flemish heritage site, is home to a new Experience Centre, where you can learn about the history of this beautiful monument. The site has been under restoration since 1998, and the Experience Centre, which opened last autumn, is only the latest chapter in Herkenrode's continuing history.

Admission to the centre includes

an audio guide, available in four languages. The audio tour is triggered by electronic sensors, so you can go at your own pace, and all the wall texts are likewise translated from Dutch into English, French and German.

The theme "A Journey Through Time" arranges rooms chronologically, from the violence and piety of the Middle Ages to the luxury and privilege of later centuries. Everything is state-of-the-art, with touch-screen displays that allow you to explore topics in depth, and video screens showing dramatic re-enactments of episodes in the abbey's history.

Unexpectedly surreal

The exhibits sometimes resemble art installations rather than museum displays, lending the experience an unexpected touch of surrealism. For instance, one kiosk, dedicated to a miraculous event of 1317, is ringed with video screens depicting



a communion wafer that starts to bleed before your eyes. On entering from the bright, modern lobby, let your eyes adjust to the dimly lit room beyond. Don't be surprised to see a life-size statue of a unicorn, the symbol of Herkenrode, or the silent figures of two nuns on the benches to your left. Here you can watch a film that gives an overview of the time periods and introduces some of the historical figures you will encounter in the rooms ahead.

Founded in 1179 by the Count of Loon as a burial place for himself and his descendants, the abbey became a Cistercian convent in 1217. At that time, the Cistercian order was at the height of its power and influence, rapidly expanding throughout Europe. During a period when women enjoyed few rights, religious establishments such as Herkenrode afforded them a degree of independence that their secular sisters rarely experienced.

The role of women at Herkenrode is a primary focus of the exhibition. At each point in the historical timeline, an abbess relates the events of her day in a fictionalised script that brings the past to life.

The fortunes of Herkenrode rose and fell over the centuries, due to religious wars, political feuds, famine and disease. The mid-16th century was a period of great prosperity for the abbey, Herkenrode's "Golden Age", when

In 1974, Herkenrode was listed as a historical monument and the surrounding landscape became a nature reserve. The government of Flanders bought the site in 1998 and began a programme of restoration and development. Today it is one of a dozen official Flemish heritage sites whose preservation is linked to their importance in the history of the region.

Uncovering the "historic heart"

The Experience Centre is in the newly renovated stables in the west wing of the complex. In addition to the museum, the centre includes a gift shop and café, where you can enjoy Herkenrode's own abbey-style beers. Plans for the site include a restaurant in the stables and a project intended to reveal the now-vanished "historic heart" of the abbey. An open structure on the site of the original church will give visitors an idea of the building's dimensions, while texts will describe the church and other lost buildings. In the courtyard outside the Experience Centre, a paved area will be used for outdoor events.

The site also includes an Inspirience Garden, where visitors can learn about medicinal herbs and other plants grown at Herkenrode. The surrounding landscape is ideal for a stroll, and there are four signposted walks that start at the abbey.

Herkenrode Abbey and its inhabitants played a key role in the history of Flanders – a role that is now much easier to understand, thanks to the Experience Centre. It's well worth a visit, either on a winter's day when a few hours spent exploring the past are a welcome escape from the cold, or in summer, when the gardens and nature walks beckon.

► www.abdijsiteherkenrode.be

STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Alan Hope

Haspengouw watercress

Watercress is one of the oldest leaf vegetables known to man, but the traditional character of the cultivation methods of Sint-Lucie in Tongeren recently earned them the official *Streekproduct* (Regional product) label. Sint-Lucie *waterkers*, or watercress, joins the produce of the IJse valley in Flemish Brabant as the only kind officially recognised.

The vegetable may have been around long enough to feature in the Talmud as a remedy for bleeding, but it's only been farmed in Flanders since about 1938, when André Vansimpson started growing it in Heers, Limburg province. The plant grows by itself next to running water, and the Haspengouw region – home to so much of Flanders' production of fruit and vegetables – has the perfect clean, slightly alkaline, water and fertile soil needed.

Vansimpson's family took over production at the Sint-Lucie spring, and Christel and brother Frank are now the third generation of producers. Many claims are made for the health-giving properties of watercress, from folk wisdom that it aids digestion and improves blood pressure to a recent study suggesting it might offer protection against breast cancer. It's certainly high in iron, calcium and folic acid, as well as vitamins A and C, making it almost tailor-made for pregnant women.

In the 18th century, it was recommended as a remedy for scurvy in the British navy, being easier to get hold of than limes. A study in the US suggests it might contain compounds that break down some of the toxins produced by smoking. As the name suggests, watercress flourishes near water and production of the crop demands

a huge amount of water: At Sint-Lucie, they pump 160,000 litres over the plantation every hour.

Watercress belongs to the *nasturtium* genus and is related to members of the cabbage family like radish, mustard and garden cress, all of which share the peppery flavour. In the kitchen, watercress lends itself well to salads as well as sauces and soups. When cooked, the leaves retain a vivid green colour, bright with chlorophyll.

Sint-Lucie products are always labelled with the company's logo, and the packaging features a recipe that changes regularly. There are more recipes on the *streekproduct* website.

► www.sint-lucie.be
► www.streekproduct.be



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Close up and personal

Wendy Van Wanten takes on opera and Streisand in new show *Intimate*

Alan Hope

There's a good case for describing Wendy Van Wanten as one of the most famous people in Flanders, a member of that celebrity tribe known as *Bekende Vlamingen* (well-known Flemings), or BVs for short. She's been a model, a singer, a TV presenter, was at one point romantically linked with Prince Laurent and even met her partner through a Bachelorette-style competition shown on TV. She's also a regular target for "de boekjes" – weekly gossip magazines like *Story* and *Dag Allemaal*. So it's a little bit surprising to find her launching a new musical tour under the title *Wendy Intiem* – Intimate Wendy. You might be excused for thinking public intimacy is something she'd prefer to avoid.

"The intimacy comes from the intimate setting, which is something I've dreamed about for a very long time," she tells me after a rehearsal show that was open to the public recently in Brussels' cultural centre De Markten. "It's rather daring to present a show with just a piano accompanist. It's a big challenge because you usually appear with a lot of musicians."

Her accompanist is Bart Buyle, who teaches at the Brussels Conservatory. He'll also be her sole backing when she plays the much larger venue of the Casino in Ostend for the show's premiere on 25 February. "Those are the two extremes – the hall today and the large auditorium in Ostend," she says. "But the idea is that the intimacy stays the same. It's all about the purity of the music and the lyrics."

A life set to music

Wendy Intiem, which is also scheduled to run in Geel in May, is a selection of her favourite songs from the various genres she's practised over the years, ranging

from Barbra Streisand to opera to French chanson, and even including a medley of Eurovision Song Contest hits, representing a lifelong ambition never fulfilled.

The programme, she says, is "a stroll through my musical biography. They're all connected in some way with my life story. I spent years singing soprano in a choir. I travelled with them extensively to Berlin, Paris, London, Israel. I grew up with that, from 12 to about 16 or 17. Then I sang more popular songs, and I was happy to be able to make a living doing that. Now I'm getting the opportunity – and I think I also have the maturity – to bring this sort of music to the public."

It certainly is daring to tackle operatic arias by Puccini or no fewer than three songs associated with Barbra Streisand, who for nearly 30 years was prevented by stage fright from performing her own songs on stage.

The Puccini is clearly taxing for Van Wanten, but the rest of the programme – including songs by Gilbert Bécaud and Ramses Shaffey and numbers from *My Fair Lady* and *West Side Story* – is much more successful, and the audience responds enthusiastically. The songs of Streisand, much imitated but never equalled, lend themselves better to the more mature voice than do the arias of ingénue roles.

The tabloids

Which brings us to the Streisand Effect, and the local example that happened just last month, when BV Phaedra Hoste tried to get a court to pull an edition of *Story* magazine with an offending article about her. Like Streisand before her, the attempt only generated more publicity for the story.

Just after Van Wanten's rehearsal, she was in the press also, denying



"Rather daring": Wendy Van Wanten

claims she had received a Mercedes as a gift from Prince Laurent, paid for by defence department money. "I've got a lot of baggage on that front," she sighs. "I don't think this week turned out well for [Phaedra]; things went more against her than for her. How do I react? Where I'm really ready to show my claws is when it affects my children. That's crossing a line for me. My responsibility as a mother is to protect my children. I've made my position quite clear: If that happens

again, there will be very severe consequences."

But she's convinced of the wisdom of her fans. "The thing that encourages

me is that the public itself doesn't believe any of that any more. If [the magazines] want to write about me, OK. I've chosen this way of life."

25 FEBRUARY, 20.00

Wendy Intiem

Kursaal Ostend, Monacoplein

► www.vpf1980.be

Make mine a Sixpack

A new crop of Flemish Illustrators introduces itself at Mekanik

Catherine Kosters

The title *Sixpack* officially refers to the number and shared background of the young artists on show at Mekanik comic shop's gallery in Antwerp, but that doesn't mean that the boys don't have a penchant for beer and late nights.

All six studied at the KASK institute of fine arts in Ghent, and all have

been slowly building a reputation in illustration since. Korneel Detailleur is the brains behind Sixpack, organising the whole exhibition and convincing Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens to come and say a few words at the *vernissage* on Thursday, 16 February (complete with a reception and drinks – beer, no doubt).

One of the prerequisites for a show at Mekanik is the sole inclusion of previously unpublished work. All illustrators have seen their art in print – from children's books to magazines and poetry anthologies – but the exhibition focuses on never-before-seen drawings.

Each artist brings his own unique style to the table: Alain Verster's melancholic illustrations are actually collages of old photographs, created with a technique he invented himself, while Tim van den Abeele's monotypes draw inspiration from American cinema and the myth of modern suburbia. Detailleur is the most widely published of the six; his fantastical drawings even adorn the electrical panels in Dageraadplaats



square in Berchem.

Coming from such an eclectic band, the exhibition is surprisingly coherent. Drawing styles differ, but the artists are united by humour

and imagination. To these classic ingredients of illustration, the Sixpack add a tangible enthusiasm and a typically Flemish penchant for the absurd. And for beer.

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Getting legal

Before settling in Belgium for more than three months, it's important to make sure all the right paperwork gets filled out. This can be the most complicated part of the move.

visas

To simplify travel in Europe, 13 countries, including Belgium, have signed the Schengen agreement, which allows for free movement of citizens. However, there are still documents to be obtained and rules to be followed if you plan to stay in Belgium for substantial periods of time.

For European Union citizens who come to Belgium for a period of less than three months (90 days), obtaining a visa is not necessary. These individuals can stay based on their European Union identity card, provided they report their presence to the local municipal administration within 10 days of arriving in their new home. This is the only necessary step if you are not staying in a hotel, hostel or similar lodging. Certain non-EU citizens — such as Americans — do not require a visa, but do not need a visa for stays under 90 days in any six-month period.

non eu

Non-EU residents must have a visa if they intend to stay in the country for more than 90 days. The specific type of visa to apply for is a "temporary residence permit" or Type D. There are only a small number of countries from which Belgians and non-EU citizens can obtain a visa. These are: to study, for employment (or self-employment), family reunification, cultural or sports activities. The documents required are a passport valid for at least 15 months, a certificate of good conduct issued no more than six months earlier, a residence permit and a work permit or other documentation explaining why a visa is necessary.

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renting

In Belgium, there are two common rental leases: a yearly lease and a flexible lease for a period between three and nine years, and a short-term lease for contracts up to three years. The rental period allows the tenant to break the lease with three months' notice (and payment of a penalty). The amount is fixed for one year, and then the rent increases linked to the Belgian cost-of-living index.

The short-term lease may be set for any period up to three years, and can be brokered by a tenant or landlord. It may be renewed once only, up to a maximum of three years — for example, a one-year lease may be renewed with a two-year lease.

RENOVATION

If you settle on a property that needs renovation, familiarize yourself with the taxes and costs involved. While VAT on materials and services for renovations is typically about 21 percent, there is a 6 percent rate for the renovation of properties aged 15 years or older. Building a new home can be considerably more expensive, as a 12.5 percent tax is charged on the price of the land, and architect's fees can be costly.

Settling down . Moving in

Renting and buying property

Accommodation in Brussels is cheaper than in many big cities, but the Belgian system follows a different process than that of other countries. Here's what you should know.

deposits

The lessor will require you to put down a security deposit, normally equal to two months' rent, against any damage caused to the property during your lease. On completion, you are generally responsible for a detailed inventory of the property, called an *atlas des lieux/état des lieux*. The lessor then allows the tenant to break the lease with three months' notice (and payment of a penalty). The amount is fixed for one year, and then the rent increases linked to the Belgian cost-of-living index.

The short-term lease may be set for any period up to three years, and can be brokered by a tenant or landlord. It may be renewed once only, up to a maximum of three years — for example, a one-year lease may be renewed with a two-year lease.

renting

If you want to renovate a rented place, it's possible to draw up a 'renovation lease', where the landlord agrees to the transformation and the tenant agrees to pay for it by reducing the rent. It's best to get legal advice while drawing up this contract.

buying

Buying is another viable option if you plan on settling in Belgium on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. The first step is to find a notary, as they will need to draw up the contract and the transfer of the property. The notary is responsible for the property, and therefore must insure it. At this time, a down payment is also required from the buyer, typically about 10 percent of the total cost. Closing follows within four months' time.

The remainder of the money changes hands at this time. Typically, the price agreed upon in the contract and the amount you paid up in payment can be quite different. As well as legal fees, most properties require a 12.5 percent registration tax to be paid to the state. However, if you don't own any other properties in Belgium, you are eligible for a rebate.

mortgages

Mortgages can be fixed for the term of the loan, variable annually, or reviewed every three or five years, with options on the term of the agreement. The family common practice of using a mortgage broker can be helpful.

We can help you find the ideal neighbourhood and the right schools, and point you in the direction of where to learn a language, so you can really integrate into Belgian society. We also talk you through the social scene, getting married — or divorced — and finding a bank or health insurance policy. Not forgetting, of course, our guide to TV, books and bars.

Welcome to Belgium — we hope you like it here as much as we do.

*The Autumn 2011 edition of
Newcomer is on sale at newsstands*

THE Bulletin
Newcomer

Jazz fundamentals

Flemish institution De Werf celebrates 25 years of adventurous jazz and offbeat theatre

Christophe Verbiest

It may look like a kindergarten from the outside, but the brick building in Bruges' de Werfstraat, with its distinctive yellow door crowned with an arch and adorned with window frames in the same colour, is in fact one of Europe's jazz hotspots: De Werf. It's come a long way since 22 April 1987, when it hosted its first gig, by Belgian band Seven Steps.

De Werf director Jan Denolf takes us even further back. In 1986, non-profit cultural organisation Masereelfonds bought a small, dilapidated theatre in Bruges that was on the brink of being demolished. "It was a bargain, and they decided to renovate it," he says. "They wanted to use it for theatre with a social undercurrent and contemporary adventurous jazz. Theatre and jazz have remained the fundamentals of De Werf."

In 1993 De Werf started its own record label, W.E.R.F. The first release was *Sketches of Belgium* by KD's Basement Party, the band of Flemish piano player Kris Defoort. "Defoort had been studying in America for some years and came back full of ideas," says Denolf. "But he couldn't find a label interested in releasing an album, so De Werf decided to join in." Since then, the label has released more than 100 jazz albums.

"We never had the intention to become a player on the commercial market," Denolf points out. "We are an art centre; we work with public money, which means our decisions can't be based on commercial considerations. Our albums are artistic tools: We put a professional recording at the disposal of Belgian bands that have the potential to break through internationally. That recording is their calling card to

convince clubs and festivals in other countries. That it appears on a CD is, in the end, a side issue. Of course, we won't prevent the CDs being sold."

First De Werf, then the world

The selected artists, too, should be representative of today's Belgian jazz scene. Defoort, Octurn, Brussels Jazz Orchestra and Tuur Floorizone are a few of the now internationally renowned artists that have been supported by De Werf. "I think you can almost prove mathematically that we have been an important catalyst," Denolf states.

Every two years, De Werf organises a festival that focuses on European jazz. Denolf: "We are the only festival in Europe that is fully dedicated to new contemporary European jazz." He adds, with a little smile: "Of course, we don't turn down bands with an American member, but the band has to be perceived as European. With this festival, De Werf, even if we're still a relatively small club, has gained a strong reputation in the European jazz world."

Theatre is as important for De Werf as jazz. It's a receptive platform, showing small productions in De Werf itself and moving to other spaces for bigger productions.

"We exist to help the artist, not vice versa"

Though it has no company itself, it sometimes acts as a producer of new pieces. "We like to support new artistic practices that don't get many opportunities."

Still, De Werf is best known for jazz. "Very early on we were one of the most important Flemish players in the jazz field, and international

changed, but it's difficult to change the perception."

There's no ambition to add a third axis to De Werf's activities, though Denolf points out that "new productions often are a hybrid of different art forms. Some of them are very cinematographic or incorporate performance art. We welcome this, and we will adapt if necessary. We exist to help the artist, not vice versa."

► www.dewerf.be

recognition followed not long after. With theatre, for a long time, we have focused on local talent. After the merger in 2004 with Het Net, the last theatre company in Bruges, that

room's amazing acoustics. Others praised the intimacy of the room: no small feat for a place with almost 1,300 seats. But those qualities weren't the main talking point when the Concertgebouw opened. Instead, the talk of the town was the 68,000 terra cotta tiles that cover the outside walls and give the building its reddish glow, matching the colour of the roofs of Bruges' houses.

Unfortunately, not all of them had been affixed when the building opened. To make matters worse, after a few months it was clear there was a risk they would fall off. All of them, except those on the roof, had to be replaced, one by one. Consequently, the Concertgebouw, for a while, was the laughing stock of Flanders. But there won't be much talk of those tiles during the festivities. Now, it's impossible to imagine Flanders' cultural landscape without it. That strong reputation, of course, is due

to the programming and the team's artistic choices. It focuses strongly on music (mostly classical), musical theatre and contemporary dance.

Moreover, the building – by internationally renowned Flemish architectural firm Robbrecht and Daem – has been embraced by most of the city's inhabitants, even those who at the beginning thought its modern architecture wasn't in keeping with the old buildings that have been so carefully preserved. Now the Concertgebouw, a flaming gatekeeper at the main entrance to the inner city, is heralded as one of the benchmarks of early 21st-century Flemish architecture and features in the book *1001 Buildings You Must See before You Die*. In the new book X, which commemorates the Concertgebouw's 10th anniversary, artists – including choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, cellist Arne Deforce and writer Peter Verhelst – praise the Concertgebouw as both a building and an art centre. Author Mia Verstraete also presents an exhaustive overview of the building's eventful history. Not a word on the terra cotta tiles, though.

► www.concertgebouw.be



Rêve d'éléphant orchestra, pictured above, plays at De Werf's label night on 18 February. Other artists on stage include the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, the Kris Defoort Trio and the Nathalie Loriers New Trio

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Hotel BLOOM! in Brussels has been named the **13th Trendiest Hotel in the World** by the leading tourist website TripAdvisor. The awards are based on the reviews of millions of travellers across the world. Hotel BLOOM! is under the management of Christel Cabanier, known for her role on the jury of Flemish TV show *Mijn Restaurant!* She also sits on the advisory board of the Flemish tourism ministry.

► www.hotelbloom.com

Swedish director Erik Leijonborg is planning a remake of the **2007 Flemish film Ben X**, in which a young man with Asperger Syndrome struggles with school bullies. The original film was made by Ghent-based director Nic Balthazar and won several international awards. In other film news, two Flemish feature films have been accepted to screen at the Cinequest Festival in San Jose, California: Guy Lee Thys' *Mixed Kebab*, which opens in Brussels and Flanders later this month, and Geoffrey Enthoven's *Hasta la vista*. The festival, which runs from 28 February to 11 March, focuses on young acting talent, independent productions and films that utilise new technologies.

► www.cinequest.org

Residents of Brussels and Flanders are buying **more music by local bands than ever before**, according to the Belgian Entertainment Association. Half of the 10 best-selling albums of 2011 were by Flemish artists, including Selah Sue, Hooverphonic, Triggerfinger, Gotye and dEUS. The top-selling single of the year was Gotye's "Somebody That I Used to Know". The 31-year-old singer lives in Australia but was born in Bruges.

► www.belgianentertainment.be

Madonna will make a stop in Brussels this summer during her 2012 World Tour, only the second time the queen of pop has ever performed in the country. The first was in 2009, when she sold out 70,000 seats at the Werchter Boutique. Tickets to this year's performance at the King Boudewijn Stadium on 12 July go on sale on Friday, 17 February, at 9.00 and range from €45 to €150. Buy them on the day if you want to buy them at all.

► www.proximusgoformusic.be



PARTY! TEN YEARS OF BRUGES' CONCERTGEBOUW

On Saturday, 18 February, De Werf record label W.E.R.F. presents its best acts with nine concerts in four rooms in Bruges' Concertgebouw. It's in fact the start of a long week of festivities at the venue, which opened its doors on 20 February 2002 at 20.02 – or 20.02.2002 at 20.02 – with a concert by Bruges-based orchestra Anima Eterna. Afterwards, so the story goes, conductor Jos Van Immerseel raved about the



© Stad Brugge

room's amazing acoustics. Others praised the intimacy of the room: no small feat for a place with almost 1,300 seats.

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Cinephiles of the future

Youth Film Festival

Lisa Bradshaw

In Belgium, the ratio of commercial blockbusters to local and/or smaller films released is not bad at all, partially because the independent cinema scene is still fairly strong. But it's not the same for films for young people. "There are definitely not enough alternative films for children," says Iris Verhoeven, director of Flanders' annual Youth Film Festival, which takes place simultaneously in Bruges and Antwerp. "The market is smaller, so it's mostly only the big, commercial projects that get bought and distributed."

That's why the festival was launched in the late 1980s. "We really want to give children an alternative so they see that there are a variety of films," says Verhoeven. "Then later in life, they can appreciate film more."

There's also plenty to appreciate for adults here, though, from movies marked ages 6+ to the "Cut the Crap" programme for teenagers. And because the programme is restricted to films from Europe, youth won't be distracted by American blockbusters (which they can see outside of the festival anyway).

Opening night features what might just be the best-looking animated family film to ever come out of Denmark. In *The Great Bear*, Jonathan and his sister Sophie visit their grandfather for the summer. Grandfather's only rule: Don't go into the forest. Of course that's where Sophie heads after an argument with her brother, and Jonathan must go after her. The pair find all kinds of marvellously fantastical creatures

there, including the title character, who is much, *much* greater than one might think.

The closing film, meanwhile, also finds a girl taking to the woods: When Cathy decides to put to the test her theory that her distracted parents wouldn't even notice if she disappeared, she fends for herself in a much more realistic forest, with only the aid of a dog and an interior monologue that will be recognisable to both young and old. The intelligent and charming *À pas de loup* (On the Sly, pictured) is a Belgian/French co-production by the director of *Pom, le poulin*.

Nature and survival in fact figure heavily in many recent European movies for young people. In Swiss director Christine Repond's *Silver Forest*, a group of boys discover a gang of Neo-Nazis living in the forest, while in the animated *Snowflake* from Spain, the only white gorilla in the world escapes from a zoo in search of a witch who can make him into a "normal" gorilla, only to find that the world outside can be a dangerous place.

Both those subjects mean adventure, and kids tend to like that, notes Verhoeven. There are two children's juries (one in each city) that decide on winning films in competition. "We give them a little bit of film history and ideas on what to look for besides the story – like the acting and the music. But sometimes you just know which film is going to win from the beginning. Adventure films are very popular."

But in the end, the kids of the jury

see a number of styles and stories, and the goal of festival organisers is that the public does, too. Charging only €5 per film is one incentive. Workshops and special events are others. For closing film *On the Sly*, there is an awards ceremony and a reception. "If you're not used to

seeing lesser-known children's movies, you might not choose them on the programme. But closing night is like a party; that's how you get both kids and parents to come, and then they see the movie."

The festival has also launched a special programme this year called

"Fun in Bed". They stream the short films in competition through their website to a number of hospitals in Flanders so kids stuck in hospital who can't come to the festival can also take part.



18-26 February | Antwerp: Cinema Zuid & EcoHuis • Bruges: Cinema Lumière & Cinema Liberty | ► www.jeugdfilmfestival.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

Kasper Demeulemeester's Black&White Photography

Putting The Beatles and Metallica side by side in any context seems absurd. But young Brussels photographer Kasper Demeulemeester begs to differ. Inspired by the American heavy metal band's *Metallica* (also known as *The Black Album*) and the English pop-rock group's *White Album*, he visualised a photo shoot that would serve as a tribute to these two milestones in rock'n'roll history. In less than one day, Demeulemeester gathered four models, had them painted from head to toe in yellow, green, blue and red, then snapped full-frontal portraits using an old Canon. And yet the black and white squares they're holding draw the most attention. I can't help but wonder what James or Ringo would make of the exhibition. And just when things couldn't get any more quizzical, a band called Beatalllica confirmed that it will perform at the festive opening. **Robyn Boyle**



MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Genk

Eden/No Man's Land: Works by second- and third-year Master's students from the Media, Arts and Design Academy, focusing on initiatives that try to limit the damage caused by unbridled consumption

Until APR 1 at COALFACE Gallery, Vennenstraat 127/2

► www.coalface.be

16 February to 15 March,

opening party 16 February, 20.00-4.00

Bonnefooi, Steenstraat 8, Brussels

► www.bonnefooi.be

EVENT

Night of the University Museums

We all know about Ghent's phenomenal modern art museum, fine arts museum and new city museum. But did you know that its university has its own impressive set of museums with fascinating collections that remain, for the most part, behind closed doors? In the name of education and research, many faculties have acquired quite the stash of valuable objects over the years. Come out this one night only for the chance to see full animal skeletons, old microscopes and measuring devices, primitive art and more. Test Joseph Plateau's famous phenakistiscope (the precursor to film) at the Science History Museum, marvel at human and animal plastinates at the Morphology Museum and discover a myriad of archaeological treasures at the Archaeology Museum. Other participating museums include the Zoology Museum, History of Medicine Museum and the Museum of Ethnographic Collections. A free shuttle service from Campus Sterre is provided all evening long. **RB**



24 February, 19.00-00.00 | Across Ghent

► www.sciencemuseum.ugent.be/museumnacht

MORE EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Boeremet: Multicultural artisanal and organic food market in a festive atmosphere with live music and drink stands, every other Thursday

FEB 16 15.00-19.00 at the Abattoir in Anderlecht

► www.boeremet.be

CONCERT

Liesa Van Der Aa



Liesa Van Der Aa is best known for her acting skills on the stage of Antwerp's Toneelhuis. But if we can believe the murmur around her debut album, *Troops*, the 25-year-old about to make a major splash using her voice and a violin. This latter instrument Liesa's been playing since she was five years old, but not in the way you might think. She plucks it like a ukulele and beats it like a drum. But however she makes her unique alt-rock sound, Van Der Aa promises to give a spellbinding performance as she steps to the beat of her greatest influences, from Mozart to The Velvet Underground. **RB**

16 February, Bourla, Antwerp
29 February, Vooruit, Ghent

See website for more dates | ► www.liesavanderaa.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Borgerhout

Thé Lau: The Dutch singer-songwriter plays his greatest pop hits

EB 17 20.30 at De Roma, Turnhoutsebaan 286
► www.deroma.be

Turnhout

Yevgueni: Flemish folk rock sensation

FEB 18 20.15 at De Warande, Warandestraat 42
► www.warande.be

CARNIVAL

Peer Stoet

Little old Herenthout in Antwerp province lays claim to the title of *Stoetersdorp*, or "carnival village". Fair enough, since the town has been celebrating the start of Mardi Gras season every year since 1892, and not just a little bit. Two Sundays in a row, giant floats take to the streets, escorted by troupes of dancers, entertainers and musicians with a whole lot of flair. But that's not all. On the evening of Monday, 20 February, the town comes out en masse for the annual masked ball, and again on Tuesday afternoon for the children's parade. If you're lucky, you'll get to see Carnival Prince Nico Goormans, a handsome local elected each year in the name of tradition. **RB**

19-26 February | Herenthout | ► www.peerstoet.be



MORE CARNIVAL THIS WEEK

Aalst

Aalst Carnival: Flanders' largest carnival celebration, with up to 80,000 participants and visitors expected

FEB 19-21 across the city

► www.aalst.be/carnaval

Blankenberge

Carnival Parade: Giant parade through the streets of the coastal city

FEB 19 14.30 starting from Kerkstraat and Zuidlaan, ending at Grote Markt

► <http://carnaval.blankenberge.be>

Tongeren

Carnival Parade: Weekend celebrations include a children's parade on Saturday followed by an even bigger parade on Sunday

FEB 18-19 14.00 across Tongeren

► www.tongeren.be

Jennifer Jansons

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Le Cercueil

Haringstraat 10, Brussels

A stone's throw from Brussels' Grote Markt is a long, dark hallway leading into an eerily lit café, adorned with skeletal remains, black velvet and funeral wreaths. In the corners of the room, black lights hang above small groups of people huddled around glass-topped caskets, casting a shadow across the glow of the skeleton resting inside each time they reach for their drinks.

Le Cercueil, or The Coffin, has been wetting the palates and chilling the bones of both tourists and locals since 1974, opening one year after the release of the American thriller *The Exorcist*.

With a dozen ceramic mugs shaped like human skulls staring at me from behind the bar, I ordered the house speciality, a Leffe coupled with a flaming shot of Cointreau, served in one of these house mugs. My friends all had a round of beers on tap, also served in their own skull mugs.

Though Le Cercueil has a decent selection of beer, their death-themed cocktail list is the real attraction. If you really want to have the full experience, it seems best to do it with a mug of Corpse Urine, Toad Slime or Devil's Soup.

Refreshment in hand, we all descended the stairs to the special smoking room, where the rising smoke actually complemented the surroundings, like a thin fog coating the grounds of a cemetery. This of course led to us asking a patron to photograph us all as we raised our skulls to the night.

Despite the morbid theme, the staff and clientele are quite welcoming. The music selection also helps to lighten the mood: Nirvana, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Metallica, among other classics, kept our table buzzing about the music.



Le Cercueil's drinks are overly pricey due to the location, but the unique atmosphere pays dividends and ensures that "an experience" is exactly what you'll have.

► www.lecercueil.be

Fin de Siècle ★★★☆

There's no website, no one answering the phone and no sign on the building. And yet Fin de Siècle near Sint-Katelijneplein is jam-packed every single night. They also don't take reservations, so expect to wait a while for your table. Our party of five takes a draughty seat by the door and nurses a round of Trappist beers (Rochefort, Chimay, Orval) in the meantime. Finally seated, we have a look down the rows of other diners squeezed together at long wooden tables. There's a party of 17 next to us. (Or are they together?) This is by no means a romantic one-on-one kind of restaurant, but rather a place where you bring along a bunch of mates, or go to meet a few new ones.

The atmosphere is full of energy, buzzing to the sound of silverware on plates, clinking glasses and plenty of laughter. Miraculously, our server remains as calm as a Buddhist monk. She is in fact the owner of the restaurant, which has been around for 16 years. And there are in fact two dining rooms – across the street from each other – equally as busy. She doesn't bother with publicity: Word of mouth serves just fine.

At Fin de Siècle, there are no menus. You order from a giant chalkboard at the centre of the room, which is filled with classics and a few nods to African and Asian cuisine: *entrecôte*, calamari, spare ribs, lamb, couscous. In the end, it's the simple, traditional dishes that convince our table.

My friends order rabbit in a Kriek beer and prune sauce, grilled *entrecôte*, Chimay-infused beef stew and the most classic Brussels dish of all, *stoemp* with sausage. I decide on the ham shank in a grain mustard sauce, one of my favourites.

The dishes arrive within 15 minutes looking, well, good enough

to eat. We tuck in, and it's unanimous: Everything is excellent. But my fork takes a wander around the table just to be sure. The *stoemp* is a royal portion of mashed potatoes topped with two thick, juicy country sausages and surrounded by a moat of savoury gravy. The beef stew is just as it should be, the meat falling apart and the sauce dark and bold like the Chimay. Next to the stew is a heap of lumpy potatoes, tender broccoli and buttery soft *witloof*. The *entrecôte* is without sauce, and it doesn't need any. The steak is barely grilled on both sides, bloody in the middle and very tasty. It comes with a baked potato and a huge salad.

Mine also comes with a butter-stuffed baked potato and loads of salad, with a creamy vinaigrette. Together with the ham shank, my plate is big enough to be slightly embarrassing. It's mostly bones, I try to explain to my dining companions in between bites. But that's not true. The ham shank consists of a massive portion of pork, steamed to the point where it's practically falling off the bones. Its delicate, sweet flavour is perfectly complemented by the sharp and tangy grain mustard sauce.

As good as it is, we all agree that the rabbit is the best. Its Kriek and prune sauce is so sweet, almost caramel-like, that the whole dish tastes like dessert. The generous helping of meat is succulent and slides right off the bone. It comes with a pile of mixed sautéed veg including carrot, courgette, broccoli and green beans.



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TALKING DUTCH

Ik zie u graag

Romantics may argue that love, like music or war, is in itself a universal language and that words are not only unfit but also unnecessary when feelings need declaring. A mere gaze into the eyes of the beloved would be all that is needed.

Others, including yours truly, sort of like the luxury of language and often need a little help to go with the gazing.

They may very well, just to be clear, at some point tell their counterpart: *Ik zie u graag*, which means literally: I like seeing you. Or, in the wider sense of the phrase, I like you. Or, in an even wider sense, I love you.

The phrase is manifestly

Flemish and not to be used in the Netherlands, where *Ik vind je leuk*, I like you, or *Ik hou van jou*, I love you, are used. These are used in Flanders, too, mind you, but *Ik zie u graag* is much more fashionable.

So now you know the meaning of that anonymous postcard you received in your mailbox on Valentijnsdag, Valentine's Day. Yes, the American holiday has managed to infiltrate Flemish society, too. It gained a foothold in the mid-1990s and has been growing in importance ever since. Today, it's like an unmissable snack in between the meals of New Year and Easter.

Shops around the country hope to get the most out of the highly commercialised February holiday,

decorating their windows with red hearts and roses. Even the post office jumped on the love boat once, issuing special Valentine stamps.

Lovers like to do something special, like *op restaurant gaan*, go to a restaurant, or *naar de film gaan*, go to the movies. They don't seem to understand, however, that Valentine's Day is the worst day of the year to do anything of the sort, as everybody in town has the same idea. I, personally, am planning to stay in and *een maaltijd koken*, cook dinner. Maybe light an extra candle.

They give each other *kusjes*, little kisses, and call each other sweet names, such as *schatteke*, literally meaning "small treasure", but actually meaning something like "sweetie".

Maar, het is niet allemaal rozengeur en maneschijn.

But it's not all (the smell of) roses and moonshine. Valentine's Day has its fair share of opponents, more so than any other holiday, it seems. They are annoyed by the commercial aspect of the day, which they say was invented by shopkeepers with the sole objective of tricking people into buying stuff.

I can understand those people. There are many things I don't like about Valentine's Day. I think it is forced and kitschy, mostly. But right now, nothing is really bothering me. Because Monica, *ik zie u graag*.



Philip Ebels

The last word...

Recipe for success

"Here's a trick: if you feel like a piece of Cote d'Or, just think about the fat elephant that's on there."

The residents and staff of the Denderdruif rest home in Aalst are trying to lose a total of 500 kilograms to raise funds

Cleaning up

"We just want to make the life of the modern woman easier. And there's nothing to say that men can't come and have a look, too."

Two women from Roeselare have set up the advice website www.homeworkforhousewives.be

Have an ice day

"It's not very nice in this cold weather to be sprayed with water."

Brussels police spokeswoman Ilse Van De Keere after police were hosed down by protesting firemen

To err is human

"I've had some criticism. Most people are not at all okay if you dare to attack the master. They try to defend him every which way."

Professor Dirk Huylebroeck of Ghent University found an error in a calculation in one of Leonardo da Vinci notebooks

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Flemish director Michaël Roskam and actor Matthias Schoenaerts are in Hollywood as we speak, trying to make an impression on Oscar voters in the lead-up to the big night. We talk to the director about why his film *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*) has so resonated with international audiences

Business

It's hard to imagine a Flemish fashion landscape without Kipling in it. The consummate producer of bags with the little gorilla attached is turning 25 this year, and we look back at its history, its milestones and its impact on the industry

Living

We'll introduce you to an organisation that began as a farmer's association and has become what might just be both the oldest and the largest women's organisation in Flanders