

In plain English

New international school opens in Ghent



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New and improved

Flanders' most creative urban renewal projects in a new book in English



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Magical mystery tour

Helmut Lotti and Roland stage a fantastically unlikely summer tour



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Ready for the Chinese century

Flanders' strengthens relationship with China through joint education programmes

Andy Furniere



China's state councillor for education and youth Liu Yandong is greeted by an enthusiastic group of Chinese students in Leuven last month

It's been clear for some time that China is growing into the world's leading economic powerhouse. Flemish universities are wasting no time in implementing programmes and signing agreements with Chinese universities to make sure their students are ready.

Liu Yandong, the state councillor responsible for education, youth and culture and the most powerful female politician in China, did not just pay a friendly visit to Flanders last month. She strengthened the cooperation between the Flemish and Chinese education systems by inaugurating a new Confucius Institute at the University College West Flanders (Howest). Confucius Institutes teach the Chinese language and culture with the support of the Chinese government. Liu also announced the doubling of the number of scholarships for students at the University of Leuven (KUL) from 12 to 25.

These measures are new signs of the growing cooperation between this small region and the world power in the Far East. The West Flemish Confucius Institute is now the third in Flanders, following institutes established in Leuven and Brussels, and it's one of 340 worldwide.

About 2,500 Chinese students and researchers are currently registered at Flemish colleges and universities, 600 of them at front-runner KUL. The university signed agreements with five top Chinese universities as part of Liu's visit, which should bring even more Chinese knowledge to Flanders through the platform Leuven EDGE (KUL's Research and Education Gateway to Europe).

Teaching karaoke

The foundations of the West Flemish Confucius Institute were laid in 2000, when the province concluded a partnership agreement with the province Zhejiang in the southeast of China. Two years ago, Howest began collaborating with the Zhejiang Gongshang University which last October sent a Chinese teacher to provide language courses at the university college. Around 80 students enrolled for a basic study programme in Chinese language and culture, either on the Howest campus in Bruges or Kortrijk.

In 24 lessons of three hours a week, all students learn the basics of the language and the principles of Chinese etiquette. Starting this autumn, the Confucius Institute will provide more specialised courses to different target groups "because businessmen planning to negotiate with Chinese companies have different needs than retired citizens who want to learn a new language as a hobby," explains Philip Vanhaelemeersch, director of the Confucius Institute at Howest. Entrepreneurs will, for example, learn how to make a toast to all guests at formal dinners, an important Chinese custom. "We should even practice singing karaoke in class because Chinese business meetings often end in karaoke bars," smiles Vanhaelemeersch. Huang Zhonghui, the Chinese teacher at Howest, agrees with the future plans. "After this preparation year, we know the different interests of our students – social customs, food culture, music and history," she says. "I will be able to provide everyone with the basics in Chinese culture that will be indispensable for them."

Beyond Engineering at Group T

Group T, the International University College Leuven, has had privileged contacts with China since 1993 because it provides English-language engineering studies from the first year. At the Confucius

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

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Monica Van Kerrebroeck

Last week it was announced that Monica Van Kerrebroeck will bring up the rear of the CD&V list in Ghent for the municipal elections in October. It's the return to active politics for a woman who's now 72 years old and only a year ago was diagnosed with lymphoma.

Van Kerrebroeck, known to one and all as Sister Monica, has been a city councillor in Ghent since 2001, and from 2004 to 2009 was also a member of the Flemish Parliament. So, roughly at a time when most people are considering retirement, she was holding down two public positions, and that was after a long career as a nun and director of the Sint-Bavo school in Ghent.

"I started in politics too late," she told *Het Nieuwsblad* in 2004. "On one hand, I regret that, but, on the other, I can't be sorry for what I've achieved during my long career."

Van Kerrebroeck was born in Ghent in 1939. After studying history, she went on to teach at the Sint-Bavo school she would eventually run. Only later did she take her vows and join the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, dedicated to helping the sick and

needy. The order's most famous sister was Sister Marie Louise Habets, fictionalised in the novel and film *The Nun's Story*.

In Belgian electoral politics, with its system of party lists, each list has its puller (*lijsttrekker*) and pusher (*lijstduwer*). The puller is the candidate most likely to succeed on the basis of list votes, and it's a plum position for any politician. The pusher is at the bottom of the list, and the place is usually reserved for prominent personalities who do not expect to be elected but who help out by lending their public recognition to the campaign.

Van Kerrebroeck is widely respected across party lines and is something of a *bekende Vlaming* from appearances on TV programmes like *De slimste mens ter wereld* (The Smartest Person in the World). She's also outspoken when she feels she needs to be. In 2010, when the new Archbishop André Leonard described Aids as "immanent justice" from God, she responded: "I can't go along with this. These words are harsh and conflict with my own feelings. God is not a vengeful God; he is a God of love."

News in brief

The Gates Foundation of Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda has awarded a **grant of €3 million to the Institute for Tropical Medicine** in Antwerp for research on malaria-carrying mosquitoes in Cambodia. The project will arm the entire population of a village with anti-mosquito cream or spray all at one time to see if that helps repel the insects. Malaria kills an estimated 800,000 people every year.

► www.flandershouse.org

Belgians are **more happy than average**, with the country in the top half of a table of nations on quality of life, according to the latest Better Living Index from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In a list of 36 countries – the member states of the OECD plus Russia and Brazil – Belgium comes in 14th, with high scores for incomes, comfort and work-life balance. The country does less well on employment and pay differences between the lowest and highest earners.

► www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org

This year's award for **Teacher of the Year**, given out by *Klasse* magazine, has gone to a group of 11 male staff members, each of whom represents one of the essential elements of the DNA of the perfect teacher, the magazine said. The 10 teachers and one handyman, who come from schools all over Flanders, represent professionalism, drive, patience and discretion, humour, a sympathetic ear and more. *Klasse* also declared 2012 the year of the male teacher, whose presence in Flemish schools is on the decline.

Groen member of the Flemish Parliament Luckas Vander Taelen has called on the government to **move Flanders House in New York** to a more accessible location. Flanders House is located on the

44th floor of the New York Times building in Manhattan, but Vander Taelen, who visited recently, said that the entry has heavy security, including passport checks, and visitors to the various exhibitions and other events organised there have to announce their arrival 24 hours in advance.

Godfried Lannoo, son of the founder of the publishing house of the same name, **has died at the age of 85**. Lannoo started in the family business in 1945 and built the company into one of the foremost publishers in the Dutch language. Lannoo publishes books by writers such as Marc Reynebeau and Phil Bosmans, photographers like Carl De Keyser and Stephan Vanfleteren and the best-selling *SOS* cookbook series by TV chef Piet Huysentruyt.

► www.lannoo.be

Leuven mayor Louis Tobback has warned he will revive a proposal to **shut down cafes** on the university city's Oude Markt at night if complaints about noise and disturbances continue. Tobback has promised to introduce a curfew between 3.00 and 6.00 after the October elections.

Flanders could be facing a **waiting time of two years for electrical work** on new construction in the near future, the training centre Vormelek announced. In the last year, the number of open job vacancies has increased by one-third, while the number of newly qualified electricians continues to fall – by 20% over the last five years. Contributing to the problem are rising numbers of electrical gadgets in modern homes.

Former Belgian prime minister Guy

Verhofstadt, now a member of the European Parliament, requested a visit with **opposition party leader Julia Tymoshenko**, during his trip to Ukraine last weekend. As *Flanders Today* went to press, Verhofstadt was expected to see Tymoshenko, who is in hospital. Tymoshenko recently abandoned a hunger strike started in protest at her conviction for abuse of power while in government, and her case has led to a boycott by EU institutions of the forthcoming European football championships in Ukraine and Poland.

Thursday, 31 May, is **World Day without Tobacco**, and 20 hospitals in Flanders and seven in Brussels are offering a free test for smokers to measure the effect of the habit on their health. Every visitor will be given a personal passport to present to the family doctor, who will then be able to order further tests as well as medical treatment.

► www.dagzondertabak.be

People in Flanders are **economising mainly on clothing, food and restaurant visits** in response to difficult economic times, according to a survey carried out by the Christian Mutuality. More than 90% of people said they were cutting spending on new clothes, with 86% buying less expensive food and 55% going out to eat less often. Energy prices are also a concern: 68% have turned down the heat, and 28% left the car in the garage more often.

The Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels and the federal environment ministry have launched a public **campaign to improve biodiversity** in the North Sea, using the characters of Gust the endangered oyster and Suzette the grey shrimp.

► www.waarisgust.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Snoring for Flanders

"You should congratulate my wife; she's the one who sent in the film." It's doubtful if his wife feels like someone to be congratulated, because her husband, Philip Cox of Kuringen, a district of Hasselt, has just been named the loudest snorer in Flanders.

The annual competition is organised by the Antwerp SomnoClinic for Snoring and Apnoea, as a light-hearted way to draw attention to an often-overlooked problem. Members of the public were invited to send in videos or recordings of their partners (or themselves) snoring, and the experts at the clinic would determine who was loudest.

In the video Philip's wife sent in, Philip is seen conked out on the couch. All of a sudden, someone fires up a particularly



© Shutterstock

noisy chainsaw. Or not quite: that ear-rendering sound you hear is Philip snoring.

According to the analysts, he reaches peaks of 85 decibels, the equivalent to a lawnmower or a chainsaw. "My wife goes to bed an hour earlier than I do, otherwise she can't fall asleep because of my snoring," Philip told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "Sometimes she wakes up in the night and then she has to go and sleep on the couch. Sometimes I even wake myself up."

The full force of Philip Cox (with handy volume control) can be experienced at www.checkthis.com/ztdr#.

Loud snoring, of course, is no laughing matter. For the snorer, it means poor sleep patterns and a restless night, followed by a day of headaches and fatigue. For the partner, it's much the same and has actually led to divorce.

The Antwerp clinic offers a quick online quiz so you can see if you're suffering from the condition known as sleep apnoea, in which the sufferer stops breathing hundreds of times a night, waking up slightly when the brain becomes starved of oxygen. The condition can be treated by anything from a pressurised mask to surgery.

► www.snurken.org

Ready for the Chinese century

One in five engineering students in Leuven's Group T are from China

► continued from page 1

Institute of Group T – established in 2008 – third year engineering students follow lessons to prepare them for contacts with Chinese employers and colleagues. The programme is called Beyond Engineering. “We want to broaden the horizons of our students, all the way to the Far East,” explains Wim Polet, director of the Confucius Institute in Leuven. The students learn the basics of the language and culture, but also do certain activities together with fellow Chinese students, who constitute 20% of the engineering student population at Group T. In “cross-cultural cooking training”, for example, Chinese students help their Flemish colleagues to prepare a typical Chinese dish and vice versa. “It’s a simple kind of collaboration, but it helps them to get to know each other better,” says Polet. Every April, Group T, together with the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce, organises a Flanders-China job fair, which gives Flemish companies a platform to recruit both Chinese students and Flemish students interested in a career in China. The Confucius Institute in Leuven also offers an eight-day programme in the summer. Students learn basic communication skills, customs, symbols and what to expect during certain social situations such as dinners. In preparation of the probable introduction of an optional Chinese course in Flemish secondary education in 2013, Group T is organising China Classes in six Flemish schools. China Classes are extracurricular activities of one or two hours a week that introduce secondary students to the Chinese

president of the People’s Republic Xi Jinping passed by the university. That is no coincidence: KUL has maintained close contacts with Chinese educational institutions for 35 years. The university has teamed up with Chinese partners for more than 70 research projects and has close bonds with, among others, the top institutions Tsinghua University in Beijing, Peking University, Zhejiang University in Hangzhou and Fudan University in Shanghai. This academic year, approximately 600 Chinese students and researchers are active at the university, the largest Chinese population at any Flemish university. The Chinese are the second largest foreign group at the KUL – only the Dutch are more numerous. To further intensify the Chinese collaboration, the university has signed five new agreements with universities in China as part of the new international platform called Leuven EDGE. A base for common research projects between the KUL and foreign universities, EDGE should help in bringing the best foreign students to Leuven. The scheme will also provide summer programmes of two weeks to students from all over the world. “Instead of installing an expensive campus abroad, we hope to make Leuven into an international knowledge hub,” says Bart De Moor, vice-rector of international policy at KUL. “Our assets are not only the quality of our education but also our connection to the European institutions in Brussels. Many of our alumni, like the president of the European Council, Herman



China’s state councillor of education and youth Liu Yandong attends the opening of the Confucius Institute in Bruges last month. To the right of the podium is governor of West Flanders Carl Decaluwé, Bruges culture and education alderman Yves Roose and China’s ambassador to Belgium Liao Liqiang

China as sinology laboratory

KUL wants not only to attract more Chinese researchers and students to Flanders, it will also be sending out more of its own students. The Chinese government’s scholarships for KUL students of sinology (the study of China) provide one year of study at a Chinese university. The scholarships cover registration fees – which can amount to €4,000 – and a monthly allowance to cover most of their living costs. “For a sinology student, an opportunity to stay in China is just



Group T’s China-Flanders jobs fair offers Chinese students the chance to work here and Flemish students the chance to work in China

“For a sinology student, an opportunity to stay in China is just as important as the availability of laboratory environment to a chemistry student”

world. In the future, Group T hopes to start up Confucius Classes, secondary schools that are integrated in a Confucius Institute. **KUL hub of Chinese connections** For the KUL, Liu Yandong was the second high-level Chinese politician to visit in a few years. In 2009, vice-

Van Rompuy, are now important decision-makers.” And international universities – such as China’s – are “fascinated by how efficiently we transfer knowledge and technology to enterprises,” notes De Moor. “Not only for economic purposes – our knowledge in human sciences helps to improve development aid.”

as important as the availability of laboratory environment to a chemistry student,” says Nicolas Standaert, head of the Sinology Department at KUL, which counts about 150 students. “That’s why nearly 90% of our students have already spent a study year in China. They need to experience the pleasant aspects of the culture but also, for example, the tiresome

bureaucracy. When they come back, they are not only more proficient in Chinese but also more mature.” Other Flemish institutions such as Group T and Howest also send their students to China, although the number of scholarships is more limited. But, as part of its Beyond Engineering programme, Group T organises a two-week trip to China, during which third-year students are guided around by the Chinese students in the group. At Howest, the exchange programme “China from Within” provides approximately 40 Bachelor

students with three weeks of language and culture lessons at the Zhejiang Gongshang University and a course called “Doing Business in China”. “All these initiatives are needed to bring our young generation closer to this often unknown culture in the Far East,” says professor Standaert, “especially as the 21st century could very well be the Chinese century.”

► www.tinyurl.com/confuciusshowest
► www.tinyurl.com/confuciusleuven

IN THE LAND OF DRAGONS AND EMPERORS



KUL student Anne Timmerman at the Forbidden City in the centre of Beijing

KU Leuven sinology student Anne Timmerman, who spent last year in Beijing on a Chinese government scholarship, cannot emphasis enough the importance of her time abroad. “I learned to dare to speak Chinese,” she says. “It became a natural way of communicating in everyday life instead of a language that you practice with fellow students.” The 22-year-old says that her studies at KUL prepared her adequately for the culture shock in China. “Our teachers, who are mostly Chinese, explain the customs and illustrate them by showing us TV shows. Although nothing prepares you for the crowds and queuing an hour long for a train ticket,” she smiles. Timmerman is already applying for jobs in China in the hope of starting work there after she

graduates. Her fellow sinology student Vincent Vanassche also hopes to return to China, after studying there last year. He feels confident about working there after experiencing the everyday reality. “I can now negotiate better with possible employers because I understand Chinese customs,” he says. “You have to take into account, for example, the sensitivity of the Chinese for formal politeness. In China, you always greet the teacher when you enter and leave the classroom. They also have different ways of communicating than we do; a ‘no’, for instance, can mean there is just a very small detail that has to be resolved.”

► www.tinyurl.com/kulsinology

New Flemish Charter unveiled

Document is an “identity card” for the region, says minister-president

Alan Hope

The Flemish government last week presented its new *Handvest*, or Charter, the fruit of 20 years of work by successive governments. The document, which lays down the basic governing values of the region, contains some texts lifted from the Belgian constitution and the European charter. These articles cover matters such as the right to integrity of the person, freedom of enterprise and the protection of intellectual property.

Other articles were greeted with caution by politicians on

the French-speaking side of the country. The preamble describes Flanders as “a nation with its own language and culture” and emphasises that “Brussels is the capital of Flanders”.

The charter is not to be regarded as a “constitution”, said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, and it “has nothing to do with independence”. The word “nation” was reported to have been inserted at the insistence of the nationalist N-VA party, but elsewhere the document stresses that Flanders is part of the federal state of Belgium.

Peeters described the text as a sort of “identity card of Flanders, with a timeless character”. His party colleague Lieven Decaluwé, head of the CD&V fraction in the Flemish parliament, pointed out that the text is not exceptional. The German regions all have one, he said. A full copy in Dutch of the charter is available for download on the website of *De Standaard*.

► www.standaard.be/handvest



FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The emperor and the beard

Ostend is known as the Queen of Bathing Resorts, but now it turns out it also has an emperor. The Emperor of Ostend is how two VRT journalists refer to Johan Vande Lanotte, the socialist federal minister of economy and the North Sea.

In a book by that same name, they describe how Vande Lanotte is all powerful in his home town, where his party holds an absolute majority. He is surrounded by cronies, decides everything without the elected councillors (in a manner compared both to Hitler and Mao) and constantly finds himself in conflicts of interest. As the president of the Ostend basketball club he uses his political status to attract sponsors. When he was left without a ministerial post, he became active in the offshore wind power industry, which he now has to grant concessions as minister for the North Sea.

The book shocked no-one, as most of the facts were already known through the satirical columns of Koen Meulenaere in the newsweekly *Knack*. Meulenaere mixes reality with fiction for maximum effect, with *The Beard* – as he calls Vande Lanotte – as one of his favourite subjects. The Emperor of Ostend lists many of the same things – stripped of the fiction. The book lacks a real smoking gun, though – proof of any actual wrongdoing. Vande Lanotte, who points out many factual errors, shrugs it off as “nothing but insinuations”. He points the finger at Jean-Marie Dedecker, the judo coach-turned-politician who has been his main adversary in Ostend, as one of its main sources. Dedecker threw in the towel, moving out of Ostend, but, according to Vande Lanotte, not without vowing to destroy his opponent.

Whether the book will harm Vande Lanotte at the local elections remains to be seen. So far, it has mostly caused collateral damage – not to Vande Lanotte, but to the VRT. The public broadcaster's editor-in-chief has come under fire for his handling of the situation. Luc Rademakers gave both journalists permission to write the book, independent from the VRT, read fragments before it was published and distanced the VRT from it once it was, assigning both journalists to office duties.

Rademakers has been criticised for misjudging the situation from the start and not standing by his journalists. Are you the right man in the right place, he was asked on air, by one of his own journalists. Now there's a question Vande Lanotte would never hesitate to answer... unlike the VRT boss.

Brussels launches new pedestrian plan

The Brussels-Capital region last week launched a new plan to further pedestrianise the city. At present, 32% of movements within the city are made on foot – a figure the government wants to increase to 40% by 2040. That involves the creation of a network of walkways to encourage people to leave the car at home. “One in four people still use the car for journeys of less than one kilometre,” said the region's mobility minister Bruno De Lille. “With congestion these days and the constant search for parking spaces, they would be just as quick on foot. Above all, it's cheaper, healthier and more social. Walking is not only relaxing and healthy; you might happen to meet an old friend or discover a new square with attractive terraces. Walking is as old as the street itself, and it's the future of the street.”



An artist's impression of what the Koningsplein in central Brussels could look like under the new plan

STAM wins Museum Prize, twice

STAM, the city museum of Ghent, has won this year's Museum Prize for Flanders, scooping both the main jury prize and the public prize. STAM (pictured below) opened in 2010 on the Bijloke abbey site. The museum's collection reflects the history of the city, and STAM also hosts temporary exhibitions relating to Ghent.

This year's nominees also included the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren, Gaasbeek Castle, Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp and Mu.ZEE in Ostend. Ghent's victory comes as something of a surprise: The past year has been dominated by the arrival on the scene of the new MAS, which last week announced it had attracted one million visitors in its first year.

De wereld van Kina (The World of Kina), also in Ghent, took this year's children's prize, voted by a children's jury.

The Museum Prize is regional, and this year's Brussels winner is the Victor Horta Museum in Sint-Gillis, located in the architect's former home and an adjoining house, which now includes an archive and library, an exhibition room and a cafeteria. Each Museum Prize is worth €10,000.



Dispute procedure filed over Hedwigepolder

The Flemish government has started a dispute procedure with the government of the Netherlands over their refusal to honour a treaty agreement to flood parts of their coastline along the Scheldt.

The two governments reached an agreement in 2005 over the deepening of the Westerschelde channel between the North Sea and the Port of Antwerp. The channel had to be deepened to allow the new, larger generation of container ships to reach the port. However, most of the Westerschelde is within the Dutch Zeeland province.

The dredging works went ahead, but another part of the treaty, imposed by EU law, obliged the Dutch to turn over part of the coastline – the Hedwigepolder – to the waters, to offset the impact of the deeper channel on wildlife. The flooded areas would become a habitat for water birds and plants. The Dutch government tried to come up with

alternatives to what is called *ontpoldering* – reversing the effect of turning what was once underwater into land – but an agreement could not be reached on any of them, whether that was within the Dutch government or with Flanders or with conservation organisations. Last week a final effort by Dutch agriculture minister Henk Bleker to break the impasse with a partial *ontpoldering* of the Hedwigepolder failed to make it through the Dutch parliament.

“We've shown a great deal of patience and understanding with the Dutch up until now,” minister-president Kris Peeters said. The dispute procedure, written into the treaty, allows for six months of negotiation. “If there is damage caused by the delay, we will be putting that on the table, too,” Peeters said.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

30,000

pupils in the fifth year of more than 1,100 primary schools in Flanders have taken a computer test on common traffic situations, aimed at improving their awareness as cyclists or pedestrians of the dangers of the road

21

arrests a day by police on Brussels transport, after extra officers were drafted in, following the death of a transport worker in April. Before the incident, an average of 7.6 arrests were made per day

119

attempted drugs smugglers apprehended by customs at Brussels Airport in 2011, compared to 68 in 2010. Officials said the increase was due to more flights coming from the Dominican Republic

€76 million

damage caused by last August's storm at the Pukkelpop festival, in which five people died, according to the insurance company Swiss Re

49%

reduction in road deaths in Flanders between 2000 and 2010, from 848 to 436, less than the EU target of 50% but better than the EU average of 43%

Government enterprise pay cap proposed

Proposal would see a big drop in salaries for CEOs of public concerns

Alan Hope

The senior managers of government-owned enterprises should earn no more than €290,000 a year before deductions, Paul Magnette, federal minister for government enterprises, has proposed.



Those enterprises include the three companies that make up the rail authority NMBS, bpost and Belgacom. Magnette proposes a basic salary limit of €200,000, about the same as the top civil servant at a government department, supplemented by up to a 30% bonus and a maximum of 15% for pension plan or company car. Share options and other forms of remuneration would be ruled out. In addition, managers would on their departure from the company receive a package of no more than one year's salary. If the departure is voluntary or the result of poor performance, no remuneration would be paid. Didier Bellens of Belgacom (pictured) is now the highest-paid CEO of the group at more than €2 million, almost double the salary of bpost's Johnny Thijs at number two. Bellens' successor would, if the proposal becomes law, make 13% of the current salary. The change would

also bring the boss slightly closer to his employees: At present Bellens earns 63 times more than the lowest-paid Belgacom employee. Magnette said the proposal was part of "a worldwide movement to bring morality back into the economy". Asked if he wasn't worried that the drastic cuts would deter executives from bringing their talents to the public sector, he said: "It's always said that if you pay peanuts, you'll get monkeys,

but it's not true. Money is certainly not the only motivator for these people. Don't forget that leading that sort of company has a lot of prestige attached. It's a very exciting job and looks good on the CV." The proposal would have no effect on CEOs currently under contract. Last week the federal inner cabinet decided to send the document to a working group for further examination.

The current pay of government enterprise CEOs

CEO	Company	Current salary
Didier Bellens	Belgacom	2,164,000
Johnny Thijs	bpost	1,108,000
Jannie Haek	NMBS Holding	497,000
Luc Lallemant	Infrabel	480,000
Marc Descheemaeker	NMBS	447,000

Hedwig De Meyer wins Vlerick Award

Hedwig De Meyer, the founder and CEO of Stageco in Rotselaar, Flemish Brabant, has won this year's Vlerick Award 2012. The award is given by alumni of the management school in Ghent and Leuven to a manager who has shown impressive sustained results from an international perspective. De Meyer started in the entertainment industry at an early age, organising parties at his local youth club. That led to a business constructing stages for the local Rock Werchter festival, later expanding all over the world. His company has had contracts with some of the biggest names in popular culture, from the Paralympics in Athens in 2004 to the Rolling Stones 2005-2007 tour to U2, Madonna, Lady Gaga and Coldplay. De Meyer is famous in the industry for never saying "no" to an artist's sometimes wild stage fantasies. Previous winners of the annual award include

politicians Karel Van Miert and Jean-Luc Dehaene, scientists Peter Piot and Catherine Verfaillie and businessmen Gabriel Fehervari and Herman Van De Velde.



Stageco created the structure called "The Drum" for an oil and gas industry event in Qatar

Novel concepts pour in to "One Idea A Day"

Winners of the Eén idee per dag, or One Idea a Day, competition organised by creativity agency Flanders DC have been announced. The competition asked the public to post one creative idea a day during a one-month period, on the basis of creativity, feasibility and relevance. The contest attracted more than 4,000 ideas. The winners include: fruit and vegetable vending machines in schools; a store selling refills for toiletries and cosmetics; baby buggy rentals for holidaymakers; a cloakroom built under the counter in bars; a machine to change pocketfuls of change into banknotes; subtitles in Dutch on the RTBF and in French on the VRT; and a special light on your car to signal that you intend to park in an empty space. Special mention went to Sara Coene, who managed to post an idea every day of the competition and won a package of books for her concept of giving every 18-year-old a business number on his or her birthday, to ready them for an adulthood of entrepreneurship.

► www.eenideeperdag.be

Bekaert lay-offs lead to unexpected vacancies

A couple of months after announcing the company was cutting more than 600 jobs in a restructuring, steel wire producer Bekaert is now faced with vacancies in two of the three plants affected. The cuts were aimed at Bekaert factories in Aalter, Zwevegem and Ingelmunster as part of a restructuring affecting the company worldwide, with 600 jobs to go in Flanders and another 1,250 in China. Unions at the Flemish works negotiated a deal where workers would be allowed to take voluntary redundancy or early retirement, with the result that at the two plants in Ingelmunster and Zwevegem, no forced redundancies were necessary. But the rush to leave voluntarily has left the two factories with a number of vacancies, as some of the posts vacated have to be filled. "It seems like we were able to work out a pretty good agreement," one union representative said.

Study backs proposal for Flanders' own credit rating

A report by two study centres at the University of Leuven has confirmed the advantage to Flanders if the region had its own credit rating, separate from the rating for the country as a whole. The report by the Centre for Economic Studies (CES) and the study group Vives backs the proposal made by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters for Flanders to be treated by the ratings agencies as a distinct entity. Recently, when the agencies lowered Belgium's credit rating, two of the three main agencies automatically lowered Flanders' rating at the same time. Only Moody's kept Flanders where it was. Peeters says that the two economies – regional and federal – are sufficiently distinct to justify their own ratings, so that Flanders' budgetary discipline, for example, can be recognised on its own merits. That's already the case for the *länder* (regional governments) in Germany, as well as for the Basque country, Galicia, Andalucia and Madrid in Spain. The federal government is, however, in the process of shedding some of its budgetary responsibilities onto the regions. Together with demographic factors, that is likely to lead to increased spending by the regions. "We're aware of those dangers," Peeters said. "A separate rating sets us in front of our responsibilities and strengthens us in the policy we're already following."



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Investment ► Statoil

The Brussels-based coordination centre of Norwegian state-owned oil and gas group Statoil has increased its capital by an additional \$6.1 billion to help finance its international activities outside of Norway. The total capital of the local affiliate now stands at some \$16 billion.

Investment ► Verlinvest

The Verlinvest holding company, owned by the local family shareholders of beer giant AB-Inbev, has acquired a large stake in the US Popchips producer of popcorn and fat-free chips located in Los Angeles.

Press shops ► Lagardere

France's Lagardere Services is opening a network of convenience stores in airports and petrol stations. The company, which already operates the Press Shops and Relay chains locally, has plans to further increase its operations to reach commuters, travellers and hospital visitors.

Retail ► Wijnegem

The Wijnegem shopping centre near Antwerp, one of Flanders' largest, will be renovated at a cost of some €50 million. The facility, owned by Axa Belgium and the ING Retail Property Fund, will remain open during the works, which should be completed by September of 2013 in time to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Telecoms ► Datang

China's Datang telecommunications company is the mystery buyer of the country's fourth mobile phone network. The €22.5 million deal was finalised in November last year with the BUCD consortium. It is believed that Datang will operate in partnership with Chinese Mobile on the local market.

Telecoms ► Telenet

Mechelen-based telecommunications and cable company Telenet, owned by the US Liberty Global group, is harnessing its financial muscle for a €1.8 billion bid for local mobile phone operator Base, owned by the Dutch KPN telecom firm.

Tobacco ► Gryson

Gryson, specialised in rolling tobacco under the Orlando, Domingo and Arizona brands, has been sold to Japan tobacco for €475 million. The company, founded 25 years ago and based in Wervik, West Flanders, has become a European leader in the field as demand for loose tobacco surged in response to health concerns and the fast-increasing price of cigarettes.



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School's in

The International School in Ghent is now taking registrations for its first academic year

Alan Hope

On Monday, 3 September, 45 children between the ages of three and 12 will walk through the doors of Belgium's newest international school. Their parents are international executives and scientists, among others, working for companies and laboratories in East and West Flanders. Until now, the only options for imported employees have been a number of international schools concentrated in the Brussels area and Antwerp, or local Flemish schools. While the latter is an attractive option for those on a long-term stay, it's not practical for those whose stays are limited or who have children already in their teenage years. A year ago, business and government representatives sat down to put the finishing touches on a plan to open an English-language school for pre-school and primary-age children in Ghent, serving the whole of East and West Flanders. This month, the first registrations began at the International School Ghent (ISG) for the academic year starting this September.

ISG is a private initiative involving four main partners: from the private sector, technology company Barco and Volvo Cars, and from the public sector, the University of Ghent and the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology. All are keen to attract foreign executives and researchers with the best package of facilities available, for their work as well as for their families. The scientific establishments, in particular, sometimes find it hard to attract top-level post-doctoral and research personnel because of the problem of available schooling, something the institutions are keen to change to help Flanders position itself as an international



Ghent's new International School will cater to children from families working and living in West and East Flanders

centre of excellence. Children of parents from other employers can also register to attend the school. ISG has also received backing from the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, the city of Ghent, which helped find premises, the city of Kortrijk and the provinces of East and West Flanders. The Flemish government has given moral support to the project but is prevented from offering anything more concrete by the laws that require all government-backed schools in Flanders to teach in Dutch.

New arrivals

"It's going very well, though there are still many, many things to do," says Sonja Van de Walle, the head of the ISG. "We started pre-registrations, and we have 12 pupils so far, and that's without the partners. I expect more to come via them. We can take a maximum of 45 this year. The final numbers depend on when the companies start with new people. We're only expecting newcomers: Expats who are here already will not change their children's school, so I have to wait for new arrivals."

The school is on the Ledeganck

campus of Ghent University, close to the Citadel Park and within walking distance of the Sint-Pieters train station. While ISG itself offers an international curriculum in English, it will also work closely with the local school De Kleine Ikarus, with which it will share facilities and services, and cooperate on some school projects and extracurricular activities. That, Van de Walle says, will encourage parents and children to integrate into the local community as well as providing valuable educational experience. In addition, ISG children will receive Dutch-language tuition from the start, with French being introduced in grades five and six. "Right now we have some very young children," said Van de Walle. "My pre-school will, I think, be the most successful."

Following the Flemish system

In the beginning, ISG will offer an education that corresponds to the Flemish *basisschool* system – a pre-school for children aged three to six integrated into a primary school for ages six to 12. That

system has proved to help children educationally by smoothing the transition into primary school and is one of the reasons Flemish schoolchildren score so highly. Coincidentally, it also solves the problem of day care for younger children. In the future, ISG aims to also provide places for secondary school students.

The school is also in the process of taking on staff. The pedagogical adviser is Annelies Depuydt of Ghent's Artevelde University College, an education worker specialised in toddlers and young children. "We're very happy because we have some very high-level applicants," she says. "We expect to be able to employ teachers who are all native or high-level English-speakers. And they will all have experience in international schools."

Because of the backing of the four main sponsors, tuition fees have been kept to €9,800 a year, with a one-time registration fee of €800. That compares to fees of up to €32,000 a year for tuition at other international schools in Brussels and Flanders

► www.isg-ghent.org

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researcher Diether Lambrechts of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and the University of Leuven has discovered the first indicator that predicts **which patients will benefit from treatment with the cancer drug Avastin**. After clinical studies in pancreas and kidney cancer patients, Lambrechts found a genetic variant that did not react well to the medicine. The variant caused the production of a certain protein that neutralises the treatment. This indicator, or biomarker, could be used to distinguish patients who don't benefit from this specific medicine and so spare them an unnecessary therapy and possible side-effects.

The University Hospital Brussels, part of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), is the first European hospital to apply a new technique that **prevents the rupture of a swelling in the arch of the aorta**. The aortic arch is a critical place where the main artery leaves the heart. A rupture there can cause a life-threatening haemorrhage, and 700 Belgians die from the condition each year. Vascular surgeons placed on the arch a special stent – a tube with layers of metal wires that functions as a sieve and holds open clogged arteries to allow blood to flow more efficiently through the body. Implanting the stent requires a less invasive operation than the usual procedure in which the chest is opened and an artificial artery implanted. A control scan of the first patient revealed that the swelling had fully disappeared after six weeks.

From next year, XIOS University College Limburg will start a **postgraduate degree in mobile application development**. The study focuses specifically on mobile applications (or apps) for smartphones and tablets and will follow closely the trends in that market. To provide students with the best opportunities, the three most popular mobile operating systems will be taught: Android (Google), iOS (Apple) and hybrid solutions such as HTML5. According to business analysts and technology experts, there will be 1.2 billion more smartphones on the market in the next five years. The use of business tablets is expected to increase by 50%.

► www.xios.be

Antwerp city council is planning to create the **first Flemish "school boat"** for pre-school education. With this creative solution, the city wants to tackle the shortage of schools in Antwerp. "A school boat is not so exceptional abroad," says education alderman Robert Voorhamme. "The great advantage is that it can be quickly installed." The search for builders and locations has already started, and kids in Antwerp could receive their lessons on the water from the start of the next school year.

Andy Furniere

Q&A



Piet Grymonprez is Chief Research Officer of the West Flanders University College (Howest) in Kortrijk, which has just signed an agreement with the University of Ghent to award the first-ever university degrees in West Flanders

degrees – the Bachelor's after three years of study and the Master's after five years. That was more than a decade ago, which is the time it's taken for the Flemish government to implement the necessary measures.

What difference will it make for the students?

They'll still spend all their time here in West Flanders, just like before. That's important because of the links we have with industry and the many businesses that are in this part of the country. But the students will now be awarded degrees from Ghent University.

Isn't there a worry that Howest will lose some of its independence, after being swallowed up by this giant university?

Of course that was a concern. This is like a business unit – 10% of Howest – that we are selling to a much larger company. The other 90% of Howest stays independent. But I think we've reached a good agreement. We've always been occupied with applied research – research at the request of and in the interests of industry, at home and abroad, from San Francisco to Tokyo. Whereas the university is

more concerned with fundamental research. So while there is room for each to contribute to the other, there's not really a question of them taking us over.

When do the changes come into effect?

Not the next academic year coming up, but the one after that. There are already some changes being made on the work floor, so to speak, but for the students the changes begin in September of 2013. *interview by AH*

What led to this agreement to change degrees at Howest?

In fact, the change comes from the European Union, which called for more uniformity in the award of



“

I love being in BSB's French/English bilingual class and am learning Italian and Spanish as well because I have so many friends here from around the world.”

Noé (aged 5 years and 4 months)

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Make yourself at home

A living laboratory in Hasselt is furnishing the houses of the future for the elderly and disabled

Andy Furniere

If you are looking for housing, and you are in a wheelchair, then you are fully aware of the challenges that entails. The Provincial University College Limburg (PHL) is busy right now building what they call the Universal Design Living Laboratory, a model house full of design and technological novelties to make life safer and easier for residents who are elderly or disabled. PHL's priority is to raise awareness among architects that new houses should be designed with later adjustments in mind. From early 2013, the model home in the centre of Hasselt will open four days a week to visitors interested in innovations that improve the homes of the elderly and disabled. Universal Design refers to concepts that are user-friendly, regardless of age or disability. (The walk-in shower is one of the most famous examples.)

High-tech yet simple

The Living Lab, built in the former PHL janitor's house, consists of two model residences on two floors. The ground-floor home will be furnished for an elderly couple, modified for wheelchairs. The upper level is set up for a young couple, with adjustments for people with an audiovisual or auditory

impairments. Technological innovations include "falling mats" alongside the beds, which set off an alarm to warn medical services or relatives if the person falls out of bed. A special pill box reminds patients to take their medication and sends a signal to a nurse if the patient forgets. In the kitchen, counters automatically raise or lower to the ideal level, according to the height of the person – particularly useful if you're sitting in a wheelchair. "But not all modifications have to be high-tech," says project coordinator Mieke Nijs. "Some adjustments are very simple, such as broader hallways and foldable desks to provide more space for wheelchairs. Placing a support bar in the shower is not much work, but it makes a lot of difference."

Put to the test

The general public as well as nurses, architects, project developers and companies are welcome at the demonstration house for a tour and advice. Exhibitions and conferences will also be organised to bring interested parties together. "We especially want to make architects aware that from the first design, they have to keep future adjustments in mind to prevent

expensive renovations later on," says Nijs. The Living Lab will also serve as an education centre, where architects and contractors can follow courses to learn how to make accessible houses. PHL students will, meanwhile, follow practical lessons in architecture, interior design, nursing, ergonomic therapy and respiratory physical therapy. One day a week, elderly people or those with disabilities will actually move in to test and evaluate new methods or appliances created by companies, under the scrutiny of researchers and students. "But perhaps for certain projects, they could stay there for more than a week," says Nijs. Society as a whole, claims Nijs, needs to realise the importance of adapting houses for the future. "As people live longer, rest homes will not be able to accommodate every elderly person. We have to make sure people can enjoy the maximum of comfort in their own homes." The budget for the whole project is about €1 million. One-third is financed by the European Regional Development Fund and another one-third by the PHL. The government of Flanders, the City of Hasselt and Limburg province contribute some



Homes that adapt to aging residents will have level surfaces, doors that open easily and kitchen counters with adjustable heights

€100,000 each. Partner companies provide products, and the project is supported by the non-profit accessibility organisation

Toegankelijkheidsbureau (Accessibility Bureau).

www.woonlabo.be

The studios American

Boston University celebrates four decades in Brussels

Nicholas Hirst

“Forty years ago, Boston University established itself as the first US university to offer an American-style degree in Europe,” says Frank Billingsley, director of international graduate programmes for Boston University, during a graduation ceremony at the Brussels Town Hall for the class of 2012. The students at the ceremony earlier this month were an international bunch, with 32 nationalities on the Grote Markt receiving a US post-grad degree. For the US students among them, it's a chance to study in the Capital of Europe as well as to be near NATO headquarters. The non-US students, meanwhile, are keen to study in English and to learn “the American way”. “It's the ‘American way’ because classes are small with an emphasis on interaction,” says student affairs manager Pamela Dalby. “There's a great deal of discussion between the professors and the students who, in addition, are regularly assessed. Both factors set us apart from most European universities.” The institution has its origins in another epoch. In 1972, the Cold War still cast its shadow over Europe and the world. It was the year when Nixon made his surprise visit to China and when the



Boston University graduates receive their diplomas in the Grote Markt

USSR is thought to have reached nuclear parity with the US. That year, Boston University came to Brussels to teach US servicemen who were posted in Europe. It was one of the first American universities to create a campus outside

of the US. But Boston University in Brussels, or BUB, is no Cold War relic. Its various degrees now take students from all over the world to study for a range of master's and post-grad diplomas,

including a Master in Leadership, a Master in International Relations and a Graduate Diploma in Finance. Its modern facilities are based in the pretty university neighbourhood known as Elsene Cemetery. Students enjoy plenty

of nightlife and rub shoulders with brain-boxes from the neighbouring Belgian universities. Indeed, BUB's location and its connections make up for what it lacks in size. “Our library is small; however, students have access to Boston University's large online facilities, and they can use the Royal Library and the libraries of the local universities,” says Dalby. Of course, small can also be beautiful. “As we only had about 42 students last year, we got to know them very well,” she explains. “We also assist them in finding internships and can draw on a good alumni network.” BUB's more pragmatic approach to teaching is reflected in the diversity of its faculty. For example, faculty head Melissa Rancourt runs a project management consultancy firm and heads an NGO promoting the participation of girls in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Ambassador Reinhard Bettzuege brings a long career as a German diplomat to his teaching, while Professor Michele Chang holds the Jean Monnet chair at the College of Europe in Bruges.

www.bu.edu/brussels

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The regeneration game

A new book explores the tailor-made projects that are transforming urban Flanders

Cleveland Moffett

Many a crime has been committed in the name of urban renewal. Residents evicted without fair compensation; buildings of architectural or historical value bulldozed; homes replaced by office blocks. But now there are signs in Flanders of a greater awareness on the part of all concerned that imagination and innovation can combine to create new cityscapes that avoid the mistakes of the past.

Starting with the new millennium, the Flemish government called together experts from various fields – administration, architecture, economic development, demography, transport, ecology, culture – to draft the *Witboek Stedenbeleid*, or Urban Policy White Paper. Well aware that the road to disaster is paved with good intentions, the authors of the report made sure that the inter-disciplinary

Case in point: Sledderlo

It is characteristic of the region that each inhabited area is an independent town or district. Sometimes too independent for a developer's taste, says Vervloesem, citing the example of Sledderlo, a Genk neighbourhood a few kilometres south of the Limburg city. Private investors were eager to build 20,000 homes in the area, but the Genk authorities decided against it, called for no more than 600 and proposed an entirely different approach.

Because Sledderlo was quite isolated and consists predominantly of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, it had come to be seen as something of a ghetto. But by consulting the residents and involving them in the decision-making process, the project is turning out to be both practical and highly imaginative. Landscaping, for instance, is playing a

“The fact that Flanders has no major developers who dominate the field is a distinct advantage”

cooperation was close and self-critical. And the results? They are outlined in the revealing new book *Urban Renewal in Flanders (2002-2011): A Particular Practice in Europe*, a summary of 37 projects in 25 Flemish towns and cities to which the Flemish authorities have awarded grants over the last decade. To place the Flemish initiative in a European context, the book includes surveys of urban projects in Bordeaux, Hamburg, Liverpool and other cities.

The book describes the surprising variety of schemes under way or near completion throughout Flanders. One of the authors is architect Els Vervloesem, 33, who specialises in the integration of community life with new neighbourhood development projects.

“The fact that Flanders has no major developers who dominate the field is a distinct advantage,” Vervloesem says. “A lot of the most interesting and successful work is being done on a relatively small scale.”



Els Vervloesem specialises in integrating local communities with new development projects

major part in the overall concept. The nearby pine forest that served only to supply timber to the building industry has been selectively thinned out and integrated with parkland and sports fields.

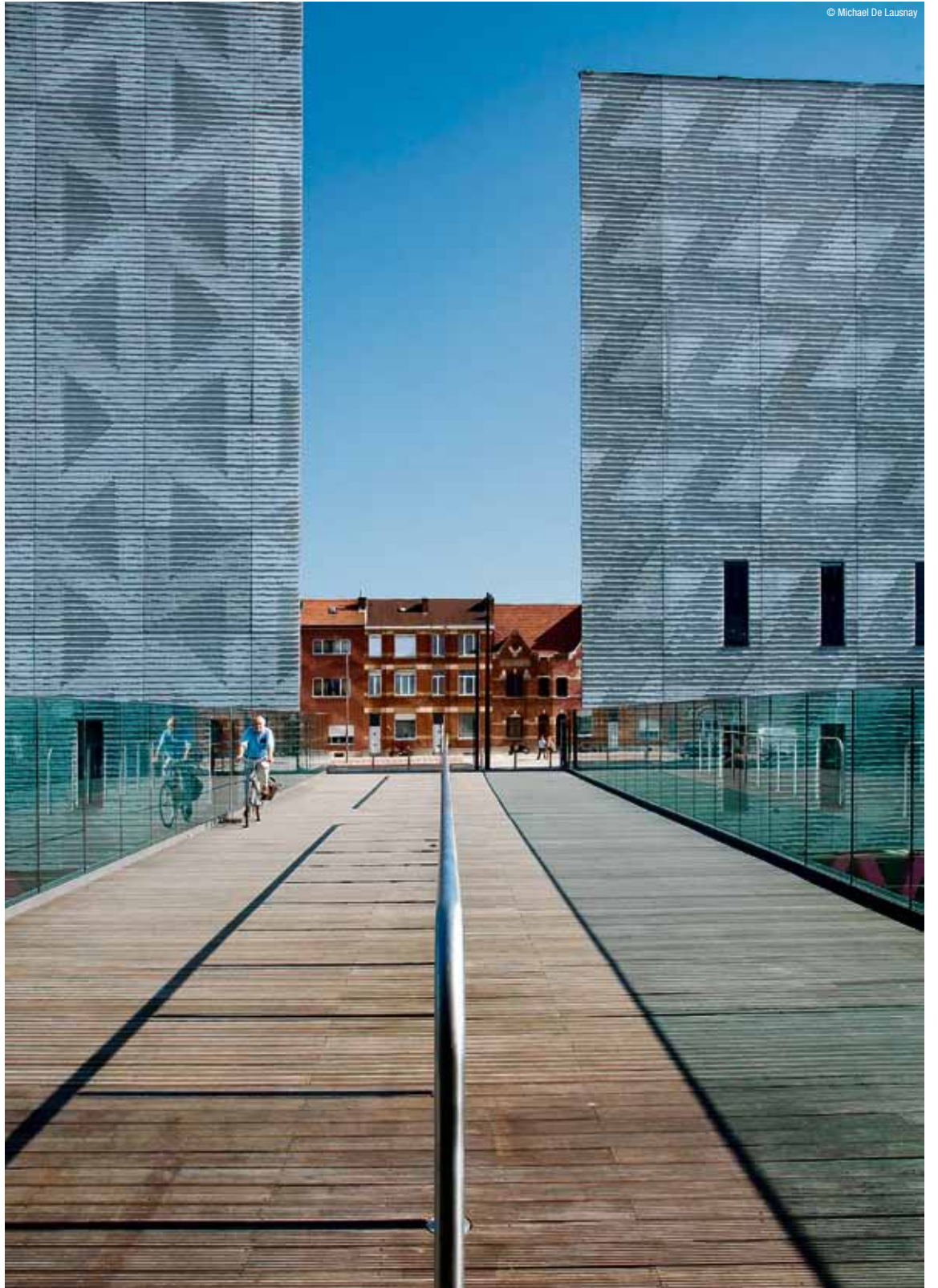
In the words of Freya Van den Bossche, the Flemish minister for cities and social economy, writing in the book's foreword: “These projects are tailor-made, scaled down to each town or city and the specific needs of its residents, while taking its unique character into account.” The Turkish community in Sledderlo has put up the money to build a mosque.

Uniting the two sides of the tracks

It is a curious fact that in cities everywhere the railway often creates a barrier between two parts of the community. Stations built in the 19th century showed off a lavishly decorated facade in front and a dreary back entrance on the other side. In time, it became generally accepted that there was a “right” and a “wrong” side of the tracks to live on.

An example of this is the university city of Leuven, which is divided from Kessel-Lo by a deep railway cutting. The twin communities have long occupied two separate worlds: the academic and middle-class city of Leuven and the blue- and white-collar area of Kessel-Lo.

After lengthy discussion and planning, the Leuven train station entrance has now become double-sided; it has two fronts and no back. A tunnel under the tracks and pedestrian and cycle bridges over them increase the sense of solidarity between the two halves. Abandoned warehouses are to be remodelled for social housing and ample green space.



A pedestrian bridge now links Kessel-Lo with the train station in Leuven, providing a much-needed link between the two sides of the tracks

Flour factory-turned-urban loft

There was a time when the municipal authorities would not hesitate to tear down a deserted factory or warehouse, but “new uses for old buildings” is now a familiar strategy in urban thinking. In Bruges, two former flour mills have stood empty since the 1980s. A private developer had a plan that fell through, and the handsome, old seven-storey buildings were again put up for sale. At last the organisation West Flanders Intermunicipal came forward with a renovation plan for the entire area. On the outskirts of Bruges along the Ghent-Ostend Canal, the buildings were part of an area badly in need of salvaging from years of neglect. As with all the White Paper projects,

variety was the watchword. What had been an industrial site was to become a focus of contemporary urban living, offering an imaginative range of properties, from lofts to ground-floor apartments with gardens, as well as affordable housing for young families with children.

While the scheme in Bruges is quite ambitious, some of the most valuable work is being carried out on a much smaller scale. “In some towns, the entire department of urban planning may be run by only one person – no staff, practically no funds and certainly little or no influence,” notes Vervloesem.

Planning master class

It's no use having big ideas if you have no way of carrying them out. But

Vervloesem explains that the Flemish government is introducing the idea of master classes in urban planning and design for just such lonely pioneers who are eager to learn the rudiments of the field so they can work more closely with the experts.

Vervloesem has also made the important point that the projects described in the White Paper should be seen as “good examples of participatory democracy. It is a document that demonstrates the essential value of good governance. It is a way of replacing bureaucratic thinking with visionary thinking.” And, as she would be the first to acknowledge, not just thinking about it, but getting it done.

► www.tinyurl.com/urbanrenewalflanders

“I was never a musical racist”

Crooner Helmut Lotti and blues master Roland's Enlightening Music Machine

Tom Peeters



A leather-clad Helmut Lotti and a silk-robed Roland don't care what people say

It's a surprising combination, no doubt: Roland Van Campenhout, the long-haired Flemish blues pioneer, and Helmut Lotti, the Flemish crooner, with a career of Elvis covers, *schlager* hits and a jumble of Latin, African and Russian styles.

It was a shared gig last year at the Dranouter folk festival, together with an A-list of local musicians, that stimulated this curious bond. Now the two have hit the road under the moniker Helmut Lotti & Roland's Super Allstar Enlightening Music Machine, with three concerts coming up across Flanders and a somewhat controversial performance at this summer's Rhythm & Blues Festival in Peer.

"I think this kind of narrow-minded pigeon-holing is ridiculous," fulminates Roland in response to criticism from blues purists.

"This must come from grouches," adds Lotti. "You know, those bitter people who pass their time posting venomous messages on the websites of newspapers."

Roland, 66, knows the type: "The pot-bellied blues fans. People who yell during bar crawls: 'Give him another bottle of whisky. He might play an extra hour.' Those people only like one sort of music. And it's certainly not the more subtle blues musings of Mississippi John Hurt." For those who doubt Lotti's blues roots: He has been listening to Elvis recordings from his early youth, impersonating his idol many times. "There's a lot of blues in those songs," he says. "Take for instance 'One Night'. In the cleaned-up version, Elvis sings: 'One night with you'. But at home I have the original

version, which is more rough and in which he sings 'One night of sin'..." Once when he was cruising his hometown's Gentse Feesten as a teenager, Lotti was suddenly attracted by a distinctive voice that bore resemblances to Elvis' heartfelt, bluesy tone. When he went for a closer look, he saw a man with a beard playing the guitar. It was his first encounter with Roland.

Playing in a sand box

It would take a very long time before they actually meet. The first time they stood on a stage together was at the 0110 benefit in Ghent in 2006. "We did a song that Helmut wrote in Ghent dialect in the tradition of Karel Waeri and Walter De Buck, which I found really good," Roland recalls. Later, the pair made a studio recording of the number. Roland soon discovered that he and Lotti had more things in common. Lotti had made forays into classical music, and that was the first kind of music that Roland listened to in his youth. "I never was a musical racist," says Roland. "I've been constantly expanding my taste in music. As a teenager, I often went to the opera, and I was a big fan of Beethoven and Wagner. It was only afterwards that I discovered blues and jazz. Pop music came into my life much later."

"We are the sum of all our experiences," says Lotti, 42. "That's our luggage. But some music comes earlier than others. You only take decisions when you are ready for them." For the first time, the singer is working on a solo album of his own songs, written in Dutch with the help of musicians he has

learned to appreciate over the last few years such as Zita Swoon's Stef Kamil Carlens.

"The people around you are crucial," confirms Roland, "certainly as a musician."

In the Super Allstar Enlightening Music Machine, the two artists have indeed surrounded themselves with all the right people: chameleon musician Pieter-Jan De Smet;

check. Your Louis Armstrong growl, check."

He's right. I once heard Lotti perform a dull version of the Creedence Clearwater Revival classic "Proud Mary" with a classical orchestra behind him, and it missed the power that Ike & Tina Turner had later given the song, for instance. So, it was a surprise hearing him sing "Cindy

"We all have an arsenal of voices in our head and take out the ones we need"

Steven De Bruyn on harmonica; guitarist Elko Blijweert; the young singer and guitarist Ruben Focketyn; bassist Jasper Hautekiet; and drummer Jeroen Stevens.

"It's really like little children playing in a sand box," smiles Roland.

Lotti: "I have performed 'Cindy Cindy', an Elvis cover, but with Roland and Elko, it becomes something totally different. That's what I like about this band. It's also a big change for me. Earlier in my career, everything was more planned, strict and safe."

The main dish

"You always react to the musicians with you," Roland says. "If I play on my own, let's say, acoustic folk, my voice sounds different than when I'm singing with a rhythm & blues orchestra or a rock'n'roll band. Then I sometimes have to grab onto my Tom Waits rattle. We all have an arsenal of voices in our head and take out the ones we need. Your Bob Dylan nasal voice,

Cindy" with a much deeper voice. But a rather nice one.

Both artists believe there's still a long career ahead of them. "It's not against the law to keep on doing the things you like after your 21st birthday, you know," says Roland. "I am getting a bit older now, and my private life can be chaotic and not very well organised, but once I am standing on that stage, I am crystal clear. My memory for the lyrics and the songs suddenly returns. I often think of the guys from the Buena Vista Social Club. If they're not onstage, they can hardly stand on their feet. But once in front of an audience, they immediately start flirting with the ladies on the front row."

Lotti talks about a documentary he recently saw about Paul McCartney's world tour. "The most beautiful shot in the film was of a man in his 60s watching the show. Hearing the music and looking in his eyes, you could really see his life passing. Isn't that great? Isn't that what it's all about? So, it would feel very awkward if someone would take the music away from me. I need it. But, of course, it's not the only thing I like to do. I have other interests, too."

"For me, it is definitely the main dish," says Roland. "It's my therapy and my addiction. I need music like a junkie needs drugs."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

After the success of the first edition, the fundraiser **Climbing for Life** will be back this year on 1 September. The initiative, staged to draw attention to asthma and cystic fibrosis and raise money for research, finds 3,500 Belgian cyclists joining a few famous Flemings on a ride up the mountain pass Col du Galibier in the French Dauphiné Alps. Celebrities taking part this year are singers Sioen and Ozark Henry, TV presenter Roos Van Acker and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, an avid cyclist.

► <http://sport.be.msn.com/climbingforlife>

Michaël R Roskam, the Flemish director of the Oscar-nominated film *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*), is in **pre-production on his second feature, *The Faithful***. The romantic *noir* will be set against the backdrop of Brussels organised crime in the early 1990s. Hans Van Nuffel, the award-winning director of *Adem* (*Oxygen*), is also working on his second film: In *Equator*, a Belgian woman travels to Africa in search of answers to her father's mysterious death. Savage Film is producing both projects and is also supporting the directorial debut of actor Matthias Schoenaerts (*Loft*, *Rundskop*), who is making a documentary called *Franky*. Meanwhile, Geoffrey Enthoven, Flemish director of films like *Happy Together*, *Meisjes* and *Hasta la vista*, has been named by industry publication giant *Variety* as one of Europe's top 10 "directors to watch".

Belgium was not represented at the **finals of the Eurovision Song Contest** last weekend in Azerbaijan, as Flemish teenager Laura Van den Bruel (know by her stage name Iris) did not make it past the semi-finals with her song "Would You". "It's disappointing," she said, "but I've enjoyed myself here and think that I performed the song well".

Brussels-based multidisciplinary artist **Ivo Dimchev** has opened up his studio space, known as the Volksroom, every Monday evening to any artist keen to stage a performance. Artists apply for a spot, and the plan is to host four performances each week, which will be open to the public. The Volksroom is on the Bergensesteenweg in Anderlecht.

► www.ivodimchev.com

The **National Jenever Museum in Hasselt**, a popular tourist destination for visitors to Limburg, is in the planning stages of a complete renovation. Work should start next year and finish sometime in 2014. The museum, housed in a 19th-century jenever distillery, takes visitors through the process of making the popular spirit and its social and economic history. Organisers want to give the museum an updated look, with more interactive exhibitions. The total budget for the project and whether the museum would have to close for all or part of the renovations have not yet been determined.

► www.jenevermuseum.be

HELMUT LOTTI & ROLAND'S SUPER ALLSTAR ENLIGHTENING MUSIC MACHINE

9 June, Handelsbeurs, Kouter 29, Ghent

10 June, Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110, Brussels

15 June, De Roma, Turnhoutsebaan 286, Antwerp

13 July, Blues Peer

Festival seeks audience

The Brussels Film Festival continues to fine-tune its strategies in promoting European cinema

Gorik de Henau

Every self-respecting city needs its own film festival these days, and Brussels is no exception. With its unambiguous name, the Brussels Film Festival makes it clear that it aims for the top spot among the many film fests in Belgium's capital. The BFF is celebrating its 10th anniversary and wants to get back to basics.

"The festival has established itself as the place to discover young cinematic talent," says BFF director Ivan Corbisier, entering his third edition at the helm. "Now we want to become a springboard for filmmakers, with a programme that reflects the diversity and richness of European cinema."

This shift in policy that began last year is a reminder of the fest's turbulent past. What started out in 1973 as essentially a showcase for a few Brussels-based film distributors grew into a respectable festival in the early 1990s. Christian Thomas is credited with defining the European mission of the event, but after about 10 years he got tired of the continuous struggle for recognition and threw in the towel. At the turn of the millennium, the

festival got picked up by film producer Dominique Janne (*Pauline & Paulette, Farinelli*) and he tried to give it a new lease on life by focusing on the first and second films of up-and-coming directors. This worked well for a while, also thanks to the new location at Flagey. Yet the fest never seemed to be able to connect with the masses, which was not helped by changing dates with every new edition.

This year once more sees a change in strategy. The pre-vacation, end-of-June period is being abandoned in favour of the beginning of the month, possibly to avoid competition with the knock-out stages of the Euro 2012 football championship. The jury will award two prizes, the Golden Iris for the best film in competition and the White Iris Award for the best first feature.

The jury is comprised of British filmmaker Peter Greenaway and a combination of Belgian and French actors and directors. Director Koen Mortier (*Ex-drummer, 22 mei*) is the odd-man out as the only Fleming in the jury, but the festival organisers have long chosen to align themselves with

Belgium's francophone authorities. The school programme, for example, is only available in French, many films are only subtitled in French, and there is hardly a Flemish film being shown.

Wicked & Woody & Williams

The official competition includes films from across Europe, from the UK to Russia and from Sweden to Turkey. The eye-catcher promises to be *No habrá paz para los malvados* (*No Rest for the Wicked*), an exuberant Spanish thriller that won no less than six Goyas (the Spanish Oscars) in February. In the panorama section, you can see the premiere of the Belgian-French manga adaptation *Couleur de peau: miel* (*Approved for Adoption*).

The preview section includes *Trishna*, Michael Winterbottom's take on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* with Indian actors, and two movies with Woody Allen connection. His own *To Rome with Love* is an homage to the Eternal City, and the star of Sophie Lellouche's *Paris Manhattan* is played by the bard himself.

The open-air screenings, BFF's most successful programme, are free of charge and begin at sunset on the Heilig Kruisplein in front of Flagey. There you'll find Belgian crowd-pleasers *Hasta la vista* and *Les géants* and a couple of relatively obscure films being shown with live soundtracks by NLF3 and NeirdA & Z3ro, two experimental bands from France. Since there is also an interesting section with music documentaries, we detect something of a theme here – although one can never be quite sure with this chameleonic fest. Interesting films are *Vinylmania*, about the



Two to see: Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna* (above) and Enrique Urbizu's *No Rest for the Wicked* (below left)

persistent allure of vinyl records, and documentary takes on such musical acts as British garage band The Libertines and American rapper Lil' Wayne.

Several filmmakers and others from the industry will be on hand to talk about their films, including Danish producer Peter Aalbaek Jensen (one of the instigators of the infamous Dogma 95 movement) and French composer

Jean-Michel Bernard (who wrote the soundtracks to Michel Gondry's *Be Kind Rewind* and *The Science of Sleep*).

Finally, to celebrate its anniversary in style, the festival closes with a party on 9 June, with DJ sets by Carl Barât (The Libertines) and poet/singer/actor Saul Williams, who starred in the 1998 indie hit *Slam*. Spin that wheel and spread the word.



Digging deep

Artists and scientist examine the uneasy bond between nature and culture at Kaaitheater

Tom Peeters

Wellness and green spaces are buzz words for the latest trends in urban life. In these hectic times, we need space to breathe. There's a growing nostalgia for an authentic and laid-back leisure time we seem to remember our grandparents had. Possibly the most visible activity in this new back-to-basics trend is the urban garden. We want to grow our own veggies in the city. But do they really belong there? This topic is high on the agenda of the fifth edition of Kaaitheater's Burning Ice, a festival of art and ecology. Once again, the Brussels venue has programmed a mind-expanding selection of performances, lectures and exhibitions, this time investigating

the rising tension between nature and culture. Artists, scientists and other experts will gather around the theme "We The Gardeners". Take the project of the French designer Damien Chivallé. He puts a greenhouse on top of a container housing an aquarium with fish. The water and the faeces of the fish feed the plants in the greenhouse, which in turn purify the water, which is returned to the aquarium. The result is a self-regulating city-farm the size of a parking space.

Before the festival even starts, you are invited to join the carrot city workshop, conceived by the Department of Architectural Science at Ryerson University in Toronto. It explores how design

can enable the production of food in cities. If this sounds too hands-on, sit back for a guided tour in the urban farming bus, which rumbles along to several town gardens and urban farms. Maarten Roels of Ghent University will comment on the garden city trend. Back at Kaaitheater, Voorraad BRXL Réserve demonstrates the potential of urban farming in the capital: Several existing initiatives introduce and sell their products. One of the more subtle, but profound, offerings of this edition is *The Black Lamb*, a project by documentary filmmaker and artist Els Dietvorst. Her work is sometimes compared to Joseph Beuys and his social democracy

concept. Dietvorst recently moved from Brussels to a sheep farm in Duncormick, Ireland from where she watches her neighbours struggling to make ends meet. This sketch of the daily fight for survival, far away from the city, offers a wholly different perspective of the idyllic human condition in the countryside.



Dutch artist Nick Steur's *FREEZE!* will make you believe in mind over matter

5-9 JUNE

Burning Ice Festival

Kaaitheater, Sainctelettesquare 20, Brussels

► www.kaaitheater.be

The shape of your desire

John Irving

Lisa Bradshaw

Billy has, so he tells us, “crushes on the wrong people”. But, says his stepfather, “there are no ‘wrong’ people to have crushes on, Bill.” Little does the stepfather know that he’s on the receiving end of one of those crushes.

It’s 1950s Vermont, a time and a place very familiar to American author John Irving (pictured), who was born next door in the state of New Hampshire in 1942. Most of his 13 novels are set in these small, provincial states of America’s northeast, largely because he has lived there all his life but also because it’s so much more fun to whip open those closets full of skeletons when they are located in a place most Americans see as tranquil and safe. There’s nothing Irving likes more than to uncover hypocrisies and tragedies – both big and small – committed by a small-minded populace. You cannot walk a metre in a little 1950s town and not find plenty of *that*. His settings, therefore, remain fairly constant, from his early works to his international bestsellers *The World According to*

Garp, *The Hotel New Hampshire*, *The Cider House Rules* and *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. The latter, a story of a fast-friendship between two adolescent outsiders that explores the emotional effects of the Vietnam War on young Americans, is now a regular on college reading lists.

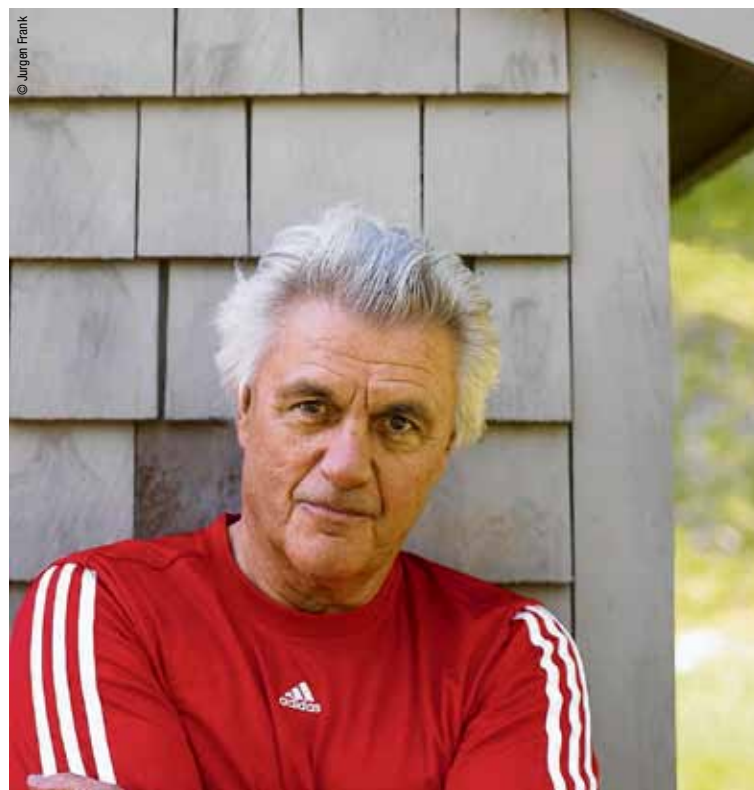
Irving is a fan of theatre and finds the best novels are those that are more like “a performance – something that you make so vivid that the reader can actually see it”. This could be why so many of his own memories pop up in his books. Recurring themes are boys’ schools (he went to one), wrestling (he excelled at the sport and was a coach for many years), trips abroad to Vienna (he studied there) and... transsexualism. Well, there doesn’t appear to be any of that in his past – that we know of, at least.

But all four subjects figure prominently in *In One Person*, his latest book, which he will present this Sunday at Bozar. In typical Irving style, it’s epic and bittersweet, with a profound honesty punctuated by

laugh-out-loud moments.

The title of the book, says Irving, comes from Act 5, Scene 5 of Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, in which the king says: “Thus, play I in one person many people, and none contented.”

Which brings us back to Billy, *In One Person*’s protagonist, who narrates the novel as he looks back on six decades of his life. Billy’s teenage crushes include not only his stepfather, but the intellectually stimulating town librarian, Miss Frost; the soul-crushingly cruel wrestling captain Kittredge; a fragile transsexual named Donna and an arrogant professor in Vienna. Throughout the story, Billy not only struggles with who he is at any given time – a son, a writer, a partner, a bisexual – he also struggles with what everyone *wants* him to be. “It’s a novel about how difficult it is to really, truly be tolerant of *everyone’s* sexual identity,” says Irving. “It isn’t easy. This is a story about that.”



3 June, 20.30 | Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels | www.bozar.be

PERFORMANCE

The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic

The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic was one of the highlights at last year’s Manchester International Festival, easily earning its Manchester Theatre Award for Best Special Entertainment. Visionary

American director Robert Wilson designed it to be a biography of the self-proclaimed “grandmother of performance art”. The result is a continuum of words and sounds, a collage of ever-flowing images and movements. All come together to tell the story of Abramovic’s life and artistic development, starting from her childhood in Serbia up to her current status as one of New York’s most respected performance artists.

Abramovic herself plays opposite audience-puller Willem Dafoe, recognised for his roles in films like *Platoon* and *The English Patient*. The musical score is as impressive as the cast: Antony Hegarty of Antony & The Johnsons sings live onstage, giving the performance a morose, almost opera-esque quality (in English with surtitles in Dutch and French). **Robyn Boyle**



28-30 June, 20.00-22.40 | deSingel, Desguinlei 25, Antwerp

www.desingel.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Nederlands Dans Theater: See one of the world’s best dance companies perform its new work *Move to Move* live via satellite on the big screen

MAY 31 19.15 at Kinepolis Cinemas across Flanders

www.kinepolis.be

Ghent

CREW: The story of RF Scott’s exploration of the South Pole, with technical special effects, directed by Eric Joris and Stef De Paepe; written by Peter Verhelst (in Dutch)

MAY 29-JUN 2 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

www.vooruit.be

FOOD & DRINK

Dinner in the Sky

No need to read on if you suffer from vertigo. A very sturdy crane, set up at four locations in Brussels throughout the month of June, will lift a table of 22 diners to dizzying heights, offering stunning views of the city and well beyond. Brusselicious, the year-long programme dedicated to good eats in the capital, has again come up with a dining experience to blow you away (figuratively speaking, of course). If that doesn’t impress you enough, the menu certainly will. Each day, one of seven star chefs will treat guests to a four-course gastronomical lunch or dinner. The price for the experience, including Champagne and wine, is €250, but that hasn’t deterred registrations; some dinners are already fully booked. **RB**



4 June – 1 July | across Brussels | www.dinnerinthesky.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

Brussels Wine Week: Week of events dedicated to wine, featuring open-air tastings, guided tours, seminars, films and more

Until JUN 3 at Brussels Info Place, Paleizenplein, and across the city

www.brusselwineweek.be

Diest (Flemish Brabant)

Loterbol Brewery Open-Door Day: Visit the local brewery, discover its rich history and sample its beers

JUN 2 16.00 at Brouwerij Loterbol, M Theysstraat 58a

www.loterbol.be

Westende (Middelkerke)

Fish Weekend: 28th annual celebration of fish at the coast, including tastings, demonstrations, special menus in restaurants, kite festival and more

JUN 9-10 across Westende

www.middelkerke.be/toerisme

SPECIAL EVENT

SHOW2012

The annual graduation show of Antwerp Academy’s Fashion Department is, above all, a chance for students from all four years to show off their designs on the catwalk. The event annually brings together more than 6,000 spectators from all over the world, including friends, fashion enthusiasts, manufacturers, former students, fashion designers, styling agencies, culture buffs and the press. All attend for their own reasons, be it to judge or admire the work, but no one can deny it’s the unique atmosphere of this grand defile that pulls them in. SHOW2012 is a celebration of fashion and creativity spread over three consecutive evenings. An international jury of experts from the industry will be on site to evaluate and give final scores to the many daring collections and installations. **RB**



© Ronald Stoops

7-9 June, 20.00 |
Hangar 29, Rijnkaai 150, Antwerp
► www.antwerp-fashion.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Homosexuality among Belgians of foreign descent: taboo?: Open discussion on the subject of race and homophobia (in Dutch); register at communicatie@merhaba.be
JUN 8 19.30 at Atlasgebouw, Carnotstraat 110
► www.merhaba.be

Diamond Jubilee Flower Festival and Garden Party: The British community celebrates 60 years of Queen Elizabeth’s reign
JUN 2 11.00-16.00 at St Boniface Church, Gretrystraat 39
► www.boniface.be

Ghent

Queen’s Jubilee: Garden tea party with food and culture from across the Commonwealth to celebrate the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee
JUN 2 13.00 at Saint John’s Anglican Church, Theresianenstraat 9
► www.saintjohnsghent.com

VISUAL ARTS

Manifesta 9

Sixteen tonnes of German coal is not a usual delivery request in the old mining town of Genk in Limburg province. But that’s what British artist Richard Long needed for his work “Bolivian Coal Line”. The sacks of coal are just one of many special deliveries to arrive in Genk recently as the city gears up for the opening of Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art. Manifesta got its start in the 1990s and has been trotting around Europe ever since, highlighting the most innovative work by artists across the continent. This first staging in Belgium will take place in the former coal mining complex of Waterschei. The venue is not just a unique place to showcase art; the curatorial concept for this edition is “The Deep of the Modern”, which ties into the region’s mining past, creating a complex dialogue between different layers of art and history. Some works interact directly with the current state of ruin of the building. Others, dating from 1800 to the present day, clearly demonstrate how the history of art was aesthetically influenced by the industrial era. Art, local history and culture collide in this multi-faceted round-up of exhibitions, installations, performances, multi-media experiments and more. **RB**



2 June – 30 September | André Dumontlaan, Genk | ► www.manifesta9.org

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Middelheim Museum: Antwerp’s famous open-air collection of sculpture celebrates the opening of new pavilions for temporary and more delicate permanent collections
Permanent at Middelheimlaan 61
► www.middelheimmuseum.be

Brussels

Decorum: Book bindings by contemporary artists
Until JUN 24 at Bibliotheca Wittrockiana, Bemelstraat 23
► www.wittrockiana.org

Ghent

Design Works?: Contemporary outdoor furniture by Flemish designer Dirk Wynants
Until JUN 3 at Design Museum, Jan Breydelstraat 5
► www.designmuseumgent.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Closing Night at Velvet Lounge & Stereo Six

Antwerp’s famous clubs Stereo Six and Velvet Lounge, located in that trendy area of ’t Zuid, are calling it a night. After 10 years of clubbing, the owners want to repurpose the building and turn their attentions to a new food concept (a luxurious Asian restaurant, if rumours can be trusted). But night owls needn’t worry: all party concepts normally staged in the venues will continue over at club Roxy and Strantwerpen (Antwerp’s city beach) on “Het Eilandje”.

For many years now, a trip to Luikstraat 6 meant a good night out, often including a meal at Velvet Lounge: modern Italian cuisine, ranging from tasty antipasta to homemade pizza, in a fancy interior. A DJ would spice up the vibe from 23.00 until the wee hours. To wine and dine for the last time at Velvet Lounge on 2 June, email filip@velvetgroup.be. In the same building, night-crawlers know their way to club Stereo Six with their eyes closed. On the same night, the club will be the scene for one final party: And they’re leaving with a bang. The event starts at 22.00 with a drink, followed by Sven Van Hees, Flanders’ renowned lounge DJ; Tom De Neef, house DJ and famous remixer; and Phill Da Cuna, one of Antwerp’s hot DJs of the moment. Also behind the decks: Delafino, Licious and Mack. And if all goes as planned, the new Asian restaurant, seating up to 250 people, should open its doors at the end of September. Sounds promising!

► www.velvetlounge.be



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Den Hoed ★★☆☆

Krulbol, the Flemish version of Italian *bocce* or French *boules*, is an outdoor game from Meetjesland, the stunning polder region in north-western East Flanders. Back in the 1950s, when players got together on the court in the centre of the village of Assenede, they were treated to mussels by local restaurant owners Petrus and Martha.

Petrus was also known as a bit of a town jokester, who would hang his tall top hat from the flagpole during any festivity. That's why the current and third-generation owners named it Den Hoed (The Hat) when they took over the business in 1987.

Continuing the tradition, Den Hoed specialises in mussels. You can have them raw or prepared in either Provençal or Armagnac sauce or in escargot butter. But that's not all this wet, low-lying polder region is known for; freshwater eel is another delicacy here. At Den Hoed, they serve it baked or in one of a number of sauces, including green herb (mainly chervil), and "De Vliet", a cream sauce with mushrooms and shrimp.

During asparagus season (roughly March through June), you can indulge in a variety of lovely white asparagus dishes: Flemish-style, in Mousseline sauce, or with vinaigrette, smoked salmon, cod or ham. My dining companion and I had our minds set on asparagus starters before we even sat down.

Out come two plates of asparagus. Mine are doused in a Mousseline sauce, a refined version of Hollandaise

based on butter, eggs and vinegar, finished off with fresh whipped cream and white pepper. It's silky smooth and with a buttery, slightly tangy flavour that lends itself perfectly to the delicate, earthy character of the asparagus. Across the table, I can see that the Flemish-style asparagus are equally delicious – the stalks just tender enough and covered in a fine mixture of butter, parsley and soft-boiled egg.

With two freshly tapped lagers in hand, we eagerly await our mains: baked eel and eel "De Vliet". The latter is a pot filled with a thick and creamy white sauce, mushrooms, little North Sea shrimp and big chunks of eel. The dish is warm and filling and wholly satisfying to eat, especially with the crispy, fresh-cut fries that come with it.

Still, I can see that my dining companion has made the best choice. He's using his hands to eat, separating the pieces of baked eel from the thin bones, which then go on a convenient side bowl connected to the plate. The outside is crispy, almost fried, and the eel is fatty, soft and tasty. I try it, and swear to never have eel prepared any other way again. When baked, eel loses some of its typically viscous texture, becoming more firm and meaty.

Two coffees and €80 later, we're out the door with full bellies and a positive dining experience.



- 📍 Kloosterstraat 3, Assenede (East Flanders); 09.344.57.03
- 🕒 Mon 11.45-15.00; Wed-Sat 11.45-15.00 & 17.00-21.30; Sun 11.45-21.30
- 💶 Mains: €15-€25
- 📖 Traditional polder restaurant serving up regional specialties eel, mussels and asparagus

▶ www.denhoed.be

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Heroes and villains



The glittering success of golfer Nicolas Colsaerts and the perfidy of football coach Georges Leekens in recent days represent diametrically opposed examples of Flemish sport.

First Leekens. It is not too strong a term to describe his actions as a betrayal: Two years after taking the helm of the national team, he has just quit to take over at Club Brugge. The shock decision to lead Brugge, the Jupiler Pro League runners-up, has left fans, players and officials appalled.

The Belgian football association KBVB said it had been counting on Leekens to lead a talented squad to the World Cup finals in Brazil in two years' time. The KBVB's seething chairman, Francois De Keersmaecker, described Limburg-born Leekens' sudden departure as "beneath contempt".

Indeed, although the Red Devils will not be competing in the Euro 2012 tournament this month, the side is perhaps the most promising in a generation. Coveted players, like

Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany, Lille's Eden Hazard and Arsenal's Thomas Vermaelen are amongst the best in Europe, while Jan Vertonghen and Kevin Mirallas have been named footballers of the year in the Netherlands and Greece respectively.

Leekens, however, has a reputation. This will be the 63-year-old's second stint at Club Brugge, and it was his second spell with the national side. He has also twice coached Cercle Brugge, Kortrijk, Excelsior Mouscron and Lokeren during his peripatetic career. Leekens' assistant, Marc Wilmots, has been appointed interim coach. Fans can only hope that Wilmots, or whoever else is chosen for the longer term, will be able to get the most out of a side that has not qualified for a major tournament since 2002.

Thankfully, there was some good sporting news recently, too. Brussels-born Nicolas Colsaerts captured golf's prestigious Volvo World Match Play

Championship in Casares, Spain, boosting his chances of making Europe's Ryder Cup team. The win, which earned him €700,000, helped him climb from 51st to 32nd in the world rankings.

The elated Colsaerts (*pictured*) wrote a charmingly rambling post on his website, capturing his feelings: "What an adventure...room service in my suite with my parents... cheers to all who supported me here this week!... Too tired to write more... but so happy..."

Colsaerts, 29, is now in sixth place in the Ryder Cup points table (10th is the last automatic spot) for the European team, due to face the United States in September in Medinah, near Chicago. It would cap a season in which he has grabbed seven top-10 finishes in 11 events – the most of any player so far. It would also make him the first Belgian to take part in a Ryder Cup.

The last word...

Run of bad luck

"I don't think about London. It hurts too much."

Flemish athlete Lindsey De Grande, who has leukaemia, will not be running at the 2012 Olympic Games

Political science

"Dewinter says a vote for De Wever is a vote for Janssens. De Wever says a vote for Dewinter is a vote for Janssens. So then if you want to get rid of Janssens, vote for Janssens, right?"

Antwerp University political analyst Dave Sinardet tweets about his city's upcoming mayoral elections

Hidden danger

"The problem is not so much the salt that we put on our food, but the processed food that contains far more than the maximum of three grams a meal."

Cardiologist Guy De Backer, on news that Belgians eat twice as much salt as they should

Just to be clear

"That's quite an age, 111. I'm only 110, you know."

Fanny Godin of Zoutleeuw, Flemish Brabant, now the oldest Belgian since the death of Germaine Degueuldre at age 111

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Science

Did you know that there are "healthy fats"? And there's even better news: A new research centre at Ghent University is creating these healthy fats, which preserve the taste and texture of foods. They could make many unhealthy foods, like margarine and baked goods, a lot better for us

Tourism

Flanders is not short on natural areas, but the Hoge Kempen National Park is the jewel in the crown, not just for its size but also for its sheer diversity. Outdoors correspondent Denzil Walton will tell us how and when to best enjoy every corner of the only national park in Belgium

Arts

The Middelheim Museum has just emerged from a major improvements project, with the building of two new pavilions, among other changes. We'll tell you all about the open-air museum that also serves as a green public space for the people of Antwerp