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© Lieve Blancquaert / HeroRat

# Sniffing out trouble

The rat pack of Apopo detects landmines and diagnoses tuberculosis in Africa and Southeast Asia

Andy Furniere

Antwerpenaar Bart Weetjens already knew that rats weren't just vermin when he began his efforts to train them for landmine detection. He is the founder of the international organisation Apopo, which develops methods for rats to not only find landmines but to diagnose tuberculosis

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." The quote is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci but also applies to the Zen Buddhist philosophy that inspired Antwerp product developer Bart Weetjens to found the non-profit Apopo (Anti-Personnel Landmines Detection Product Development). Instead of developing high-tech robots for landmine detection, Apopo trains African giant pouched rats to sniff out the deadly weapons hidden in African and Southeast Asian fields. The intelligent rodents diagnose tuberculosis in sputum samples

as well, faster than a team of laboratory technicians. Soon, rats equipped with cameras could save people buried under rubble after disasters.

Rats may be considered vermin by many, but Weetjens knew from childhood, when he kept them as pets, that they had a very special social character. His fascination for Africa evolved later, through contacts with African students staying at his home, where social responsibility and solidarity was high up on the agenda.

"After graduating as an industrial designer, I couldn't settle down in that sector, where making profit is the main goal," he tells me. He quit his job in the industry and began painting.

### Laughed out of the room

His social commitment, combined with his Buddhist conviction of compassion, found new inspiration when Princess Diana

brought the problem of landmines to the public's attention in the mid-1990s. Millions of landmines and explosive remnants, buried during military conflicts, cause death and mutilations in 66 countries around the world, often making economic growth and development in those areas impossible.

Weetjens experienced a "eureka" moment at a conference on landmines. "A Dutch colleague showed me an article on the ability of rats to smell explosives," he explains. "While the conference mainly revolved around expensive technology such as robots and sensors, I realised rats made a cheaper detection technique possible in developing countries. They can smell the presence of mines."

His project did not meet immediate approval. "I was laughed at often," he admits. "I guess the idea was just too simple to be taken serious by many investors and donors. Thankfully, I received the support of the University of Antwerp and the



## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Assis Carreiro



© Sylvaine Potau

The new artistic director of the Royal Ballet of Flanders is Assis Carreiro, who takes over in September from the Australian Kathryn Bennetts, who left the ballet in June after a disagreement over funding and restructuring. Carreiro, who comes to Flanders from DanceEast in Ipswich, England, now faces problems over her own appointment.

Carreiro was born in the Azores, a part of Portugal, and grew up in Canada. There she rose to become the director of education with the National Ballet of Canada, before moving to the United Kingdom in 1994, where she founded DanceXchange in Birmingham, moving on to Frankfurt, then back to Ipswich in 2000.

In her time there, she became known as a creative powerhouse as well as showing talent for lobbying and fundraising, which led to the creation of a permanent residency for the company in the Jerwood Dancehouse in Ipswich, one of the country's finest venues. On the creative side, she attracted names like Sylvie Guillem and Mark Morris to East Anglia, as well as helping create the National Centre for Choreography.

But when her appointment to the Flemish Ballet was announced last week, it provoked two unions

to issue a statement calling into question her qualifications and experience. Carreiro has so far had mainly coordinating functions, ACV-Transom Cultuur said. "She doesn't have a great deal of dance experience," said a spokesperson. "Yet the evaluation of dancers is by far the main responsibility of an artistic director."

Carreiro has said she will not supervise auditions or rehearsals and will bring in external assistants and consultants. That, argue the unions, is not what the ballet needs. Bennetts left in June having declined to extend her contract by a year, following a difference of opinion with the Flemish culture ministry over its decision to merge many of the operations of Flanders Opera and the Ballet – a decision Bennetts said would place the ballet under intolerable strain.

Carreiro said she was "honoured and delighted" at getting the job. "I want to raise this company to new heights and develop it further into a national treasure."

"I am very happy with the choice of Assis Carreiro," said ballet chairman Philip Heylen, who is also alderman for culture in Antwerp, where the company is based. "She is the right woman in the right place."

► [www.balletvlaanderen.be](http://www.balletvlaanderen.be)

## News in brief

The interior ministry has plans to detail 40 police officers to the convent in Malonne that will house **Michelle Martin** if her release on parole is confirmed by the Cassation Court this week. The court's decision, following the approval for her release by a lower tribunal, was expected on Tuesday, after *Flanders Today* went to press. Police were reported to be ready to deploy water cannon and riot control measures in case of protests when the decision is announced. Martin was serving 30 years for her role as the accomplice of serial killer Marc Dutroux.

The organisers of the **Gordel**, the annual walking and cycling event through the Flemish municipalities on the outskirts of Brussels, has to move its most popular of the four starting points this year – the last edition of the event in its present form. The Sint-Genesius Rode municipal council, which is dominated by French-speaking parties, decided not to allow the event to meet there, in a break with a 31-year tradition, and that starting point has moved to Beersel. "I find it unfortunate, especially for Flemings in Rode, that we had to make this decision," said Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters. "But it would have been worse if the event had to be cancelled." The Gordel takes place on 2 September.

► [www.de-gordel.be](http://www.de-gordel.be)

The government of the Brussels-Capital Region has approved the establishment of an **advisory council on equality between men and women**, to be set up by the end of the year. The mission of the council of 21 members is to advise the government and the Brussels parliament on equal opportunity issues and to tackle problems of discrimination on the grounds of gender. The region's equal opportunities minister, Bruno De Lille, said the council was "a step towards raising equal opportunities, one of the fundamentals of our

democracy, to a higher level".

Brussels city council breached the rules by allowing **Manneken Pis** to be dressed last week in a T-shirt bearing the logo of the Hard Rock Café, according to the chair of the Order of Friends of Manneken Pis. The statutes governing the iconic statue forbid its use for commercial advertising, Edmond Vandehaute said. The Order had given a negative advice on the application by Hard Rock, which recently opened a new restaurant in the nearby Grote Markt. "The Hard Rock Café is not just any chain," said culture alderman Hamza Fassi Fihri. "Its arrival is a cultural event."

The finance committee of the Flemish parliament was due this week to **return early from the summer recess** to question minister-president Kris Peeters on recent statements made by the governor of the National Bank, Luc Coene. In an interview with *De Tijd*, Coene had warned that Belgium could face a recession by the end of the year. Peeters reacted angrily to the interview, describing Coene's statements as "out of line".

The coastal town of Bredene has brought in a **ban on the sale of alcohol** between midnight and 7.00 in an attempt to tackle increasing complaints of late-night nuisance. The ban affects a number of sales outlets, including night shops and vending machines.

The government of Flanders has agreed to pay **extra subsidies to rabbit farmers** who move their rabbits to the more spacious "park system" cages, in line with an agreement reached between farmers' representatives and animal rights organisation Gaia earlier this year. The new system will apply to all farmers by 2016. During a visit last week to a leading farm in Baarle-Hertog, Antwerp province, agriculture minister Kris Peeters announced an

increase in government support for farmers who make the transition sooner.

International aid organisation **Doctors without Borders (MSF)** inaugurated its new supply depot in Neder-Over-Heembeek in the port of Brussels last week. The 13,000 square-metre depot will be used to send emergency supplies, drugs and materials to disaster zones across the world. While the organisation will send out and receive 150 containers a year by ship, the majority of the depot's traffic will be by air, as it consists largely of medical supplies that have to arrive at their destination quickly.

CityJet, the Irish subsidiary of Air France-KLM, is stopping **flights between Antwerp and Manchester** because the route is no longer profitable. CityJet started with one weekly flight in 2009, which grew to six flights a week. The Antwerp-London City daily flight will continue.

The Brussels commune Jette is looking for **volunteers to attend the funerals** of people who lived in isolation, of whom about 10 to 20 die every year without family or friends to mourn their passing. "We always find it sad to let them depart alone," a spokesperson for the council told brusselnieuws.be, "so we are looking for people who can make some time free for another, to be present at the burial." More information is available on 02 243 1270.

The **tunnels under the Wetstraat and Jubelpark in Brussels** will reopen on 15 September following closure in June to allow work on a railway tunnel and renovations in the Schuman metro station. According to Mوبiel Brussel, the diversions caused by the closure have worked well, with little disruption thanks to the low traffic flow in July and August.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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Hans De Loore

## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## A mystery within a puzzle

Six priceless works of art have been stolen from six museums in Europe, and it's your job to find them. And if you're as good a detective as the Offside team, they're likely to stay missing for a long time to come.

The above mystery is the premise of a new TV series premiering on 9 September on VRT, but you can get a head start by joining in the investigation online. Not only is the TV show *The Spiral* revolutionary, it's also available as a computer game, which should keep your blood up for hours on end (if only from frustration).

The TV show is remarkable because it features an international cast from Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Directed by Flemish director Hans Herbots, who has also made episodes of *Flikken*, *Zone*



*stad* and *Wittekerke*, it also stars his partner, Lien Van de Kelder, as well as Flemish actor Johan Leysen, who was in *The American* with George Clooney.

The TV show is in English and will also be screened in other countries later, by which time the more adept among you may already have solved the mystery online. The game involves

deduction, guesswork, typing very fast and running along buildings trying not to fall off. As a nice touch, the paintings – by Ekserberg, Larsson, Sjerbeck, Munch, Picasso and Rembrandt – are also "missing" (out on loan) from their respective museums.

Offside consultant Oscar, meanwhile, is 14 years old, a master of the PlayStation and more suited to this sort of thing than yours truly. He tried the game out and reported back that, while the challenges are easy enough, the game is confusing, with little explanation of the rules available. Perhaps we need to wait for the TV series to begin for more information. Or perhaps international art theft is more complicated than we thought.

► [www.thespiral.eu](http://www.thespiral.eu)



# Sniffing out trouble

In nearly 15 years of operation, not one Apopo rat has been killed in the line of duty

► continued from page 1

Belgian government, where people with experience in Africa believed in the undertaking.” Weetjens also found a partner in a former fellow student, Christophe Cox, who became the CEO of Apopo in 1998 after the non-profit received its first research grant from the federal government.

## Getting past social angst

At the University of Antwerp, Weetjens and Cox's alma mater, biology professor Ron Verhagen helped to get Apopo going by investigating which rats would be most suitable for mine detection. Verhagen, who had 20 years of research experience at the University of Morogoro in Tanzania, suggested the African giant pouched rats. “They are a widespread indigenous species, fairly easy to train with food rewards and with an average body length of 40 centimetres,” explains Weetjens. “You can work with them comfortably on a leash. Weighing a maximum of 1.5 kilograms, they don't set off mines when they detect them by scratching at the ground above, since the

mines are activated by a pressure of at least five kilograms.” Two of Apopo's rats, working with two handlers, can cover 300 square metres of land in one hour. “Two de-miners with metal detectors need two full days to cover the same area,” says

Weetjens.

The rats are also cheaper to train and manage than dogs, which are now usually used for de-mining operations. “It costs an average of €6,000 to train one mine-detection rat,” says Weetjens. “That's approximately one-quarter of the cost of a fully trained mine-detection dog.”

But of course, there are a lot more experienced dog trainers than rat trainers. “The animals are complementary,” believes Weetjens. Dogs, for instance, are widely socially accepted, while rats usually have a negative image. “Some African tribes even eat the rats,” says Weetjens. “But our local staff soon ... experience how lovable the rats really are. We also give the rats names to make the relationship between handler and animal more personal. And to emphasise the value of our rodents, we call them HeroRats. Soon, rat and handler form a team and our local workers are proud to save lives together with them.”

## Detecting tuberculosis

While Apopo has an administrative branch in Antwerp, the headquarters and training base are in Tanzania. Fifteen years after the start, the organisation has mine action programmes in Mozambique, Angola and Thailand, where

they employ more than 200 local staff and have over 300 rats. Apopo is further expanding its activities to Southeast Asia by preparing a mine action programme in Myanmar, to be launched next year.

The base in Tanzania includes a tuberculosis (TB) detection centre, where Apopo offers second-line screening to partner hospitals. Again, the concept is deceptively simple: The rats sniff a series of holes, under which human sputum samples are lined up for evaluation. They can smell TB bacteria and are trained to keep their nose in the hole for a few seconds if it's present. Then they are rewarded with a treat – mostly bananas and peanuts. Samples pinpointed by at least two rats are confirmed using microscopy.

“Our rats can evaluate 40 sputum samples in 7 minutes, equal to what a skilled lab technician can do in a full day's work,” says Weetjens. According to Apopo, this faster diagnostic method is essential to curb the spread of TB, which kills 1.7 million people every year. Left untreated, a person with active TB on average infects about 10 other people in the course of a year. Since the beginning of 2012, Apopo has expanded its TB programme into Mozambique, which like Tanzania is a high-risk TB country.

## Love and whiskers

In the future, HeroRats could also serve as CameRats, equipped with small cameras on their back to search for survivors under rubble – where dogs cannot go – after disasters such as earthquakes. For the moment, Apopo relies on grants and donations, but that may change in the near future. This year, the organisation has carried out experiments to determine



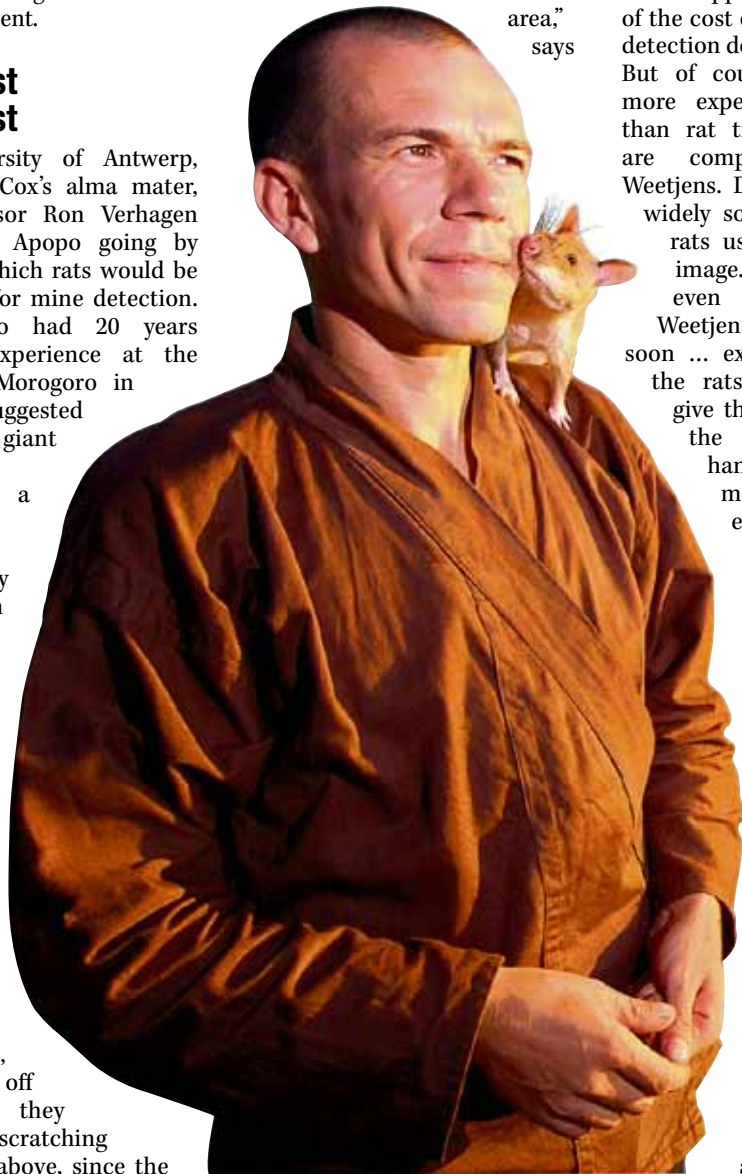
Local workers in Tanzania, the headquarters and training base for HeroRats

whether rats are capable of detecting tobacco, salmonella bacteria and bed bugs. They have already received a request from the Port of Rotterdam to help search for smuggled goods, a project that is in a pilot phase.

To support the mission of Apopo, people can adopt a rat and receive regular updates about its daily life, signed “love and whiskers”.

“We want to create a connection with our rodents, and from there raise public support for our plans so we become more mainstream,” says Weetjens. “I hear that, for example, Bill Gates, who also battles TB with his foundation, is not fond of rats. Hopefully we can change this mentality as we keep on digging.”

► [www.apopo.org](http://www.apopo.org)



Rallying behind rats: Bart Weetjens

## A RAT'S LIFE

According to Apopo, the training of rats starts at four to five weeks, when juveniles are weaned from the mother. After nursing by caretakers, the rats learn to associate a clicking sound with a food reward and have to perform certain tasks to get this reward. The training programme takes eight to 12 months in total. The rats train and work mornings from Monday to Friday and, like most of us, get the weekends off.

HeroRats' living facilities are spacious, and they are regularly taken outside for play time. African giant pouched rats can live up to eight years and, as a result of careful treatment, the majority of mine-detection rats live to the end of that lifespan. Rats work up to five years in the field. Incredibly, none of Apopo's rats has ever died during detection work.

“Although we prefer that robots or other technological applications are deployed instead

of animals, we understand that this technology is not always affordable for developing countries,” comments Michel Vandenbosch, president of the animal welfare association Gaia. “We haven't seen Apopo's facilities with our own eyes, but it looks like the NGO fulfils all conditions to make sure that the rats don't develop neuroses, as do many captive animals. We hope that this example inspires research facilities to treat laboratory rats, who often live in small cages without recreation, in a similar way.”

Gaia also welcomes efforts to improve the image of rats, “which are still seen by many as carriers of diseases that have to be exterminated,” Vandenbosch says. “These animals are not vermin; they are affectionate creatures with intelligence and skills.”

## HERORAT: THE EXHIBITION



To present its mission to the general public, Apopo has set up the exhibition *Op pad met HeroRat* (On the Path with HeroRat) in the castle at Rivierenhof park in Antwerp. Celebrated Flemish photographer Lieve Blancquaert contributed a series of photos, shot during a visit to Tanzania and Mozambique (see cover photo) with Princess Astrid, the honorary president of Apopo since 2009.

Children can test their skills as HeroRats by entering a rat hallway that leads to a rat cabinet, where they have to detect identical fragrances. On a mine carpet, they can search for mines using magnets. The exhibition also includes equipment from the Belgian army, such as de-mining suits, mine detectors and landmines. Furthermore, the Flemish

organisation Klaprozen voor Vrede, or Poppies for Peace, provides an installation of ceramic poppies. By buying one (or more), you support Apopo.

UNTIL 14 OCTOBER  
Rivierenhof Castle

Turnhoutsebaan 232, Antwerp



# Fatal accident on army shooting range

## Explosion kills one officer, while another remains in critical condition

Alan Hope

One of the seven members of the army's bomb disposal squad DOVO injured in an accident on a shooting range last week is still in critical condition in the military hospital in Neder-Over-Heembeek, the Belgian army has announced. A 47-year-old warrant officer leading the team in the disposal of explosive materials died shortly after the accident of his injuries. Two other members are still in hospital in Brussels and Liège with severe burns, but their condition is reported as stable. Three men received lesser injuries. The accident happened during a routine procedure in which the men were disposing of unused explosive powder. It was to be loaded into a concrete-lined fire trench on the artillery range near Houthalen-Helchteren in Limburg, where it would be exploded safely. During the transfer of the unopened boxes from the truck to the trench, the powder ignited. Three men who were standing behind the truck escaped with minor injuries. Four others, including Warrant Officer Johan Bosmans, who was in charge of the operation, sustained severe burns. WO Bosmans, from Schoten near Antwerp, has been in the army for 21 years, 19 of them with DOVO. He died later of his injuries.



A military helicopter from Kleine Brogel base was used to evacuate casualties to hospital

Minister of defence Pieter De Crem and chief of the defence staff General Gerard Van Caelenberge sent messages of condolence to his wife and young son. "This is a severe blow for our service," said DOVO commander

Luc Moerman. The same sort of operation is carried out monthly without incident. The cause of the fire is being investigated. It's the second serious incident to take place on the Houthalen-Helchteren range, part of the

Kleine Brogel military base, this year. In April, a test firing for a private company led to a fire that destroyed 500 hectares of the surrounding grassland.

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Challenge from the left

From Sunday on, VTM will broadcast *Deadline 14/10*, the Flemish drama series that has been likened to the Danish award-winning series *The Killing*. *Deadline 14/10* mixes fiction with reality, partially set in Antwerp's City Hall. It focuses on the upcoming local elections in Antwerp, with two characters based on socialist mayor Patrick Janssens and his nationalist challenger Bart De Wever. (So much so that Janssens had hoped that it would not be aired until after 14 October.)

Again, this series portrays the elections as a duel, which in fact they are not. As interesting as the number of votes both candidates get may be, it should not obscure the fact that more than two parties take part. Take Open VLD, which has "imported" the popular federal minister for the interior Annemie Turtelboom for the purpose of the elections. Also, Bart De Wever may be Janssens' most prominent challenger, but the mayor may lose just as many votes to the left.

Groen was just about wiped out in the last Antwerp elections, as Janssens lured away many of its voters. Since then, the situation has changed. With Meyrem Almaci and Wouter Van Besien, the greens present two relatively new politicians, with growing popularity. They may also benefit from the messy debate on the Oosterweel link. Moreover, many Antwerp residents with foreign roots, who overwhelmingly supported the mayor in the last election, are disappointed in Janssens. The mayor did not appoint an alderman from their community (although he might this time, as the talented Yasmine Kerbach is second on his Stadsljst), and he was the driving force behind banning the headscarf for civil servants. Two more parties are trying to seduce left-wing voters: the extremist PVDA and Rood. Peter Mertens, author of the successful book on the financial markets *Hoe durven ze?* (How Dare They), has gained more credibility than the PVDA party, over which he presides, has ever enjoyed. Rood, which split off from the SPA some years ago, has managed to attract film director Robbe De Hert, a living legend in Antwerp.

Neither PVDA nor Rood may gain enough votes to get a seat in the Antwerp city council, but the votes they do get will not go to Janssens' Stadsljst, which also incorporates CD&V. To find out the net result of the voter movements on the left, there is only one deadline: 14/10.

## DIY for women at Technopolis

The Technopolis hands-on science and technology centre in Mechelen hosted 200 women last week for the Women@Work workshop on do-it-yourself skills. The visitors could take part in a range of workshops, including connecting electricity, fixing a leak, drilling holes in the wall and changing a flat tyre. The workshops were provided by a variety of industrial sponsors, and the evening also included information on energy saving and sustainability

► [www.technopolis.be](http://www.technopolis.be)



© Technopolis

## New money to help spread of communal gardens

Minister-president Kris Peeters has given the go-ahead for the Flemish Land Agency to spend €300,000 on developing a network of communal gardens in the region. Peeters made the announcement during a visit to the communal garden Drakenhof in Antwerp.

Flanders and Brussels are home to some 4,600 communal gardens, where residents are allocated a plot of land to grow vegetables or flowers. More than half of them are in Antwerp; Drakenhof is the largest, with 238 plots, accounting for 10% of the total number in Flanders. Demand continues to grow; research suggested that the current availability of communal gardens only meets about one-third of demand.

Last year the Flemish government granted €105,000 to the Land Agency for pre-financing to allow for the purchase of land for new gardens. The latest grant will finance the work to make existing land suitable, as well as pay for a study on future management issues, looking at questions such as the target population, the duration of projects and the criteria for funding for associations and municipalities.

The Drakenhof project is criss-crossed by foot- and cycle paths, which makes it accessible to a wide section of the local population. One of the aims of the new project is to reinforce participation in the associations that run garden parks, with the goal of allowing them eventually to become independent of any subsidy.

Applications for support are invited before spring 2013 through the Land Agency's website.

► [www.vlm.be](http://www.vlm.be)

## VTM changes TV advertising strategy

VTM, Flanders' largest commercial TV station, last week announced a new autumn season, which includes reality shows, variety, drama and a new approach to advertising. Reality shows include actor Lucas Van den Eynde in the ballroom dancing show *Sterren op de dansvloer*, and award-winning chef Sofie Dumont going head-to-head with Jeroen Meus (on VRT) with a nightly cookery show. Investigative reporter Luc Alloo hosts a documentary series set in Leuven Central prison, and both *Belgium's Got Talent* and *So You Think You Can Dance* start new seasons. The channel will run fewer ads during programmes and longer ad blocks between programmes. That, according to the channel's research, is more in line with what viewers want, which should benefit advertisers at the same time.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

14

municipalities in Flanders use no pesticides, in advance of a law that comes into force in 2015 banning their use in all but exceptional cases

1,500

offences, mainly fare-dodging, discovered so far this year on the coast tram – three times as many as last year, largely as a result of a major increase in inspector activity

2.1

tonnes of cocaine seized by police and customs in Antwerp harbour, from a ship carrying cocoa beans from Ecuador. The find is the largest in Antwerp since 2005

€11.6 million

to be spent on renovations to two Brussels pre-metro stations, Beurs and Anneessens, which will include the arrival of shops in Beurs and a service desk for the homeless in Anneessens

29,400

tests for natural radioactivity carried out across Belgium revealed that Limburg and Antwerp are the two least radioactive provinces

► [www.telerad.fgov.be](http://www.telerad.fgov.be)



# Peak performance

## Flemish politicians and celebrities join cyclists with cystic fibrosis for Climbing for Life

Anja Otte

With enough motivation and plenty of training, nearly anyone can cycle up a Tour de France mountain pass, even if they suffer from asthma or cystic fibrosis. That's the most important message of Climbing for Life.

"I've done several sports, but I am not one for hanging on long. This is a good test, for my condition as well as my character," says Louise Ailliet. She has just finished secondary school and is looking forward to her studies in linguistics and literature in Leuven. But before that, she will be one of more than 3,500 Flemings cycling up the Col du Galibier on 1 September in the Climbing for Life charity ride.

Climbing for Life, which was launched last year, raises funds for afflictions such as asthma and cystic fibrosis (CF), from which Ailliet suffers. "Some CF patients are hospitalised up to three times a year," she says. "I've only been in the hospital twice in my whole life. I'm one of the lucky ones. But it is good that more awareness is created about CF, as it is quite common but unknown to most people."

Raising funds is just one on the organiser's list of 10 reasons people should take part. Many of the other motivations have to do with the Col du Galibier, altitude 2,645 metres.



The Galibier is a classic stage in the Tour de France and, for the Flemish, an essential part of cycling history. In 1969, the legendary Eddy Merckx made it to the top first, in a stage won by Herman Van Springel. Lucien Van Impe, the last Belgian to win the Tour, did the same in 1979. Merckx,

Van Springel, Van Impe... names like these are enough to make many a cycling heart in Flanders jump. Incidentally, Van Impe will take part in Climbing for Life, as one of the patrons of the event. Other Flemish participants are musician Sioen and radio DJ Roos Van Acker, who

will report on her feat for Studio Brussel. Other patrons are cyclist Philippe Gilbert, musician Piet Goddard (known as Ozark Henry) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, one of the founding fathers of the event.

"It is very important that we spread

the message that someone with asthma should not remain passive but get in shape," says Peeters. "The participants with asthma and CF will demonstrate that they can take on activities most people would think twice about." In 2010, Peeters took part in a similar expedition, climbing up the Aconcagua mountain in Argentina with asthma patients.

The success of Climbing for Life illustrates the renewed popularity of cycling in Flanders, among both participants and spectators. In fact, it is sometimes claimed that cycling is the new golf: an excellent way to network while exercising, with the competitiveness extending not just to the performance but also the gear. Peeters, TV tycoon Wouter Vandenhaute and economist Geert Noels are well-known examples of this.

Ailliet, meanwhile, is confident she will make it to the top. "I've had plenty of training in the Ardennes. My boyfriend, my father and my physiotherapist will be there with me. I'm ready!"

► [www.climbingforlife.be](http://www.climbingforlife.be)

## Mapping everyday speech in Limburg

Usually it quite easy to sort out who is from Limburg if you're in the company of a group of Flemings. The province has a large range of dialects but with a specific tone of voice. There has been a lot of linguistic research on the dialects, but the project Spraakmakers (a play on words meaning something like "Speech Pals") wants to look further.

The goal of the project, which sports the tagline Taalvariatie in Limburg, or Language Variation in Limburg, is to illustrate the rich variation of everyday speech in the eastern-most Flemish province by means of videos from residents.

"With 'language variation', we mean the different ways of speaking that people use in their everyday lives," explains Silvia Weusten, coordinator of the project. "This variations depend on the



context. People talk differently at the kitchen table, for example, or among friends at school. The surroundings, the situation and the relationship between talkers all play an important role in how we speak. So it is about more than just different dialects."

The method of Spraakmakers is simple: The public is asked to submit short films about everyday situations. "We have chosen not to do interviews ourselves," says Weusten, "because during interviews, people tend to adjust their language. We are looking for spontaneous speech." The films are brought together on a website. "Anyone can join, and there are even prizes to win."

Spraakmakers is a collaboration between the different cultural heritage organisations of Limburg and FARO, the Flemish Centre for Cultural Heritage. Because everyday speech is very diverse and constantly evolving and developments such as migration and media have a major impact on how people communicate, language is considered an essential part of the intangible heritage of a region.

Toon Lambrechts

► [www.spraakmakers.be](http://www.spraakmakers.be)

## Tourism generates nearly €2 billion last year

The average day tripper to the cities of Flanders spends €68 per person, mainly on shopping and eating out. Longer-stay tourists spend €142 per person a day on food, accommodation and shopping. The figures come from a new report on visitors to the Flemish "art cities" – Brussels, Antwerp, Leuven, Mechelen, Ghent and Bruges.

The data are a result of a poll of 4,750 people, roughly one-third day trippers and the rest longer-stay tourists, between April and December 2011. The survey was carried out on a commission from Toerisme Vlaanderen, the Art City Action Plan and the five cities.

The share of each city in the total number of longer-stay tourists is: Brussels 40%, Bruges 28%, Antwerp 17%, Ghent 10%, Leuven 3% and Mechelen 2%. Tourists stay longest in Brussels: an average of 2.6 nights, compared to 2.3 in Antwerp, which is second, and 1.8 in Ghent, the lowest. Many tourists visit more than one of the art cities on the same holiday.

The total amount spent by longer-term holidaymakers in 2011 is estimated at €699 million: €345m for Brussels, €159m for Bruges,



The Gruuthuse Museum in Bruges

€116m for Antwerp, €53m for Ghent and €13m each for Leuven and Mechelen.

Brussels also leads in the number of day trips made by visitors, with 5.07 million. Not surprisingly, by far the largest number of day trippers comes from Belgium (66%) followed by the Netherlands (16.6%). In the case of day trippers, nearly two-thirds had been to one of the art cities before in the last five years. More than 90% were adults travelling without children. Contrary to popular belief, only

a small percentage (6%) were travelling in an organised group. Day trippers to the art cities brought in an estimated €1.2 billion in 2011. Antwerp leads the field this time, with €392 million, ahead of Brussels with €385 million. Alan Hope

► [www.tinyurl.com/flanderstourism](http://www.tinyurl.com/flanderstourism)



THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESS**Air Transport**  
► **Flybe**

Low-cost British airline Flybe has decided to cancel its services between Brussels and Manchester.

**Banking**  
► **Dexia**

Ailing holding group Dexia, burdened with tens of billions of unsecured assets, will use the €837 million released by the sale of its 50% stake in Dexia Investors Services to shore up Banque Internationale du Luxembourg. They sold the former affiliate to the Luxembourg state and the Qatar Precision Capital fund earlier this year.

**Building products**  
► **Etex**

The Brussels-based building products group is inaugurating two new production units in the coming weeks in Poland and Colombia. In Poland, the company has invested €65 million to increase capacity of its cladding board production unit, while in Colombia some €42 million have been invested to increase output in ceramic tiles.

**Chemicals**  
► **Christeyns**

The Ghent-based chemical group is to take over the British Klenzan company, specialised in the production of cleaning equipment for the dairy industry.

**Dating service**  
► **Berkeley**

London-based upmarket dating service Berkeley International, with branches in New York and Cannes, has opened an office in Brussels to meet demand from international residents.

**Gas**  
► **Fluxys**

Gas transport group Fluxys, based in Brussels, is bidding for the Czech Net4gas gas network management company in partnership with the Czech energy group EPH. The deal, which could be worth up to €1.4 billion, follows the decision of Germany's RWE to sell some of its non-strategic assets. For Fluxys, the move would consolidate its position as a key player in the European gas transport system.

**Wealth**  
► **New record**

The net wealth of the Belgian population reached a record €1,802 billion last year, according to the country's National Bank. The figure, which represents five times the country's GDP, is broken down into €940 billion in financial assets and €1,066 billion in property interests, minus €204 billion in debts.

# More students choose technology studies

## Industry, government and the VDAB all welcome the stark increase over last year's figures

Alan Hope

Nearly one-third more students than last year have enrolled in scientific and technical courses at universities and university colleges in Flanders in the last few weeks, according to the tech industry federation Agoria. As Flanders Today went to press, more than 2,300 students had signed up for courses in ICT, engineering, technology and industrial sciences – compared to just over 1,600 at the same time last year.

The figures were immediately welcomed by the Flemish government, as well as the region's agency for work and training VDAB, which has been working hard to steer more young people in those study directions. The number of women opting for these courses remains low, just 10%. "Anyone who wants to attract more tech workers will have to find a way to motivate young women," said Agoria director-general

Wilson De Pril.

"These figures...give cause for hope," commented Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, also minister of the economy. "Hopefully they will give an impetus to a lot of young people who have yet to make their choice. It also appears that other areas, like the care sector and construction, are also achieving better numbers."

Agoria hopes this year to pass the 7,500 mark of enrolling students, to help make up for the yearly deficit of 500 to 700 graduates in science, engineering and technology. Earlier this year, the Flemish government approved the STEM action plan (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to provide more of a stimulus to young people to enter technical and technological training

The students enrolling now

will help, industry hopes, to fill what are known as bottleneck jobs – those for which too few suitable candidates are available. In times of economic crisis, Agoria said, young people tend to opt for security and aim for areas where jobs will be available.

However, Peeters pointed out, the decision to follow a particular educational course in itself will not solve all the problems of hard-to-fill vacancies. On-the-job training needs to be made more attractive to those the industry is trying to reach. Last year, 84% of all vacancies advertised through the VDAB were for bottleneck jobs. Some businesses are now exploring new means of filling vacancies, such as by paying existing employees a premium if they recommend a suitable candidate.

In Flanders, the official list of jobs considered

bottleneck includes 97 categories, from nurses, teachers and mechanics to engineers, technicians and IT workers. The list also includes restaurant wait staff, taxi drivers, security personnel and call-centre operators. The list for the Brussels region includes fewer categories, consisting

mainly of skilled technical jobs but also includes sales representatives, bar staff and receptionists.

► [www.tinyurl.com/bottleneckjobs](http://www.tinyurl.com/bottleneckjobs)

© photos: Helen King / CORBIS

## KBC joins class-action suit against Facebook

The Leuven-based bank and insurance group KBC has joined in a class-action suit filed in the US against social media giant Facebook, alleging misleading information given out in the run-up to Facebook's launch on the stock market last May. KBC Equity Fund New Shares and KBC Equity Fund Technology together bought "a limited number of shares" in the recent IPO. To reassure its own clients, given the decline in the Facebook share price

since the public offer, KBC stressed that "Facebook represents a position of barely 1% in these funds. The impact on their investment performance and inventory value is therefore strictly limited."

The lawsuit alleges Facebook published misleading information in the prospectus accompanying the offer. "KBC Asset Management is joining the suit because, as asset manager, it has the duty to defend the interests of its customers, however

large or small," KBC said in a statement.

According to documents filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, KBC held 23,600 shares in Facebook at the end of June. The bank declined to give details, but if those shares were bought in the IPO, and if KBC still holds them, then the bank has lost an estimated €350,000. Facebook shares launched initially at a price of \$38. Last week the price dipped below \$19 before closing slightly higher.

## Unions meet to talk rail reform

Unions representing workers for the NMBS have said they will enter talks over the reform of the national rail authority this week "with an open mind," while retaining the option to take industrial action.

Paul Magnette, federal minister for government enterprises, has outlined a new structure for the railways, taking what is now a three-part organisation – the service side of the NMBS, the infrastructure authority Infrabel and the over-arching NMBS Holding – and turning it into a two-part structure, essentially scrapping NMBS Holding.

Unions have lobbied for a single integrated, structure which they say would "guarantee a quality service for passengers as well as a worthwhile future for NMBS staff". The two-part structure is "no solution" to the railways' problems, one representative said. "We need to go back to a single integrated company with one boss."

## Q&A

**Katherina Kitsinis of Design Hub Limburg is staging The Future Company, an event in Genk that brings together traditional and creative industries**



**Why is this called "The Future Company"?**

The Future Company is a business-to-business event in conjunction with an exhibition that's going on here in Genk called The Machine: Designing a New Industrial Revolution. It lets designers show their vision of how industry will look in the future. With new technologies

like 3D printing, designers – and consumers – are now in a position to develop products for themselves. So the exhibition contains machines that you can use to make products for yourself right in your living room. The Future Company event brings together the creative industries and the traditional production industries and offers business people a new kind of enterprise, with workshops based on various themes as well as talks.

**What's in it for traditional industry?**

We especially want to get to traditional businesses who, for example, have been producing their

product for years in the same way but who are now wondering how they can use the knowledge that's available to reach new markets. And we've also invited the creatives – product and graphic designers, industrial and furniture developers. We're bringing the two together in the belief that co-creation by different types of entrepreneurs can lead to new applications. An example is city mobility. Let's say that a new approach is needed for a tram network. That would involve a whole team of engineers, roads workers, the city government and more. And we're convinced that building a team is the way to try out new approaches and new insights

into, for example, new materials or the needs of the transport user.

**Damien Declercq of the US company Local Motors is the special guest. Why?**

The event is happening in Genk. Local Motors uses open-source, co-creation models in the car industry. It's a platform where the development of car parts is thrown open to ideas, and where you can now build your own car without being tied to one supplier.

Interview by Alan Hope

► [www.the-machine.be/the-future-company](http://www.the-machine.be/the-future-company)



# Flushing energy away

Scientists at Ghent University are working to harvest electrical power from wastewater

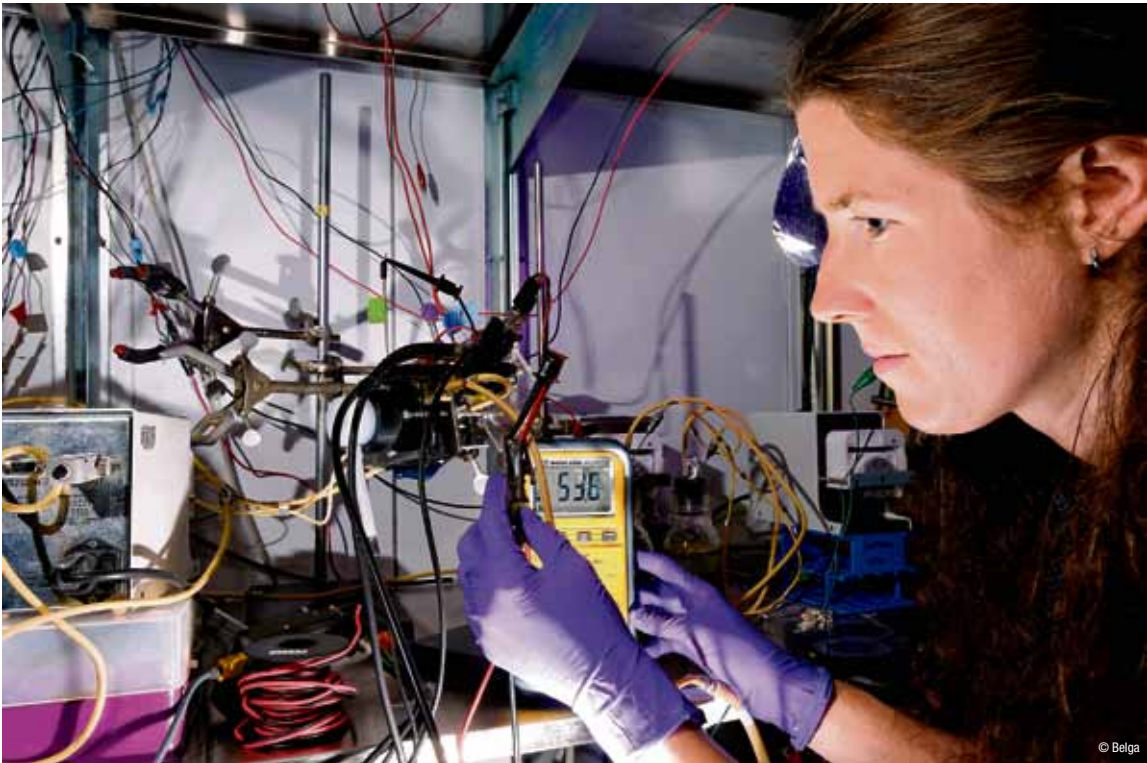
Senne Starckx

Water treatment plants are usually big energy consumers. But with the help of sewage-loving microbes locked up in fuel cells, the electricity bill can be significantly reduced. Scientists at Ghent University are leading the way in the search for the perfect “microbial fuel cell”

Politicians and scientists from all over the world are gathering this week in Stockholm to discuss global and local problems concerning water management. One of the many topics on the agenda is how to organise more sustainable systems for wastewater treatment.

Wastewater treatment is no minor issue because treatment plants are huge energy consumers. First, a lot of power is needed to “air” the bacteria that break down the organic components in the water. Second, it takes a lot of energy to get rid of the remaining sludge. In 2010, Flanders needed 733 gigawatts of electricity to power its water treatment plants. That’s about 3% of the total electricity use.

However, at Ghent University’s Laboratory of Microbial Ecology and Technology (LabMET), scientists are working on a ambitious solution: the so-called microbial fuel cell, or MFC. The theoretical concept behind it is far



Researcher testing the electrical output of a microbial fuel cell. A chamber contains an organic solution (such as wastewater) and bacteria. The bacteria colonise the anode electrode in the fuel cell and oxidise the organic compounds. The reaction allows the bacteria to transfer electrons directly to the anode, which then flow to a cathode electrode, generating electricity

(pictured below) worked in Australia, where he was a guest professor at the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Centre of the University of Queensland. It was there that he set up the first MFC pilot plant in the world to generate

as a scarce commodity.” So how did the MFC plant at the Foster’s brewery do? “Very well,” says Rabaey, “although we didn’t break records in producing electrical power. But for us the major goal was to study how we could scale-up this technology to support larger discharges of wastewater. While most researchers make tiny reactors, we have been building larger systems and investing much time in making them work really well.”

The Wastewater Treatment Centre’s reactor consists of 12 modules; each one is a three-meter-high tube with carbon brushes on the inside that serve as the anode. The wall of the tube is a membrane that facilitates the transport of electrons to the outside of the cylinder, which consists of cathode-carbon brushes clamped to a stainless steel mesh.

“The goal of the pilot facility was to remove at least five kilograms of organics per cubic metre of reactor

volume per day,” explains Rabaey. “We succeeded in doing that, by which we achieved a power production of up to 500 watts continuously. But actually power is always the secondary target. In this first phase, we wanted to clean the wastewater in an energy-efficient way and without generating much sludge. That’s where the real benefit is.”

## Chemical yield

Since Rabaey installed the MFC plant at Foster’s five years ago, he and his colleagues have learned that it would be more beneficial to use the plant not only to produce electricity, but also to “yield” valuable organic and inorganic chemicals, like bio fuels, hydrogen gas and methane. Rabaey: “We have calculated, economically speaking, that the production of these chemicals yields 20 times more than the production of electricity. So thanks to this pilot project, we discovered a more profitable trajectory on which to base further research.”

So can MFC technology help in making wastewater treatment in Flanders more sustainable? Definitely, thinks Rabaey. “And it could save us a lot of money. If you look at wastewater treatment, this is an area where we spend money and use energy. If we can install a technology that just saves money, then it’s making money. We don’t have to make it pay for itself, we just have to make it better than what people are currently using.”

But Rabaey also says that scaling-up these systems for use in domestic water treatment is a long-term goal and that the more immediate need is to develop pilot-scale reactors for industrial locations like food-processing facilities or in remote parts of the world that lack central waste treatment facilities – like the Foster’s brewery in Australia.



“While most researchers make tiny reactors, we have been building larger systems”

from new: In 1911 scientists wondered if they could lock up certain types of bacteria in tubes and then place them in wastewater. In the ideal scenario, the bacteria would take out electrons from the pollutants and give them to an external circuit – to generate electricity. Apart from cleaning the water, then, MFCs would actually produce electrical power. And water treatment plants, each powered by thousands of connected MFCs, would therefore become self-reliant. In theory.

Thanks to rapid design improvements in MFC technology during the last decade, theory is becoming more and more a practice. The power output of a single MFC, for example, has been multiplied by a factor of 10 since the turn of the century.

## The Matrix

Korneel Rabaey, head of LabMET and an absolute pioneer in MFC research, compares the operation of an MFC with the movie *The Matrix*, in which humans are hooked up to machines to provide electrical power. “MFC’s work in a similar way,” he says. “What we do is use certain micro-organisms that can be connected to devices to generate an electrical current. The current can be used to generate power.” Before he returned to Ghent University – his alma mater – in 2011, Rabaey

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers at the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), have found a way to **reduce the side effects caused by chemotherapy**, such as hair loss and nausea. They succeeded in blocking the activity of PHD2, a protein that reacts to a lack of oxygen in the blood. The blocking of the protein in mice results in the production of enzymes that neutralise the side effects. According to the researchers, this means patients will need smaller doses of chemo medicines that work faster and more effectively. It could be a few years before specific blockers are ready to be used on patients.

The lung transplant team of the University Hospital Leuven **transplanted a pair of donor lungs** that were earlier declared unsuitable for transplantation. The lungs contained fluid that forms after the brain death of a donor, but the team extracted the fluid with respiration equipment and a special blood solution. Professor Dirk Van Raemdonck believes that the breakthrough will increase the number of transplant donor lungs by 25%.

Despite objections of parents, a secondary school in the coastal town of Blankenberge is **requiring all pupils to start the new school year with an iPad** to follow lessons and do their homework. The Sint-Pieters College/Sint-Jozef Commercial School (SPSJ) announced the plan to become the first school with iPads in Flanders last March, but a group of parents protested because of the costs. The Flemish Education Commission agreed with the parents, but the school feels it’s too late to turn back. “Our pilot project was very successful,” said school board president Nicole Vancollie. “Besides, only 10 of the 700 parents complained.” Parents who lack resources can apply to a fund to rent an iPad.

Two Master’s students of the University of Antwerp examined the **accommodation preferences of 1,782 fellow students** via an online survey. The results show that students opt for a studio instead of a traditional student room and that most students don’t like having a student housing supervisor around. They are willing to pay on average €171.00 extra every month for a studio rather than a room with common living facilities. This did not come as a surprise to the researchers, as students attach ever more importance to privacy and hygiene. What was unexpected, however, is that students also prefer not to share a common kitchen, while previous surveys indicated that they appreciated it due to social contact. **Andy Furniere**



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# Part of the furniture

## Blankenberge's Belle Epoque Centre portrays a bygone age of seaside holidays

Marcel Schoeters

Today Blankenberge is just one of many towns dotted along the Flemish coast, but between 1870 and 1914, it was one of Europe's most prestigious resorts. Since the 1840s, the tiny fishing community rapidly expanded and transformed into *the* place to be seen for Europe's gentry and nobility. The wooden pavement along the dunes was quickly replaced by a concrete promenade along which the wealthy were soon to book suites in five-star hotels or set up mansions of their own. In Blankenberge, as well as in other Belgian coastal cities, many of these seaside mansions and villas have disappeared. But in the streets and squares off the promenade, a substantial number have survived. It was in three stately homes dating back to 1894 that the Belle Epoque Centre was established. It is home to a permanent interactive exhibition revealing the carefree and festive atmosphere of the town in the Belle Epoque.

### Style and substance

Art Nouveau was the prevailing style of the turn-of-the-century period, which was reflected not so much in the general design of the houses but rather in their stained-glass windows and tiles used for floors and walls. This is why visitors entering the museum are first directed to the roof terrace, which is walled by a "mosaic sofa" made up of fragments of Belle Epoque villas. The second floor tells the story of



The museum in Blankenberge celebrates the atmosphere of the Belle Epoque and is currently hosting an exhibition of rare Thonet furniture

the conversion of Blankenberge from a fishing village into a summer destination for Europe's great and good. The fishing trade, which had been carried out on the threshold of the captain's cabins for centuries, was moved, and a casino and pier were built. Both have survived (albeit not in their original form). The fishermen and their families were able to earn extra income by wheeling cabins into and out of the water, allowing tourists privacy to change into their swimming gear. The first floor is dedicated to

the *zeitgeist* of the Belle Epoque, such as an architectural model of the Grand Hôtel des Bains et des Familles, along with pictures of its Art Nouveau furniture. Opposite is a list of the more famous visitors of the period. In another room, the daily life of tourists and fishermen alike is evoked through film footage.

### The brothers Thonet

On the ground floor, finally, a painfully restored arcade and living room give an impression of what a seaside mansion would have looked

like in the 1890s. The story of the restoration is told down a flight of stairs in a basement room. Another basement room hosts the temporary

exhibition of Thonet furniture. The Viennese Thonet brothers founded their factory in 1853, after several years of experimenting and small-scale production. The brothers claim to have been the inventors of bent wood, which is questionable: The technique was already employed by the ancient Egyptians and in the early 1800s, a Belgian named Chapuis was already producing chairs of bent laminated wood. It was, however, Thonet who turned the technique into a well-considered mix of mass production and keen marketing techniques. Their basic material was beech wood, and the chair seats were made of cane, often referred to as Vienna straw. The exhibition also intermingles with the permanent collection. The chairs to be found on the second floor are examples of the earliest period, between 1855 and 1870. The first floor shows pieces true to the Wiener Sezession style, Vienna's contribution to the Art Nouveau movement. The more flamboyant pieces – among them the rocking sofa that became a source of inspiration for Le Corbusier – are on display on the ground floor.

## UNTIL 28 SEPTEMBER

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► [www.belle.epoque.blankenberge.be](http://www.belle.epoque.blankenberge.be)

# Bradt publishes first-ever travel guide dedicated to Flanders

Imagine our surprise and delight at the *Flanders Today* office when *Flanders: Northern Belgium* – the first ever guide book to Flanders – arrived in the post. Guide books to Belgium are a dime a dozen, but British travel writer Emma Thomson



decided that Flanders needed a book all its own. Working as an editor at England's Bradt Guides a couple of years ago, she convinced the company to back the book, which also includes Brussels. "Initially I was nervous about the idea because I didn't want it to be seen as a backing of the linguistic divide," says the author, who lived in a farmhouse outside of Aalst for 18 months. But the regions, she says, "have such a distinct character. And there is so much to do that I couldn't pack it all into one book." Like so many before her, Thomson moved to Flanders after falling for a local. Although she's been based elsewhere lately, she moving back permanently next month. Now a freelance travel writer, she also covers Tanzania and Sierre Leone in Africa. Like all good travel guides, *Flanders* offers a rather extensive history of the region, which proves interesting even for those of us who live here and aren't just passing through. In

fact, I found much of the book serves that purpose, discovering new cafes and festivals I hadn't yet heard of – including, for instance, the Butter and Cheese Festival in Diksmuide, where new Knights of the Butter are inducted and the winner of the blindfolded cheese-tasting contest can win his own weight in butter. "I don't know what you would do with that much butter, but still, it's quirky," says Thomson. It's the seemingly never-ending quirky factor that intrigues Thomson the most, and she relates it to the

good-naturedness of the Flemish. "They are always up for telling you about their favourite museum or the greatest cafe. It's hard to pinpoint the nature of the people, but there is a proudness about everything. In Britain, people tend to moan about everything, but not the Flemish. And you can't help but get excited right along with them." So where should someone go who only has ONE day in Flanders? "Ghent," she says, without hesitation. "It has all the waterways and none of the tourists." Lisa Bradshaw

## EMMA THOMSON'S TOP PICKS

### Favourite cafe?

Den Babbelaer in Aalst (Klapstraat 3). "An old building, with lots of twists and turns and little, candlelit corners."

### Favourite beer?

Westvleteren 12. "I wasn't a big beer fan before, but Flanders has converted me. I made the pilgrimage to Westvleteren. After a couple of the 12s, I was in love. It's just so smooth and rich, especially if you eat it with the cheese."

### Favourite place nobody's ever heard of?

St Hermes Church and crypt in Ronse. "It dates from the 13th century, and there is a great tour guide there named Charles, and he explains all the rules and regulations people had to go through to get a place in the crypt."

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# Digging for treasure

Despite the trend in bookshop closure, Tervuren's Treasure Trove is still going strong

Emma Portier Davis

Along the high street Tervuren, a small window display beckons. There, nestling in this cosy portal, is an assortment of English-language children's books, hinting at literary treats to be found inside. This is Treasure Trove, dedicated to providing children's books in English. Entering the shop is no disappointment: There are thousands of books for children of all ages. Not to mention comfy chairs to sink into and a doll's house and cuddly toys to entertain the youngest clients. Seated at a table, children are busy with activities, inspired by their literary heroes. On Wednesdays and Sundays they are invited to story time while their grown-ups browse the store, sipping coffee or tea.

## Small beginnings

It all began on the front porch of a house in the countryside, just outside Tervuren, Flemish Brabant. Christine Moore, a British mother of three children, who were all very fond of reading, started Treasure Trove about 30 years ago. As the collection on her porch spilled over into her basement, she decided to move to new premises in Moorsel, a district of Tervuren. Once her children grew up, Moore sold Treasure Trove to Dutch

businessman Friso Coppes, who had specialised in supermarkets but had long desired to own a bookshop. He was looking for a shop to fill premises he already owned on Tervuren's main street, which became the new home of Treasure Trove.

Conveniently located just outside of Brussels, this self-styled toy-box of a shop now welcomes hordes of English speakers from the capital and across Flanders. Its ethos remains: This is a bookshop for children. "We want them to feel that it is their shop," explains Jane Still, one of the Treasure Trove team.

On any day, Still and her co-workers can be heard chatting to the children on a first-name basis and suggesting titles in which they might be interested. Name any genre, and they are sure to come up with something new to satisfy bookish desires.

## Quality before quantity

There are many reasons why a shop like Treasure Trove should not survive – competition from online retailers with lower overheads, the rise of electronic publishing and the abundance of shops in the area selling English books, such as Stonemanor and Waterstones.

Treasure Trove has a thriving business supplying books to local schools and holding book fairs for children. But Still and her colleague, Jennifer Hayers, explain that this is nevertheless not a money spinner, since the margins on text books are minimal; it really is the shop. Part of the explanation for its longevity is its buying strategy. "We don't really stock the bestsellers; we choose the ones that are more quality literature," explains Still. "We don't sell the books you could pick up in the supermarket or airport."

That's not to say there are no bestsellers. Certainly, you may find in the small but well-stocked adult section the books from the blockbuster *Fifty Shades* series, but, Still warns with a glint, you have to be



Treasure Trove's Jane Still, the woman children go to for expert advice on what to read next

quick as they sell out fast.

Treasure Trove is a place where you can find all the old children's classics in abundance as well as the best of contemporary fiction, ample in its provision of a wide range of literature to suit all tastes. Perhaps steering away from bestsellers as such has also attracted the committed readers. The ubiquitous Harry Potter novels may have brought a wave of new readers, but, Still says, "there are just as many serious readers as there always were, and they read masses of books."

The window displays – tailored to events throughout the year and featuring so far in 2012 a gardening theme for spring, sports books and stories about London to tie in with the Olympics and currently a selection of back-to-school books – are where it all starts for Treasure Trove fans. "The window is essential," says Hayers. "That's what draws people in."

► [www.treasuretrove.be](http://www.treasuretrove.be)



Customer Sue and her children get caught up in reading and colouring at one of the bookshop's wooden tables

## RECOMMENDED READS

### Young adults

The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness  
Looking for Alaska by John Green

### Young children

Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly Nelly by Nick Sharratt  
The Princess and The Pea by Lauren Child

### Classics

The Hobbit by JRR Tolkien  
Ballet Shoes by Nina Bawden

# Carbon Hotel restaurant Gusto takes to the outdoors

Just across the street from Genk's railway station, Carbon Hotel serves business travellers and tourists with its designer rooms, deluxe wellness centre and on-site fusion restaurant, Gusto. The latter is a popular lunch and dinner destination among the locals, too. The restaurant has recently extended its domain from the lobby dining room and street-side patio to Carbon's rooftop lounge terrace. The description is slightly misleading. It is on a rooftop, but not that of the hotel

itself, which rises a further few floors. This rooftop terrace is in fact surrounded on all sides by taller buildings, giving it a more courtyard-like vibe.

If there's no view to speak of, however, its exotic landscaping and ultra-modern decor, including a sleek canopy, more than compensate. The food is another selling point. As of this summer, good eats are to be had day and evening on the lounge deck. The Carbon crew have installed an extensive salad bar and a grill,



where meat and fish are cooked before your eyes (and under your nose).

Finally there's the pitch-perfect selection of Italian wines, furnished by Gusto's resident connoisseur Toni Etneo and his SVI group. You won't regret taking a bottle of the Tuscan Dromos. Mmmm.

Georgio Valentino

► [www.carbonhotel.be](http://www.carbonhotel.be)





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# New York's Flemish master

Marc Van Cauwenbergh has found success in a tough market of critics and buyers

Leo Cendrowicz

It seems apt that Marc Van Cauwenbergh's apartment in downtown Manhattan overlooks Flanders Square. No matter that this small corner of City Hall Plaza is named after forgotten broadcaster Steve Flanders, it is now home to perhaps the most famous Flemish New Yorker today.

Van Cauwenbergh has lived in New York for two decades, and in that time his abstract paintings of figurative forms dancing over multiple intricate layers have earned him a cult reputation amongst the city's art cognoscenti. Although his recent exhibition in Ghent was a rare return to his home region, he enjoys regular shows across America, including one currently running at the Pratt Manhattan Gallery.

At this moment, however, he is simply enjoying New York's balmy summer. Sporting a white T-shirt and denim shorts, he beams as he welcomes me into his apartment. "There is something about the spectacle of New York that I really like," he says, gesturing out of the window to the view of the crowds thronging through the park below.

Van Cauwenbergh's studio, part of his apartment, is littered with his works in progress, their forms and colours at once alien and familiar. Splashes, smears, drips and veils of paint half evoke figures and actions, yet remain deliberately evasive.

"They are inspired by my experience of life in general," he says. "I'm affected by my surroundings. The mood in a work will evolve, like how life evolves and changes. They explore the darker spaces within relationships, how troubled or joyful you can be, and that might be reflected in chaotic structures."

## The dancing painter

The 58-year-old's journey to Manhattan from his hometown of Ninove, East Flanders, has taken many turns. He focused on art at school, while also taking dance classes, before earning a degree from Ghent's Saint-

Luc fine arts school, where he excelled in woodcuts. (A remnant from that era is a small woodcut on his desk featuring an explicit sexual act.)

But work was scarce after graduation, so Van Cauwenbergh auditioned for the opera-ballet in Ghent, where he danced for two years on a programme covering opera and operetta, jazz, modern styles and tap. As for his painting: "I just kept working," he says. "It was tricky because there was not much spare time."

As he built his portfolio, he also reached out beyond Flanders, eventually moving to New York in 1987, where he completed a Master of Fine Arts at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. He briefly returned to Europe – three years in Brussels – before making New York his permanent home in 1994.

It was then that the abstract took hold. Van Cauwenbergh began exploring cascading colours and jostling forms. "I was probing more inside the psyche in Ghent and Brussels. Here, it is busier and more aggressive, with the influences of New York's chaos and energy," he says.

## Layering in wait

Each element, though, still represents an organic being – "a sculptural presence of a form," he says. "There was always a silhouette sitting or standing on a neutral background."

Indeed, the movement of the forms, their delicate balance and rhythm seems sometimes to recall his own dance heritage. As for colours, Van Cauwenbergh uses the weave, texture and absorbency of the canvas linen

"They explore the darker spaces within relationships"

– adding washes of oil paint directly onto the canvas – creating more subdued, less vibrant tones that mix intriguingly with his signature green-yellows and Venetian reds.

The layering of translucent paints can be time consuming, and Van



Cauwenbergh often has many canvases on the go at the same time. "I let things rest as I freeze the motion, but it's not always practical," he says. "It does not have to be completely dry,



Marc Van Cauwenbergh's "The Eclipse" (top); the artist in his Manhattan studio

one that he relishes as he continues to explore the interaction of form and colour.

► [www.marcvancauwenbergh.net](http://www.marcvancauwenbergh.net)

# Festival memories at Rock Werchter X

The festival Rock Werchter may take place only four days in July, but now you can experience its positive vibes all year long at the exhibition Rock Werchter X set up at the cultural centre Jack-Op in Werchter, which is a district of Rotselaar. This former brewery site once housed the festival administration.

"Rock Werchter X is not a museum exhibition," assures Maria Lauwers of the Rotselaar tourism office. "It's an experience centre for those who want to relive their time at the festival – and for those who haven't experienced that atmosphere yet."

Starting in 1975 as a small festival of the local Chiro youth movement, Rock Werchter has grown to be Flanders' biggest music festival but also one of



the biggest music festivals in the world. This evolution is shown through photos, clippings, posters and memorabilia such as tickets, caps and wristbands.

On a jukebox, you can choose your favourite song played at Werchter. Movies filmed backstage and interviews with employees of the festival offer a view behind the scenes. You can have your picture taken with stars such as Nick Cave and Chris Martin – or at least with their cardboard cut-outs.

Key moments in the festival's nearly four decades are highlighted, such as the transition from black-and-white to colour posters. (That decision, you'll discover, was taken after director Herman Schueremans, on holiday in Italy, took a closer look at what he thought was a poster of his own festival

hanging on a wall. It turned out to be a death notice.)

Rock Werchter X also displays the collective memory of festival visitors, brought together in the "anecdotes forest", where everyone can reminisce about their Werchter adventures. The collection includes a small note from Maria Verbist, mother of Schueremans, who describes how she used to light candles to pray for good weather on the crucial days.

The exhibition is open from Wednesday to Sunday until 30 September and then permanently on Sundays only. Visitors receive a free Jack-Op beer and a poster from the early days of Rock Werchter.

Andy Furniere

► [www.rockwerchterx.be](http://www.rockwerchterx.be)

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Legendary Italian film composer **Ennio Morricone** will make a personal appearance in Antwerp's Sportpaleis on 22 December to conduct a tribute to his many celebrated scores. The 81-year-old is best known for his work on the films of Sergio Leone, such as *A Fistful of Dollars* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. He will conduct the Il Novecento orchestra and a choir of 100 singers.

Works on the digging of a storm basin by the Vaartkom in Leuven were interrupted last week when workers came upon the **remains of part of a river wall** dating back to the 15th or 16th century. Samples of the wall will be taken before work goes ahead.

The **Antwerp-born actress Maité Nahyr** has died in Marseilles at the age of 64 after a long illness. She had roles in films starting in the 1970s to the year 2000, including Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* and Federico Fellini's *City of Women*.

Radio stations **Nostalgie**, **MNM** and **Radio 1** all saw increased listener numbers in the months from April to June, according to the Centre for Information on the Media. Nostalgie saw its share go up from 6.5% to 7.7% for its classics playlist. MNM went up 1.3 points to 9.5%, while Radio 1 rose only 0.6 points to 8%. The latter two stations are broadcast by the public broadcaster VRT.

Geert Noppe, keyboard player with the **Flemish pop group Yevgueni**, will stand for election in October as a candidate for the Groen-SPA coalition in Beveren, East Flanders. The musician said his platform would include better cycle paths, car-free streets around schools and a ban on heavy goods traffic in the town centre.

A 15th-century triptych painted by a follower of Rogier Van der Weyden has been returned to its place in Sint-Pieters Church in Leuven. It was removed in 2007 for restoration and then formed part of the opening exhibition in the city's Museum M. **The Edelheere Triptych** was painted for the family of the same name in 1443 and is a copy of Van der Weyden's "The Descent From the Cross".

Brothers **Stijn and Steven Kolacny**, founders and directors of the choir Scala, were last week made honorary citizens of the choir's home town of Aarschot in Flemish Brabant. Since its creation in 1996 the all-female choir that covers pop and rock songs has gone on to become an international sensation. Receiving the honour, Steven Kolacny announced a new concert series in December.

► [www.scalachoir.com](http://www.scalachoir.com)



*Discomforting pals of the everyday*

# Objects as Friends

Bjorn Gabriels

When your friends irritate you, that often tells you more about yourself than about those friends. In the case of *Objecten als vrienden* (*Objects as Friends*), though, artists Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys definitely set out to get on your nerves.

Last year, the Brussels-based partners in art, working together since the late 1980s, received the Flemish Culture Prize for Visual Arts. "The duo has a keen eye for the banal and the absurd," said the jury. To say the least. Their exhibition in Ostend's Mu.ZEE consists of about 300 photographs of found object assemblages in front of a dull background. On the floor in each photograph lies some white powder.

De Gruyter and Thys bring together two, three or more things – but never an abundance – lying around in their studio, gathered from flea markets and other places where objects go once their initial life of servitude has come to an end. A single shoe is seemingly about to be launched into space from a mini ironing board. A cute blue toy hides in a shadowy container of sorts. Time and time again, the objects take a central position, just like in traditional still-lives. Strong shadows and reflecting surfaces repeatedly stress the overexposure by an artificial, harsh light. This is where the banal



and uncanny meet.

The carefully composed still lifes rarely support any narrative interpretation visitors may have. Moreover, the show as a whole seems to willingly defy a storyline, or even a chronological order. Halfway through the first floor, perhaps at the place where you

start wondering if there's any meaning developing here, a gilded book displays an aphorism about friendship usually reserved for bathroom tiles. It is one of the few instances where words appear and offers a prime example of the duo's sly humour.

Seemingly devoid of content and incapable of communicating, the objects have little else to do but strike a pose. Every now and then, the arrangements take on human forms, sometimes aided by a wig or glasses. But De Gruyter and Thys have not set out to humanise inanimate objects; rather, they obliterate their day-to-day functions and let them speak the language of images. The compositions steer clear of the attention-craving spectacle of much contemporary art, while tackling the deceptive simplicity of ordinary life.

Part of this series has already been on display at Kestnergesellschaft in Hannover (Germany) and Culturgest in Porto (Portugal), where the duo also incorporated some earlier video work. This work is absent from Mu.ZEE, possibly an intent to avoid even the slightest suggestion of a narrative.

The untitled photographs are hung up in a rigid pattern across three museum floors. The distances between all those purposely daft still lifes are always the same. Like film stock brought to a standstill. Repetition is the mother of the unspectacular.

Until 7 October | Mu.ZEE Romestraat 11, Ostend | [www.muzee.be](http://www.muzee.be)

## MUSIC FESTIVAL

### Jazz in 't park

When lofty white tents pop up among the trees in Ghent's Zuidpark, you know it's time for Jazz in 't park. The end-of-summer festival always manages to attract a diverse public, with its free entry, relaxed park setting and wide range of jazz styles. As usual, every night features a string of rousing concerts followed by Jazz on Film: documentaries, features and recorded sessions projected onto the big screen.

Thursday is all about fusion and features concerts by Jozef Dumoulin Trio, BackBack and Rackham, who melt together jazz with rock, pop, electro and even rockabilly. Come on Friday for "fresh jazz" by a talented new generation of Belgian artists, including Bram Weijters Quartet, Ifa y Xango and De Beren Gieren.

The biggest night, though, is Saturday, when "Jazz XL" welcomes to the stage bands with an extra-large stage presence (both figuratively and literally). These include Rêve d'Eléphant Orchestra, Brussels Youth Jazz Orchestra and the Belgium Jazz Big Band featuring Ghent's very own funky jazz *madame*, Lady Linn. The closing acts on Sunday switch back and forth between young up-and-coming "jazz kittens" like Pure Elastic Quintet and more experienced "jazz cats" like Christian Mendoza Group and the Dré Pallemmaerts Quartet. **Robyn Boyle**



6-9 September | Zuidpark, Ghent | [www.jazzintpark.be](http://www.jazzintpark.be)

## MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Laundry Day:** 15th edition of the giant electro party featuring more than 200 DJs on 13 stages

**SEP 1 noon-midnight at Nieuw Zuid, Ledeganckkaai**

[www.laundryday.be](http://www.laundryday.be)

### Roeselare

**TRAX Festival:** Free pop, rock and dance festival featuring Bed Rugs, De Jeugd Van Tegenwoordig, Intergalactic Lovers, more

**SEP 1 from 18.00 at GLS Site, Beversesteenweg 67**

[www.traxfestival.be](http://www.traxfestival.be)

## EXHIBITION

### Art@Europarl

The Parlamentarium opened its doors last autumn to much fanfare. As the European Parliament's official visitor centre, the place is brimming with state-of-the-art, interactive exhibits that illustrate the history, structure and workings of the institution. In keeping with the principles of the Parliament, the building is accessible to all, admission is free and all media are available in 23 languages. So far so good, but let's face it: the subject matter – legislative procedure at the EU level – isn't exactly creating a buzz. To add a splash of colour, the Parlamentarium is hosting this exhibition of contemporary art from all 27 member states. Their individual contributions show how modernity has been filtered through distinct national and regional traditions to form a collective oeuvre. **Georgio Valentino**



Until 31 October | Parlamentarium Wiertzstraat 60, Brussels

[www.tinyurl.com/art-europarl](http://www.tinyurl.com/art-europarl)

## MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Dalí: Hidden Faces:** More than 100 works by the Spanish surrealist painter, including etchings, drawings, rare books, magazines and vintage documents

**Until SEP 10 at Grote Markt 19**

[www.artcofrance.fr](http://www.artcofrance.fr)

### Hasselt

**Alcohol During the 19th century:** The evolution of biotechnology over the years, from traditional distillation methods to modern-day distilleries and its effect on jenever production

**Until NOV 4 at National Jenever Museum, Witte Nonnenstraat 19**

[www.jenevermuseum.be](http://www.jenevermuseum.be)



SPECIAL EVENT

Retropolis

Neo retro (read: vintage style and glamorous entertainment from the 1920s to '50s) continues to grow in popularity, thanks in part to the epic parties organised by the Ghent-based Radio Modern. This weekend is their first edition of Retropolis, a vintage lifestyle festival that promises to go down in history. The fun kicks off on Friday with a concert by English rockabilly star Si Cranstoun, plus a frivolous burlesque show by the pin-up dolls of Follie Follies. Saturday features more steamy performances by international starlets and music, from the swinging '20s and jiving '50s to the go-go dancing '60s, plus late-night retro clubbing to electro-swing with break dancers to boot! Retropolis also features a cosy Vintage Market, a place for young designers to show off their clothing and accessories and loads of vinyl. **RB**



31 August to 2 September | C-Mine, C-Mine 10, Genk  
► [www.retropolis.be](http://www.retropolis.be)

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

**The Gordel:** The last edition of the annual cycle and walking event in celebration of the Flemish identity in the municipalities surrounding Brussels. Loads of activities for the whole family  
**SEP 2 at starting points in Beersel, Dilbeek, Zaventem and Overijse**  
[www.degordel.be](http://www.degordel.be)

Sint-Niklaas

**Vredefeesten:** Festival for peace featuring the release of hundreds of specially shaped balloons, plus concerts on three stages featuring The Scabs, Gabriel Rios, Das Pop, more  
**AUG 31-SEP 2 at Grote Markt**  
► [www.vredefeesten.be](http://www.vredefeesten.be)

FOOD & DRINK

Belgian Beer Weekend

It's the event that beer lovers the world over look forward to every year. For the 14th time, the first weekend in September is wholly dedicated to Belgian beer, with brewers setting up shop on Brussels' Grote Markt. This edition features 51 breweries offering more than 350 beers to sample. Head to the back of the Beurs building to discover "Beer Street", a 50 metre-long bar with a range of specialty beers on tap. Inside the Beurs, find out all there is to know about beer and food pairing and taste gourmet appetisers that incorporate regional treats like Van Tricht cheese and Callebaut chocolate. **RB**



31 August to 2 September | Grote Markt & Beurs, Brussels  
► [www.belgianbrewers.be](http://www.belgianbrewers.be)

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

**De Zonsondergant (The Sunset):** Watch the sun set on the Scheldt River on the wooden stands built expressly for the purpose. Bring your own food for the grills that are ready and waiting and join in the community barbecue  
**Until 15 October at Zeeuwsekoornmarkt 5**  
► [www.zomervanantwerpen.be](http://www.zomervanantwerpen.be)

Brussels

**Longest Veggie Potluck:** Record attempt for the largest number of people ever to attend a vegetarian potluck, with table and chairs, recipe books, aperitifs, entertainment and more provided by non-profit organisation EVA Brussels. Just bring along a vegetarian dish and a few friends  
**AUG 30 14.00-20.00 at Sint-Gillis Voorplein**  
► [www.donderdagveggiedag.be](http://www.donderdagveggiedag.be)

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Katy Desmond

Cheese and Wine Café  
Lesbroussartstraat 52, Brussels

"Can you please lower your voices?" said the gruff voice of an elderly man leaning across to our table. The few tables at Cheese & Wine Cafe were packed tighter than usual that night to make space for a jazz trio crammed into the window display. I had picked the cafe after walking by it several times and hearing the siren call that sounds in my ears whenever I see exposed red brick, weather-worn wooden tables and crates stacked high with bottle after bottle of wine. Our group of three had managed to pack ourselves into the last corner table and were enjoying the music over some conversation and a fantastic 2002 Loire Valley red. But something was a bit off. It seemed that Gran had caught wind of her grandson's performance that evening and had invited a band of her friends to come out and see the show. So Cheese & Wine's already limited space was filled nearly entirely with geriatrics – not exactly the crowd one expects on Brussels' *bourgeois-bohemian* Lesbroussartstraat running between Flagey and Kasteleins. While few of them ordered anything, we had been studiously exploring the eclectic list of wines by the glass, from French staples to Belgian sparkling wines to Tanzania's only wine. We were warm, chatty and completely in the groove. Until we were shushed, of course. Nevertheless, the experience was so enjoyable, I have returned several times since, each of which



has been blissfully *opa*-free. Besides its general cosiness, Cheese & Wine's main attraction is the care with which they bring interesting choices to the table, with special attention given to local products, from wine to cheeses to *fois gras*. Every night a board sports shortlisted wines by the glass (€4-€7). This is backed up by a menu of over 100 wines from every corner of the earth where a grape will grow. As its name suggests, you can order plentiful plates of cheese, charcuterie and salad to accompany your wine (though bread is distributed parsimoniously, and refills come slowly). You can also have the same, buffet-style, at their Sunday brunch. Book ahead.

► [www.cheeseandwinecafe.be](http://www.cheeseandwinecafe.be)



BITE

Robyn Boyle

La Moulinière ★★☆☆

Even though most of the mussels we eat in Flanders aren't raised along the Flemish coast, there's something to be said for indulging in the molluscs there, as opposed to inland. And in Ostend, you are spoilt for choice. My dining companion and I choose a cute place with a view of the fisherman's quay and, farther down, the city's imposing train station.

We have chosen this particular address thanks to a tip from a friend who was keen to tell us La Moulinière prepares its mussels in no less than 40 different ways. 40? We're hard-pressed to come up with more than four: natural, white wine, garlic, cream.

Pierre Gilbert (our server) and Allisson Goossens (alone in the kitchen) opened this modern mussel eatery just over a year ago. But not before making the place over with a bright, cheery interior and a new name: It was originally called Red Pepper and was made famous a few years ago as a contestant on the popular TV series *Mijn Restaurant!*.

We have fun scanning all the creative preparations on the menu, which include spicy curry, goat cheese and bacon, Herve cheese with *Luikse siroop* (Liège syrup) and even a couple of French cheese options like Camembert and Roquefort. Our eyes fall upon the perfect menu option: two one-kilo pots of mussels and a big bottle (75cl) of Petrus blonde beer for €46.

Gilbert presents the Petrus at our table as one would do with a bottle of wine, pops the cork and pours the beer



out for us into two tall-stemmed glasses. The smooth, pleasantly bitter and slightly hoppy ale from Bavik (a West Flanders family brewery that's been around for more than four generations) lends itself perfectly to mussels.

We're amazed how quickly the mussels arrive, their shiny black shells piled high and half-open inside two big mussel pots. Next to this is a bowl of fries and side dishes of mayo and tangy mussel sauce.

My companion's pot is the most fragrant of the two as he's ordered the Ricard with garlic and cream. Ricard, the French anise-flavoured liqueur, gives the mussels a very distinct mild liquorice flavour, while the cream balances it out. Garlic, along with the typical mussel fixings of leek, onion and celery, gives the whole dish a lot of zing and crunch. The mussels themselves are steamed to perfection – whole and meaty, yet still tender and juicy. My choice, a random pick-of-the-draw, is equally delicious, albeit less outspoken. Kosak is a preparation that combines vodka, tomato, mushrooms and cream, plus the usual, afore-mentioned veg. The mushrooms give the dish a nice earthy touch. And while tomato adds a surprising twist to the mussels, it is perhaps not the most fitting combination. There's very little trace of the vodka, but it may be responsible for the mussels' succulence.

- 📍 Visserskaai 17-18, Ostend; 059.50.87.00
- 🕒 Fri-Wed 12.00-15.30 & 18.00-21.00
- 💶 €20
- 📖 Well located restaurant along the fisherman's quay with mussels prepared 40 different ways

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Proudly dialectical

Did you think that learning Dutch was difficult? Well, think again. Because the Flemish are now breathing new life into their many different and utterly incomprehensible local dialects. Or so says journalist Leen Vervaeke in the daily *De Morgen* (The Morning). "A growing number of singers revert to their own regional languages," she writes. "A growing number of films and TV series contain dialogues of spicy patois."

Great. Here I am trying to convince you to watch Flemish TV to help you learn the language. Little did I know that it would be of use only within a radius of three-and-a-half corn fields.

That, of course, is *overdreven*, exaggerated. It is true that the Flemish – from the beggar to the prime minister – are famously fond of their own village vernaculars (see Talking Dutch of 9 November, 14 September and 30 March 2011).

But, as Vervaeke points out, the revival is more than anything else a reaction to a trend of steady decline, a final gasp of air before being smothered by the hands of time. "The Flemish are beginning to cherish their dialects," she quotes linguist Reinhild Vandekerckhove as saying, "because they realise that they are in danger of extinction."

It is mostly the elderly who still practice the patois of old. The young, whose horizons in a generation's time have broadened from Steenokkerzeel to Shanghai, have all but forgotten. "With every old person that dies, a small dictionary is

lost," Vandekerckhove says. The result is a plethora of "nostalgic initiatives," writes Vervaeke, "so as to cling for a little longer to the language of grandma and grandpa." Examples are elections of the most beautiful word of a specific dialect (such as *tsiepmuile*, cry baby, in Gents, the dialect of Ghent), quiz shows on the radio ("guess what *gatbadgerke* means"), theatre plays, revised editions of Tintin comic books or even smartphone apps that allow the user to compare West-Vlaams, Limburgs, and

Brabants, among others. So in the end, for you it is good news (unless you are fluent now in nothing but coastal West Flemish). It means that you can continue watching the news every evening like you have so religiously been doing. It means that you can continue talking to the baker, from west to east, north and south. In my next edition, I'll be discussing the body language of the Flemish. Happy to hear your thoughts!

▶ [talkingdutch@hotmail.com](mailto:talkingdutch@hotmail.com)



The last word...

**Too much of a good thing**  
"Our mother didn't realise there were three of us in there. It was only at the birth when a second child came out all of a sudden, and then a third."  
The oldest triplets in Flanders – Julien, Antoinette and Petrus de Waele, last week celebrated their 80th birthday(s)

**Pleasure of leisure**  
"It's great to do nothing."  
Koen Wouters, TV presenter and half of the music duo Clouseau, brings a sabbatical year to an end and prepares to host the new season of *Belgium's Got Talent*

**Hero worship**  
"Like many of my generation, I had read the Hergé album *Destination Moon*. Neil Armstrong turned that fantasy into reality."  
Hours before the historic giant leap of Neil Armstrong, who died last weekend, Eddy Merckx had won his first Tour de France

**Grand larceny**  
"If we did that with the whole of the staff here, we'd be working for two days."  
Thieves broke into a warehouse in Antwerp last week and managed to get away with 24 tonnes of metal blocks, each weighing 50kg

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

You know that grain prices have increased, but that extra €15 for a loaf of bread is not such a big deal to you. But the rising prices have in fact affected us more than we know. Next week, we look at the whole chain of the grain economy, from farmers and sellers to consumers

Tourism

With its ancient tombs, daunting abandoned factories, commanding old castles and hidden church cellars, Open Monument Day is one of Flanders' most successful events. We flag up some highlights for this year

Science and Education

The Sea Life Centre in Blankenberge not only educates every Flemish schoolchild in the mysterious ways of the ocean, it also has an active rescue department that nurses sick animals until they can be returned to the sea. We go behind the scenes to meet the staff that keeps it all afloat