

VRIND indicators

Everything you need to know about Flanders is in one annual report

► 4

Snowing inside

A new climate room tests components and systems for the impact of extreme temperatures

► 6



Friendly face

Our interview with Peter Van den Begin, who dons a dress in the revival of *Debby en Nancy*

► 11



High fashion, low countries

Brussels is giving Antwerp a run for its money with a new fashion centre of excellence and a host of stylish events

► page 3



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Raoul De Keyser



© Christophe Vander Eecken

It's not often that a journalist, let alone a sports writer, goes on to work in the fine arts. Raoul De Keyser, who died last weekend at the age of 82, was an exception. In his 20s, De Keyser covered cycle races for the socialist newspaper *Volksgazet*. By his 30s, he was on his way to becoming one of the most influential abstract artists Flanders has ever known. De Keyser was born in Deinze, East Flanders, in 1930 and lived there his entire life. A late starter, it was only in 1963 that he took art lessons at the academy in Deinze, where his teacher happened to be Roger Raveel, then, as now, one of Belgium's most celebrated artists. De Keyser bloomed under the inspiration of Raveel, absorbing the master's talent for seeing the pictorial in every aspect of life and taking it into even more abstract realms. Fittingly for a sports fan, De Keyser always will be identified with chalk lines on a football field: an abstract pattern imposed by a single man on a field of grass, which might otherwise be a pasture, a meadow or a forest clearing. The motif was to recur

time and again in his work. His fame spread worldwide, with exhibitions in Venice, London, Chicago, Dublin, the MoMa in New York and Documenta in Kassel, Germany, to name a few. In 2006, a retrospective was held in the Fine Arts Museum in Brussels. The following year, De Keyser was awarded the Flemish Culture Prize, and last year his work was the subject of a major exhibition in the Loketten gallery of the Flemish parliament. "He was one of our most exceptional and honest artists," said culture minister Joke Schauvliege on the announcement of his death. "His work continues to inspire many young artists." Art guru Jan Hoet called him "one of the best painters of the last 50 years". De Keyser himself had no illusions about his talent. In an interview with the VRT, he once said: "There's a difference between a painter and an artist, do you know what it is? A painter brings some colour to things. An artist brings more contemplation."

News in brief

A Flemish diplomat whose 25-year career took him to posts in Tokyo, Lisbon, New York, Delhi and Copenhagen has been **accused of espionage**. The man, who comes from Bruges, was suspended a year ago and is currently the subject of an investigation by the local prosecutor's office. According to state security, the man has regular contact with agents of the Russian government.

The University of Leuven has risen from 67th to 58th place in the highly regarded *Times Higher Education rankings of world universities*, released last week. Ghent University broke into the top 100 at 93, while the University of Antwerp enters the lists at 192. The list is headed by the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, with Stanford and Oxford sharing second place. Leuven scored extremely high on income from research (99.7%) and did well on citations – the number of times its research is cited by others.

A man who was accused of **shooting his girlfriend in the head** in Hasselt but was released from prison because of a procedural error (*news, last week*) has been located and arrested on separate charges of abuse and assault brought by his victim.

Poet and novelist Ivo Michiels, considered one of the leading exponents of experimental fiction in Flanders, **has died at his home in France** at the age of 89. Michiels, born Henri Paul René Ceuppens, published 35 books, the last of them, 2011's *Mag ik spreken?* (*May I Speak?*) a reworking of his second experimental novel, *Journal Brut*, from 1958. During his career, Michiels received many awards, including the triennial prize of the Flemish Community in 1977 and the American Award this year. His 1963 novel *Het boek alfa* was translated into English under the title *Book Alpha*.

The **chief of police in Mechelen** has taken an indefinite vacation after he accidentally sent an email intended only for mayor Bart Somers to the press. Yves Bogaerts was reporting a police alcohol check in which one of the candidates in the coming elections had a positive breath test after running through a red light. Bogaerts' fate will now be decided by federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet.

Police investigating the **murder of an Indian woman** and her three children in Etterbeek (*news, last week*) are still looking for Alam Khorshed, 29, an asylum-seeker from Bangladesh, who works with the victim's husband in a Brussels restaurant. Khorshed has been missing since the killings. Police say he was captured by video cameras in the vicinity of the family's home on the weekend of the murders.

Subsidies of higher education in Flanders do not achieve the goal of helping young people from **lower-income families attend university**, according to Ides Nicaise, an economist at the Higher Labour Institute of the University of Leuven. While studying in Belgium is considerably cheaper than in neighbouring countries, Nicaise said, "we notice that it is still young people from better-off families who come through into higher education. In that sense, the policy of keeping tuition costs low is an unintended subsidy for richer families."

A Flemish government policy that gives **priority in the sale of homes and building land** to buyers who can demonstrate a connection with the local area has been described as "an abridgement of basic freedoms" by the advocate-general of the European Court of Justice. The policy, which operates in 69 municipalities mainly around the language border, was taken to the Constitutional Court by the union of owners and

co-owners, along with Eric Libert, a French-speaking alderman from Sint-Genesius-Rode, and Christian Van Eyken, the only French-speaking member of the Flemish parliament. The Constitutional Court referred the question to the ECJ for an opinion. The advocate-general's opinion is not binding on the full-court's ruling, though it is followed in a majority of cases.

Brussels' **new parking policy is a tax on motorists**, according to motoring organisation Touring. Brussels recently introduced paid parking around Bruparck and the Koning Boudewijn Stadium, where many Flemish commuters leave their cars before continuing by public transport into the city. Parking now costs €7 for a maximum of three hours. "This is too crazy for words," a Touring spokesman said. "While everyone is begging for more park-and-ride facilities, Brussels is working against them. The result will be that people will just drive on into the city instead of switching over to public transport."

Genk in Limburg province is the **"smartest city in Belgium"**, according to the federal technology industry federation Agoria. The federation looked at five main indicators: energy consumption, the volume of waste produced, use of information technology, public space and mobility. Genk, with 98 points from a possible 125, was followed by Aalst and Beringen.

This Thursday, 11 October, the socialist rail union will hand out flyers and **pass through trains with a petition** calling for a new structure for the rail authority NMBS, better job mobility for employees and better handling of the authority's €4 billion debt. Last week's strike was declared a success by unions, although road traffic was not severely disrupted, and many people chose to work from home for the day.

Alan Hope

FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.



The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope
AGENDA EDITOR Robyn Boyle
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Sarah Crew, Katy Desmond, Marie Dumont, Andy Fumiere, Nicholas Hirst, Tamara Gausi, Toon Lambrechts, Mark Latham, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Senne Starckx, Georgio Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton
GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore
PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
tel 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22
editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING
Evelyne Fregonese
02 373 83 57
advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Pressing questions

One week until the local elections, and daily newspaper *De Standaard* is celebrating with a series that throws 10 personal questions at candidates across Flanders. The template-interview is a loose version of what is known as the Proust Questionnaire, so called because the ailing French author (*pictured*) answered a list of questions in an English "confession album" in 1890 (such lists were very popular in late Victorian England).

The idea, apparently, is to reveal hidden depths of the personality through the answers to quirky questions like "what is your favourite virtue"? (Proust replied: "The need to be caressed and spoiled".) The questions of *De Standaard* are rather less intense but quirky enough. They include: What was the most beautiful moment of your life? What's your favourite place in [local municipality where the subject is standing for



election]? What talent do you wish you had? Some examples:

What is your favourite dish? Spaghetti. (Mon Fillet, Open VLD, Haacht)
All kinds of vegetable dishes seasoned with delicious herbs. Mmm ... seasonal vegetables grown here in the area, with respect for nature and for the farmer. (Denise Puttaert, Groen, Mortsel)

What's your hobby? Yoga...alternative medicine, studying herbs and plants. (Lieve Eyskens, SPA, Ranst)
Cooking great meals for friends and family and supporting the basketball club in Keerbergen. (Dominick Vansevenant, N-VA, Keerbergen)
Now and then, when I have time, I go for a beer in Tremelo. (Benoit De Swert, SPA/Groen, Tremelo-Baal)

What do you want to do at least once in your life? A parachute jump. (Piet Penneman, Open VLD, Wachtebeke)
Cross the Atlantic to the US and Canada, but also discover the wonderful nature of European countries, like Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland. (Kurt Van Noten, Vlaams Belang, Ekeren)
Nothing special, I'm already content. (Marik Cooreman, CD&V, Moerbeke-Waas)

Mad about fashion

The new Mode and Design will bring together Brussels' fashion agencies in one fabulous place

Katrien Lindemans

With Mode and Design – also known as MAD – Brussels has its very own centre of expertise for all things fashion and design. In 2015, MAD will move to a renovated building amid the capital's Dansaertstraat fashion district. The centre is awaiting planning permission, but behind the scenes, director Alexandra Lambert and her team are already hard at work

Much like this year's food celebration Brusselicious, the city of Brussels devoted a year to fashion and design in 2006, with Mode Design Brussels. "Once the event was over, we didn't want to see our efforts go to waste," says Lambert, who worked at that time with Brussels Export. "We felt local fashion and design should be more than tourism. That's how the idea grew for an organisation devoted to supporting the creative sectors of fashion and design, and putting them on the international map." One year later, Lambert had put together a dossier explaining how a fashion and design centre could be beneficial to the area. She filed it with the Brussels-Capital Region, and eventually not just the region, but Europe and the city of Brussels contributed to a start-up fund of nearly €7 million.

But naturally, there were conditions. "We had to find a building in the right area and prove that our project would integrate with the area," explains Lambert. "The centre needed to be more than a trendy place and had to interact with the fragile area around the canal."

Two years later, the right building (formerly occupied by a Danish company that specialised in water meters) was found and bought

on the Nieuwe Graanmarkt. A competition was held to renovate the building, and honours went to design agency V+ and architects Rotor, both based in Brussels. "They are renowned for renovations based on actual structures, rather than knocking everything down." Works will start at the end of 2013. Spread over 3,000 square metres, MAD will have a large exhibition space, a visitor centre, library, gift shop, conference room, cafeteria and 500 square metres dedicated to international residences.

The opening of the centre may seem a long way off, but MAD has been active for a while – the non-profit organisation was created at the end of 2010 as Brussels Fashion and Design Centre. It was renamed MAD Brussels last March and officially opened in the Dansaert Centre on Aalststraat, just a few minutes' walk from their eventual permanent home.

Fertile ground

"With MAD, we want to integrate all the existing structures in Brussels that deal with fashion and design," says Lambert. "They all deliver great work but only operate vertically. Modo Brussels, for instance, represents Brussels fashion designers, and the Brussels Invest and Export agency deals with the economic development of the region. MAD wants to offer a series of integrated services for everything fashion- and design-related."

There are a few action points in particular, including supporting economic growth and working closely with schools to support designers of the future. MAD will "organise business seminars to help combine the creative and economic aspects of the sector," says Lambert. "We will also work with the Brussels employment



Modo Parours mixes art and fashion in the capital this month

agency Actiris on job opportunities in the industry."

MAD "wants to be there for all the professionals in the sector too," she emphasises: "designers, journalists, production directors and so on. And to put Brussels on the larger fashion map, we'll invite international artists to stay at our residence halls and develop similar interactions with other fashion and design centres."

The idea of designers in residence isn't reserved for internationals, though: In a second building called Potier (in Gierstraat), MAD is already inviting graduates from local art schools for three-month stays. "They will have to do something interactive with the area, as agreed in our initial dossier," says Lambert.

MAD's place in the Dansaert Centre, a creative business centre, puts them next to the Modo Brussels team. Modo Brussels will join MAD in the new building when the time comes "and continue their excellent work," says Lambert. "Of course there will be interaction with other organisations and cities as well. But as a lot of our subsidies come from Brussels, we'll mainly engage with this city and its own creativity. It's got its own particular vibe, different from anywhere else. I would say that the multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism of our city results in a creativity without roots, one without references. Brussels is very fertile ground for artists."

► www.madbrussels.be

MAD FOR MORE?

The fashion fun continues this autumn with **Brussels Fashion Days** from 19 to 21 October: Fashion shows, pop-up stores, makeover sessions and much more

► www.brusselsfashiondays.be

Modo Sales takes place from 2 to 3 November: Rummage through the stock leftovers of Brussels designers and score some top creations at (very) affordable prices

► www.modobrussels.be

MODO PARCOURS FASHION TRAIL

To see the very best of Brussels and Belgian fashion, join the masses from 12 to 14 October for the 12th edition of Modo Parours, an annual free fashion trail through the capital. Seventy-five shops and galleries will host installations by Belgian fashion designers.

"Some of the boutiques or businesses are quite exclusive, which makes the Parours the perfect opportunity to discover the place and a fashion designer at the same time," says Modo coordinator Elke Timmerman.

Modo Parours is the largest fashion event of its kind in Brussels or Flanders, and this year, for the first time, it will be all Belgian, with the theme Fashionism. "We've asked designers to showcase their true fashion identity," says Timmerman. The idea was inspired by the economic crisis and the recent bankruptcies of great local



© Javier Barcala

talent such as milliner Christophe Coppens and designer Luc Duchène. The list of participating designers



and shops is a real treat for fashionistas; Modo Parours showcases their latest collections as well as boasts clever window displays and fashion-as-art installations. Fancy checking out Bruno Pieters at Haleluja, Raf Simons at Stijl or Jean-Paul Lespagnard at Zsenne Art Lab? There are some lesser-known names, too. Take the new store Summer Ends (Rollebeekstraat 43), for instance. It's been open

only two weeks and will feature the work of accessory designers Geoffrey Massure and Kristof Buntinx. The former designs jewellery made from hair, the latter will present a collection of ties and scarves. Buntinx used pictures he drew during an emotionally difficult period in 2007, which he manipulated digitally and printed on silk (pictured left).

► www.modobrussels.be

High Fashion Low Countries

Every year, the Modo Parours plays host to an exhibition as well. This year, in another first for the event, the exhibition is in collaboration with a guest country. The winningly titled *High Fashion Low Countries* is the brainchild of the Dutch embassy in Brussels and is staged

in the building that is the future home of MAD Brussels at Nieuwe Graanmarkt 10. "Belgium and the Netherlands have never worked together on a fashion project, but we have lots in common," says curator Javier Barcala.

Three designers in each country were asked to work around the theme of sustainable fashion. "We've asked them to create pieces made with a technique they haven't used before, and in collaboration with artisans from their area." The exhibition (pictured far left) has travelled from Amsterdam to Antwerp and will end in Brussels. "We're not sure what will happen next," Barcala says, "but there is talk about it travelling to London or New York." High Fashion Low Countries runs longer than the parours, until 26 October.

► www.highfashionlowcountries.com

New VRIND reports shows economic bounce-back

Flanders' annual list of indicators ranges from home-ownership to level of happiness

Alan Hope

An overwhelming majority of people in Flanders are "happy" or even "very happy" with their lives; four out of 10 people never feel unsafe, and two-thirds are perfectly content with public transport – although 72% drive their car to work.

Those are some of the conclusions of this year's edition of VRIND, the annual Flemish regional indicators, released last week by the government of Flanders. A hefty volume of some 450 pages, it contains details on 700 different indicators ranging from the economy to personal circumstances.

Compiled from data gathered last year, VRIND shows that Flanders is one of the most prosperous regions of Europe, with per capita value added of €31,700 compared to an average of €25,200 in the EU as a whole. The economy has grown by 20% since 2000, and the setback of 2009 at the start of the economic



Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters discusses the VRIND report last week

crisis has now been neutralised. Minister-president Kris Peeters, presenting the report, promised that 2012 would be a difficult year, with nil growth or even a slight negative growth of 0.1%. Growth of 0.7% or

0.8% is forecast for 2013, rising to 1.9% a year for 2014 to 2017. The VRIND report also offers a portrait of the average Fleming: • 86% of people are happy to very happy with their living situation

- Half of the population takes part in sport "now and then", 40% spends at least 20 minutes a week on "intense physical activity"
- Only 9.1% of young people leave school with only a secondary diploma, the second-lowest figure in Europe after the Netherlands
- Owners spend an average of 12% of the household income on accommodation, compared to 27% for tenants. Flanders has a high home-ownership level: 77:23, with 6% of tenants in social housing
- Two out of three Flemings are pleased with the state of public transport, and 40% are satisfied with the state of cycle paths. But when it comes to travelling to work, 72% go by car, 11% cycle and fewer than one in 10 uses public transport.

Download the full VRIND report or selected chapters from the website

► www.tinyurl.com/VRIND2012

Youth protest at new fines

A proposal to extend the scope of the local fines known as GAS has met with opposition from young people. The federal government intends to pass a measure that would increase the sums municipalities can fine, to €350 for adults and €175 for young people aged 16 to 18. The legislation would also lower the age at which the fines could be applied, from 16 to 14 years.

GAS fines are applicable in cases of public nuisance and cover a wide variety of offences, determined by local councils and differing from town to town. Hasselt, according to the league for human rights, leads the field, with 164 offences on the books. These range from making mortar in a cemetery other than in a bucket to throwing confetti picked up after a carnival procession to dragging boxes in the street instead of carrying them.

The Flemish Youth Council and the scout organisation Chiro both criticised the plan to lower the ages for fines. A spokesman for Chiro said that the proposal treated children like a societal problem rather than as members of society. The measure "looks only at punishment and not at the causes of problems," said Katrien Crispeyn of the Youth Council.

That reaction, according to Flemish minister for youth Pascal Smet, is "a positive one", and he stressed that the Flemish government would encourage municipalities to apply the GAS laws "in a responsible and youth-friendly manner".

Brussels launches cycle awareness campaign

The Brussels-Capital Region has launched a new campaign to raise awareness among motorists about cyclists on the road. The campaign, Maak plaats voor fietsers! (Make room for cyclists!), features a car parked on a cycle path as bicycles pile up behind.

That central image, said the region's mobility minister, Bruno De Lille, "says it all. When the infrastructure for cyclists is not respected, that's when they are forced into dangerous manoeuvres, and that's when accidents happen." The campaign is part of the region's road safety plan, which aims to reduce the number of accidents by half in the next eight years.

At the same time, Brussels last week opened a new depot for stolen and recovered bicycles on Leuvensesteenweg. In time, the depot will be the single point for all stolen and recovered bicycles in the region. "Anyone who's had a



bike stolen knows the story," said De Lille. "Your search for your bike takes you round six police zones. But that's now a thing of the past." Brussels, meanwhile, is now included on Flanders' website for recovered stolen bicycles.

► www.gevondenfietsen.be

New law for Ghent sex workers

"We are not against prostitution," surprised BBC viewers heard last week from Ghent mayor Daniël Termont, interviewed about his council's new rules on sex workers in storefront windows. In Ghent's red-light district, as in many other cities, prostitutes sit in windows to attract potential clients. According to the new law in Ghent, women must wear something in addition to lingerie and may not dance or make suggestive gestures. "Prostitution has a social value, and it's necessary in a city like Ghent," Termont told the BBC World Service. He stressed that the measures were intended to reduce the nuisance caused by customers in the red-light district, rather than to victimise the workers.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

22,945

tickets sold by SMS for De Lijn buses and trams on 4 October, the day after the national rail strike, a record for the year

€22,500

average net income per resident of Sint-Martens-Latem in East Flanders, the highest in the country, according to figures from the federal government

21%

of the party lists in Flanders for the municipal elections are led by a woman candidate. The number of female mayors is expected to go up from 31 to 40 after the election

€21,300

average annual salary of a Flemish farmer, 25% less than five years ago and half of the average salary of a worker in another sector, according to farmers union Boerenbond

5,773

Dutch students enrolled in Flemish universities for the new academic year, compared to 2,418 Flemish students studying in the Netherlands. The cost of the net deficit, according to two members of the Flemish parliament, is €50 million a year

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

10 things to watch out for on election night

1. Local elections are, above all, local. The general trends journalists report may mean nothing with respect to the town you live in, where popular candidates can make all the difference.

2. Antwerp. N-VA's Bart De Wever seems set for a landslide win, but will it really happen? Sitting socialist mayor Patrick Janssens lags behind but may benefit from strategic voting. In short: All voters who do not want the nationalist De Wever as mayor may rally around Janssens.

3. The Christian-democrat CD&V calls itself the people's party because of its strong grass roots support. Can it hold on to this status? Or will N-VA, whose local candidates lack the stature of De Wever, become the new people's party?

4. Socialist SPA is especially strong in cities, like Antwerp, Ghent, Ostend, Hasselt and Leuven. Repeating the spectacular 2006 results seems impossible, but just how red will these cities remain?

5. How big is the uppercut for Open VLD, whose voters in the last election tended to turn their backs in favour of N-VA? What does this mean for Open VLD president Alexander De Croo, who lacks credibility not just with voters but also within his own ranks? And what about Annemie Turtelboom: She is one of the few popular liberals left, but in Antwerp, she is fighting a war she cannot win.

6. Right-wing Vlaams Belang once attracted the attention of international media. Now it could well be wiped out, as De Wever lures away its voters, and the party desperately retreats to the xenophobic rhetoric of its olden days.

7. Wouter Van Besien and Meyrem Almaci have revived the greens to become relevant once more. Can Groen cash in on this, in Antwerp and beyond?

8. Every election holds a surprise. Which of the above hypotheses will turn out to be completely wrong?

9. It is not about the percentages; coalitions are what matter. Votes mean nothing if a party does not find a partner with a majority between them in the town council.

10. The aftermath. According to Bart De Wever, any Flemish dynamic is hampered at the federal level. He wants change, not just in Antwerp, but also in Brussels. The democratic revolt, he calls this. His eyes are set on the 2014 federal elections, but to win those he needs to win the local vote first. Will he? And if he does, how nervous will this make all the other parties, including the French speakers?

On the fringes

Flanders leads an EU conference on land management in tricky rural-urban border areas

Mark Latham

Together with the neighbouring North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany and the Netherlands, Flanders lies in one of the most densely populated parts of Europe, and the high concentration of inhabitants puts especially high demands on land use. The challenges of managing land use and development on the fringes of cities and towns will come under the spotlight at a conference being held in Brussels this week.

The conference is being organised by the Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe (Vleva), the Flemish farmers' union Boerenbond, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Flemish Land Agency, the Association of Flemish Provinces, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities and the provinces of Antwerp, East Flanders and West Flanders. The event will be attended by representatives of the Purple network, which brings together 16 regions from across the EU that are affected by the urbanisation of the countryside.

From a planning point of view, the problems being addressed can be seen particularly on the borders of cities and towns, where demand for housing competes with commercial, recreational, agricultural and environmental considerations. The conference, "Implementing Rural-Urban Partnerships" aims to examine ways in which the planning of these so-called peri-urban areas can be improved throughout Europe and includes a presentation of Flemish best practices.

"Urbanisation has a spatial component that is putting increased pressure on open spaces and on the environment," says Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, responsible for both agriculture



Jacek Cisko's photo of the Silesion region of Poland won the Purple photography contest

and rural policies. "In Flanders, there is a persistent pressure of suburbanisation; as a consequence, rural areas are becoming more urbanised. That means a reduction of open space."

Green belt

Flanders has a mixed record when it comes to the planning of land use around its urban developments. The Zoniënwood, to the south-east of Brussels, is one of the world's most heavily protected city green belts. But other conurbations in Flanders suffer from ugly urban sprawl, typically brought about through unchecked ribbon development that leads to fragmentation of the countryside.

This unintentional urbanisation of the Flemish countryside has been blamed by some on a lack of communication and co-operation between neighbouring local authorities. It is hoped that better co-ordination of development policies between municipalities as well as with rural development

agencies and the Flemish farmers' organisation will improve the situation in the coming years.

This new more co-operative approach has recently been successfully trialled by 18 municipalities in the Westhoek area of West Flanders, where a multi-agency forum has been created in which development issues can be debated and development strategies formulated.

One of the projects that will be highlighted at the conference is an attempt by the Flemish Land Agency to connect a number of green spaces in the *Vlaamse rand*, or the ring of Flemish municipalities around Brussels. The project in the communes of Wezembeek-Oppem, Kraainem and Zaventem aims, among other things, to build the missing links of a bicycle lane between Leuven and Brussels. It also aims to improve access to various streams running through the three communes.

Peeters says that this "territorial cohesion" can be an inroad to



The skyline of Ghent against a natural boundary

helping both cities and surrounding villages "make the most of their strengths. In addition, it can help them to collaborate in response to common challenges."

Urban/rural co-dependence

The Flemish government's coalition agreement already calls for the protection of the region's remaining open spaces to be improved. Policies in this field include a push to make more land available for public allotments; the promotion of urban agriculture projects; the building of forest in or close to urban areas and encouraging the use of brownfield sites for development.

"There are many aspects to the relationship between cities and the countryside," notes Peeters. "Urban areas are the main employment centres for people living in rural areas. Services, education and entertainment are also largely focused on cities. Conversely, city dwellers depend on the surrounding

countryside for rest and relaxation." So mutually beneficial approaches are imperative for all parties.

The Flemish region, says Peeters, should be focusing on multi-functional approaches wherever possible. He points to community gardens in densely populated areas, where people can not only make efficient use of available ground but also socialise.

The conference, which is being held as part of the Open Days: the 10th European Week of Regions and Cities, will also see the announcement of the winners of a photography competition that was organised by Purple to coincide with the event. About 300 shots by photographers from across Europe were submitted on the urban-rural theme, and the best 30 will be on display at the conference. Many of the images highlight the incongruity of factories or shopping centres built close to idyllic-looking farms.

► www.tinyurl.com/ruralurbanbond

Flemish doctors and celebrities support BRA Day

About 9,000 women in Belgium are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. Early detection is crucial, but so is the after care. October is breast cancer month, and, to help raise awareness about breast reconstruction, Flanders is joining Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day on 17 October. BRA Day was first organised last year in Canada and has since gone global.

Leading physicians will be present in hospitals in Bruges, Brussels, Genk, Ghent and Leuven, giving seminars and information sessions. The day is sponsored in Flanders by the Beautiful ABC Foundation, founded by Ghent University Hospital surgeon Phillip Blondeel, an internationally recognised



TV actresses, journalists and other Flemish notables have lent their names to the BRA Day cause. Marie-Paule Meert is pictured centre, with her hands clasped

pioneer in breast reconstruction, and one of his former patients, Annette Porter. The pair want to give patients as much information as possible to enable them to make the right choices about breast reconstruction.

Fifteen Flemish celebrities are supporting BRA Day as well, and the initiative also has two patrons, including Marie-Paule Meert. The 64-year-old former spokesperson for retired prime minister Wilfried Martens was diagnosed with breast cancer a couple of years ago and is now recovering.

"It's important to talk about it, as every year more and young women get the bad news," Meert says. "The health system works well, but there are certain things that need

improvement: communication about early detection, for instance, and definitely the after care."

Breast reconstruction, she says, "is a very intense operation. It's not just about aesthetics, rather it's a vital part of the healing process, the ability to feel good again. The need for such an operation is also different from patient to patient." She also knows how important every bit of information can be. "Breast reconstruction is evolving fast, and there are solutions out there for every single patient. The day I'm able to have such an operation, I want to undergo it in the best possible circumstances." **Katrien Lindemans**

► www.bra-day.com/events.php

Fair wind or foul

Turbine components are put to the test in extreme conditions at a new high-tech climatic chamber in Antwerp

Andy Furniere

In the Port of Antwerp, researchers are set to test the reliability of wind turbine components by simulating extreme weather conditions in the largest climatic chamber in Europe. The chamber is the flagship of the Offshore Wind Infrastructure Application Lab (OWI-Lab), constructed by the Belgian tech industry's knowledge centre Sirris.

The government of Flanders has made offshore wind energy a cornerstone sector by financing the lion's share of this project and subsidising others such as the Flanders Wind Farm feasibility study (see sidebar).

When the chamber officially opened last week, the cold wave that greeted visitors made it feel like a refrigerator – albeit one that measures 8x10 metres. But although the temperature inside can drop to 60°C below zero, it can also climb up to a scorching 60° above zero within one hour.

“We test the durability of wind turbine components of up to 150 tons, such as gear boxes, that could be installed offshore or at remote locations with extreme temperatures,” explains project leader Pieter Jan Jordaens. In the near future, humidity tests will also be possible. Jordaens: “We want to see it snow in the climate chamber.”

Testing the outdoors from the inside

Hostile climate and weather conditions pose challenges for both the machines and the maintenance teams. If repair works have to be postponed because of the weather, this affects the profitability of the turbines. Examples of locations with harsh weather are the north of Finland, where wind turbines operate at minus 40°, and the desert of India, where temperatures can climb up to 50°. These largely uninhabited areas have plenty of space for wind turbines.

The OWI-Lab provides both large and small businesses rare testing facilities to ensure the viability of their products and reduce the time needed for development. Annually, between 30 and 40 test projects will be performed here. Depending on the size of the components, tests take from one day to two weeks.



OWI-Lab project leader Pieter Jan Jordaens (right) hopes to one day see it snow in the climate test chamber



The OWI-Lab's Climate Test Chamber

Although the climatic chamber is primarily intended for the wind energy sector, other industries can also benefit from its technology – such as the aerospace industry.

With the inauguration of the climatic chamber, the activity at the OWI-Lab has really taken off. It was initiated at the beginning

of the year, through a cooperation between leading companies in the Belgian wind energy sector (3E, GeoSea-DEME, ZF Wind Power and CG Power Systems) in close collaboration with Agoria – the federation for the Belgian technology industry – and Generaties, the industrial innovation platform for renewable energy technologies in Flanders. The Free University of Brussels (VUB) is responsible for academic research on the project, while keeping in touch with other local universities.

The OWI-Lab has a €5.5 million annual budget to invest in test and monitoring infrastructure that supports wind power R&D throughout the industrial value chain. Apart from the climatic chamber, the OWI-Lab has also invested in Flidar, an offshore meteorological station designed for marine renewable energy technologies such as offshore wind, wave and tidal power. Flidar can operate autonomously for more than six months in demanding off-shore environments. Other focuses are on remote measurement and monitoring systems, plus tools for the efficient operation and maintenance of the wind turbines.

View from the top

The OWI-Lab wants to function as a platform that stimulates both local

and European research projects by bringing companies and research partners together. Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters spoke at the official launch of the OWI-Lab and took a few minutes to talk to *Flanders Today*.

The government of Flanders is contributing €4.8 million of the OWI-Lab's total budget of €5.5 million. Why has Flanders put its weight behind this project?

Kris Peeters: Wind energy is key in Flanders' New Industrial Policy and for the energy sector of the 21st century in general. We especially back partnerships between large groups of enterprises and knowledge centres, which have the most chance of leading to innovation. With more than 20 companies and knowledge institutions involved in the users' committee, the OWI-Lab is a prime example. As 150 companies in Flanders are now estimated to be active in the wind-energy value chain, our investment will prove its worth both in the short and long term.

What are the benefits of wind energy?

The advantages are ecological as well as economical. Wind energy does not emit CO₂ and is good for our balance of payments as we do not need to import any gas. According to Agoria, the wind energy sector will account for about 9,000 new jobs in Flanders by 2020. As Belgium also pledged to generate 13% of its energy supplies from renewable energy sources by that time, wind energy plays a crucial role.

Does Flanders focus on off-shore wind energy specifically?

Yes, because one-third of our wind energy in the near future should be generated by off-shore wind farms, and Flanders has many international pioneers in this sector. We have to maintain this vanguard position of our enterprises and research centres while the industry is still maturing. In the 1980s, Flanders had a similar reputation in on-shore wind energy but failed to consolidate this position. We are making sure history does not repeat itself.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking ► Dexia

Belgo-French bank Dexia has sold its Turkish Denizbank affiliate to the Russian Sberbank for some €3 billion, somewhat more than initially expected. The move releases some €21 billion in risk guarantees underwritten by the Belgian and French authorities.

Chemicals ► Solvay

Plastics and chemicals group Solvay has inaugurated a €15 million rare earth recycling unit in Saint-Fons, France. The facility specialises in the processing of used energy-saving lightbulbs.

Energy ► Belwind

Supermarket chain Colruyt has become the majority shareholder of the Belwind offshore wind farm, operator of 55 windmills, by acquiring the 20.7% held by Dutch investment group SHV.

Food ► Picard

French frozen food group Picard plans to open 60 stores in Belgium over the next five years. The first two outlets will open in the Brussels area later this year, while further stores are slated for Antwerp and Ghent in early 2013. Picard considered taking over the 110 outlets of the O'Cool chain but has dropped the idea because of the unsuitable floor plan of the stores.

Horeca

► Lunch Garden

Self-service restaurant Lunch Garden has signed an agreement with oil products distributor Total to take over the Cafe Bonjour food outlets located in petrol stations. The first sites will open in Jabbeke, Tessenderlo and Waarloos.

Hotels ► Conrad

The Brussels landmark Conrad Hotel is being sold to the German Steigenberger group. The 269-room, five-star Conrad, built 20 years ago, will undergo renovations by the new operators.

Pharmaceuticals

► Janssen

Janssen Pharmaceutica, based in Beerse, Antwerp province, has inaugurated a €49 million distribution centre in La Louvière, Wallonia. The new 21,500 square-metre facility allows the firm to centralise output of its production units in Belgium, Italy and Switzerland.

Supermarkets

► Colruyt

Colruyt has signed an agreement with the Roelandt group to build a bakery facility in Lokeren, East Flanders. The new facility, to open in 2014, will supply the company's stores.

THE BIG PICTURE

The OWI-Lab is part of the Flemish strategy covering innovation in wind energy. Other initiatives launched recently are Flanders Wind Farm, OptiWind and HighWind.

Flanders Wind Farm A feasibility study is analysing the possibility of constructing a test site for new types of off-shore wind farms off the Belgian coast. The goal is to test new foundations and turbines off shore before they become commercially available. Study results are expected by the beginning of next year. “There is a huge demand for such a site among companies,” according to Freek Couttenier, the project coordinator of Agoria, “as this is the time of the first generation of true off-shore wind turbines. Earlier, on-shore wind turbines were just adapted as much as

possible to off-shore conditions.”

OptiWind This strategic research project of four years, supported by the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology (IWT), unites universities and enterprises to optimise serviceability of the next generation of off-shore wind turbines. “For example, we stimulate innovations of wind turbine components, like segmented blades,” says Stefan Milis of Sirris, “because, as wind turbines become bigger, the blades are more difficult to transport.”

HighWind A new robot makes the installation of off-shore wind turbines less weather dependent.

Supermarkets accused of price-fixing

Consumers paid too much for five years for cleaning and personal care products

Alan Hope

Seven supermarket chains could be facing massive fines for price-fixing, according to the results of a five-year investigation by federal competition authorities. The complaint also covers 11 suppliers of skincare and cleaning products alleged to be involved in the scheme. Authorities have not revealed the names of the chains, but Delhaize, Carrefour and Colruyt have all admitted to the press that they were among the targets of the inquiry. The three companies said they have received the dossier from the competition authorities and are preparing their responses for the competition council, which will decide on sanctions, if any.

The complaint alleges that suppliers and supermarkets conspired to keep prices for a wide range of products high, over the period 2002 to 2007. The products include toothpaste, shower gel, toilet paper, shaving foam and washing powder, as well as other cleaning products.

The maximum fines for breaches of competition law are in principle hefty: up to 10% of the worldwide sales of the company in the year in question – in this case 2007. As some of the suppliers are brand names manufactured by some of the world's largest consumer goods companies, and the three



supermarkets had a combined global turnover that year of more than €100 billion, the potential fines could be enormous.

Historically, however, fines in Belgium are lower than they could be. The record is currently held by Belgacom, with a fine of €66.3

million in 2009, when its mobile subsidiary Proximus was found guilty of abuse of a dominant position. Procter & Gamble and

Unilever were fined €315 million by EU competition authorities in 2011 for price-fixing of washing powder in eight EU countries, including Belgium. A third company in that case, Henkel, was given immunity from prosecution in return for information on price-fixing practices, which led to the current investigation.

The companies involved will now prepare a defence against the allegations. Given the number of companies involved and the complexity of the investigation, the first hearing is not likely to take place until next year.

In any case, consumers who paid too much for years will not be compensated, said Ivo Mechels of the consumer rights organisation Test-Aankoop. The organisation repeated calls for Belgium to introduce the right – already existing in 14 EU member states – of consumers to join in a class action suit against companies that break competition laws.

While members of the public may no longer have evidence of the payment of inflated prices, the supermarkets do, thanks to the use of loyalty cards, and the competition authorities could oblige them to reveal it. “Fines do nothing for the customer,” Mechels said.

Source of river pollution discovered

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has filed a legal complaint against Cosucra in the Hainaut province of Wallonia, which has been found to be the origin of the pollution of the Scheldt River that killed up to 10 tonnes of fish last month. Cosucra produces starch and dietary fibre extracted from organic materials.

Earlier, the Walloon environment minister Philippe Henry had denied that Cosucra was involved and claimed his own inspectors had found abnormally low oxygen levels in river water in West Flanders. However, when Flemish environment inspectors confronted the owner of Cosucra, he admitted that his factory had caused the leak, Schauvliege told the Flemish Parliament. “We will of course take the necessary legal steps,” she said. Last week the Flemish environment agency said the damage to fish in the river would take years to repair.



Vilvoorde power station to close

The risk of future power cuts increased last week when E.ON, a German electricity supplier, announced it will close a gas-fired generation plant in Vilvoorde in January 2014 because it is no longer profitable. E.ON's Belgian subsidiary last year made a loss of €33 million, up from €11 million the year before.

The closure, which the company said was temporary but for an indefinite period, is likely to cause further problems of electricity supply security in the country, according to the grid manager Elia. Two nuclear power stations, one in Doel, East Flanders, and one in Wallonia, are currently closed as a result of minute cracks in the reactor housing. Federal energy minister Melchior Wathelet has said those closures will not put winter supplies at risk, and if the E.ON closure looks like it will present a problem, the government has the option of forcing E.ON to keep the plant open.

Futures are the future for pig farmers

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters announced “an historic day for Flemish agriculture” by placing the first order for the new Pig Trading Companies (PTC) on the pork futures market in Herentals.

PTC is a grouping of about 70 pig farmers representing 15% of Flemish production. Together with the banks KBC and BNP Paribas Fortis, as well as consultants DLV Belgium, the farmers have set up two PTCs – one for futures trading and one for actual trading in pork products.

The futures market, now widely associated with financial products, started as a way of dealing in commodities such as rice and olive oil, and later coffee, copper and wheat. A basic futures contract has the buyer agreeing to purchase a certain quantity of a product for a certain price at a given date in the future. The contract allows the producer – in this case the pig farmer – to obtain a fixed price for the product in the future, regardless of what conditions may intervene in the interim. The buyer, meanwhile, is

making a bet that the price agreed today will be lower than the price it might otherwise have to pay at the time of delivery.

The problem pig farmers have is that price fluctuations for their own product do not match price fluctuations for their principal raw materials. Farmers may be paying high prices for feed and energy now but find themselves unable to pass those price increases on when the time comes to sell the meat. Futures trading could help iron out those discrepancies.

“The Flemish pig sector is a front-runner in efforts to improve the sustainability of the sector,” commented Peeters, whose portfolio also includes agriculture. “Price volatility is an important factor. Initiatives have now been taken whereby farmers can be trained in the possibilities of the futures market. I am delighted today to be able to place this first order on behalf of the Pig Trading Companies.”

Telenet invests in TV and film

Cable TV and internet operator Telenet has announced it will spend €30 million over the next four years to support the production of Flemish audiovisual productions, both television and film. The programme, called Telenet STAP, will subsidise projects on application from producers, in return for certain broadcast rights. In addition, Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten called on the company to use the funds to support productions for broadcast on channels that make up the basic package of Telenet cable services in Flanders, where the Mechelen-based company has a monopoly.

The STAP programme is likely, however, to go only a small way towards appeasing the creative sector, which is currently in dispute with Telenet over the rights it collects from viewers, but which they claim the company passes on to producers only in part.



CLEARLY NOT MOVED BY GOSSELIN



The items you treasure most deserve the greatest attention when you move. They are treated with the utmost care by those meticulous men sent by Gosselin, who wrap them in that specific Gosselin paper and move them in accordance with the Gosselin master plan specially drawn up for you. Gosselin has over 70 years' experience in VIP treatment. Their service is so impeccable that you will be moved when you see their specialists at work.

Gosselin was the first moving company in Belgium to have achieved FAIM/ISO, the international moving industry's most prestigious accreditation. With their 32 own branches across Europe, Central-Asia and the Caucasus, you will no doubt receive the service you have always been looking for.



WE KNOW HOW TO MOVE PEOPLE

Belcrownlaan 23 | B-2100 Antwerp - Belgium
T +32-3-360 55 00 | T +32-2-772 34 87 | F +32-3-360 55 79

WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU | INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU



GOSSELIN moving

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP

In search of peace

EU gives backing to Flemish abbey as place of contemplation, but can't save it from closure

Alan Hope

Beethoven is said to have found his inspiration during long solitary walks in the countryside. Philosophers like Schopenhauer and Thoreau have extolled the virtues of isolation and meditation, while religious leaders from Moses to Jesus to Mohammed are all reputed to have put themselves into isolation, the better to contemplate God; the very word "contemplation" implies sequestration, a place set apart. So it's slightly surprising to find the European Union, not immediately thought of as contemplative and spiritual, backing the promotion of places of relaxation, slowing down and contemplation, in a cross-border project involving the Dutch province of Limburg, its Flemish neighbour and Flemish Brabant. One of the sites chosen as part of the project is the contemplation centre of Herkenrode Abbey, just outside Hasselt, which recently opened an exhibition on the order of nuns who live there: the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre was founded by Godfrey of Bouillon, the crusading knight who claimed Jerusalem from the Muslim empire in 1099. The order soon spread across the Low Countries and into Italy, Poland, Spain, Germany and England.

Illustrious history

The abbey of Herkenrode stands on a spot where the first convent of nuns of the Low Countries was established by the Cistercians in the 12th century. The convent grew to be rich and influential, until the abbey was closed in

1796 by French revolutionaries. The sisters wound up in Bilzen, but the abbey buildings suffered endless indignities, being used at one time or another as a jenever distillery, a sugar beet refinery, and accommodation for farming families (and beasts). Eventually in 1972, the remains of some 16th-century buildings, the infirmary, the 18th-century residence of the abbess and the surrounding park were sold to the canonesses in Bilzen for the creation of a centre of contemplation. Two years later, the site was listed as a historic monument. In the years that followed, the order rebuilt the magnificent residence and built a new church and cloister, woven into the 16th-century remains. The Reflection Centre is open to visitors, who can turn their back on the noise of the nearby E313 and turn towards the wide-open landscape of the park, as guests or as participants in a programme of silent retreats or contemplative sessions of two or three days. Demand, according to Ivonne Jansen, the coordinator of the Interreg project, is constant. The Herkenrode site is one of the premium entries in the EU's growing inventory of places of peace and quiet, which also includes the pilgrimage spot Scherpenheuvel and other sites in Flemish Brabant, including Zoutleeuw, Tienen and Haacht. The Interreg project is part of a massive programme of cooperation between Dutch and Flemish areas in the border region, covering economy, environment and tourism.



The Reflection Centre at Herkenrode Abbey is open to visitors for silent retreats and other programmes until 15 December



The exhibition *Order of the Holy Sepulchre* relays 900 years of religious history in Limburg

End of the road

However, in December, the Reflection Centre will close its doors. "They just can't afford to keep it up," explains Jansen. "They don't have the money to pay for the renovations needed. For example, there are 360 windows, each three metres high, all of them single-

glazed. The centre costs a fortune just to heat. Because the centre is a historic building, there are strict limits to what you can do about the windows." In addition, she says, there are only nine sisters left in the convent, two of them elderly. New recruits are no longer coming forward in Europe,

though convents in Brazil, Congo and Rwanda are thriving. The order, in the natural way of things, is slowly dying out.

The sisters will continue to live in the cloister and worship in the new church: "The church is always full on Sundays and feast days," Jansen says. "We must be the only church in Belgium that never has to worry about empty seats."

But the fate of the Reflection Centre, the former residence of the abbess, is uncertain. "It will be sold, but we don't know to whom," Jansen says.

The spot would be perfect for a hotel, but that would be the death-knell of the spirit of the order and the qualities the EU's interregional project is trying to foster. Luckily, it's not likely to happen. "One of the conditions of the sale is that the building has to fulfil a social function," Jansen explains.

The Reflection Centre is open to visitors by appointment only. Groups can visit the exhibition for a guided tour

► <http://herkenrode-abdij-bezinningscentrum.skynetblogs.be>

Elsewhere on the site of Herkenrode Abbey is another visitor centre run by the Flemish heritage organisation Erfgoed Vlaanderen, with its own exhibition

► www.abdijsiteherkenrode.be

Good clean fun

Relax at the bar while doing your laundry at Ghent's coolest new hangout

Daan Bauwens

Wasbar must be one of the most inventive nightlife concepts ever: A *wasbar*, a play on words meaning both "washing bar" and "washable", is a place where you can have a beer with friends while you're doing your laundry. It's a combo laundrette and bar, and at the new *wasbar* in Ghent, you can even get your hair done.

"We thought we had invented the concept," says Yuri Vandenbogaerde, who opened the bar last week with his husband, Dries Henau. "Only later, we discovered that there are other *wasbars* in the world. But in Belgium, we're the only one."

According to Henau – as is so often the case – the idea was born out of necessity. "We used to live in a tiny apartment without any room for a washing machine. At our age, it's rather embarrassing to have your



laundry done by your parents. You don't want them to interfere with your life, but you still want them

to do your laundry? That's how we came up with the idea." But then the stylish 20-something

couple went one step further. "We were both working full time and didn't have time to go to the hairdresser during the week," Henau says. "On Saturdays, all the hairdressers are full of women, and we always had to wait hours for our turn. So we thought: Why not have an evening barber at our new place?"

At the *wasbar*, there are 10 washers and 10 driers, but lots more chairs. So the pair encourages people to just come for the bar. "There will be people saying: Damn, too bad I have a washing machine because that's the coolest place in town," says Vandenbogaerde.

The heavily illuminated bar is dressed in pastel green, yellow and white. The place seems to be a mix between futurism and nostalgia and the tricolour tiled bar is the real eye-catcher. The full interior in "new

retro" style was designed by the internationally renowned Antwerp design studio Pinkeye. Even the design of the washing machines is notable. The only downside is the flashy adverts for sponsors, which, though incorporated into the design, doesn't do any justice to a place that so desperately wants to create its own personality.

But Wasbar is indeed pleasing to the eye, and it's hard to believe that the concept won't catch on in this student-laden city centre. Check the website for theme days, including Men's Monday (with a free pils for the guys), Do Tuesday ("Creativity with cork! Knitting! Flower arranging!") and concerts on Thursday (washing machines as drums).

► www.wasbar.be

THE RACE IS ON!

Join us on **November 6** at the **Renaissance Brussels Hotel** and share the excitement of the US Election. Take part in a debate between Democrats and Republicans. Cast your vote in a straw ballot... and **enjoy the party!**



Democr



Republi



www.thebulletin.be/en/electionnight

Renaissance Brussels Hotel - doors 20h30 - tickets €15

Brought to you by



THE Bulletin.be

ING



RENAISSANCE
BRUSSELS HOTEL



Al het stadsnieuws in 3 talen
Toute l'info régionale en 3 langues
The local news in 3 languages

 www.tvbrussel.be

Familiar face

Flemish actor Peter Van den Begin reprises his most glamorous role

Daan Bauwens

Even if you don't watch much television or rarely walk into a cinema, you must have seen his face before. It has a look that is, quite simply, hard to forget. And this year Flemish actor Peter Van den Begin has been on the front page of every magazine, in the pages of every newspaper and on billboards across the region.

The 47-year-old writer and actor, once described by the magazine *Humo* as "servant of the natural, driven towards truth", is more in demand than ever before. Last spring, his role as a stubborn, small-town butcher in *Allez Eddy!* won plaudits, and this summer he shot the new comedy *Frits en Franky* – a follow-up to the hugely popular 2010 movie *Frits en Freddy*. He also co-starred in the Belgian film *La cinquième saison* (*The Fifth Season*), much-applauded at the Venice Film Festival last month.

In the meantime, he's frightening the nation as right-wing mayoral candidate Bert Coenen in the popular television series *Deadline 14/10*. It's about to come to a close, just in time for the 13 October launch of a new season of *Debby en Nancy*, the sassy talk show Van den Begin shares with his colleague and friend Stany Crets. It's the one place you might not recognise Van den Begin – since they do the show in drag.

Surprisingly, Van den Begin found the time to sit down, have a drink and talk with us about past, present and future endeavours. He shows me to the cellars of Elisabeth NV, the production company he co-owns with Crets. "It seems like a lot, but I'm doing fine," he says of his schedule, leaning back in a black leather sofa. "This summer I even took a month off. But now we have a tough job ahead of us. *Debby* and *Nancy*'s new show is going to be quite a ride: We're preparing 20 new episodes."

It's been four years since you last went on air with *Debby en Nancy*. Why are you coming back with the same formula?

We've always considered coming back because it's so much fun. Dressing up as *Debby* and *Nancy* is the perfect excuse to play stupid, to create an amusing show and to ask our guests questions others would never dare to ask. We can be nastier, too, because we're not ourselves, we are *Debby* and *Nancy*. Wearing the mask makes the interaction more fun.

What's new this time around?

There is one big difference: It's a live show. That allows us to do a lot of things we couldn't do before. We're broadcasting from the Zuiderkroon hall in Antwerp with a live audience. When the show starts, viewers will get the feeling they can come over and join in. During the show, we can call on people to do something, and we can include and comment



Peter Van den Begin as the ever-flummoxed Frits in *Frits en Freddy* (top right), in drag as *Debby* (left) of *Debby en Nancy* (bottom right) and most likely as himself at the opening of the Ostend Film Festival



on things that happened that day. It is happening now, everyone is welcome, that's the feeling we're trying to create.

This time we will also be backed by a band of 14 musicians, all of them Flemish top talents. It's the show's big band and our guests will sing to their music. That's an essential part of the programme; we want to bring the big band back on the screen. Just like it used to be in the 1970s and '80s.

In the 2010 TV series *Oud België* you also conveyed the feeling of how things used to be. Is that an important element in what you create?

I wrote *Oud België* based on childhood memories. *Oud België* is the name of the theatre featured in the show. I used to go there as a child. The place itself still exists but has now turned into a clothes shop. Nevertheless, you can still see the interior and imagine how it used to be. I have to admit that lots of the things we create do have a link with long-lost times.

And the same goes for *Debby en Nancy*: It's a revue, just like in the old days. But we do our best to find a formula that still makes it relevant

in 2013 or 2014. It's not our intention to make old-fashioned programmes but to make programmes that take you back to the feeling of those

"Dressing up as *Debby* and *Nancy* is the perfect excuse to ask questions others would never dare to ask"

times. People tend to really like that glimpse of nostalgia.

In *Deadline 14/10*, based on Antwerp's mayoral race, you play Bert Coenen, the antihero. In the 2008 TV series *Matroesjka's* – about the sex trade in Eastern Europe – you played the villain Ray Van Mechelen. These are both a long way from the part of *Debby*. Is it difficult to reconcile all these personalities?

Not really. The former is fiction, the latter is entertainment. But even in fiction I don't prefer the antihero over the hero, or vice versa. I don't make that kind of distinction when I'm asked to play a part. In the first place, I ask myself if it's something I am intuitively drawn to. Does it excite me? Does it stimulate

my fantasy? Then: How are the circumstances? How is the rest of the cast? And then, of course, how is the script?

In terms of the show being based on Antwerp's mayoral race, many might consider you more of a Patrick Janssens than a Bart De Wever...

The director asked me which part I preferred, the part of the mayor or the part of the contender. I was immediately curious about the antihero. It's not the kind of part you are offered every day. I don't like to use this word, but for me it was a challenge. It was a challenge to play this part as credibly as possible.

***Deadline 14/10* is a hit. *Debby en Nancy* has always been a success story. But suppose a series or movie flops: Would you feel personally responsible?**

Of course, but not entirely. The making of a movie or a series is a

group process with lots of different phases. As I said, in the first instance you make a choice based on intuition. After that, all that matters is trust on the set, trust in your director and trust in the way things work. I'm only a small part in a larger whole. When I'm in a movie, I play my part to the best of my ability, and, after that, I hand it over to other people. There's nothing else to do but wait and see what happens.

And in the case of the upcoming *Debby en Nancy* live shows?

That's different. Over there [he points to the meeting room of his production company], we are steering everything ourselves and doing what we want. That's a different responsibility. It's enormous fun, but if it doesn't work, it's our responsibility. In any case, it's regretful to see something fail when you have put so much of your energy into it. Luckily, there are always plenty of new things popping up, so you don't really have the time to ponder too long on it. But honestly: I have almost never regretted my choices.

► www.tinyurl.com/debbyennancy



Congratulations to
Gemini Corporation N.V. (www.geminicorp.be)
on winning the
“Excellent Enterprise 2012” award.
Hope this is just the beginning of many
milestones to achieve.

VM LOGISTICS BVBA

Email: Info@vmlogistics.be

VM WAREHOUSING BVBA

Madridstraat 3, B - 2321 Meer, Belgium Phone: +32(0)3-311 81 67

BRUSSELS MUSEUMS

NOCTURNES

20/09 > 13/12/2012

EVERY THURSDAY EVENING



brussels
museums.be

www.brusselsmuseums.be

Les Nocturnes des Musées bruxellois sont organisées par le Conseil bruxellois des Musées / De Nocturnes van de Brusselse Musea worden georganiseerd door de Brusselse Museumraad



To the gallery!

Visitors are treating art galleries more and more like free museums – they look but don't buy

Christophe Verbiest

Regular visitors to art galleries know that when popular names are on show – think Luc Tuymans, Michaël Borremans or Thierry De Cordier – you'll often see more visitors than at some exhibitions in museums or centres for contemporary art. And the numbers seem to be growing. Moreover, some art galleries put on group shows that compete with the exhibitions at public spaces. Of course, an art gallery remains a commercial space: The main purpose of the gallerist is to sell art. Still, galleries are becoming more and more important as exhibition spaces. And they tend to be getting larger, too. Zeno-X in Antwerp – arguably Flanders' best gallery, featuring Tuymans, Borremans and Marlene Dumas – will double its space next spring. Zeno-X founder Frank Demaegd stresses that he stumbled on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – he was able to buy a part of an adjacent recently vacated building – but he has embraced the extra space. Deweer Gallery in Ottegem, West Flanders, meanwhile, has just reopened after substantially increasing its exhibition space (see sidebar). And the Brussels gallery Xavier Hufkens was a trendsetter, with a major expansion 15 years ago.

Space growing but not sales

These three galleries have seen their audiences grow. It doesn't mean, though, that they see more potential buyers. "I know people who have been visiting our gallery for 30 years who have not once bought a work of art," Gerald Deweer points out. "They come because they're art lovers. We welcome them with as much courtesy as potential clients."

Demaegd in Antwerp sees the same type of behaviour. "Art lovers used to have qualms about visiting a gallery because they feared they had to buy something," he says. "Nowadays, we see that they know you can just visit an exhibition in a gallery, without further ado." He points to a possible explanation for the rising visitor numbers: "More people are becoming interested in contemporary art. This, I think, is a result of the higher prices for the works and the media's interest in that economic aspect."

Sometimes museums explicitly ask galleries for help because they might "have difficulty finding the budget necessary for a specific exhibition," explains Deweer. "It has happened that we have sponsored the catalogue when one of our artists has had an exhibition at a museum." Simon Devolder, an assistant of Xavier Hufkens, adds: "Or they ask us for financial support to help produce or transport the art works." Xavier Hufkens also wants "to expose our artists to the largest number of people possible," confirms Devolder. "So we're happy to have as many visitors as possible. Artists want to be seen and appreciated. We even

Brussels artist Michel François will show at Xavier Hufkens gallery next month

give guided tours for schools." Demaegd has noticed another shift: A gallery is becoming less of a shop window for new art, which is now often sold at international fairs. "Art fairs have become increasingly important for selling works," he says. "International buyers find it easier to visit fairs than to come to Antwerp."

Who gets first dibs?

Some visitors also don't expect to buy when they visit a gallery,

assuming that all of the best works are sold before the show even opens. "That's exaggerated, and we try to avoid it," notes Devolder.

"But by the end of the opening weekend, it does regularly happen that a show is sold out." Demaegd is more candid: "It's

especially true for artists for whom the demand exceeds

the supply, like Michaël Borremans. If you have 50 potential

buyers and only 10 works, the question arises: Where

do you want those works to land? For instance, selling a work to an important museum can be better for one's career than selling to a private collector, even if the latter wants to pay much more."

Deweer confirms that museums sometimes are only able to pay about half the price that private collectors are. "Of course, it always happens in consultation with the artists," he says. Devolder: "We, too, try to give priority to buyers we deem important or who have been loyal to us."



WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The **Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren** will remain open until the summer of 2013, in another delay to the start of major renovation and expansion works. The museum was originally scheduled to close for works in the spring of this year, then the date was pushed back to July. Now the museum says administrative problems mean it will remain open until at least the end of the current school year. The re-opening date of summer 2016, however, remains the same.

► www.africamuseum.be

Ghent restaurant **Balls & Glory** (*Bite, last week*) has won the **Concept Restaurant Awards** for Belgium and will now go on to represent the country at the international competition in 2013. Chef Wim Ballieu has taken the traditional Belgian meatball to a new level: He serves giant meatballs filled with, for example, chervil and pancetta, endive and mustard or apple and goat cheese. The Belgian Hospitality Award, meanwhile, went to healthy fast food chain Exki, while the Innovation Award went to *Food Inspiration* magazine. The biennial prizes are awarded by the professional restaurateur platform Leaders Club Belgium.

► www.leadersclub.be

Flemish artist Jan Fabre last week unveiled new works located at the Antwerp Zoo. At the entrance to the zoo, **two mosaics depict Greek land turtles** that Fabre had as pets when he was a child; specialists from Italy assisted the artist with the placing of the tiny glass pieces that make up the works. Inside the zoo are two bronze sculptures of turtles by the artist. Fabre has lived near the zoo for his entire life, he said at the opening. "It has a special place in my heart. From when I was five, my father brought me here three times a week so I could paint the animals. We did that until I was 14."

► www.zooantwerpen.be

The Tomorrowland DJ dance festival in Boom, Antwerp province, has won another award – **Best International Festival at the DJ Awards** in Ibiza. Tomorrowland, which attracts 180,000 fans from across the world, also won Best Festival at the International Dance Music Awards in Miami earlier this year. "It's fantastic to see that Tomorrowland is so respected internationally and that we in Belgium have apparently created something that is really unique," said festival co-director Michiel Beers, accepting the award in Ibiza.

► www.tomorrowland.be

RE-OPENING AT DEWEER

Deweer Gallery is an oasis of art in the rural southern part of West Flanders, between farmhouses and fields of cows. Established in 1979 by Mark and Marleen Deweer, who used to own a weaving mill, the gallery is now led by their sons Bart and Gerald.

The gallery has just reopened after a substantial expansion. It now consists of three rooms and a black box, used for video projections. The most surprising element is the cellar, with a permanent installation by Jan Fabre – a move almost never seen in a gallery.

The first exhibition in the renewed Deweer Gallery is *Re-Opening*, an ambitious group show that gives an overview of the artists it represents, including almost a dozen new ones. "We sometimes stage exhibitions that could also be presented in museums," Gerald Deweer says. Indeed, I've seen less interesting exhibitions than *Re-Opening* in museums. An essential difference, of course, is that at the gallery, all the art works are for sale. Some of the new artists look really promising: like German Jorinde Voigt, with her huge manic drawings full of lines. There are more whirling

lines, both white and coloured, on the small monotypes of American Matthew Lutz-Kinoy. The playful paintings of South African Gerda Scheepers are another highlight of *Re-Opening*. Some well-established artists have contributed new work to the exhibition. A wooden sculpture by German Stephan Balkenhol bathes in an eerie atmosphere. Swiss Tatjana Gerhard's paintings are as crazy as ever, and with his surprisingly simple but strikingly beautiful installation "Sun Set (for a veteran abstractionist)", Stefaan Dheedene confirms his position as one of Flanders' most interesting artists. German veteran Günther Förg shows some older work, but his small abstract acrylic paintings in subdued colours are the highlights of this worthwhile exhibition. In the next two or three years, all these artists will enjoy a solo exhibition at the Deweer Gallery. "Since we now have the space to do so, we'll present two artists at once," the gallerist explains. "One established artist next to one who is up-and-coming."



The newly expanded Deweer Gallery presents the ambitious group show *Re-Opening*

I'd like to teach the world to bungle I Fail Good

Georgio Valentino

Beursschouwburg's autumn festival I Fail Good exposes one of the last taboos in contemporary Western society: failure. Of course, archetypal tragic figures and anti-heroes have long lurked just below the surface, celebrated (logically) by the underground. And comedy, the neurotic art which serves as a sort of collective bad conscience, has always recognised the universal nature of failure. It's no surprise, then, that Beursschouwburg general director Tom Bonte borrowed the festival's tagline from Marge Simpson (delivered to Homer): "I don't hate you for failing; I love you for trying."

I Fail Good isn't a comedy festival, however. Bonte has lined up two months of failure-flavoured performance, film, music and exhibition. It was a decidedly difficult task. "Art hasn't dealt with the issue of failure very well," he says. "It should be independent and critical, or at least that's the clichéd role of art. In fact the arts have been swallowed by the neo-liberal system in which success is king. Most artists want to succeed, to make money, to be in the right networks."

But there are some, they found, who accept and even celebrate the possibility of failure as one of life's



Dmitry Paranyushkin and Diego Agulló's unforgettable "The Humping Pact" was filmed across Brussels

unavoidable hazards. Several I Fail Good artists are dealing with this kind of personal and professional failure.

Such as Feiko Beckers. The Dutch performance artist pulls no punches in his self-critical sketches. He is often accompanied by family

members and sundry acquaintances with whom he interacts awkwardly. His latest, *No Chance of Success Whatsoever*, is no exception. This time it's dear old dad, the only family relation to date who Beckers has failed to incorporate into a performance.

There's also an entirely different species of failure tackled by I Fail Good. Ironic fate would have it that our economic and political institutions are hardly producing the peace and prosperity that they promised. "Our neoliberal society, which doesn't allow failure, is in fact

failing on a grand scale," Bonte says. An I Fail Good lecture series provides the theoretical fundamentals, while the artistic programme dramatises this systemic failure.

British artists Britt Hatzius and Ant Hampton's interactive installation/performance *This Is Not My Voice Speaking* even gives the audience a chance to *feel* the fail. Small groups of spectators are ushered into a world of technology, some of it advanced and some of it antique. They are given instructions to use devices with which they may or may not be familiar, but it is ultimately an exercise in futility.

The festival's centrepiece is the *I Fail Good Expo*, an ongoing exhibition that starts with German artist David Helbich's makeover of the Beursschouwburg façade and extends into the depths of the artistic psyche, courtesy of Bas Schevers' "Curriculum Ruinae". Schevers solicited evidence of professional failure from fellow I Fail Good artists. The end result is a warts-and-all catalogue of rejected grants, project flops, aborted residencies and other trade disasters.

Let's hope that this unique, two-month festival is a success, lest it give failure a bad name.

Until 24 November | Beursschouwburg, A Ortsstraat 20-28, Brussels | www.beursschouwburg.be

VISUAL ARTS

GraphicArtes

The Rotary Club of Bruges has seen the city's design and illustration biennale through 13 editions. The event has hit its stride in the past several years with the Bruges Museums association signing up as co-sponsor. More than 300 artists from across Europe responded to the biennale's open call. There are no strict technical requirements besides a bar against photography. The submitted works have only to be mechanically reproducible. Forty-three prints by 19 artists were ultimately selected for exhibition, representing Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal and the Czech Republic. They are on display until next year and will be sold to benefit the Rotary Club and its various causes, including support of the arts in Bruges and beyond. **GV**

Until 20 January | Arentshuis, Bruges

www.graphicartes.be



MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

25 Years of M HKA: Antwerp's contemporary arts museum celebrates its 25th birthday with Collection XXXI, a showcase of works by five of M HKA's favourite artists, including American architect-sculptor (and the focus of the museum's inaugural exhibition in 1987) Gordon Matta-Clark.

Until JAN 20 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32

www.muhka.be

Bruges

American Icons: Flemish photographer Peter De Bruyne explores America's numerous clichéd symbols, looking for the truths hidden within them. An official opening on 19 October features a solo set of American standards by Flemish singer Daan

Until NOV 16 at Concertgebouw Café, 't Zand 34

www.concertgebouw.be

Brussels

Grass Roots: The Green Wall Irish Art Collective, made up of Irish artists working in Brussels and Flanders, launches its inaugural exhibition

OCT 12-14 at Golfle Center, Du Roy de Blicquy laan 43, Zaventem

www.greenwallart.eu

SPECIAL EVENT

Elephant Parade

The last thing you expect to see on the streets of Hasselt is an elephant, much less 42 of them. But through this month, the city welcomes Elephant Parade, an outdoor art parcours and fundraiser dedicated to the preservation of the Asian elephant. The colourful pachyderms, each 1.5 metres tall, have been decorated by Limburg artists and designers, including such notables as Stijn Helsen, Piet Stockmans and Koen Vanmechelen. The elephants are spread throughout the city centre and along Hasselt’s ring road. Elephant Parade was started by a Dutch father and son after they visited an elephant hospital in Thailand. The first exhibition was held in Rotterdam in 2007; subsequent editions have taken place in Antwerp, Amsterdam, London and Singapore. Small elephants are for sale in the Elephant Parade store on the Grote Markt, and the original sculptures will be auctioned off at a gala event on 8 November. **Diana Goodwin**



Until 1 November | Across Hasselt | www.elephantparade.com

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Pencil Run: In honour of the local elections, where you will be filling out your ballot with a pencil, a group of running enthusiasts and street artists are hosting this marathon in Brussels in which you run from pencil to pencil painted on the walls and other spaces of the capital
OCT 14 13.00-18.00 across Brussels
www.77pencils.tumblr.com

Ghent

Flanders International Film Festival: More than 100 feature films and documentaries, several concerts of film music and the World Soundtrack Awards during Flanders’ largest film festival
Until OCT 20 at Kinepolis and other venues in Ghent
www.filmfestival.be

LITERATURE

Salman Rushdie

Recent events have rekindled the long-simmering debate on the limits of free speech in the face of religious sensitivities. It’s nothing new; Salman Rushdie has famously lived under death threat since 1989. That was when the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against the Indian-born British author for perceived blasphemies in his acclaimed novel *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie went into hiding and stayed there for 13 years. The *fatwa* was never revoked, and an Iranian official recently increased the bounty on the offending author’s head. But Rushdie has since emerged from the netherworld of police protection and evidently feels safe enough to go on an international tour in support of his autobiography *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. The title refers to one of the many pseudonyms he used during his years of hiding. Rushdie will present the book and discuss controversies past and present with Flemish TV journalist Annelies Beck. **GV**



13 November, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels | www.bozar.be

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Brussels

Book Week: Biennial event at the British School of Brussels, with a book fair and an international roster of authors, poets and illustrators
OCT 15-19 at British School of Brussels, Leuvensesteenweg 19, Tervuren
www.britishschool.be

Ghent

Ayse Kulin: The celebrated Turkish novelist talks about her latest book, *The Last Train to Istanbul* (in English)
OCT 16 at De Centrale, Kraankinderstraat 2
www.decentrale.be

FAMILY

Dog Swim

Some traditions have legs. For the past 162 years, the canine athletes of the West Flemish hamlet Sint-Baafs-Vijve have convened on the second Sunday of October to show off their skills. It’s a sort of doggie biathlon with a run in the shadow of Saint Baaf’s church followed by a swim across the river Leie. Around 50 dogs of all shapes, sizes and breeds are entered in the competition each year (note to aspiring dog-swimming champions: registration is on-site the day of the event). They are first sized up with an antique yardstick and divided into three heats: small, medium and large. The winners in each division then compete in one final championship race. But the party doesn’t end there. The townsfolk celebrate the winners of this annual animal Olympics with a neighbourhood fair where you can browse stalls full of local crafts. Finally, fittingly, there’s a dog toss (this time, however, the pooches are stuffed). **GV**



14 October from 15.00
Sint-Baafs Church, Sint-Baafs-Vijve (Wielsbeke) | www.sintbavovrienden.be

MORE FAMILY ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Week van het bos (Week of the Woods): Flanders’ forests host activities throughout the week. The theme “Everyone Welcome” emphasises the issue of accessibility, so young and old can enjoy nature walks, recreation and entertainment
OCT 14-21 across Flanders
www.weekvanhetbos.be

Hasselt

The Emperor’s Clothes: Don’t miss the closing weeks of this exhibition, which pairs classic fairy-tale illustrations with real-life costumes and accessories. These unique pieces were made to order by a team of artisans led by Flemish fashion designer Anita Evenpoel
Until OCT 20 at Literary Museum, Bampslaan 35
www.literairmuseum.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Andy Furniere

Staminee Den Boulevard

Groeningelaan 15, Kortrijk

A previous visitor to our table at Den Boulevard has written on a Post-it note: “I came from the pearl in the Flemish Ardennes, and here I found the shell.” It’s clear that this spot in Kortrijk brings out the poet in its guests. Den Boulevard is, strictly speaking, not a “café”, but a “staminee” – an old *Kortrijks* word for a bar. A nostalgic feeling is also apparent in the interior decor, which consists of rustic wooden furniture, vintage mirrors and old illustrations. No televisions, here, of course, nor disturbingly loud music. In the background, you will hear a Billie Holiday standard or Portuguese *fado*. For those who like a bit of extra entertainment, there are several board games. All this makes it my favourite place in Kortrijk, just outside the noise of the city centre, to sit and talk with friends for an entire evening. During the summer, outside under an old plane tree, in the winter huddled in the warm atmosphere created by the subdued lighting. The owners, José Clarysse and Tine Lemaitre, easily succeed at making guests of all ages feel at home, in what indeed used to be their private dwelling until 2001. Up to then, José (*pictured*) was already known to the locals behind the bar in different cafés of Kortrijk for decades. Den Boulevard is not a café to drink a simple *pintje*, but to discover the rich variety of the Belgian beer landscape. Although I have been trying new beers in



the several years I’ve been going there, I still feel like I have only started exploring. Which isn’t that strange, as the impressive drinks menu lists more than 100 speciality beers. Den Boulevard also offers a diverse selection of wines, hot drinks and the mysterious *Mont Ventoux* (all I can disclose is that it comes with whipped cream). A selection of tapas are available, but the kitchen also serves homemade delicacies such as oven-prepared goat cheese in honey sauce. If you go, don’t forget to leave your own Post-it note – lyrical language definitely permitted.

www.denboulevard.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

In de Zwaan ★★☆☆

"Limburg's oldest café grills with fruit wood" was the headline of the article, but I didn't need to read any further. If a restaurant inside a listed historic building from 1656 isn't enough to make me book a table, the fact that its cooking methods reflect the region's rural character is.

Haspengouw in southern Limburg province is known for its fertile countryside and abundant fruit trees. Driving there for lunch with a friend, my head was constantly swivelling as we passed one orchard after another – mostly apple trees with their branches hanging low, heavy with ripened fruit. Numerous pumpkin stands also caught our attention, but hunger kept us on a bee-line for the church tower of Groot-Gelmen, a district of Sint-Truiden.

Travellers have been stopping at In de Zwaan for hundreds of years. In the beginning, they'd hitch their horses to the side of the brick building and head in for a drink or a good night's rest. Today, you'll see more bicycles parked outside, but the idea remains the same.

High-quality meat is what they do best, on a restored 17th-century wood-burning grill, no less. Wood chips from local trees keep the fire crackling and add a subtle fruity smokiness to the meat.

Chef and owner Ben Elen and his wife Elien Reniers resurrected the restaurant almost five years ago, following an extensive 12-year renovation, which saved the building from falling into ruin. Many of the original elements are still intact, and the interior maintains much of its old-world charm thanks to warm, natural materials like wood and brick, plus red-and-white checked table linens and candlelight.

The beer menu is long, and we ask our server to surprise us with two local brews. He brings out an Adelardus



Trudoabdijbier, a Haspengouw tripel that pours hazy blonde with a creamy head. But it's a bit too sweet for my taste. My friend fares better with her Wilderen Goud from the tap, a clean, hoppy and refreshing beer that comes in an unusually short, wide tumbler.

The menu is a barbecue enthusiast's dream, with a long list of grilled specialties including different cuts of Belgian blue-white beef, marinated spare ribs, rotisserie chicken, bluefin tuna and lobster, plus nine homemade sauces. But not everything's grilled. In de Zwaan also offers a few Flemish classics such as beef stew made with brown beer

and *Loonse stroop*, a local artisanal fruit spread; hand-rolled meatballs in tomato sauce and steak tartare.

We're surprised when they bring a delicious bowl of fresh chervil soup on the house. Then the mains arrive, hot off the grill: one 500g slab of Scottish Aberdeen Angus fillet steak and one long lamb brochette. The chunks of lamb are generously marinated in garlic and likely brushed with butter over the grill because the meat is rich and tender. My friend's steak, too, is juicy and just pink in the middle with a nice amount of flavourful, fatty trim. We enjoy these with croquettes, fries, homemade mayo, salad and two different sauces – pepper cream and mushroom sherry.

Again we're treated to a surprise course with the arrival of vanilla ice cream topped with vanilla chocolate shavings. Together with a strong coffee, it's the perfect way to round off an outstanding lunch. The bill comes to an even €80 in total.

► www.indezwaan.com



Kleine Gelmenstraat 1, Groot-Gelmen (Sint-Truiden);
011.76.73.77



Fri-Wed 12.00-23.30; Thurs 18.00-23.30



Mains: €16-€44



Inviting and cosy grill restaurant on the site of Limburg's oldest café

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

The pout-head-nod combo

More this week on the sticky-out-pout, the gesture with the mouth and head an anonymous reader in my last column said the Flemish are famous for when wanting to say something like "*Ja, het is goed*." Yes, it is okay.

I discussed this in the last column, which resulted in several emails from readers. "I have been in Antwerp for a little over a year now and it still amuses me," reader Diane Porcella writes, in a discussion of what she calls the "pout-head-nod combo".

She agrees on the general meaning attributed to it but says the gesture can have a different meaning when in response to the question "*Hoe ist?*" – a popular contraction of *Hoe is het?* or How is it? How are things?

Then, it is "for emphasis on just how 'not good' everything is" and "can just as often be followed with 'My girlfriend left me, my car broke down, I lost my phone and my hair is falling out'."

To add to the complexity, she says, some throw in a little tilt of the head – something she says confounds her. "I think it has something to do with the degree of the tilt," she writes. "[Less than] 10% seems to signal consideration of a statement, question or situation. But if the tilt leans more towards 15%, then it starts to feel like disbelief or wonder."

I have officially met my match in the fine art of human observation. I'd be curious to know how she calculates the angles of the tilt. Does she at all times carry a protractor, ready to produce the

instrument whenever confronted with a pout-head-nod?

But even to the most seasoned observer of the Flemish in the wild, going native may prove a

this, and on the look-out for the abundant heritage there of the Dutch language. For example, there is, according to Wikipedia, something called Jersey Dutch,



Jersey Dutch spoken here

testy endeavour. "I seem to have unwittingly adopted a convincing pout-head-nod," she continues, "but I think it simply takes more time to incorporate the tilt".

In fact, I estimate that it takes on average some seven-and-half years of hard labour to master the 10% tilt, and another two-and-half for the extra five.

Next time, I'm planning to write about something different. I'll be in New York when you are reading

"a variant of the Dutch language spoken in and around New Jersey from the late 17th century until the early 20th century."

The website says that it "may have been a partial Creole language based on Zeelandic and West Flemish Dutch dialects with English and possibly some elements of Lenape."

I wonder what the body language was like – with a pinch of pout-head-nod?

The last word...

The sympathy vote

"When you came to consult with me in the hospital, you had a problem you thought I could help you with. Will you think of me on 14 October when you go to vote?"

A doctor in Eeklo, East Flanders, is in trouble for sending patients a letter soliciting their vote for the municipal election

Standing strong

"I want to make Antwerp the capital of Flanders."

Jan Lippens of Loving Antwerp is one of several one-man parties also standing in Sunday's elections

Hippo heartache

"In fact, the intervention was intended to save his life."

Two-year old Antwerp Zoo hippopotamus Lambiki died last week during a surgery to castrate him, a procedure intended to prevent him from battling with his father, a rival male nearly three times his size

Fabulous 40s

"Studies show that people in their 40s are fitter than those in their 20s. That's because they're a risk group and take better care of themselves."

Cardiologist Danny Schoors of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) explains a drop in deaths from heart disease over the last decade

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

On the latest endangered species list was, most surprisingly, the angel shark, which can be found – or used to be – in the North Sea off the Flemish coast. We'll tell you about the elegant-looking, flat-bodied shark and other species in Flanders that might be in trouble

News

Whether or not you vote on 14 October, the results determine the way in which your city is run. *Flanders Today* will provide an in-depth report of results across the region. And the mayor of Antwerp is...

Living

Ten years ago, many of us weren't yet on the internet or didn't have a mobile phone. Now it's hard to imagine life without either. Under the tagline "Future Primitives", Kortrijk's major design biennial is looking at the lifestyles of the future. Visit it to see how your home, office or classroom could look in 2022