

## Great War centenary

A star-studded committee is ready to brainstorm for the start of the First World War commemorations



## United naties

Why are businesses at the port of Antwerp called *natie*? What do they do anyway? All your questions answered

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## Families first

A never-ending supply of events during your kids' Christmas holidays, from treasure hunts to baking



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## Clijsters says goodbye to fans

The Flemish tennis star ended a groundbreaking career last week at Antwerp's sportpaleis

Flemish tennis player Kim Clijsters bid farewell to her tennis career last week with a victory over Venus Williams in an exhibition match at Antwerp's Sportpaleis.

The former No 1 defeated her friend and rival 6-3, 6-3 in front of 13,000 fans, including Prince Filip, Princess Mathilde and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. Clijsters retired from competitive tennis after the US Open in August but the Antwerp match was a thank you and final farewell to her fans.

The 29-year-old announced last year that 2012 would be her final season in the sport after a glittering career spanning 15 years. During that time, the Bilzen-born ace won four Grand Slam titles, including the 2011 Australian Open



and three US Opens.

Clijsters originally called time on her career back in 2007 to have a baby. To the surprise of Flanders and the international tennis world,

she made a return to the game after the birth of her daughter, Jada. Three of her Grand Slam triumphs came after her comeback, as she enjoyed a resurgence in form.

Wimbledon was never a good match for Clijsters, with two semi-final appearances the limit of her success; she got to the finals twice at Roland Garros but missed wins both times. Clijsters will perhaps best be remembered for winning the US Open in 2009 in her first major event back on the circuit: Unseeded, she only came in on a wild card entry, yet won the match. At the same time, she became the first mother to win a major tournament since 1980. A favourite with the fans, Clijsters was also popular among her peers, with her bubbly spirit

earning her the nickname Miss Congeniality. The past two years have been marred by injuries, and Clijsters has also made no secret of her wish to have another baby with her husband, pro basketball player Brian Lynch. Though emotional after her Antwerp game, she was clearly looking forward to the next chapter.

"I had no regrets at stopping my career on 29 August at the US Open, and I still don't have any," she said. "My life is not only tennis. I like cooking, gardening, reading, decorating the house, putting up the Christmas tree and running." Leo Cendrowicz

▶ www.kimclijsters.be

## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



## Hans Bruyninckx

Professor Hans Bruyninckx, an expert in international environmental policy at the University of Leuven, last week became the first Fleming ever appointed to head the European Environment Agency (EEA), based in Copenhagen. The EEA was set up in 1994 and has 32 member countries – the 27 EU states and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Turkey and Switzerland – and seven cooperating countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Croatia.

Bruyninckx was born in Schoten, Antwerp province, and studied political science at Leuven before earning a doctorate in international environmental policy at Colorado State University in the US. He currently lectures in Leuven and is coordinator for the Support Agency for Sustainable Development, a cooperation between Leuven, Ghent and the Free University of Brussels (VUB). In 2010, Bruyninckx took over as director-general of Hiva, the research institute for work and society linked to the university and the Christian workers' movement ACV and partly funded by 11.11.11, the network of NGOs in Flanders. Bruyninckx,

48, is also chairman of the environmental organisation Bond Beter Leefmilieu, BBL campaigns to influence government policy at all levels. Current issues include energy prices, renewable energy and reducing car use. The EEA gives independent advice on the environment to the European Commission and national agencies on environment policy, especially in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, clean water, land use and sustainable production and consumption. Among the first jobs Bruyninckx will have to tackle is the preparation of the 2015 post-Kyoto agreement on climate change. The EU recently agreed to provide €7 billion in climate funding for 2013 and 2014. The climate summit in Qatar earlier this month was generally seen as a disappointment. "I'm aware there's a lot of work to be done," he told *De Morgen* on news of his appointment. "There remains a huge gap between what we do and what we have to do. But I'm a positive man by nature; otherwise this job would be self-torture, and that's not my sort of thing."

A team of researchers from universities in Ghent, Leuven, Harvard and the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) has succeeded in **reconstructing the DNA of yeast cells dating from prehistoric times**. The research aimed to discover how the protein that allows the digestion of the grain sugar maltose evolved. "Our research gives us an image of how new functions can come into being through evolution in a relatively short time," said Steven Maere of UGent. "That was a gap in the theory of evolution that was often used by creationists to cast doubt on Darwin's ideas."

independent Congo. The decision follows an application by the widow and sons of Lumumba, who was elected in June 1960 and ousted barely three months later. The new investigation involves 12 people named as suspects in financing and organising the deposition and killing of Lumumba. The crime is not yet too old to prosecute, the court said. A parliamentary enquiry in 2001 decided Belgium was "morally responsible" for the crime, which led to an apology to Congo by then-prime minister Guy Verhofstadt.

a condition of government contracts and subsidies.

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last week issued an invitation to local authorities and associations to present **projects for allotment gardens**. The government has set aside €300,000 in support for the popular community garden projects over three years. "Allotments have a long history and play an important role for those who have little access to land of their own," Peeters said. "Apart from that, they're also a natural local meeting place, and their social role should not be underestimated."

Primary school children in Flanders **score well in international rankings for mathematics** but rank near the bottom in science, according to a survey by Trends in International Mathematics and Science. In maths, Flanders comes second in Europe after Northern Ireland. But for science Flanders is fourth-last, ahead of only Poland, Spain and Norway. Part of the reason, explained Jan Van Damme of the University of Leuven's Centre for Educational Effectiveness, is that science is only taught from the sixth year of primary school in Flanders. Flemish education minister Pascal Smet said that schools need to start science lessons earlier. "It would seem that a number of measures need to be taken urgently, in cooperation with education providers," he commented.

The Middelheim Museum in Antwerp has received a **gift of a work by the British sculptor Anthony Gormley**, most famous for his monumental "Angel of the North" outside Gateshead in England. "Firmament III" is described as "an irregular three dimensional net surrounding a human-shaped void approximately 10 times life-size" and was donated by the Xavier Hufkens gallery in Brussels. A Gormley exhibition opens at the museum in February.

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

## News in brief

Flanders' environment minister Joke Schauvliege has presented a proposal for new procedures for drinking water suppliers before they are able to **shut off supplies to customers**. The new procedures include a clear warning in cases of non-payment, with a reasonable time between warning and shutdown. "Shutting off drinking water is an extremely invasive measure," the minister said. "It has to be carried out in a socially responsible manner, and this measure imposes transparent procedures on suppliers to provide maximum protection for the customer."

A Somali man accused of **hijacking the dredger Pompei** and holding its crew hostage in April 2009 has been sentenced to nine years in prison by a court in Brussels. Hassan O denied involvement, but the court rejected the plea that he was a minor at the time of the hijacking, which lasted 72 days, after bone tests showed he was at least 19 years old at the time of the incident. The dredger belongs to the Jan de Nul group of Aalst.

The federal prosecutor's office has announced that it is **re-opening the investigation into the 1961 murder of Patrice Lumumba**, the first prime minister of the newly

Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits and her Brussels counterpart Brigitte Grouwels last week presented plans for a **400-kilometre cycling network** linking the city of Brussels with the Flemish municipalities on the periphery of the capital. The network, to be completed by 2025, is intended for commuters, to travel to work and school. In Brussels and the so-called *rand*, 71% of all journeys are less than 15km. The estimated cost of the network is €120 million.

A Swiss marketing agency has apologised for a **letter sent to 150 American companies** established in Belgium that advised them to move house to Zurich because of strikes, government debt and low economic growth here, minister-president Kris Peeters told the Flemish parliament. Peeters wrote in protest to the Swiss ambassador to Belgium, asking him to take the appropriate steps to set the record straight.

The 10 largest companies in Belgium, among them AB InBev, Colruyt and KBC, offer **little to no transparency over their earnings** from subsidiaries in other countries and how much tax they pay abroad, according to a study by Transparency International Belgium. The organisation called on the federal government to make transparency

## FLANDERS TODAY

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Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE  
I'm feeling lucky

Bart De Wever was for the third year in a row the most popular politician on Google in 2012. The N-VA president and new mayor of Antwerp topped the list for the number of searches carried out from Belgium on the site, according to Google's annual *Zeitgeist* report.

Google *Zeitgeist* offers data on 51 countries worldwide, as well as a global search portrait. The service doesn't distinguish between Flemish and French-speaking queries and only counts searches conducted via Google.be, so if you use the main site Google.com, you haven't been listed. With that in mind, De Wever's lead is all the more impressive.

The top search in general was for Belfius, but seeing as the bank only recently changed its name from Dexia, most people were likely mystified as to what a Belfius is. Euro 2012 came second, followed by two mysteries to me: Zalando and Twooo. It turns out that Zalando is an online shoe retailer. Twooo, meanwhile, is a chat-dating site, so we'll draw a discreet veil over that. The unstoppable Jeroen Meus' daily cooking show *Dagelijkse kost* was the most-searched TV programme, and Flemish shows made up the whole Belgian top 10. Celebrities, on the other hand, were mixed: tennis player David Goffin on top, followed



Jeroen Meus' *Dagelijkse kost* is the number one googled TV programme by the late minister and *bon vivant* Michel Daerden, Barbie-like BV Lesley Ann Poppe and released convict Michelle Martin. Some other category winners: 3m8s (musicians); castle murder (current events); *Dead Man Talking* (movies); Eden Hazard (athletes) and Whitney Houston (people). Whitney also topped the worldwide people and performing artists search lists.

► [www.google.com/zeitgeist](http://www.google.com/zeitgeist)

# 12 from 2012

**It's been quite a year in Flanders. Our correspondents look back at the biggest stories of 2012, one month at a time**

The year began with pioneering surgery in Ghent and ended with promises of cheaper energy for all. In between there was tragedy, controversy, transport chaos and the occasional sporting triumph – here's our round-up of how Flanders fared in 2012.

## January

### A surgical first

Surgeons at the University Hospital in Ghent carried out Flanders' first face transplant in an operation that took three years and 65 members of hospital staff to prepare. Using 3D scans of the patient and the prosthetic to ensure a perfect fit, it was said to be the most complex of the 19 face transplants carried out so far around the world. "We look on this not as a prestige project but as a breakthrough in giving people back their lives," said Dr Philip Blondeel, head of the surgical team. The patient was apparently a man but his identity was never released. **Alan Hope**



## February

### Oscar nomination

Although it was no surprise that the darkly tragic and smartly written *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*) won wealth of awards at film festivals big and small, Flanders was still pleasantly surprised when Hollywood gave the directorial debut of Michaël R Roskam (pictured below) a nod by nominating it for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It didn't win, but the publicity was enough to propel its star Matthias



Schoenaerts into talks for a major role in an American production and for Roskam to be handed both an HBO project and the role of director for Fox Searchlight's *Animal Rescue*. **Lisa Bradshaw**

## March

### Tragedy in Switzerland

For 22 families in Flanders, the unthinkable happened. Two classes of sixth-year students from schools in Lommel and Heverlee were returning from a week of skiing in Switzerland when their coach crashed in a tunnel near Sierre in the Valais region. Four members of staff, both coach drivers and 22 children aged 11 and 12 were killed (photo, above right). A further 24 children were injured. A national day of mourning was declared. The Swiss displayed efficiency and compassion in equal measure in dealing with the situation, but the exact cause of the crash has never been discovered. Both schools have now cancelled future ski trips. **AH**

## April

### Transport worker killed

Public transport in Brussels came to a standstill for six days when MIVB staff walked out after a supervisor, 56-year-old Iliaz Tahiraj, was assaulted and killed by a friend of the driver of a car involved in a collision with a bus. The federal government promised extra security, with 400 police drafted in to patrol transport routes. But MIVB staff came close to a strike in November, claiming promises of more police security had not been met. Meanwhile the 28-year-old accused, who admits the assault but denies any intent to kill, is free awaiting trial. **AH**

## May

### Nuclear closures

The closure of two nuclear reactors – at Doel in East Flanders and Tihange in Wallonia – threatened to force electricity prices up this winter as other suppliers struggled to meet demand. The reactor at Doel power station was closed down after routine inspections revealed microscopic cracks in the concrete reactor housing, and it was feared at one point that it might never reopen. The situation was found to be less serious than it first appeared, but it is not expected to open until February. **AH**

## June

### Shopping centre controversies

After months of speculation, the leisure and shopping centre Uplace in Machelen received approval from the Flemish environment ministry. The province of Flemish Brabant opposes the project, claiming it would create congestion on the Brussels Ring, increase pollution and take customers from town centres like Vilvoorde and Leuven. Two more new shopping centres, Neo at Heizel and Just Under the Sky by the Van Praet bridge, were also approved, making those problems worse, according to critics. There are proceedings pending to stop Uplace filed by the Brussels-Capital Region and Unizo, among others. Uplace hopes to begin construction next year for a 2016 opening. **AH**

## July

### Olympic challenges

Although London's Olympic Games extravaganza offered myriad delights, it was a barren occasion for Flanders, with just one medal – won by Ghent's Evi Van Acker, who took bronze in Laser Radial sailing (pictured

below). But there were other memorable Flemish performances along the way: Tia Hellebaut (fifth in the high jump), Kim Clijsters (made it to the tennis quarter-finals), Hans Van Alphen (fourth in the decathlon) and the men's field hockey team (fifth place). There was redemption a few weeks later at the Paralympics, where Flanders brought home seven medals, including two golds for horsewoman Michèle George and one for Marieke Vervoort for the 100m wheelchair sprint. **Leo Cendrowicz**



## August

### Woman of the street

We have heard from women in the expat community complain for years about harassment on the streets of Brussels. But this year Flemish film student Sofie Peeters decided to go a step further and record the experience. The Leuven-born filmmaker made headlines with her Rits school graduation project *Femme de la rue*, which documented just how bad verbal harassment from men of ethnic origin is in the capital. The film called up questions of identity, sexism and machismo and convinced the city to make verbal harassment illegal. **LB**

## September

### Rail reform

Plans from federal minister Paul Magnette for the reform of the rail authority NMBS ran up against opposition from unions, with a series of all-out strikes and local industrial actions hitting commuters in the autumn. At issue is the tripartite structure of the NMBS, which all sides agree has to change. Magnette proposes two divisions: rolling stock and infrastructure. The unions argue that only a return to the old unitary authority will allow them to provide the services customers expect. For stranded passengers, particularly those hoping to get to the airport, the dispute seemed arcane and beside the point. **AH**

## October

### Enter mayor De Wever

Each of the 308 communes in Flanders had different stakes and results in the municipal elections of 14 October. Still, a regional trend was clear: The victory of the nationalist N-VA was unprecedented in decades. With 37% of the vote in Antwerp, De Wever (pictured above right) took town hall. After more than 90 years in power, socialists no longer govern Antwerp. Ghent, too, had a historic result, going against the trend and living up to its



nonconformist image. A joint list by socialists and greens, headed by the folksy mayor Daniel Ternmont, gained an absolute majority. **Anja Otte**

## November

### Ford Genk closes

Ford Europe announced that the factory in Genk, which employs 4,500 and provides work for about 5,000 more in Limburg, would close in 2014. The city, the province and the Flemish government rallied around to set up a task force, headed by BNP Paribas Fortis chairman Herman Daems, to hammer out a strategy for Limburg's future, while minister-president Kris Peeters demanded European aid. Four suppliers who depend on the factory have now said they will also close, and the snowball is expected to keep rolling as the winter goes on. **AH**



## December

### Electrabel cuts prices

The country's largest gas and electricity supplier, the French-owned Electrabel, finally bowed to consumer and government pressure and announced it would cut its prices from January, worth about €200 a year to the average household. During the year, Electrabel saw 300,000 people desert it for cheaper prices elsewhere. Federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte, who had imposed a price freeze on all suppliers until the end of the year, said he was "cautiously positive". **AH**

# Committee gears up for war centenary commemoration

## A who's who of Flemish politicians, academics and artists will help plan the 2014-2018 events

Alan Hope

War correspondent Rudi Vranckx and astronaut Frank Dewinne are among the nine members of the steering committee of the Flemish government's centenary commemorations of the First World War. The committee was presented by minister-president Kris Peeters last week at a ceremony in Flagey in Brussels, following a special performance of Verdi's *Requiem*.

The other members of the committee are: photographer Lieve Blanquaert; artist Jan Fabre; Jacques Rogge, chairman of the International Olympic Committee; Chris Van den Wyngaert, a judge at the International Criminal Tribunal; EU council president Herman Van Rompuy; philosopher and honorary vice-rector of Ghent University Etienne Vermeersch;



Former South African president FW De Klerk (left) and Kris Peeters at a meeting last year. De Klerk will attend a peace symposium in Flanders during the First World War centenary commemoration

and Marc Vervenne, honorary rector of the University of Leuven. The committee will offer advice and generate ideas for the

government's 100 Years of the Great War project for 2014-2018, as well as acting as its ambassadors in other countries. Among the plans are a Memorial Park that includes 40 battlefield sites, the creation of memorial gardens in foreign cities using soil from Flanders' fields and an international peace symposium featuring Nobel Peace Prize winners, which has already secured the presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former South African president FW De Klerk. "In the coming years we want to set up a unique commemoration project," Peeters said. "Our wish is to make present and future generations aware of questions such as tolerance and international cooperation, and make clear to them that these are the essential building blocks of an open and tolerant society."

## City coalition takes shape in Antwerp

Bart De Wever, the new mayor of Antwerp, will serve the full six-year term in office, regardless of the result of the 2014 federal and regional elections, he announced last week. After eight weeks of negotiations, a coalition has been formed to run the city, following the defeat of Patrick Janssens' *Stadslijst* (City List) in the October municipal elections.

The new coalition includes two members of the outgoing Janssens administration: Marc Van Peel and Philip Heylen, who retain their old portfolios of the port and culture respectively. New to the city hall is Open VLD's Claude Marinowier, who takes over education. Rob Van De Velde of N-VA is in charge of small businesses.

Van de Velde is one of five N-VA aldermen. Ludo Van Campenhout's portfolio is sport, diamonds and public works. Liesbeth Homans, often seen at De Wever's right hand during the election, takes social affairs and housing. Koen Kennis is in charge of finances and tourism, while newcomer Nabila Ait Daoud is head of youth.

De Wever's administration also presented a 450-point plan for governing the city, including placing more security cameras, partially covering the ring road, more events on the Grote Markt and investigating the possibility of free wireless internet connections. The council also intends to pay down Antwerp's debt by the end of De Wever's six-year mandate.

## Rutte discusses Fyra with minister-president

The problems experienced by the new Fyra high-speed train between Brussels and Amsterdam are "teething troubles" that will sort themselves out in time, according to a statement by Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, on a visit to meet with Kris Peeters last week. The public transport users' group TreinTramBus (TTB) called for the new train to be taken out of service until its problems could be solved. The former Benelux train should be reinstated in the meantime, TTB said. Users and politicians have complained about the train that has replaced the Benelux train: It costs more, provides less-frequent service, requires a reservation and some stops, like The Hague, have been removed from the route. In its second week, Fyra was again plagued by delays and cancellations. However, the old Benelux train, according to NMBS CEO Mark Descheemaeker, was cancelled seven times in its last two weeks. Also last week, 250 passengers aboard a Thalys train travelling from Paris to Amsterdam had to be evacuated when it broke down. And a Eurostar train from London to Brussels was delayed by 87 minutes.

## Ministers and art experts angered by Belfius sale

A plan by Belfius bank, formerly Dexia, to sell off some of its artworks has been described as "morally and ethically unacceptable" by Bozar director Paul Dujardin, while Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege has demanded an explanation from the bank.

Belfius has a collection of about 4,500 artworks, making up the largest "private" art collection in the country. The definition of "private" is exactly where the question lies: Dexia Bank Belgium, as it was before the name-change, was taken over by the government in October 2011 after the

parent company collapsed. In the view of federal minister Paul Magnette, whose portfolio includes federal museums, the art collection, with works by such Flemish luminaries as Constant Permeke, Fernand Khnopff and Jan Brueghel the Elder, is also now public property.

According to Schauvliege, the artworks in the collection are of national significance and would require approval and a licence from her department before they could be sold to a foreign buyer. According to Flemish art curator Jan Hoet, the entire collection is worth about €200 million.



Fernand Khnopff's "The Garden" (1886) is just one painting that could be sold if Belfius gets its way

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**170 km**

of roadworks planned for Flanders in 2013, 30 km more than this year. The total cost of the works is estimated at €87.4 million

**€37.4 million**

fine received by the postal authority bpost from the Competition Council for its misuse of a dominant market position in giving large discounts to major business customers

**€10,400**

paid out by the Flemish Agency for Nature and Woodland in six compensation claims for damage caused by beavers. There are an estimated 120 beaver families in Flanders

**19%**

above average purchasing power in Belgium, compared to the rest of the EU, according to Eurostat. Belgium is in eighth place on the list, which was headed by Luxembourg at 171%

**100**

supporters of those arrested during a protest against genetically modified crops in Wetteren in May 2011 will appear before a court in Dendermonde in January and volunteer to be tried alongside the accused

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Rumours, rumours

"If you don't read the newspaper, you're uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you're misinformed," Mark Twain once said. Be warned as you read on, for who can tell how much truth there is here? This column is about rumours, not the truth, but both can be equally harmful to a politician. The rumours concern Steven Vanackere, finance minister in the federal government. According to some, he is tired of his job. Vanackere denies this, using Mark Twain's quote. "Tired? That I am. But not tired of the job," he quipped. During the budget talks, which can be exhausting if anything, the Christian-democrat was not only responsible for number crunching all the proposed new taxes, he also had a host of European meetings to attend. According to a schedule he made public some weeks ago, he was up for 47 hours in a row, rushing from one meeting to another.

Still, the rumours are there: Vanackere is not living up to the job and would rather hold another function. Last year, he was named as the next governor of the province of West Flanders, a job his father held briefly until his untimely death.

Vanackere had always dreamed of "finishing his father's job". However, around the time the governor was appointed, CD&V ran short of politicians with experience in the federal government, as Yves Leterme had left to work with the OECD and Inge Vervotte quit politics. CD&V called on Vanackere to stay on, which he did – reluctantly.

"See the way politicians live. Would you like to be in our shoes?" Vanackere was quoted in *De Standaard* last month. "This is not something that one can do for a lifetime. You do it as long as you feel you're doing it well."

This was a reaction to the first rumours, which originated among the French-speaking coalition partners. Anonymous sources called him "a catastrophe" and "spineless", blaming him for the slow functioning of his department and the lack of progress made on the Dexia issue. In the weeks after, Flemish politicians echoed the earlier criticism, until the rumours started that Vanackere may be on the lookout for another job.

Maybe he can switch jobs with federal minister of foreign affairs Didier Reynders. Vanackere seemed quite content as foreign minister, much like Reynders was during his long years as finance minister. Unless we were misinformed, of course.

# Flanders tackles bankruptcy prevention

**Companies at risk will receive front-line help, says Peeters**

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders is freeing up €5 million for projects aimed at preventing bankruptcies in small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) on the brink of failure, minister-president Kris Peeters announced this week. The projects will be administered by employers' organisations, who will be asked to take a proactive role in monitoring businesses and be ready to step in when problems first start to appear.

"Experience with preventive company policy teaches us that it is crucial to approach those companies at risk from falling into economic difficulties from within the organisations that are close to them," Peeters said. The subsidised projects would then offer targeted and individual advice and support. As part of the approach, the government is also increasing the subsidy available to companies to pay for a thorough re-start plan drawn up by experts, to 75% of the



cost, up from 50% at present. About 15% of small businesses in Flanders are at risk of going out of business, according to a recent survey carried out by Unizo and the business consultancy Graydon.

The sectors worst affected are food services and trucks logistics, and Antwerp is in the worst position. This year, 10,550 businesses across the country have gone out of business, a new record.

## Government offers support to airlines

The federal government last week agreed to €20 million in support for the airline sector in Belgium, for training and costs for social security charges. Part of the aid will go to pay pilots who train other pilots, currently without remuneration. In addition, work carried out by staff in other countries will be partially exempted from social security charges on the airline.

While at present flight crew are paid as if they were on duty during layovers in destination countries,

they will in future be paid a premium for being on call, which is not liable to social security charges. Both measures are a means of getting around EU laws on state aid to industry while giving support to the industry to combat competition from airlines in countries where salary costs are lower. The sum agreed is less than the airlines had hoped, by about €10 million. However, a spokesperson for Brussels Airlines said that they were "happy" that the government

recognises there is a problem. We have been pleading for measures like this for eight or nine years." Jetairfly said the decision was "a step in the right direction". The government also announced that it intended to address the unusually advantageous conditions given to low-cost airline Ryanair for operating out of Charleroi Airport. Part of that support is made possible because Charleroi pays nothing towards the cost of Belgocontrol, the air traffic control agency. When

## Arbitration required as Ford talks break down

The management of Ford Genk has called for independent arbitration after talks with unions broke down last week after only five hours around the table. The dispute is not over the closure of the factory but a decision by unions to stop finished cars from leaving the plant and supplies from outside coming in. The two sides are also unable to agree on the resumption of work.

The breakdown in talks also led management to a decision to cancel two planned working days on 19 and 20 December, due to be the last of the year. Since before the closure announcement in October, Ford Genk has been operating a system of part-time work, with the factory open only on certain dates. Full-time work is scheduled to resume on 9 and 10 January.

Ford had demanded workers at Genk allow cars and parts to leave and the number of vehicles kept at the plant be limited to 1,500. In return, they offered a 25% premium

on top of the basic hourly wage for the next 40 shifts – a proposal the unions described as "insufficient".

Also last week, the task force set up by the Flemish government to consider the economic future of Limburg province started work, with a meeting involving ministers Kris Peeters (economy), Geert Bourgois (interior) and the three Limburg ministers in the government: Ingrid Lieten, Jo Vandeurzen and Philippe Muyters, as well as representatives of employers, unions, the EU and the city of Genk. First items on the agenda: retraining for workers made redundant and the future of the land on which the current factory stands.

In related news, Flemish labour minister Muyters revealed that only one in six of the workers made redundant by the closure of Opel Antwerp two years ago and given a bridging pension has since found a job. More than 2,500 workers were laid off by the closure in 2010.

## Bruges' Oud Sint-Jan becomes congress centre

The city of Bruges has re-opened the former Oud Sint-Jan hospital as a new meeting and congress centre. The centre stands on the site of a hospital for the sick and needy dating back to the 12th century, which was largely replaced in the 1860s.

The new centre takes over the inner courtyard, the central building and the passages and offers facilities for seminars, conferences, product launches and meetings. In another part of the complex is the city's Memling Museum featuring works by not only Hans Memling but also Picasso, Matisse and Miró.

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



## ESA Incubation Centre launched in Geel

Last week Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters launched a Business Incubation Centre (BIC) in Geel, Antwerp province, for the European Space Agency (ESA). The goal of the centre is to apply space technology to commercial applications. Currently, ESA BICs exist in the UK, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

"The presence of this BIC in Flanders is

an important additional incentive for our companies and research institutions to work with space technology, an area in which we're already very successful," Peeters said.

The space technology sector in Flanders employs 1,200 scientists across a number of companies, with a total turnover of €220 million.

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Banking ▶ ING

ING Belgium is investing €110 million over the next four years to renovate more than 230 of its larger branches.

### Banking ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution will open five additional branches across Ireland, as the Irish market is recovering after several years of downturn. KBC Ireland has attracted €1 billion in deposits in the last 18 months.

### Chemicals ▶ Christeyns

The Ghent-based chemical and detergent producer has acquired the British Alex Reid company, an affiliate of the Johnson Service group, with plants in Leicester and Croydon.

### Finance ▶ BASF

German chemical group BASF has created a financial base in Brussels with a capital of €8 billion to centralise the company's financial operations. Meanwhile, Pfizer Animal Health has also created a financial management affiliate in Zaventem.

### Holdings ▶ Dexia

The ailing Dexia bank has finally sold its Dexia Asset Management affiliate to Hong Kong-based GCS Capital for €380 million. The move is part of the group's restructuring and significantly lowers the amount of guarantees supported by the French and Belgian states.

### Insurance ▶ Delta Lloyd

The Dutch Delta Lloyd bank has sold its local damages insurance activities to Fidea, an affiliate of the American JC Flowers group.

### Media ▶ Alfacam

The TV services provider, based in Lint, Antwerp province, is in negotiations with the Indian Hinduja group to receive a €24 million credit line and €6 million in cash. The move comes as a relief to Alfacam, burdened with a €58 million debt linked to its unsuccessful foray into broadcasting. Shares of the company jumped some 60% on the news.

### Property ▶ WDP

WDP Warehouses has paid €26 million for a 30,000 square-metre distribution centre in Barneveld, the Netherlands. This latest move brings the company's Dutch investments to €350 million.

### Supermarkets ▶ Delhaize

Delhaize plans to open up to 30 additional stores next year, including two supermarkets and more than 20 of its convenience outlets.

# The United Nations of

**There's a long and rich history at the port of Antwerp, where medieval guilds met forward-thinking business**

Alan Hope

The moment you get close to the port of Antwerp, you start to notice something intriguing. Everywhere you look are buildings, warehouses, cranes and trucks emblazoned with the name of this "Natie" or that "Natie". Sometimes the names offer a clue to what the businesses do: Katoen Natie, say, or Tabaknatie. But what is a *natie*?

**N**atie is the Dutch word for "nation" – in Dutch, the UN, for instance, is called de Verenigde Naties. The word, though, once meant the same as "guild" in the southern Netherlands, of which Antwerp was a part. And now, it refers to shipping companies working out of the port of Antwerp – but in particular, shipping companies with a long and rich history.

"It's a very old system; they say the origins go back to the 13th century," explains Danny Deckers, a senior adviser at the Antwerp Port Company, which runs the entire port. (These days, the port takes up more space than the city itself.)

"In 1263 the city of Antwerp, which was operating the port at that time, saw a group of people specialising in particular products. At the beginning it was very basic – weighing the grain, counting the fish, bringing in wine in barrels. At a certain point the city said, this is interesting because if they're specialised, then we always have people who are experts in one aspect of business."

## Thank you for smoking

Over the centuries, the specialisations appeared in the names of those companies. "Katoen Natie for cotton, Wijnnatie was wine, Tabaknatie was tobacco," says Deckers. "In fact, Tabaknatie is the only one today that still deals in the same product that gave it its name: They only handle tobacco. It's also the only company in the world that I know where there's a sign on the desk of the general manager saying 'Thank you for smoking'."

The specialisation also extended to geographical areas: Hessenatie for the Rhineland region of Hesse in Germany; Noordnatie for Scandinavia; Mexico-Natie and Amerika Natie. The latter two no longer exist, while Hessenatie and Noordnatie have been taken over



transport, another was responsible for personnel. And it developed with the times. One was responsible for

to be aged between 20 and 35, have done their military service and pass an exam in reading, writing and mental arithmetic. They also had to pay dearly: According to historian Wim Snykers, the cost of one share in Vlasnatie (flax and linen) in 1834 was 5,260 francs, or the equivalent of 10 years' average wages. A share in Melknatie in 1865 was the equivalent of 24 years' average pay.

"The ownership of the *natiess* has changed a bit in the course of the years," Deckers says. "Normally they would have 40 to 60 shareholders, *natielazaten* we called them, or *natie* bosses. But things have changed. Katoen Natie is owned by one person; he bought up the shares of all his colleagues and built the company up to a world leader. He employs

10,000 people all over the world now. Other *natiess*, like Wijngaard Natie and Zuidnatie, still have their shareholders working in the company."

## Katoen Natie

"We're one of the biggest at this moment but not the oldest," says Fernand Huts, the sole owner of Katoen Natie. At the same time, he says, the medieval concept finds its echoes in modern-day business practices. "It has very modern applications because it has a cooperative rationale, and working together in a company and sharing the profit is also a very modern idea." Katoen Natie began in 1854, around the time when ships were getting too big for the crews to handle the

loading and unloading of cargo, and dockworker became a profession. The *natiess* of the time began providing what we now think of as supply chain management: everything from taking the cargo – in the case of Katoen Natie everything to do with cotton and related materials – from the ship through customs to the eventual end-user.

"We now work with a lot more varied and diversified products than we did in the beginning," Huts explains. "We're now doing business in 32 countries spread over all the continents."

Tabaknatie is also huge and ultra-specialised, dealing only in tobacco and on a world scale. In its five warehouses in Antwerp, the company holds the world's strategic reserves of tobacco. The warehouses themselves, unusually given names – Apollo, Argos, Ariane, Asterix and Atlantis – are state of the art.

The five warehouses are climate controlled to protect the products from the cigarette beetle (*Lasioderma serricorne*). "The temperature never goes over 16 degrees, and they have special traps to capture the male insects so they can't reproduce. It's famous," says Deckers. "They have the normal tobaccos, which are in daily use, let's say, but they also have the strategic stocks of the cigarette makers. Whenever a crop is unsuccessful somewhere in the world, they can get their tobacco here."

## From Antwerp to your coffee cup

The supply chain, meanwhile, reaches from Antwerp all the way into our homes. Katoen Natie handles all of sports retailer Decathlon's goods, for instance. "It comes in from all over the world, they put it in warehouses, and they send it to the shops. Nova Natie does the same for the DIY chain Hubo, with screwdrivers and hammers and everything else. They put it all in storage and then two or three weeks before you get the brochure through your letterbox, they take orders from local sales managers

**"The city realised that, through the port, they always had people who were experts in one aspect of business"**

by the global giant Port of Singapore Authority.

"Even today we have this idea of *natiess* as a form of voluntary cooperation within a company," Deckers says. "The traders had to buy a share in the company, and after a trial period they could get a job in the company, in full solidarity with each other. One was commercial, one was responsible for

horses in medieval times, now it's trucks and haulage carriers. So the structure still exists. And we see new *natiess* appearing, or at least the principle."

## Tough standards

The owners of the *natiess* in the 19th century, when the growth in international trade boomed, had

# Antwerp

ng shipping companies



and send it out all over Belgium and the Netherlands."

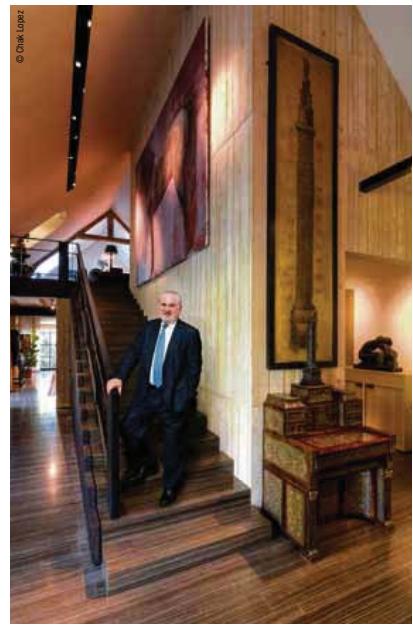
More and more coffee is arriving in containers, too, says Deckers. "450,000 tonnes on average – or 62 billion cups. And there's a specialised *natie* – Molenbergnatiek – with a name that

refers to the street in Antwerp where they had their offices. But they should have been called Koffie Natie. So each *natie* has its history."

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



As the cargoes grew and ships' crews were not enough, the profession of dockworker was born



The medieval guild concept "has a cooperative rationale", says Fernand Huts, CEO and sole proprietor of Katoen Natie

## Emerging natiess

**The newest addition to the team that moves hundreds of thousands of products through Antwerp**

**W**hile the major *natiess* are all old companies, a newcomer appears from time to time on the scene. And though Shipt doesn't call itself a *natie*, that's essentially what it is. It was founded in 2003 by Jan Goderis, a former merchant navy officer, and Jan D'Haeyer, a trained naval architect, who came up with the idea when they were both studying for MBAs at Flanders Business School in Antwerp.

That must have seemed a daunting prospect, at best. "Between the feet of the elephant, there's always room for a mouse," states Goderis. "Our activities offer a potential extra level of service to the users of the port of Antwerp, in particular on the left bank. That's basically what our core business is, the organisation of multi-modal transport." The term refers to a contract that involves at least two means of transport: rail, road, sea, inland waterway, etc. In 2008, Shipt obtained a concession of 130,000 square metres on the left bank of the Scheldt.

"Our platform here, with the connection to the Deurganck dock, aims to provide multi-modal support in all areas. In that respect, we're quite different from the classic *natie*. Katoen Natie does a similar sort of business to us but is of course many times bigger and specialises in logistics and added value in logistics. Whereas we're specialised in multi-modal transport. That's where the difference lies."

### It's good to be small

It might even be an advantage to be younger and smaller, Goderis ventures. "There are always those who think, 'I want something new and something different', and maybe they have a desire to work with other people than those huge classic businesses. So yes, we're certainly something different. We often work with companies that are themselves somewhat smaller and don't want to be treated like a number, but that are looking for what you might call a more personal service.

I think we're more easily able to offer that sort of service than the large corporations might be."

A plot allowance of 130,000 square metres may seem enormous – it's about the size of a large stadium – but in port of Antwerp terms it's small. Katoen Natie, for example, has 1.65 million square metres in Antwerp and 4.8 million at its disposal worldwide. Tabaknatie has 314,000 square metres in Antwerp alone.

"We're currently at around 80,000 square metres because of the construction of the new lock next door," explains Goderis. "So a certain area is not at the moment available to us. Still, the whole site is a pretty small area. We're still a small-scale operation." AH

► [www.shipt.be](http://www.shipt.be)

## A PORT NEEDS ITS SPACE

Standing isolated in the vast acreage of Antwerp harbour, barely visible above the endless vista of stacked containers, is a church steeple, all that remains of the village of Wilmarsdonk, which was evacuated in the 1960s to make way for the extension of the port. In 1966, the village was razed, but the Gothic steeple of the church of St Lawrence was retained (*pictured*).

Wilmarsdonk, which dated to 1155, is just one of the villages that had to disappear to make way for commerce at the port. Oorderen was even older, and its place was until recently the site of Opel Antwerp. One building from the village is preserved at the outdoor museum in Bokrijk, Limburg province.



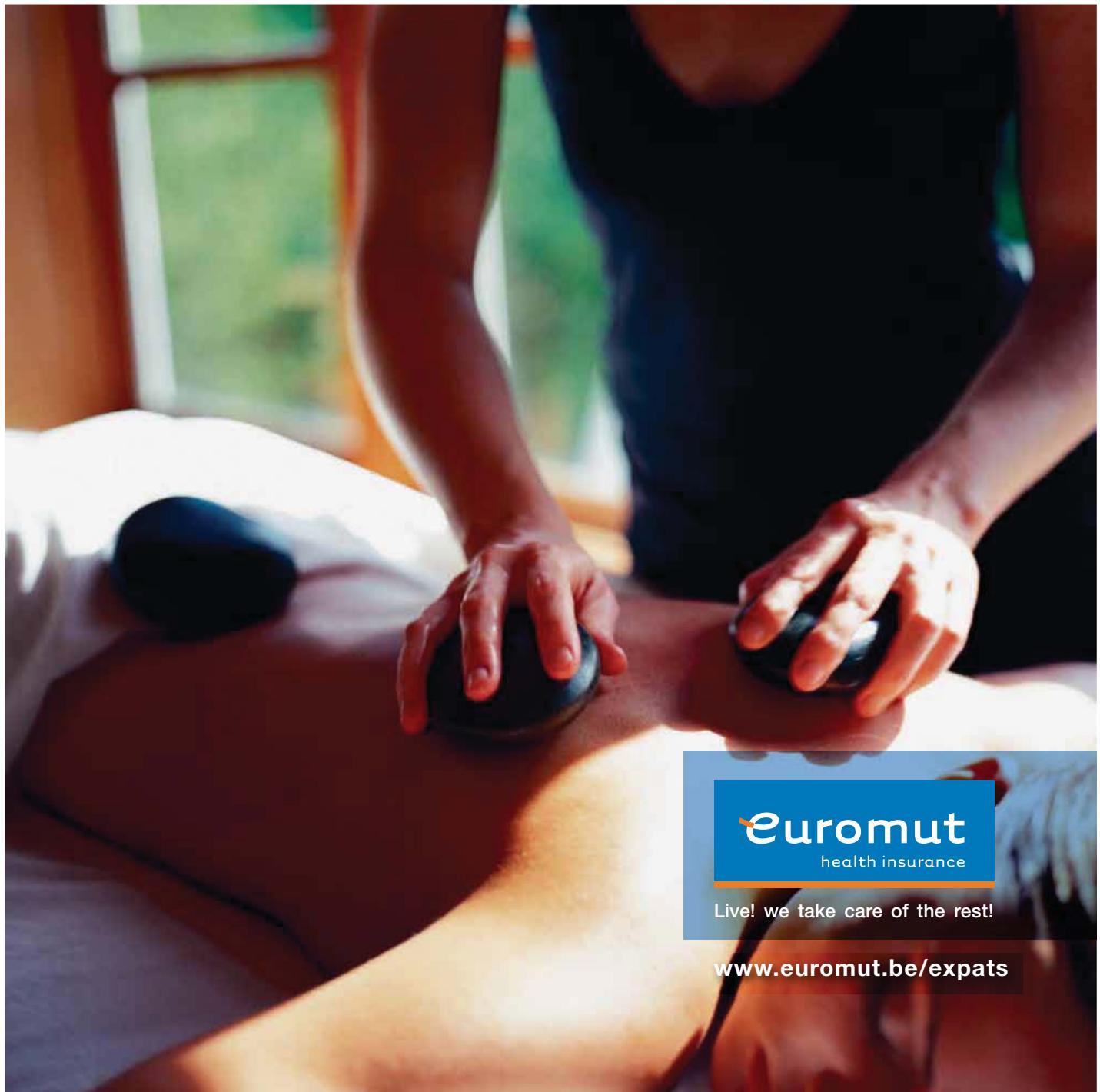
Jan Goderis (left), a former merchant navy officer, and Jan D'Haeyer, a navy architect, run Shipt

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# The good life

**Out of the rat race and on to the farm: meet an expat couple who escaped to the country**

Sally Tipper

We've all surely fantasised at some point of giving it all up, of packing in the day job and heading to the country to live off the land. We meet one expat who actually did it

Two years ago, a normal day for Debbie Quinn would involve putting on a suit, getting in the car, fighting traffic, sitting in an office, then doing it all in reverse come the evening. Sound familiar? But now she's to be found in wellies and an old jumper, milking goats, riding a horse, making soap and teaching others long-forgotten handicrafts at her smallholding in Geel. And she's never been happier. British-born Debbie, 45, and husband Stuart ditched the rat race in the Netherlands and crossed the border to Geel, in Antwerp province, two years ago. She gave up her job managing a team of social workers and followed the dream of self-sufficiency. Now, she manages chickens, sheep, pigs, rabbits, turkeys, bees, a horse and a particularly stubborn billy goat. She also passes on her expertise to others.

Entirely self-taught, Quinn invites people into her home for a day or a weekend of lessons in sewing, quilting, soap-making, sausage-making or cheese-making. Guests bond quickly during the journey from tentative incompetence to the beginnings of a skill; the combination of a patient teacher who happens to be a warm host and a great cook is a winning one.

## Make do and mend

"I started giving lessons and workshops last year to local people, and a year later I spread my wings to a wider clientele," Quinn says as she tries to teach me how to thread a sewing machine. "It was a great success and people reacted really positively to it. I heard regularly that these were skills they wished they had learned from their mothers or grandmas."

It's a return to the good old days of make do and mend; of creating tasty, healthy food from scratch and of doing away with the mass production and the food miles. Quinn produces wool from her own sheep, milk from her own goats (and a neighbour's cow), eggs from her chickens that roam freely in the garden and meat from animals raised in the open air, fed well and killed humanely. Every step of the process is under Quinn's control: She even takes charge of the slaughtering herself.

There's something of a backlash now against processed food and a revival of traditional crafts, a harking back to ways of life long gone in large parts of society. There was a time when home economics was a staple of every girl's education, and these things were learnt at grandma's knee: Mine would be spinning in her



grave to think I'm paying another woman to show me how to whip up a handbag on the Singer. "I've always been creative and loved sewing, so when the opportunity came to start a sewing school, I grabbed it with both hands," Quinn explains. "I love teaching people, and friends kept telling me that I had creative talent that I should share. I have a passion for reviving old skills that can easily be adapted to a modern lifestyle. For example, to make goat's cheese you don't need to keep goats, as goat's milk bought in the shop will work just the same. And sausages and cured hams can be made with meat from your local butcher."

## What's for dinner?

Just about everything on the Quinns' table comes from the surrounding fields and garden. Here's a sample lunch menu: home-baked bread fresh from the oven, goat's cheese flavoured with herbs and nettles, smoked and grilled ham, hung in the shed for the best part of a year. And for dinner: broccoli soup, coq au vin (all but the *vin* Quinn's own endeavours), followed by two

flavours of goat's milk ice cream, the creamiest you're likely to taste.

"It's really helped me to integrate into the local community," she says. "I think they were a little shy of us at first, but once the ice was broken it was amazing how they helped and promoted my workshops and products. They really stand by us, helping and supporting local farmers and businesses."

## Worth every minute

It's a far cry from the family's previous life in the Netherlands, where they lived for almost 20 years and raised their two children. "It wasn't easy to begin with; we lived a very comfortable life in Goes," Quinn admits. "We'd spent years dreaming and planning what we wanted to do once the kids had flown the nest. I gave up a well-paid job as head of a department of social workers to make the smallholding and sewing school financially viable. We were townies and had never kept animals; but we are hard workers and were keen to give it a go."

Once the kids were through school, the couple "found our paradise



Back to nature: Debbie and Stuart Quinn (and friends) at home on their smallholding in Geel

here in Geel," she says. "Stuart works all around the world placing and removing oil rigs, which takes him away from home for weeks and months at a time. It was – and still is – hard work, with lots of blood and tears spilled, but is it worth it? Definitely! I'm a lucky lady to be able to make a living based on what I am passionate about."

Her enthusiasm for her new lifestyle is infectious and is helping to make her small-scale endeavours a growing word-of-mouth success.

"Every morning I wake up inspired and plan and dream about my future here. I have lots of plans I'd love to fulfil; I'd love to have a Jersey cow to make more cheese, breed more Mangalitzza pigs and inspire young and old to take up sewing again."

Debbie Quinn's classes range from €25 for an afternoon's sewing to €150 for a weekend with full bed and board. Call 0499 71 76 79 or email [quInny@telenet.be](mailto:quInny@telenet.be)

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# Let it snow

Come fair weather or foul, there's plenty on offer to keep kids busy over the holidays

Alan Hope

Keeping the kids busy is easier in the winter holidays than at any other time of year, thanks to the generosity of Sinterklaas, Father Christmas, Grandma and Grandpa and whoever else has bestowed gifts on your family this December. But sometimes they – or you – just have to get out of the house, so here are a few tips.

## Wiejoow • Antwerp

Even children (aged six and up) who don't speak Dutch well (or indeed at all) need not fear: The new theatre experience *Wiejoow* by Dimitri Leue involves language, but not one that anyone else will be familiar with. It's mainly built around music and images, and Leue is well known to be boundary-breaking and exciting. It premieres at Het Paleis on 21 December, runs into January, then then tours into February. If your name is Dimitri, you get in free.

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

## Nutcracker marionettes • Brussels

What could be cosier and more seasonal than a theatre stuffed with children and a classic of the musical repertoire? There's no language involved in the Theatre Royal du

Peruchet's marionette production of *The Nutcracker Suite* on 19 and 26-28 December. It might seem daring to attempt a ballet using puppets hanging from strings, but what is art without a challenge?

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

## Kopergietery's Kerstspecial • Ghent

The Kopergietery in Ghent is in the process of building up its own repertoire of Christmas classics, and this year's Kerstspecial is a veritable festival of entertainment, with visiting performers, kids from local schools and students of the Circuscenrum helping put on a different show every day, from 23 to 30 December. And it's all to the benefit of the children's oncology ward at the city's University Hospital.

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

Also in Ghent, the Vlaamse Opera presents a children's version of its winter production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. It's directed by filmmaker Gust van den Berg and includes the talents of the opera's children's choir. Early shows are already sold out, but you can still book for 27 and 28 December. It runs

for a few days in Antwerp in January, too. (in Dutch)

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

## Jules in M • Leuven

Leuven's award-winning Museum M has proven itself to be unusually open to children, with something or other going on during all the school holidays. This time it's to do with Jules, the protagonist of the children's books by Flemish writer and illustrator Annemie Berebrouckx. Jules has been given the job of leading children around the museum's collections on a traditional scavenger hunt, every day except Wednesday (and Christmas and New Year's days).

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

Also in Leuven is another version of *The Nutcracker Suite*, performed by the piano duo Mephisto (Katrijn Simoens of the Simoens Trio and Queen Elisabeth contestant John Govaert) with reading in Dutch. It's at the 't Bad cultural centre in Vilvoorde on 19 December.

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

## Marc de Bel • Achel

Another popular Flemish children's author is Marc de Bel, creator of the

Boeboeks and the Kriegel Sisters. De Bel started his career as a teacher and now not only writes and illustrates hugely popular books but also travels around giving animated readings. He'll be at the Michielshof centre on 28 December, and we don't dare predict what might happen.

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

## 20 Years of Lotje • Genk

Lotje is a young witch, and this exhibition at Genk's public library celebrates her two decades until 5 January. Don't forget that 2013 is the year of reading aloud in Flanders: If you're looking for ideas, the library is the place to start.

► <http://bibliotheek.genk.be>

## Baking Museum • Veurne

Few things are more magical in a child's eyes than the trick of taking nothing but flour, water and yeast and turning them into bread. That ancient metamorphosis is the basis of Baking Days at this museum in Veurne on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 26 December to 4 January. Anything from Christmas cookies to cupcakes to French bread

– make it with your hands, pop it in the oven, and it's ready.

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



# Couples only

Spend a few quiet nights in this holiday season at one of Flanders' most romantic hotel rooms

Lisa Bradshaw

Family activities are all well and good during the school holidays, but what if your goal is to get away from the little darlings more than to entertain them? Call a babysitter and check into one of these hotels for the most romantic weekends going.

## Hotel De Castillion • Bruges

This 17th-century building was once the home of the bishop of Bruges. Now it's your home for the duration, excellently located a few minutes' walk from the hustle and bustle of the Christmas market-laden Grote Markt but in a quiet street, just across from Sint-Salvators Cathedral. Each of the 20 rooms is individually decorated, and they even have a series of rooms called "Romantic". With deep wood tones, velvet furniture and sweeping canopy beds, you'll feel a bit like royalty.

Royalty pays, though, so for a Romantic room, plan on about €175 a night for two. The Classic rooms, however, are also very pretty and



Surround yourself in the 17th century in Bruges' Castillion

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



Monasterium PoortAckere's modest exterior belies its breathtaking appointments inside

inside to appreciate the splendour. Built inside a 13th-century monastery, this hotel in the centre of Ghent expertly blends much of the original interior with modern elegance. Sophisticated rooms have church windows, low lighting and wooden timbers. Many hold four

or six adults but don't necessarily cost more for two than the other rooms (the most romantic of which are from €165 a night). Neo-gothic arches await in the restaurant, bathed in natural light for morning breakfast.

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

## 't Huttenest • Zedelgem

The region around Zedelgem in West Flanders is not far from the E40 but still bursts with lovely landscapes. It's a great place for a winter walk if you can tear yourself away from this quiet country home, with a smattering of charming rooms sporting light wood beams, Victorian accents and views of the substantial front and back gardens. Not being in a city, the prices are a bit more modest – unless you opt for the super romantic Loft Room, which comes with a sauna, infrared, outdoor Jacuzzi, an open fireplace and a flat-screen TV.

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

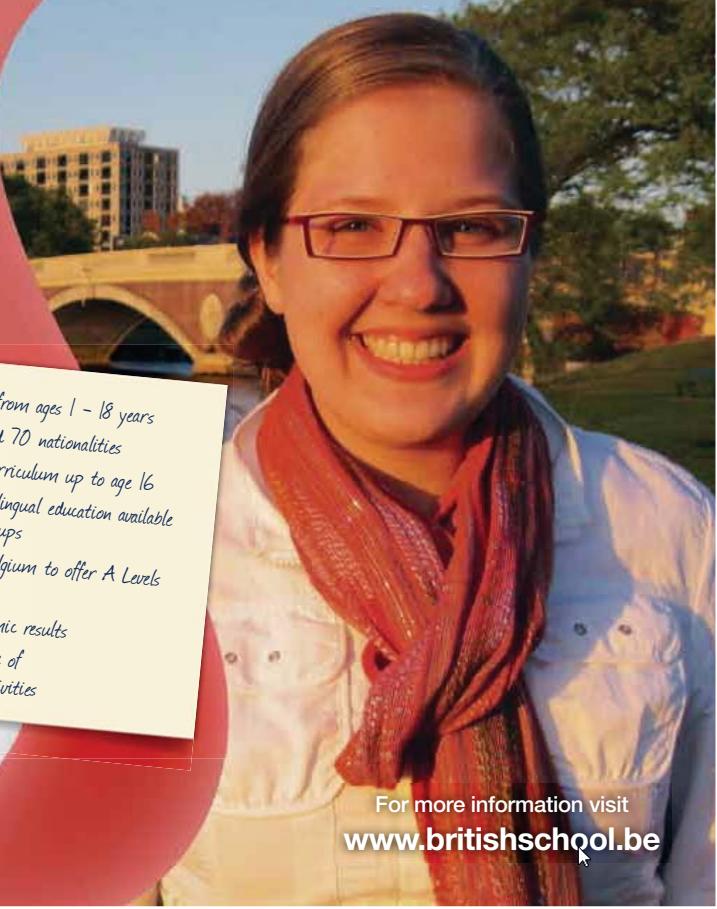
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**Kaat de Corte (BSB alumna,  
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# Twist of fate

## Art imitates life in Peter Terrin's AKO award-winning, autobiographical new novel

Rebecca Benoot

Over the past few years, Peter Terrin has won or been nominated for many literary prizes, but none of them compares to the AKO, which he recently received for his latest and most intimate novel, *Post Mortem*. He is only the fourth Flemish author to win the prestigious award, with its €50,000 cash prize, which has been awarded annually since 1987 for the best Dutch-language book of the year. *Post Mortem* is Terrin's fifth novel since his 1998 debut, the short story collection *De Code* (The Code). *Post Mortem* is the story of Emiel Steegman (an author with a striking resemblance to Terrin), who is working on a new idea for a novel when tragedy strikes: His daughter has a cerebral infarction.

"Originally it was going to be a philosophical thriller about a famous author who has biophobia, as I like to call it, a fear of his own biography," says Terrin, 44. "He starts thinking, what if something happens to me, how will my four-year-old daughter remember me, as she's too young to have any conscious memories and a biographer can never fully convey who a person is." Emiel then seeks people from his past to find out their impressions of him in trying to control how people will remember him when he is gone. "He then starts thinking about how he can influence this."

### The personal fictionalised

In 2008, Terrin's own daughter Renée suffered a cerebral infarction, which is a kind of stroke. Terrin stayed at her bedside doing what he does best: writing.

"Our daughter was in a coma," he says, "and I was sitting beside her at the hospital when I started taking notes on what was happening around us. It was a way to deal with the situation through something familiar. But I was also conscious that what I was writing then would someday be read by her." The result is a touchingly true portrait of what he and his family went through.

However, *Post Mortem* is much more than Terrin's personal struggle. The first part of the novel is a declaration of the author's passionate love for literature. "Emiel is totally consumed by his idea for the novel," Terrin adds. "People often ask me how I go about writing a novel, and here I could finally show them."

Filled with references to the book business, *Post Mortem* illustrates the conception of an idea. "Emiel just has an idea and lets it marinate without ever writing anything down," continues Terrin. "He just gets these passages that strike him out of the blue, so the book is already alive in his mind. But just as he gives in to the fiction, he is hit by reality when his daughter becomes ill."

### Complex cross-overs

The author Terrin is thus writing a book about an author who's writing a book about an author. Sound complicated? Bear with me for just a while longer.

In the third and final part of the novel, we learn the effect of the novel Emiel has written, seen through the eyes of his biographer, a clever addition as a biography is the only part of an author's oeuvre he doesn't control.

The result of this highly refined literary construction filled with autobiographical details is an indictment by Terrin of the contemporary fascination with the intimate details of other people's lives. Reality these days seems to sell more books than fiction. "My previous books were never autobiographical," Terrin says. "I like to think of myself as a pure fiction writer. I don't want my work to be analysed according to my personal life when I'm gone. I want my work to speak for itself. And yet, it's the autobiographical aspect that draws people in. That's ironic because it's exactly what I'm trying to denounce."

### An expression of love

People should, says Terrin, "focus more on the actual story, which is far more intimate as it has taken up so much of an author's life. But still, people want to know 'the story behind the story'. I realised that if I wanted to talk about this subject, I had to give up some personal information, such as what happened to my daughter, to add some force to the novel. It gives the novel an extra layer."

*Post Mortem* is part autobiography and part literature, an intricate web where the fiction embraces the facts. It is a daring, often challenging and very humane novel, a novel that makes you think about the interaction between life and literature. It is already due to be translated into 15 languages, including English.

But most of all, *Post Mortem* is an expression of love, not just for literature, but also for his daughter,

© Robert Van CORBIS



"An emotional moment": Peter Terrin's new autobiographical novel, which recounts his own daughter's medical emergency, won the AKO prize in October

which is why Terrin winning such an award for this novel makes it an even more extraordinary experience. "The AKO is one of the biggest literary prizes in the Low Countries, so it's quite an honour," he confirms, "but I

also perceive it as a confirmation of my daughter's struggle and courage, making it even more special. When she gets older, she'll be able to read how much I loved her and literature, in my own words. If you add all

these things up, then winning this prize becomes a very emotional and important moment."

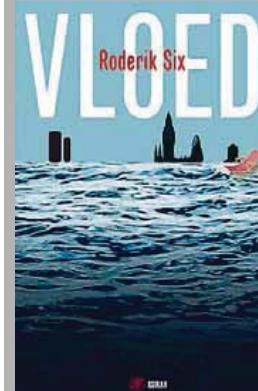
► [www.akoliteraturoprijs.nl](http://www.akoliteraturoprijs.nl)

## FRESH FICTION

### Vloed (Flood)

by Roderik Six • Arbeiderspers

Book reviewer-turned-author Roderik Six won the Bronze Owl this year with his debut novel *Vloed*, in which four students survive on a rooftop after the earth is flooded by torrential rains. They pass their time with the only things they have left: sex, alcohol and the new drug Ultra. When one of them is hurt, they



desperately start looking for an omen as they are confronted by their inner demons. *Vloed* is a contemporary look at the current zeitgeist against the backdrop of an ecological disaster.

### Verstrooiingen (Distractions)

by Bernard Dewulf • Atlas

Antwerp's city poet has written a collection of essays in which he takes a long, lingering gaze at daily life. He did the same a few years ago with *Kleine dagen* (Small Days), in which he pondered his family. Dewulf now contemplates paintings, books and photographs and even tries to look at Jayne Mansfield's breasts through Sophia Loren's eyes and answer what makes life worth living for an author. Written with depth and illumination, *Verstrooiingen* will make you look at the world as never before.

### De speler (The Player)

by Bavo Dhooge • Marmer

With more than 70 books and several awards to his name, 39-year-old Bavo Dhooge's newest novel is exhilarating and

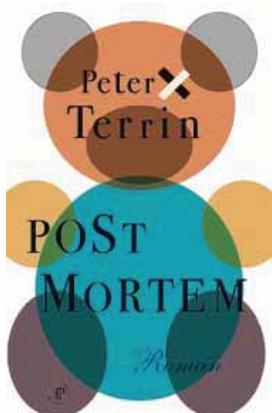
fast-paced, with snappy dialogue and famous movie quotes that emphasise his background as a film director. In *De speler*, would-be movie star Jacques finally lands a job: a walk-on in a soap opera. His wife, however, tired of his blind ambition, focuses her attention on another man. Jacques decides to "remake" himself and turns his life into a movie so he can finally shine as the leading man.

### De seingeve (The Signaler)

by Ann de Craemer

• De Bezige Bij

In her second novel, de Craemer presents a man who has lost almost everything due to his obsessive love for cycling. Now he spends every free minute cheering on his heroes and mourning his own dreams. Based on a true story, de Craemer's tale chronicles a lost life with precision and compassion as well as offering an interesting and accessible look at Flanders' fascination with cycling. Crisp, clear and without frills, *De Seingeve* is a modern-day tragedy.



# Royal couples, veneration of fools and one burning in effigy January carnivals

Andy Furniere

If you thought Flanders was dead between New Year and Carnival in February, think again. East Flanders is home to two unique early carnivals, in Zottegem and Ronse. Carnival princes and kings lead colourful parades of floats every first Saturday after New Year. Known as Driekoningencarnaval at its start in 1956, Zottegem's carnival festivities originate from the celebration of Driekoningen (Three Kings' Day, or Epiphany) on 6 January. According to Christian belief, this is the day that the Magi brought Jesus their gifts.

There are no groups of people dressed up as kings from the east in the contemporary parade any more, but a carnival prince is elected each year as head of the festivities. On 3 January, the prince receives a symbolic key to the city to kick off the party weekend.

The parade of about 35 groups with their colourful floats moves through the town centre as part of Saturday evening's programme. Like any good carnival, many of the floats make fun of politics or parody world-famous carnivals such as the one in Rio de Janeiro. Later that evening, a jury chooses the winners in categories like "best costumes", and the party continues on the central square. On Sunday, youngsters seize power. A jury elects a youth prince and



princess after a talent competition, and all children can dress up to parade on floats through the centre in the afternoon. Then the elderly take centre stage, with an afternoon of dancing and other activities, led by the senior emperor and empress. The party, then, is over in the centre of Zottegem – but not in outlying districts such as Erwetegem and Sint-Maria-Oudenhove, where

parades are organised the following weekend. The city key is handed back to the mayor on the next Monday.

## Bommelsfeesten in Ronse

The Bommelsfeesten started in the early 1950s when local carillon player and composer

Ephrem Delmotte assembled the merrymakers on Zotte Maandag, or Crazy Monday – the last day of the winter holidays – in one parade. The costumed partiers were called *bonmohs* in the local dialect, which later became *bommels*. (Very loosely translated as *vrolijke vrienden*, or jolly good fellows.)

Early on 5 January, the elected

carnival king and queen will head a small group of dignitaries through the town and call on the inhabitants to participate in the day's festivities. After leaving from the *Zotte Muur*, a wall covered in caricatures, they lay flowers at the statue of the *Ronsiese Zot* or Ronse's Fool – the symbol of the Bommelsfeesten (pictured). When the group arrives at the central square, the mayor hands them the key of the city, just as he does in Zottegem.

In the evening, a parade of floats, musicians and majorettes amuses the crowd, followed by stage performances on the central square. Whoever catches the caramel during the *karamellenworp* (caramel toss) receives a gilded sculpture called the *Gouden Bommel*. The night is further brightened up with fireworks.

As in Zottegem, the Sunday is full of activities for children (*bonmohkies* in Ronse's dialect) and special entertainment is provided for older citizens on Monday. On Monday evening, the royal carnival couple return the city key to the mayor and together they bring the festive weekend to an end by burning a straw dummy dressed up as a *bommel*.

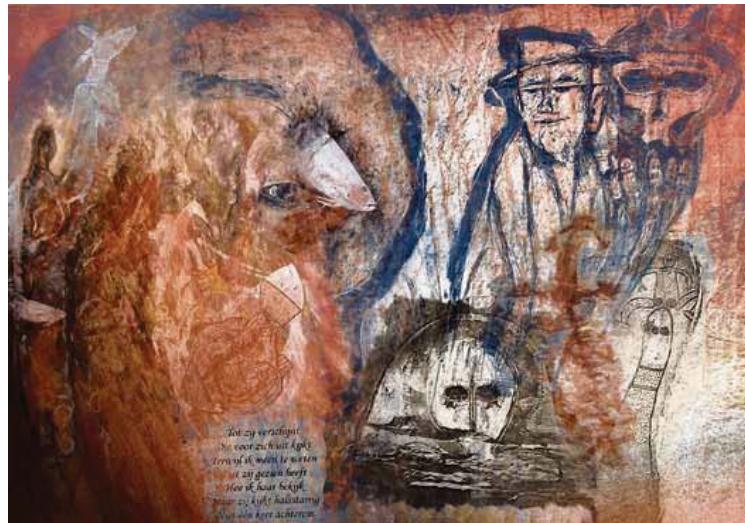
## EXHIBITION

### Veerle Rooms

Flemish artist Veerle Rooms has been pushing the boundaries of printmaking for more than 30 years. Although trained in classical drawing and design, Rooms never held artistic convention as dogma. She was fascinated by the fundamental relationship between image and text, the communication function of design. This relationship is not a given; it has taken various forms in different parts of the world. So Rooms studied not just the history of European printmaking but Japanese methods, Coptic manuscripts and even pre-historic pictograms. This curiosity also drove her pursuit of technical alternatives to simplistic black-and-white graphics. She brings colours and other fine-arts elements into a field too often defined by its function and not form. The result is an immense body of work aided by cutting-edge techniques and broad cultural perspective. See an excellent selection of it at this exhibition on the coast, which is free of charge. **Georgio Valentino**

Until 13 January | Galerij Welnis, Oostduinkerke

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



## MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Lucie&Simon:** Works by French-German photographer couple, presenting a unique vertical view on the world in one series and atmospheric perspectives on world metropolises in the other

Until JAN 27 at **FotoMuseum**, Waalsekaai 47

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

### Brussels

**Bül in Brussels:** A festive installation from Montreal featuring giant balls of light and light shows every evening at nightfall

Until JAN 7 at **Stefaniaplein**

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

### Ghent

**Nervous Women:** Two centuries of women and their psychiatrists, revealing a remarkable history of how society and psychiatry evolved and facts about mania, melancholia, weak nerves, theatrical tics, passionate love, self-mutilation, boredom, rebellion and self-starvation

Until MAY 26 2013 at **Museum Dr Guislain**, Jozef Guislainstraat 43

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

## FILM

## Brasserie Romantiek

"There's so much drama possible in a restaurant!" exclaims scriptwriter Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem, discussing his new film *Brasserie Romantiek*. The directorial debut of Joël Vanhoebrouck, who cut his teeth as assistant director on a number of Flemish films, the movie is certainly full of drama, as couples gather in a chic brasserie on Valentine's night. Not only does each couple have their own set of issues, but server Pascale (Sara De Roo) is knocked for a loop when her old lover Frank (Koen De Bouw) comes through the door and asks her to run away with him to Buenos Aires that very night. Will Pascale follow her still-burning passion or will she stay to run the family restaurant with an exasperating and irresponsible brother (Axel Daeseliere)? The film opens in cinemas this week and should do well; writer/producer Van Rijckeghem has scripted another crowd-pleaser in the vein of his films *Aanrijding in Moscou* and *Man zkt vrouw*.

Lisa Bradshaw



Across Flanders and Brussels | ► [www.brassierieromantiek.be](http://www.brassierieromantiek.be)

## MORE FILM THIS WEEK

## Brussels

**BE Film Festival:** See all the Belgian films you missed this year, gathered together in one festival. Especially recommended are *Dead Man Talking*, *A perdre la raison* (*Our Children*) and *Een weekje weg* (*On the Sly*)

DEC 26-30 at Bozar and Cinematek

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

## Turnhout

**La cinquième saison (The Fifth Season):** The premiere of the new film by Flemish director Peter Brosens and his wife, American director Jessica Woodworth, which won two awards at Venice and doesn't open to the public until next month

DEC 20 20.00 at Utropolis, Graatkarre 99

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

## NEW YEAR

## New Year's Eve at Oude Vismijn

Ghent's Oude Vismijn on the river Leie is a marvel of adaptive reuse. Yesterday's fish market has been transformed into today's multipurpose events centre with a built-in brasserie, Bord'eau. It's a space where old meets new: remnants of ancient architecture sit side-by-side with bold, contemporary design. And here, too, our old friend 2012 is set to meet lucky 2013 with a New Year's Eve all-nighter put on by Belgian watchmakers Lebeau-Courally. The evening's entertainment is provided by DJs Destin, David Latour and Laurent Saint-Yves (an alumnus, appropriately, of Knokke disco collective Kitsch Club). Reserve in advance to save €5 on admission or, better yet, wine and dine at Brasserie Bord'eau beforehand and get into the party for free. **gv**



31 December, from 23.00 | Oude Vismijn, Ghent | ► [www.nye2013.be](http://www.nye2013.be)

## MORE NEW YEAR PARTIES

## Antwerp

**Radio-A-Gogo New Year's Edition:** Steamy retro-style New Year's countdown hosted by notorious party organisers Radio Modern, featuring two rooms full of danceable rock'n'roll beats from the 1960s to today, plus teasing burlesque performances, DJs and more

DEC 31 23.00-7.00 at Petrol, d'Hervouvillekaai 25

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

## Brussels

**Fables & Fairytales:** An Exclusive New Year's Eve Ball: A medieval castle theme and dress code, DJs and concerts, Champagne and oysters and an optional dinner

DEC 31 22.00-9.00 at Brussels Event Brewery, Delaunoystraat 58

► [www.facebook.com/events/FablesandFairytalesparty](http://www.facebook.com/events/FablesandFairytalesparty)

## Knokke-Heist

**Sylvester Night:** Annual New Year's Eve dance party with a sharp dress code: strictly suits and ball gowns

DEC 31 21.00-7.00 at Casino Knokke, Zeedijk 509

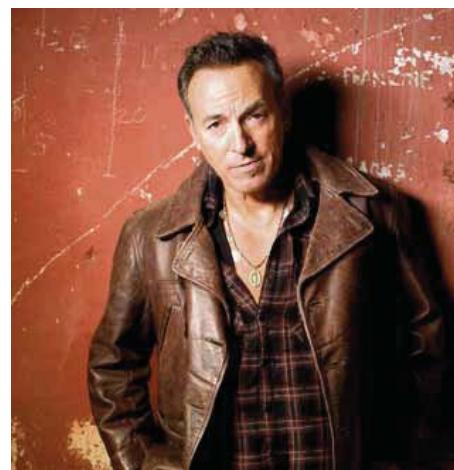
► [www.sylvester-night.be](http://www.sylvester-night.be)

## CONCERT

## Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band

GET TICKETS NOW

After 17 albums and some 40 years in the music business, the Boss remains on the short list of bona fide global superstars. Springsteen's latest hit, "We Take Care of Our Own", was adopted earlier this year as the unofficial theme song of Barack Obama's re-election campaign. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement, boosting the singer's royalty stream while giving the president a helping hand with the blue-collar voters who have identified from the start with Springsteen's working-class, everyman persona. Forget about the fist-pumping anthems, though, his finest moments are the angsty dirges of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *The River*. We hope to hear plenty of them when the Boss and his E Street Band headline next summer's TW Classic. Tickets are on sale now and moving briskly. **gv**



13 July | TW Classic, Festivalpark Werchter | ► [www.twclassic.be](http://www.twclassic.be)

## CONCERTS THIS WEEK

## Across Flanders

**De Nieuwe Snaar:** Series of farewell concerts featuring the "best of" the multi-instrumentalist band that's been producing unique, eccentric, musical theatre since 1982

Until JUN 2013 across Flanders

► [www.tinyurl.com/denieuwesnaar2012-13](http://www.tinyurl.com/denieuwesnaar2012-13)

## Brussels

**Great Mountain Fire:** Brussels indie rock band with a long list of razor-sharp pop songs presents an acoustic version of its album *Canopy*

DEC 21 20.00 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81

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

## CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

## De Weerelt Oude Markt 44, Leuven

It's 20.00, Thursday night, on the Oude Markt in Leuven. While some bars are gearing up with Justin Bieber, De Weerelt is playing Carly Simon as a couple canoe over a game of Scrabble at the bar. I am huddled at a table beneath an enormous mural of the world, sipping a Tripel Karmeliet and talking shop with a group of anthropology post-grads.

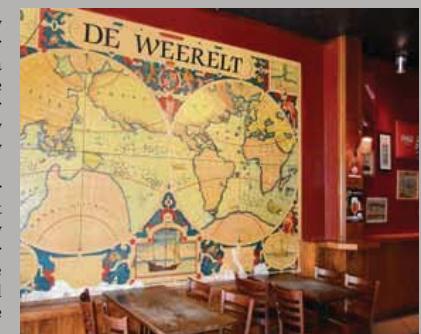
In the summer, when this square (lovingly referred to as "the longest bar in Europe" by youth-oriented tourist office Use-it) is a sea of woven plastic chairs, it makes little difference where you sit. One bar's Stella is as good as another's, and they all bleed together so you rarely know which bar you're patronising.

But in the winter, we are forced to make a choice. Ask any local, and you will learn that this choice is a critical one, based on the very fibre of your being, an expression of the identity you project to the world and, most importantly, of your taste in beer.

My bar of choice is De Weerelt. It is more a post-university crowd, with an average age hovering around 30 (ancient for Leuven). On the playlist, new pop music is replaced by Gloria Gaynor, so I know the words to the songs. Its narrow space means I do not feel obliged to dance, which is really better for everyone. The beer list is good and, best of all, they offer the very delicious Boon Geuze Mariage Parfait (albeit for an unstudent-y price of €7.50).

Perhaps I make it sound unexciting? Admittedly, there are wilder nights out. But De Weerelt is reliably cosy and relaxed, and what it loses in wildness it gains in authenticity along a strip of fairly commercial cafés. In my experience, it is best used as a first or last drink. And, depending on which end of the evening you're on, that drink can come pretty early (or late). Closing at 5.00 and opening again three hours later, De Weerelt is the last to close and the first to open on the Oude Markt.

Katy Desmond



## BITE

## De Zuidkant ★★★★

Normally I run a quick Google search on a restaurant before booking, but in this case I did it the other way around. With a table confirmed, I discovered that De Zuidkant in Damme – a bit northeast of Bruges – had recently been awarded its first Michelin star. My first reaction was to worry about the cost, my second, about what to wear. Both totally unfounded, it turns out, as this place is comfortable and unpretentious. The interior is old-fashioned but modishly renovated and feels warm and inviting. My partner and I enter on a Tuesday evening to find a full house. "We've been booked up every night since we got that star," chef and owner Patrick van Hoorn tells us. "We had to go out and buy a diary for 2013!"

His cheery demeanour matches that of his wife, Cora Moerman, who is our server. The couple are from the Netherlands but have been living in Flanders for 12 years and running De Zuidkant for the past four. It's obvious Patrick knows traditional Flemish cuisine inside-out; the menu is filled with creative versions of classics, incorporating much local product.

First up are two glasses of cava with *crème de pamplemousse*, a pink grapefruit liqueur. The sous-chef brings us three starters to go with the *aperitif*: foam of chanterelle and shiitake mushroom, tuna sashimi with curry mayo and salmon sashimi with avocado paste. Every bite is delicious and promising for what's to come.

Aside from the à la carte items, De Zuidkant offers three, four or five courses. We order the four-course at €55 each (plus €22 for my accompanying wines).



Beautifully arranged morsels of lacquered eel, bright red beetroot coulis, fluffy cream of *foie gras* and tender confit potato make up the first course. The eel is soft and bursting with smoked flavour. It goes admirably well with the tangy beets, meaty *foie gras* and earthy potatoes, not to mention the wine: l'Hortus blanc 2011, an easy-drinking white from the Languedoc region.

But the next glass makes an even better impression: Quinta da Sapeira 2009 is a crisp white blend from Lisbon that tastes strongly of the oak barrels in which it was aged, the

perfect companion to our second course. *Karnemelksmeus*, a West Flemish classic, comes to us in a refined, modern version: a generous heap of North Sea shrimp scattered over a bed of smoothly mashed potatoes, quail buttermilk cream, a perfectly poached quail egg, roasted garlic broccoli with pine nuts and two crispy fried shrimp heads. The best wine of the night is Colors 2009, a fiery, woody red from Catalonia. Its peppery character and hints of dark fruit go well with the seasonal main course: a generous slab of hen pheasant, slow-cooked until juicy

Robyn Boyle

and tender. It comes with a brown sauce, butter-braised *witloof*, silky celery root puree, caramelised silver onions, chanterelle mushrooms and dabs of tart cranberry gel. Our palates are refreshed by a pre-dessert of pear, yoghurt and rice pudding before a platter of cheese arrives. We enjoy the Oud Brugge, Stilton and Camembert with nut bread, jam and sweet fig gingerbread. Just as we're agreeing the main dish is the highlight, out comes dessert. This perfect marriage of sweet and salty, creamy and crunchy is achieved through chocolate mousse, caramel butter, crème brûlée, vanilla ice cream, chocolate biscuits and something grainy that pops and fizzes on the tongue.

After settling the more-than-fair €155 bill, we enjoy a coffee and petit fours, as the chef tells us that "the star was a pleasant surprise, but we just want to keep doing what we're doing, to keep our regular clients happy – especially the ones who ride here on their bikes from Knokke."

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

► Jacob van Maerlantstraat 6, Damme; 050.37.16.76

► Fri 19.00-22.00; Sat-Tue 12.00-14.00 & 19.00-22.00

► €45-€65 (lunch menu €34)

► Affordable Michelin-starred restaurant that puts a superior twist on Flemish classics

## TALKING DUTCH

### The Grand Dictation

Philip Ebels

Three cheers for Edward Vanhove! The 34-year-old engineer from Maaseik, Limburg province, rose to victory last week when he made only three mistakes in *Het Groot Dictie der Nederlandse Taal*, the Grand Dictation of the Dutch language. (The word *der* is an old-fashioned way of saying *van de*, meaning "of the".)

The annual spelling contest is something of an event. It is broadcast live on national TV, both in Flanders and in the Netherlands, with participants – celebrities and civilians – from both parts of the Low Countries. There is always a healthy dose of rivalry between the two.

"*Vlaamse winnaar bij Groot Dictie*," reported Dutch public broadcaster NOS, not without a shard of jealousy. Flemish winner at Grand Dictation. "*Het dictee is nu dertien keer gewonnen door een Vlaming en elf keer door een Nederlander*," it continued. The dictation has now been won 13 times by a Fleming and 11 times by a Dutchman.

As is custom, a novelist – Adriaan van Dis – wrote



the text this year. And, as is custom, he had done his utmost to trick people into making mistakes. His text *Zijn waar wij niet zijn*, To Be Where We Are Not, contains words such as *kitschtrukendoos*, a box of tacky tricks, and *twee-onder-een-kapwoningwijk*, a neighbourhood of semi-detached houses (something you may have seen in this neck of the woods).

Now that's a spelling contest. Three mistakes is nothing. The runnerup, Piet Goedhebeur from Leffinge, West Flanders, made 10. The average was 29 – in a text of no more than 315 words, or less than one page long. Flemish journalist Riadh Bahri said he thought the whole thing was "*echt moeilijk*",

really terrifyingly difficult. The secret to his success, Vanhove told the presenter, was to go with his gut. "*Ik ben op veel plaatsen op mijn gevoel afgegaan*," he said. Many times, I followed my instincts. But, he said, "*ik ben de eerste om te zeggen dat het niet altijd werkt*." I am the first to say that it doesn't always work. So much for good advice.

Now there is only one thing left to do. Go to the website below and try for yourself. It will be a full-on collision with the wonders of the Dutch language. Or, if you prefer not to feel like a fool, try the children's version. In any case, let me know how you did.

► [www.grootdictee.nps.nl](http://www.grootdictee.nps.nl)  
► [talkingdutch@hotmail.com](mailto:talkingdutch@hotmail.com)

## The last word...

### Reluctant hero

"I never decided to become a comic strip artist. Let's say I was drafted into it." Marc Sleen, creator of the strip *Nero*, celebrates his 90th birthday this month

### Big winner

"I'm a dwarf. For me that's something quite new. For years I thought I was a vampire because when I looked in the mirror I couldn't see anything."

William Boeva has won this year's Humo Comedy Cup

### Limburg's finest

"An apple from Sint-Truiden contains up to 20% more nutritional value than one from Knokke." Agricultural expert Luc Busschaert researched Flanders' apples and found the best in the Haspengouw region

### Foodie festivities

"Black puddings are the new *foie gras*." Roel Dekelver, spokesman for Delhaize, offers an idea for the holiday table

## FLANDERS TODAY TAKES A HOLIDAY...

Like the rest of you, we here at *Flanders Today* are settling in for a long winter's nap. But not too long. We'll be back in your letterbox on 9 January

To help remember the date, perhaps you should...

### ENTER TO WIN A FREE CALENDAR!

deRand, the organisation that brings Flemish and internationals together in *de rand*, or the belt of municipalities around Brussels, is giving away five of their mega-size calendars to readers of *Flanders Today*. The *Reuze Randplan 2013* is as practical as it is pretty, with texts on historical and other attractions in the Flemish Brabant cities, loads of photos and a complete set of stickers to personalise it into a mean household planning machine.



To win a *Reuze Randplan 2013* calendar, send an email to [editorial@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:editorial@flanderstoday.eu) with "Reuze Randplan" as the subject and your mailing address in the email. Emails must be received by noon on Monday, 24 December. Winners will be notified the same week.