

Rail reform

Reform of the NMBS rail authority is announced, and unions are less than satisfied

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Eye on the ball

Antwerp pulls out all the stops as the European Sports Capital for 2013

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We'll drink to that

Flanders launches a cocktail institute to train bartenders to shake, stir and muddle

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The art of giving

Citizens are coming up with some ingenious ways to fight poverty and connect with each other in Flanders

Sabine Clappaert

As the euro-zone crisis takes its toll on unemployment and poverty levels, a number of average citizens in Flanders are taking the initiative to do something to help. While we found some who set out to help the poor directly, many are simply encouraging everyone to live more simply and share more generously.

There was no sign of the crisis as crowds bustled about in the rain laden with last-minute gifts in central Antwerp on the Saturday before Christmas. Yet recent research

by the Vlaams Netwerk tegen Armoede (Flemish Network Against Poverty) shows that the number of people in Flanders living in poverty has risen by as much as 30% over the past year.

Driven by the relentless economic and euro-zone crises, poverty is becoming an increasing problem. Today, nearly 10% of people in Flanders live in poverty, and in Brussels and Antwerp, youth unemployment is peaking, nearing 24% in Antwerp and sitting at more than 30% in Brussels. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters calls the growing gap between rich and poor a "time bomb".

The group most vulnerable to slipping into poverty remain single-parent families with young children. The continued economic crisis is cited as the biggest cause but inadequate policies also play a contributing role, say NGOs combatting poverty.

"The government didn't take the right decisions when the economy was still strong, which means there is extra pressure on us during difficult times," the Flemish Network Against Poverty recently told the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws*. "Structural decisions have to be made or even we as an organisation will not be able to survive."

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Eric Van Zele

When Eric Van Zele took over as CEO of Barco in 2009, he can hardly have imagined that within three short years he'd be throwing a One Billion Euro party at the company's Kortrijk headquarters to celebrate turnover passing that magic landmark for the first time. Back then, the company was saddled with unsold inventory, inefficiencies and operational costs that gobbled up 42% of all income. It took a doubling of sales to top the €1 billion target; costs are now 29% of income, and Van Zele has just been elected Manager of the Year by the magazine *Trends*, Kanaal-Z and the Flemish Management Association. And at the age of 64, he still has work to do, he says: "How do we get from one billion to sales of two or three billion?" he mused in a recent interview. "We'll be laying the foundations this year. At the same time, we'll be looking out for someone to lead that Barco of the future. So it looks like I'll be around for another year or 18 months yet." Founded in 1934 as the Belgian American Radio Corporation, Barco makes display hardware, like projectors, LED displays, flat panel displays and image processing

equipment. Half of all the digital cinemas in the world are fitted with Barco screens, and you can even see them above Piccadilly Circus in London, where they carry advertisements for competitor Sony. The company is active in 90 countries worldwide. Traditionally it's been concentrated in Europe, North America and Asia, but one-third of its sales now come from growth economies – another achievement that allowed Barco to weather the world economic crisis. When Van Zele took over, he gave the staff an ultimatum: change their "amateur" ways, or the whole place would close. "We were too expensive, too arrogant, too parochial and not competitive," he said. And refreshing at the moment: He rarely has problems with unions. His secret, he says, is that he puts his money where his mouth is. "You have to have an intelligent dialogue. If you come to clean the place up, you have to cancel the dividend and the bonuses and lay off your chauffeur. Then you'll have no problem with unions."

► www.barco.be

News in brief

Brussels' taxi drivers are staging a **massive action to block traffic** on 29 January in protest at the lack of taxi ranks and a new charter. The city's mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels argued that the region plans 91 new ranks this year on top of 63 last year. The measures in the new charter include an obligation to put baggage in the boot and a ban on leaving vehicles unsupervised.

Carine Van Cauter, a member of the federal parliament for Open VLD, has introduced a bill to make **bullying and harassment illegal**, with prison sentences of up to three years and fines of up to €6,000. Bullying in the workplace was made illegal in 2002, but Van Cauter argues the coverage needs to be extended to other situations.

All Flemish TV broadcasters last week introduced a system to bring their noise levels into line with each other, to prevent viewers having to **adjust the volume of their TV sets** when switching between channels. The broadcasters will now use loudness processors to ensure their sound levels are all the same on average.

FederProCycle, the industry group for bicycle repairers, has complained that the **cycle workshops in and around train stations** are unfair competition. The workshops, operated by Cyclo in 42 stations, provide small repairs for commuters, but the federation complains they are also carrying out larger repairs at unfair prices, as well as selling accessories and second-hand bikes. A spokesperson for Cyclo said the chain – made up of non-profits that employ people looking for jobs – applies market prices for all work. Rail authority NMBS plans to extend the network this year to 67 stations.

Clean-up work began last week at the **Waalse Krook site in Ghent**, where

the new city library and Centre for New Media is planned for 2015. More than 250 barges will transport 17,000 tonnes of polluted soil from the site, where a coal-gas production facility once stood. The first phase of the clean-up will last 120 days and cost the Flemish government €1.5 million.

Schools in Flanders will receive a DVD of a short film drawing attention to the **dangers of hearing damage** caused by, among other things, loud music, culture minister Schauvliege announced last week. The film *Ruis* (*Noise*) is based on the true story of Dietrich Hectors, a young man who took his own life in 2009 after suffering tinnitus, a constant ringing in the ears. An estimated 20,000 young people suffer significant hearing damage every year in Flanders.

► www.helpzenietnaardetuut.be

The city of Genk has become the first in Flanders to allow its civil servants to **work beyond the age of 65** if they choose. Mayor Wim Dries said the council was confident its initiative would not be opposed at the regional or federal levels. Most civil servants in Flanders must retire at 65 but some working for the federal and Flemish governments can work longer with permission.

Flemish dredging companies Deme and Jan De Nul will help with maintenance work on the Dutch coast to **protect against rising sea levels**. The two companies, together with a Dutch and a Danish firm, will spray 28 million cubic metres of sand at 20 locations, on beaches and on the sea floor close to the coastline.

Brussels will in the future consist of **six to nine municipalities in place of the current 19**, Brussels-City mayor Freddy Thielemans predicted last week. The fusion of the capital's municipalities will, he said, be the most important debate faced by the

Brussels parliament in the coming year.

The institutional affairs committee of the Belgian Senate last week voted unanimously to recognise the responsibility of the Belgian governments in the **persecution and deportation of Jews** during the Second World War and called on the federal government to recognise the status of those deported as well as "orphans of the Shoah". The resolution of the committee was "a historic event," said Senate chair Sabine De Bethune, who called for the two language communities to develop new learning materials to teach future generations about "this dark period in our history".

The Brussels Philharmonic is looking for **investors to help buy expensive instruments** for its musicians, which will appreciate in value over time. "It's not easy for a young musician to buy an instrument," explained orchestra manager Gunther Broucke. The orchestra is looking for investors who will contribute to the costs and reap the benefits later when the instrument increases in value.

Former prime minister **Wilfried Martens**, 76, is recovering after a successful operation on his digestive tract, his office announced. The former PM, who chairs the European People's Party in the European Parliament, is expected to leave Erasmus hospital in Brussels this week.

The Brussels communes of Schaarbeek and Vorst **introduced a new currency** last week. The "eco-iris" is a pilot project to reward people who work towards a better living environment. It is earned by taking part in ecologically responsible activities and can be used in select local businesses. After the pilot project is evaluated, it could be extended to the rest of Brussels.

► www.ecoiris.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope
AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Angela Chambers, Sabine Clappaert, Sarah Crew, Katy Desmond, Marie Dumont, Andy Furniere, Nicholas Hirst, 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

Alan Hope

Bucket list for kids

What should a child have done by the time he or she reaches the age of 12? That's the question being put to the kids of Flanders in a new campaign from VRT children's channel Ketnet. Over the next few weeks, they'll be gathering ideas from children for a list of 50 must-dos. The Checklist is based on an idea from the National Trust in England, which thought kids were spending too much time in front of one screen or another, and so compiled a list of 50 things kids should have done. It included some pretty routine ideas like walking barefoot in the wet grass, crawling under barbed wire or sleeping in a tent, as well as some ideas that more likely appeal to adults than children, such as looking after a baby or ripping apart a faulty electronic appliance. Ketnet hasn't offered any suggestions of its own, and early



participants (the site launched last weekend) seem to be somewhat confused. While some of the National Trust ideas were perhaps difficult (stroking a pig, building an igloo) they were all basically

possible. The Ketnet kids, on the other hand, seem mainly to want to fly through the air.

Some examples:
Julie: I want to be able to fly!
Ine: I'd love to meet the boys from One Direction. It could happen because I have tickets for their concert on 1 May.
Victor: I want to be on stage.
Femke: I'd like to do magic, and flying would be great!
Emma: I'd certainly like to fly and to be free.
Ilias: I'd like to skip school for a year.
Roos: Earrings.

Once the final list is drawn up, Ketnet intends to encourage children to check items off, helping them where possible to achieve their goals. (Whether that will involve not going to school or flying through the air is another matter.)

The art of giving

From handing out soup to setting up a free shop in their own house, citizens are stepping up to help the poor and reduce waste

► continued from page 1

Cooking for the people

While authorities and organisations alike grapple with red tape and multi-stakeholder negotiations to find solutions to alleviate poverty, citizens are increasingly taking matters into their own hands when it comes to helping others, both to combat poverty and reduce consumer waste.

Aided by the ease of connection through social media such as Facebook, a wealth of informally organised citizen initiatives are springing up across Flanders. Initiatives, for instance, such as Volxkeuken, which was handing out food, clothing and toys on Koningen Astridplein at Antwerp's Central Station that same crowded pre-Christmas Saturday.

Volxkeuken is an initiative of friends Patsy Van Der Parre, the writer Jeroen Olyslaegers and his wife Nikki Vanlierop. "We decided that we had to do something on 17 October – the International Day Against Poverty – when we heard that 25% of people in Antwerp were living in poverty," says Van Der Parre, huddling under an umbrella between tables laden with pots of soup, bread and quiches that

Solidarity, regardless of political preference – that is our message."

Give what you can, take what you need

In Leuven, Jan Roeckx had a similar idea. "I believe that we live in a world of abundance, that there is enough for everyone, if only we learn to share," he begins. Roeckx founded De Weggeefwinkel, or Give-away Shop, in 2011.

Based on the premise that we all have possessions that we no longer want or need but that are still useful to others, Roeckx started De Weggeefwinkel when he was considering a move from his four-bedroom house to a much smaller one.

"I realised that I wouldn't be able to take all my stuff with me, but I didn't want to throw it all away – so much of it was still useful," he says. "That's when I put all the things I no longer wanted in my front room and put out an ad to let people know they were free to come and collect things." And De Weggeefwinkel was born.

"The idea is simple: Give or take without obligation," says Roeckx, 35. "No money changes hands, and we



Volxkeuken and Occupy Antwerp hand out food, clothes and toys to anyone who needs them every Saturday on the square at Central Station

"Solidarity, regardless of political preference – that is our message"

volunteers hand out to passers-by. "We approached the people of Occupy Antwerp with our idea," she continues, "and they invited us to share their space here on the square. Now we're here every Saturday. We hand out food, clothes and toys to people who need them."

The group has been at it since October. The first day, the trio brought soup and sandwich wraps. "We put out a call on Facebook and took it from there," says Van Der Parre. "Things have grown rapidly since. Every week, more people volunteer to bring food or help us man the tables." They plan to be on the square every Saturday until the end of the winter.

Van Der Parre is realistic about the impact an initiative such as theirs can have on alleviating the problem. "We realise that we can't take away poverty, but that is not the aim of our initiative," she explains. "We want to help raise awareness that people are struggling. We want to tell people: 'Do something about what is happening in your community!' We can't wait for the city council or the government to take action before we get off our couches and do something. It is our responsibility as citizens to shake up our leaders and say: 'This matters to us! Do something!'"

Volxkeuken wants to show that average people "can help shape our own future in a positive way.

don't operate on a 'one-in, one-out' principle. If you see something you like, you simply take it."

Roeckx is quick to point out that his shop was not set up specifically to help people in need. "I wanted to address poverty in the broadest sense of the word," he explains. "The shop is not an initiative *against* poverty but *for* solidarity and connection. There is a lot of joy to be had from making others happy with stuff we no longer need."

"A sense of connection"

His thinking has proved a success. In the two Saturdays leading up to

Christmas in 2011, he had more than 300 visitors. "Sharing possessions creates a sense of connection that we miss in our modern societies," he claims. "An example: In my bathroom I am using an electric heater that was brought into the shop by an Indian man. Now, every time I switch on that heater, I think of him."

In the end, Roeckx never moved from his four-bedroom house. "The shop has grown to be such a success that instead I've created a smaller living space for myself upstairs and use the downstairs areas for the shop." De Weggeefwinkel is now open at least one Saturday every month. Roeckx runs it with an ever-growing network of 50 volunteers, both regular and sporadic.

Roeckx has also begun organising give-away book fairs and has more plans for 2013. "For Christmas, a friend hosted a dinner that anyone was free to attend. It offered people who live alone or don't have anyone to visit on Christmas the opportunity to share a meal. In the future, I want to work out an 'open living' concept



Jan Roeckx of Leuven has turned his house into a shop of free goods and now hosts a fair of free books, CDs and DVDs

where people can get together to share meals, watch TV, read a book or talk – shared spaces that reinforce our sense of community."

On Antwerp's Astridplein, the rain continues to pour down on the brightly coloured umbrellas that shield huddled groups of people who have come to collect food and

other items. Hands wrapped around a steaming mug of Thai soup, Van Der Parre concludes: "If we all do our part, even if only in small ways, we can help make a real difference to the way we shape future societies."

► www.leuvendorp.be

SELLING YOUR LEFTOVERS

For Frances Van Assche and Adélaïde Ranjard, the young women behind website thuisafgehaald.be, the goal was to limit food waste. Their site connects people who have leftovers to those who want them.

"Why waste food if we can give our leftovers to others?" says Van Assche, 23.

On thuisafgehaald.be, those who've made more than they can eat – whether by accident or on purpose – can offer portions to other users. Once registered, users immediately see who is offering



meals in their neighbourhood. The seller offers the meal at the cost of the ingredients, the buyer picks it up at the home of the cook with their own containers.

Launched just two months ago, the site has already attracted thousands of cooks and eaters across Belgium and the Netherlands. "People are tired of wasting food," says Van Assche. "They would much rather give it to someone else than throw it away. It's a win-win situation."

A quick review of the site finds many freshly cooked meals at low prices: €3 for a huge portion of lasagne, €1.50 for half a litre of carrot soup or €0.95 for a dish of chocolate mousse.

"It's not a commercial system," explains Van Assche. "In times of crisis, many people need to budget carefully. With our site, people can eat for a fraction of the price it costs to cook a full meal. And those who cook can get a little something back for what they would otherwise dump in the garbage."

In the days leading up to New Year's Eve, the women put their site to good use, calling on chefs in the Antwerp region to support Occupy Antwerp's initiative of cooking a festive year-end meal for the city's homeless.

► www.thuisafgehaald.be

Minister announces rail reform

Unions promise strike action if concerns aren't met

Alan Hope

Unions representing railway personnel have threatened further industrial action following an agreement by the federal cabinet last week on the reform of the structure of the rail authority NMBS.

In his last act as federal minister for government enterprises before going off to be mayor of Charleroi, Paul Magnette announced the planned reform. As expected, the NMBS will move from its current tripartite structure – with rolling stock operated by the NMBS and infrastructure run by Infrabel, both under the NMBS Holding – to a two-pronged structure without the holding company. Under the new structure, the NMBS will be responsible for everything



From left: Jean-Pierre Goossens, Michel Abdissi and Serge Piteljon during the ACOD union press conference last week

that directly affects the rail user. The NMBS was last reformed

in 2005, but, according to Magnette, the three-sided authority never really

worked. "Punctuality kept getting worse, customer satisfaction went down and

down, and the debts went up," he said.

Unions have argued for a return to the unitary authority of pre-2005 and now feel their views have been ignored. "If this is a take it or leave it proposal, then we have a major problem, and we will be taking action," commented Jean-Pierre Goossens of the socialist rail union ACOD Spoor.

"How can there be an agreement if we're not involved?" asked Luc Piens of ACV-Transcom. "We were promised feedback, but nothing happened. Now all of a sudden there's an agreement." A proposal is expected to be put to the union membership on Thursday, 17 January. According to Goossens, "a strike lasting several days can't be ruled out".

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

To whom does a city belong?

"On the one hand, there are politicians such as Daniël Termont or Guy Verhofstadt, who rebuke Bart De Wever as an ethnic nationalist. Sooner or later, the Thirties come up, or even the Auschwitz extermination camps. ... Others, such as Patrick Janssens or Steven Vanackere go about it more subtly. They accuse us of polarisation, of putting people up against one another, of insulting our adversaries."

Jeroen Overmeier, until recently Bart De Wever's spokesperson, ended this analysis with a sigh. N-VA, De Wever's party, has a tendency to feel unjustly attacked.

Sometimes, though, it does provide the right ammunition. One of De Wever's first acts as mayor of Antwerp will undoubtedly result in more criticism, of the latter sort. The new city council decided to drop the city's slogan 't Stad is van iedereen, which had been introduced by former mayor Patrick Janssens.

't Stad is van iedereen – "the city belongs to everyone" – is a well-known phrase in Antwerp, much like the phrase "It's a free country" is in America. Janssens used the enormously popular saying to tell off intolerant people, making it an official city slogan with an inclusive ring.

Last summer, after rioting broke out in Borgerhout, one of Antwerp's districts with a large immigrant population, De Wever had already stated that to him, the city did *not* belong to everyone. Troublemakers should not be included, he believed. Eventually, the phrase became part of the local elections campaign, resulting in discussions that to outsiders sounded rather absurd: Did the city belong to everyone, or not?

De Wever, having won the elections convincingly, now has the final say.

Another decision last weekend will only add to De Wever's critics' gloom about this: the mayor, fearing a repeat of last summer's riots, imposed a ban on assembly in Borgerhout. The district's mayor immediately stated that the measure was unnecessary and exaggerated. This type of discussions is what we can expect for months and maybe years to come. De Wever believes he represents the "common" people who are tired of crime, social security fraud and high taxes. His opponents believe him to be intolerant and secretly xenophobic. Which side you are on depends on who you are. Somehow, the figure of De Wever is polarising, whether he means to be or not.

Researchers discover new penguin colony

Researchers from the Belgian Antarctic station Princess Elisabeth have discovered a previously unknown population of about 9,000 emperor penguins on the east coast of the continent. According to expedition leader Alain Hubert (*pictured*), the penguins were unafraid of humans. "They'd never seen people before, but we were still able to come within a few metres of them," he said. British researchers had previously speculated at the presence of a penguin population, based on satellite pictures. But Hubert's team is the first to see the birds.



© Int'l Polar foundation / Alain Hubert

Payments to royals reviewed

Prime minister Elio Di Rupo is reviewing the payments made to members of the royal family, after it was revealed last week that the dowager Queen Fabiola has set up a foundation to avoid paying inheritance taxes. According to Di Rupo, the ruling coalition has agreed to amend the 2013 budget to bring Fabiola's allowance in line with that of Prince Filip – from €1.44 million at present to €922,000 a year. Fabiola inherited when her husband, King Boudewijn, died in 1992 but has continued to receive a civil list payment. It is believed that an unspent portion of that payment has gone towards funding the foundation.

Complaints about proposed tip-line

The Human Rights League has protested against a planned tip-line to be opened by the Antwerp prosecutor's office for members of the public to report suspicious activity, such as young men with no apparent job or income driving around in luxury cars. The plan was revealed by chief prosecutor Herman Dams in a newspaper interview last week. "A plan like this will not necessarily lead to better crime fighting," commented League chairman Jos Vander Velpen.

Meanwhile, Wouter Van Besien, chair of Groen, has lodged a complaint with the High Council for Justice alleging discrimination. The plan to report suspicious vehicles, Van Besien said, aims to target foreigners and is in conflict with the principle of the presumption of innocence.

Record jury pool for crèche murder case

Kim De Gelder, who goes on trial next month for the murder of a care worker and two babies at the Fabeltjesland crèche in Dendermonde in January of 2009, had plans to attack three crèches, according to the indictment against him, which was read out in court for the first time last week. De Gelder is also accused of the murder of an elderly woman in Beveren, Antwerp province, a week prior to the crèche attack.

At a preliminary hearing in the assizes court in Ghent last week, De Gelder, now 24, appeared confused and was unable to answer when the judge asked if he was employed at the time of the attacks. De Gelder has previously said he heard voices at the time of the attack, but a panel of five psychiatrists were unanimous in declaring him sane at the time of the crimes.

The trial begins on 22 February. An unusually large pool of jurors – 180 instead of the more usual 60 to 90 – has been formed to make up the jury of 12, with six reserves. Some 170 witnesses have been listed, including the psychiatrists and De Gelder, who will be interviewed by the court's president on 25 February. De Gelder faces four charges of murder and 25 of attempted murder relating to the infants and staff who were injured in the attack.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

4,229

complaints in 2012 to the roads and traffic agency over the state of Flanders' roads, almost 400 fewer than in 2011. This year will see repairs on a further 170km of the region's roads

18.1%

fall in the quantity of cut diamonds exported from Antwerp in 2012, from 8.48 million carats in 2011 to 6.95 million. Imports dropped by 17% to 7.44 million carats

3,048

incidents attended in 2012 by the army's bomb disposal squad Dovo. In 95% of cases, the call concerned an unexploded munition from the First or Second World War

361

cases of whooping cough reported in Flanders in 2012, the highest figure since 1995. Parents were advised to have their children vaccinated

5.6 million

SMS tickets sold by De Lijn in 2012, an increase of 2.5 million on 2011

Design of the times

The Henry van de Velde Awards recognise innovation and eco-awareness in design

Katrien Lindemans

For Flemish product designers and their fans, 15 January was an important day: the annual ceremony of the Henry van de Velde Awards & Labels. Six awards and eight quality labels were given to Flanders' finest designers and products of last year.

These prestigious awards have been issued since 1994 by Design Flanders, which maintains a database and promotes local designers of objects, textile and jewellery. The award is named after Flemish painter/designer/architect Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) and honours

both young and established talent, extraordinary products, one select company and an eco-design.

Every year, the Design Expert Group and a team of other specialists face the difficult task of choosing the winners, with innovation and ecology as key elements in their judging. The list of past winners reads like an inventory of important talent, including Piet Stockmans (porcelain tableware), Erik Sijmons for Samsonite (lightweight luggage) and Linde Hermans (furniture and objects).

This year, illustrator **Ever Meulen** received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Meulen started his career in 1970 as a cartoonist for Flemish magazine *Humo* and has since seen his work published in dozens of other magazines, including *The New Yorker*. The Young Talent Award went to Brussels-based **Maarten De Ceulaer**, who won international attention last year after his Transformation line of vinyl coverings (in collaboration with Italian fashion house Fendi) and his Mutation line of prehistoric-looking furniture were very well received at the Salone del Mobile in Milan. Limburg sofa designer **Indera**, meanwhile, took home the Company Award.

The public speaks

The Public Award was chosen by



Furniture from the Mutation Series by Maarten De Ceulaer, winner of the Young Talent Award

visitors to the Henry van de Velde exhibition last year. Last year, eight products received the Henry van de Velde Label – a recognition of high quality – and the Public 2011 Award has now been given to the one that received the most votes: **Cyclo**, a carpet made from old bicycle inner tubes. "Receiving the label last year was quite an honour," says Christophe Vervaeke, product designer at Papilio, the company behind Cyclo. "But I'm even more excited by this award, as it's a sign my design is commercially pleasing

as well."

The flat-weave Cyclo rug isn't Vervaeke's first experiment with recycled material. "I've made carpets with sari silk, denim and old newspapers. Creating new things while trying to do something about the amount of waste is important to me. While stuck in traffic in the Far East, I thought it could be interesting to do something with bike tyres. That's how the idea for Cyclo was born."

Vervaeke has been working on new ideas, which he presented with

Papilio at the renowned Domotex fair in Hannover last year: "It's a carpet made from phosphor fibres, created with designer Gerd Couckhuyt," he explains. "Put it outside during the day, and the design will light up in the evening." The ecological aspect of design becomes more important every year, which is why the Henry van de Velde Awards teamed up with Flanders' public waste agency, OVAM, for two special awards. The jury gave the OVAM Ecodesign Product on the Market Award to Beams, an **aluminium radiator** created by Wim and Bob Segers of Maaseik, Limburg province. Quinny Jet, a **combo skateboard/baby buggy** for the hip urban parent on the go, designed by Antwerp Studio Peter Van Riet and manufacturers Quinny, was named OVAM Ecodesign Product in Development. Besides the awards, the jury also has to select eight of the 123 products to receive the Henry van de Velde Label. One of them will win the Public 2012 Award next year. To help decide who will win, visit the Henry van de Velde Awards & Labels exhibition at the De Loketten gallery inside the Flemish Parliament building. Entrance is free, and it runs until 2 March.

► www.designvlaanderen.be



Beams, a stylish aluminum radiator, pulled in an Ecodesign award

Good sports

Antwerp takes playing seriously as it's unveiled as European Sport Capital

Alan Hope

No sooner had he taken over as mayor of Antwerp than Bart De Wever found his city transformed into a capital – the European Sport Capital, to be precise. The title is handed out every year by the European Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation to the city with a sports policy that best corresponds to the five core values: pleasure, success, fair play, social cohesion and health.

Antwerp's term of office, as it were, will be marked by an accent on cohesion – the creation of community spirit, as symbolised by the virtual sports club Sporting A. "Sport is the best means of building cohesion and collective pride, bringing different groups within the population of the city together," De Wever said at the launch earlier this month.

Hardly less important is health, and De Wever pointed out that he has personal reasons – his recent massive weight loss – to take sport more seriously. "Sport is essential to our welfare. Encouraging people to take part in sport has positive consequences not only for the individual, but also for the city." According to Antwerp's alderman

for sport, Ludo Van Campenhout, two out of three *Antwerpenaars* are involved in sport in one way or another, as supporters or participants. But the other third are not to be forgotten. "You'd have to be very obstinate indeed to avoid taking part this year," he said.

No one left out

The programme takes in numerous locations, from local squares to top venues, including the Sportpaleis, and an impressive array of disciplines. For the next six weeks, 24 squares across the city and in the districts of Deurne, Merkssem, Wilrijk and Hoboken will become arenas for local clubs and associations, which will receive subsidies and support for organising their own activities. Demonstrations and workshops will introduce new activities to the curious. This week, for instance, are workshops on freestyle football in Berchem and Linkeroever and a collective training in Park Spoor Noord for the coming 5km or 10-mile run. Next month includes the production *Essien, I Want to Play As You* by Australian stage director Ahil Ratnamohan. It features eight African footballers discovered



Clockwise from top left: Sporting A ambassadors Toby Alderweireld, Linde Merckpoel, Marc Herremans and Matthias Schoenaerts

training in an Antwerp park, whose skills with a ball transform an informal kickabout into something ballistic.

There's also no shortage of top sport in the year to come, including this summer's World Outgames, EuroHockey Championships and European Championship in Wheelchair Rugby, plus the World

Championship 3-Cushion billiards in October and competitions in breakdancing and gymnastics.

Sporting BVs

The Sporting A initiative has the patronage of 20 ambassadors, including Ajax footballer Toby Alderweireld, wheelchair Iron Man Marc Herremans, boxer Sugar

Jackson, snowboarder Seppe Smits and BVs, including actor Matthias Schoenaerts and Studio Brussels DJ Linde Merckpoel. Their job is to act as role models and inspiration.

"I was always very sporty," said Schoenaerts. "I was obsessed with football, tennis and also boxing. I know how important sport was for me, and that's why I wanted to stand behind the project." For the actor, whose international breakout role in the drama *Rundskop* required him to undergo a formidable physical transformation, the key is enjoyment: "Pleasure is central to sport; the pleasure of playing and the relaxation it instills, have a kind of meditative quality."

Herremans calls sport "a passion, an obsession". In 2002, the Ironman athlete had a cycling accident while training in the Canary Islands. Since then he's been in a wheelchair, but he carried on with triathlon, completing the terrifying Hawaii Ironman in 2003 and creating the foundation To Walk Again, which supports medical research into spinal injuries. "Sport taught me the value of life," he says.

► www.sportingA.be

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Air

► Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport handled nearly 19 million passengers last year, breaking the 2001 record established before the demise of national carrier Sabena. Transit and long-haul traffic rose 7.7 and 6.3% respectively, while the number of intra-European passengers remained stable. Freight traffic dropped 3.3%. Meanwhile, Finnish carrier Finnair Cargo will set up its western European hub at Brussels Airport in March.

Banking ► BNY Mellon

The US-based BNY Mellon, an affiliate of the Bank of New York, is establishing a Central Securities Depository centre in Brussels.

Electronics ► Xeikon

Xeikon, the digital printer and graphic systems producer owned by Flanders-based Punch International, is expected to be taken over by a Dutch investment fund. Shares in Punch rose some 40% on the news.

Horeca ► Harry's Bar

The Singapore chain of 26 pubs has been taken over by the Verlinvest holding company, controlled by the family shareholders of Inbev, in partnership with the Indian Everstone Capital. The move will strengthen Verlinvest's position in the hospitality sector in Asia, where it already controls the Indian Blue Foods restaurant chain.

Postal Services

► bpost

Local post office bpost has acquired a majority stake in the US Landmark Global, a delivery company for internet-ordered parcels. California-based Landmark operates nine handling sites in the US and Canada. Bpost will consolidate its existing MSI US postal operations in the new acquisition.

Retail

► Antwerp Meir

Antwerp's Meir has become the busiest shopping street in Belgium with 290,000 visitors a week, taking the lead from Brussels' Nieuwstraat for the first time.

Traffic control

► Traficon

The road traffic and management systems developer, based in Wevelgem, West Flanders, has been taken over by the US Flir Systems company for €35 million. The company has installed some 80,000 road sensors worldwide and manages traffic flows in more than 500 tunnels.

Government demands
repayment of aid to Ford

The €42.9 million is earmarked for the revival of Limburg's economy

Alan Hope

The Flemish government is demanding the repayment of €42.9 million in aid it paid to Ford Europe since 2002, minister-president Kris Peeters said last week. The aid was granted for training and investment support for the car plant in Genk, which has now been marked for closure in 2014.

Should the procedure be successful, the government plans to devote the money entirely to encouraging new economic revival in Limburg, Peeters said. The government has already earmarked €57.9 million for that project; the reclaimed aid from Ford would be added to that fund.

Unions representing Ford workers last week started legal action against the company for breach of contract. A first hearing of the case is due to take place on 22 January in Tongeren. The unions base their claim on the Future Contract signed last year, which promised work security until 2020 in return for a 12% cut in pay. Ford denies it is in breach of contract, arguing that a pull-out clause allows



A Ford Genk workers blockade is keeping parts from reaching the plant

plans to be revised in the event of "major economic changes". The unions claim that that clause is too vague to allow for exceptions.

Meanwhile, Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen said he was examining plans for providing short-term benefits for workers affected by the closure of Ford Genk. "We are thinking, among others things, of organising a telephone help-line

and extending the existing provision of information, advice, support and counselling," he said in an answer to a question in the Flemish parliament last week.

Production starts
and stops

Last week production restarted at Ford Genk but closed down

again after only 78 cars had been assembled from a planned total of 900. The factory ran out of parts because of the continuing blockade of four suppliers by some union workers (*photo*). The morning shift at Ford, 95% of whom turned up for work, according to management, were sent home early.

The stock of new cars unable to leave the premises now stands at 7,000. Pickets allow one car to leave for every new car assembled: Last week's production saw 78 cars shipped out to their new owners. "The customers who have been waiting the longest will be served first," a company spokesman said.

On Monday this week police moved in to break up a barricade set up by workers at the four suppliers. As *Flanders Today* went to press, unions and management were due to sit down to discuss a social plan for the workers made redundant. Ford Europe has said it wants to have the plan ready and agreed by March.

Labour market needs to be reformed,
says VDAB

The labour market in Belgium needs to be completely reformed to take account of new economic realities, according to Fons Leroy, director-general of the Flemish employment and training agency VDAB. Interviewed in *De Morgen*, Leroy (*pictured*) said that the laws on redundancies, salaries and careers support are all outdated and take no account of an ageing workforce, rapid fluctuations in the economy and the need for a more flexible work ethic.

The law on redundancies in particular needs to be scrapped and redrafted, Leroy said. "It has to be more geared towards providing jobs. The priority has to be that a worker who is made redundant can more easily move into a new job." The current system, he said, concentrates too much on financial support through redundancy payments.

In addition, the old rules on seniority need to make way for more performance-related pay and promotions, although employers also have a responsibility to provide more training. Leroy's statements were welcomed by employers. "He has not only put his finger on the weaknesses and problems of the labour market, he has also provided a means to a solution," said the Flemish chamber of commerce, Voka, in a statement.

For Unizo, the organisation representing the self-employed, more flexibility in the length of time people have to work, better support for job-seekers and a new single status for all employees are all essential, but the reform of redundancy rights is a top priority. "The labour market is no longer appropriate for the needs of today and certainly not for those of tomorrow," said director-general Karel Van Eetvelt.

For trade unions, on the other hand, a revolution as suggested by Leroy is not required, as the situation of the labour market is in constant evolution. "By pleading for *tabula rasa*, he gives the impression that what has happened down the years is of no value," commented a spokesman for the socialist union ABVV. "The opposite is true: This country has been better protected against the effects of the crisis as a result."

The VDAB, meanwhile, recorded 263,471 job vacancies last year, 14.3% fewer than in 2011. The largest drop in vacancies was for jobs requiring no qualifications or only a secondary school diploma, where the number of vacancies was down 17.2%.

Peeters: Delay agriculture CAP for
one year

The Farmers' Union has welcomed a call by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters for the introduction of the new common agricultural policy of the EU to be delayed for a year to allow farmers time to adapt to the new situation. The new CAP is due to come into force on 1 January 2014.

According to Peeters, whose portfolio includes agriculture, the EU still has not completed negotiations on a multi-year budget package, and details of the CAP reform are far from settled. Discussion is still under way on questions such as animal welfare, quality standards and fluctuating crop prices.

"A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work," said Peeters. "The Finnish farmer is not the same as the Greek, and a Flemish farmer is different from a Pole. The measures introduced also have to be suited to the climate and the sort of agriculture practiced in each member state."

Piet Vanthemsche, chairman of the farmers' union Boerenbond said that they were "happy that Peeters wants to delay the introduction of the new CAP. The earliest Europe can finish CAP talks is this summer, which means that governments won't have time to adapt, and farmers won't have time to prepare. We don't even know yet what Europe will be asking of us."

Vanthemsche and Peeters spoke at the Agriflanders agricultural fair last week, where Peeters also turned his attention to the issue of animal rights. Thousands of horses are not receiving the care they deserve, he said, calling for more investment in the battle against abuse. The animal welfare service of the federal health ministry last year dealt with 500 cases of maltreatment of horses, Peeters said. A new law recently introduced levying heavier fines is "a good thing on the face of it," he said. "But it is essential to provide the necessary enforcement." Last year Peeters set up the Foundation for Horses in Need, which raises money for the care of mistreated horses.



Boerenbond chair Piet Vanthemsche (right) and Kris Peeters at the Agriflanders fair last week

► www.vlaamspaardenloket.be

Freight down, flights up

The port of Ghent, like its counterparts in Antwerp and Zeebrugge (*see Business, 9 January*), handled slightly less freight in 2012 – 600,000 tonnes less, or 1.2% down on the record 50 million tonnes of 2011, according to the latest figures. Seagoing freight was down 3.2% to 26.3 million tonnes, while freight shipped on inland waterways rose 1.2% to 23.2 million tonnes.

On the waterways of the Albert Canal and the Kempen canals in Antwerp province, meanwhile, 2012 saw 37.4 million tonnes of freight shipped, a decrease of 7%, largely due to the closure of steel production in the Liège area and a reduction in the traffic of ore and coal.

The airport at Kortrijk-Wevelgem in West Flanders saw its best year since 2008, with 2,840 flights, including business and medical flights.

Watching me, watching you

Ahead of a European conference, an exhibition in Brussels considers surveillance and our privacy

Alan Hope

Data protection is never far from the headlines. Last week, this newspaper reported on two data leaks, one in the rail authority NMBS, the other in the ministry of defence. This week comes news that the employment magazine *Jobat* accidentally released the salary details of 4,000 people who took part in a poll. Yet while those to whom we entrust our information find it difficult to keep it safe from hackers, nothing can stop us from providing more and more data, much of it open and unguarded on the internet. In the run-up to European Privacy Day on 28 January, policymakers, academics and computer programmers will meet for three days in Brussels for an annual conference on computers, privacy and data protection. The conference is aimed at professionals, but the related exhibition *A Look Inside* is for everyone. *A Look Inside* gathers works from artists in the UK, the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Belgium on the subject of surveillance: the watchers who watch all of us, and the artists who watch them back. Admission to the exhibition is free. “We tried to take a broad approach in the selection of the artists,” says Jeroen De Meyer, who co-curated the exhibition. “Otherwise it’s easy to fall into the trap of only showing technological works. So we’ve included a lot of interactive pieces, showing many different viewpoints from which the question can be regarded.” So what message comes through about our culpability? “One thing we tried to avoid is the message of fear or the creation of anxiety around this theme,” says De Meyer, who is also organising a workshop for the public on 26 January. “Of course it’s present in certain works, but the overall tone is offering an

image of what privacy is.”

Too much information

Privacy is almost becoming an outmoded concept in a day and age when people seem to be content to upload all their personal details on to the internet to share with everyone. We seem to have given up any right to privacy in return for participation in social media on the one hand and commercial interests on the other. Then there are the privacy invaders we simply cannot avoid such as the mobile in your pocket that keeps track of your every move or the Mobib card that records your transport. Or there’s the supermarket loyalty card, which allows retailers and advertisers access to the deepest recesses of your kitchen cupboards and bathroom cabinets. “I think all that makes it more essential to talk about privacy,” insists De Meyer. “There are still a great many areas where we as citizens have to take responsibility for our private lives. Privacy is something as old as society itself. One of our first concerns in living with others was what we allow the neighbours to know about us. What am I going to make public, and what am I going to keep to myself?” For previous generations, he continues, “that was something that only concerned you in your village; that was the extent of the public sphere for most people. The advance of technology has turned that into a global problem on a completely different scale. So it’s important that we have this debate as a society. Where do we draw the line?” Does De Meyer think people are interested in the issue? “Some people care a great deal. There are those who are happy to share everything they do and think.



In “Reverse Blinking”, by Leuven’s Ief Spincemaille, goggles manipulate vision to make the world look unreal, as if it were a photograph

There are others who become quite paranoid about the matter,” he says. “We already know that if you have a photo of yourself on Facebook with a cigarette, your insurance company could penalise you in a very concrete way. The other factor is the durability of that information: You may not worry too much about what the government can do with the information they have on you,

but who’s to say that in 30 years there’s not a quite different sort of government whose aims may not be quite so benign?”

A free, open workshop on privacy and technology is offered on 26 January. Register at jrndemeyer@gmail.com

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Q&A

Peter Lievens is the Dean of the University of Leuven’s science faculty. He explains the reform of the first year in physics and mathematics

How will the lessons and exams of first-year physics and maths students change in the next academic year?
Instead of spending on average seven hours a day at university, student will have to be present for a maximum of four hours a day. They will study only one course each day, which should help them to concentrate on that specific area of science. We are adding two “lesson weeks”, which replace one free study week and an exam week. Each semester, the students will have four exams in two weeks, which in total is three fewer exams than now. Their progress will be more regularly evaluated during the year. The free study week at the end of the year remains in place.

Will there be extra opportunities to ask for additional help?
Now, students make appointments with teachers informally, but this system will become more structured and expanded. It will be easier for students to arrange contact with teachers, individually or in groups.

Why are these measures necessary?
In particular, we want to tackle the procrastination of students, who now often postpone their work until the free study week before the exams. This is an important reason why only one-quarter of first-year students succeed the first time. But, even if these students pass the exams, they will not remember the

subject matter for long. If students have enough time to prepare the lessons thoroughly and are frequently tested during the year, their knowledge in the long term and the efficiency of the lessons will increase.



How did you come to this conclusion?
In 2009, we started research to examine education systems worldwide and included our student associations in the brainstorming process. Not all first-year students – around 100 now – will be happy with the change, but the adjustments should improve the chances of the majority.

Will this system be extended to other studies?
We will assess the results after the first year and take another year to decide whether we can implement similar measures in other study areas.

Interview by Andy Fourniere

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The University Hospital Antwerp (UZA) is introducing new techniques to **reduce the radiation dosage** for patients by up to 80%. It launched the DoseWatch project, in cooperation with General Electric, because the number of radiological examinations has increased spectacularly in recent years. This results in faster and more precise diagnoses, but the radiation also raises the risk of cancer. UZA connects CT scanners to a dose management programme, which determines the maximum acceptable dosage and has updated medical imaging software to filter away fuzz. The two innovations reduce the radiation during a brain scan by 40%.

History professor Peter Van Nuffelen of Ghent University has received a prestigious grant from the European Research Council (ERC) for **research on the late antiquity period** in Europe and the Mediterranean. The ERC is investing a budget of about €1.5 million for ambitious projects lasting five years. Van Nuffelen will focus on the historiography of the period 300 to 800 AD. He will study complete and fragmented texts in Latin, Greek, Syrian, Arabic, Armenian and Coptic and link the changes of the genre to the socio-political evolution of the time.

Researchers at the Institute for Media Studies at the University of Leuven found that Belgians aged between nine and 16 spend **an average of 86 minutes a day on the internet**. About 27% of the surveyed children experienced negative effects caused by excessive use: They sleep too little, skip meals or neglect school work and social activities. However, less than 1% of the children are actually considered to be addicted to the internet. And 40 to 60% of parents underestimate the exposure of their children to online risks such as cyber-bullying. The researchers recommend teaching children in primary school how to be safe online.

Erasmus University College in Brussels is **building a new campus in the city centre** with space for 1,000 students. In 2016, the education studies department will move from Jette to the new school, which will be close to Dansaertstraat. The campus will be partly located in a former brewery, which will be renovated by B-Architecten and Slovenian architect Bevk Perović. They have designed a transparent and energy-efficient building with two auditoriums, 40 classrooms, a library, cafeteria and terraces. The project’s budget is €16 million. **AF**



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A feel for history

The BELvue museum invites blind visitors to handle their collection on a special tour

Andy Furniere

Ever heard of a museum with a “please touch” policy? The BELvue museum in Brussels has designed a tour that permits blind visitors to feel their way around the country’s history, identifying symbolic and authentic objects by touch.

A specialist organisation involved blind people in the development of the project. Next up, the BELvue team plans adjustments to attract more deaf people and also foresees future installations for people with mental disabilities.

After winning the Museum Prize in 2009, the BELvue invested the prize money in adapting their collection to the needs of blind and partially sighted visitors. “They are often discouraged by the ‘don’t touch’ policy of museums,” says communication officer Mathilde Oechsner. “Although guides provide concrete examples and anecdotes, such a museum experience lacks an essential dimension for them.”

To offer more than an audio tour, the museum team contacted CAP Patrimoine Pour Tous (Heritage for All). Together, they furnished all nine rooms of the BELvue with installations that invite visitors to touch and handle objects linked to a specific period of the country’s history. Blind people have access to additional information written in Braille and partially sighted visitors



Bernard Slachmuylder with the BELvue's Belle Epoque collection, which helps blind people discover how architecture looks by feeling it

to texts in large print.

Feeling is believing

The unique project took two years of work, during which blind people evaluated the plans. “They asked us to include playful challenges,” explains concept developer Bernard Slachmuylder of CAP. “We searched for a balance between uncomplicated and more interactive activities.”

The museum team sometimes simply took objects out of their glass cages, such as a bronze replica of the Congress Column, which gives the visitors an idea of how the impressive monument in Brussels looks. But most installations consist of boxes with holes that contain objects that refer to crucial events in history.

In the first room, you find a pistol typical of the time of the revolution that created the new Belgian state in 1830. Further on, improvements in transport technology are illustrated with a comparison of replicas of a steam train and a modern train.

The room of the Belle Epoque (1885-1914) is the favourite of Lucy Kloeck, a blind music teacher who tested out the installations. She especially appreciated the Art Nouveau house fronts and the sgraffito replica – typical graphic work on Art Nouveau facades of Belgian houses. “House fronts are unknown territory for blind people, as we cannot explore the whole surface with our fingers,”

Kloeck says. “Although I already knew how they looked in theory, I now truly understand their forms.” In the same space there is also a typical telephone from that time, operated with a turning handle.

Respect for diversity

From the beginning, the team felt that the project had to be integrated into the existing collection as much as possible. “We didn’t want to make blind people feel like a separate group,” says Oechsner, “and we realised that all visitors would enjoy the interactive features.”

Her point is proved in the room on the Second World War, where a group of (seeing) visitors enjoys a tactile game in which you have to identify a certain kind of helmet from three authentic items. At the same time, other people play the wooden board game that challenges you to find your way in a network of trenches. The museum also provides a specific “touch route” with fun assignments for children.

The BELvue’s real goal is to attract more people who are often reluctant to visit museums because of physical and mental limitations. It’s a mission completely in line with that of the King Baudouin Foundation, which manages the museum: creating a better society through respect for diversity.

► www.belvue.be

A new perspective

Discover the stories of the capital’s literary past on foot

Andy Furniere

Although Brussels is mainly known as an international hotspot for comic art, the capital also has a rich literary history. Visitors can explore the capital as it was in the 19th century with four self-guided walking tours and an audio tour thanks to the project Brussel Leest (Brussels Reads), organised by the Flemish community commission (VGC). You will meet literary giants such as the French writer Victor Hugo, Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and British poet Lord Byron and come face to face with a certain Madame Chapeau, not forgetting learning how an Irish army captain offered British tourists and expats advice on living in Belgium.

At the beginning of the 19th century, many international writers came to Brussels to visit the battlefield at Waterloo, where Napoleon was defeated in 1815. Among them was Lord Byron, who, in 1816, stayed at a hotel by the city’s Warande Park, where a plaque commemorates his stay. Byron described the experience of his journey in the poem “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”. Earlier, Scottish author Sir Walter

Scott lodged at the same premises in Hertogstraat on a similar expedition, resulting in the poem “The Field of Waterloo”.

A mistress and a shooting

After the Revolution of 1830, Belgium established a very liberal constitution for that time and became a neutral state. For these reasons, foreign artists often fled to Brussels in case of disturbances in their own region. After a coup in France in 1851, Victor Hugo first moved to Violetstraat and then to the Grote Markt. He also bought a house on Barricadenplein for his wife, where you’ll find a plaque with his name and a quote. Hugo lived in Brussels with a fake Belgian passport, which his mistress Juliette Drouet had provided. The French actress stayed in an apartment above a bar in the Prinsengalerij, a side passage of the Sint-Hubertus galleries, where she also worked as Hugo’s secretary. The bar of that time is now the bookshop Tropismes.

Another famous French relationship, Scott lodged at the same premises in Hertogstraat on a similar expedition, resulting in the poem “The Field of Waterloo”.



The hotel Au Neuf Provinces, briefly home to Leo Tolstoy and now overlooking Brussels’ Nieuwstraat

this time between the poets Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, came to an end near the Grote Markt. In a hotel in Brouwersstraat, a drunken Verlaine tried to shoot Rimbaud during a fight. He was sentenced to 18 months in the nearby city prison, which today has become the Hotel Amigo.

Madam Hat

The list of British, French and Dutch writers who spent an important part

of their life in Brussels includes the Brontë sisters, Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas and Eduard Douwes Dekker (better known as Multatuli). But writers from outside western Europe also found their way to the capital, like Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy.

In 1861, Tolstoy rented a room for a month in the hotel Au Neuf Provinces at the corner of Muntplein. He came to order a bust of his deceased brother at the workshop of Flemish

sculptor Willem Geefs but also paid visits to political exiles such as the Polish historian Joachim Lelewel.

You will not only encounter famous writers, but also classic characters, like Madame Chapeau (Madam Hat). At a corner of Zuidstraat and Mussenstraat stands a statue of this character from the Brussels play *Bossemans et Coppenolle*.

When tired of walking, you can recharge in the cafes Goudblommeke in Papier and Dolle Mol, both famous literary hubs. Or sit on a bench in the Warande Park and listen to the idyllic description of the environment by Henry Robert Addison. This Irish army captain, who lived in Belgium since its origin in 1830, assisted British tourists and expats in their discovery of the country with books like *Belgium As She Is* from 1843.

Download the self-guided walking tours and audio tour of Brussel Leest (in Dutch) online and pick up an MP3 player at the VGC office, Emile Jacqmainlaan 135, or at Goudblommeke in Papier, Celrebroersstraat 55

► www.erfgoedcelbrussel.be

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Movers and shakers

Cocktail makers are gaining ground in a landscape where beer is the status quo

Linda A Thompson

We hear plenty about Flanders' prowess and passion when it comes to beer – but there's a cocktail revolution slowly shaking things up and tempting drinkers away from their usual tipples.

When Olivier Jacobs opened a cocktail bar in Ghent last year, he figured he would go easy. Thinking that most of his patrons would revolt at a cocktail-only menu, he stocked up on different kinds of drinks. But his precautions quickly proved unnecessary. "Nobody buys beer; nobody drinks wine or champagne. They all come in for the cocktails." Packing a full house every night, Jigger's has been a solid success in an unfriendly financial climate. Like other Flemish cities in recent months, Ghent is bucking a long-standing beer trend to embrace cocktails in never-before-seen numbers.

Jacobs is part of a new cocktail vanguard shaking things up in beer-crazy Flanders. In the past 12 months, a new generation of cocktail makers have rolled out one initiative after another, determined to show beer lovers the universe of Tom Collins, Manhattans and Black Russians.

Just a couple of months after Jigger's opened, the first professional cocktail training programme for bartenders in Flanders was established in collaboration with the British Diageo, the world's largest distiller. Founders of the Nine-X Cocktail Academy say their aim is to train 75 bartenders over the next year and help those already at top-level to perform better in the Diageo Reserve World Class, considered the premier international cocktail mixing competition.

At around the same time, the Vittail Academy foundation was created to promote *vittails*, or non-alcoholic cocktails, in Flanders. Then, in October, the Famous Bartenders Institute was launched in Antwerp, a series of guest sessions featuring award-winning international bartenders. The goal, according to organiser Dieter Van Roy, was to put cocktails more firmly on the map of Flemish drinking culture. "We have quite a lot of good bartenders in Belgium, but not really the crowd," he explains. "People still need an extra push."

"Selective luxury"

The men behind these efforts all deny that they had a master plan to get barflies over to the cocktail side. "It's not like we talked two years ago: 'Hey guys, in 2012-2013, we're putting out a large offensive'," Van Roy explains, chuckling. "It's all happening quite naturally."

Either way, the fruit of their labour is evident. Cocktail culture in Flanders is booming, says trend researcher Tom Palmaerts. The partner at Ghent research institute Trendwolves

says the popularity of all things cocktail is both unprecedented and promising. "I think it's just the beginning," he says. "We have some top mixologists, so the possibilities are big."

According to Palmaerts, cocktail culture has benefited from a recent move toward "selective luxury". He cites research that shows that Belgians go to bars, restaurants, and clubs less frequently, but when they do go, they spend more money, opting for more expensive wines and stronger beers. With cocktail prices ranging between €9 and €13 at most places, the cocktail scene is catering to a select urban, young and professional crowd.

The drinks at the heart of this cocktail revolution have little to do with the mojitos, piña colodas and daiquiris traditionally offered at summer fairs and festivals. Instead, bartenders like Van Roy and Jacobs offer classic, *Mad Men*-era cocktails or twists on such classics.

"A great bartender is somebody with 15 bottles, some lemons, some limes, an orange and a bottle of bitters, who can serve the real classics the way they should be," explains Ben Belmans, co-founder of the Nine-X Cocktail Academy and regarded by many as the godfather of Flanders' cocktail scene. These barkeeps pride themselves on using only fresh ingredients and the finest spirits. Jacobs, for instance, has a herb garden to use in the homemade syrups that go into many of his drinks.

When Manuel Wouters opened Flanders' first real cocktail bar in 2000, naysayers told him that *Antwerpenaars* would never betray their beer roots, that there was no money to be had in cocktails. Fast-forward 12 years, and the famous Sips is still going strong. And it has paved the way for the present generation of fine drinking establishments – places like Jigger's and The Old Fashioned in Ghent, Josephine's and Cocktails at Nine in Antwerp and L'Apereau in Blankenberge.

Wouters has also made it his mission

"A great bartender is somebody with 15 bottles who can serve the real classics the way they should be"

to strip cocktails of their pretentious image. With his TV programme and the accompanying recipe book *The Art of Making Cocktails*, he has been trying to teach Flanders how to mix drinks at home, DIY-style.

"Educational consumption"

A strong beer tradition isn't the only reason it's taken so long for Flanders to embrace cocktails. Lack of professional training has played a critical role. Hotel schools and



hospitality training programmes in Flanders have traditionally devoted scant, if any, attention to cocktails. "Oh my god, they have no idea how to make a drink," Jacobs says about hotel school instructors. Most training is heavily geared toward wine, with cocktails covered almost



From top: Manuel Wouters founded Antwerp bar Sips in 2000, which blazed the trail for other cocktail bars to follow; The recipe for the perfect cocktail? The freshest ingredients, the finest spirits – and the right training; Jigger's in Ghent is packed nightly

didactic streak. These proprietors believe firmly that, by delivering expertly made classic cocktails, they are spreading the gospel. "At the moment a lot of mixologists are being like teachers – not just giving a lot of choices to their customers but actually choosing for them," Palmaerts explains. "At this point, I think it's educational consumption."

The bartenders are all very excited about the recent ground that has been made but point out that the road is still long. Van Roy says that the region's best cocktails bars are trailing behind fine drinking establishments in, for instance, London. "We're not even doing half of what those guys are doing," he says. "We're still not there yet."

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Expressing the unspeakable

The inimitable Antwerp band Dez Mona tours their Sága song cycle

Christophe Verbiest

Dez Mona are, without any doubt, one of Flanders' most original bands. Formed in 2003 as a duo, with Gregory Frateur singing and Nicolas Rombouts playing the double bass, this Antwerp-based ensemble at first combined torch songs, spirituals and jazz. But when the band got bigger, the sound did, too.

Last autumn they made their most rock-influenced album, *A Gentleman's Agreement*. It's their fifth and the first one to feature guitar. As a matter of fact, they expanded their line-up with not just one but two guitarists. Still, the sinister jazz, baroque fantasies and tormented melodrama that characterised their first three albums haven't evaporated.

Weirdly, their previous album, *Sága*, recorded with the chamber ensemble Baroque Orchestration X (or BOX), was labelled an opera, though Frateur and Rombouts agree that "song cycle" is a better description.

Anyway, it might seem a long stretch from *Sága* to *A Gentleman's Agreement*, but it isn't, insists

whose band Sir Yes Sir, is releasing a much anticipated debut album next month, and Sjoerd Bruil to audition and soon discovered the combination of the two worked wonderfully.

Dez Mona are now six musicians; rounding out the band are accordionist Roel Van Camp (you might know him from DAAU) and drummer Steven Cassiers. But Frateur and Rombouts still hold the reins. "Until a few years ago, the two of us couldn't let go, though we tried. These days it feels more like a group than ever before. But the two of us still take, if there's no consensus, the final decision."

Quest for home

In February, Dez Mona will perform *Sága* four times live. Rombouts: "It's a song cycle about the quest for home and the feeling of homecoming. It's named after the goddess of history in Norse mythology: She looks out over her country and narrates stories about its past, present and future."

Sága, he continues, is "dedicated to our country, our home. By putting that motto on the album, we want



Singer Gregory Frateur (front) and double bass player Nicolas Rombouts (middle back) are the core of Dez Mona

are sung. He then scrutinises the lyrics, and we discuss them. In some texts, a lot is changed, in others only one word. The advantage is that he's not only a native [English] speaker but also a singer. This collaboration, without any doubt, has made my lyrics better."

Uncanny associations

Dez Mona are named after – you probably guessed it – Desdemona, the tragic wife of Othello. Frateur: "First of all, it's a great name that has uncanny associations – Desdemona, demons – but Desdemona herself is far from eerie. I like that contrast." Rombouts adds that "when making

music, you have to dig deep into yourself. That's confronting, but it renders your life interesting. I agree with Sartre who stated that life was senseless, but that you can give sense to your own life by questioning yourself continuously."

Frateur: "I didn't realise it at first, but I've discovered that by singing I can express things I can't say with words. I learned this from listening to gospel music. The first time I heard Mahalia Jackson, I was 17, and I thought: 'Hallelujah!' I didn't realise you could do that with a human voice."

Rombouts agrees. "Expressing the unspeakable, that's the great power of music."

14-19 FEBRUARY

Sága: the songcycle

Across Flanders

► www.dezmona.com

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Dood van een schaduw (*Death of a Shadow*) by Flemish director Tom Van Avermaet has been **nominated for an Academy Award** for live action short film. The film stars Matthias Schoenaerts as a deceased First World War soldier who is resurrected by a "shadow collector". The short is Van Avermaet's first since graduating from film school and has already won five awards at festivals. "Being nominated for an Oscar has left me a bit speechless, to be honest," said the young filmmaker at the announcement last week. "I'm enormously honoured and excited." The Academy Awards ceremony takes place on 24 February.

► www.oscars.org

Belgium is the guest of honour at the **Taipei International Book Exhibition**, the largest book fair in Asia, which begins on 1 February. A Belgian pavilion will feature local authors, books and 22 publishers, and the fair is using the Smurfs as a theme on its signs and promotional materials. The Brussels-based, Astrid Lindgren award-winning children's book illustrator Kitty Crowther will make an appearance at the fair.

► www.tibe.org.tw

Boek.be is looking for people to make up the **"readers' jury" for this year's Gouden Boekenuil**, or Golden Book Owl, awards. Head of the jury is singer Bent Van Looy of Das Pop. Members of the public have to read five books by the end of April and offer their opinion. Interested parties can sign up for the jury on the website.

► www.boek.be

Flemish director Fien Troch's new movie *Kid*, which received a special mention from the jury at the Flanders International Film Festival last autumn and this month screened at the Palm Springs Film Festival, opens



this week across Flanders and Brussels. The film follows the lives of young boys as their single mother struggles to raise them in the Flemish countryside (*photo*). *Kid* completes a trilogy about children that includes 2005's *Een ander zijn geluk* (*Someone Else's Happiness*) and 2008's *Unspoken*. **Lisa Bradshaw**

► www.kid-film.be

"Expressing the unspeakable is the great power of music"

Rombouts. "We strongly believe that a riff that works on guitar can also be played on, for instance, accordion or theorbó," he says. (The latter is, in case you, like me, wondered, a lute-like instrument developed at the end of the 16th century.)

Two is better than one

Rombouts explains why the band opted for adding two guitar players to the line-up. "Bram Weijters, our pianist for some years, left to pursue a jazz career. It wouldn't have felt right to look for a new piano player. Not that we'll never have another one, but, after his departure, we felt we needed a change."

They asked both Tijs Delbeke,

to encourage people to contemplate what is their country, what is their home? How important is your nationality? Is language a significant characteristic of your nationality?" But *Sága* isn't a tract, he confirms. "Our art is apolitical. It's important that people shape their own opinions instead of taking over the ones presented by politicians and the media."

On *Sága*, Frateur collaborated with Scot Craig Ward on the lyrics. During the second half of the 1990s, Ward played in dEUS and nowadays he's one half of True Bypass. Frateur: "I write the lyrics and pass them to him with the first demo recording. That way he has an idea how the words

mocks his previous persona in "Hoera, ik ben een ster!" (Hurrah, I'm a Star!). An amazing album.

► www.helmutlotti.be

Aram

Music from Quiz Me Quick • Bonka Circus

Last year's much lauded Flemish television series *Quiz Me Quick* received praise for all its aspects: the screenplay about amateur quizzers, the *mise-en-scène*, the actors and the music. Guitarist and all-round snare master Aram composed nearly six hours of music for the series. Some 45 minutes are present on this soundtrack, which tickles the imagination. Guitars form

the basis, but the arrangements also include a string quartet, percussion and piano. The titles of the tracks ("Al Qaida", "Pizz Me Quick") add some zesty humour.

► www.aram.be

Tape Cuts Tape

Black Mold • Heavenhotel

At first, *Black Mold* might seem too intricate, but once you're accustomed to its restlessness, it blooms. It's the second album by Tape Cuts Tape, a trio consisting of guitarist Rudy Trouvé (known from his Octet, and formerly of Dead Man Ray), jazz drummer Eric Thielemans and singer Lynn Cassiers (Lidlboj, Octurn). They all also play other instruments,



like keyboards and percussion. It results in broken rock songs, jazz suffused with electronic effects and forlorn pop. It takes times to discover its beauty, but *Black Mold* is worth the investment. **CM**

► www.heavenhotel.be

MUSIC REVIEWS

Helmut Lotti

Mijn hart & mijn lijf • [PIAS]

Although 2013 is only two weeks old, *Mijn hart & mijn lijf* (*My Heart & My Body*) is without any doubt the musical makeover of the year. Helmut Lotti became a European crooning star with his *Classic* albums and has sold 13 million records. With the guidance of Stef Kamil Carlens (of Zita Swoon Group), Lotti shows an unknown side of himself on *Mijn hart*, surfing from gritty rock via passionate soul and from chafing blues to intimate folk. Though the album has a few frivolities, the prevailing tone is dark and melancholic. But humour is always at hand; he even ruthlessly

Encounters in the dark

Territoria

Daan Bauwens

“Creativity – like human life itself – begins in darkness.” With these words, American journalist and poet Julia Cameron defines the life of the artist. The Flemish, born and spending most of their lives under thick clouds, know as well as anyone else what this means.

Territoria, a new production by the Antwerp-based music theatre company Transparant, is a classic example of how darkness is transformed into art. In this experimental stage play, three artists – an actress, visual artist and scenographer – show how far darkness and isolation can drive the human mind.

A woman (An De Donder) wakes up alone in the corner of an empty and dark room. One beam of white light moves slowly over her body, but she doesn't show the slightest sign of life. The beam moves on,

transforming and enlarging the space. “It is a mental labyrinth,” explains De Donder. “The woman is alone and is looking for her identity but ends up in a state of complete estrangement.” Moving through “a kind of nightmare, she beholds everyone she actually is. Finally, she begins to define every single one of her alter-egos.”

The woman's delirium is further expressed by a series of masks, “with staring eyes, to show how estranged she really is,” says artist Freija Van Esbroeck. “In the meantime, she is moving through empty spaces, her compulsive movements projected on walls that often change place and shape.”

The three collaborators did everything possible to depict how strangely people can react to stimulus – or the lack of it. Through simultaneous stop-motion and live-action projections, “she moves



within her own mind through rooms and corridors, the images of which are projected onto the walls of the

main room,” explains Van Esbroeck. “The mind acts as a double house.” *Territoria* is, says scenographer Erki

De Vries, “a confrontation with one's self. The three of us have tried to reveal the different layers of reality, each of us within our own discipline. This was the most interesting and beautiful part in making the piece: When the three art forms meet, they start to live their own lives.”

Transparant's production is unique also for its starting point – not text but three compositions for string quartets by contemporary Flemish composer Wim Henderickx. The music is used to create spaces on stage. “It is mental music,” says De Donder, “intriguing and inspiring. When I first heard it a few years ago, I instantly wanted to create a stage play based on it. But it was only after I met Freija and Erki that I knew we had the right team to do this. First, there was music, then the three of us created images and only then did we put words on what we had created.”

16-17 January 20.30 | Stuk Naamsestraat 96, Leuven
24-25 January | Monty Montignystraat 3, Antwerp

► www.transparant.be

JAZZ

Djangofolllies

It's January, and that's the month that Belgium celebrates Django Reinhardt, the pioneer and undisputed master of gypsy swing, who was born in a caravan near the Walloon town of Liberchies on 23 January, 1910. With performances in well over a dozen towns across the country, Djangofolllies (yes, with three Ls!) is the most extensive of several dedicated Django festivals on the agenda this month. Brussels' Les Riches Claires is ground zero, presenting a solid weekend of concerts, including Nomad Swing (*pictured*). This local outfit is not, strictly speaking, a gypsy jazz ensemble; they perform a cross-section of swing-era styles from the lighter jazz of Louis Armstrong to the brooding torch song of Billie Holiday to the raucous gypsy rhythm of Reinhardt, which will surely take centre stage. **Georgio Valentino**



16-27 January | Across Belgium | ► www.djangofolllies.be

MORE JAZZ THIS WEEK

Brussels

WinterJazz: Annual festival featuring concerts by international musicians, plus jazz in art and film

Until JAN 26 at Marni and Flagey

► www.winterjazz.be

Ghent

Robin Verheyen & Aki Rissanen: Local contemporary sax-piano duo
JAN 20 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2

► www.decentrale.be

FESTIVAL

Private Investigations

Beurschouwborg's new festival focuses on notions of personal experience and authenticity in art, that unique human endeavour whose object is the expression or representation rather than the thing itself. Contemporary artists from Europe and beyond have been invited to present works largely based on found items and private narratives. Polish performer Janek Turkowski's *Margarete*, for example, begins with a box of someone else's 8mm home movies and ends as an intimate multimedia performance implicating Turkowski himself in the drama. German artist Britt Hazius' installation *Kabul for You* presents a video diary of her father Thilo's daily life as a foreign consultant in the Afghan capital.

There's much more to Private Investigations, of course, including Beursschouwburg's resident artist Pieterjan Ginckels' whimsical installation *Human Disco Bong* (*pictured*), a post-Christmas junk auction where you can recycle your own unwanted personal recollections, and an air guitar contest in which the winner takes home a real Gibson six-string. And no programme is complete these days without the opening weekend electro soirée. **GV**



18 January to 22 February

Beursschouwburg, Brussels | ► www.beursschouwburg.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Bach Academy Bruges: Third annual festival devoted to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, with a particular focus on his time as Leipzig's most famous director of church music and cantor at St Thomas

JAN 22-27 at Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34

► www.concertgebouw.be

Hasselt

Modfest: Dance music festival featuring techno, house and bass. Line-up includes Aeroplane, SKIP&DIE, The Whatevers, Raveyards, Ossie, more

JAN 19 22.00 at Muziekodroom, Bootstraat 9

► www.muziekodroom.be

COMEDY

International Comedy Night

English-language comedy can be hard to find in Brussels, but when it rains, it pours. Brussels’ Kings of Comedy Club presents three internationally acclaimed comics in a single night. You’ll no doubt recognise Ghent-based American comic Jovanka Steele (*pictured*) – one of the stars of the new TV show *Fans of Flanders*. She is an accomplished stand-up performer, having toured the US, the UK and Continental Europe with her one-woman show *Adventures in Europe-Land*. This is her first appearance in Brussels. British comic Neville Raven, meanwhile, is an original comic whose punchline is usually not what you see coming. Ireland’s David Hayden, finally, acts as master of ceremonies. More English-language comedy follows next weekend (see below). **GV**



20 January 18.00
Kings of Comedy Club, Brussels | www.kocc.be

MORE COMEDY THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Nen Belgische Leeuw (A Belgian Lion): Stage comedy about three petty thieves who call themselves businessmen; by David Mamet, directed by Eric Kerremans (in Dutch)
Until MAR 3 at Theater aan de Stroom, Blancefloerlaan 181B
www.theateraandestroom.be

Brussels

Stand Up World: Stand-up performances by UK comedians Bob Mills, Andy White and Arthur Smith, with optional Indian dinner (in English)
JAN 26 20.30 at Théâtre 140, Eugène Plaskylaan 140
www.standupworld.com

Rotselaar (Flemish Brabant)

Comedy in Rotselaar: Stand-up night featuring William Boeva, Chris van der Ende, Nick De Wil, Peter Gysen, Wilfried van der Elst and Dennis Vansant (in Dutch)
JAN 18 at De Mena, Provinciebaan 2
www.comedyinrotselaar.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Antwerp Holiday Fair

The cold, dark and damp winter now upon us inspires nothing if not a profound longing to travel to far-off (read: warm and sunny) places. The Antwerp Holiday Fair, which specialises in off-the-beaten-path travels, is perfectly timed to capitalise on this impulse. The fair originated in Amsterdam, where its recent second edition attracted more than 6,000 visitors. The Antwerp edition is held in the riverside warehouse-complex-turned-expo-centre Waagnatie. This fair is all about quality over quantity, with unique and personalised travel opportunities. So boutique agencies are here alongside established names, and the usual slick travel agents and their sales pitches are supplemented by performers and cultural ambassadors. Visitors can get a taste of their prospective global destinations through live music and talks with international authors as well as slide and film presentations. **GV**



Win two tickets to the Antwerp Holiday Fair!
Send an email to editorial@flanderstoday.be by noon on 18 January with “Holiday Fair” in the subject line. Winners will be notified the same day

19-20 January | Waagnatie, Antwerp | www.vakantiebeursantwerpen.eu

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Stemmen uit Babel (Voices from Babel): Guided walk through Brussels’ Molenbeek commune
JAN 19 13.30 from De Markten, Oude Graanmarkt 5
www.demarkten.be

Wezembeek-Oppem

Australia Day: Celebrations include an Aboriginal art exhibition, entertainment for kids, wine tasting, buffet BBQ, prizes and more (RSVP by 22 January)
JAN 27 12.00-17.00 at De Kam, Beekstraat 172
www.australiansocietyinbelgium.blogspot.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Georgio Valentino

Lord Byron

8 Kartuizersstraat, Brussels

When one feels strongly attached to a cafe, there is always the temptation – admittedly antithetical to the journalist’s code of conduct – to keep it entirely to oneself. Especially when said cafe is the very definition of cosy, accommodating only some two dozen patrons comfortably. This is how I feel about Lord Byron Art Cafe, which is tucked away in the once-quiet Kartuizersstraat in downtown Brussels. Although I’ve been haunting the place for years, I haven’t breathed a word about it, not even to my own mother, for fear that tomorrow I may not be able to find a place on one of its vintage leather couches. Recent developments, however, have rendered all this Shakespearean contemplation a moot point. To wit, the cat has been let out of the bag and Kartuizersstraat is no longer the sole domain of the brave few who dare venture those fateful few metres from the chic Antoine Dansaertstraat and bustling Sint-Gorikspein. This charming but tiny side-street has now become a destination in its own right, with several new boutiques and its own neighbourhood association, which organised the block’s first winter fair last month. Lord Byron predates all of this. It was established in 2007 by a Kosovar transplant with impeccable taste and whose name, Bajram, was constantly mistaken for Byron. The decor is a blend of old and

new. The building’s original brick and beam work give way here and there to smooth, neutral-hued walls on which Bajram exhibits a rotating selection of contemporary art. There are several small tables in the front of the room and a short bar along the back wall. A decent list of beers, wines and cocktails are affordable. The music is never too loud but is *always* inspired. In short, this is a place for lubricated conversation or, for solitary types, hazy contemplation. This is not to say that Byron caters to the early crowd; the good Lord opens daily (except Sunday) at 18.00 and almost never closes before 2.00 (more often 5.00, 6.00 or 7.00). In case I’ve been unclear, Lord Byron is highly recommended.



BITE

Robyn Boyle

La Botte ★★☆☆

A visit to Limburg’s Hoge Kempen National Park is even better when charged with the anticipation of a post-walk feast. My trail partner and I trade in our muddy boots for nicer shoes and head to what is often lauded as Flanders’ best Italian restaurant, La Botte.

Backed by celebrity chef Peppe of Njam! TV, La Botte pulls in a full house just about every night. I’ve been drooling over Peppe’s Italian cooking show for a while now, just waiting for my chance to see him live in the kitchen. And the first half of the evening exceeds all expectations.

We are greeted courteously and allowed to choose our own table in the modern, classy and predominantly white dining room. Our aperitif comes with a tasty rice-ball teaser. Unable to choose from the lengthy menu, we decide to do it “the Italian way”: antipasti followed by pasta followed by meat or fish, finished off with dessert. (Our walk made us feel entitled to the extra calories.)

We immensely enjoy our antipasto, which comes in a deep bowl filled with a sweet-and-sour *caponata* sauce. The tomato, eggplant, olive, celery and other vegetables are topped with coils of white squid so tender I first mistake them for pasta. My starter is spaghetti *vongole*, a traditional dish tossed with little half-open clams and pieces of barely seared tuna. I would probably enjoy it more if my partner didn’t have the most delicious pasta dish I’ve ever tasted. His homemade ravioli are stuffed with braised beef and smothered in copious amounts of butter, aromatic sage and paper-thin slices of truffle. Underneath it all, a layer of sharp cheese adds a touch



of crunch and pungency. The combination of creamy, salty, buttery and earthy couldn’t be better executed; I would come back for this dish alone.

The wine list comes to us on an iPad, which, besides being progressive, tells me that the list is prone to change often – a good sign. After some time leafing through the digital pages, we’re rescued by Peppe’s brother and wine sommelier, Gaspare. He asks us about our main dishes before returning with a very nice bottle of Chianti for around €30.

I like the way Gaspare hollers to his brother in the kitchen, and vice versa. It’s a loud, Italian family business. In fact, Peppe and Gaspare’s parents came from Sicily to visit Belgium back in 1978 and never left, opening La Botte two years later. After the memorable starters, my main dish disappoints.

The swordfish steak comes with a sauce very similar to the *caponata*. The fish itself is borderline dry and bland. Fortunately it comes with some perfectly seasoned savoy cabbage, celery root puree and oven-roasted rosemary potatoes. My partner has the same accompaniments, which is unusual considering he has a completely different dish. His veal ribeye is juicy and the sauce equally full of flavour, thanks to salty Parma ham, sage and white wine.

Desperately wanting to end the evening on a high note, I order a dessert to share and two espressos. The coffee, as expected, is potent and delicious. Unfortunately, the *cannoli* is a rock-hard, tasteless pastry filled with sugary ricotta.

The inconsistency is so astonishing that we decide to give a bit of constructive criticism. Alas, our feedback is quickly returned with indifference. It is with mixed feelings that we settle the not-inexpensive €165 bill and get going on the long drive home.

► www.labotte.be

- 📍 Europalaan 99, Genk; 089.36.25.45
- 🕒 Thurs-Mon, 11.30-14.30 & 17.30-22.45
- 💶 Mains: €30-€36
- 📖 Established Sicilian family restaurant in Limburg with outstanding fresh pasta but inconsistent mains

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Word up

The Flemish are a creative bunch. Every year, they seem to invent a whole galaxy of new words, often to describe new phenomena. In fact, they do so to such an extent that since the beginning of the century, several language institutions have been awarding the most notable newcomer the title Woord Van Het Jaar, word of the year.

Last year around this time, I wrote about the award by dictionary publisher Van Dale. In the year that saw the introduction of the ban on smoking in public places, it was *stoeproken* that took home the prize. *Stoep* means pavement; *roken* means to smoke.

This year, there must have been something else going on. Van Dale’s word of the year for 2012 is *frietchinees*, meaning *Aziatische frituurhouder*, an Asian operator of a *frituur*, a typically Flemish place that sells fries and other fried food.

The Institute for Dutch Lexicology, however, came up with a different winner: *pandapunten*, or panda points, a term popular among Dutch college students. One panda point equals one week without sex – raising the risk of becoming extinct, like the panda. Other beauties in the two competitions included *weblief*, meaning *geliefde die je via het internet hebt leren kennen*, a romantic interest you met on the internet; and *wrijftelefoon*, meaning *telefoon met een touchscreen*, phone with a touchscreen. (*Wrijven* means to rub.)

The UK Word of the Year 2012, by the way, according to Oxford Dictionaries, is “omnishambles”, meaning “a situation that has been comprehensively mismanaged, characterised by a string of blunders and miscalculations”.

Over the years, the awards paint something of a history of the

society itself. The Woord van Het Jaar of the year in 2000, according to Dutch language historian Ewoud Sanders, was *weblog*. In 2009, according to magazine *OnzeTaal* (OurLanguage), it was *twitteren*, or to tweet (post something on Twitter).

It seems no coincidence that people started recording new words around *de eeuwwisseling*, the turn of the century, when the internet began to move into full swing.

Sanders, who was one of the first to spend his days looking for new words, even set up a website where people can report unusual language use, “*om alle ontwikkelingen rond de Nederlandse taal vast te leggen*,” to record developments around the Dutch language. So next time your kid says something strange, you know where to go.

► www.meldpunttaal.be



The last word...

Job application

“I can work like a horse, man. Whoever takes me on won’t regret it.”

After 32, Flemish prisoner Freddy Horion still sees a future for himself on the outside

Simple enough

“The crowd is always wrong by definition.”

Antwerp comedian Nigel Williams weighs in on the debate on bad taste in comedy

Heavy metal

“Cars are stuffed full of copper. There’s now 1.5km of copper wire in a car, 30 times more than in a car from the 1940s.”

Researcher Raf Custers accused cars of a massive waste of scarce raw materials

A fine mess

“I got confused by the difference between miles and kilometres per hour.”

Former Ghent footballer Yassine El Ghanassy had an original excuse for an English judge when caught speeding

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Flanders’ literary greats are looking for *luuurve* during the annual Saint Amour tour, which moves across the region in time for Valentine’s Day. We’ll tell you who you’ll see, what they’ll be reading and if it’s appropriate for a first date. In fact, we’re all about books in the next issue, with more events in our agenda and a piece on Antwerp’s indie bookshop scene

Science

Walter de Brouwer left Flanders for Silicon Valley and is certainly making his home region proud. He’s the founder and CEO of Scanadu, which recently unveiled three consumer health tools that are being hailed as the biggest innovations in home medicine since the invention of the thermometer. We talk to our man in California about the company and the products

Tourism

Flagey is turning 75 years old, and they are rolling out a programme of celebrations. We’ll tell you how the landmark building got its start, its resurrection as one of Brussels’ leading cultural institutions and what’s in store for the next couple of months