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THE PEAR PROBLEM

Thanks to Russian sanctions, there are way too many pears in Limburg. Is it worth the cost of harvesting?



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HELPING HANDS

Belgians win prizes for innovative products that help the elderly and those with a handicap

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GETTING GRUESOME

Inspired by a memorable Bruges painting, Pieter Aspe's latest book takes a turn for the chilling




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A sea change

Flemish trailblazers champion the infinite potential of algae



Andy Furniere
More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

Seaweed doesn't elicit strong reactions in most people. But many scientists are getting very excited about this marine algae. They are betting that seaweed will become an essential energy resource, as global leaders try to move toward a more ecological future.

With its ambitious plans for the mass-production and harvesting of seaweed in the North Sea, a Flemish textile company recently joined the growing seaweed movement.

"Since about 70% of the surface of our Earth consists of water, there is a huge potential to produce seaweed for different applications," says Bert Groenendaal from Sioen, which is co-ordinating the seaweed cultivation project At

Sea. "In Asia, huge amounts of seaweed are already being produced, but in a very labour-intensive way that is only profitable because of the low salaries being paid."

In 2012, a European consortium began working on a new technique to grow and harvest mass amounts of seaweed, one that wouldn't require expensive and extensive manpower. The At Sea project is primarily being funded by the European Commission and was originally established by Sioen, which is based in Ardooie, West Flanders. Bexco and Centexbel, both based in East Flanders, also rank amongst the 11 project partners, the rest of which are located across Europe.

Using their expertise in textile materials, Groenendaal and his colleagues tried to develop innovative sheets on which


seaweed could be grown in larger quantities as an alternative to the ropes typically used today. The company's ambition was to create these cultivation sheets, ropes to stabilise the sheets in the water and a special coating that would improve the efficiency of seaweed growth.

Two years and six months into the project, the multidisciplinary At Sea team, which includes textile experts, marine engineers and biochemists, has successfully completed the first test phase. The team succeeded in producing seaweed on a small scale at three North Sea sites in Scotland, Ireland and Norway.

"We sprayed the 200-square-metre sheets with young seaweed, and in September of last year, we put the sheets about one metre under water," Groenendaal explains.

“Don’t eat wild mussels”

Consumers should choose farmed mussels to avoid high levels of chemicals, says Ilvo



Andy Furniere
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Mussels gathered from the sea at the Belgian coast, and especially near ports, contain relatively high concentrations of chemical substances and too high concentrations of potentially damaging bacteria. That is the conclusion of the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (Ilvo) after studying the quality of mussels at quays in Nieuwpoort, Ostend and Zeebrugge, as well as other breakwaters along the coast. Mussels harvested in the wild contain two to four times the levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and polychlorin-

ated biphenyls (PCBs) than the commercial Zeeuwse mussels, although they still meet food standards for chemicals. Wild mussels however do not meet the standards for the *E. coli* bacteria, responsible for about 80% of all urinary tract infections. Not only is gathering wild mussels illegal, researchers warn that eating them may also be dangerous. “Mussels filter sea water to get food and, during this process, absorb all kinds of polluting substances,” Ilvo researcher Bavo De Witte told *De Morgen*. “That makes them good indicators of water quality.”



Flemish politicians and celebrities take on Ice Bucket Challenge

Flemish ministers Jo Vandeuren and Philippe Muyters have both joined in the Ice Bucket Challenge, joining prominent footballers and other Flemish celebrities in showing support for the local ALS organisation. The Ice Bucket Challenge began in the US to raise money for the ALS Association, which funds research and patient services related to Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative disease of the central nervous system that causes muscle atrophy, leading to paralysis and respiratory failure. The Ice Bucket Challenge involves someone challenging others to either give money to the organisation or to dump a bucket of ice cubes (or icy cold water) over their heads,



© courtesy VTM
VTM anchor Stef Wauters takes on the Ice Bucket Challenge

film it and post it to YouTube. The person challenged then nominates three new victims, who have 24 hours to comply. So far, the Ice Bucket Challenge has been met by prominent figures, including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and (twice) Justin Bieber.

In Flanders, the ordeal has been undergone by Red Devils captain Vincent Kompany, who nominated team coach Marc Wilmots, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Stromae; fellow Red Devil Romelo Lukaku and Kevin De Bruyne; comedian Urbanus; and teen Buddhist monk Giel, who sent a video from his monastery in Nepal. Flemish health minister Vandeuren was one of the first in Flanders to be given the Ice Bucket Challenge, nominated by the chair of Belgium’s ALS League, Danny Reviers, who has the disease, together with fellow minister Muyters and former Red Devil Jean-Marie Pfaff. “It’s not my style to get involved in this sort of thing, but the ALS message is

extremely important,” Vandeuren explained, before his sub-zero drenching. Muyters, minister of work and sport, followed, getting his public soaking on Martelarenplein in Brussels, VTM cameras on the scene. Q Music DJ Sven Ornelis challenged King Filip and, while royal administrators posted a photo of a bucket of water standing before the palace in Brussels, the king was offering more of a “wink” of support, said a spokesperson. The exact cause of ALS is not known. Well-known victims of the disease include American baseball player Lou Gehrig and British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking. / Alan Hope

Stowaways undetected due to faulty equipment

Shipping police in Zeebrugge said that a container full of stowaways headed to the UK went undetected earlier this month because the cargo scanner meant to detect abnormalities in cargo was not working. The scanner broke down the previous Thursday, according to Benny Lavaert of the police union NSPV. The equipment is 11 years old and in need of replacement. “In these budget-strapped times, I don’t think we’ll be getting a new scanner any time soon,” said Lavaert. The stowaways, a group of Sikhs from Afghanistan, including 13 children under the age of 12, were discovered in Tilbury docks in Essex on 16 August. One man died during the journey. An Ostend-based company implicated in the case, meanwhile, has denied any involvement. “We are able to state categorically that the container did not come from us,” the company Cool Solutions said in a statement. “We have nothing to do with this matter. We could not be involved, since we do not transport deep-sea containers.”

The company’s name came up in reports because the container was found beside a Cool Solutions trailer at Tilbury, near London. “We have not been approached by the authorities,” a spokesperson said, explaining that they had been contacted by the British press. “It’s too bad our image has been besmirched like this.” The stowaways, who are assumed to be the victims of human traffickers, were treated in hospital for hypothermia and dehydration and will later be questioned by British police to enable them to reconstruct their voyage from Afghanistan to Zeebrugge, from where they crossed to Tilbury. Ferry company P&O said the container arrived at the dock in Zeebrugge one hour before it was loaded on board, set off two hours after that and arrived in the UK after an eight-hour crossing. There is no evidence to suggest the stowaways entered the container in Zeebrugge. \ AH


Last Post bugler honoured for 60 years of service

Antoon Verschoot, 89, was honoured this week for his 60 years of service as a bugler at Ypres’ Last Post, which has – apart from a period during the Second World War – been staged under the Menin Gate every evening since 1928. Verschoot joined the buglers in 1954 and is its longest-serving member. He has performed at the Last Post more than 15,000 times and currently has no plans to retire. He is the holder of numerous honours, including a knighthood in the Order of the Crown, the British Empire




Medal, the Order of Australia and the membership of the British Empire (MBE). \ AH


214




20%




€2.3 million



490,000



25%



214 cases of “lookalikes” trying to travel with someone else’s passport caught at Brussels Airport last year, up from 194 in 2012. The airport will soon install biometric scanners that read fingerprints and facial details

of children born in Flanders in 2013 were delivered by Caesarean section, the highest percentage ever

profit in 2013 for the five Flemish dioceses. Only Mechelen made a loss, of €630,000, which included a reserve of €200,000 to pay damages to the victims of sexual abuse

day-trippers travelled to the Flemish coast for the long Assumption weekend, despite the iffy weather. Some 16% came from other countries, mainly France and the Netherlands

of children in Flanders go to school by bike, “bad news” according to the Cycling Union and the Flemish Traffic Science Foundation, as the number in 2000 was 40%

WEEK IN BRIEF

The army’s bomb disposal unit Dovo has been promised a new system for the **dismantling of munitions containing toxic substances** such as mustard gas by 2016. Earlier this year, it was revealed that the installation in Poelkapelle, West Flanders, intended to disarm the bombs was no longer functioning, and more than 3,000 shells were stockpiled instead of being destroyed. At the time, 200 bombs containing mustard gas had just been unearthed in nearby Passchendaele. Dovo is now looking at two possible methods, commandant Glen Nollet said: controlled explosion or incineration. “In the meantime, we are storing the toxic munitions in the safest way possible,” he said.

Football club KRC Genk has named former Scotland coach Alex McLeish, 55, as its new coach, replacing Emilio Ferrera, who was dismissed last month after one game. McLeish’s heyday was with Glasgow Rangers, which he led to victory in two league championships, two Scottish cups and three Scottish league cups in the space of five years. He later coached the national side, and managed Birmingham City and local rivals Aston Villa. His last appointment was with Nottingham Forest, a job he left in February 2013.

A 13-year-old **boy from Guinea** was **quarantined** in Ostend’s AZ Damiaan last week, suspected of having the Ebola virus. The boy, whose father sent him to Belgium to protect him from the deadly virus that has killed more than 1,200 in western Africa this year, was admitted to the hospital with a high fever. The hospital placed him in quarantine, but it was determined that he did not have the virus. He is now in the hospital’s paediatric ward, being treated for what is thought to be malaria.

Car-free Sunday will take place in the Brussels Capital-Region on 21 September from 9.00 to 19.00. Motor vehicles are limited to public transport, taxis, emergency services, the

handicapped and diplomats. Visitors can park in Parking C at Heizel and travel into the centre by metro. Other parking facilities will be signalled on the Ring Road.

Residents of the Marollen neighbourhood of Brussels have occupied a patch of ground they have turned into a **communal garden, preventing work from going ahead** on the construction of four houses adjoining the piece of land. The ground has been vacant for years, until the garden was started in March. It soon became a meeting place for residents of an area that has very little green space. Brussels City has offered the use of another patch of land 100 metres away, consisting of planters on asphalt, described by the gardeners as “not sufficient”.

A woman of 75 was pushed to the ground outside the town hall in the Elsene district of Brussels after a youth who had been behind her at the counter heard what he later described to police as “**a Jewish-sounding name**”. The woman suffered bruising in the attack. A complaint has been filed by the Belgian League against Anti-Semitism.

The Antwerp prosecutor will **not pursue criminal charges against two pre-school teachers** accused of sexually abusing children in the Blokkendoos pre-school last year. The school has since been renamed Creatopia. The allegations made by a number of parents led to the school closing early before the summer holidays. The prosecutor said there was no evidence against the teachers, who will now resume teaching in September after being transferred temporarily to administrative functions.

The **platform on top of Brussels’ highest building** will not after all be freely accessible, property company Atenor said. The Upsite apartment block by the canal will house a restaurant on the top floor,

together with an observation platform with room for 50 people, which will only be accessible on payment of a fee. Both restaurant and platform should be open by the end of the year.

A former justice of the peace and police court judge who now writes about the justice system for the Flemish press has been **described as a risk to justice by a report** issued by the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary. Jan Nolf now pens often critical articles in *Knack*, *De Morgen* and *dere-dactie.be*. According to the report on Independence and Accountability of the Judiciary, “in Belgium, a retired judge has started working for the press and repeatedly criticises the Council for the Judiciary and the justice system. His attacks are based on real situations in which the justice system has, for example, delayed, but are fuelled by his intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the system.”

A waiter from central Brussels’ famous restaurant street, Korte Beenhouwersstraat, and his brother have been accused by the Brussels prosecutor of **copying and making purchases with credit cards** belonging to foreign visitors for months. The fraud was detected by credit card company Atos Worldline last month when purchases were made in Brussels using the cards of Russian, Chinese and American tourists.

A 31-year-old Kayak enthusiast from Lier **drowned after capsizing in the Barents Sea** to the north of Norway. Michiel Delille had completed a four-month journey of 4,000 kilometres and had intended to finish at North Cape in Norway. He apparently encountered difficulties just 30km from his destination. “In his last letter he wrote that he didn’t want to take any unnecessary risks,” his father told *De Morgen*. “He absolutely wanted to reach his goal. The closer he came, the more carefully he proceeded.”

FACE OF FLANDERS



© courtesy Royal Ballet School

Nadia Deferm

Nadia Deferm, a former ballerina turned ballet teacher, has been appointed artistic director of the Royal Ballet School in Antwerp. She takes over on 1 September from the American Michael Shannon, who served for four years. The school should not be confused with the company Royal Ballet Flanders, which caused an artistic stir earlier this month when it dismissed its artistic director, Assis Carreiro, who was accused by staff of having administrative but no practical dance experience. No such problem in the case of Deferm. She graduated from the Ballet School in 1984 and went straight into the corps de ballet of the Royal Ballet of Flanders, shortly after the departure of the legendary Jeanne Brabants. As a student, Deferm, 48, danced with the company in *The Nutcracker*, and she was soon plunged into the classics of the repertoire, including *Petruschka*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*, first in the corps and later as a soloist.

It was as a soloist that she first travelled to Germany, but it was as a teacher that she decided to remain, obtaining a Master’s in dance teaching at Folkwang University in Essen, Germany. She then spent the following years as teacher and youth co-ordinator in Wiesbaden and Essen, before working for 11 years at the head of the international ballet school BVC in Wiesbaden. Now, 27 years after leaving, she returns to Antwerp and her alma mater. The Royal Ballet School opened in 1951, and remains to this day the only secondary school in Belgium for dance students, offering a mixture of artistic, practical and academic studies. There are 92 students, and Deferm’s first reaction was a pledge to put their well-being first, together with contact with parents. She also intends to strengthen the contacts with her other alma mater, the Royal Ballet, and to use her international contacts to give the Ballet School a more international profile. \ Alan Hope

FLANDERTODAY Flanders State of the Art

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE Wild Weasel whisky

Flanders has a new whisky, only the second to be distilled in the region. Wild Weasel was presented last weekend at a festival specially organised in its honour in the Wilderen district of Sint-Truiden. It takes three years and a day for a distilled product to become a true Scotch whisky, and the dram that Offside had the honour of tasting last Sunday was first introduced to its Kentucky oak barrel in 2011. It’s since been waiting patiently in a storeroom with iron bars and gates with double locks – one key held by the customs and excise department and the other by distiller Mike Janssen. Janssen (*pictured*) spent most of his life in brewing, as well as taking



© Alan Hope

over and renovating old properties, like Ter Dolen castle in Veurne, West Flanders. This latest project involves both, and distilling to boot. “My wife saw an ad for a house for sale with an old distillery in the garden.” He approached the owner, a widow, who didn’t want to show him around. “It had been more than 20 years since anyone entered the

building,” he says. “There were bats and rats and mice and owls all living here. She wanted me to go to the agency. I begged her to let me look just for a minute. She opened the door, and, right at that moment, I had the whole project for this building in my head.” Wild Weasel, named after a family of weasels who had taken up residence in the chimney, with a bit of the wild of Wilderen thrown in, will be sold in three strengths: cask strength at 62.4 degrees alcohol; the single malt at 46 degrees; and a blend at 40 degrees (about €40). Or you can order a whole barrel, for only €10,000, for delivery in three years. \ Alan Hope

Strike services could be law

Federal government negotiators focus on strikes and civil service pensions



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Federal negotiators Kris Peeters of the Flemish Christian democrats CD&V and Charles Michel of the French-speaking liberals MR spent another weekend behind closed doors working out the fine details of government policy.

The talks in the run-up to forming a federal government focused on state industries, civil servants and foreign policy, according to a press statement issued by Peeters. Negotiators considered proposals for a compulsory minimum coverage during strike actions, favoured by three of the coalition partners – Open VLD, MR and N-VA.

“It exists in most European countries, so I don’t see why we shouldn’t apply it here,” said Alexander De Croo of Open VLD. “The citizen has a right to a reliable service,” he argued. “You can’t have the country brought to a standstill.”

Unions oppose the plan because they say it represents an attack on the basic right to strike. Chair of the Flemish socialists S.P.A, Bruno Tobback, also rejected the idea, arguing that it was more important to limit strikes than to limit the right to strike.

The negotiators also worked on plans to bring civil service pension rights in line with the private sector and to make it easier to fire



© Olivier Hoslet/epa/Corbis
Federal government negotiators Charles Michel (left) and Kris Peeters

civil servants who perform badly. Last week, negotiators planning to discuss tax cuts turned their attentions to justice and

security. The agenda change was prompted by the beheading of the American journalist James Foley by the Islamic State (IS) organi-

sation.

The next Belgian government, said outgoing federal foreign affairs minister Didier Reynders, has to do more to confront the problem of radicalisation, which is a danger not only to the people of Iraq and Syria but also threatens Europe. The negotiators also raised the prospect of amending the law to allow accused people to plead guilty, which would help to speed up the judicial process. Attention later turned to the terms of a budget that involves cuts of €17.3 billion over the coming five years. The cuts, which are required to meet budgetary targets set by the European Union, will have to be achieved by reducing federal government expenditure in areas such as civil service jobs and the health-care sector. But all four parties will have to agree on the cuts before a government can be formed.

The slow pace of the negotiations is having an impact at the European level, where Belgium is the only country that has not yet appointed a candidate to sit on the European Commission. The EU has told Belgium to come up with a name by the end of August. The EU is putting further pressure on the negotiations by insisting that all the member states submit their budget plans by 15 October.

Power shortages will have minimal impact, says energy minister

The country faces a real risk of electricity shortages this winter as a result of three nuclear power plants being out of action, but the risk is minimised by measures the government has taken over the last few years, according to federal energy minister Catherine Fonck (pictured). She was appearing in front of the federal parliament’s joint interior and business committees last week.

Two of the reactors, at Doel 3 in Beveren in East Flanders and at Tihange 2 in Wallonia, have been out of service for months, since material defects were discovered in the reactor casings. The third, Doel 4, was closed down at the beginning of August after oil leaked into the steam turbine in what appears to have been an act of sabotage.

The stoppage at Doel 4, Fonck said, led to a “political game”, with stories in the media and announcements from politicians that as many as half the municipalities in the country could be facing power cuts this winter, due to the government uncoupling some areas in the evening to reduce peak demand on the network.

“The real risk is reduced because the government for the first time made provision for additional measures to guarantee the security of the energy supply,” Fonck told the committee. “There is no need for panic.”



Those additional measures include plans for the import of energy, the creation of a strategic reserve and the uncoupling plan, which would be predictable and manageable. According to the plan, the public in the affected areas would be alerted by radio, TV and newspapers that their power was to be switched off, allowing them time to prepare.

Earlier, in an interview with Radio 1, outgoing federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte said that reports that the country risks power cuts this winter due to the closure of two nuclear power stations were exaggerated. He noted that there were “adequate solutions” to deal with the problem.

Vande Lanotte argued that the problem can be solved by introducing emergency generators and encouraging industry to adapt its energy consumption patterns. “In other countries, there are many cases of companies adapting their energy use according to the circumstances,” he said. “Some companies even incorporate this into their business plans.”

The minister added that the country could import energy supplies from abroad without this necessarily leading to higher fuel bills for consumers. “Energy in the Netherlands is no more expensive than our own,” he said.

Vande Lanotte went on to say that there was currently an over-supply of energy in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. “There is a 1,300 megawatt Dutch gas-fired power station lying idle just three kilometres from our border. All we need to do is to lay a cable to connect it to our national grid.”

\ DB & Alan Hope

Leave pears unharvested, says Bourgeois

Limburg pear farmers could save money by leaving pears to rot on the trees, according to Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois. Bourgeois met pear farmers last week during a visit to the Haspengouw Auction in Sint-Truiden.

The visit was prompted by the recent decision by Russia to ban the import of certain categories of European fruit in retaliation at EU sanctions directed at Russia because of its role in fuelling the Ukraine conflict.

The pear industry in Limburg province is one of the sectors that has been hardest hit by the

ban. The pear harvest began last week, but some farmers are considering stopping and leaving the pears on the trees.

“Farmers have to pay a huge amount to pick, sort and store the fruit,” said Bourgeois. “If they can’t sell the fruit, then they are piling up costs without making any income.” But Luc Vanoirbeek of the Boerenbond, or Farmers’ Union, says that there’s too much uncertainty to risk losing a crop. “Fruit growers still don’t know how much compensation they will receive from the EU if they leave their harvest on the trees and don’t bring the

pears to market,” he told *De Standaard*. “But they can’t wait any longer to find out. Nature has her own demands.”

The EU has set aside €125 million to support farmers hit by the Russian import ban. The money will be taken from the Common Agricultural Policy budget to compensate farmers across the EU, including the Limburg pear farmers. But for Bourgeois, that’s not nearly enough. “€125 million is absolutely insufficient to compensate the affected sectors,” he said. \ DB



© Courtesy VRT

A sea change

Brand new ways to grow and store seaweed lead to massive harvests

WWW.ATSEA-PROJECT.EU
WWW.ALGENWEB.BE

continued from page 1

At this depth, the seaweed can receive the necessary sunlight to grow without being exposed to other damaging natural elements such as strong winds.

The seawater at the North Sea location needs to contain enough phosphor, which seaweed feeds on. "We specifically used sugar weed, for which the moderate temperatures of the North Sea are ideal," says Groenendaal.

When the team harvested the seaweed in May, the results were just what they had hoped. "We managed to produce about 15 kilograms per square metre, which is about double the traditional production volume," says Groenendaal, who adds that he feels confident that they will be able to achieve the ambitious volume of 20kg per square metre by the end of the project.

underwater at the production site. Seaweed can be stored in its natural environment for several months in such tanks. "If you produce large quantities of seaweed, factories cannot process all of it fast enough," explains Groenendaal. "The flexitanks will allow us to spread out the processing of the harvest."

In September, the At Sea team will again place its special sheets in the water at the same three North Sea sites, but this time the production scale will be upped. Groenendaal feels confident that the results of this crop, which will be harvested in May, will be equally successful – and he is already looking further ahead.

"We don't want this enterprise to end in July, when the European project finishes," he says. "Together with other partners in the consor-

preneur. By posting and linking to accessible articles, the website works to inform the general public about the various possibilities that algae offer.

At UGent, Taelman is the resident expert on the environmental impact of seaweed production. "When I talk about my specialisation, I get a lot of negative reactions about how dirty and distasteful seaweed is," says Taelman, who also devoted her Master's thesis to the topic. "Most people don't understand the enormous potential of seaweed and only think of toxic algae or harmful algal blooms, a perception that I hope to change a little through my website."

Taelman is currently working on two major projects: the Omega-Extract project supported by the government of Flanders and the EnAlgae project, primarily funded by the European Union.

Omega-Extract is being backed by the Flanders Innovation Hub for Sustainable Chemistry and brings together three partners: UGent, the University of Leuven and the Flemish Institute for Technical Research. The goal of Omega-Extract is to produce stable, omega-3 rich algae oil, which boasts several advantages compared to the omega-3 oils currently commercially available. If successful, it would be possible to use these algae in cosmetic products without the negative side effects on their colour, odour and stability.

The original goal of EnAlgae was to use algae for the production of biofuels, but this ambition has partly changed since the project was launched in 2011. "It became clear that the production of algae



© At Sea

At Sea researchers used special cultivation sheets to grow seaweed in much larger quantities

“Most people don't understand the enormous potential of seaweed

The new types of ropes used in the At Sea project stabilised the sheets extremely well and even withstood a strong winter storm at the Ireland site. "While the traditional ropes used by other producers were severely damaged, ours remained in terrific condition," says Groenendaal.

Not only did the team successfully create an advanced cultivation system, they also developed an innovative seaweed storage method. The experts built so-called flexitanks, large bags made out of coated textile, which were placed

tium, we hope to establish a start-up company to commercialise our activities. The potential to produce around the world is huge."

Mass-cultivation of seaweed is one thing, a market is another. If Groenendaal's commercial project succeeds, what will be done with these large batches of seaweed?

That's one of the main questions that Flemish researcher Sue Ellen Taelman from Ghent University (UGent) wants to answer with her algenweb platform, which she launched together with her partner, Yuri Hellyn, an internet entre-

preneur. By posting and linking to accessible articles, the website works to inform the general public about the various possibilities that algae offer.

The focus of EnAlgae, which will run until next June, has consequently partly shifted to other research domains such as the purification of waste water. In Flanders, researchers at West Flanders University College designed a test installation that was originally placed at the site of agro-food company Inagro in Rumbeke, West Flanders. The installation has since been moved to purify the waste water of the Wevelgem-based company Alpro, which makes soy-based foods and drinks. "Basically, the algae absorb the phosphor and carbon dioxide from the waste water," explains Taelman. "Not only is the waste water purified, the algae can also still be used as a fertiliser, for instance. These kinds of biorefineries on a small and large scale have a huge potential to be used in industrial environments."

Some algae offer great ecological alternatives to other food substances because they are full of vitamins, iron and proteins. "Since seaweed is produced in water, its cultivation does not compete with the production of food products on land and does not necessitate the cutting down of forests," Taelman says.

In the future, seaweed could, she continues, "replace the production of soy for cattle fodder for which acres of land are now used in Latin America, for example.

Furthermore, since seaweed also uses carbon dioxide to grow, it helps to reduce the amount of the harmful gas in our ecosystem."

In Asia, seaweed is also very popular as a consumer product because of its healthy reputation. "Seaweed can easily be incorporated into food, without any effect on the appearance of the product," says Taelman, "but there is still some way to go to convince the food sector and consumers in our region of its beneficial effects."

The UGent researcher is considering including a webshop on her site to support commercial initiatives that use seaweed in food products. "The list of possible applications goes on and on, however," she says. "Algae could be used in the future for medical applications, to make bioplastics and substances for the chemical industry."

Taelman believes more investments and long-term projects are needed to bring the algae research from its current test phase to the ultimate production of viable commercial products.

Still, progress is being made, she says. "In Flanders, the Vlaams Algenplatform is trying to form a network of organisations by providing information about the events, financing and conclusions of different projects related to algae research."

The Ghent researcher hopes that with more of these kinds of initiatives, algae will gradually become accepted as part of our daily lives.



© At Sea

The crops were placed close enough to the surface to catch sunlight but far enough down to avoid storm damage

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air \ Emirates

The Gulf state carrier will inaugurate its daily Dubai-Brussels service on 5 September, allowing passengers to connect with the airline's 145 destinations worldwide.

Banking \ Natixis

The French financial institution is opening a private banking affiliate in Brussels at the end of September to cater to high-net-worth individuals.

Cars \ Tesla

The upmarket US electric automobile brand, with a showroom in Brussels, opened a new showroom and service centre in Aartselaar, Antwerp province, last week.

Energy \ Electrabel

The country's leading power producer has been handed a €2 million fine for selling electricity on the market with a "disproportionate" margin for one day. The company would have faced a €670 million fine if it had been convicted of abusing its dominant position on the local energy market.

Handling \ Aviapartner

The British 3I investment group is selling handling company Aviapartner, based at Brussels Airport and facing stiff competition from Swisport, to the American HIG Capital fund.

Hotels \ Meridien

The bankrupt Brussels Meridien hotel has been acquired by the Russian-owned HDI Property group from its previous owners, the Swiss SHLC investment company. The new operator expects to reopen the hotel, located across from Central Station, in September and is negotiating the Meridien franchise agreement.

Supermarkets \ Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket is believed to be considering the sale of its Bottom Dollar chain of 66 stores in the northeast of the US. Potential buyers include the German discount retailer Aldi and the Dutch Ahold distribution group. Delhaize's other retail activities in the US include the 700 stores of Food Lion and Hannaford.

Tobacco – Verellen

The tobacco group, based in Wuustwezel, Antwerp province, which produces 185 million cigars and cigarillos a year under the Gold brand, is being acquired by the Scandinavian Tobacco Group. Some 125 workers are employed by Verellen, which was founded in 1868.

Tech park promises 2,000 jobs

UGent extends Science Park in Zwijnaarde for R&D companies



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

A new 35-hectare industrial site for companies involved in research and development will be developed next to Ghent University's (UGent) existing Science Park in the Ghent district of Zwijnaarde. The new Eiland Zwijnaarde (Zwijnaarde Island) will bring 2,000 new jobs to the area, according to Matthias De Clercq, a member of the Flemish parliament and alderman in Ghent. De Clercq is also chair of the Eiland Zwijnaarde development company.

Last week the UGent board approved the creation of an alliance between the company, the university and the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB). A parcel of available land finally

offered a solution to the problem of a growing lack of space for the existing Science Park. Eiland Zwijnaarde replaces the previously planned Rijvissche science park, on the drawing board since 2004, which saw its development plan annulled by the Council of State in 2012. The new Eiland Zwijnaarde lies close to the E17/E40 interchange and has its own on-off ramp on the Ghent's R4 ring road. "Thanks to the alliance with the university and VIB, the site can be developed into a high value knowledge cluster of R&D companies," said De Clercq. "That will lead to further economic growth and the creation of more than 2,000 new jobs in the Ghent area."



© gentcement.be

Part of Ghent's technology park in Zwijnaarde, which is about to get a lot bigger

West Flanders brewers have bright future, says study

The beer brewers of West Flanders "can face the future with confidence," with prospects for growth good despite a decline in consumption of beer overall, according to a study carried out by the West Flanders University College (HoWest) for the quarterly *West Vlaanderen Werkt*.

The study looked at 17 of the 28 breweries in the province, excluding 11 for being too small to affect the results significantly. The 17 breweries produced 530,000 hectolitres of beer in 2013 – an increase of 20% over four years.

Three breweries – De Brabandere (Bavik), Omer Vander Ghinste (Omer) and Van Honsebrouck (Kasteel) – produced more than 100,000 hl, and Rodenbach, owned by Palm, made 60,000. Total capacity, however, was 960,000 hl, showing significant room for growth. Despite those figures, the West Flanders brewers represent barely 3% of total production in Belgium of some 17.5 million hl. They are dwarfed by giants like AB InBev, Alken-Maes, Haacht and Duvel Moortgat.



De Brabandere has been brewing in Bavikhove for 120 years

But the brewers also have substantial property interests, with 600 bars and restaurants owned directly, and another 800 businesses linked by contracts. Only five of the 17 still brew pilsner, the segment of the market most affected by the decline in consumption.

The brewers can face the future with confidence, according to HoWest, thanks to their success in finding export markets for 34% of their production, 11% more than a decade ago. They also have no fear of being taken over, although three have already declined offers from a Dutch investment group. \ AH

Flight routes plan would cut airport capacity in half

Brussels Airport's management company has described as "unacceptable" a proposal by federal transport minister Catherine Fonck that would see the airport's capacity cut in half.

Fonck is facing the impossible task of complying with a court ruling to scrap two flight routes for aircraft taking off from Zaventem, while finding a way to allow all scheduled flights to take off. If the two contested routes disappear, only two routes remain, leaving no margin to allow all flights a take-off slot.

Fonck has presented three scenarios, one of which would cut capacity by 20% and one by 50%. Brussels Airport says any reduction in capacity is unacceptable. The third scenario is brand new, and it would take 60 days to go through the procedures for introducing it. The government has until 1 November to come up with a solution, after which it will face a fine of €50,000 a day.

According to Fonck, the airport has a capacity of 74 flights an hour but only currently schedules 60. That underestimates the problem, according to the airport company, which says the real number of flights at the moment is 70, so the effect of her measures would be even greater. \ AH

Government considers deposits on cans and plastic bottles

The government of Flanders has said it will carry out a study to examine the effects of a proposal to introduce deposits on drinks cans and plastic bottles. Last week the regional government of Wallonia said it planned to introduce a deposit of €0.10 in an effort to combat littering.

There is already a deposit on glass bottles, but so far there is none on plastic bottles or aluminium cans, which go into recycling bags. The Flemish government is reluctant to introduce more deposits. According to the governing accord, "Flanders is among the leading regions of Europe, and we want to hold on to that position by implementing an innovative recycling economy".

Unizo, which represents employers, claims to have already studied the impact. "Neighbourhood stores in particular have neither the space nor the ability to collect cans and plastic bottles," the organisation said in a statement. If introduced in Flanders, "the measure would result in additional costs for operators."

It would also involve costs and extra effort for the consumer, said Unizo. "At the moment, consumers can throw plastic bottles and cans into the PMD bag and have them picked up from home," rather than having to take them back to the place where they were bought. \ AH

BBC will broadcast VTM series Cordon

The BBC will soon begin broadcasts of the VTM drama series *Cordon*, in which a section of Antwerp is put under quarantine because of a deadly virus. Earlier this year, the BBC showed the 2012 VRT series *Salamander*.

Cordon, starring Wouter Hendrickx and Veerle Baetens and directed by Tim Mielants, follows the social breakdown of a neighbourhood in Antwerp that is put under strict quarantine – with the help of containers from the port – as the fictional National Institute of Infectious Diseases struggles to find an antidote for a highly contagious virus. The 10-part series was first broadcast in Flanders last spring.

The BBC deal marks the first foreign sale of the series and comes ahead of the international TV fair Mipcon in Cannes in October – the marketplace for international TV sales. According to producers Eyeworks, the BBC sale should lead to increased attention from other potential buyers. Meanwhile, VTM announced that



© VTM

it would place a large portion of its own productions online for up to four weeks after broadcast, starting this autumn. The offer covers the channel's own series, reality shows and current affairs programmes, but not films or imported series.

The broadcaster's biggest competitor, public broadcaster, VRT, already places some of its programming online, including "cultural, educational and children's programmes," said the broadcaster's Stijn Omebelets.

VTM also takes part in the Stieve app, together with VRT and SBS (Vier and Vijf), which allows live viewing anywhere, as well as viewing up to seven days after broadcast. \ AH

Rising to the challenge

Awards for inventions that make life with a disability easier



Andy Furniere
More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.HANDICAPINTERNATIONAL.BE

Each year, the Belgian branch of Handicap International organises the Design with a Heart competition to reward inventions that improve everyday life for the disabled and the elderly. A jury of experts from the health and disability sector has this year chosen four winning projects out of a record number of 43 submissions.

“For elderly people or those with disabilities, simple actions like picking something up or getting dressed are often not straightforward,” Handicap International spokesperson Hanna Plas told *Het Nieuwsblad*. “There are a lot of tools on the market, but these are usually expensive or not adjusted to specific needs.”

Two of the four winning projects this year were the result of a co-operation between students in industrial design at Ghent University and ergo-therapy at West Flanders University College (HoWest).

HoWest students designed the ZipAid with 40-year-old Fabien from Kortrijk in mind. Fabien is paralysed on the left side of his body because of a brain haemorrhage. “One of his major difficulties was that he couldn’t close a zip with one hand and always had to rely on others to do this for him,” Steffi Mussly, one of the winning students from HoWest, told *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The existing aids for zips can only be used while sitting down, which makes them unsuitable in many situations. So the students came up with the ZipAid, a device with magnets that enables users to close a zip with one hand or even with the mouth, while sitting or standing.

“Not only does this product allow the user to be more independent, it simplifies and speeds up the action, which eliminates a lot of frustration,” the Handicap International report said.



© A Bertels
Jos Weckx from Leefdaal, Flemish Brabant, designed a walking frame for his three-year-old daughter, Mona

The Eclips light switch, meanwhile, was invented by Ghent students to help Julie Leurs from Menen in West Flanders. Leurs, a wheelchair user, is helped by an assistance dog in her daily life, but one of her problems was that neither she nor her dog could switch off the light in her bedroom because it is installed so high up. “Every night, she had to ask someone to turn off the light,” student Lotte Boury told *Het Laatste Nieuws*.

The students solved this challenge by installing a pull switch that enables the dog to turn off the light by pulling on a rope. “However, we had to avoid the system breaking if the dog pulled too hard,” said Boury. The students developed a little box with a hole for the rope to run through and tied a knot in the rope, thus solving this problem.

The third winner was Jos Weckx from Leefdaal, Flemish Brabant, who designed a walking frame for his three-year-old daughter, Mona. Mona was born two months premature and suffers from balance problems because of cerebral palsy.

“Mona had a walking frame from the hospital, but it didn’t help her much at home,” Weckx told *Het Laatste Nieuws*. “The device was much too big and didn’t have swivelling wheels, which made it hard for her to move around and caused her to bump into things a lot.”

After studying the hospital model, Weckx – who is a physical therapist but doesn’t have special technical knowhow – built a new walking frame with material he found around his house. “I adapted everything to Mona’s size and also included a little basket so she can carry stuff,” he explained. “The thinking process for the concept took me a few weeks and the construction only one day.”

The fourth winner was Valérie Dardenne from Pont-de-Loup in the Walloon province of Hainaut. She has a genetic disease that makes her less mobile. She had a basket on her walking frame that she didn’t like because it was rigid and couldn’t close. She turned an old pair of jeans into a user-friendly bag that she can attach to her walking frame – a cheap solution to her problem.

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Universities adapt medication to kids

The universities of Ghent, Brussels and Leuven are joining forces to set up clinical studies to make children’s medication safer. Professor Johan Vande Walle of Ghent University, the co-ordinator of the initiative, told industry magazine *De Artsenkrant* that children are too often seen as small adults when it comes to medication, and more than half of the children’s medicines were not examined through trials with patients in the age group for which they are meant. With the financial support of the Flemish government’s agency for innovation through science and technology, the universities will bring together the fragmented expertise. In the long term, they will advise developers of regulations so clinical tests for children can be optimised.

iPot to increase potato production

The potato sector federation Belgapom is partnering with research institutions to develop a platform to increase the efficiency of potato production. The iPot platform collates data assembled via drones and satellites. Belgium is the biggest exporter of frozen potato products in the world. The availability of a sufficient crop is crucial, but production isn’t at full capacity, said Belgapom. The new geo-informatics platform should help change this by integrating weather data, soil maps, growth models, field observations, aerial photos and satellite images. iPot should enable a more efficient monitoring of potatoes in the field, including growth, quality risks and yield.

Researchers to study worms

The University College Vives’ Roeselare campus and Ghent University are collaborating to examine soil biodiversity in an urban centre. At the end of the year, researchers will analyse populations of earthworms in private vegetable gardens in Roeselare. Earthworms compost and recycle dead plant material and are an essential kind of “ecosystem engineers” for a robust, living soil – necessary for healthy plants and trees – and are excellent indicators of the quality of the soil. Earlier research concluded that about 25 species of earthworm can be found in Flanders. In Roeselare, 13 species were found in different types of urban vegetation during previous research.

Westerlo Castle and 3D technology star in musical

For the first time in Flanders, revolutionary 3D mapping projection technology will be used to incorporate vivid decors in a musical performance. 3D mapping, or video projection mapping, has the capacity to transform any object into a screen. Forget flat projection: 3D mapping takes a real-world 3D object, such as a building, and projects it on to an existing surface without any distortion. Because the technique is site-specific, 3D mapping can enhance – if done properly – the architecture it’s projected on to.

3D mapping is mainly used to add lustre to arty events and parties and has been seen in light festival installations. But in the coming weeks, the projection technique will make its debut as a set decor in a stage performance (*pictured*). The setting is the well-maintained castle of the old aristocratic De Merode family in Westerlo, Antwerp province. The subject of the musical is Marie-Antoinette, the detested wife of Louis XVI who was killed – along with many other aristocrats – under the guillotine during the French Revolution.

According to Simon de Merode, descendant of the Merode family and producer of the musical, the projection of the decors on his castle’s facades will be a real challenge.

“Normally, one projector covers one facade,” he explains. “Here, because of the structure of the castle, we have three facades with only two projectors. Also, in a normal 3D mapping session, you project a show that has been



© Sophie Peirsman

prepared in advance – like one image as a backdrop for an entire classical music concert. In our case, we will project different decors depending on the scenes.”

That means quick thinking on the part of the technicians. “They need to shoot the decors on the facades during the show, perfectly synchronised with the other light engineers.”

The 32-year-old Merode, whose full-time job

it is to manage Westerlo Castle, thinks innovative technologies like 3D mapping offer new ways to promote heritage. “We have such a rich history in Belgium and in Flanders. We have it, and we need to make it accessible. 3D mapping is a good way to organise new cultural entertainment around our common history.”

\ Senne Starckx



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Remnants of the past

Industrial meets natural at new gateway to Kempen national park



Diana Goodwin
More articles by Diana \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.CONNECTERRA.BE

Belgium's only national park has a new gateway, but it's not actually located in the Hoge Kempen National Park. And that's not the only way in which Connecterra is different from the other five recreation areas that provide public access to the park. Located just to the east of the Hoge Kempen on the site of a former coal mine, Connecterra combines a natural environment with Flanders' industrial heritage. Eisdén, in the municipality of Maasmechelen, was one of seven mines in Limburg and was active from 1922 until 1987. When the mine closed, three large slag heaps – hills comprised of waste material from the mines – were left behind. Today, those hills are covered with vegetation and comprise the main features of Connecterra's landscape.

The new gateway encompasses other relics of the site's industrial past: two distinctive headframes that once crowned underground mine shafts now greet visitors at the park entrance. The older of the two dates from 1921 and is completely original. The other is a reconstruction of a 1926 structure. Visitors can climb the staircase to the lower platform, situ-



© Annelien Mengels
A headframe that once crowned underground mine shafts now greets visitors at the park entrance

ated at a height of 12 metres, for a panoramic view of the surrounding area.

The sixth gateway to be opened, Connecterra has the prestigious title of *hoofdtoegangspoort*, meaning it's the Hoge Kempen's main access point. So it's a little surprising to learn that it's not actually enclosed within the boundaries of the national park.

The land, along with the rest of the Eisdén mine site, is privately owned by the Maas Valley Development Company, which is

responsible for other tourism and commercial ventures in the area. The inauguration of the new access gate is part of a local initiative to find economically viable uses for the former industrial site while respecting Eisdén's role as part of Flanders' cultural heritage. Visitors can choose from four hiking paths varying from 1.4 to 10.9 kilometres in length. The two longer paths circle a large lake at the centre of the park, and there are panoramic lookout points atop two of the three former slag

heaps. The slopes of the three hills provide a habitat for a range of flora, birds and insects. Along the various trails, walkers encounter a variety of terrain, from shaded woods to grass-covered fields.

In keeping with its status as the park's main gateway, Connecterra boasts a brand new visitors' centre that showcases an innovative construction method. Clad in untreated larch, the wood-framed structure was completed in just five months. Its simple lines and natural materials harmonise with the landscape, and the floor-to-ceiling windows offer a panoramic view of the outdoors. The centre also houses an info desk, snack bar and shop.

Rangers are on hand at the visitors' centre to offer educational programmes for young and old. There is also a large playground for kids, while a number of picnic tables provide a nice spot to enjoy a cold drink or ice cream. Connecterra is conveniently located next to the local tourist information office and the Maasmechelen Village shopping mall. A restaurant and cinema occupy former mine buildings at the site, and a luxury hotel is currently being developed.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Companies to study energy challenges

The industrial sciences and technology department at Limburg Catholic College (KHLim) is starting a new study programme on energy management. The European Energy Management programme is meant for people who want to improve the efficiency of their company's energy consumption. It is based on European standards but adapted to the Belgian context. By developing engineering and management skills, the one-year programme helps professionals cut energy costs and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. The graduates also become part of a European network of energy experts who have followed a similar course.

New Dikke Van Dale next year

A new print version of the standard in Dutch-language dictionaries, the Dikke Van Dale, will be published next year, the first in a decade. At the end of this month, the dictionary celebrates its 150th anniversary. The last paper version was published in 2005 in three volumes totalling 4,464 pages, but Van Dale, based in Utrecht in the Netherlands, publishes a digital update every six months. The editorial team will decide this year which new words will be included in the dictionary – a headline-making event. They will examine the frequency and the spread of use of new words across various media before deciding.

Students' French decreasing dramatically

Knowledge of French among first-year students at university has decreased in recent decades, according to statistics published by Antwerp University. The university has been using the same orientation test to evaluate students who start French language studies since 1986. In 1993, the students at the beginning of their first year achieved an average score of more than 54%; 10 years later, this had dropped to 43%. Last year, the average score was 36%. According to Antwerp French linguistics professor Alex Vanneste, the poor results are caused by the methods used in secondary education. He also feels English has started to receive much more attention, even though French is one of Belgium's official languages. \ AF

Limburg school preps kids for entrepreneurship

On 1 September, the Heikamp boarding school in Maasmechelen, Limburg, will launch a new programme to develop students' entrepreneurial skills.

"Today's education system insufficiently prepares students for the business world in general, and for entrepreneurship in particular," Denis Vonckers, general director of the community education network's Maasland school group, told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "With our new approach, we target parents who don't want their children to be the followers, but the leaders of the future." The boarding school will work with monthly themes, which will be introduced by an expert. "To make sure that our programme is balanced, we asked the professional associations of entrepreneurs for advice," explained school principal Manette Bambust. The team of educators will adapt the course materials to the level of class groups, which span the ages of six to 18.

The themes addressed will include public relations and marketing, communication and presentation techniques, sales methods, financial management, leadership skills, teamwork and organisational abilities. The project is supported by Hasselt University's faculty of economics and by the Erasmus University College Brussels.

\ Andy Furniere

Gay teacher sparks debate on information shared in class

A social media post by Flemish teacher David Degreef, who turned down a job offer from a Brussels school after being told not to disclose his sexual orientation in class, sparked a major public debate last week.

In a Facebook post, Degreef said he was offered a job at a primary school in Brussels' urban education network on the condition that he didn't tell his students that he is gay. He argued that sometimes students ask teachers if they are married but was told to not divulge this information about his private life.

The director-general of the public education network of the city of Brussels, Charles Huygens, has advised teachers to maintain neutrality in the classroom by being careful in their statements about their private lives, including their sexual orientation. "We live in a big city with people of different origins and with different convictions, so we should respect a minimum of rules," he told *dereadactie.be*.

Huygens' statement was criticised by both education professionals and politicians. Raymonda Verdyck, managing director of the community education network of schools (GO!), said that "whether you love men or women doesn't have anything to do with neutrality; it's essential to the identity of a person."

Her counterpart at the Catholic education network, Lieven Boeve, declared that openness around sexual identity helps "to raise young people to become complete individuals".

Brussels state secretary for equal opportunities, Bianca Debaets, also supported the



The photo David Degreef (right) posted with his now-famous Facebook message

teacher. "Brussels children should learn to deal with diversity," she said. Debaets wants to have a meeting with leaders in the Brussels urban education network, as does the Interfederal Equal Opportunities Centre. Jozef De Witte, head of the centre, stated that "we should lay the basis for an inclusive society, and schools and teachers have a leading role in this". Degreef himself told Radio 2 that "it's first important that directors and schools get used to the idea that there are homosexual teachers who want to talk about their partners. The children and parents will then just follow, whether they have a foreign background or not."

\ AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Essence of Thailand

The Royal Thai Embassy has been organising this annual cultural festival since 2006. Authentic Thai cuisine, dance performances and muay thai (kick-boxing) demonstrations, plus Thai massage and food market. *31 August, 10.00-20.00, Dumonplein, Stockel (Brussels); free*

\ WWW.TINYURL.COM/
ESSENCE-OF-THAILAND

Wezemaal Wine Festival

Buy a commemorative wine glass for €6 and receive five coupons for wine tastings at the vintners' booths. (You can also enjoy a glass of wine for €2.) Visit the Centre for Hage-land Wine or take a walk in the vineyards, where you'll find live music and local food. *30 August, 14.00, Wezemaal village centre, Rotselaar; free*

\ WWW.TINYURL.COM/
WEZEMAAL-WINE

Maasland bike ride

Choose your starting point and the length of your route (35, 45, 70 or 90km) and enjoy a day of cycling in the scenic Meuse river valley. A bike ferry gets you across the river and the border with Dutch Limburg. Food and drink available at both starting places. *31 August, registration 8.00-15.00, Hoekstraat 1, Maasmechelen or Hoogbaan 134, Dilsen-Stokkem; €2.50*

\ WWW.LANDELIJKE-
ILDEOPGRIMBIE.BE

Zarlar Swing

It's a day of down-home fun and swingin' good music on the farm! Kids' entertainment, old-timey jazz, a country & western duo, barbecue and a big dance party in the great barn... It's a unique festival for all ages. *30 August, 15.00, SwingBoerderie, Moutstraat 29, Zarlarding; €16*

\ WWW.SWINGBOERDERIE.COM

European Night of the Bat

This international event aims to create greater awareness of these nighttime fliers and promote conservation of European bat species. Activities offered at 40 locations across Flanders, including talks and evening walks. *29-30 August*

\ WWW.NACHTVAN-
DEVLEERMUIS.BE

Apple picking

Spend a day in the orchards of Haspengouw and harvest your own fruit. *30 August and every Saturday in September, 10.00-17.00, Jacobs Fruit, Heide 114, Sint-Truiden*

\ WWW.JACOBSFRUIT.BE

New season, new hopes

Big moves for the Red Devils, while top athletes come to Brussels



Leo Cendrowicz

More articles by Leo \ flanderstoday.eu

It's amazing what a World Cup can do. Just 10 weeks ago, the Red Devils were untested as a team, rated by connoisseurs of the game but still seen as dark horses as they approached their first major international tournament for 12 years.

But after being shaded by Argentina in the quarter-finals in Brazil, the Belgians are a force to be reckoned with, and Europe's top clubs all seem to want one in their squad. This month, Barcelona edged out Manchester United to snap up Arsenal captain Thomas Vermaelen for €19 million. The Kapellen-born central defender, who came through the famed Ajax academy in Amsterdam, has been a mainstay of the Belgian defence for the past eight years.

Fellow defender Jan Vertonghen was also rumoured to be a Barcelona target, and could still be snapped up by Manchester United, but is expected to stay at Tottenham with a new long-term contract and a pay rise. Everton smashed their transfer record when they bought Romelu Lukaku from Chelsea for €35 million – the 21-year-old had already spent last season on loan there, scoring 16 times as the team finished fifth in the Premier League. At the same time, Divock Origi moved to Liverpool from Lille for €13 million, while Steven Defour went from Porto to Anderlecht on a five-year contract that will give him an annual salary of around €1.5 million, making him the highest-paid player in Belgium. Belgium and Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany has signed a new five-year contract for his club worth a stunning €39 million. And across town, Adnan



© Joan Cros Garcia/Demotix/Corbis

Thomas Vermaelen is unveiled as a Barcelona player after being signed for €19 million earlier this month

Januzaj has taken Ryan Giggs' hallowed No 11 shirt at Manchester United after being encouraged to do so by the long-serving Welshman – an indication of how highly the 19-year-old is regarded at Old Trafford.

Meanwhile, Club Brugge could lose Oscar Duarte, who is a target for Sunderland: Duarte scored against Uruguay in Costa Rica's shock World Cup victory and has already scored for Brugge in the league this season.

But the summer marked the end of the road for Daniel Van Buyten, who announced his retirement. The 36-year-old defender, who played for Charleroi, Standard Liège, Marseille, Manchester City and Bayern Munich during his career, had received offers from German, French and Belgian clubs, including Anderlecht. Van Buyten, who helped Bayern Munich win four Bundesliga titles, won the last of his 84 caps in the defeat to Argentina.

The domestic season began in early August and Flemish clubs

are already dominating the Jupiler League: Anderlecht, Club Brugge, Gent and Westerlo are sitting at the top of the table. Anderlecht are also in the Champions League, which is due to resume on September 16 and 17, with Standard Liège hoping to join them if they get through a qualifier against Zenit Saint Petersburg (where Belgians Nicolas Lombaerts and Axel Witsel will be battling for the Russians). Club Brugge and Lokeren will need to beat Zurich's Grasshoppers and England's Hull City respectively to be sure of playing in the Europa League.

As for the Red Devils, the World Cup effect also meant a new kit deal with German sportswear giant Adidas that runs until 2016, replacing little-known Burrrda. They will wear the new kit for first time in a friendly against Australia on September 4 in Liège. Supporters will also have the chance to catch up with them on September 6 in Ostend when they hold a Family Day with an open training session, and meet-and-greets with fans.

After that, they begin their qualifying campaign for the 2016 European Championships in France, with a match against Israel in Jerusalem on September 9. Belgium are now ranked fifth in the world by Fifa, so they are favourites to top their qualifying group, which includes Wales, Bosnia, Cyprus and Andorra. Such is the expectation among fans now that nothing less is expected from them.

Elsewhere in sport, sprinters Justin Gatlin, Mike Rodgers, Tyson Gay and Kim Collins will be in the line-up at the King Boudewijn stadium in Brussels on September 5 for the Memorial Van Damme games. All four have run the 100m in under 10 seconds this season, with Gatlin the fastest at 9.80.

The home contingent includes long jumper Mathias Broothaerts, Pieter-Jan Hannes in the 1500m, Kevin, Jonathan and Dylan Borlée in the 400m, Eline Berings and Anne Zagré in the 100m hurdles, Axelle Dauwens in the 400m hurdles and Filip Milanov in the discus.

Though Belgium brought back just one medal from the European Athletic Championships in Zurich this month – Nafissatou Thiam's heptathlon bronze – locals are expected to be on the podium in Brussels.

Others at the games include New Zealand's double Olympic shot put champion Valerie Adams, while the high jump will pit Ukrainian world champion Bohdan Bondarenko against Russian Olympic champion Ivan Ukhov. World record holder Usain Bolt is skipping this year's event for the first time since 2010 as he battles to regain his fitness after surgery on his left foot in March.

BITE

Keen on quinoa

Quinoa is not entirely new to Flanders. In the 1930s book *Praktische leergang over groenteteelt* (Practical Vegetable Course), teacher Emile Stappaerts explains his research into the experimental cultivation of the plant in Vilvoorde, carried out then under the name *rijstemeld*.

Or take the Oxfam *wereldwinkels* scattered across Flanders. They've been selling their brand of fair-trade quinoa for two decades. And now shops like BioPlanet and Delhaize are jumping on the bandwagon.

But lately when I go to pick up a bag at my local Delhaize, more often than not I find an empty shelf. Last time the empty shelf held a small note from management in which it explained that Delhaize cannot guarantee a constant supply of the product due to sharply increased demand.

Quinoa, it seems, is a full-fledged craze: TV chefs are now regularly touting the benefits of this wonder food and incorporating it into many a dish.

Originally grown in places such as Bolivia, Chile

and Peru, quinoa comes in numerous varieties. And it's now being grown in Belgium, too. On 13 hectares in Rhisnes, Namur province, a test crop is underway. The agronomists behind the project expect to deliver their quinoa to organic and health-food shops in November.

"The organic farming sector is booming, and quinoa is a new opportunity for farmers because there is not enough supply to keep up with demand," says one of the team, François Gilbert. "People had surely thought of it before, but no one had planted it yet. They probably thought it wasn't possible. But with a little help from a university in the Netherlands, we found a variety that is adapted to our climate and soil."

Quinoa is not part of the grain family, as you might think, but comes from the same family as beets and spinach. The edible part of the plant is its seeds, and the health benefits are too many to name. For starters, quinoa is gluten-free and contains essential amino acids, proteins, vitamins and minerals.



There are no precise figures so far about quinoa consumption in Belgium because it is a trend that is just starting to take off. But quinoa is rapidly gaining popularity here and across Europe as a healthy alternative to pasta, rice and semolina. The UN made 2013 the International Year of Quinoa, and nearly 10,000 tons were imported into Europe. Worldwide, the production of quinoa has reached an astounding 73,000 tons per year. The local harvest in late August is estimated to yield about 20 tons. \ Robyn Boyle

Flanders off the beaten path

Roller gates, hell holes and street fights: the secrets of Antwerp province



Toon Lambrechts
More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.eu

The rich heritage of Flanders has left many traces behind. Some are touristic highlights, others remain virtually unknown. Flanders Today went in search of its quirkiest historical spots for our five-part series, Flanders off the beaten path. This week we visit the province of Antwerp, unearthing forgotten tales of fruitless defensive lines, independence declarations and back-breaking industrial labour

Visitors to Lier who don't know where to look will never find that one spot in the city with a huge significance in Flanders' military history. Visitors walk past the unmarked concrete pile on the crossroads between Aarschotsesteenweg and Slenderstraat, unaware of the purpose it once served.

The metal and concrete construction reinforced with steel looks unimpressive, yet it is a remnant of a large structure, the hastily built KW-line, which was meant to stop the Germans from advancing during the Second World War. During the 19th century, the country's military defence relied on a number of forts around strategic locations such as Antwerp and Liège. Decades later, the First World War made it painfully clear that that approach would not suffice when the Germans invaded without much effort, marching in through a piece of undefended territory then referred to as the "hole of Visé".

After the war, new forts, such as the supposedly impregnable fortress of Eben-Emael on the border with the Netherlands, were built. Still, the country's military leadership remained worried about its ability to fend off attacks. When international tensions again began to mount in the mid-1930s, they came up with a new plan.

The idea was to build various defensive lines, with the KW-line the main one, complete with bunkers and anti-tank barriers. The line was to be defended together with English and French troops. Construction of the KW-line began in September of 1939, and the line became operational just before the outbreak of the Second World War, stretching from the fortress of Koningshoeven to Wavre, good for some 400 kilometres of bunkers and anti-tank obstacles.

Belgian army soldiers guarded the KW-line from Lier to Leuven, while British troops took positions between Leuven and Wavre. On 15 May, the Germans reached the KW-line in Wijgmaal, Flemish



© photos: Toon Lambrechts
Small workers' houses in Noeveren today point to the village's once-flourishing brick industry

Brabant. A day later, the Belgian Allied High Command ordered its troops to withdraw.

The Germans had broken through the defence in northern France, and the Netherlands had already surrendered. The risk that German troops would encircle the Belgian troops had become too high. The soldiers pulled back further along their bases on the Leie river, and the KW-line was abandoned before it was ever really fully used. On 28 May, Belgium also capitulated.

A lasting reminder of that Second World War history, the concrete structure in Lier served to anchor the Cointet elements. Named after the French general of the same name who masterminded the barricades also known as C-elements or Belgian Ports, they look like heavy metal gates with reinforced rear structures. The fences were mounted on rollers so they would be movable, and they were fastened together with steel cables and occasionally anchored to concrete pillars, like the one in Lier. A large part of the KW-line consisted of Cointet elements, so residents referred to it as the Iron Wall.

The Cointet elements didn't change the course of the war. Most were dismantled by the Germans and were reused in the construction of the Atlantic Wall defence line. Here and there, concrete anchoring piles can still be found in the landscape. Many bunkers along the former defence line still stand today, silent witnesses to the history of the war.



This concrete structure in Lier is a left-over remnant of the impressive – but never used – KW defence line

A bridge too far

Meanwhile, another forgotten spot in Antwerp was also home to a memorable bit of heritage. In spite of the current construction works on the building's facade, visible from Twaalfmaandenstraat, the city's former stock market today looks abandoned. Hidden in a little street off the Meir shopping avenue and currently closed to the public, the Handelsbeurs has long stood empty, waiting for a new purpose.

Yet almost some a century ago, in the final year of the First World War, it served as the backdrop to a dramatic political event – Flanders' erstwhile declaration of independence.

In the years leading up to the conflict, the "Flemish question" had become increasingly important, and, during the war, the German occupiers tried to use

these nationalist sentiments to their advantage. Through the infamous *Flamenpolitiek*, they tried to drive a wedge between the two language communities so they could bring "Germanic" Flanders under the German sphere of influence.

Their scheme didn't work out as planned. Even for the many Flemings who had advocated for their language rights before the war, collaborating with occupying forces proved a bridge too far. But a small group of Flemings calling themselves *activisten* (activists) were willing to co-operate with the Germans.

As the war dragged on, the *activisten* took increasingly radical positions. On 22 December 1917, the Council of Flanders, a shadowy organisation headed by the leaders of the activists, declared the independence of Flanders.

The *activisten* knew all too well

that they did not have the support of the general population, so they staged elections to give their actions legitimacy.

In Ghent and Brussels, the polls were organised discreetly, but in Antwerp a large meeting was held in the Handelsbeurs – a move that soon proved to be a bad idea. A counter-demonstration brought 10 times as many people, and a street fight broke out between the two camps. The Germans subsequently grew tired of the *activisten*, and that was that. The Declaration of Independence came to nought.

Hell on earth

A bit further south in Antwerp province, the banks of the Rupel river today seem quiet, but at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the brick industry thrived here.

Below the river's surface lies the wealth of the region. Stretching from northeastern Belgium to the east of the Netherlands, a clay layer, dubbed Boomse Klei by geologists, is deposited here by the Rupel. The clay is suitable for making bricks and tiles, and the strategic location of places like Niel, Noeveren and Boom on the Rupel near the Scheldt resulted in a flourishing brick industry from the mid-19th century onward.

The name Hellegat (literally "hell hole") probably refers to the neighbourhood's location near the mouth of the Rupel, and for a long time the place lived up to its name. For workers in the region's brickyards, life must have indeed felt a little like hell on earth. Working conditions were miserable in this town, even by the standards of that time. Men, women and children worked long days, performing extremely heavy, monotonous labour.

Throughout the region, traces of that once-flourishing brick industry can still be found in the old clay pits, the now beautiful nature reserves and the remains of the old furnaces. In Hellegat and especially in Noeveren, the remnants of this past are still visible, with multiple types of former brick-baking ovens and drying sheds.

The neighbourhoods with tiny houses where workers lived in appalling conditions also survived. You can find the Boom Brickworks Eco Museum and Archive here, too, which is dedicated to the history of the brick industry. All this makes the Noeveren area, which has been protected industrial archaeological heritage since 1986, the only place in Flanders where the atmosphere of the early days of the Industrial Revolution still lingers.

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The voice on the other side

Flanders' independent radio stations are finding new audiences



Toon Lambrechts
More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.KATANGA.BE

WWW.RADIOINVLAANDEREN.INFO

Not long ago, almost every village in Flanders had its own radio station, and making radio was a popular hobby. These days, the few truly independent stations that still exist are the tenacious survivors of the heyday of local radio. Radio Katanga in Aalst is one of them.

“On air” reads a sign at the bottom of the staircase that leads to the studio of Radio Katanga, Aalst’s only independent radio station. Nevertheless, silence isn’t necessary. At this time of day the studio operates fully automatically, explains Stijn Vanderheyden, the station’s producer and music editor.

“During the holiday season, the schedule looks a little different, but normally we start the day with a morning programme that I and my colleague Ralph present, featuring news from the region,” he says. “In the evening, we send more specific programmes out. One of our most popular shows is *The Finest Hour*, with music from the war years and stories from those times about Aalst and its surroundings.”

Radio Katanga began in 1982 out of dissatisfaction with the bigger channels, which the founders thought were all airing the same music. Now, it is the only remaining radio station of its kind in Aalst. “I don’t know how many independent radio stations you know of, but it won’t be a high number,” Vanderheyden says, laughing.

“Establishing a new channel is

“More and more stations are opting out of the chains and playing to their strengths

simply impossible now,” Vanderheyden continues. “The costs are high, and getting a licence to use the airwaves is virtually impossible. It was different in the early years: A transmitter, a mixer and two turntables, and you had a radio station. Radio Katanga could be heard on the frequency of Aalst’s fire brigade. Today if you tried something like that, you’d have the police at your door, and all your equipment would be confiscated.” Radio Katanga is truly a local station, says Vanderheyden. “We



© Toon Lambrechts

“Establishing a new channel is simply impossible”: Radio Katanga producer and music editor Stijn Vanderheyden

broadcast here in Aalst and the surrounding communities, and we really focus on the region. We present news, inviting the mayor or other local figures to the studio, and report on major events like the Carnival in Aalst and the elections.”

A broadcast licence is not forever, though. In 2016, the available frequencies will be redistributed, something Radio Katanga is already working on. “The government’s plan is to shrink the radio landscape,” he says. “There are too many candidates for the available frequencies, and chains that add little value are no longer desirable. The media ministry now wants to focus on community radios with a strong local angle. So basically we’re OK with Radio Katanga.”

Independent radio has a rich history in Flanders. The first Dutch-language station to go on air was Radio Antwerp in 1926. The founder, Georges De Caluwé, was an early radio enthusiastic and built the equipment needed to broadcast himself.

Radio Antwerp’s transmitter was placed on top of a church in Edegem, which was why the station later changed its name to Radio ‘t Kerkske (The Church Radio).

After the Second World War, the national radio station founded by the government was given a monopoly on broadcasting in Belgium. Needless to say, this didn’t please many radio enthusiasts, and the veteran De Caluwé challenged the police and the government. After his radio equipment was confiscated one too many times, he issued a public ultimatum: Either radio remained free, or he would start to broadcast from a ship off the Belgian coast.

His threat was not taken seriously, but in 1962 he set off. De Caluwé, at the time 73, bought a ship from the French navy, named it Uilen-spiegel and started to broadcast again. Radio Antwerp moved from the roof of a church to the sea off Knokke-Heist.

It set a precedent for many more offshore radios to come: Radio Veronica, Radio Noordzee, Radio Mi-Amigo... All of them sent their signals to the mainland from the North Sea and gave the name “pirate radio” a whole new meaning.

Filling the gap

Meanwhile, on dry land, illegal independent radio also flourished. The stations filled the gap that the BRT (the forerunner of the VRT) left open, with modern programming and music. It was an exciting time in Flanders’ history of radio. The government tried to shut down the stations and traced their transmitters, but the stations got round this by inventing transportable transmitters, secret studios and fake apparatus to mislead the inspectors.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the number of independent radio stations reached a peak, to the extent that they occasionally disturbed each other’s frequencies. Cases have been reported where local stations even sabotaged their rivals’ transmitters. Accepting defeat, the government provided some frequencies for independent stations and regulated broadcasting. However, a lot of local stations did not survive this regulation, due to the high cost of a permit to broadcast and all the administration that came with it.

Another passionate radio man

is Herman Boel. He is involved in shortwave radio – a different story altogether – and maintains the website about radio in Flanders. “Over the last few decades, independent radio in Flanders has been disappearing. Those that exist are those that have survived; creating a new independent radio station is not an option anymore. You can on the internet, of course, but that’s different.”

There are several reasons for this, Boel continues, “but the most important is the frequency. There are virtually no more free places, partly because the VRT stations occupy a lot of space on the airwaves.”

According to Boel, the arrival of corporate-run radio has had a negative effect on the radio landscape. Before there were national commercial stations, there were chains that took over local channels. The chains supplied them with pre-recorded programmes to broadcast in return for a fee and technical assistance. It was easy money, but the local aspect was often lost.

“There are those that still have a local angle, which is required in principle, but most are simply merged into the uniformity that big radio chains offer,” he says. “But now you can see a reverse movement. More and more stations are opting out of the chains and playing to their strengths.”

And the future of independent radio? “It’s hard to say,” Boel muses. “Local stations can be successful if they focus on a specific audience. Radio Minerva in Antwerp, for example, focuses on older people and is very popular. But radio will always exist. People need this voice on the other side.”

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Charles V biopic to shoot in Ghent

The massive film production *Emperor* about the life of Charles V, who was born in Ghent and raised in Mechelen, will shoot several scenes in Ghent, according to the local producer, Paul Breuls, of Antwerp-based Corsan Films. The English-language movie stars Adrien Brody as the emperor and is directed by New Zealander Lee Tamahori (*Die Another Day*). *Emperor* will begin shooting in Prague on 1 September and is scheduled to move to Ghent towards the end of October. Many Flemish actors have been cast in the production, including Sam Louwyck (*The Fifth Season*), Lize Feryn (*In Vlaamse velden*) and Marie Vinck (*De Rodenburgs*). In related news, Adrien Brody will make an appearance at the Ostend Film Festival next month to introduce the drama *Third Person*, a Paul Haggis film in which Brody co-stars amid an ensemble cast.

Mechelen wants world’s biggest clock back

A group of *Mechelaars* has formed a committee to get the clock on the gothic Sint-Rombout’s tower, which used to be the biggest in the world, renovated and back in place. In the early 18th century, the city’s Sint-Rombout’s tower was equipped with a 12-metre clock face and hands of about 3.6 metres long. During the First World War, the clock was severely damaged, and the last pieces were removed about 50 years ago. The group have turned in a petition with 11,000 signatures, so the city will hold a referendum on 5 October. The costs for the renovation and placement of the clock are estimated at about €600,000.

Politicians and police punch it out

Jean-Pierre “Junior” Bauwens of Ghent, who became the lightweight European boxing champion in June, is staging a showcase boxing day in the centre of the city, in an open-air ring under the *stadshal*. Bauwens and his club, Gent Bokst, are hosting Street Boxing on 30 August to thank the city for its on-going support. *Gente-naars* taking part are former KAA Gent footballer Gunther Schepens; former pro runner Cédric Van Branteghem; the city’s police chief, Filip Rasschaert; and member of the Flemish parliament Freya Van Den Bossche. Bauwens himself will close the event at 17.30 in a fight against boxer Alex Bone from Spain.

\ www.juniorbauwens.be

20 years of fictional frenzy

Pieter Aspe is firmly established as Flanders' most popular crime writer



Rebecca Benoot

More articles by Rebecca \ flanderstoday.eu

There's no better time to dig into a good crime novel than the summer, and, with two a year, there's always something new to read from Pieter Aspe. The Bruges author has come a long way since his first novel 20 years ago. And he's got no intention of stopping.

When 61-year-old Pieter Aspe (born Pierre Aspeslag) published *Het vierkant van de wraak* (*The Square of Revenge*) in 1995, he had no idea he was about to become Flanders' most popular crime author.

Aspe had taken a wide array of jobs – salesman, maritime police officer, clerk, furniture restorer, photographer – before ending up as a concierge in the Basilica of the Holy Blood in his home town of Bruges, where he started writing his debut novel.

"I worked as a concierge for 11 years," he says, "and on a hot summer's evening in the garden of the chapel, I decided to write a book. Just me, two pieces of paper, a pen and a Duvel. The result was *Het vierkant van de wraak*, which was originally called *Het vierkant van de tempeliers*, inspired by a BBC documentary."

When the novel was finished, he continues, "I just looked up publishers in the telephone book". The only one he recognised was Manteau, which published the work of Flemish crime author Jef Geeraerts. Manteau had financial problems at the time and soon merged with Meulenhof, but it took a leap of faith with this unknown author who would go on to sell more than three million books, returning the publishing house to rude health and launching Aspe's successful career.

Aspe's novels revolve around Chief Inspector Pieter Van In, who, with public prosecutor Hannelore Martens – who later becomes his wife – solves grisly murders in and around Bruges. The books have a fixed cast of characters, helping the reader empathise with their trials and tribulations as they hunt the latest psychopath.

“If I planned everything in advance, there wouldn't be much fun in writing it

Van In soon achieved cult status as a loveable grump who women swoon over, aided by his portrayal by actor Herbert Flack in the successful VTM television series *Aspe*, which was based on some of Aspe's books. Sales rocketed further.

"We created a kind of rule book for the show, which documents the traits and personalities of the characters," Aspe explains. "But that's it; I didn't write the screenplays. Not even the episodes that were inspired by my books."

Besides 34 novels starring Van In, Aspe has also written four stand-alone novellas and two young adult novels.

Aspe is a disciplined worker, admitting that he writes four pages a day, six days a week from eight in the morning until midday. And yet he never knows where the



© Andre Cocquyt

Pieter Aspe, the man behind the popular series of crime novels featuring Chief Inspector Pieter Van In

story will take him.

"I start with an idea, and then I just start writing," he says. "I'm very impulsive. Along the way I create questions that I have to answer. If I planned everything in advance, there wouldn't be much fun in writing it." The result is two books a year, one in the spring and one in the autumn, just in time for Antwerp's annual Boekenbeurs, or book fair, where he is a

regular guest.

"I want to write books that sell, because sales equal readers, and what author doesn't want to be read?" he once said. As of last year, his first two novels, *Het vierkant van de wraak* and *De Midasmoorden* (*The Midas Murders*), have been released in the US, published by Pegasus Books, making Aspe the first Flemish crime writer to achieve success

across the Atlantic.

As well as charming the global public, Aspe charmed the critics when he received the Hercule Poirot Prize, an annual literary prize for the best Flemish crime novel. He won it in 2001 for *Zoenoffer* (*Sacrifice*) and again in 2010 for his entire oeuvre.

His latest novel, *(Pijn)*³ ((Pain)³), starts with a video message from a bound and bloody man – played by Aspe himself in the promotional teaser – that arrives at the Bruges police station. The man, also called Van In, says he'll be dead within the week if police don't find him, making the challenge hit close to home.

The victim in the next message has the same name as one of Van In's colleagues. Assuming the killer only targets namesakes, who will be next? In *(Pijn)*³ things get personal and very, very gruesome. He was inspired, he says, by "The Judgement of Cambyzes", a painting by 15th-century artist Gerard David that hangs in Bruges' Groeninge Museum, "in which a judge is tied to a wooden beam and skinned alive".

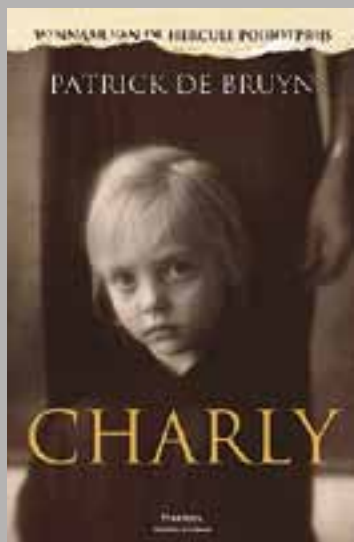
The book's launch took place in the same garden where Aspe started writing his debut novel 20 years ago, a garden not normally open to the public. That made it a unique event at a time where it's hard for books to gain publicity. That's also the reason behind the video teaser. Despite Van In's close shave in *(Pijn)*³, Aspe isn't planning on stopping any time soon; he's having way too much fun. "I love writing and don't really consider it work," he says. "As long as I'm able to, I'll keep going." His next novel, *Zonder voorschrift* (*Without a Prescription*), will be published in October.

FRESH FICTION

Charly

Patrick De Bruyn • Manteau

Charlotte, aka Charly, who first appeared in De Bruyn's award-winning novel *Dodelijk verlangen* (*Fatal Desire*), turns 18 and meets the beautiful Allison at university. Their relationship is rambunctious to say the least. When Charly takes Allison to her childhood home and finds a young couple living there, the past creeps up on them – especially when Charly sees their young daughter. Suspense, revenge and razor-sharp analysis of the human psyche drive this explosive thriller. ★★☆☆



Onderhuids (Under the Skin)

Luc Deflo & Aloka Liefink • Borgerhoff en Lamberigts

Crime writer Luc Deflo has joined forces with Belgo-Indian author Aloka Liefink, resulting in a thriller with the usual Deflo pizzazz spiced up with a dash of passion and a hint of femininity. Masha has to assist Felix on her first day with the Hasselt police. A young woman has been strangled in her apartment, and it's soon clear she's not the last. *Onderhuids* combines murder, passion and longing but sadly never really rises to the occasion. ★★☆☆

De boekhandelaar (The Book Seller)

Chris Ceustermans • Manteau

Journalist Chris Ceustermans' debut novel is an ode to love, literature and transience in this digital age. Days after Johan's wife, Anne, dies, he finds an email from her lover. Desperate to know more, he answers, pretending to be Anne, and finds out they had been planning on opening a book shop together. Without letting on that Anne is dead, he proceeds with the plan, but how long can he keep on living a double life? Quirky but fascinating, *De boekhandelaar* will have you on the edge of your seat. ★★☆☆



Art at the homestead

A Simple Plan

29 August to 20 September

Villa TD
Ruiselede (West Flanders)

One of the fundamental imperatives of modern art is that it escapes the gallery and take its place in everyday life. Art should not exist in an ivory tower; it must inhabit human space.

The exhibition *A Simple Plan* is a case in point. Artists Frank Tuytschaever (better known by his art-world pseudonym DD Trans) and Caroline Degezelle opened up their own home in Ruiselede, West Flanders, and invited art critic Sam Steverlynck to curate an exhibition. Steverlynck's point of departure was the work of late Flemish architect René Heyvaert, who pioneered a style of domestic minimalism –

“minimalism on the kitchen table” – that struck the curator as the perfect theme for a show hosted in a private residence. “The exhibition is also a tribute to Heyvaert, who never received the international acclaim he deserved,” Steverlynck says.

The house itself is a work of art, designed by Stéphane Beel, the architect responsible for Leuven's Museum M and Machelen's Roger Raveel Museum. Inside the residence, 13 contemporary Flemish and international artists riff on the theme of domestic banality. Architect Jan de Vylder, a member of Beel's team, shows a cupboard he created as an homage to Heyvaert.

Ruben Bellinkx presents a video installation of a leaking faucet. Filip Dujardin builds a wall of Flemish brick, titled “The Guest” and sits it at the dinner table (*pictured*).

Steverlynck didn't want to confine *A Simple Plan* to the house proper. The exhibition spills out into the garden and beyond. French artist Pierre Bismuth uses an automobile, parked in the street, as his canvas. “This might cause confusion and suspicion in the neighbourhood,” Steverlynck chortles.

The only concession to conventional domesticity: Reservations are required (via an email to frank_tuytschaever@hotmail.com).

\ Georgio Valentino



CONCERT

Tony Bennett

22 September, 20.30

Koninklijk Circus, Brussels

\ WWW.CIRQUE-ROYAL.ORG

Tony Bennett is a living legend. The American crooner has been recording hits like “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” since Harry Truman was president and, unlike most of his mid-century contemporaries, his popularity has never flagged. Somewhere along the way, he evolved from flirty, romantic balladeer to elder statesman of the vocal standard. Indeed, that was when he hit his stride. Most of Bennett's (current) lifetime total of 17 Grammy Awards were collected during the past 20 years. Bennett is also a philanthropist who has used his money and fame to promote arts education in his native New York. Brussels is the last stop on the singer's European tour. \ GV



FAMILY

Bloemencorsos

31 August, 14.30

City centre, Blankenberge

\ WWW.BLOEMENCORSO-BLANKENBERGE.BE

In ancient times, before the advent of pop music festivals, Flemings amused themselves by participating in annual summertime flower parades. The premise is simple: townsfolk, local businesses and civic organisations construct colourful floats from materials at hand (which invariably include locally grown dahlias) and these are strutted through

the city streets with much fanfare. The practice was once widespread in Flanders but now only a handful of towns keep the tradition alive. The Blankenberge event, established in 1895, is the oldest of these. Three more *bloemencorsos* are scheduled throughout September, in Dendermonde (7 Sept), Loenhout (14 Sept) and Wommelgem (21 Sept). \ GV



FESTIVAL

Begijnhoffeesten

29-31 August

Begijnhofdries Park, Ghent

\ WWW.BEIJNHOFEESTEN.BE

On an average day, the Sint-Elisabeth *begijnhof* is an oasis of calm in the heart of urban Ghent. But once a year the religious sanctuary gets raucous. Begijnhoffeesten is at once a block party and a celebration of regional history – specifically, the history of the medieval lay communities that established *begijnhoven*

like Sint-Elisabeth across Flanders. There are live concerts, DJs, exhibitions, street theatre and circus performances throughout the weekend. Locals will trade collectibles and bric-a-brac at the festival flea market. Finally, this is the perfect opportunity to enjoy Belgian beer and regional cuisine. \ GV



VISUAL ARTS

Gaël Turine: The Wall and the Fear

11 September to 19 October

Botanique, Brussels

\ WWW.BOTANIQUE.BE

In 1993, the Indian government began building a wall around neighbouring Bangladesh, with whom India has quarrelled since the partition of Britain's erstwhile South Asian empire precipitated the establishment of multiple independent states from one colonial whole. Measuring in at over 3,000 kilometres, this evolving complex of mortar and barbed wire makes the Berlin Wall look like Lego brick. Belgian photo-journalist Gaël Turine spent two years documenting life on both sides of a border that, despite India's attempt at demarcation (and enforcement), remains demographically mixed, littered with enclaves. Locals are routinely imprisoned and even



tortured for infractions. The exhibition is sponsored by Amnesty International. \ GV

CONCERT

Heusden-Zolder

Rawhide: Up-tempo Flemish bluegrass sextet, including some members from Sons of Navarone and the Broken Circle Bluegrass Band. 28 August 20.00, MUZEcafé, Dekenstraat 40

\ www.muze.be

Ostend

Sunset Boulevard: Badjekkah brings hip hop-electro-soul from Amsterdam, followed by a party with Ostend DJ collective Soulspinnas. 30 August 20.00, Vrijstaat-O, Zeedijk

\ www.vrijstaat-o.be

FESTIVAL

Brussels

ReggaeBus

Festival:

Belgium's only Reggae-Dub festival, boasting five themed stages: 100% Belgian, alternative discoveries, Roots Reggae, various genres and one dedicated entirely to the Amsterdam-based Sound System, King Shiloh. 29-30 August, Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86c

\ www.reggaebusfestival.be

Joêrmet Festival: Annual festival with flea market, farm animals, fireworks and concerts from a variety of music genres, including Johan Verminnen, De Frakskes and The Glorious Gentlemen's Club. 1 September 14.00, Garcet Park (Jette)

\ www.jette.irisnet.be

FAMILY

Antwerp

The Best of Dimitri Leue: Children's concert (ages 6+) by the Flemish actor and musician, featuring his best songs from the past 15 years, some of which are featured on CDs by Kapitein Winokio, Het Geluidshuis and The World Wide Fund for Nature (in Dutch). 29 August 14.00, Rivierenhof, Turnhoutsebaan 232

\ www.openluchttheater.be

Genk

Vollebak Vennestraat: Multicultural folk festival for the entire family, in a street filled with design objects, concerts, games for kids, street theatre, workshops, short films, exhibitions, wellness treatments and more. 30 August, 6 & 13 September 17.00, C-Mine, C-Mine 10

\ www.vollebakvennestraat.be

Talking Dutch

Let them eat pears



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Hardly a week goes by without some new word coming along to confuse us. Last week, it was *peerfies* that came out of nowhere to hit the headlines. A *peerfie* is a selfie taken while eating a pear, and it's our way of hitting back at Russia.

It all started a few weeks ago when Russia announced that it was banning the import of fruit and vegetables from European countries in retaliation to EU sanctions. The ban was expected to hit several sectors badly, such as apple growers in Poland, olive farmers in Greece and, closer to home, pear growers in Flanders. But then someone came up with an apparently simple solution – *als we zelf die peren kopen die voor Rusland bedoeld zijn, is de kwestie opgelost* – if we buy the pears that were meant for Russia, the problem is solved, noted *De Standaard*.

So that's what lots of people did. *Belgen reageren massaal op de oproep om meer eigen fruit te eten, na de invoerboycot door de Russische president Poetin* – Huge numbers of Belgians responded to the call to eat more of our own fruit, following the import ban by the Russian president Putin, the paper reported.

De verkoop is verdubbeld – the sales have doubled, according to the Limburg Fruit Association. *De klanten willen de Belgische producten steunen* – Customers want to support Belgian products, confirmed a spokesperson for supermarket chain Carrefour.

The idea then spread to the small town of Peer in Limburg province, whose name means, literally, Pear. *Ook de burgemeester van Peer steunt de fruitboeren die getroffen worden door de Russische sancties* – the mayor of Peer has also come out in support of the fruit farmers hit by the Russian sanctions.



© Courtesy Het Nieuwsblad

In een filmpje op YouTube roept Steven Matheï de inwoners van zijn stad op om massaal peren te kopen en te eten en een foto daarvan op sociale media te zetten – In a clip on YouTube, Steven Matheï called on the residents of his town to buy and eat as many pears as they can and to post a photograph showing them doing so on social media. The video is called *Perenaar eet peren* – People of Peer eat pears. They responded enthusiastically.

The story spread to the Netherlands where it was picked up by *De Volkskrant*. *Elke Belg zou een jaar lang ongeveer één peer per week extra moeten eten om het verlies van de Russische export te compenseren* – every Belgian has to eat roughly one extra pear a week for a year to compensate for the loss of exports to Russia, the Dutch newspaper said.

Now we just need to buy more Greek olive oil and Polish apples.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

this guy @thisguysfood
Mind-blowing dinner last month at In de Wulf. @Kobewulf
<http://thisguysfoodblog.com/2014/08/21/in-de-wulf/> ...

Glen Murray @Glen40NT
Visiting towns along the trench lines in Flanders you get a strong sense of the depth of Canadian involvement in that war.

Jun Song @JunDishes
Apparently there's a whole female Thai population in Ghent obsessed with watching Korean dramas and they all crave Korean foods. Woah.

Jamie Dornan Online @JamieDornan_org
4 nominations for @FlyingHomeFilm at Ensor Flemish Film Awards; but no Jamie for best actor <http://cineuropa.org/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=261844> ...

John Orbea @Cyclopunk
Ever wanted to see one of those insane Flemish races on cobbled town centre roads but never been able to get to Belgium? @NewportNocturne!

Bruno Waterfield @BrunoBrussels
100 years since Germans razed Leuven – naturally @M_Museum is serving a special smoky beer to mark the events pic.twitter.com/B6bmbLfjAO

Marcus Ericsson Just about to board my flight to Brussels. Race time again, and it's SPA which ofc is one of the best tracks on the calendar. Exciting! #ME9

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Poll

Should Flanders allow banks to offer student loans to help students pay for college and university?

a. Yes. With fees set to go higher, students need the extra help and learn the responsibility of paying off debt in the process

20%

b. No. Don't saddle young people with debt just as they're graduating. Society needs educated people so should take on the expense

80%

Truth be told, we're not terribly surprised to learn that the vast majority of you are against forcing students to take out loans to help them make their way through higher education. The reason for the question was, of course, that tuition fees are due to increase, by order of the new government of Flanders.

Reactions in the press have been varied, from the Flemish Asso-

ciation of Students' statement that increased fees will cause some more vulnerable students to rethink attending university to education expert Ides Nicaise pointing out that it's worth it as these graduates will earn more for the rest of their lives.

And then there was former KU Leuven rector André Oosterlinck's suggestion to allow banks to provide student loans. One in

five of you thought that was a fine idea: If the students are going to earn more for the rest of their lives, surely a few thousand in loans won't hurt them. The rest of you, though, aren't interested in taking on a system seen in the US and the UK, where graduates spend years paying off an education that has, in essence, improved society as a whole.

THE LAST WORD

Sticky situation

"Right now, we can fit all of the obligatory information on the bottle cap. Soon that won't be possible any more. We're going to have to stick on a label."

A spokesperson for the Westvleteren brewery on EU rules that will force the monks to alter the distinctive look of their bottles

A democratic dinner

"I've come to the realisation that I'm not a Sergio Herman or Peter Goossens and never will be. Those were dreams I had when I was younger, but now I realise I'm really just a man of the people."

TV chef Jeroen Meus is lowering the prices in his Leuven restaurant Luzine

Bug bargain

"I've made an agreement with the insects. I always plant twice as much as my wife and I need. The insects can eat half, and the other half is for us. Sounds fair, right?"

Children's author Marc De Bel is a committed organic gardener at his home in Kruishoutem, East Flanders

Bourgeois brilliance

"In the Victorian era, there were four times as many geniuses in the world as there are now."

VUB professor Michael Woodley's research suggests our IQ is steadily dropping

\ Next week's question:

Minister-president Geert Bourgeois has expressed support for an idea to let surplus pears rot on the tree instead of paying to have them harvested when there's no market (see p4). What do you think?

Log on to the Flanders Today website at www.flanderstoday.eu and click on VOTE!

