Cracking the code

A researcher in Ghent has put Flanders in the scientific spotlight with the discovery of a new stage in the production of stem cells

Courtney Davis

A researcher at Ghent University, Thomas O'Leary (pictured) is in the final stages of completing his PhD, which focuses on the origins of human stem cells, looking into the process of how they are created in embryos. “Until now, everyone thought that human embryonic stem cells were generated directly from the inner cell mass of the embryo,” he explains. “Our paper reveals that the inner cell mass transforms \textit{in vitro} before the stem cells arrive. Essentially, we've discovered a new stage.”

The article “Tracking the progression of the human inner cell mass during embryonic stem cell derivation” was recently published in \textit{Nature Biotechnology}, one of the most widely read and influential scientific journals in the world. This research, done in collaboration with Leiden University Medical Centre in the Netherlands, is indicative of the university’s scientific aspirations.

Professor Petra De Sutter, head of the Department for Reproductive Medicine at Ghent University Hospital, has every intention of continuing to aim high. “From an infertility treatment perspective, our long-term goal would be to create gametes [an egg or sperm] \textit{in vitro} so these infertile couples could have a child with their own genetic make-up.”

Curing infertility is one of many dream scenarios posed by stem cells, an area of research that has captured the imagination of scientists and the public alike. Whether it’s a spinal cord injury that has left someone paralysed or a debilitating degenerative disease like Parkinson’s, stem cell research has instilled a hope so strong it’s nearly tangible.

Stem cell research is complex and multi-layered. “Stem cells have two unique traits,” explains O’Leary. “One is self-renewal, so they can be grown in culture indefinitely. The second trait is pluripotency, which means they can be directed to differentiate or to develop into any of the adult cell types in the body.”
Andre Van de Casteele

Andre Van de Casteele has become an unlikely celebrity. The 88-year-old features in a YouTube clip called “Grootmoeder uit haar kritiek over Jeroen Meus” that has gone viral like mad. From her living room, Andrea talks about the popular Flemish TV chef Jeroen Meus, whose cooking skills do not impress her in the least: “He puts savory cabbage in the pan with streaky bacon, with no potatoes at all! I wouldn’t touch the stuff.” She then proceeds to explain just how savory stoemp should be made. “Add salt, pepper and some nutmeg. Anyone can do it.”

The clip is part of a larger documentary, in which Andrea talks about her life and times in Zwalm, a rural East-Flemish region, population 7,000, containing poetic sounding villages such as Beerlegem, Dikkele, Nederzwalm-Hermelgem, Paulatem and Sint-Blasius-Boekel. From her childhood, she remembers the wooden clogs she wore to school. Her wedding was held in her parents’ house, a pig wore to school. Her wedding was held in her parents’ house, a pig wore to school. Her wedding was held in her parents’ house, a pig wore to school.

In her entire life, she went on exactly one holiday: to Lourdes, France, in the family car, packed up with food and drink to last the full three days. “Once we got there, we never dared to leave the car, for fear of it being stolen.”

Andreas story is just one of 20 interviews with people of her generation, filmed for the Cinema Pax project: bakers, farmers, shop and pub keepers, a teacher, a priest and - typical of Zwalm - mill workers. Some speak nostalgically of the past, others remember the many hardships. Cinema Pax is a co-production of the town of Zwalm and the social- artistic organisation Victory Deluxe. “We bring together artists and ordinary people for performances or documentaries”, says Koen Cannaert of the organisation. “Cinema Pax, named after a former cinema in Zwalm, is essentially heritage material. We are very happy with the result, as all the participants, who live quite isolated lives, met afterwards, and some keep in touch now. We showed how everyone has something interesting to tell, each in their own way.”

Andre, meanwhile, who is protected from the media by Cinema Pax, remains largely unaware of the star she has become.

“We didn’t know any better then.”

In their own way.

Bakkerij De Connaisseur in the Antwerp district of Hoboken has been chosen as this year’s friendliest neighbourhood shop in the city’s Golden Glimlach (Golden Smile) competition. The bakery, which has only been open for two years, will receive a street party and an advertising campaign paid for by the city. The award was decided by the votes of residents.

The Brussels-Capital Region government has approved the renovation of the Leopold II tunnel, the longest tunnel in the country at 2.5 kilometres. The project will begin in 2014 and take a maximum of three years. The tunnel will remain open during works, to limit disruption to the 65,000 motorists who use it daily.

Police in Ghent are ready to repeat an experiment that saw four police officers from Bulgaria working with local police to gain confidence in the police service among the city’s large 10,000-strong Bulgarian community. The four Bulgarian officers ended their one-month stay in the city last week.

The ombudsmen’s service of the Flemish government has called for a single complaints procedure for the whole region, including complaints regarding other administrative services. Last year the ombudsmen received more than 53,500 complaints, of which only one in four were related to Flemish government services. The rest were passed along to the service concerned. “Things could be done more efficiently” with a single complaints service for all, ombudsman Bart weekers said.

One Flemish contestant made the cut for this year’s Queen Elizabeth Music competition for violinists. This is the third time that Jelente De Maeyer, 28, has taken part in the competition. The largest national contingent among the 88 young violinists accepted to compete in the prestigious competition comes from Korea, with 15, followed by the United States with 13, including four with dual Belgian-American nationality.

This year marks the competition’s 75th anniversary.

A technology spin-off from the University of Leuven, Soundtalks, has developed a way to prevent unnecessary use of antibiotics by pig farmers, the university announced. Soundtalks uses microphones installed in the pigs’ stalls to pick up and analyse the sound of coughing so that farmers can administer antibiotics only to those pigs showing signs of infection. The first operational system was due to be installed this week on a farm in the south of the Netherlands.

FloraBrand, the world’s third-largest beef processor, has gained a 30% stake in Argentine meat producer Livestock Supply Company (LSC), one of the biggest beef producers in Argentina. The stake is held through FloraBrand’s holding company, Codelco Argentina.

The team had planned to interview two of the 12-year-old Hester from Wevelgem in the month’s final struggle against the Tour of Qatar. The investigators also visited Toptours, the coach company whose bus was involved in the accident. The investigators also spoke with crash survivors from the Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee. The team had planned to interview children from the school in Lommel, but parts of the seven survivors declined to give permission.
Cracking the code

A supportive legal system and active in vitro fertilisation programmes have put Flanders at the top of stem cell research

Kinds of stem cells and where they come from

There are a few ways of obtaining stem cells. There are adult stem cells (such as Hematopoietic, found in bone marrow), but once these cells have a lineage, this is the only purpose or direction they can have. While they can still self-renew, they no longer have pluripotency.

There are induced pluripotence stem cells (iPSC), which are artificially derived from genetic diseases for which you had all these embryos in a dish fertilised in a lab in vitro. A strong in vitro fertilisation programme in Flanders is the source of many donated embryos. Stem cell extraction is only done with full consent of the donors.

Opinions – both from members of the public and from couples undergoing treatment (a major source of egg donations) – are divided depending on how people see embryos, says professor De Sutter. “If it’s a clump of cells without any potential, then research is fine. That is the core of the discussion.”

Professor Karen D Sermon, head of the Department of Embryology and Genetics at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), says she “wouldn’t be doing this if my thoughts weren’t clear. Is it ethical to use eight or 100 cells, or clumps of cells, for research for the betterment of patients and their children? I’ve been working with human embryos and hESC from the first day of my PhD. It is not a person and doesn’t have the same rights as a person.”

Legal restrictions and ethical committees

Professor Catherine Verfaillie, head of the Stem Cell Institute at the University of Leuven (KUL), which uses embryonic stem cells but doesn’t create them, says the decision to not make embryonic stem cells has to do with logistics. “We could make them, but the VUB lab is nearby, and it didn’t make sense to have two labs in the same vicinity focusing on the same thing. KUL has no objections, ethically or morally, regarding this.”

The law seems to agree. Flanders is at the forefront of hESC research for two reasons, and one of them is legality. “The 2003 law that regulates embryo research in Belgium allows us to do a lot of great work,” says Sermon. “But it is also very clear: Both the scientists and the patients are protected. You have to ask for permission for any work you want to do, which takes time. But this is a small price to pay. You can do the research as long as you follow the rules.”

Professor De Sutter of UGent admits that it is a liberal law, but that universities still can’t “do whatever we want”. Any planned research must receive approval from both regional and federal ethics committees. “There are strict regulations,” she says. “It has to be relevant, and we must explain why we want to do the work. It is actually time-consuming and difficult to get clearance. Another condition is we must be given informed consent by patients. So we tell them quite specifically what we will do with the embryos – not a vague research explanation.”

Access to embryos is the other reason for Flanders’ success in this field of research. “We have a unique situation in that we have a lot of embryos available,” explains De Sutter. “Our busy in vitro fertilisation programme, with 2,500 cycles a year, is the second largest in the country. Only VUB is bigger, with 4,500. This creates the possibility to do this type of research in the first place.”

VUB’s professor Sermon: “The ethical consideration and legal framework in Belgium is one of our assets. This is why we want to stay on the embryo side of the research – it’s really where we have a head-start. This is our niche.”

Precisely the director of the Stem Cell Institute at the University of Minnesota in the United States, Flemish professor Catherine Verfaillie (left) now holds the same position at the University of Leuven.
New rules for daycare
Flanders promises a place for every child by 2020

Alan Hope

The Flemish parliament last week approved the government’s plans for a new decree governing daycare for children, by a vote of 53 to 29. Among the requirements are that each new daycare facility receive a licence from Kind & Gezin, the Flemish agency for families, and that staff speak Dutch, in order for the facility to be eligible for subsidies. Some crèches that were previously registered with Kind & Gezin have now switched to the French-speaking equivalent to avoid the new language rule.

The government’s aim is to make a place available by 2020 for every child under the age of 2.5 years requiring daycare. At 2.5, toddlers become free except for supervision of children in daycare facilities. At 2.5, toddlers become free except for supervision of children in daycare facilities.

At present, Flanders is suffering a growing shortage of daycare places, with estimates that 3,000 new places will be required by 2016. Vandervoorde has promised 1,000 new places this year. All daycare will now be organised on three levels: family care (child-minders), group care (crèches) and home care (babysitters or nannies). Extra subsidies will be given to daycare that operates a means-tested payment system or that works with disadvantaged families.

Fries for gay bashing in Brussels

Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen made an emphatic return to the top last Sunday, winning a record-equalling third Tour of Flanders, six years after his previous triumph. In 2010, a young man in 2005 and 2006, beat Italian duo Filippo Pozzato and Alessandro Ballan in a sprint finish to the 255-kilometre race.

With 61km to go, Switzerland’s Fabian Cancellara, winner of the tour in 2010, Flanders. With 61km to go, Switzerland’s Fabian Cancellara, winner of the tour in 2010, and 2006, beat Italian duo Filippo Pozzato and Alessandro Ballan in a sprint finish to the 255-kilometre race.

This year’s Tour of Flanders included a triumphant return for the top three winners from 2005 and 2006, beat Italian duo Filippo Pozzato and Alessandro Ballan in a sprint finish to the 255-kilometre race.

The vote was taken among some 200 people present in the Maalbeek cultural centre in Brussels, who heard the 10 nominated words defended by their proponents. Bru-Taal organises conversation tables where Dutch learners can talk with native speakers.

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Acw is the Christian Workers Movement, an umbrella organisation that includes the ACV trade union, the CM mutuality, organisations for youth, work and elderly, a holiday organisation and a service that provides care in the home. Its membership runs at over four million. Its power is informal, but real and works mostly through “befriended” CVP politicians, including former prime ministers Jean-Luc Dehaene and Yves Leterme, vice prime minister Steven Vanackere, Flemish minister Hilde Crevits and secretary of state Servais Verhstraeten. During election periods, they happily associate with ACV and its many members. These days, though, many of them downplay their links with the workers’ movement.

ACW is not just the organisation of small Flemish people, it is also a big investor. One of ACW’s organisations is Arco, a cooperative holding that invested heavily in Dexia. Recently it was revealed that Arco was driven by greed, which contributed to the downfall of Dexia, as long-term prospects were overlooked.

Fines for gay bashing in Brussels

Boonen returns for tour triumph

Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen made an emphatic return to the top last Sunday, winning a record-equalling third Tour of Flanders, six years after his previous triumph. The 31-year-old, a winner in 2005 and 2006, beat Italian duo Filippo Pozzato and Alessandro Ballan in a sprint finish to the 255-kilometre race.

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In 1837, two enterprising gentlemen tried their luck investing in the new technology of steam shipping. This year, the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, better known as P&O, is celebrating its 175th anniversary. The original company has grown into a group with a strong presence in Zeebrugge on the Flemish coast. P&O's founding fathers were Brodie McGhie Willcox (in contemporary documents described as 'a young man with no influence but limited pecuniary means') and Arthur Anderson, whom he employed as a clerk. By 1835, thanks to the financial backing of Dublin ship owner Richard Bourne, they were able to set up under the name Peninsular Steam Navigation Company, as they had set their minds on launching a regular service to the Iberian Peninsula.

The operation of regular intercontinental services was impossible before the arrival of the steam ship. World maritime trade was still mostly in the hands of sailing ships, which were cheap and easy to run. They were also unreliable, being totally reliant on tides and winds. The Royal Navy, ordered to rule Britannia's waves, would not hear of the steamers. There was no artistry in working steamships, especially not compared to the steam engine was used merely as an extra source of propulsion, rather than a power in its own right. As such, they were not fit for ocean-going and were deployed merely for inland shipping and coastal services.

Anderson and Wilcox took a huge risk with this endeavour, just like that contemporary of theirs, Samuel Cunard, who decided to deploy steam ships on the western routes. When, in 1837, the company was granted a contract to carry mail from the UK to Spain and Portugal, the real foundation stone was laid for what was to become P&O. The 'O' for Oriental was added in 1840, when another contract was landed to carry mail to Egypt and, in the years to come, to the farthest shores of the British Empire. In 1904, P&O was the first ship operator to introduce the concept of the leisure cruise. The company survived two world wars and various economic crises thanks to its proactive and resilient attitude towards major changes in the market. In the 1960s, the company acquired interests in the container business and eventually in terminal handling. In 2006, the group itself was taken over by Dubai World Ports, one of the major terminal operators in the Port of Antwerp.

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But it is the core ship owning business that is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year. The Port of Zeebrugge will no doubt get its fair share of the festivities. Thanks to P&O Ferries, the Flemish coastal port has been able to develop as a major continental gateway for traffic to and from the UK. Specialisation is the key word in the offer from Zeebrugge. Served by the Pride of York and the Pride of Bruges, the overnight Zeebrugge-Hall service can land passengers and freight in northern England and Scotland. Freight and lorries are taken board the Bore Song and European Trader on the Zeebrugge-Middlesbrough Teesport route as well as between Zeebrugge and Tilbury. All these services allow lorry drivers to comply with the European regulation on driving and resting time.
Brussels Airlines complaints of “unfair competition”

CEO of flag carrier airline threatens to leave their base at Brussels Airport

Alan Hope

Brussels Airlines is ready to be considering a move from Zaventem to either Luxembourg or Ireland, both of which would place BA on a similar footing to Ryanair. Davignon later said that the airline still considered Zaventem the best possible base, “Brussels Airlines is not at the moment considering a move out of Belgium,” he said. “If the management has sounded the alarm, it is because the company does not wish to proceed to such extreme action.”

Brussels Airlines operates 300 flights a day out of Brussels Airport, to 70 destinations worldwide, and employs 3,300 people. The airline, 45% owned by Lufthansa, was created after the collapse of national airline Sabena in 2001.

The air traffic control organisation BA operates in Belgium. According to Arnaud Feist, CEO of Brussels Airport Company (BAC), Charleroi airport receives €300 million in subsidies from the Walloon region, equivalent to a subsidy of €12 for every passenger using the airport. In addition, Charleroi pays no contribution to air traffic control organisation Belgcontrol, which amounts to a further subsidy of about €3 per passenger. BAC, on the other hand, pays €7 million a year.

Brussels Airlines has denoted it is seeking subsidies but says that "something must be done" to tackle the problem of what the company calls "unfair competition". Ryanair has advised the airline to move to Ireland.

Aalst most enterprising city

Aalst in East Flanders has been declared this year’s Enterprise Town by Unizo, the Flemish organisation representing the self-employed. Aalst won the prize for its services package Hartelijk Ondernemen (Open-hearted Enterprise), which provides tailor-made services for new businesses.

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Turning young people to technology

Technical and engineering jobs in Flanders are ‘bottleneck jobs’, or job vacancies that are difficult to fill. In an effort to tackle the chronic shortage of qualified personnel, the Royal Flemish Engineering Association (KVIV) hosts the annual WINT day to present the world of engineering to a group of young people.

WINT stands for science, innovation, networking and technology, and forms part of the World at your Feet programme supported by the KVIV together with the Flemish government’s Flanders in Action programme. The aim is to convince students, especially girls, to follow technology or science studies by introducing them to the variety of jobs available in industry. Those who have started or worked for businesses in the sector share their experiences, allowing students to gain evaluate their own abilities. The project was launched in 2008, and the first WINT day took place in 2010 in Ghent, followed a year later in the second in Heusden-Zolder. This year’s event is at Antwerp Expo. The day consists of a series of workshops presented by companies in the sci/tech sector for students and teachers, with the general public welcomed later in the afternoon for an open visit to the stands set up by businesses. At least one of the staff present at each stand will be female. Students taking part also spend half the day in a product design competition, the results of which will be on display. WINT takes place on 26 April at Antwerp Expo and is open to the public from 15.15. Registration is required.

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Life on Mars

Flemings of the Mars Society took part in a simulated mission in preparation for astronauts one day reaching the red planet

Andy Furniere

The Belgian flag was planted on Mars 22 years ago, but two Flemings have again set foot on the red planet. Or the closest thing to it on our own planet anyway. Nicky De Munster was commander of a simulated mission to Mars in the Utah desert, while Astron Stein took charge of the educational aspect. The two were at the Mars Desert Research Station run by the Mars Society.

The Mars Society is an international, non-profit organisation of scientists, astronauts, educators, astronomers and other space enthusiasts who make it their mission to educate both students and the public about the possibilities of space travel to Mars. The society operates the Mars Desert Research Station in the US state of Utah, where members go on regular simulated missions. The local chapter, Mars Society Belgium, gives classes and workshops to help prepare new generations of astronauts and space engineers.

During a simulation at the Mars Desert Research Station last December, six volunteers lived together for two weeks in a small exploitation habitat closed off from the world. Excursions on quads or on foot in the Mars-like terrain had to be undertaken in a space suit. Participants performed scientific experiments, took soil samples and tested materials and nutrition for future astronauts and transmitted their experiences to knowledge centres and the public. The Mars Society Belgium is looking ahead to the first human expedition to Mars in the coming decades.

De Munster, who teaches information technology in Waregem, West Flanders, and serves as a volunteer teacher at the Euro Space Society in Brussels, was in command of the crew that landed in Utah on 17 December. They were the 109th crew to do such a simulation. De Munster was also part of the all-Belgian crew that, in February 2010, took over the Mars station.

Awe-inspiring experience

During the two weeks in Utah, the crew survived on a diet of powdered food and lived as economically as possible. One of the crew’s tasks was to explore and map the surroundings as if it were an unknown planet. “The environment, with its red earth and wide views, was wonderful, but it was exhausting to walk there in heavy space suits and be constantly thirsty,” says De Munster.

For these Flemings, space exploration is an awe-inspiring experience. “It was wonderful, but we had to save our water supply as much as possible,” says Astron Stein. Even though every member team had a private bedroom, there was no privacy anywhere else in the small habitat. “It was like a camping ground, with movements day and night, like in Big Brother,” De Munster says. “We didn’t have contact with the world outside, which was lovely sometimes,” Stein adds. “But the deactivation and silence in the desert were also awe-inspiring.” Stein performed experiments that students could later try for themselves. He designed a “solar tube”, for example — a black plastic tube filled with air. The air was heated by the sun, which made the tube float 20 metres high, like a hot air balloon.

On the universal map

The Flemish race to Mars started in 2008, with the European Mars schools and trains teachers to get children interested in space travel through fun experiments in class. Children learn, for example, how to pack an astronaut’s suitcase and to prepare the food-packet. One practical experiment involves trying to land an egg using a parachute so that it doesn’t break, in a small-scale simulation of a Mars landing. “We want to arouse their curiosity,” says Vermeulen, who works for the Royal Meteorological Institute in Brussels and is a flight instructor. “According to the latest predictions, and gravity challenges. Gravity differences make human bones decalcify and weaken quickly. So why go through all the trouble of putting a person on this inhospitable planet?”

Pushing the boundaries

Robots have been performing experiments on Mars for years, but for humans the red planet is still a long way off. Not only would it take six months to get there, the astronauts would have to stay another six months on the planet to be in the right position to leave. Providing enough supplies for the astronauts is a major challenge, not to mention the atmosphere...

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On the universal map

The Flemish race to Mars started in 2008, with the European Mars
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See what you’ve been missing
A new hiking network connects the Knokke and Zeeland sides of the Zwin nature reserve

Denzil Walton

The Zwin nature reserve in Knokke-Heist is one of Flanders’ natural wonders, and the first part of an ambitious development plan has just opened up to the public. A beautifully maintained network of footpaths lets you create your own walks or cycle rides from Knokke to the Netherlands and back again.

There are two ways to describe the Zwin nature reserve. One is that it’s a 159-hectare lagoon, which sea water enters with each tide. It comprises dunes, salt marshes, salt pans and two large inlet channels with adjacent tidal flat and creek systems. The whole region extends 2.5 kilometres along the North Sea coastline on the Flemish-Dutch border.

And the other? The Zwin is one of those glorious, mystical areas where sky, land and sea merge to create a spectacular wilderness. It’s where the eerie call of the curlew will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It’s where you can lie on your back in the sand and watch the clouds scudding overhead, taking your anxieties with them. And it’s a place full of contrasts. Sit on the seaward side of a dune, and the wind will cut through your coat and chill you to the bone: move to the sheltered side, and the sun will turn your face red in minutes.

However you describe the Zwin, the good news is that a new cross-border hiking network has just opened there. It consists of more than 50 kilometres of hiking trails in the coastal areas of Knokke in Flanders and Zeeland in the Netherlands.

At the centre of the network is the Zwin nature reserve, but on the Flemish side the footpaths also run through the surrounding dunes and polders, along the coastline and even through the streets of Knokke. On the Dutch side, the paths pass through the charming municipalities of Cadzand and Retranchement and connect with Zeeland’s own network of footpaths. This means that one of my favourite coastal paths, from Breskens to Cadzand-Bad, has suddenly been extended. Now I am able to keep going by crossing the Uitwaterings canal and walking along the edges of the reserve itself. I can even go further and walk into Knokke. However, the total distance from Breskens to Knokke is more than 25km, getting the bus back to Breskens has its appeal.

Feet, wheels or hooves?
The Zwin nature reserve and surrounding polders are largely undeveloped, so the footpaths provide spectacular views of the sea, the vastness of the estuarine marshes and the dunes.

But don’t forget this is a network. It’s not just a string of paths laid out randomly. This is an expertly devised criss-cross of well-developed and excellently signposted paths. Thanks to an informative water-resistant map (€6 from local tourist offices), you can devise your own walk, making it as short or as long as your time and energy allow. You simply go from one numbered junction to the next. Each junction is clearly marked and points you in the direction of the next one. The network can be used by cyclists and those on horseback, too. Some of the paths are like a three-lane rural motorway, with dedicated lanes for feet, bikes and horses.

More changes afoot
The new hiking network is just one component of a major redevelopment of the Zwin area. Plans are well advanced to turn the Zwin into a contemporary, educational and touristic nature destination. I’m not totally convinced about their new slogan, however, which is: “The Zwin: an international airport for birds”. By focusing solely on birds it denigrates the Zwin’s importance as an area rich in salt-loving wild flowers. Some of these are as interesting in appearance as they are in name: sea lavender, herbaceous serepwead, glasswort, greater sea-spurrey and sea milkwort.

Moreover, an airport is merely a temporary stop-off: a place where you stay for as short a time as possible before heading off to where you really want to go. That’s not the case with the Zwin, where hundreds of birds – from storks to stonechats, ringed plovers to reed buntings – take up residence for the spring and summer to raise their broods. In the autumn, the arriving wild geese might look like planes landing at an airport, but these birds will also stay for months, making it their winter lodgings.

Still, the plans look impressive, with one of the highlights being a new viewing centre. This will be a large circular building with windows offering superb panoramic views over the Zwin plain. Visitors will have the opportunity to observe the tide, plants, birds and other aspects of the Zwin in comfort, whatever the weather.

No cages please!
Also in the plans is a modernised Zwin Nature Centre. Its focus will be education, nature development and sustainability. This is also welcome news because the sooner the current centre is shut down the better. It’s a hideously outdated concept that has no place in the ecologically aware 21st century.

I can imagine the original idea seemed a bright one – but that was in 1953 when Count Leon Lippens turned the Knokke royal residence into a bird zoo. You can imagine someone thinking: “We have all these wild birds in the Zwin, but they’re so far off and difficult to see. I know, let’s catch some of them and put them in cages so people can see them close-up.”

Unfortunately, the results are still visible today. More than 20 cages house birds that can be seen in the wild less than a kilometre away. These include oystercatchers, avocets, turnstones, curlews and godwits – birds that belong to the vast expanses of the salt flats and the estuary. There’s even a cage with seagulls in it. Anyone wanting to look at a gull at close quarters just has to walk along the promenade in Knokke while eating a sandwich. But the most distressing sights are of a red kite, a black kite and a peregrine falcon. To see these birds in cages, when they are normally seen soaring in the open blue skies, is heart-wrenching.

I hope that the outstanding efforts that have gone into making the network of coastal footpaths such a marvellous and highly attractive new feature of the Zwin will now be channelled to create an equally impressive new Zwin Nature Centre that – unlike the current one – is a credit to the province of West Flanders.
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"It would require a second book to list the various sites in Antwerp. But during this one is a survey of success and defeat, and the art of combining both in one life."

That's how Count Daniel Le Grelle describes Een groot Antwerps verhaal (A Great Antwerp Story), a new book by journalist Lex Moolenaar based on hours of interviews with Le Grelle. "It's a story, more than a biography," Le Grelle says. Een groot Antwerps verhaal (Lankertoever Uitgevers) summarises a substantial part of the history of Antwerp, through the eyes of an extraordinary charismatic nobleman. Close to his 90th birthday, Le Grelle felt the time was right for it to be put down in words.

"I did everything my way, without letting events or people change my personality."

Le Grelle's link with the city of Antwerp goes back to the 17th century, when Guillaume Le Grelle came to live in the port city and began working as a baker. From then, the family has been omnipresent in the city's political, merchant and social life. Guillaume's grandson Gerard is regarded as the pater familias of the current Le Grelle family. Gerard's youngest son, Joseph, founded the Banque Le Grelle in 1792, which was, in 1964, sold to the Generale Bank. His brother, Henry, was an alderman in Antwerp and brought nobility to the family when he was named in the city of Antwerp goes back to the 17th century, when Guillaume's grandson Gerard is regarded as the pater familias of the current Le Grelle family. Gerard's youngest son, Joseph, founded the Banque Le Grelle in 1792, which was, in 1964, sold to the Generale Bank. His brother, Henry, was an alderman in Antwerp and brought nobility to the family when he was named in the city of Antwerp.

In 1831, Joseph's son (another Gerard) became Antwerp's first mayor – and only – directly elected mayor, a year after the country's independence. "Quite a remarkable accomplishment," notes Moolenaar. "As a family of nobility, the Le Grelles were extremely loyal to the Belgian royal house, but the family were also true 'orangists', followers of the Dutch king Willem I, strongly believing in a unified Holland and Flanders, even today. Right after the country's independence, many followers of the 'orangist' movement moved to the Netherlands. But Gerard, inspired by a sense of duty, decided to stay. He managed to unite liberals and Catholics to become, at the age of 38, mayor of Antwerp."

A port with "a human face"

Daniel Le Grelle is the only living great-grandson of Gerard (who was awarded the title of count in 1853) and continues in his footsteps. For 30 years, Le Grelle was a member of the Antwerp city council. He was affiliated with the CVP political party (now CD&V) but was elected as an independent, proof of the power of the family name. "I did everything my way, without letting events or people change my personality," he says. The count moved to Berendrecht, north of Antwerp, and in 1948 teamed up with Count Moretus, mayor of Stabroek, to fight the ongoing expansion of the Port of Antwerp. "We've always strove for a viable combination of port activities and nature, for a port with a human face," he explains. "But I've witnessed the expansion of the port: I've seen people being chased out of their farms at gunpoint, and Antwerp city council was the platform to raise the protest. Thanks to our battle, we have managed to safeguard the nature and villages of Berendrecht, Zandvliet, Lillo, Stabroek and Kapellen from becoming port industry sites."

Today, the Le Grelle castle is a unique vantage point looking out over the Reigersbosch in Berendrecht from where you can watch grey herons build their nests.

A delicate balance

As a banker, Le Grelle started his career in 1947 with the Dutch bank Van Mierlo in Antwerp. In the 1970s, he became CEO of the Antwerp branch. "Both ABN Bank and the US-based Continental Bank wanted to buy us. I decided to go overseas, bearing in mind the basic principles of banking, with solid securities and well-defined contracts," he explains.

At the age of 55, Le Grelle joined inspection and control organisation Vincotte, where he was named manager and member of the board. He adapted the judicial structure of the organisation and prepared the 1990 merger with their biggest competitors, AIB.

In addition to his hectic professional agenda, he also found the time for sport – as a tennis player, he presided over the prestigious Don Brandt tennis circle in Antwerp. In 1967, he was named chairman of the Provincial Association of the Belgian Olympic Committee and it was he who introduced the now International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge to the organisation.

Le Grelle also promoted the installation of public basketball courts in Antwerp's districts and helped the city's KAZC become the country's leading swimming club.

"It all comes down to passing on life values: 'That's essential to me,' he says of the 180 pages in the book. "In writing Een groot Antwerps verhaal I learned a lot myself," Moolenaar admits. "The difference in culture – and political culture – the battle for nature and heritage, the careful balance between city preservation and innovation. Daniel Le Grelle invites the reader to look ahead."
Antwerp illustrator, comic artist and painter Philip Paquet considers himself a storyteller first. And what's better for a good story than a good soundtrack?

So the Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BJO), together with Flemish trumpeter Bert Joris, wrote a score to Paquet's famous jazz stories. To return the favour, he drew a story about the renowned big band. The result is the live performance Graphicology: A Visual Jazz Score. Paquet, 38, lives in a neat apartment in the Berchem district of Antwerp. The distinctive mix of black and white with only an occasional blotch of colour that typifies his graphic novels is reflected in both his interior and his clothing style. Black is the colour of jazz, his passion, and of the night. Paquet is not a 9 to 5 person. He likes a passion, and of the night. Paquet typifies his graphic novels is a blend of black and white with only an occasional blotch of colour that typifies his graphic novels is reflected in both his interior and his clothing style. Black is the colour of jazz, his passion, and of the night. Paquet is not a 9 to 5 person. He likes a passion, and of the night. Paquet typifies his graphic novels is a blend of black and white with only an occasional blotch of colour that typifies his graphic novels is reflected in both his interior and his clothing style. Black is the colour of jazz, his passion, and of the night. Paquet is not a 9 to 5 person. He likes a passion, and of the night.

The illustrations for Graphicology, which will be projected to the live music of the BJO, are in sepia grey – ideal for shaping the mood of his favourite musical genre. 'I started drawing jazz musicians because I liked everything around it,' Paquet tells me. 'Not only the music – I'm a bassist myself – but also the bars and the smoke.' Paquet hung out in those places from the time he was a teenager. 'In those days, you could spot me in Antwerp music bars like De Muziekdoos and De Muze with a pipe: it fit the lifestyle,' he smiles. 'And while reading the biographies of the biggest jazz names, plenty of images appeared in my head.'

**BJO as strip characters**

Fragments of three of his graphic novels – the biographical Louis Armstrong (2001), the compilation Snapshots (2003) and Playin'/Smilin'/Fightin'/Cookin' (2010), which are all written in English – are all part of Graphicology. It was Tom Horsten from the graphic arts support organisation Strip Turnhout who connected Frank Vaganneé, the artistic leader of BJO, with Paquet. They decided to create two new stories, one in which BJO plays a major role. 'They are chasing me the whole evening,' says Paquet, who didn't want to portray them too realistically. 'It stays a comic, and, for sure, there are a few 'character heads' in the band.'

Another new story takes place in New Orleans. 'It's about the legislative history of the blues. I try to evoke some magic realism: There are a lot of references to voodoo, and we visit the crossroads.' Paquet was astonished to see how few words the musicians needed to get Graphicology right and how much attention they paid to particular details. 'While composing, Bert Joris even called me a few times for a background check on some characters in my story.'

**Batman & Frank Quinn**

Paquet has been drawing from the moment he could hold a pencil. Much to the annoyance of his teachers, it became a true obsession. 'My dad wasn't too fond of my mother, who was not allowed to go to art school herself because my grandfather didn't support her, gave me the freedom to do what I wanted. She was not amused when I gave up secondary school, but I was just fed up with it and wanted to earn a living with my pencil.' At 16 he discovered the Mekanik comic book shop in Antwerp. Batman, above all, appealed to him. 'It eventually occurred to me that all good comic artists had worked on Batman.' Contemporary American graphic novelist David Mazzucchelli, who created the graphic novel Asterios Polya, 'began his career drawing Batman,' says Paquet. 'The same for Frank Miller. Next to Batman, I fancied the work of Franquin. Zwartkijken, his comic book from 1977, was an eye-opener: only black ink, dark and very cynical. He had a go at a Batman story, too, but it never got published. But as a 23-year-old, he was – rather surprisingly – selected for an exhibition in New York. "I had sent my first jazz comic Miles du cat as remembered by the Bird. They liked it, and I was part of a group exhibition in the Jazz Gallery in New York. "From that moment on, I knew what I was going to do." He took it as a sign and kept on drawing jazz comics. First there was Louis Armstrong, in which he portrayed Satchmo's youth and early days as a musician. It earned him a small but worldwide cult following. He remembers meeting the Argentinian an comic artist José Muñoz, who had published a graphic novel on Billie Holiday. "He is really one of my heroes. And when we got introduced he said: 'This guy brought Louis Armstrong to life! Your book made me dream, man!' I was walking on clouds the time in Dutch. "It will be a mix of different styles and a story with a lot of suspense." Right now, a gallery in Berchem is hosting a show of Paquet's work. Paquet also illustrates live with a "tagtool", a device connected together with drawing tablet, a projector and a laptop. Operated by an illustrator and an animator, it allows images that have just been drawn to move. Together with animator Gillem, he lives up festivities with this new, extraordinary tool. Most recently a Radio Modern retro party. 'I like the variation of the work, I don't want to sit at my drawing table all the time. And what's better than being paid to be at a party?'' But his biggest project so far is definitely the one in the De Villegas Park. The city of Antwerp ordered a work of 150 square metres for the renovation of the park in Berchem. The result will be an illustrated wall in which the last century of the community and its most distinctive people will come to life. The wall should be ready by June, and Paquet has moved his workshop to a secret hideout provided by the city. "We had to look for a room with 50 metres of open space. It really gives me a New York loft feeling." But whether he's drawing a new comic book or painting a wall, Paquet stays truthful to his mission. 'I like to touch people with as few lines as possible, with a visual that recalls an emotion or an atmosphere. But it has to stay pleasant, meaning it should be presented with astonishing and an infantile enthusiasm.'

Philip Paquet turns the Brussels Jazz Orchestra into comic book characters

**Infantine enthusiasm**

As a freelance editor, Paquet's work is also often music related. He provided the artwork for the Blue Notes label CD-boxset. Last year he drew illustration representing the Gent Jazz Festival and followed DEUS on tour for Knack Focus magazine. Later this year, he will be an artist-in-residence in Italy, where he will attend some concerts with pencil in hand and work on a new graphic novel, this time in Dutch. "It will be a mix of different styles and a story with a lot of suspense." Right now, a gallery in Berchem is hosting a show of Paquet's work. Paquet also illustrates live with a "tagtool", a device connected together with drawing tablet, a projector and a laptop. Operated by an illustrator and an animator, it allows images that have just been drawn to move. Together with animator Gillem, he lives up festivities with this new, extraordinary tool. Most recently a Radio Modern retro party. 'I like the variation of the work, I don't want to sit at my drawing table all the time. And what's better than being paid to be at a party?''

18 APRIL, 20.00

**Graphicology: A Visual Jazz Score**

Vaganée, the artistic leader of BJO, together with Flemish trumpeter Bert Joris, wrote a score to Paquet's famous jazz stories. To return the favour, he drew a story about the renowned big band. The result is the live performance Graphicology: A Visual Jazz Score. Paquet, 38, lives in a neat apartment in the Berchem district of Antwerp. The distinctive mix of black and white with only an occasional blotch of colour that typifies his graphic novels is reflected in both his interior and his clothing style.

Philip Paquet, a self-portrait

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**New York minutes**

**Guitarist Renaud Audenaerde is as happy on stage in the Big Apple as at home in Flanders**

Lawrence De Geest

A guitar is a piece of wood with strings. At around midnight on his first New York City appearance, young modern artist Renauld Audenaerde plugged his in while the guitarist from Space Clamps, a popular word-of-mouth band from the East Village, stepped up to the mic. “We’re lucky we’ve got one of the most talented axmen from Belgium with us tonight,” he said to the crowd. “And there’s more good news: Today, so I hear, Belgium finally formed a government.” The applause erupted, and Audenaerde, wearing a classic New York paperboy hat, launched into his first song.

“Coming to New York City reminded me of the old days of playing for the experience of the moment itself,” says Audenaerde (pictured), who hooked up with Space Clamps through a friend. “We rehearsed for two days and then went straight to the gig – all off the cuff. They loved us, but really you just care that you’re doing it.”

Making it in music has never been easy. Even the lute-strumming jester of the old days lived by the fickleness of the court. Flanders is crazy about live music – Werchter is one of the biggest works of art ever created in Belgium.”

The work will be complete by the autumn, and the scaffolding is due to come down well before then. “Hybrids” will dismount on 20 June. But instead of trashing this colourful canvas or stowing it away for the building’s next facet, ING has opted to carve it up and create a limited run of unique shoulder bags from the remains. Moerman’s 2,200 square-metre spread will yield a whopping 1,400 bags, to be divvied up by means of an online competition. Winners will have the choice to select the fragment of their choice.

Art lovers among ING’s clientele and labour force needn’t fear loosening their purse strings. At around midnight, the Neddes are trying to change that. For a long time they focused exclusively on songwriting. Now they’re performing more. Lead singer Ricky organises an annual festival called Fricky Rock where a couple of hundred aficionados show up for three shows a night and beer for €1. The drummer is a married man, and Audenaerde plugged his in with us tonight, “he said to the crowd.

“Metro Vivaldi”

After several years of classical training, Audenaerde moved into jazz and then his own inventions. Despite predicting a future in music, he didn’t go for it until he took a hiatus from his Master’s in sinology and moved to New York with his girlfriend on a whim. “My parents didn’t want me to only do music,” he says. “Even though I had music in my head and night, I also had all the insecurities of not knowing what to do. You can’t make all the right choices when you’re 18.”

He founded a job sipping drinks at a Manhattan cocktail bar run by Russians and lived in Brooklyn with a young Mexican-Filipino experimental classicist. Music was everywhere. “I remember one late night after work when I was waiting for the subway. I heard these guys, on cello and violin, playing the most beautiful Vivaldi I had ever heard. I asked them where they had trained. They said nowhere. Six years ago they just decided to buy the instruments and teach themselves.”

When the set was finished, Audenaerde looked out at the crowd applauding like they were throwing roses. What he felt was truer than words. A guitar is a piece of wood that comes alive in the hands of a guitarist willing to reveal what to do. You can’t make all the right choices when you’re 18.”

**You can take it with you**

ING gives away bags made out of dismantled artwork

Georgio Valentino

ING Belgium’s headquarters on Marnixlaan in Brussels have been undergoing renovation for some years now. Its scaffolding-clad facade is straddled by what ING’s PR reps boast as “one of the most impressive buildings ever created in Belgium.”

The massive digital print, a kinetic frenzy of brightly coloured blobbs by Brussels artist Jean-Luc Moerman and called “Multifunctional Polydirectional Hybrids”, was commissioned by the banking giant to celebrate the building’s imminent liberation from the contractor’s jackhammer. For it’s true: Nothing lasts forever, not even construction. The work will be complete by the autumn, and the scaffolding is due to come down well before then. “Hybrids” will dismount on 20 June. But instead of trashing this colourful canvas or stowing it away for the building’s next facet, ING has opted to carve it up and create a limited run of unique shoulder bags from the remains. Moerman’s 2,200 square-metre spread will yield a whopping 1,400 bags, to be divvied up by means of an online competition. Winners will have the choice to select the fragment of their choice.

Art lovers among ING’s clientele and labour force needn’t fear Moerman’s departure. They can expect the return of the Marnix building’s modern art collection. ING – accumulated over the past half century – as soon as the dust settles and the contractors clear out.

Anyone can enter the competition on the website to win the shoulder bags. If you do not have an ING account, just fill in the branch nearest you under “your ING branch.”
three visions for a metropolis

Brussels 2040

Nicolas de Muy

What will Brussels be like in 30 years’ time? What kind of city will we be living in? These questions were handed over to three teams of professionals from the built environment, including architects, urban planners and sustainable development specialists. Their pragmatic and thoughtful visions of the Brussels metropolis that could be is on show now at Bozar in Brussels.

As you enter the exhibition space (which you do free of charge), you already have to question: where should I start? This is probably what most urban planners and architects must have thought when imagining Brussels three decades from now. In a small space, a ton of information is available to you: maps, information sheets, videos and models. Various short films from the exhibition’s authors are set on different volumes, as if to make this experience even more disconcerting.

A central space offers us the raw data and maps concerning Brussels and its uppermost important hinterland. The three other spaces represent the various proposals and visions of each team of architects – one based in Brussels, one mostly Dutch and one based in Italy. One thing is clear: the opportunities and challenges of this city are enormous. From affordable housing, demographic growth and social division to public transport and sustainable development, the teams tackled every aspect.

The team comprised of Brussels-based firms has come up with the idea of a double transport network using the existing rail infrastructure to reconnect the city with its neglected corners, as well as a network of parks along the Molenbeek river to the northwest. The Italians, meanwhile, want to consider Brussels as a horizontal city. Where New York or Hong Kong are defined by their verticality, Brussels is in some ways defined by its flatness and its capability to “disappear” into the surrounding countryside.

The Dutch team shows examples of densification from the Erasmus campus to the southwest through the canal and towards the North and Schaarbeek train stations. “As I see all these holes in the urban fabric, my hands are twitching,” says one of the architects on this team. Most of the proposals are concerned with development nodes and corridors, such as the canal, railway lines and the topographical structure of Brussels based on its rivers and soft valleys. Surrounding by cities such as Rotterdam, Lille and the Ruhr area in Germany, we are reminded of the strategic position this city has.

Most importantly, this exhibition enables the viewer to see Brussels and its economical hinterland from an aerial perspective, sometimes we forget about a city’s influence beyond its administrative borders. Here we are boldly told that Brussels need to go beyond its boundaries and become a proper metropolis.

Brussels 2040 is an exhibition that will probably – and unfortunately – be visited mainly by professionals and students of the field. But the future of our capital is a matter that concerns us all.

Until 15 April | Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels | www.bozar.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Tomorrowland

This eighth edition of Flanders’ world-famous, award-winning outdoor dance music festival promises to be another rager – for those lucky enough to get their hands on tickets, that is. Some already confirmed names include (are you sitting down?) Swedish DJ Avicii, French house music god David Guetta, American electro-house musician Steve Aoki, the one and only acid house techno musician Carl Cox, Italian dance-punk music project The Bloody Beetroots, the DJ of all DJs Mr John Digweed, the ever-funky Fatboy Slim and so, so many more. Because of the enormous success of Tomorrowland, not far from Antwerp, organisers gave hands on tickets, that is. Some lucky enough to get their hands on tickets, that is. Some

27-29 July | Worldwide ticket sales start 7 April | Schommellei, Boom | www.tomorrowland.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Bierbeek (Flemish Brabant)

Blues&Up Festival: Annual blues festival featuring Roland Tahkounté (CAM/F), Kyla Brox Band (UK) and Kirk Fletcher Band (USA)

APR 7 18.30-1.00 at CC de Borre, Speelpleinstraat 10 | www.bierbeekbluesup.be

Ghent

REWIND-easter-FEST: New Wave Classix festival featuring eight bands each day and after-parties

APR 6-7 16.30-5.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23 | www.new-wave-classix.be

SPRING BLOOMS

Floralia Brussels

If you like tulips, there’s no need to go all the way to our neighbours in the north. For the next four weeks, the 14-hectare park around the Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden, just outside of Brussels, is bursting with the colour of more than 400 varieties. And there’s also narcissi, daffodils, hyacinth and numerous rare flowers, spread out like a carpet under the park’s ancient trees. This annual international flower exhibition makes for a lovely day out, or in. The park’s greenhouses are equally impressive, boasting 1,000 square metres of blooming garden beds and flower arrangements that change every Friday way to our neighbours in the north. For the next four weeks, the 14-hectare park around the Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden, just outside of Brussels, is bursting with the colour of more than 400 varieties. And there’s also narcissi, daffodils, hyacinth and numerous rare flowers, spread out like a carpet under the park’s ancient trees. This annual international flower exhibition makes for a lovely day out, or in. The park’s greenhouses are equally impressive, boasting 1,000 square metres of blooming garden beds and flower arrangements that change every Friday when a renowned artist from the Netherlands and his team will arrange bouquets according to the theme of the week.

6 April to 6 May | Groot-Bijgaarden Castle | www.floralia-brussels.be

MORE BLOOMS THIS WEEK

Eeklo (East Flanders)

Om de tuin g elied: Walk through the blossoming plants of Het Leen Arboretum, featuring camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and more

APR 8 14.00-16.00 at Provinciaal Domein Het Leen, Gentsesteenweg 80 | www.eeklo-vlaanderen.be

Hasselt

Hanami Festival: Bring along a picnic and enjoy the bright pink blossoms of the cherry trees in Europe’s largest Japanese Garden

APR 8 14.00-18.00 at Gouverneur Vervlighensingel 23 | www.tijdpasoutdat.be

Meise

Magnolia Walk: Guided educational tour (in Dutch or French) through the National Botanic Garden’s impressive collection of magnolias

Until APR 30 at Nuwenelaan 38 | www.br.fgov.be
Kris Dewitte: Open Asia
Shooting movie stars and film sets is in Kris Dewitte's blood. For the past 25 years, the Flemish photographer has captured enough portraits of the beau monde of the film world to fill a dozen books. His most recent travels brought him to Asia where he was involved in set photography and responsible for a series of stunning shots of the actors and actresses he encountered there. These colourful works are on display now in Turnhout, in honour of the city's upcoming film festival Open Doek, celebrating its 20th year.

Until 30 September | Kunstforum Würth, Turnhout | www.wurth.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp
Chantal Akerman: Too Far, Too Close: The very first large-scale retrospective of the Brussels-born filmmaker and feminist icon's work
Until JUN 10 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32
www.muhka.be

Knokke-Heist
Photo Festival: Annual international photography festival with indoor and outdoor exhibitions featuring the work of famed photographers from across the world. This year's theme is Wonderland and includes work by Ruud Van Empel of the Netherlands and American Michael Light
Until JUN 30 across Knokke-Heist
www.totefestival.be

Meise
101 Pocket-Sized Trees: To celebrate its 35th anniversary, the Flemish Bonsai Organisation exhibits more than 100 of its most beautiful miniature trees. Bonsai specialist Marc Noelanders will teach a master class and there are also permanent demonstrations for beginners
APR 6-15 at National Botanic Garden, Nieuwelaan 38
www.plantentuinmeise.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Libertine Supersport
13 April
Mirano, Brussels

From October 2009 until January 2012, Libertine Supersport was the hippest venue for electronic music in Brussels. It was even named the best club in Europe by the French Trax Magazine. Located at K-Nal, next to the canal in the city centre, it united a couple of hundred party people on Saturday nights.

At the start of 2012, the organisers unexpectedly cancelled all upcoming events, and nobody could tell when or if the club would ever re-open. Last month, Libertine sent out a bunch of mysterious e-mails with the promising message: "Libertine Supersport ... Soon!" How soon, you want to know? Well, mark your agenda for Friday, the 13th(!) of April, for the new and improved Libertine Supersport club night. The event no longer takes place at K-Nal, but at nightclub Mirano. The choice for this location was rather obvious, as Mirano used to host the Dirty Dancing party nights, the predecessor of ... Libertine Supersport. The comeback event on the 13th gathers a few of the Libertine Supersport regular DJs behind the decks: Rick Shiver (pictured), A.N.D.Y, Christoph Lefrog, Mickey and Attari. As usual, the line-up features some international DJs as well. Gear up for poppy electro by Punks Jump Up (UK), cosmic electro by Todd Terje (Norway) and more electro beats by Dixon (Germany). The doors open at 23.00. You'll pay €7 if you arrive before midnight, €12 if after. Another good reason to be on time: A bottle of Lanson champagne costs "only" €50 before 1.00. Price, perhaps, but the renewed Libertine Supersport parties will only be held once month (on the third Friday), whereas before they were every week, so you can perhaps splurge. Let's hope Friday the 13th will bring good luck to Libertine Supersport's second life.

www.libertinesupersport.be
**BITE**

Farine's Food ★★★

Sometimes, though very rarely, you step inside a place and feel right at home. This is Farine's for you: one long wooden table, a grandm generously open kitchen and plenty of retro knick-knacks. American expat Justine Vanhilt opened this haven for “coffee, croissants and comfort food” in Antwerp. Only two years ago, but the atmosphere is remarkably worn-in.

And there’s a definite tip of the hat to her home country on the menu, which includes both breakfast foods and lunch classics like the BLT (bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich) and traditional American cheeseburger.

My friend’s in the mood for an early lunch, I for a late breakfast. So she orders a tuna melt, and I opt for the sunny-side up special. While we’re waiting, we sip two double-shot lattes that come with little chocolate brownies.

The tuna melt is two ultra-thick slices of brown organic bread, lightly grilled and covered in a smooth, sweet-sour mixture of tuna, mayo, capers and spring onions with melted cheddar cheese on top. Next to this is a pile of fresh rocket salad, grated carrots and creamy vinaigrette.

I get a basket filled with a crispy croissant and two types of organic bread, perfect for soaking up the golden runny yolks of the two eggs. These come with crispy bacon strips and a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice, plus another coffee (or tea). Our bill for two is €25. As it gets closer to noon, the room starts filling up with lunching colleagues, and we are impressed by the communal feel of the long table.

As it turns out, Farine’s makes good use of this table during its weekly salons. A salon, according to Wikipedia, is “a gathering of people under the roof of an inspiring host, held partly to amuse one another and partly to refine taste and increase their knowledge of the participants through conversation.”

The central idea of Farine’s salon is to combine conversation and good food. It begins at 18.30 with a simple drink (wine, beer, cola). At 19.00, people line up for the buffet – two choices, one always vegetarian – and continue serving themselves until the food is gone. At 20.00, everyone orders coffee or tea before switching spots at the table and continuing the conversation.

The topic of the salon changes every week, but it is consistently lively, engaging and unpredictable evening, as the group consists of (up to 16) expats and locals who are meeting one another for the first time. The cost is €22 per person.

The next salon in English is on 17 April, and the theme will be “Attraction: defining beauty in 2012 and beyond.” Reserve your spot in advance with an email to salon@farinesfood.com.

Farine’s is open every Tuesday, with salons Tuesdays (€22, in English). They’re at 18.00 but you can start at any time. Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

**TALKING SPORTS**

Red Panthers claw their way to Olympics

Better late than never: Last month, the Belgian women’s field hockey team reached their first-ever Olympic Games when they thrashed Ireland 4-1 in a qualifier play-off in Roosdaal.

Three goals in quick succession from Sofie Gierts and another from Erica Cendrowicz clinched the victory for the Red Panthers, ensuring a trip to London this summer. The win, before a home crowd of 3,000, followed four other play-off games against Spain, France, Russia and the Netherlands before losing 4-2 in the semi-finals against Germany.

Three times World Cup winners Germany are part of the semi-finals. The victory marks a stunning turnaround for Belgian hockey. Last summer, the men’s team reached the semi-finals of the European hockey championships in Germany: The Red Lions, who had never before reached the final of any major championship, were at one point 2-1 up against the three-time World Cup-winning Netherlands before losing 4-2. The semi-final placing also meant the men qualified automatically for the Olympics.

That means that Belgium, once non-contenders for hockey, can now look forward to cheering for all their red cats in the biggest sports show of the year. And for the Red Panthers, there is more to come next year when they will be hosting the women’s European Championships.

**The last word...**

Money matters

“Not one of Bekaert’s workers could save up De Graeve’s bonus in a whole lifetime,” says a worker at steel-works manufacturer Bekaert who has threatened to strike after a 32% increase in the bonus paid to CEO Bert De Graeve, after the announcement of more than 600 redundancies.

Old hands

“Herman Van Rompuy and I are equally humble, but he hides it better than I do,” says Henry Van Bael of Zwijndrecht.

Bear necessities

“We’re very happy the bears have found such a good home.” Workers at the nature rescue centre in Opklabbeek, Limburg province, last week off sent three malnourished circus bears to a new home in Scotland.

Never too late

“Too bad that my Ivonne can’t be here for this. I would have wanted her to see it. She would have been proud of me.”

**NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY**

Cover story

If you haven’t planned your summer holiday yet, you might consider the Flemish coast. Been there, done that, you say? Not if you haven’t seen Breda 04, the outstanding triennial of European artists at surprising outdoor locations along the sea, the ports and the city streets

Living

Bruno Pieters is about to launch a new fashion label that will tell you exactly how much the clothes cost to manufacture. For the first time, you’ll be able to compare what they spend with what you spend. We talk to the Flemish designer about the controversial new initiative

Arts

Nineteenth-century author Hendrik Conscience is beloved among the Flemish and not just because he penned The Lion of Flanders, a novel set against the backdrop of the great Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302. This year is the 100th anniversary of his birth, and we’ll tell you what Antwerp – the city in which he was born – has in mind for the occasion.