Lock up your data

Recent online privacy breaches should put data security at the top of Flanders’ digital agenda

Linda A Thompson

From addresses and birthdays to relationships and credit card details, huge parts of all our lives are now stored online, and we trust agencies and corporations to keep them safe. But a series of recent data leaks should have us questioning just how safe the brave new digital world really is and how security can be improved.

Around mid-December, news reports surfaced that the personal information of hundreds of solar panel owners in Flanders had been briefly accessible to anyone with a login and password to the website of the Flemish energy regulator, VREG.

Just before Christmas, an online data leak at the railway operator NMBS Europe exposed the names, addresses and birthdates of 700,000 international customers.

Two weeks later, the job-search website Jobat involuntarily dumped the salary details of 4,000 users online.

These were just the latest in a string of data leaks that have raised tricky questions about consumer rights, privacy and accountability in a brave new digital world that is moving increasingly quickly.

The data breaches have played an important role in alerting businesses, government agencies and consumers in Flanders to
Five people were killed when a Polish tour bus carrying a group of Russian school students and staff ran off the E34 motorway at Ranst, Antwerp province, last weekend. The coach rolled 15 meters down an embankment. Fifteen more people were injured. Six of those injured, including three students, remained in hospital in the province as Flanders Today went to press. Several suitcases containing the four adults – were sent home to Volgograd, while other children were able to talk to their parents via a video link.

The median wealth of Belgian families, at €206,200, is more than four times greater than the median for Germany, according to a study by the European Central Bank. The reason is that the figure includes property, which is far more prevalent in Belgium than in Germany, which has a higher proportion of renters. The Belgian median is almost twice as high as the figure for the entire eurozone.

Flemish novelist Tom Lanoye has been nominated for the Jean Monnet Prize for European literature, which rewards a European author published or translated in the previous two years. For his 1991 novel Kartoonen dossen (Cardboard Boxes). Other nominees for the prize include British author Julian Barnes and the Lebanese-French author Amin Maalouf. The winner will be announced in October.

Rail authority NMBS last year took in €5.18 million in fines, almost double the total for the year before thanks to the increased use of balliffs. "Before, people just laughed at us," said spokesperson Bart Crols. "Now they pay their fines quietly. They seem to be afraid of a possible summons." 

Bart Crols. “But now they almost all pay their fines quietly. They seem to be afraid of a possible summons.” 

The pictures you see here is of the city of Antwerp. It was tweeted last week by Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield from the International Space Station (ISS), with the message: “Antwerp, Belgium with the Scheldt river like lightning sparking up the city”. Commander Hadfield is a space veteran, with two space shuttle missions under his belt, and is now the commander of the ISS – the first time his country has been at the helm of the orbiting station.

But it’s as an inveterate snapper that he’s attracted the attention of the world. On the same day as he posted the photo of Antwerp by Night, he also sent back to earth photos of Helsinki and Tallinn; the mouth of the Mediterranean; the “pillowy farms ... tidily tided in each section” ... “and then providing individual counselling. The basic principle: ‘Self-analysis is the key to helping referees become more resilient’.

Of course, other top performers are lining up for his advice, and he brings a somewhat New Agyr, wellness approach to his work. “I coach you in creating an effective combination of your private and professional life,” he writes on the web page of the Ticca counselling consultancy. He’s also national director for the human resources group Profiles International. But it was as psychologist to the Olympic team that he first came to the public’s attention last year, including when he had to offer his services to the selectors of the 4x400m relay, who had the unenviable task of choosing two runners out of a field of seven (the Boele brothers were selected). The process of forming a team in a sport – athletics – which is made up of loners was “10 times more bother than sitting on the bench at a football match,” Brouwers admitted at the time. Brouwers’ award ceremony will take place on 23 April, when he will give a lecture (in Dutch).

The owner of Le Bleu bar in Ghent’s student district has been sentenced to 18 months in prison and fined €60,000 for repeated breaches of the rules on noise levels. The court fined the man’s company another €60,000. Inspectors have repeatedly measured noise levels of up to 94 decibels: the legal limit is 90. Because of the way the decibel scale is calculated, an increase of 4dB is heard as more than twice as loud. The owner plans to appeal the sentence.

An information campaign extolling the virtues of sugar by the Flemish professional association of food scientists and dieticians VBVD was paid for by Coca-Cola, the magazine Eso revealed. According to VBVD chair Dirk Lemaître, the campaign simply pointed out that sugar can form part of a normal diet, “Is it really necessary to draw attention to sugar when you know that 50% of adults are overweight and there are 200,000 obese children?” commented Patrick Mullie, a food scientist at the Free University of Brussels (VUB).

Flemish media minister Ingrid Lienert has given regional radio stations 30 days to bid for one station Profiles International. He’s also national director for the human resources group Profiles International. But it was as psychologist to the Olympic team that he first came to the public’s attention last year, including when he had to offer his services to the selectors of the 4x400m relay, who had the unenviable task of choosing two runners out of a field of seven (the Boele brothers were selected). The process of forming a team in a sport – athletics – which is made up of loners was “10 times more bother than sitting on the bench at a football match,” Brouwers admitted at the time. Brouwers’ award ceremony will take place on 23 April, when he will give a lecture (in Dutch).

The meta...
the importance of keeping personal information safe online. In a recent blog post, Ulrich Seldeslachts, co-founder of Storify, a social media storytelling platform that Ti...
**Action sought on jihad fighters**

Muslim youth from Flanders and Brussels are feeling the pressure to go and fight in Syria

Alan Hope

Two parents from Flanders are in Syria, hoping they can find and convince their sons, who have gone to fight on the side of rebels, to come home. Meanwhile, politicians have come up with a possible selection of proposals for what to do about the problem of growing numbers of youths being recruited to travel to foreign war zones to take part in jihad.

Last week, Dimitri Bontinck from Antwerp was looking for his 16-year-old son, Jejenn, while another father from Vilvoorde was reported to have departed on the same mission.

As Flanders Today went to press, neither had made contact with his son. Though there have been several reports from around Flanders and Brussels, no one knows for sure how many young men have gone to take part in the Syrian rebellion, often convinced by radical Islamist groups that it is their duty. There have been numerous press reports from Syria that the rebels don’t actually welcome foreign volunteers, who can be more of a hindrance than a help.

The mayors of Antwerp, Mechelen and Vilvoorde, where the growth of radical Islamist youths is particularly acute, held a summit to consider a response to the problem. Any action would only be taken prior to departure or following return: The foreign ministry has made it clear it is unable to intervene on the ground in Syria unless the volunteers request it. Many parents lay the blame on groups like Sharia4Belgium; its leader Fouad Belkacem made headlines at the end of last year after being jailed for hate speech. According to Mimoun Aquilounch, chairman of the Maqir Annasr mosque in Vilvoorde, the 20 or so youths who have left the city to fight in Syria were known to be problem cases, and the community failed to act in time. “They were looking for some sense in their lives, some direction,” he said. “But they found it in Shariah/Belgium, not with us.”

Politicians have suggested a wide variety of measures that might be taken to prevent or respond to the growth of militant groups.

- **Bart De Wever, mayor of Antwerp**: Use the system of municipal administrative fines to discourage the growth of radical groups.
- **Hans Bonte, mayor of Vilvoorde**: Confiscate the passports of members of radical groups.
- **Joëlle Milquet, federal minister of the interior**: Forbid Belgian citizens by law from going to Syria to fight.
- **Serge Muylts, Antwerp police chief**: Pay special attention to young men who suddenly decide to grow a beard.
- **Nordine Touniil, Antwerp imam**: Look up would-be recruits in detention centres.

**Bullying huge problem, says Unicef**

Belgium scores a low 21st in a ranking of 28 countries for fighting and bullying at school, a UN report revealed last week. The study by the UN children’s agency Unicef looked at 28 countries of the OECD and ranked them worst to worst for children’s well-being on a variety of criteria. Belgium was worse for bullying than all but six countries, including Portugal, Estonia and Lithuania.

For fighting it did slightly better. Ahead of seven countries, including Slovenia, Romania and Spain.

The so-called Innocenti Report Card measures children’s well-being on issues including health, housing, safety, education and socio-economic circumstances.

Belgium’s overall ranking was ninth, with excellent results for education, from pre-school places to higher education opportunities. According to the chair of the Flemish anti-bullying network Kies kleur tegen pesten (Take Sides Against Bullying), the report is not a revelation. “Research has previously shown that bullying is a major problem in this country,” said spokesperson Gie Deboute. “Other countries have been more successful in getting a handle on the problem.” Governments in Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland “invest in a structural approach, which is what we are lacking. That is a shame because we know that bullying figures correlate with the high youth suicide figures in this country.”

**Ghent mayor calls for ban on begging**

Ghent mayor Daniel Termondt has called on the federal government to take action and introduce laws against begging. Ghent city council has passed a law to outlaw certain types of begging, but it is difficult to enforce, he said.

“Organised gangs use the weak and vulnerable to make money,” Termondt explained. “And it is impossible to catch them. They brief the beggars to say they have no papers and no address if they’re caught.” This allows those asking for money, he explained, to escape the fines his council has enacted.

Begging is not illegal in Belgium, according to federal law, which makes it impossible for police to make an arrest. Termondt called on interior minister Joëlle Milquet to take action. “As long as begging is legal, the problem will not go away,” he said.

Ghent’s local rules prohibits blocking the pavement, using animals, standing in the roadway at crossroads and using any aggressive behaviour. Thirty-nine fines were handed out in 2011. Last year, that went up to 121. Ghent’s local law faces another hurdle: It has been brought to the Council of State by the Human Rights League, which is asking for it to be struck down as illegal.

**THE WEEK IN FIGURES**

- **€130,000** spent over the last four years by the Brussels public transport authority MIVB to repair damage by vandals to artworks in the metro

- **€3.8 million** in Belgian francs turned to the National Bank in 2012. At the end of that year, the equivalent of €1.58 million was still in circulation

- **€3.8 million** seized by police and customs agents at Brussels Airport in the past six months, a record amount. One man was found with a suitcase containing €1.272,000

- **8%** increase in house prices in Zeenens-Vlaanderen in the Dutch province of Zeeland, as a result of Flemings moving across the border to live there

- **40,000** square metres of office space leased by the European Parliament in De Meeûs Square, in what is sure to be the largest property transaction in the capital this year
Projects across Flanders aim to control flooding while creating new habitat for wildlife

Toon Lambrechts

“Developing nature” is something of a contradiction: Common sense says that “nature” signifies the absence of any human intervention. But in a densely populated area such as Flanders, this concept of nature is losing its meaning. Most nature reserves are tightly managed, and sometimes the choice is made to develop new ones. The results are indeed often remarkable.

Last week, a major construction project began in Kruibeke, East Flanders. The intention, however, is not to construct new roads or buildings, but new nature: reed fields, small islands and spawning grounds for fish. The works are part of the Flemish government’s Sigma plan, which aims to create space for new bodies of water along the river Scheldt and its tributaries. The plan will not only aid nature, it will protect against flooding.

Kruibeke is not the only place in Flanders where nature is being actively developed. Since the 1990s, many projects to restore natural landscapes have been carried out, sometimes in unexpected places. One is the Maas River Valley, a river restoration project, which we covered in last week’s issue. Another is in the industrial area of the port of Antwerp, where wetlands have been created as a habitat for grassland birds. Doing nothing seems the most obvious option if you want to create new nature: just wait and see what happens. But in practice, it requires a skilful approach. If the aim is to give a certain type of nature the chance to develop, choices have to be made. A lot depends on factors such as the condition of the soil and the water, for example. Similar areas elsewhere are taken into consideration, too, as is data about the plants and animals already present in the surrounding area.

Home and abroad

“Throughout the years, we have developed a consistent body of knowledge on new nature,” says Geert De Blust, a biologist working at the Institute for Nature and Forest Research (Inbo), which supplies the scientific basis for Flanders’ nature and conservation policy. “What happens here in Flanders is based both on our own research and experiences from abroad. For example, while planning the recent project with the river Maas, we had a close look at experiences in France with the river Allier.”

But Flanders is not France, and the pressure on the available land is particularly high here. Nature development requires space, and that space is becoming increasingly limited. “For example, to develop a forest, you need at least 50 hectares. That’s the only way to get a full-blown forest ecosystem,” explains De Blust. “Other habitats such as species-rich grasslands can be created in smaller areas, provided that there is not too much interference from outside. Drainage and fertilising are quite often a problem. In addition, you need a lot of patience: A forest doesn’t grow overnigh.”

On the contrary, De Blust: “It requires at least 150 years.” In the past, Flanders hasn’t made nature development in spatial planning a priority, and the future use of the available space is now a pressing issue. Nature development is a difficult political and economic issue. Everyone would like to live in a green environment, but that requires space, which is becoming increasingly scarce.

“New nature requires land, and that is often agricultural land,” says Noah Janssen of conservation organisation Natuurpunt. “But it is also true that quite a few soils are not suitable for modern agriculture. Creek valleys, for example, are too wet for farming, which relies on heavy machinery. The conversion of agricultural land to nature always leads to debate, and we try to reach a consensus. But that doesn’t always work.”

Compensation

Nature development often occurs as compensation for nature lost elsewhere. That is an EU obligation, explains Janssen. “We would all like to see Brazilian rainforest conserved. But in Brazil, they also think that the European lynx is a beautiful animal. That’s why Europe has to take responsibility for its own nature. In practice, this means Flanders is obliged to preserve a certain number of natural habitats. So if these ecosystems are affected, compensation is required.”

That sounds good in theory, but with the possibility to create new nature, isn’t there the risk that policymakers will be less careful with existing nature? De Blust doesn’t think so. “Nature development does not guarantee that the specific type of nature we would like to see will effectively evolve. Compensation is really a last option that takes a lot of time and resources.”

Janssen is less convinced. “We see sometimes that nature development projects are claimed as compensation when availability this wasn’t the purpose of the project. It is important to keep in mind that, especially, some ecosystems like old-growth forests or peat moors, is simply irreplaceable.”

Natural healing

But how natural is new nature? That question is irrelevant, according to De Blust. “In Flanders, there is no single piece of land that is not influenced by man. Creating new nature can be done by natural means, but a site almost always has to be prepared before nature can take its course. Still, some external influence can never be completely eliminated.”

And of course, there are degrees of human interference in the management of nature. Large herbivores such as sheep and cattle are sometimes used to secure variation in the ecosystem, so that these systems as a whole comes as close as possible to its natural state. Mowing prevents certain species becoming dominant, and this is often necessary to maintain a genuine natural ecosystem but not a genuine natural ecosystem but not a genuine natural ecosystem, such as the Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands. In this vast area created during the land claim on the Zuiderzee inlet in the North Sea, a complete ecosystem has been developed and is doing without any human intervention whatsoever.

“That wouldn’t happen in Flanders,” according to De Blust. “There is simply no space and no public support, just look at the fuss about foxes and wild boars and the anxiety caused by the possible return of the wolf. Nature cannot be neatly divided into isolated areas and will always cause border conflicts. Flanders is simply too densely populated for true wilderness.”
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A small core of 475 fast-growing businesses is driving private-sector employment in Flanders. Flanders has 13,895 private companies, and the study identified initiatives aimed at the “short-chain”, which encourages the consumption of local and seasonal produce. About 38% of the financing goes straight to the farmer, with 24% going to market development and 25% to research facilities, practice centres and demonstration projects. “The Strategic plan we signed in 2008 with Boerebond, the ABS and Bioforum is now bearing fruit,” said Peeters. “The second Plan was signed at the start of this year, with the food and retail industries. This promises to raise the Flemish organic sector to the next level.”

Marc Bontemps is the spokesperson for New B, a Brussels-based co-operative of more than 36,000 members that intends to set up a new bank in Belgium.

New B has been widely reported as a “new bank”. But the bank is still to be created. We’re a co-operative with the intention of starting a new bank. We reversed the tradition of marketing laws, which say you first create a product and then try to find clients. We first found clients – in this case members – and with these members we are going to create a bank.

What is the difference between a co-operative bank and any other bank?
In a co-operative bank, everybody has a say: we have a system of one member/one vote. You can’t say that that is the case in the whole of the rest of the banking sector. Right now, we’re limiting it to one share per person because we’re not at the stage of collecting capital. We’re at the stage of collecting a long list of citizens who would like to take part in this movement.

You’ve already got more people than you were expecting. Why do you think the response has been so huge?
I think there are fundamentally three reasons. First, we managed to get the backing of 61 organisations representing Belgian society: Dutch and French speaking, different colours of the rainbow and different social sectors, like NGOs and small businesses. This is rather unique. I don’t remember any organisation in the last 10 years that had such a broad backing. Such broad support increased our level of credibility.
Secondly, people are fed up with all the negative information they get on the financial and banking sector, and here we come with a positive answer, instead of complaining. The third reason is something I’ve been experiencing since we started out on the road show, which is that people actually get emotional about this subject. We really touched some deep strings in the mindset and the feelings of people. We knew there were questions and discontent [with the banking sector], but we never realised it went quite so deep.

New B holds free information evenings in Brussels and across Flanders
Trains

The national railway network is easy to use, cheap and efficient. Trains are run by SNCB/NMBS and offer a multitude of discounted passes and season tickets. There are passes that allow those who frequently use the train system to pay less per journey and students can also get a school pass. For weekend travel, SNCB/NMBS offers up to 50% off the price.

Buslines

Within most cities, taxis, trams, and buses are convenient options. Most small towns and villages have bus networks. Outside Brussels, buses are operated by TEC (Wallonia) and De Lijn (Flanders).

Taxis

Taxis operate in all the main cities and towns. The tip is included in the meter price, but most people round up the fare to the nearest euro. In Brussels, taxis must have a taximeter linked to a printer which provides passengers with a receipt at the end of the journey. Unlicensed taxi drivers charge exorbitant rates and may not be safe.

Car-pooling

Companies such as Taxistop provide car-pooling information and car-sharing arrangements. Rates are fixed according to the distance. Cambio is a car-sharing system for those who occasionally need access to a car but don’t want to buy one. In addition to monthly subscription fees, Cambio charges for the time used and the distance driven.

Welcome to Belgium

Newcomer gives you all the info you need to start a new life in Belgium

We’ll help you find the ideal home, the right school and a place to learn one of the local languages. We also talk you through getting married — or divorced — and finding a crèche, bank or health insurance policy. Not forgetting, of course, our guide to clubs, books and bars.

Get the latest Newcomer at newsstands and in our webshop www.thebulletin.be/shop
Biodiversity magnified
High-tech radar and unmanned planes will investigate and map Flanders’ nature as part of Lifewatch project

Senne Starckx

Contrary to what you might think, satellites can’t see every detail on the ground. Services like Google Earth aren’t very useful when it comes to recognizing certain types of vegetation (types of trees and low cover, for example), nor can they snap every moving object in the air, like birds crossing Flemish territory as they migrate north. But to protect and maintain – and maybe even restore – biodiversity in Flanders, these sources have to be monitored in detail, and in real time. In a nutshell: Flanders needs a huge magnifying glass that constantly monitors biodiversity, objectively and without too much human interference.

The Flemish Institute for Nature and Forest Research (Inbo) and the Flemish Institute of the Sea (Vliz), both agencies of the Flemish government, are putting the finishing touches to such a high-tech monitoring system. Over the next five years, several automatic and semi-automatic detection systems will be rolled out, each monitoring a different aspect of biodiversity.

The initiative is part of a pan-European project called Lifewatch, part of the European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures (Esfri). “It’s the first time an Esfri grant has been allocated to a project with a multi-country infrastructure,” says Jurgen Tack, administrator-general of Inbo. “The history of Lifewatch goes back to 2002, when we urged the European Commission to develop a pan-European initiative to map and protect the biodiversity on the continent.”

Saving valuable time
At the core of Lifewatch is automatic and semi-automatic monitoring, “With this approach, we will have more control over everything,” explains Tack. “Currently the ecological value of every parcel of land in Flanders is calculated by a team of 25 civil servants, who visit and check the parcels in person. Because it’s so time-consuming, some valuations are already more than 12 years old.”

Manual and unmanned aircraft will make their work easier, by flying over Flemish territory and scanning the land. Tack: “These planes look like drones, except they are armed with a camera and a detection system that automatically recognises different types of vegetation, trees and individual plants. We believe these planes can make a reliable assessment of the biodiversity of a terrain.” Another high-tech detection system that is part of Lifewatch is an automatic bird radar. The system will be used to map migration routes in Flanders – for example of ducks and geese flying overhead. This information is important ecologically and economically.

“Our radar will investigate how we can maintain bird habitat while allowing the construction of windmills”

Investors in wind energy like to put their windmills in straight trajectories, preferably along canals, highways and railway lines,” explains Tack. “But birds also use these landmarks to direct themselves south or north. Currently these migration routes are – literally – spotted and tracked by volunteers, who are concerned that the construction of windmills on these routes will interfere with the birds’ natural migration.”

“That creates tensions with the constructors of windmills because open space in Flanders is scarce,” continues Tack. “With the bird radar, we will be able to tell exactly where birds are flying so that we can protect them while optimising opportunities for windmill construction.”

The bird radar was developed by the Dutch company Robin Radar Systems as a tool to map migration precisely. “Thanks to these developments, we will be able to spot every bird within a distance of 10 kilometres,” says Tack. “We will also be able to tell how high and how fast the birds fly.”

But the most striking feature of the radar is its ability to recognise individual species, without any help from a bird watcher. “Our radar measures the frequency, the Doppler of the wing beats, which is unique for every species.”

Global reputation
During Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters’ recent economic mission to Canada, a team from Inbo demonstrated the possibilities of the bird radar to their Canadian colleagues. It was a success: The Canadians are going to use Flemish know-how to help with the construction of 700 windmills near Vancouver. After its mission in Canada, the radar will return to Flanders.

“There are a lot of applications for windmills in, for example, the harbour area,” says Tack. “But, of course, the area is also very rich in bird life, and large areas are thus currently unavailable for windmills. Our radar will investigate how we can reduce these areas, without affecting bird habitat or migration routes.”

The Lifewatch project will gather as much information as possible about biodiversity in Flanders. But that’s not the final goal. Based on historical and future data, researchers will be able to make accurate prediction models about biodiversity in Flanders. These predictions can influence – just like daily weather reports do – many economic activities: transport, the planning of infrastructure, fishery, tourism, agriculture and more.

One particular prediction model being developed at Vliz is a “seabird radar” – similar to the rainfall radar that tells people when to take their umbrella. Despite what the name might suggest, this project has nothing to do with the bird radar above. Instead, researchers from Vliz will monitor the presence of plankton in the North Sea using sensors attached to several buoys along the Flemish coast. Based on that information, they will be able to predict when (and exactly where) you will find seabirds at the coast.

Forty residents of the Grevenkasteel care home in Sint-Amands, Antwerp province, have started the test case of Hit4-Life 65+. High-tech company BioRICS from Leuven and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) are motivating elderly people to move more. For more than three months, the seniors will carry a meter and a smartphone that registers their pulse and movement patterns. Researchers will analyse the data and send a weekly report to their physical therapists. The results, expected in September, should lead to solutions that reduce health-care costs and improve the self-reliance of the elderly.

Political scientist Didier Caluwaaerts of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) received the Young Researcher Scholarship from the Fullbright Commission for Educational Exchange between the US and Belgium. Caluwaaerts was one of the driving forces behind the popular democracy movement G1000. He will spend a year at Harvard University, investigating the role of civilian initiatives in democratic innovation.

Flemish minister Ingrid Linnen is calling on universities to create an action plan to improve gender balance in academic staffing. Figures show that one in five professors at Flemish universities is a woman. University rectors will have to present their strategy to the government at the beginning of next year. Linnen also wants to close the gender pay gap, as well as improve opportunities for windmill construction.

Ghent University is the first in Flanders to establish a campus abroad. In Inchon, South Korea, just west of Seoul, students can earn an engineering diploma from UGent starting in March of next year. UGent was chosen because of its international reputation in the studies of biotechnology, environmental chemistry and food safety. About 20 students are expected in the first year, but the faculty could house up to 1,000 students in the future.

A PhD student at Ghent University, Ko Catton, has examined the beneficial quality of hops in beer as protection against cancer and infections, focusing on the absorption, distribution and metabolism characteristics of the ingredient. Experiments on rabbits showed that most hop acids are quickly and efficiently absorbed by the stomach, intestines and improved the health of the animals.

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© Robin Radar systems
Ostend has a rich history as a port, a strong British connection as the residence of the royal family: king and queen, prince Leopold (later to become Leopold II), Prince Philippe (whose son became Albert I) and Princess Louise-Marie. Serruys’ widow drew up a rental lease (Serruys died that year) letting the house to the royals for 3,000 francs a year. The lease was later extended on the three-six-nine-year pattern familiar to any tenant in Belgium.

The house in Langestraat – joined with properties in Kapucijnestraat and Louisastraat – became the summer residence of the royal family: king and queen, prince Leopold and his queen consort, Louise-Marie. Serruys’ widow drew up a rental lease (Serruys died that year) letting the house to the royals for 3,000 francs a year. The lease was later extended on the three-six-nine-year pattern familiar to any tenant in Belgium.

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At home in the rest of the world

Ostend’s Mu.Zee hosts an exhibition of 30 years in the life of Antwerp artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui

Lisa Bradshaw

Being a person who feels most comfortable with linear narratives, I felt a little lost in the Philip Aguirre y Otegui exhibition in Ostend’s Mu.Zee museum. At least at first. But once you let go of wanting to see a story built from the 1980s to today, you realise how delightful each work is in its own right, regardless of when or why the Antwerp artist created it.

That was the goal of Aguirre, who curated the show himself. “We decided not to make it a historical, retrospective kind of show because I thought I was too young for that,” the 52-year-old tells me from his home in the Roegherdout district of Antwerp. “Instead of chronological or thematic, it’s more like a poetic landscape. Every visitor can make their own story from it.”

That concept translates extremely well in the connecting spaces in which the exhibition, which lasts until 20 May and features 30 years of Aguirre’s work, is staged. “My work is such that everybody can get something from it,” he says. “There is a story, or multiple stories, behind each piece – anecdotal or historical or political – but in the end, it’s the work itself that has to speak to the visitor. I still believe in visual art as a language. This is my own language, and you don’t have to read a book to understand it.”

Beauty in the everyday

Aguirre’s work is heavily influenced by both utilitarian tools and the demands of everyday physical labour. The smaller-scale sculptures are sometimes simple forms – pots, cylinders or rectangles – but often are more recognisable, like chimneys or water pumps. Some of the most intriguing are those that look like some sort of tool, but you’re not exactly sure for what it might be used.

“A painter works with colour, a sculptor works with forms,” says Aguirre. “I find a lot of inspiration in utilitarian forms. They often have the perfect form – because of course they are tools developed to be used for something. The best chair, for example, is one that looks like some kind of tool, but you’re not exactly sure for what it might be used.”

“I do,” answers Aguirre. Seeing the beauty in the industrial shapes and translating that to us is part of that personal language he’s talking about. In the Mu.Zee, though, I can see that the small sculptures that contain figures are the ones that cause visitors to linger. They more readily allow, as Aguirre hopes, viewers to create their own stories about the pieces, in which they can see themselves. “Woman” is beautiful in its simplicity: A female forms stands atop a bulbous mound, much larger than she. She seems at once alone in the world and powerfully beautiful because you have all these little objects, all those forms!”

Built in 1998, “Kiosque” is partially made from a Shell oil barrel, in reference to the oil company’s scandalous activities in Nigeria at the time. “Then the form of the kiosk is an African woman, with a bowl on her head, and wearing the colours you often see there. So it’s the conglomeration of a lot of ideas.”

Architecture as sculpture

Aguirre is now finishing up his biggest – literally – project ever. He has created an amphitheatre and lavoir in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Douala, the largest city in Cameroon. The well in the ground already existed, and hundreds of residents use it every day to wash their clothes. With the help of local engineers, who fitted pipes and filters, Aguirre has created an infrastructure for the lavoir, as well as a gathering place for meetings and performances. Programming is already started – for the first time, performance groups are coming to this part of the city. “It’s like a sculpture,” says Aguirre, “but a very large one.”

The entire project is funded by Belgians. “I asked some well-placed friends how we could build it, and they contacted all their connections. Within a month, we had the funding, all from Belgian companies and private donors – it was incredible.”

This year is the 25th anniversary of Aguirre’s first-ever solo show. So I ask the obvious question: How has his work changed over 25 years? “It’s maybe less emotionally naive that it was in the beginning,” he answers. “But what has stayed the same is that I really love to do it. I hope that people can see that when they see the object, that it’s made with love. And I use the word ‘love’; it’s not too strong a word.”
BOZAR FESTIVAL!

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If I could turn back time

Heritage Day in Flanders and Brussels invites visitors to stand still and look back

Alan Hope

If the heritage industry is about one thing, it’s about time: bringing the past to the attention of the future, stopping and – if possible – reversing the ravages of time. The theme of this Sunday’s annual Erfgoeddag (Heritage Day) is Stop de tijd!

Bruges and Flanders have teamed up for this year’s Erfgoeddag, or Heritage Day, so they are both on the same day. The slogan of this 13th edition is Stop de tijd, or Stop Time!, which is ‘more than ever an invitation,’ according to Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege.

‘It’s an invitation to step outside the daily race against time, stand still and enjoy the work of the many thousands of heritage workers, both volunteers and professionals, who fight that fight against time day after day,’ she says. ‘With their work, they try to prevent as best they can the results of the passage of time. Their efforts and your interest together form the guarantee that what is important and meaningful for us, our cultural heritage, can be passed on to the generations who come after us.’

The massive programme for Heritage Day can be downloaded by province online; we have a few suggestions of our own for how to spend the day, depending on where you live.

Antwerp province

The clock museum in Geel is the ideal place to reflect on the passage of time. The collection of watchmaker Victor Wyts contains more than 600 examples, some simple and some ornate, all of them in working order.

Antwerp’s Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) sent 15 volunteers out into the city to find traces of Morocan heritage. They left no stone unturned: From trade to religion to the arts, travel and education, the team had constructed an entire history by the time the assignment was completed. Objects and information they collected are on show at the museum, and they’ll be on hand to answer questions and provide more information to visitors.

Brussels

The dead may be thought to have stepped outside the flow of time, but of course bereavement is an ongoing matter for those left behind. That’s the subject of the exhibition Home of the Living at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, which continues after Heritage Day. It covers life and death, mourning and remembrance and a belief in the hereafter, and includes artistic, religious and philosophical expressions, some of which have never been shown before.

East Flanders

Ghent’s Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textiles (MIAT) contains many artefacts that are highly sensitive to the natural conditions that museums fear the most: dampness, mould, infestations. The museum is offering a demonstration and a guided tour to show how their expert conservators tackle the constant threat of some natural phenomena that could spell the end for part of their collection. Reservation required for the guided tour at publiekswerking.miat@gent.be.

Yet another local history association, the Heidebloemke group from Genk, is organising a guided walk around what’s left of the artists’ village in the city, which was started 100 years ago this year. Reserve via email at cultuur@genk.be.

West Flanders

The Bruges Art Route is a guided walk through the city highlighting a number of living or recent local artists – heritage in the making, you might say. Among them are Flori Van Acker, André De Meulemeester, Gilbert Swissberghé and Koen Scherpereel. There are three routes, and a map can be downloaded from the website for you to construct your own walk at any time.

Heritage Day events are free but some require a reservation. De Lijn (Flanders), MIVB (Brussels) and NMBS (national rail) all have special tickets available on the day.

21 APRIL

Across Brussels and Flanders
A matter of perspective

Knokke-Heist Photo Festival

Bjorn Gabriels

Like photography itself, the annual Knokke-Heist Photo Festival continues to tinker with its format, while keeping its nucleus intact. Last year, the 80-odd selected photos could be found along a tour in and around Knoke. That scattered group exhibition replaced the long-time tradition of sending visitors to a series of distinct but interlinked exhibitions across the coastal cities. This time around, there’s no need to hop on a bike or hike around the Knoke hinterland. All photos await your gaze at the Schaarpoord Cultural Centre. While only a year ago the free-for-all festival wanted to bring contemporary photography to the masses by taking it to the streets, suburbs and crowded public spaces, the current edition aims for that same goal by staying indoors and launching a new international prize for photography: the biannual Pixersee Awards. A matter of perspective, no doubt.

The festival hands out two prizes.

The Pixersee Award has been given to Italian photographer Guido Guidi, who displays a keen eye for contemporary landscapes. In Knoke, he presents a selection from his latest book, A New Map of Italy. Guidi, now 71, steers clear of the picture-perfect idylls of his native country, preferring to depict spaces of everyday life. His photos are modest in size, too, and avoid folkloristic stereotypes in favour of what he calls ‘simple, actual reality’. His work is in tune with the current crisis in Italy, while framing the photos he took during the Tunisian revolution (pictured) as works of art, he just tacks them to the wall as witnesses to an often-grotesque reality.

All the other photographers use the exhibition setting to display imaginative interactions with the world around them or create installations on site, which range from playful gimmick to artistic-historical research. Dutch photographer Atouk Kruithof encourages visitors to take a mirror and look at the photos she has attached to the ceiling, Clave Strand of the UK explores the history of the uses of photography, using found photographs in her interactive installations and photomontages. In dark shadows and brown planes, German artist Andrea Geyer explores the relationship between photos, archive documents and historical objects that refer to the 1919 Spartacus revolution in Germany. Compatriot Annette Kelm, on the other hand, has by far the most colourful works in this Emerging Artist section.

French photographer Noémie Goudal offers monumental pictures, often with trompe-l’oeil effects, whereas his project Vladimirovsk undertakes a personal and poetic journey, named after a place Cornul doesn’t show. By tradition, the Knoke-Heist Photo Festival also welcomes Photo View, a selection by the Centre for Visual Expression, an image medley from local photography clubs, and from 9 May the touring World Press Photo exhibition. In this year’s winning photo, by Swedish photographer Paul Hansen, a group of grieving men carry two dead children through a narrow street in Gaza. You’ll also see the portrait series People of Mercy by Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren, who won the World Press Photo category ‘Staged Portraits’.  

**VISUAL ARTS**

**Neo Rauch**

The Obsession of the Demiurge is contemporary German painter Neo Rauch’s first solo exhibition in Belgium. Known for his massive canvases that feature bizarre scenes, Rauch is like a postmodern Hieronymus Bosch, painting largely recognisable figures (soldiers, workers, citizens) but in ultra-surreal combinations. One canvas, for example, reveals a woman lighting a fire underneath a pair of grappling, giant beetles (pictured). “You don’t have to understand them,” Rauch assures his audience, “just to feel this creation, to the greatest possible extent, is at peace with itself.” The Leipzig-born artist’s eccentricities are partially explained by his upbringing in pre-reunification East Germany; his craft is marked by the insularity of the place where he grew up.

**FOOD & DRINK**

**Guéuze Tour**

Belgian beer is, of course, world famous but not all beers are created equal. The bubbly guéuze, for example, is not nearly as well respected as the rich Trappist brews. To give the regional beer a boost, the High Council for Artisanal Lambic Beers (Horal) organises an annual Guéuze Tour through the Pajottenland and the Zenne valley. Beer lovers will visit eight producers, where master brewers will show you how the beer is made and let you sample their wares. Admission is free and reservation is not required, unless you want to ride on the Horal bus that shuttles between breweries (in which case, book as soon as possible). There’s even a special-edition brew created just for the occasion. The Old Guéze Mega Blend 2013 is the delicious fruit of a collaboration between the tour’s partner breweries and is bottled in collectible, numbered units.

Until 9 June  |  Schaarpoord Cultural Centre, Meerlaan 32, Knoke-Heist  |  www.fotofestival.be

**MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK**

**Antwerp**

Optimumus: Works by Brussels artist duo Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys based on a theme of alternative realities, including installations, drawing, sculpture, performance and mass media.

Until MAY 12 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32  |  www.mhka.be

**Leuven**

Saskia Olde Wolbers: Three recent video installations by the London-based Dutch artist that hinge on the relationship between the earthly and the familiar.

Until MAY 26 at M Museum, Vanderkenrenstraat 28  |  www.museum.be

**Tongeren**

Tractor Steven: Photographs of agricultural machinery in action around Tongeren by Steven Cuyx.

Until MAY 26 at de Velinx, Dijk 111  |  www.tractorsteven.be

**ioctl: Brown Beer Month: Oudenaarde in the Flemish Ardennes is celebrating its famed Old Brown style beer with brewery visits, walking tours, overnight arrangements, beer-inspired lunches and more.

Until APR 30 in and around Oudenaarde  |  www.blynt.be/oud-brown-month

**Sint-Truiden**

Fruit tour bus: Daily three-hour bus tour along Limburg’s blossoming fruit orchards and producers, with a knowledge guide and a gift basket to take home.

Daily until APR 30, leaving at 14.00 from Oud Stadshuis, Grote Markt  |  www.touristinlimburg.be
CONCERT

Kraakpand
Four completely different bands hang out for an evening of musical exploration. Billed as a kind of artistic kraakpand (squat), the show puts the musicians in close proximity to the audience, which may be the last time you can get intimate with one of these rising stars. Flemish pop-rock band Douglas Firs are blasting off on a rocket of publicity surrounding their debut album Shimmer & Glow. The group is led by Gertjan Van Hellemont (pictured), better known as the guitar. Another Flemish buzz band, the Bony King of Nowhere, led by Gertjan Van Hellemont (pictured), better known as the guitarist of another Flemish buzz band, the Bony King of Nowhere. Singer Ellen Schoenaerts is another up-and-comer on the bill. Peter Van Halle's latest project Gorilla Mask brings a fair measure of gonzo, free-jazz madness to the evening. The Berlin-based Canadian saxophonist will be on a lightning, weekend tour that also includes performances in Brussels and Antwerp. Finally, the capital's BL!NDMAN saxophone quartet are also squatting Kraakpand with their minimalist brand of contemporary music.

FESTIVAL

Brussels Short Film Festival
The Brussels Short Film Festival proves that size doesn’t matter. The gifted short filmmaker can communicate in 10 precious minutes what might take another two hours. Yet, for all its focus on the small work of the film world, BSFF is a big deal. This 16th edition takes place on several screens across Brussels. At the heart of it are national and international competitions that feature dozens of short films from here, there and everywhere, including the animated Junkyard, the Netherlands’ entry to this year’s Oscars (pictured). Opening night celebrates Hollywood with a screening of Oscar-winning shorts. A few days later, the Night of the Shorts will keep you entertained into the wee morning hours. For a dose of young talent, check out the Next Generation student film competition at Elsene’s Mercelis Theatre. And a brand-new mini-festival presents 40 works by students from around the world.

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp
Sleepers' Reign: One of the most promising young bands to come out of Humos Rock Rally Finale 2012 bring a dreamy mix of soundscapes and mesmerising vocals
APR 19 19.30 at Trix, Noorder ingestel 28-30
> www.trixonline.be

Brussels
Karl Hyde: The Underworld frontman goes solo and intimate, with Norwegian artist Farao as special guest
APR 20 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Ansichtskaai 110
> www.acceuropean.be

Leuven
Murphi Sound: Flemish band bringing fragile, emotional pop rock
APR 23 20.30 at Stuk, Naamsestraat 96
> www.stuk.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders
Moos Film Festival: Festival of world cinema with a focus on social issues
APR 17-28 in Bruges, Turnhout and other cities across Flanders
> www.mooscv.be

Alden-Biesen (Limburg)
International Storytelling Festival: Annual festival featuring storytelling by 35 professionals from every genre, including horror, travel, fables and fairy tales, biography, adventure and more
Unti APR 23 at Landcommanderij Alden-Biesen, Kasteelstraat 6
> www.alden-biesen.be/artsfestival

Kortrijk
Festival of Flanders: Kortrijk kicks off the months-long, region-wide festival of classical, contemporary and world music
Until MAY 5 across Kortrijk
> www.festivalkortrijk.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

VE Day Party
3 May, from 19.00, Cocteau, Ghent
This 8 May marks 68 years since Belgium became free from the cruelties of the Second World War. Back then, street parties thrown all over the country indicated the war was truly over. If you want to get a glimpse of what it might have been like, join the Victory in Europe Party on 3 May at Cocteau in Ghent. Party organisers Casablanca promise “an atmosphere of girls dancing in flower dresses to the tunes of Glenn Miller and Vera Lynn, while the guys are smoking king size cigarettes”. Dress up in your best ‘40s style, but keep it comfortable as you’ll be swinging, waltzing and Lindy Hopping all night long. No worries if you can’t dance, though, there are courses before the night starts; you’ll be partying like it’s 1945 in no time.
As you’ll notice, the organiser has a keen eye for detail, from the entire setting to the old coins and notes with which you’ll be paying for your drinks. Tickets cost €10.
>V www.ve-day.be

Dr Sketchy’s
22 April & 2 May, 20.00-23.00
The night before Casablanca’s VE Day Party, the already-decorated Cocteau is also the place to be for Dr Sketchy’s, a sketch night for those of all artistic levels. Based on a concept out of New York, the unique Dr Sketchy’s themed sketch nights are hosted by the Neo Retro Agency, also responsible for the Radio Modern swing parties. A master of ceremonies leads you through the evening, which is trust us, not your average art class. Background music, cocktails and all sorts of side entertainments help bring your drawing creativity to the fore. For the Liberation Edition, the burlesque model will be wearing her prittitent nylon stockings, as they were invented during the war and suit the VE Day spirit perfectly. The April Dr Sketchy’s, meanwhile, Murder in the Mansion, takes place in the Hap parejaet House in Antwerp. In your finest cocktail wear, you’ll be a guest at a swanky 1960s English mansion, where, you might have guessed, the fun won’t stop there. The April Dr Sketchy’s, meanwhile, Murder in the Mansion, takes place in the Hap parejaet House in Antwerp. In your finest cocktail wear, you’ll be a guest at a swanky 1960s English mansion, where, you might have guessed, the fun won’t stop there.
Tickets for a Dr Sketchy’s night cost €10 at the door, but you need to sign up in advance.

24 April to 4 May | Across Brussels | www.bsff.be
TALKING SPORTS

A fatal Fed Cup fall?

When Kim Clijsters and Justin Henin were in their pomp a decade ago, Belgium could almost claim that it had become synonymous with women’s tennis. But those titans have retired, and their successors have struggled to match their achievements. And now, six months after Clijsters quit the game, Belgium is facing the ignominy of tumble into the third tier of tennis’s premier team competition, the Fed Cup. What has gone wrong?

Perhaps it was too much to expect that the Flemish women’s tennis. But those titans have retired, and their successors have struggled to match their achievements. And now, six months after Clijsters quit the game, Belgium is facing the ignominy of tumble into the third tier of tennis’s premier team competition, the Fed Cup. What has gone wrong?

Perhaps it was too much to expect that the Flemish

Part of the problem is commitment. Wickmayer and Kirsten Flipkens have impressed in recent years, neither have been close to winning any of the WTA titles they have between them. They reach the semis in the US 4-1 in February 2011. With Wickmayer out, Flipkens is joined by 181st-ranked Alison Van Uytvandt. An-Sophie Mestach, who is currently at 330 in the WTA rankings and Yolande Bonaventure, at 399. They will face a Polish side led by fourth-ranked Agnieszka Radwanska and her sister Urszula. Unless Flipkens and Co can defy their dreary Fed Cup form, Belgium is looking down the barrel of back-to-back relegations in a competition it once conquered.

The last word…

Waves of sympathy

“I’m glad I’m a man.”

Guinea pig reporter Jesse Van Regenmortel tried out an artificial birth-contractions machine at Ghent University Hospital.

Firing range

“In this heavily populated and fragmented Flanders, hunting comes more and more in conflict with other users of public space.”

Jan Rodts of Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen, which has put together a broad coalition of groups in favour of a total ban on hunting.

Standing ovation

“Marcella, last of the beguines, is no more. A bronze statue, just as she was: strong and humble. Kortrijk is in mourning.”

A bronze statue, just as she was: strong and humble. Kortrijk is in mourning.

Car contradiction

“You can’t very well complain about badly maintained roads, then complain there are too many road works.”

Local works minister Hilde Crevits on road disruptions over the next few weeks.

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

How the brain works is a mighty big subject for one research project, so several European universities are pooling their resources to consider how neurons behave and communicate. How do they do it? They listen to them. We talk to the co-ordinator of the Brainport project at the University of Antwerp.

Flemish beers aren’t only popular in Flanders: The US is importing them in ever-greater numbers. But some Flemings have taken an even greater leap: started breweries in the US. We meet these Flemish-Americans and see what’s brewing.

FLANDERS TODAY APRIL 17, 2013

backpage

BITE

Les Brigittines ★★★★★

If it were up to chef Dirk Myny, he’d sit down with each and every one of his guests. As chef-proprietor at Les Brigittines, a Brussels establishment for some 30 years, he knows how to make people feel at home with genuinely warm hospitality.

Myny (pietradura), who grew up in Dilbeek, just outside of Brussels, learned to cook in his grandmother’s kitchen. That explains the long list of classics filling the menu, from cow udder broth to his famed pig’s trotters.

My dining companion and I opt for five courses, each paired with a different beer. What we get is entirely up to the chef. We eagerly await the first course by nibbling on fresh, crusty bread smeared with butter, all the while admiring the magnificent Art Nouveau dining room.

First up is a terrine of pork ears and whirligs, served with a gribiche sauce. The bits of meat and other ingredients, including crunchy carrot and celery, are held in place by the pork’s gelatinous stock. It has a distinct seafood flavour thanks to the whelks, or sea snails.

The gribiche, made with boiled eggs and mustard, is the perfect tangy accomplishment for the terrine. This rustic starter is paired with a glass of Bulles Estivale, a pale ale brewed in Wallonia. It pours hazy golden and has a nice hoppy aroma and trace of citrus fruit, which makes it a good match for the fatty terrine.

The next course is steamed cod. The ultra-moist cod sits atop a bed of braised wilted leeks, carrots, parsley and barley and topped with a fluffy sabayon made from farm-fresh eggs and lambic beer. The combination of tart lambic with expertly seasoned grains and vegetables proves complementary to the subtle flavour of the fish. Naturally, to go with this meal Myny has chosen a glass of lambic from famed Brussels brewer Cantillon.

Next we are treated to the ultimate Brussels dish: zonne pot. Myny’s version of this once number one dish of Flemish peasants is a divine combination of cabbage cooked in Cantillon Guinevere with bloomypunch (blood sausage), dried sausage and whirligs. The bottom layer of blood sausage is deliciously soft, sweet and slightly spiced, while the top layer of guinea-soaked cabbage, whirligs, and dried sausage is salty and sour. The beer served is the same as that found in the dish. The dishes just keep getting better as the evening progresses, and the main course is no exception. I can think of few things more delicious than veal cheeks braised for four hours in Cantillon Kriek beer. The beer lends its sweet cherry flavour to the pork, which is soft to falling apart. It comes with seasonal veg, including parsnip, whole young carrots, pearl onions, witloof and a skin-on potato. A clump of sour cream on top is just beginning to melt and run down onto the meat. A glass of the reddish-pink Cantillon Kriek is the spot on pairing.

But the toppper of the evening was still to come. A scoop of dark chocolate sorbet might normally be average, but the way in which Myny pairs it has us both blown away. The flavours inside the glass of XX Bitter from Breery De Ranke mirror the sharp, bitter qualities of the dark chocolate in the sorbet. Pairing beers with food in this way immensely enhances both the beer and the dish. Instead of letting us order the usual coffee after our meal, Myny has another suggestion in petto and pops open a bottle of Smoked Porter from Stone Brewing Company in California. This rich, malty ale has all kinds of complex flavours, including roasted cocoa and coffee bean. It makes for the perfect finish to the perfect evening. And all for about €100 each.

Kapelmarkt 5, Brussels; 02.512.68.91
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IN FLANdeRS TodAY

FLanders today

to them. We talk to the co-ordinator of the Brainport project at the University of Antwerp.

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FLanders today

to them. We talk to the co-ordinator of the Brainport project at the University of Antwerp.

Next we are treated to the ultimate Brussels dish: zonne pot. Myny’s version of this once number one dish of Flemish peasants is a divine combination of cabbage cooked in Cantillon Guinevere with bloompunch (blood sausage), dried sausage and whirligs. The bottom layer of blood sausage is deliciously soft, sweet and slightly spiced, while the top layer of guinea-soaked cabbage, whirligs, and dried sausage is salty and sour. The beer served is the same as that found in the dish. The dishes just keep getting better as the evening progresses, and the main course is no exception. I can think of few things more delicious than veal cheeks braised for four hours in Cantillon Kriek beer. The beer lends its sweet cherry flavour to the pork, which is soft to falling apart. It comes with seasonal veg, including parsnip, whole young carrots, pearl onions, witloof and a skin-on potato. A clump of sour cream on top is just beginning to melt and run down onto the meat. A glass of the reddish-pink Cantillon Kriek is the spot on pairing.

But the toppper of the evening was still to come. A scoop of dark chocolate sorbet might normally be average, but the way in which Myny pairs it has us both blown away. The flavours inside the glass of XX Bitter from Breery De Ranke mirror the sharp, bitter qualities of the dark chocolate in the sorbet. Pairing beers with food in this way immensely enhances both the beer and the dish. Instead of letting us order the usual coffee after our meal, Myny has another suggestion in petto and pops open a bottle of Smoked Porter from Stone Brewing Company in California. This rich, malty ale has all kinds of complex flavours, including roasted cocoa and coffee bean. It makes for the perfect finish to the perfect evening. And all for about €100 each.

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