

# expat time

Essential lifestyle and business insights for  
foreign nationals in Belgium

## INTERVIEW

“I feel  
increasingly  
like a citizen  
of the world”

### SCOTT BEARDSLEY

Senior partner, McKinsey & Company

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Property for expats

Yves Saint Laurent  
shines in Brussels

The smart investor

addicted  
to **moving.**



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# Welcome to your magazine

It's a great pleasure for me to bring you the first issue of Expat Time, the quarterly business and lifestyle magazine for foreign nationals in Belgium.

Why a new magazine for the internationally mobile community in Belgium? Belgium already has several good English-language magazines for this demographic. However, from listening to our clients, we have realised that there is a keen interest in business and lifestyle matters that aren't covered by the current expat magazine offer.

Subjects like estate planning, pensions, property, work culture, starting a business in Belgium, investments and taxation are of real interest to you, but they don't seem to be answered in full by any of the current English-language expat magazines. That is a long sentence full of dry business and investment content. It is, however, our commitment to bring a fresh and lively perspective to these subjects with the help of respected experts in the various fields.

We will look not only at topics related to business in Belgium. The other half of Expat Time will be much lighter and devoted to lifestyle in Belgium: insights from expats in Belgium, a regular light-hearted feature on fundamental changes in the world, arts and culture, events and more.

In this first issue, we focus on property in Belgium, from both a private and commercial angle. For me, the most striking contribution is the interview with Scott Beardsley, senior partner at McKinsey and a long-term American expat in Belgium.

The key message from me, though, is that Expat Time is your magazine, and we welcome your suggestions about lifestyle, business and investment issues that you'd like us to cover. Please send those suggestions to us at [expattime@ing.be](mailto:expattime@ing.be).

I hope to have stimulated your curiosity and wish you a pleasant and interesting read.



## **Dave Deruytter**

Head of expatriates and non-residents  
ING Belgium

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# Get connected

We asked four expats why they came to Belgium



## Arthur White

**“The family needed to move to have time together”**

🚩 Arthur and Belinda are British and have three children: Sophie, 10, is at the local francophone school, James, 13, attends the British School of Brussels and Alexandra, 18, is at university in the UK

“I’m an airline pilot and left the UK 12 years ago to work for DHL Aviation. Initially I commuted, but after three years I took a management role and my family joined me. We live in the village of Sart-Saint-Laurent, near Namur, where my wife, Belinda, breeds alpacas. I am now managing director of VLM Airlines and work at Antwerp airport and also spend time at our Rotterdam office. We like the education and health systems in Belgium and think it is a good place to bring up children. The beer is also a big positive! The downside is the traffic on the Brussels ring, which adds at least an hour to my commute.”

## Debbie Quinn

**“I gave up a well-paid job in the Netherlands to set up a smallholding”**

“I moved to Geel in Flanders with my husband, Stuart, two years ago with the aim of being self-sufficient. We previously lived in the Netherlands for 19 years, and Stuart works all over the world for the oil industry. I look after our smallholding: I have pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, turkeys and rabbits, and I also run workshops. We like Belgium for its rural space, beautiful houses and friendly people. The disadvantage is that bureaucracy can be slow and organisations are not always client-friendly.”



🚩 The British couple's two children live abroad. Tim, 29, is working in England and Rhiannon, 23, is studying taxation law at Tilburg University in the Netherlands

# Giovanni Davite

## “I came to create an import-export business in the pharmaceutical sector”

“I am a chemical engineer by training (having studied in Italy, Belgium and the UK) and worked for 10 years in the oil industry. I have been involved in many business ventures over the past 15 years, including start-ups, and am co-owner of various businesses in Rwanda (import and distribution of pharmaceutical and agro-veterinary products) and Belgium (property investment). We have been here since 2001 and my wife, Morag, is a self-employed reflexologist.

Belgium is a good country to live as an expat, but recent changes in taxation have made it less attractive.”



🚩 Giovanni is from Italy and Morag from Scotland. They live in Rhode-Saint-Genèse and have two sons aged 24 and 21. The eldest is studying interior design in Vancouver and the youngest international relations in Kingston-upon-Thames, near London

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# Lara Allouni

## “When the family moved to Brussels, I was able to continue my career”



🚩 Lara and Ray have lived in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre since arriving in Belgium. They have two children, aged 10 and five, who attend the Lycée Français Jean Monnet in Uccle, following a bilingual English and French curriculum

“I am a director with PwC, a global professional services firm, based in Brussels. I work in the financial services industry supporting strategic business development and market positioning across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and India. My husband, Ray, used to work for Procter & Gamble and was posted here seven years ago. You could call us a truly international family as Ray and I are both Syrian, I also have British nationality and Ray Canadian. Belgium is a nice and easy country to bring up a family and the gastronomy cannot be surpassed. It is also a country that allows you to travel easily to neighbouring countries.”



# Balancing act

★ By Katy Desmond  
Photos by Bart Dewaele

Expats Time sits down with Scott Beardsley, senior partner at McKinsey & Company, to talk balance, business and Belgium





**S**cott Beardsley arrived in Brussels in 1991, transferring from McKinsey & Company in New York to join the Brussels office.

Twenty-two years later, he is a senior partner, in charge of the learning and leadership development of McKinsey's global talent, and a member of the global board of directors. He is also president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium. Along the way, he has raised three sons, travelled the world for his firm and still found time to sing in a rock band. We listened in as Scott talked to Dave Deruytter of ING about being an expatriate in Belgium, where he thinks business is heading and how Belgium is going to get there.

**Your job has let you see a lot of the world's cities, from Dubai and Shanghai to New York and Paris. How does Brussels hold up, as a place to live and do business?**

In terms of living, I think Brussels compares favourably to almost any city I can think of: the quality of the education,



## “The ultimate judge of my life will be my success as a parent”

the fact that it is such a green city with the Bois de la Cambre and the Forêt de Soignes, the quality of the restaurants, the ease of getting around Europe. All these make Brussels, and Belgium in general, a great place to raise a family.

Doing business is a different question. For many professions and industries, Belgium is a great place to do business, as the centre of Europe with great infrastructure, a multilingual workforce and a lot of decision-making centres. Sandwiched between Holland and Germany and France, from a strategic point of view it is very well connected.

But Belgium is not perfect, and it has some things it can do better. Certain businesses have shown that they do extremely well here, for example, pharmaceuticals and logistics businesses. Other, more labour-intensive businesses struggle increasingly, not just in Belgium but in western Europe as a whole.

### Could Brussels learn from those new, big cities like Dubai and Shanghai?

There are always things you can learn from any city. I think the advantage of a city like Dubai is that it is more of a greenfield. It can take very large tracts of land and build something from scratch, so you can really think through how you want your city to develop. Any European city is much older, it has its history, its culture and all the constraints associated with them from an infrastructural point of view.

Countries such as the UAE and China are hungry for growth; they are much more flexible. They are willing to work 24/7 and take on large-scale projects that are unusual in Europe. The pace of change and the aspirations to change their society are on a different scale and I think they have a different objective function from Belgium. I find this mindset towards growth inspiring, with its spirit of doing whatever it takes, the art of the possible, ‘let’s see if we can do it even faster’.

### As the global economy shifts and countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China rise, how can companies and countries take advantage without losing their own strengths?

They have to look at the reality and embrace it. Every challenge is also an opportunity. In the same way that these new economies are competitors to existing companies, they are also opportunities for exporting and doing business there. China is itself a large economy, so it is also an opportunity to do business. Exporting to some of these fast-growing markets, creating relationships and partnerships and figuring out how to take advantage of their growth is an opportunity for any country. It requires investing time to go to and understand how to do business with them.

### What is Belgium’s biggest challenge as it works to keep up with more booming economies?

Belgium, like many European countries, needs to find growth in its economy. With an aging workforce and an increasing number of people not working, maintaining the social model requires growth. What ultimately allows Belgium to sustain its economy is its ability to stay competitive, to invest in things that give Belgium competitiveness, and thus





Scott Beardsley  
in conversation  
with ING's Dave  
Deruytter

to create jobs that maintain the social model and increase growth.

The question is how do we do it? Every country has to decide for itself what it is seeking to achieve. Some countries are willing to sacrifice growth for other objectives. I think that's fine if that's what their citizens and political decision-makers want. That's what democracy is about, and every democracy has to define its priorities.

### **As technology changes, how do companies like McKinsey balance the speed and breadth of progress with the need for stability and sustainability?**

We have to become the masters of technology, and not let it master us. There is no question that technology is creating rapid, unprecedented change. The vast majority of people in the world are connected to the internet and that is here to stay. The pace of change is

not going to slow down. Technology is going to continue to evolve at exponential rates, which will create opportunities and inventions that we have not even thought of.

I think we are just seeing the very beginning of what will be a radical change in learning, with collaborative tools and remote working, which will have an impact on the configuration of the workforce. You only need to look at these massive free online courses that universities are offering. Stanford University had more than 100,000 students sign up to take a single class. When you see that hundreds of thousands of people sign up for courses offered by MIT or Stanford, you get a glimpse of what is going to happen. There is going to be much more of a hybridised learning model. It is not all going to be in person; it is not all going to be virtual either. This is going to affect learning at every level, from kindergarten to the workplace. Finding that hybrid model is going to be a challenge for every

organisation, whether it's a university, a school or a company. The change that this will bring on is going to be dramatic.

Of course at McKinsey we are embracing collaboration technologies. For example, it allows us to have 24/7 access to our knowledge network all around the world. We also advise our clients on how to use new technologies and the huge volumes of data that are generated. What we call Big Data creates tremendous opportunities for companies that understand what data to collect and how to use it.

### **Some say we are in for a bumpy year. What do you think should be the top priorities for managers in Belgium in 2013?**

Companies need to look very carefully at how they plan on finding growth. It is very easy in a recession environment to focus almost exclusively on short-



term cost-cutting. Cost-cutting is often necessary, but you have to make sure you are planting the seeds for mid- and long-term growth as well. It's a constant challenge for management, but I think also a priority, making sure resources are allocated in a balanced way.

We live in a global economy, so if you are running a global business, right now there are some countries that are growing rapidly and others that are in recession. You need different approaches to different markets. Let's not forget, overall the world is growing. It is very easy just to focus on your local economy, but those who are working for companies across multiple regions need to make sure they are connecting themselves to growth of the real locomotives.

### **Your high-profile job keeps you on your toes, and you're married with three sons. Who is Scott Beardsley outside the office?**

I am probably somebody who has too many passions. How I manage my time is a neverending struggle for balance. I have always been very careful to keep time for family, because I believe the ultimate judge of my life will be my success as a parent, more than how I succeeded at work. But I also make time for other things. I play a lot of tennis, a passion I rediscovered about three or four years ago. I love music, especially rock'n'roll. I sing in a band. I like wine tasting. And I also love landscape gardening. I worked my way through college with my own landscaping business with my brother, so I have a real passion for gardening, and trees and flowers.

I don't always have the time to pursue all these passions. But these activities give me the energy I need to be successful at work. That's something I've

discovered over time: you have to invest in things that give you energy if you want to be able to perform at work.

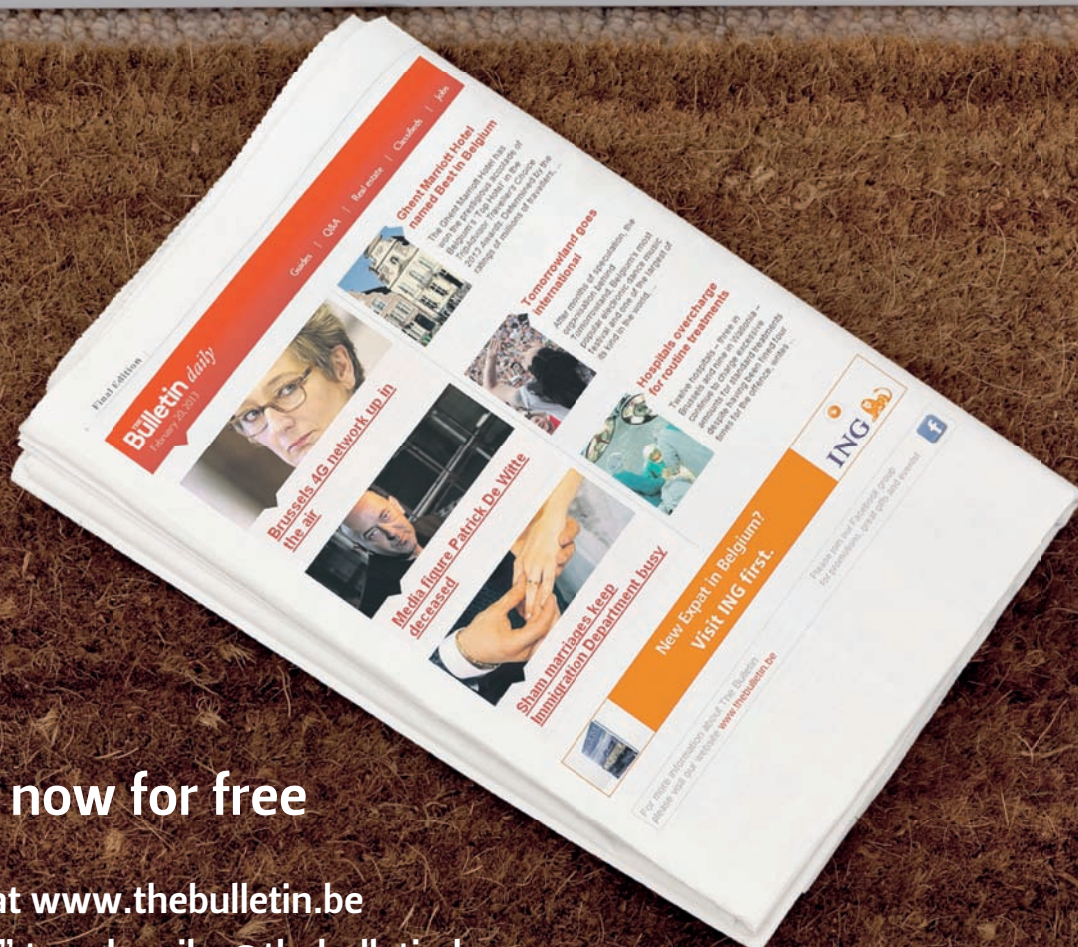
### **You grew up in Alaska and are now a business leader travelling the world. Where do you feel at home?**

I still feel very connected to the United States. All my family still lives there and we go there every summer. I serve clients there and have for a long time. Plus, my work as president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium keeps me feeling connected. I view this as a great platform to give something back both to the United States and to Belgian society. That said, I have lived now for 22 years in Belgium and my children their whole life. I have lived in the greater Brussels area longer than I have lived in any other place in my life. As a result, I feel very connected to Belgium. In a way, I feel like a hybrid, and, increasingly, like a citizen of the world.



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# The smart investor

★ By Katrien Wandelseck and Dave Deruytter

**D**ealing with everyday financial matters takes time; learning about tax structures, pension planning and investments even more. As an expat, you may look to financial advisors or a bank for help, and it's worth spending time finding the right support. A good financial advisor will make your life a lot easier.

An advisor's job is to determine your investor profile and get a picture of your financial situation. Afterwards, he'll prepare a detailed, personalised plan and provide suggestions on the best way forward.

**“The only thing at stake for an advisor is that you are a satisfied customer”**

There are two principal types of advisor: fee-only and commissioned. Fee-only means he receives compensation directly from the client for services delivered. Most charge a percentage of the assets managed. A commissioned advisor, on the other hand, acts as a broker and gets commissions on the investments the client makes through him.

In principal, the advantage of a fee-only financial advisor is objective advice. He should have a better knowledge and overview of stocks, bonds, mutual bonds and other investment possibilities than you have, and select them for you in an unbiased way. Fee-only advisors have a responsibility to choose investments that are in your best interest: the only thing that should be at stake for them is that you are a satisfied customer.

Commissioned financial advisors typically work for or with major financial institutions and can therefore make use of their facilities and specialists. But to receive this support, they have to provide the institution with revenues. As the advisors generate their income by trading commissions on the fees the client pays every time an investment transaction is made, there is a potential conflict of interest.

An alternative is to entrust your financial matters to a 'family office': a private company that manages investments for only one or a limited number of wealthy

families. Clearly, this is not suited to everyone's budget.

A relatively recent option is the online investment broker, who offers a platform to self-directed investors. It can be very efficient: such a platform allows you to carry out the transactions yourself, provided you know where to find the information to base investment decisions on and have the time to keep up-to-date on the best ways to invest. This service is limited to buying and selling shares, typically with no planning services available.

So, how can you obtain the management you want, including objective planning information tailored to your needs? First, you have to know what you want and what you need. A Belgian bank account will make your day-to-day banking a lot easier during your stay. Some banks, including ING Belgium, even offer multi-currency accounts and allow international payments in multiple currencies.

Organise your savings on a regular basis: you can ask for an automatic transfer of a fixed amount to your savings account each month, or have the balance that exceeds a certain amount automatically transferred to your savings.

As interest rates are at an all-time low, the idea of getting rich via a savings account is unrealistic. Today, you should be happy if the return keeps up with



inflation, and investment funds might boost this return. Most large banks have a range of investment funds that cover all regions and all sectors.

Banks who take the investor seriously also offer non-proprietary mutual or investment funds. They offer third-party funds, or investment funds developed by an external asset manager. That way, they can fill the gaps in their own portfolio and enhance the overall quality of their investment products. You can build a portfolio of these investment funds, in line with your appetite for risk and your investment horizon.

When is the right time to buy an asset? It's too easy to say you should buy when the rate is low and sell when it's high. You need a crystal ball for that to be successful in the long run. To make

sure you don't buy at too high a rate, you could apply the same system to your investments as many do to their savings: invest the same amount every month. On a yearly or a more long-term basis, you will pay the average price of the inventory value of the funds you've invested in. It's also important to know your investment horizon. If you need the money you invest in within a year, you may take a lot of risks.

To be fully aware of what happens in the world of investments, you should read the financial press and interact with experts. That's a bit tricky – there are after all only 24 hours in a day, and the financial press doesn't always present a united opinion. To comply with a key rule of the investment theory – diversify for less risk and a higher return over time – you could also consider

an investment fund, which invests in many assets; several investment funds investing in many assets of different economic sectors or regions; or even in a fund of investment funds.

This last fund lets investors achieve diversification and an appropriate asset allocation with investments in a variety of fund categories all wrapped up into one fund. These are quite rare, but could be worth exploring. ING Belgium recently launched a fund of third-party funds that could serve as an example. You invest globally, with investments spread between bonds and equities, regions and sectors so you can capitalise on economic trends. In fact, this kind of fund can put the whole investment strategy of the organising bank in one single investment product. A fund of funds combining several asset managers provides instant diversification.

This is just a taste, and by no means an exhaustive list of all the possibilities. Direct investment in real estate is also an option, as are gold and other raw materials, hedge funds and themed investments such as green, sustainable or social initiatives. Many of these can also be covered through investment funds.

#### UPCOMING EVENTS ORGANISED BY ING & THE BULLETIN

- **March 26, Acquiring Private Real Estate** ING Head Office, Marnix Auditorium, 1 Rue du Trône, Brussels
- **June 25, Pensions** ING Administrative Office, Orange Room, 60 Cours Saint Michel, Brussels

**Both 18.00-21.00, registration 17.30. Free, register at [events@thebulletin.be](mailto:events@thebulletin.be)**

# What's on in Brussels



## ART BRUSSELS

About 30,000 people – amateurs, pros and the mildly curious – are expected to flock from across the continent to this year's edition of Art Brussels, the annual gathering that gives a snapshot of what's hot in contemporary art in Belgium and Europe. Join them and discover three distinct spaces: the Gallery section, where established galleries will display their collections; Young Talent, featuring galleries that focus on promoting young artists; and First Call, a selection of 14 up-and-coming galleries participating in the fair for the first time.

April 18-21, [www.artbrussels.be](http://www.artbrussels.be)  
Sponsored by ING

**Audrey Hepburn**  
returns to her  
Brussels birthplace  
at the contemporary  
art fair





## BRUSSELS JAZZ MARATHON

The Brussels Jazz Marathon was conceived 18 years ago as a modest neighbourhood music festival. Today it's one of the capital's marquee events, a city-wide happening attended by thousands. This evolution is all the more surprising given the nature of its eponymous attraction: jazz music is a quintessentially cult genre more logically associated with cerebral aficionados and dark, smoky speakeasies than family audiences and sun-soaked outdoor stages. BJM strikes a balance between the two. Concerts are held both in the open air and in the capital's jazz clubs – still dark but happily smoke-free these days – and cosy cafes. The three-day festival features some 200 concerts in total, involving 700 artists. And all for free.

April 19-May 12  
[www.brusselsjazz-marathon.be](http://www.brusselsjazz-marathon.be)



## ROYAL GREENHOUSES

Every spring, for three magical weeks, the Belgian royal family opens the Royal Greenhouses at Laeken to the public. The sprawling glass-and-steel complex was commissioned by King Leopold II and constructed (over the course of 30 years!) by Victor Horta's teacher, Alphonse Balat. Considered a marvel of 19th-century architecture, the high-domed winter garden still has the power to drop jaws today. Then there's the flora: it takes 20 full-time gardeners to tend the royal collection of giant ferns, blooms and exotic trees, some of which are as old as the structure itself. Visitors are also invited to pop into Queen Elisabeth's neighbouring workshop. Be prepared for long queues and hang in there. It's worth the wait.

April 19-May 12  
(closed Mondays)  
[www.monarchie.be](http://www.monarchie.be)

## EUROPE DAY

The European Quarter comes alive on Europe Day. The anniversary of Robert Schuman's May 9, 1950 call for a European Union is of course celebrated in all 27 member states of today's fully realised EU, but festivities are especially spirited in Brussels. The whole neighbourhood is transformed into one big block party with open houses, exhibitions, workshops, concerts, street theatre and plenty of food and drink.

May 9

## QUEEN ELISABETH MUSIC COMPETITION

The annual Queen Elisabeth Music Competition has served as a showcase for Belgium's up-and-coming talent for the past 75 years. Participants are selected by an international jury on the strength of their audition recordings then run through three public rounds of chamber music performance. This year's featured instrument is the piano. Although the competition itself ends on June 1, there's plenty more music, namely a Laureates' concert and a closing concert by the year's winners.

May 6-June 17  
[www.qeimc.be](http://www.qeimc.be)



## CHANGING STATES

On the occasion of Ireland's presidency of the European Union, Bozar is celebrating Irish contemporary art with two of the Emerald Isle's leading modern arts institutions, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. Changing States: Contemporary Irish Art & Francis Bacon's Studio explores the past, present and future of contemporary art in Ireland. It shows the vitality and increasing global perspective of 20 artists who have reshaped the country's artistic landscape since the turn of the millennium. The section devoted to Bacon shows material from his tiny and chaotic London studio, painstakingly moved to Dublin after his death in 1992. It provides a fascinating peek into the life and work of the towering figure of 20th-century art.

Until May 19  
[www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## UPCOMING EVENTS WITH ING

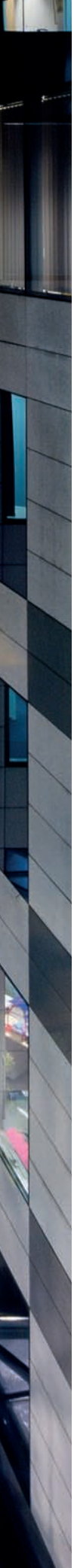
- **March 26, Belgium vs Macedonia**, World Cup qualifier, King Baudouin Stadium Heysel, [www.brussels.be](http://www.brussels.be)
- **April 18-21, Art Brussels**, international contemporary art fair, Brussels Expo, Heysel [www.ing.be/art](http://www.ing.be/art)
- **June 7, Belgium vs Serbia**, World Cup qualifier, King Baudouin Stadium, Heysel
- **June 22, Fête de la musique**, Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel concert, Brussels [www.fetedelamusique.be](http://www.fetedelamusique.be)
- **June 28-30, Couleur Cafe**, world music festival, Tour & Taxis, Brussels, 2013.couleurcafe.be



# The property man

★ By Sarah Crew

Real estate expert Rod Scrivener casts his eye over the state of the local market



## “Stability and balance continue to be key words for the residential markets, especially in the established areas”

**T**he property market in Brussels, both commercial and residential, has shaken off the 2008 credit crunch and is showing signs of recovery, believes Rod Scrivener, head of valuations at the Belgian office of property firm Jones Lang LaSalle. Scrivener, from the UK, has spent the past 23 years casting his expert eye over office investment in the country and also lectures on the property sector at the University of Leuven.

On the office front, the centre of the European capital has proved resilient, with prices and vacancies returning to pre-2008 levels. “This is a market that is pretty much in balance,” he explains. Stability and balance continue to be key words for the residential markets, too, especially in the established areas. “There is an excess of demand in the residential market, as there will always be people who want a better home; the question is: can they afford it?”

While a recent report by the Economist questioned the sustainability of Belgian house prices, in fact concluding that they are overpriced by 56%, Scrivener draws on his long experience to refute its claim that prices are likely to fall. “The Economist study compares prices to rents, and indeed there is a very high

multiplier, but there are many reasons for this, not least the attractive taxation of income from privately rented property. They also compare prices to average disposable income per person, but this is pretty meaningless in a country of such contrasts. In the case of statistics in Brussels, you have to bear in mind that the administrative boundaries are very tightly drawn and don’t include the rich Flemish periphery to the north, and Walloon Brabant to the south.

“If you include the wealthy Brabant suburbs, you get a completely different picture of the city. It is the average family income and 20% unemployment in the Brussels region that skew the statistics. Prices are low compared to Paris, for example, and there is a gulf between comfortable, cosmopolitan Brussels up the hill and a genuinely poor, deprived Brussels in some parts down the hill. It was like that twenty years ago, and it hasn’t fundamentally changed.”

One blip on the commercial side is the periphery of Brussels, especially the area straddling the ring around the national airport at Zaventem. Overbuilding between 1999 and 2001 led to a lot of empty office space that preceded the economic crash. But the situation is far rosier in the rolling hills of Walloon Bra-

bant. The business zone at Wavre Nord is one of the region’s largest economic hubs, taking advantage of the presence of major companies such as pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline. Another is Waterloo Office Park: “Probably still the best office park in Belgium,” says Scrivener, who recalls, “When the land was originally bought, it was intended for a shopping centre. We were asked by developers Codic for our advice and replied that offices might work, but they should take it step by step!”

Scrivener cites mixed developments such as the Papeteries de Genval by one of his company’s clients, Equillis, as proof of this new optimism. “It’s a big



Rod Scrivener

Head of valuations at the Brussels office of Jones Lang LaSalle

Lecturer at the University of Leuven



## What's your experience of the property market in Belgium?



### Arthur White

Before buying our farm in Wallonia we had an apartment in Zaventem, which we bought off plan and sold two years after it was built. We intend to have some of the farm outbuildings renovated to possibly rent out in the future. Property is affordable here and provided you take a medium- to long-term view, it is a good place to buy. The disadvantages are the high taxes when you buy and the time it can take to sell a property.

### Debbie Quinn

This is our first house in Belgium and it's our dream home. It was built in 2009 and has 3 hectares of land. We will probably downsize in the future as the house is quite big, but hopefully keep the same amount of land. Property is good value in Belgium, certainly compared to in Holland. I like the fact that most properties have a generous plot and that new builds are very individual.



### Giovanni Davite



We own a large villa in Rhode-Saint-Genèse that we completely renovated. We are now looking to sell it, as we want to downsize and possibly buy a property in a warmer country, where we would like to spend more time, especially during winter, though we want to keep a base in Belgium. I also own and rent out various properties in different parts of Brussels and the surrounding area, via my property investment company. Overall, the Belgian market has been a good investment, with a steady if not stellar increase in property values over the past 20 years. The rental returns have been rather disappointing in the past few years and we have had to drop rents by as much as 40% to re-rent some of our properties.

### Lara Allouni

We have always lived in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre; we like the neighbourly vibe and decided to buy a house and settle here for the foreseeable future. I am no expert, but while searching for our perfect family home in this area over the past four years, it appears that house prices have retained their market value despite the recession. It would also seem that the recession has had an impact on deterring individual buyers from buying homes that need significant refurbishment.



project with lots of apartments and shops, within easy walking distance of the station. New developments such as these are now financially viable, even if the margins are not enormous."

One factor in this success has been the province's open-minded attitude to outside investment: "Walloon Brabant has always been very welcoming to foreign businesses and foreigners." Scrivener is himself a beneficiary of this benevolence as a long-time resident of Rixensart. The father of five is a fan of the local schools and railway links to the capital, which are set to improve with the completion of the high-speed regional RER network. "The main railway line through Genval and La Hulpe is the real dorsal of accessibility to the capital, along



The Papeteries de Genvial in Rixensart by developers Equilis

with the E411 motorway. The current system suits me very well as there is a lovely Tintin-style railway station at Rixensart with regular trains to Brussels-Luxembourg.”

Scrivener rented for about 12 years before leaping on to the property ladder, only making the decision when he knew he would probably stay in Belgium for the rest of his career. With buying property for investment less attractive now, he believes the length of stay in Belgium is still the most important criteria in deciding whether to buy. The main obstacle to buying, both commercial and residential, is the transfer duty of 12.5%, he says. “For commercial properties it is a well-known fact that the registration duties are nearly always not paid because of the various mechanisms that exist, with the full consent of the tax authorities. Nobody is going to

pay 12.5% on a €50 million property, but for residential properties people have to pay.”

He would like to see Belgium follow the French route and reduce the tax to 5 or 6%, which he believes would generate far more income for the exchequer, more liquidity in the commercial market and more movement in the residential market. “This is a huge handicap to buying as you need to be sure you’ll be here for a number of years, so that when you come round to selling the price has gone up by ten or the twelve-and-a-half percent.”

Prices have continued to rise in Belgium, despite a slowdown in the market due to the economic crisis. One reason for this is the low interest rates provided by banks over the past 10 or 12 years, coupled with wage growth

and competition between banks. Scrivener believes banks have become more imaginative in listening to their customers and offer a wider range of mortgages that give people more flexibility. “We now have a more modern mortgage market and while banks are still prudent, they are happy to lend. We have seen none of the excesses in the banking system here that caused problems in 2008 elsewhere, notably in the US and Spain.”

For expats who are not ready to commit to the local property market, or are not planning on staying in Belgium, the rental market has plenty of affordable opportunities, says Scrivener. While the market has slowed over the past four or five years, with many American companies reducing their presence in Belgium, “you can find good rental accommodation at a fair price”.

# Seven pointers

## about the property market in Belgium

**1** The private sales agreement to buy a property in Belgium (known as a *compromis*) is the effective start of the purchase process. It is much more than a non-binding offer that still has to be confirmed: in fact, it's an agreement to start the formal process of buying a property, subject to some conditions.

**2** In Belgium it is common that the seller pays the estate agent involved. If you're a potential buyer and are in contact with such an agent,

bear in mind that people and companies essentially work for the person who pays them. A recent phenomenon in Belgium is estate agents who are paid by a potential buyer.

**3** Don't hesitate to take your own notary on top of the one chosen by the seller.

Both parties have the right to choose a notary, and it won't cost you more since the two will have to split the fees. The notary can give you valuable information on costs and taxes.

[www.notaire.be](http://www.notaire.be)  
[www.notaris.be](http://www.notaris.be)

**4** Once you've bought a property it is difficult to introduce a claim against the former owner if you discover a problem you were not aware of that you think they should have told you about. Always have a surveyor check the property in full before you sign anything.

**5** If you buy to let in Belgium, be aware that taxation of rental income is substantially higher if your tenant is a company or a person using the property for professional use than if it is for private use.

**6** Property has its place in any diversified investment portfolio. It is, however, important to be aware of the features of a direct investment:

- It's a (very) long-term investment particularly given the typically (very) high pur-

chase taxes in Belgium.

- It's an illiquid investment: you can't always sell the property at a good price quickly and it can take several months before you actually see the money.

- Depending on the total value of your investments, it may be a (very) big asset relative to the total of your investments, leading to less diversification and thus a lower average return in the long term.

**7** Taxation of private real estate in Belgium is very high on purchase, with headline rates ranging from 10 to 12.5% and even 21% for new buildings. Taxation on revenue is low when living in the property yourself or renting it out for private use. Capital gains are typically only taxed when you sell within five years (eight years for land), and transfer to your heirs is rather expensive unless you have the real estate assets in a company and transfer the shares in due course.

**“Always have a surveyor check the property in full before you sign anything”**



We visited most of the other international schools. BSB was the school we liked the best.”

**Brann family from Australia**  
(who chose BSB Primary for their children)

- 1,250 students from ages 1 - 18 years
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- British-based curriculum up to age 16
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For more information visit  
[www.britishschool.be](http://www.britishschool.be)

Learning together  
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# What's on outside Brussels



## FLORALIA

The Floralia international flower exhibition is always a special occasion but this year's 10th-anniversary edition, celebrating a full decade of floral fabulousness, is even more so. Visitors are invited to the picturesque Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden – just beyond the limits of the Brussels-Capital Region – to discover more than 500 varieties of flowers, including 400 kinds of tulip. The 14 hectares of park surrounding the castle have been sown with a staggering 1 million bulbs, most of them Dutch in origin but some coming from England. If that's not enough, Floralia also features a series of weekly indoor exhibitions showcased in a vast, newly restored greenhouse.

April 5-May 5

[www.kasteelgrootbijgaarden.be](http://www.kasteelgrootbijgaarden.be)



Floralia provides a splash of colour to mark the end of winter



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## NAMUR IN MAY

The annual international street theatre festival Namur in May transforms the Walloon capital into a swinging fairground. The focus here is on arts which are practised outside traditional institutions. Clowns, contortionists, illusionists, mimes, fire-breathers, folk musicians and daredevils are just some of the performers you'll encounter at various sites in the historic city centre over the long weekend. Participants are recruited from all across Europe and beyond (last year's programme included artists from as far afield as Canada and Australia). The common denominator is creativity and a determination to think – and create – outside the box. If you're looking for a whimsical alternative for the Ascension weekend, this is it. May 8-12  
[www.namurenmai.be](http://www.namurenmai.be)



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## TASTE OF ANTWERP

The gastronome in all of us will savour the opportunity to attend one of Belgium's biggest culinary festivals. The seventh edition of Taste of Antwerp is held right on the banks of the Scheldt, in the port city's new, post-industrial expo centre Waagnatie. The annual event gathers producers, distributors, chefs, critics and foodies to celebrate good food and discover just how much Belgium has to offer. Each year more than 100,000 visitors pass through the food fair's stalls and open-air dining decks, among them celebrity chefs and other media personalities. Admission is free so you only pay for what you eat (which may well add up). Look out also for Taste of Limburg from June 7 to 9. May 9-12  
[www.tasteofantwerp.com](http://www.tasteofantwerp.com)



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## UPCOMING EVENTS WITH ING

- **April 27 & 28, ING Ardenne Roads**, classic car rally, Spa, [www.ingardenneroads.be](http://www.ingardenneroads.be)
- **May 3-5, Inc'Rock Festival**, rock and urban music, Incourt, [www.incrock.be](http://www.incrock.be)
- **May 24, Doudou Mons**, folklore festival, [www.doudou.mons.be](http://www.doudou.mons.be)

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## MATISSE: LA COULEUR DÉCOUPÉE

Henri Matisse set the post-war art world aflame with *Jazz*, a book of bold and colourful cut-out experiments. This innovative technique yielded some of the French Modernist mandarin's most iconic work and announced an aesthetic revolution whose effects are still felt long after the artist's death in 1954. The Matisse family recently donated hundreds of unused gouache cut-outs from the *Jazz* period, prompting an exploration in the form of an exhibition. Le Cateau's Matisse Museum, in the French hinterland beyond Mons, presents Matisse: *La Couleur Découpée*. The newly donated fragments appear alongside finished masterpieces, tracing the evolution of Matisse's signature technique. Until June 9  
[museematisse.cg59.fr](http://museematisse.cg59.fr)

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## MODERNISM: BELGIAN ABSTRACT ART & EUROPE (1912-1930)

Several international museums are loaning works to the comprehensive exhibition *Modernism: Belgian Abstract Art & Europe (1912-1930)*. The Belgian avant-garde may have had its roots in poetry and painting but by the inter-war years Belgian modernists were active across all fields of fine and applied arts, from architecture to typography to film to music to theatre. Yet, for all that, the period is often ignored. In fact, this is the first major retrospective

in decades. The exhibition also places the Belgian Modernist experience in a broader European context by juxtaposing national artists and their international counterparts. Until June 30  
[www.mskgent.be](http://www.mskgent.be)

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## FOLKERT DE JONG: ACTUS TRAGICUS

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is perhaps the Benelux region's best-kept secret. Its banks are infamous but its cultural offerings, though just as rich, are hardly ever mentioned on this side of the Ardennes. Luxembourg City's modern art museum Mudam is currently hosting Folkert De Jong's solo exhibition *Actus Tragicus*. The contemporary Dutch sculptor works in the unusual medium of rigid foam, from which he creates the realistic life-sized figures – often characters borrowed from history books – that populate his surreal scenes. The current exhibition is inspired by Bruegel the Elder, ancient Mayan funeral rites and the architecture of the Mudam itself. De Jong tailored his latest works to dangle from the dome of the museum's Grand Hall. Until September 8  
[www.mudam.lu](http://www.mudam.lu)





Expat Time tours Brussels to hear the views of three art experts

# Is art an investment?

★ By Sarah Crew

David Altmejd  
Figure with  
Cantaloupe  
Shoulders, 2013

**T**he temptation to see art as a safe investment is understandable. Owning a piece of original art would appear a rather pleasurable way of securing assets during the economic doldrums. With its roster of galleries and auction houses continually growing, Brussels has established itself as an important player in the art world. Our experts certainly agree: an extensive art history, a thriving contemporary scene and a traditional yet open-minded culture all fuel this vibrancy.

Still, the art market can be an opaque place to do business. Is it possible to combine two apparently opposing activities, one objective, the other subjective, to make an investment when buying art?

Our search for answers starts in the heart of Brussels, in the Sablon, where many upmarket auctioneers and galleries vie for business. One recent arrival is Roberto Polo, artistic director of the gallery that bears his name, as well as

Galerie Historismus, which specialises in museum-quality decorative arts. The Cuban-American is a legendary art authority, erudite art historian and theorist, collector and dealer of Belgian and international art. He's been based in Brussels since 2007.

Polo is categorical: "You don't buy art as an investment. It goes against the nature of art. Art is bought for love, but that does not mean it cannot subsequently be a good investment." The relationship is nothing new to Polo: he was instrumental in launching Citibank's international Art Advisory & Finance in the 1970s, the first of its kind in the banking industry.

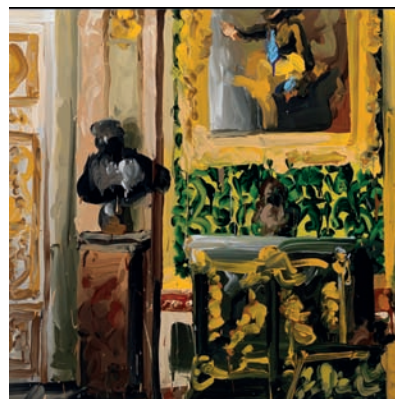
But he professes to spontaneity when buying art. "There have been two or three times in my life that I did not buy impulsively and these were catastrophic mistakes," he explains. When compiling over 300 of from around 7,000 masterpieces that passed through his hands during a more than 40-year career for the award-winning tome *Roberto Polo The Eye*, published by Frances Lincoln Limited (London) in 2011, he says, "I realised the pieces which made the most profit were those which I thought I had overpaid enormously when I bought. This is because I thought they were extraordinary and I couldn't live without them."

Polo's intuition is based on a profound knowledge of art. "Today, there is a notion that art is not a language with a grammar and a vocabulary, but you do need to read a work of art as you read a book, and you need talent, as well as education, to do so." He advises poten-



**De Vliegheer**

Green Interior (Versailles), 2013;  
 Marcus Aurelius, 2012;  
 Glass 1, 2012



tial investors to follow their heart, but adds “you have to buy what was revolutionary in its time”. He cites one of his favourite contemporary Belgian artists, Jan Vanriet, the Flemish painter who was featured in Polo’s opening show last November: “Vanriet has sources, such as Symbolism, Dadaism and Surrealism, but he is a literary painter who brings something new and has had an influence on the work of Luc Tuymans and Michaël Borremans, members of the second generation of contemporary Belgian painters.”

Polo has been championing Belgian artists for many years. His interest was initially sparked by the work of Henry van de Velde, the painter, who, according to Polo and many art-historical authorities, became the first abstract artist in Europe and father of modern design theory. Polo’s enthusiasm for Belgian contemporary painters continues with the current exhibition Jan De Vliegheer I Collections, showing until June 2.

Walking from the Sablon through the museum quarter to the business area of Trône reinforces the relationship between art and finance. It is an oft-over-

looked fact that corporate institutions are the holders of many of the world’s best art treasures. But a bank tends to buy rather than sell art, thereby bolstering its public image and providing creative inspiration for its employees. Social responsibility and educational goals have evolved along with the acquisition of more diverse pieces of art. ING in Brussels, formerly Banque Bruxelles Lambert, is one such example.

Its headquarters is an innovative Modernist building designed by Gordon Bunschraft in Avenue Marnix, completed in 1963. Banque Lambert’s president, Baron Léon Lambert, commissioned the architect who in turn encouraged the baron, a passionate art collector, to display his personal collection in the minimalist building. The baron, influenced by cultural and financial activities in the US, had the foresight to view art as a complementary aspect for the bank. When his bank merged with the Banque de Bruxelles in the 1970s, an art department was set up.

Since 1986, its head has been Patricia De Peuter, an art historian who is equally passionate about contemporary art. She

explains how the baron’s death in 1987 and the Marnix building’s extension in 1992 led to a strategy of buying international and Belgian contemporary art and organising exhibitions “which created a buzz in the city”. Its 2,500 works include sculpture by Pol Bury, Antony Gormley and Dan Graham, works by Anja Schrey and Michelangelo Pistoletto and the controversial photographic series Sans Soucis by Christian Boltanski.

“From the beginning we were not an isolated department but integrated in the general strategy of communication,” says De Peuter. “Over the past few years the bank has also been stressing its involvement in exhibitions and other empowering events such as Art Brussels. At the next edition in April, the bank is presenting the Young Belgian Painters Award, one of many initiatives that boosts emerging artists. Sponsoring cannot be a one-shot investment, but when you work in partnership, it is a win-win formula, she explains. “Art reaches you in a very sensitive and emotional way and that is particularly important for a rational organisation like a bank. Art is part of our DNA; it is about who we are and what we aim for.”

**“ING sees its collection as a challenge to be open-minded”**

She is proud of the initiatives the bank and art department have overseen. They include the satellite show of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar – for the international human rights project Newtopia in Mechelen at the end of last year – and installations that question the role of financial institutions in society, notably by Belgian Pieter Vermeersch. Swiss pair Hendrikje Kühne and Beat Klein also transformed ING stock exchange reports into model airplanes suspended above visitors' heads at Art Brussels in 2011 as a reflection of new positions that brokers could adopt in their daily activities.

De Peuter dispels the myth that banks buy art as investment. "ING sees its collection as a challenge to be open-minded. Art sharpens a reflection on society." She agrees that contemporary art is not easy to decode. "Of course knowledge is important, but people have to be open. The bank wants us to think outside the box and contemporary art has an important role in that."

Heading through the EU quarter to the top of Avenue Louise, there is a more recently established cluster of galleries. The pioneer in 1991 was Xavier Hufkens, Brussels' most successful contemporary art dealer. He is similarly adamant that art should not be viewed as an investment. "It's sad in a way because that is not what it is about, not for me and not for a large group of my collectors." His views echo De Peuter and Polo: "Art is about other things, pure pleasure, a view of society.

It should enlighten you, make you think and create dialogue." He admits that you don't have to own art to appreciate it, saying: "I need to own art, but not everyone does. I personally find it very exciting."

His entry into the art world was precocious. At 15 or 16 he decided he wanted to be an art dealer and at 22 he opened his first gallery in Saint-Gilles in 1987. Five years later he moved into his current elegant Ixelles townhouse. The gallery spread to the neighbouring building in 1997 and now Hufkens is opening a second space down the street for more flexibility. With an ever-expanding roll of mainly international artists, all top-flight, further enlargement is no surprise.

Hufkens is affable and approachable, despite a career that demands frequent travelling. He believes art is more accessible today. "I think there is something really nice about galleries, you just have to push the door, you don't have to buy a ticket," he says. He has witnessed a sea-change as Brussels has usurped Antwerp as the country's art capital, helped by the arrival of the EU and other international organisations bringing with them a wave of foreign residents.

For potential buyers, he believes there are plenty of interesting galleries and that art fairs are an option for those lacking time. Hufkens is himself on the selection committee of the Art Basel fair. But there is no short cut to ap-

preciating art: "The eyes are a muscle that you have to train. Rather like a new language, you have to learn the words. Anything good demands an effort."

He is also, naturally, an advocate of buying from dealers rather than at auction: "It depends if you like a relationship or not. A gallery, artist and collector is a triangle, while an auction house just sells a lot number. The relationship between the gallery and an artist is something special; it's an artistic relationship and also a friendship, we evolve together."

Hufkens has succeeded in maintaining relationships with many of his artists. Returning to the gallery from March 28 until May 4 is Antony Gormley, whom Hufkens has represented for more than 25 years. His show replaces Canadian sculptor David Altmejd, another gallery stalwart. Hufkens' criterion for continuing to work with an artist is that the work still excites him. "There is not a day when I can say I've been bored and that is a privilege, isn't it?"



Antony Gormley & Anja Schrey (far right)



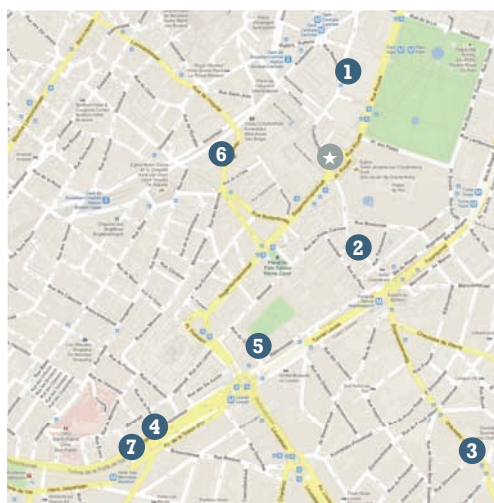
# In the neighbourhood

Our tips on how to make a day - or a weekend - out of a visit to the season's top event



## YSL

Once you've seen the Yves Saint Laurent, A Visionary exhibition, there's no need to head straight back home. There are plenty of places nearby to go for lunch or dinner, enjoy a drink, shop and even spend the night



## 1 LAURENT GERBAUD

In his mission statement, Brussels chocolate maker Laurent Gerbaud says he "swears to God that his chocolates contain no added sugars, no butter, no preservatives, no soy lecithin and no artificial flavours". What's left is a dark and rich chocolate with 75% cocoa (50% for the milk chocolate), which he blends with exotic flavours. It all started in China, where he discovered the combination of kumquat and dark chocolate. His range now includes myriad delights, including milk chocolate truffles with speculoos, dark chocolate with black Madagascar pepper and sweet chilli.  
2D Rue Ravenstein  
[www.chocolatsgerbaud.be](http://www.chocolatsgerbaud.be)



## 2 AUTOUR DU MONDE

Visit French designer Serge Bensimon's concept store Autour du Monde for a mix of ready-to-wear fashion and home decoration. Here you'll find casual outfits in cheerful colours, scented candles with dreamy fragrances and, of course, the famous tennis shoes. These simple canvas trainers with a rubber sole come in a rainbow of colours and never go out of fashion. They exist in women's, men's and children's sizes, and have a fan club that includes Jane Birkin and Natalie Portman.  
70 Rue de Namur  
[www.bensimon.com](http://www.bensimon.com)

## 3 CRAZY TEA

Ever heard of bubble tea? It's a Taiwanese tea-based drink that first saw daylight in tea-shops back in the 1980s. The addition of flavoured tapioca balls is what makes the drink so popular. Bubble tea first became a hit in the US, before it found its way to Europe. In Brussels, you'll find it at Crazy Tea. Choose your tea (fruity, milk or frozen), choose your bubble flavours (mango, passion fruit, lychee, yoghurt) and enjoy the sweet sensation.  
29-31 Chaussée d'Ixelles  
[www.crazytea.be](http://www.crazytea.be)

## 4 THE HOTEL

Located between the high-end fashion boutiques on Boulevard de Waterloo, The Hotel is the perfect place to spend the night. The recently renovated rooms ooze timeless luxury and the presence of fashion books and magazines gives away The Hotel's interest in design and couture. As long as the YSL exhibition runs, you can book a superior room, including a parking spot, breakfast, wifi and two tickets to the expo for €210 per night, per room (€390 for two nights). The special offer is only available on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.  
38 Boulevard de Waterloo  
[www.thehotel.be](http://www.thehotel.be)



## 5 RESTAURANT JB

Tucked away in a side street off Boulevard de Waterloo, Restaurant JB is a family-run business with an outstanding reputation. From the half-open kitchen you can watch chef Freddy Van Ruyskensvelde and his two sons Kurt and Frank while they blend tradition and innovation, using fresh, seasonal Belgian and French products.  
24 Rue du Grand Cerf  
[www.restaurantjb.com](http://www.restaurantjb.com)

## 6 BEAUTY BY KROONEN & BROWN

If you're looking for an exclusive scent, this is the place to be. Think niche perfumes by among others Amouage, a fragrance house that draws its inspiration from the Sultanate of Oman, perfumes and scented candles by Swedish label Byredo, and amber fragrances by Odin New York. They also stock (organic) skincare and make-up brands, such as Gentlemen's Tonic, the South African Environ and Jane Iredale. And all of this comes with great service and personalised advice.  
49 Rue Lebeau  
[www.kroonenandbrown.com](http://www.kroonenandbrown.com)

## 7 MERCKEN

After shops in Hasselt and Antwerp, luxury menswear boutique Mercken has found its way to Brussels as well. In the store on Boulevard de Waterloo you'll find suits by Italian label Brioni, luxury fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna and – exclusive to Brussels – the ready-to-wear and made-to-measure creations by top American designer Tom Ford.  
30 Boulevard de Waterloo  
[www.mercken.com](http://www.mercken.com)



# And finally ...

Emma Beddington takes a look at the stories dominating the news over the past 100 days, from surprise abdications to plummeting meteors and the whiff of horsemeat

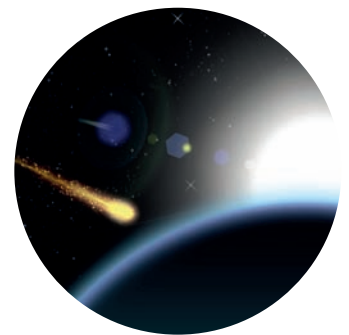


In the first high-profile retirement of 2013, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands announced her intention to abdicate in favour of her son Willem-Alexander as head of possibly the world's lowest-maintenance royal house. It wasn't exactly surprising: Dutch royals have been abdicating since the 19th century. I imagine that when Beatrix made her announcement, the nation gave a collective shrug and went back to watching Holland's Got Talent.



The alarming revelation that every time we pierce the film on a microwave ready meal a pony dies looks like dominating the news for months to come. It kicked off in Ireland when beefburgers were found to be heavily contaminated with horse DNA and soon crossed the Irish Sea to the UK, where squeamish Brits were told that their favourite brands of lasagne contained 100% horsemeat. It truly spread across Europe when Ikea withdrew the sale of its iconic meatballs in 20 countries after equine traces were found in its Köttbullar range. Perversely, all the media coverage has spurred some to give the much-maligned meat a try.

So far this year we've had fiery, end-of-days meteor showers in Russia and the DA14 asteroid that came within panicking distance (well, 27,520km – I was panicking) of wiping us all out. Are they implying there's worse to come? I'll be waiting out the next 100 days in my subterranean radiation shelter. Wearing a tin helmet. You might want to join me.



Even a pope needs to realise when the burdens of the job are getting too much. The 85-year-old Pope Benedict XVI announced his departure not only in Latin, but with an exquisitely theatrical lightning strike on the dome of Saint Peter's. Don't tell me it was coinci-

dence: I'm convinced popes have "occasional access to dramatic meteorological phenomena" written into their employment contracts. Papal resignations are unheard of (this is the first in 598 years), so the Vatican, hardly averse to a little drama, must be electric with intrigue and whispered gossip in a variety of classical languages.





★ by Derek Blyth

# The customer is always wrong, right?

In Belgium, I think you might say that the customer is always wrong. It is certainly true in department stores, where you can be quite sharply reprimanded by the assistant if you try to interrupt her while she is on the phone.

But the full truth of this proposition only came home to me recently after I had my car serviced. The garage where I get this done once a year is proud of its 10-point customer service policy. I often read this while I wait patiently to be served.

I am happy to wait. I do not expect customer service in Belgium, just as I do not expect mountains in the Netherlands. Each country has its positives and its negatives. We have to be tolerant. So I stand at the desk reading the 10-point customer guarantee and realise how lucky I am to have a garage that puts me at the very centre of everything it does.

I finally hand over the car keys. "We will call you when your car is ready," says the cheerful young man at the desk. I know this is not true. They always forget to call me. But I can live with this. I am not going to call my lawyer just because they have forgotten point six of their customer service pledge.

So I collect the car at the end of the day and read through the long list of checks that have been done, items that have been replaced, adjustments that have been made. It all adds up to a huge bill, more than the cost of a week in Sicily. But they did replace a squeaky windscreen wiper so I am in no position to complain.

Two days later, the phone rings. I know from experience that this will be the customer service department calling to check that everything was to my satisfaction. The polite man on the

phone wants to know whether I am fully satisfied, quite satisfied, quite dissatisfied, or totally dissatisfied.

I always say that I am fully satisfied, because once I said, well, not really fully satisfied.

The man was shocked. "No?"

"No."

"Would you care to state precisely what was not fully to your satisfaction?"

Here I was stuck. I speak a moderate level of French, enough to discuss the weather, or to avoid ordering steak américain thinking I will get an American steak, but not sufficient to explain that the car had started to flash a red warning light telling me that the tyre was flat, when it clearly wasn't.

"Oh," the nice man said. "I am sorry."

I thought that was the end of it, but two days later I had a call from a different man in the customer service department telling me that my complaint had been brought to his notice and would I tell him precisely what was not fully satisfactory. So I had to explain once again that, following a visit to the garage that cost me an arm and a holiday in Palermo, the indicator started flashing that the tyre was flat. This took a good 10 minutes of my time.

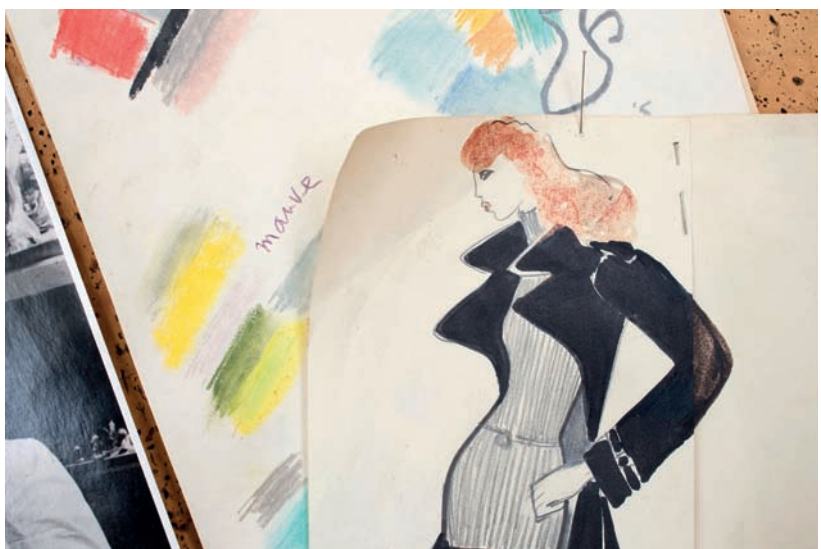
At the end of it all I really wasn't satisfied. But there was no one interested in my complaint. So now I know not to complain. The customer is always wrong in Belgium, even when he is right.

# Yellow fever

YSL exhibition brings history of visionary fashion icon to Brussels

French designer Yves Saint Laurent appeared at a crucial turning point in social history: the 1960s. Contemporary cultural and political upheaval opened up new spaces for fashion, notably around the newly liberated woman who was beginning to assert herself in the spheres of work and leisure. Saint Laurent was among the first to create functional and stylish threads for this new breed of consumer. In other words, he was a visionary. The exhibition Yves Saint-Laurent: A Visionary, conceived by ING Belgium in collaboration with the Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Foundation, emphasises that aspect of Saint Laurent's legacy.

Until 5 May, ING Cultural Centre, Place Royale 6, Brussels  
[www.ing.be/art](http://www.ing.be/art)





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