

wallonia and brussels

spring 2018

wab

magazine

Discover a region that combines
technical knowhow with quality of life

SPIROU & ME

MEET THE NEW WOMAN AT THE HELM
OF THE LEGENDARY COMIC

- Prepare to be amazed: Wallonia's top tourist attractions in the spotlight
- Making plastics smarter, greener & more efficient



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Editorial

With man-made waste polluting every corner of the Earth, the plastic industry is under particular pressure to reform its practices. In our special focus on the regional Plastiwin cluster, we discover how the sector in Wallonia is responding to environmental concerns and exploring new digital forms that will help shape the future. Remaining with the ecological theme, we meet three companies honoured for their innovative work in combatting global warming. They each picked up a Green Solution Award at the UN Convention on Climate Change in the autumn. Looking ahead to the tourist season, the region is offering a feast of offbeat activities, sights and accommodation under the banner of Amazing Wallonia (Wallonie Insolite). Keep a close eye on events coming up and take advantage of some fantastic themed promotions.

Don't forget to download **the new WAB magazine app**, now available for Android and iOS. Go to Google Play or iTunes and keep up-to-date with news and events in Wallonia and Brussels.

Wallonia and Brussels - Contact

AWEX Wallonia Export-Investment Agency
www.awex.be

WBI Wallonie-Bruxelles International
www.wbi.be

Welcome Offices
www.investinwallonia.be



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Cover: Dossogne, Dupuis 2018

AIR BELGIUM TAKES OFF AT CHARLEROI

New airline Air Belgium is taking off from Brussels South-Charleroi airport for destinations in the Far East from mid-April. Its fleet of four A340-400 aircraft is to provide a direct long-distance service to cities in Asia including Beijing and Shanghai. The company's inaugural flight will be to Hong Kong.

After obtaining its mandatory air operator's certificate from the Belgian Civil Aviation Administration in March, Air Belgium CEO Niky Terzakis said: "It's a proud achievement for my wonderful team. Very grateful for all the hard work and determination."

Despite being billed as a low-cost airline, Air Belgium offers economy, premium and business class service. The airport will need to be adapted to meet the needs of long-haul passengers, including new business class facilities. Temporary solutions will be put in place at first, with building work due to begin in May and last a year. Charleroi airport managing director Jean-Jacques Cloquet said: "Welcoming such a company to our airport strengthens our position on the international scene."

Air Belgium plans to recruit 300 staff directly and will rely on another 300 ground staff at Charleroi. The company has a starting capital of €20 million, divided among Belgian and European majority shareholders and Asian minority shareholders. Its headquarters are in Mont-Saint-Guibert, Walloon Brabant.

airbelgium.com

FOREIGN INVESTMENT CONTINUES TO RISE

In 2017, foreign companies invested more than €682 million and generated 2,009 jobs in Wallonia, divided between 89 projects, according to recent data from AWEX, the Wallonia Export-Investment Agency. It was the fourth best year for foreign direct investment in Wallonia since 2000 in terms of job creation. Although fewer investment projects were started last year compared to 2016, the average amount invested and the average number of jobs created per project increased year-on-year. After France and India, the US was the third most important source of foreign investment in 2017, accounting for about €100.6 million. Out of 89 projects launched in 2017, 35 were greenfield investments, whereby a company builds its operations from the ground up. Metronom Health, a US biotech company that specialises in diabetes management, for example, chose to establish its international headquarters in Mont-Saint-Guibert. The remaining 54 projects were expansions of existing activities. Continuing this trend, Google has announced a €250 million expansion of its data centre in Saint-Ghislain for 2018. AmCham Belgium said it supported efforts to improve Belgium's attractiveness for foreign investors and was ready to work with all levels of government to build on these figures and continue the positive evolution for the whole country.

amcham.be

MUSIC COLLECTIVE SCORES HIT WITH ITS APP

Verviers musical collective Herrmutt Lobby (HLO) is breaking into Western markets with its app, PlayGround, thanks to a partnership with US start-up incubator The Refiners. The Walloon company was spotted at a technology fair in Las Vegas in January. The app for iPhone and iPads allows users to play interactive songs by swiping and tapping on coloured objects within a multi-touch graphic interface. A spokesperson for HLO said: "We are grateful for The Refiners' trust and help and are full of motivation and energy as we glimpse a future of opportunities on the US market with our daring music-tech project."

herrmuttlobby.com



© Courtesy HLO





BRIEFS

The **EU-China Logistic** is a new cross-border business incubator at Liège Airport. It is the first of its kind in Europe, providing logistic and transport services for Europe-wide e-commerce and linking the Guangdong region export hub with Wallonia's transport hub Liège. The incubator also offers free office spaces, mailboxes, training to help companies expand their activities and access to appropriate government services and to local partners. The incubator is a result of a partnership between Wallonia Export-Investment Agency AWEX, Logistics in Wallonia and Liège Airport.

Sonaca Aircraft and Namur-Suarlée Airport signed a 20-year contract at the end of 2017 that will allow the Charleroi aerospace company to build its single-engine Sonaca 200 aircraft at the Temploux site. The subsidiary of the Sonaca Group is seeking planning permission to build a 2,000m² assembly hangar and a tarmac runway that would replace one of the two current grass ones. The new business is expected to create between 20 and 40 jobs.

Liège space optic company Amos has won a second major contract to supply specialised equipment to Airbus Defence and Space. At the beginning of 2017, Amos sealed a deal to deliver the scan mirror of the METimage Earth Observation optical instrument. In March 2018, it was asked to design and manufacture the optics of the telescope and derotator, critical elements of the second-generation EUMETSAT Polar System, due to be launched into orbit in 2021.

IBA, a worldwide leader in proton therapy based in Louvain-la-Neuve, has signed three new contracts with British company Proton Partners International to set up compact proton therapy solutions in the UK. Proton therapy, which is at the centre of the company's business, is a cancer treatment that targets cancer cells.



© Courtesy Merlix Cats Café

First cat cafe opens in Liège

If you drop into Merlix Cats Café in Liège, you risk walking out with a new furry friend. Not only is the cosy cafe, which opened in March, filled with cute cats, they are all looking for new homes. Owners Camille Nuyts and Antoine Dedave work with the cat refuge Félin pour l'autre in Villers-le-Bouillet. "Clients don't leave directly with a cat: there's a period of reflection when they have to come and see the cat a number of times before filling a form that is sent to the refuge, which manages the adoption," Nuyts explains. A second kitty hangout is set to open in the city late spring.

merlix.cafe

INNOVATION MEETS BUSINESS AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Innovation cluster GreenWin and the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) are staging an international conference called Green Chemistry and White Biotechnology: From Innovation to Business on May 23 and 24. The fourth edition of the event aims to carry out an inventory of innovative technologies and green chemistry and white biotechnology activities worldwide, to share knowledge and foster the creation of research and development projects in the sector. The event includes workshops on European projects and B2B meetings. White biotechnology is the use of living cells from yeast, moulds, bacteria and plants to create industrial products that are easily degradable, require less energy and create less waste.

greenwin.be



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IN THE SPOTLIGHT Florence Mixhel

The 36-year-old from Liège is the new editor-in-chief of Spirou, the Franco-Belgian comic that first appeared in 1938. She joined Spirou's publisher, Marcinelle-based Dupuis, a decade ago, and is Spirou's first female editor



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People think things will become outdated, but they find a way to adapt and stay relevant

How did you get into the world of comics?

I did a master's degree in journalism, but I wasn't so keen on a career as a classical journalist. It was fortunate: Dupuis was looking for someone, I was interested and applied. But I admit that's not what I expected to end up doing.

How do you choose your stories?

Our writers are always coming up with storylines – we have 40 to 50 writers and they are very creative. What I have to do is see whether it's a line we want to follow, whether it's interesting and to our tastes.

Sometimes when we have themes for an issue – for example, we might do something on cooking – then we encourage our writers to come up with relevant ideas.

There have been a number of live-action films based on Spirou characters recently. Have you been involved?

We didn't have any input in the films themselves. But we have covered the recent Spirou and Fantasio movie in depth: we published a special edition, which included a “making of...” section, and photos of the actors behind the scenes.

Do comic strips still have a place in a digital world?

Yes, comics do have their place. I was just at the Foire du livre book fair in Brussels, which was extremely successful. People like to read, they like to have something in their hands. We still have a weekly circulation of 65,000, which is quite a lot. I think paper will always be there. But for

the digital generation, we are developing apps to read Spirou on phones or tablets. Sometimes people think things will become outdated, but they find a way to adapt and stay relevant.

What has been the biggest moment of your time at Spirou?

After the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris, in January 2015, we came together to make a special issue of Spirou. We were all shocked and stunned that they should try to kill cartoonists. But we felt we had to do something, as an homage and out of solidarity. We wanted to express our feelings. This was all in addition to our regular magazine. We normally plan weeks in advance, but this was done in just four days, and over a weekend. It was not about politics but about dealing with a tragedy. Many readers felt this helped them cope; for example, we had one strip that explained how to talk about the attacks to a daughter. I was really proud of that.

Winner takes all

Promotions agency snaps up prize for tourism brochure

By Mari Eccles





If most people were asked to name the last time Belgium scored a win against the US in an international competition, they'd probably say it was four years ago at the football World Cup. Few may know that a local company emerged victorious just a few months ago, when it beat competition from not one but two American challengers.

That champion is BHS Promotion – a visitor information company based in Liège – which won the international prize at the Best Brochure Awards last autumn for its nomination, a publication on Sea Life Blankenberge. The marine park on the Belgian coast is home to more than 2,500 animals including sharks, piranhas, seahorses and rays. But the winning brochure focused on Sea Stars, a family-friendly exhibition about the ocean's starfish.

The publications were judged on their content, headline and overall appeal. Henry Goldsmith of the International Association of Visitor Information Providers said that the BHS effort “best embodied the ideals required to make it an effective marketing piece”, according to the judges. And while the Berlin ceremony may not have been televised around the globe, the award is the industry gold-standard and fiercely

competitive. Last year, visitor information centres around the world whittled down their chosen entries to 76 publications. Sea Life's closest competition came from two US brochures, one advertising a whaling trip in California, the other promoting a tour of a potato chip factory in Pennsylvania.

For BHS Promotion, the award is recognition of the contribution of a small country and its tourism products within a large international association, according to its director, Jean-Yves Beeckman. He oversees the company's activities, which makes up more than 80% of the national market and which he says have an “important presence” across the country. BHS Promotion, which has been active for more than two decades, produces 40 million brochures and posters each year within Belgium and in France, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg.

It may seem a little churlish to ask whether a company with that history behind it, and one that's just won an international award, is concerned for the future. But as the tide of digitalisation marches on, do staff at BHS have doubts about their industry's survival?

No, Beeckman insists. On the contrary, the digital breakthrough complements BHS's

core work in print media, he says, and points to the website and mobile apps the company has created.

According to market research tests the company has conducted over the past three years, paper rather than digital content is the most effective way to communicate with visitors. “Information on the web catches the attention for a short while but then is swept away,” he says. “But paper is conservable.” And even among tourist companies that rely largely on digital or online booking, often the companies will initially use BHS's paper services to get their message out.

If the digital revolution is unlikely to disrupt the way the company works, neither is the recent international success. BHS Promotions' plans for the future are to keep doing what they're doing. “We don't have a great novelty planned for the next year,” Beeckman says. “But with plenty of ideas in our team, it's rare for us go a full year without adding a string to our bow.” For him, the most important thing is that the company is seen as “stable and reliable” by its customers. “Whatever happens, we'll stay a human-size company.”

bhs-promotion.com

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Information on the web catches the attention for a short while but then is swept away

Jean-Yves Beeckman

A fair COP

Three Walloon projects have been rewarded for their innovation by the UN's Convention on Climate Change

By Andy Furniere

Three Walloon projects came home with a prestigious Green Solutions Award from COP23, the annual meeting of the UN Convention on Climate Change. The awards honour exemplary buildings, districts and infrastructures that contribute to the fight against climate change.

From 1995, the parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change have met each year to assess progress in dealing with global warming. These events now include the ceremony of the Green Solutions Awards, organised by Construction21, a network dedicated to the international sustainable building and city sector. The competition offers visibility to pioneering solutions to climate challenges.

Representing 19 countries in various continents, 150 entrants participated in the 2017 edition in Bonn, Germany, in November. Wallonia stood out, with three prize-winning projects: from BSolutions, Startech Management Group and Home-co.

Architecture and engineering firm BSolutions triumphed in the Sustainable Con-

struction category, receiving the Grand Prize for the building of their own highly energy-efficient office at the Créalys science park in Gembloux, Namur province. "The sustainable development philosophy guided the entire project," says Cédric Anbergen, the company's project manager in sustainable development.

The office is a Nearly Zero Energy Building and uses no fossil fuels. It produces its own renewable energy with a photovoltaic roof, which provides all the electricity needed to heat and cool the building. The building is partially below ground to benefit from the natural thermal insulation, while the choice of orientation ensures natural light throughout the year and avoids overheating during warm periods.

The office is not only efficient but also comfortable, with bright workspaces created using healthy materials. "Our staff can enjoy a unique level of comfort provided by the excellent temperature, air quality, acoustics, space planning and quality of the materials used," says Anbergen. It also serves as a show project, demonstrating the available options to customers interested in building a high-performance,

sustainable and economically interesting building.

The Grand Prize in the Sustainable City category went to the Cité du Centenaire urban renewal project in Charleroi, carried out by architecture and engineering company Startech Management Group. A neighbourhood with public housing first developed in 1959 is now being transformed into an eco-district, with a focus on sustainability and protecting architectural heritage.

"We renovated forty-eight apartments according to the passive housing criteria, making them the most energy-efficient apartments in the Walloon public housing sector," say the architects behind the project, Nathalie Abrassart and Marcel Barattucci. "The twelve apartments of a new building are the first adaptable social residences in the Walloon sector that are certified as passive housing." Cité du Centenaire is also a pilot project on the management of construction waste. By reusing or recycling much of the old infrastructure, the project shows how waste should be valorised in construction initiatives.



© www.iloveight.be

• BSolutions in Gembloux



© www.iloveight.be

“One of the other challenges was to involve the future inhabitants and population of the area in the project,” say Abrassart and Barattucci. “To achieve that, we set up an artistic project with the pupils of a local school.” The children were helped by Brussels artist Léopoldine Roux to create a design to decorate one of the buildings’ gables. Mineral wool panels were coloured in the many shades found in a demolished building to offer a testimonial of past lives in the area, giving a strong identity to the new eco-district.

In a second phase, two more apartment buildings will be renovated and two new ones constructed. The environment of the district also has to be developed, so it becomes a comfortable public space – with integrated biodiversity – that reinforces the social relationships in the area.

A final Grand Prize, in the Sustainable Renovation category, went to the engineering and consultancy firm Homeco’s Project 55 initiative: a zero-energy refurbishment of a heritage-listed mansion in the centre of Mons that now functions as Homeco’s headquarters.

“We wanted a sustainable office and opted to renovate an existing mansion instead of constructing a new building in an industrial park that would probably be badly connected to public transport,” says Elie Delvigne, Homeco founder and co-manager. As the mansion is in the city centre and close to the railway station, it can be easily reached via public transport or by bike.

“We also wanted to show that it is possible to achieve high energy performance in renovation projects,” he explains. The team achieved the zero-energy standard by combining extensive insulation, optimal air tightness and heat recovery ventilation. A photovoltaic installation compensates the building’s energy consumption.

The Project 55 building was also refurbished using materials like wood wool,

cellulose, C2C-certified plaster, FSC wood and clay-based coatings. The water reservoir and green roof, covered with vegetation, help to use rainwater efficiently. An urban vegetable garden and aquaponics system ensure the development of biodiversity at the site. These healthy materials and systems also contribute to the comfort of the building. Apart from being an office, Project 55 is a training facility in sustainable development and a visitor centre to disseminate best practices.

According to Delvigne, the victory of three Walloon projects proves that the region has a lot of entrepreneurial talent. Abrassart and Barattucci of Startech Management Group agree, but point out that more ambition concerning sustainable development in the region would mean even more potential could be realised.

bsolutions.be
startech-group.eu
homeco.be

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The sustainable development philosophy guided the entire project

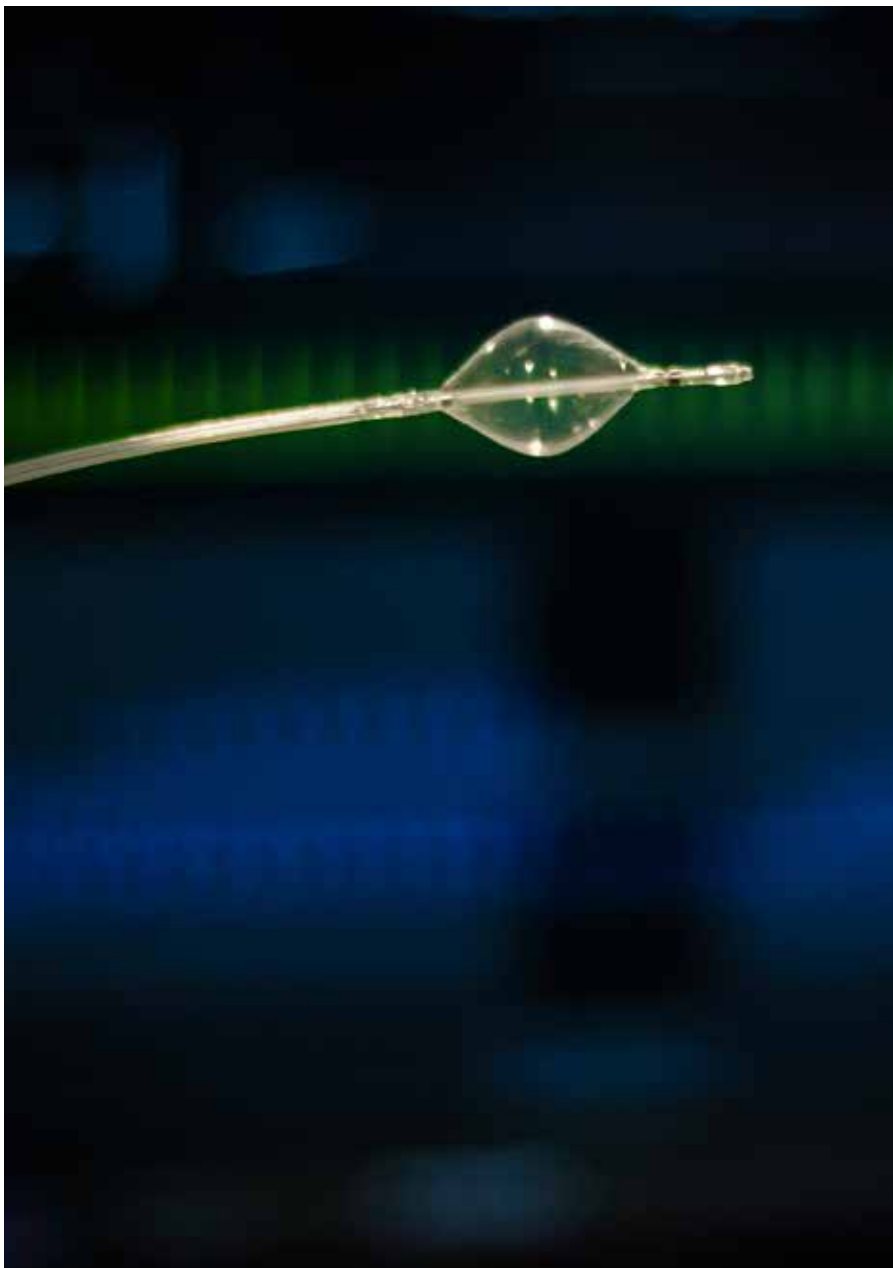
Cédric Anbergen



From the heart

Life-saving heart therapy scores investment from Walloon government and federal backers

By Saffina Rana



We all know clogged arteries can restrict blood flow to the heart and result in a heart attack, and the statistics on heart disease should be enough to put anyone off their frites. It's the leading cause of death in most European countries and the US, with more than 1.8 million deaths in the EU in 2017 and about 800,000 in America.

Austrian company Miracor Medical has scored funding from Walloon and federal public investors to develop an ingenious therapy to reduce heart failure after heart attacks. The company has moved from Vienna to Awans in Liège province where it will take up €25 million of funding from a mix of equity, recoverable cash advance and debt investors to continue research and commercialise the system.

Wallonia was the best place for the company to relocate, according to CEO Olivier Delporte. "There was a lot of interest in the company, so we had other offers of funding in different constructs. But Belgium is fantastic in that it has a very supportive ecosystem for medtech companies like us, and the combination of having a cash advance and complementary investment from public funds was the best," he says.

The therapy takes place in the operating theatre alongside coronary angioplasty and stenting procedures to widen a narrowed artery, frequently performed after a heart attack to help improve the flow of blood to the heart. However, the lack of blood flow to the heart muscle can already have damaged or killed off (infarcted) the

tissue around the heart, leading to slow recovery, complications and heart failure. When used alongside stenting procedures, the company's technology can improve the microcirculation of blood to reduce the tissue damage.

Designed by a team led by cardiovascular surgeon Professor Dr Werner Mohl, the PiCSO (Pressure-controlled Intermittent Coronary Sinus Occlusion) Impulse system consists of a catheter placed downstream of the stent, in the coronary sinus, which is then used to inflate and deflate a small balloon to create some pressure and increase the microcirculation of the newly freed blood flow around the infarcted tissue.

The results of an early study conducted at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK with three other UK institutions last year, have shown the system procedure to be safe and viable in over 95% of patients, and that it could significantly reduce tissue damage following acute heart attacks, according to Delporte.

"We need to conduct a large randomised clinical trial to talk about success rates, but on average we expect relative reductions of the infarct size of between 20 and 50%. This is major, and translates directly into heart failure prevention," he says.

An €8 million cash advance from the Walloon government will allow for a Europe-wide randomised clinical trial to start this year, and for the preparation of a randomised trial in the US. "We have designs and are in discussions with the relevant bodies and investigating sites. We already have 193 patients in Europe and will involve the first patient later this year," says Delporte.



• Miracor Medical CEO Olivier Delporte

The system is expected to receive its CE mark by 2019, confirming that it is safe for purpose under EU law. Commercialisation will be hot on its heels, says Delporte. "We won't be all out, but we will be selectively commercially available in 2019. And that's fast," he says.

The equity capital amounts to €12 million from federal Belgian and Walloon public

investors SFPI, SRIW, and Meusinvest, as well as a number of non-Belgian venture capital funds. A separate cash advance of €8 million specifically for technical and clinical research has been awarded by DGO6 of the Walloon government, the Directorate General Operational for Economy, Employment and Research.

miracormedical.com



MEET THE BRUSSELS EXPAT



**Interpreter
Milota Hudecová-
Westerbeek on
life and linguistics
in the capital of
Europe**

Iwork as an interpreter for the European Parliament. I'm from Slovakia; my mother is Czech and my father is Slovak, and I interpret from English, German, Spanish, Dutch and Czech into Slovak and sometimes from Slovak into English.

When I first came to Brussels in September 2011, I was young and single. Then I met my husband here and we have two children now, aged one and three. It can be stressful with a full-time job. We live close to Maelbeek, near Square Marie-Louise, which means we can easily walk to work. I go to Strasbourg with the Parliament every month. Interpreters from bigger booths,

bigger languages with a lot of MEPs, they go on missions all the time, but in my unit we don't travel so much. My husband is Dutch; he's a translator for the European Council and he used to be a freelance interpreter, so we understand the difficulties of each other's jobs. We each speak our own languages to the children, it's normal here to grow up speaking lots of languages.

I studied languages and have a degree in interpretation. Other interpreters might have a background as economists, for example, or lawyers, and they tend to have a European master's in conference interpreting. You have to work in a team and help your colleagues. We work in short blocks of time, usually taking it in turns to do 20-minute slots, because it requires a lot of concentration.

Some meetings are more technical than others. Often you get hearings with experts giving presentations and they whizz through them, and that can be challenging when their language is very specific. You have a mute button, in case you need to speak to your colleagues to check a word or a number or a name. But it's very rare that there's something you really can't decipher.

We have all kinds of personalities in this job. There are some interpreters who go on missions to interpret for a particular person; that suits someone who is confident, who likes to be in the spotlight. Sometimes when I'm working I feel like I'm performing, but I prefer not to think of people listening to me as that can be distracting. I focus on speaking as if to nobody, then I'm really calm and can focus on the job.





Plastic 2.0

The Plastiwin cluster is helping local companies build a smarter, more sustainable industry

By Ian Mundell

Plastic is not very popular at the moment, its image tarnished by tales of damaged wildlife and demands for more sustainable alternatives. Helping Wallonia's companies face up to this challenge, and to build a smarter plastics industry in the region, is where the Plastiwin cluster comes in.

The cluster brings together a broad range of organisations who contribute to the value of plastic products, not simply companies

that make them. "Designers are part of our value chain, as are research centres and laboratories," explains Elias Njeim, director of Plastiwin.

Next come companies supplying raw materials, from big producers of feedstock such as Total and BASF to firms making additives that colour plastics or give them special properties. Then there are the companies that make the products, known as converters, and the equipment manufacturers who

NANOCYL

Carbon comes in different forms, with radically different properties: think of the contrast between soft graphite in pencils and the hardness of diamond. In the 1980s another form of carbon was discovered, which is capable of making complex structures such as spheres and tubes at the nano-scale. These turned out to have remarkable properties, but it took time to work out how to use them.

Nanocyl is one company that has cracked the problem. It was set up in 2002 to commercialise research on carbon nanotubes at Liège and Namur universities, in particular working out how they could be used to change the properties of different materials. "We are now the world's largest producer of multiwall carbon nanotubes," says Michaël Claes, the company's chief technology officer, referring to a form of graphitic carbon made up of multiple concentric nanotubes.

The nanotubes are mostly used as a filler in plastics and rubbers, and some other applications, making materials with exceptional mechanical properties, such as flame resistance or electrical conductivity. Part of Nanocyl's business involves selling the carbon nanotubes directly to thermoplastic compounders or to manufacturers, particularly of lithium-ion batteries for smartphones. For the rest it makes materials tailored to customer needs.

"Thanks to that approach we have established ourselves very strongly in the automotive business, in packaging, in energy applications and a broad spectrum of industrial applications," Claes says. While few sales currently take place in Belgium, Europe remains a leading market for the company, followed by Asia. Despite its impressive sales growth, Nanocyl is still considered a small or medium-sized enterprise, the staff in its Sambreville headquarters mainly involved in technical selling, development and service roles.

"We try to be vertically integrated and support our customers from the synthesis of the materials through to the applications." Even so, additional expertise is sometimes required, which is where the Plastiwin network can help. "Although we mostly sell abroad, our partners need to be close by." In return, Nanocyl brings its international knowledge to the table. "Even though we are small, we have experience that is usually only found in larger companies, especially when we talk about exports, so sometimes we help in that way."

nanocyl.com



make their work possible. "In the plastics industry we have special tools like moulds and other production equipment, especially injection machines and thermo-forming machines. And these are also part of the value chain."

Next there are distribution companies and, once the plastic has been used, those whose business is to collect and recycle it. Finally there are the organisations that support the workforce, from training centres, to schools, and universities.

One of Plastiwin's roles is to make sure that all the parts of this value chain meet regularly to think about the industry's future. It holds two plenary sessions each year, to which all members are invited. "At least one of these plenaries is devoted to the environment," Njeim says, "with topics such as



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For the plastics industry, recycling is not a problem, it is an opportunity

Elias Njeim

sustainable products, recycling, the circular economy or technologies that help the environment.” The other focuses on technologies with the potential to transform the industry, such as the role of plastics in Industry 4.0, the digitised, automated industry of the future.

Otherwise members opt in to activities, such as participating in working groups on specific topics or attending conferences and business fairs under the Plastiwin umbrella. Priorities come partly from the membership, partly from Njeim and his colleagues looking ahead. “Company managements concentrate on their day-to-day business, and sometimes they need help looking at how the world is changing,” he says. “We suggest things we are convinced will help the industry and might give them new ideas.”

Sometimes there is resistance, even to ideas that are now part of everyday business. “At the beginning, it was difficult to tell them it was important to think about recycling, to consider it an opportunity for new business,” Njeim says. Another hot topic has been additive manufacturing for 3D printing. “This can provide help to any company in the development of new products, so we organised working groups and some seminars on this subject.”

Plastiwin also participates in European projects designed to strengthen cooperation between the regions and to open up new markets. “We can find collaboration here, between Walloon companies, but it is not enough,” Njeim says. “The market here is small, and we have to open up our activities and share them with others.” AdPack, for example is an EU-funded proj-

ect on intelligent packaging that brings together clusters with complementary skills from Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and the Czech Republic. This technology combines electronics and plastics to make packaging that can interact with the advanced digital systems being developed for retail and logistics. “The information is no longer a label that you stick on the packaging, it’s inside the plastic that makes up the packaging,” Njeim explains.

In 2016-17 the project collected information on company needs and the technical problems to be addressed in developing new systems. The next phase will use this information to set the agenda for building links abroad, with fact-finding missions to China, the US and Canada in 2018 and business missions in 2019.

As for the environment, Njeim emphasises the positive aspects of plastic. “People see the waste on the street or in the sea, which I agree is a problem, but it’s a problem of organisation rather than whether or not to use plastic.” Smart design can reduce the environmental impact over the whole life cycle of plastic products. “In developing a product, the design must consider aspects such as raw materials usage, the weight and thickness of the plastic, and even the consumption of energy during the use of the product.”

He also points out that 90% of plastic waste occurs within industry, where recycling and recovery are built in. For example, Pierret Extrusion in Transinne, which produces PVC for window and door profiles, takes back off-cuts for recycling. Meanwhile, companies such as Armacell Benelux, near Verviers, have found new uses for waste plastic, turning used PET bottles into high-performance insulation foam. “For the plastics industry, recycling is not a problem, it is an opportunity,” he insists.

clusters.wallonie.be/plastiwin-fr



SIMONIS GROUP

Simonis Plastic in Liège dates back to 1969. For the past 20 years it has specialised in producing technical parts for the automotive, aerospace, medical and construction industries, as well as a wide range of other applications. Customers include Airbus, Physiol, GE Healthcare, Caterpillar, SNCB and brewing giant AB InBev.

“Technical parts could mean a raw material, such as a high-performance plastic,” says Olivier Verhoyen, the company’s technical director. “It could be complex parts, or parts that need to perform under particular environmental constraints, such as a medical application.”

Customers often know what they want a part to achieve, but not necessarily how plastics can get there. What sets Simonis apart from its competitors, Verhoyen says, is that it can accompany them through the research phase, the development and design of a part, and on to its manufacture all within the company. “We see our designs constantly being implemented, as we actually produce the parts we develop for our customers,” he explains.

Belgian customers remain important, particularly in the defence and medical sectors, but today’s market is clearly global. “Our customers increasingly have plants all over the world, so we need to be able to supply them all around the world.” The company’s subsidiary in China is part of this strategy. Initially set up to make economically priced injection moulds, it is now a manufacturing hub supplying customers who also operate in China and around Asia.

This is a model for the future. “We would like to keep the agility and flexibility of a small company, but we need to be able to supply parts where customers want them,” Verhoyen says. “So the goal will be to have many manufacturing entities of this size, in different locations.” Simonis Group is also growing at home, with the acquisition of Polyform in Limbourg, a complementary business making smaller technical parts.

Another trend is that parts are growing more complex, combining different technologies. This often means finding partners with complementary expertise, which is where Plastiwin can help. “Plastiwin helps us to know who is around us, their competencies, and the key contacts,” Verhoyen explains. Importantly, it covers the whole value chain. “It’s the only place we can meet big players like raw materials suppliers, design engineering offices, plastic processors, R&D centres and so on.”

simonisgroup.be



Tomorrow's world

University of Liège celebrates its past by looking into the future

By Sarah Schug



Surprisingly, at least for the average viewer and non-science nut, quite a few Belgians are featured. Did you know the father of the modern car was Belgian? Etienne Lenoir built the first automobile with an internal combustion engine, and another inventor from Belgium, Zénobe Gramme, was behind the Gramme dynamo, a device that was able to generate much higher voltages than others at the time.

The exhibition's learning effect is one of its best qualities. Were you aware that in Dubai they are already testing transportation bubbles operated by drones? But shining a light on what's yet to come has its own challenges. "A lot of things that companies are working on right now are secret and thus impossible to show," Mager says. That doesn't mean there's not enough to see, though. An aquaponics device hints at the future of farming, photovoltaic streets demonstrate a model for tomorrow's mobility and sustainability, and a robotic kitchen imagines how we will live in our homes.

Though the exhibition's view is a global one, it also highlights local excellence, such as deep coma researcher Steven Laureys or architecture office Greisch, which is behind the record-breaking Millau viaduct in France. Heavy subjects from organ donation to man's eternal quest for immortality are balanced with light-hearted and playful elements, making it accessible for youngsters, who will love walking through a spaceship model with lots of blinking buttons to press.

europaexpo.be

The University of Liège is marking its 200th anniversary this year, and to celebrate it has created a fascinating exhibition exploring the impact of science and technology on our daily lives.

Called I'll Be 20 in 2030, the massive show – presented in four languages and stretching over 3,000 square metres in the city's landmark Guillemins train station – is an interesting attempt to predict what life on earth will be like 12 years from now. "The university did not want an exhibition about its past, but one that is tailored to the younger generations and looks at the future instead," explains Alain Mager, managing director of Europa 50, one of the co-organ-

isers along with heritage group Collections & Patrimoines.

Making sure it didn't drift into the realms of science fiction, university scientists approved all parts of the exhibition. The choice of the year 2030 as a reference point also makes clear that this glance into the future is more science-based than pure imagination. "We wanted to show that it's an evolution rather than a revolution," says Mager. A section examining major inventions of the past and showing their influence on our present lives illustrates this approach: for example, visitors can marvel at the very first calculator, developed by French mathematician Blaise Pascal, or admire one of Alexander Graham Bell's early phones.

All ripe now

Artisan and traditional farm-produced cheese is a growing niche

By Sarah Crew





The most remarkable thing about cheese in Wallonia is its sheer diversity. The region boasts about 700 varieties, be they hard mountain-style, unctuous and pungent, washed, unwashed or bloomy. And if the explosion in quality dairy products has been fuelled by the success of the local food movement, its roots lie in the souring of the milk industry.

With the price of milk frequently dropping below production costs, enterprising farmers turned to the value-added business of making cheese, yoghurt and butter. They joined a cheese-making tradition that has been ripe in Belgium since the Middle Ages, in which small-scale industrial producers, monasteries and abbeys are responsible for many of the region's familiar brands.

Also part of this growing band of cheesemakers are entrepreneurial artisans, reviving the traditional art of cheesemaking and enjoying the satisfaction of selling directly to consumers. One value they all share is a passion for making real cheese with integrity. The artisan process allows varieties to develop their own personality and reflect the flavour of local milk, uniting farming with flavour.

When choosing regional products for his shop, Chez Maître Corbeau in Namur, young cheese refiner Antoine Stoffels insists on cheeses made from unpasteurised milk and favours cow breeds other than the ubiquitous dairy Holstein. Other criteria are proximity and taste. "The most important thing is being a link between the producer and the consumer and having relationships based on confidence," says Stoffels, who opened his store in April 2017 and sells at markets in the region. Around half the cheeses that fill his counter are regular varieties, while the other half varies, to keep customers coming back. Stoffels: "Belgians like cheeses with character, and Walloon varieties have plenty of that."

In Brussels, Wallonia's cheeses have an unlikely ambassador: French expat Véronique Socié, who opened Belgium's first cheese bar in 2017 to showcase the best of the country's

dairy products. Offering up to 40 varieties of Belgian cheeses, the majority from Wallonia, La Fruitière, which she runs with son Léo, is a place for customers to get advice before they buy, as well as savouring her quality selection. She describes the strength of Belgium's cheese industry as part of a continent-wide phenomenon. "The difference in Belgium is that localisation is more dynamic; people want to buy and eat local products," she says. "What I also see is that producers want contact with consumers. They are proud of their products and want to share their passion."

One of Socié's favourites is Herve, the Liège cheese made from cow's milk and traditionally unpasteurised and for the moment the only cheese in Belgium to have the AOC quality provenance label. She also has a soft spot for the cheeses of the Hautes Fagnes region, including Troufleur, as they remind her of the mountain cheeses of her native Jura in eastern France. "There are different challenges to producing at higher altitudes and in different weather," she explains.

Wallonia's agriculture department Apaq-W is backing farmers' diversification and campaigning for consumers to eat local. One of the key challenges is helping farmers increase production, explains Guy Lecocq, who is responsible for the dairy sector. "The fact is that the farmer or artisan is not able to sell in supermarkets, because of their relatively small production. Logistics are also a problem, because of the size of Wallonia, but production is increasing," he says.

Around 20% of the cheese consumed by Belgians every year is from their own country. Apaq-W is running a TV and radio campaign, A Little Bit of Everything, which shows off the diversity of regional produce, and also organises a competition called The Best Cheeses in Wallonia in June at the Château de Harzé near Liège each May. The awards are open to all cheesemakers, be they farmers, artisans or industrial producers, who compete in 11 categories.

apaqw.be

SELECTION FOR YOUR CHEESEBOARD

Ferme de Nizelles
fermedenizelles.com

Chimay Fromages
chimay.com

Ferme Le Bailli
lebailli.be

Brasserie Dupont
brasserie-dupont.be

Ferme du Vieux Moulin
fromagerie-du-vieux-moulin.be

Herve Société
herve-societe.be

Ferme des Grandes Fagnes
ferme-des-grandes-fagnes.be

Fromagerie du Troufleur
facebook.com/troufleur

Ferme des Sureaux
fermedesureaux.com

Fromagerie biologique de Vielsalm
saveursplaisirs.be

Fromagerie d'Orval
orval.be

Fromagerie du Samson
fromageriedusamson.com

Coopérative fermière de Méan
lafermieredemean@skynet.be

Fromagerie du Gros Chêne
groschene.be

Fromagerie Mathot Rochefort
beurre-fromage.com

La Fruitière
lafruitiere.business.site

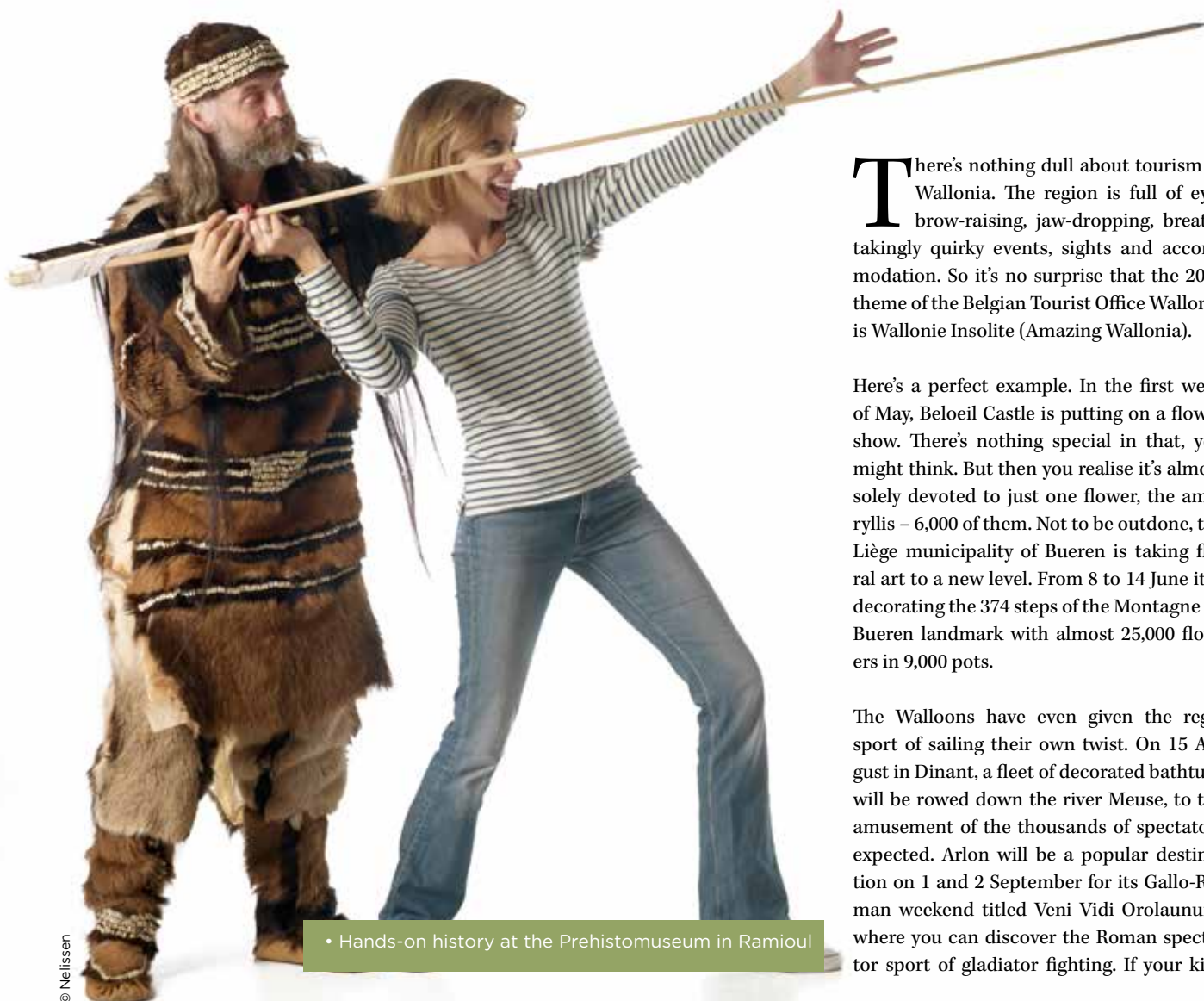
Chez Maître Corbeau Fromagerie
chezmaîtrecorbeau.be

Jacquy Cange artisan refiner
jacquycange.be

Weird and wonderful

Wallonia is going all-out to celebrate its more offbeat tourist attractions this year

By Denzil Walton



There's nothing dull about tourism in Wallonia. The region is full of eye-brow-raising, jaw-dropping, breathtakingly quirky events, sights and accommodation. So it's no surprise that the 2018 theme of the Belgian Tourist Office Wallonia is Wallonie Insolite (Amazing Wallonia).

Here's a perfect example. In the first week of May, Beloeil Castle is putting on a flower show. There's nothing special in that, you might think. But then you realise it's almost solely devoted to just one flower, the amaryllis – 6,000 of them. Not to be outdone, the Liège municipality of Bueren is taking floral art to a new level. From 8 to 14 June it is decorating the 374 steps of the Montagne de Bueren landmark with almost 25,000 flowers in 9,000 pots.

The Walloons have even given the regal sport of sailing their own twist. On 15 August in Dinant, a fleet of decorated bathtubs will be rowed down the river Meuse, to the amusement of the thousands of spectators expected. Arlon will be a popular destination on 1 and 2 September for its Gallo-Roman weekend titled Veni Vidi Orolaunum, where you can discover the Roman spectator sport of gladiator fighting. If your kids

• Hands-on history at the Prehistomuseum in Ramioul

© Nelissen

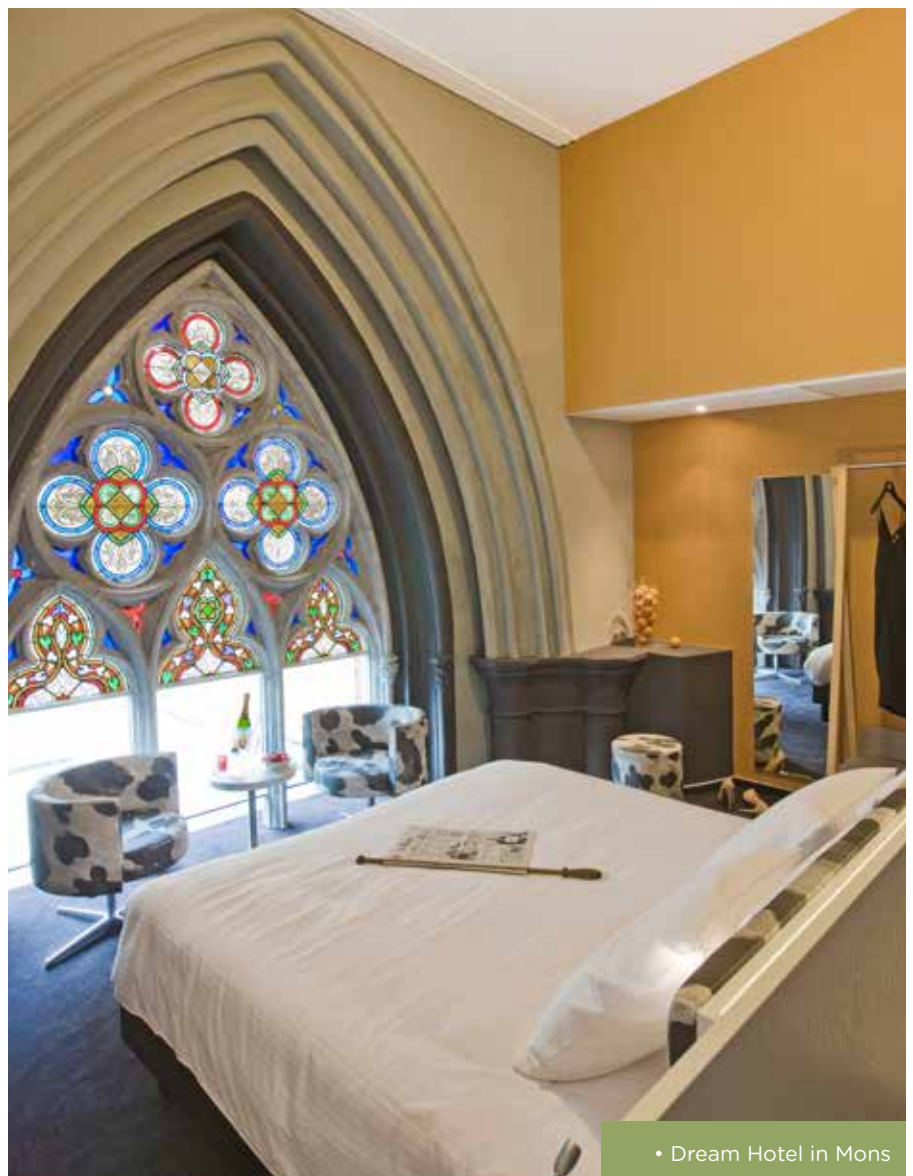


are likely to roll their eyes at anything that happened earlier than last year, take them to BattleKart Eurométropole in Mouscron, the world's first karting-gaming centre. You drive a kart on a virtual track that's projected on a giant screen, as if you're in a video game.

What about unusual places to visit? There's no shortage of those. Liège province packages seven of them up in the Route de Feu, a tour that includes the coalmine in Blegny (a Unesco World Heritage Site), the crystal glass factory of Val Saint Lambert, and the Prehistomuseum in Ramioul. Then there's the Canal du Centre that runs through Hainaut with its four extraordinary hydraulic boat lifts from the early 19th century. And don't forget the sloping lock at Ronquières. Here, boats are moved up a 68m incline in what is best described as a giant bathtub on wheels.

More futuristic is the Euro Space Center in Transinne. Spend some time in the simulator and you'll come away humming the Police song after experiencing what walking on the moon feels like. Also to be enjoyed there is the multimedia exhibition, the five-dimensional cinema and the outdoor tablet-based Space Hero game. Coming back (almost) down to earth, the Adventure Valley Durbuy boasts a treetop trail for those with a head for heights, a 1km zip wire, and a wooden children's play area the size of a small village.

When it comes to accommodation, Wallonia's got curiosities up its sleeve to suit all tastes. Have you ever dreamed of sleeping in a 19th-century Gothic chapel? You can at the Dream Hotel in Mons. If your ideal for an overnight is something environmentally friendly, try the low-energy, all-wooden Sleepwood Hotel in Eupen with its ethically sourced breakfasts. If you prefer to cater for yourself, unique gîtes abound in the region. Le Moulin du Ya



• Dream Hotel in Mons

in Houdeng-Aimeries is a 19th-century windmill, while at Le Pommier Rustique campsite in Durnal you can spend the night under the stars in a shelter made of spruce wood. The Au Plaisir bed & breakfast in Hastière is based on the game of Cluedo (Clue for North American readers), and includes the possibility to play a human-sized game of

Cluedo. Murder, thankfully, is definitely not among the house rules.

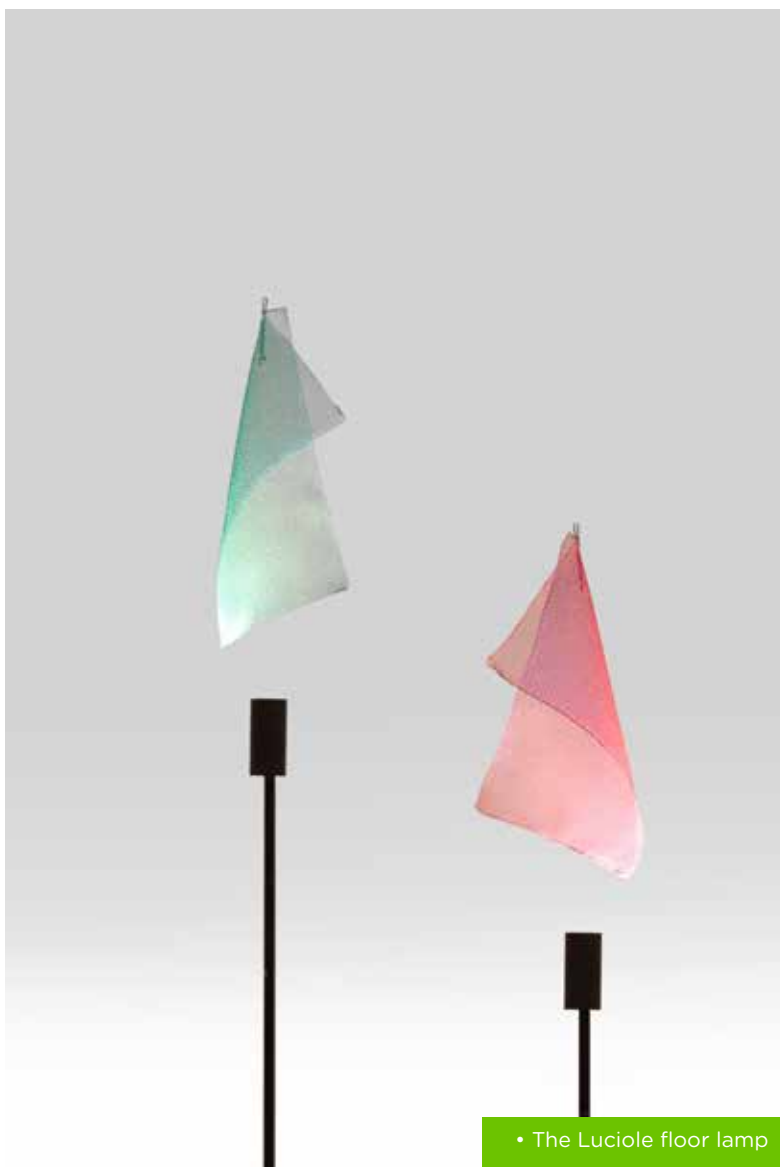
Consult the website for more surprising activities, places to stay and a year-long calendar of events.

amazingwallonia.com

Italian job

Belgian designers in the shop window at famous Milan furniture fair

By Clodagh Kinsella



© PaulinePlusLuis

Amid the bustle of the emerging-design section of huge Milan furniture fair Salone del Mobile, one stand will be proudly flying the Belgian flag. From new-generation icons like Muller Van Severen to interiors guru Axel Vervoordt, Belgian designers have attracted increasing attention of late – not least thanks to Belgium is Design, a platform created to promote the country’s design scene at home and abroad.

Belgium has long had a presence at Milan Design Week. Founded by three institutions active in spearheading native designers – Wallonie-Bruxelles Design Mode (WBDM), MAD Brussels and Flanders DC – Belgium is Design dates back to 2011. The collaboration has spawned exhibitions in the Fuorisalone (‘off’ section) of the fair, and Belgian Design Maps highlighting home-grown designers during the week’s multifarious spin-off events.

This year, however, is special. As the Salone-Satellite for emerging designers marks its 21st anniversary, Belgium is Design will also ramp up its efforts – with a new visual iden-



© Samuel Arnaud

• The AMAR foldable stool by AMORCE Studio

tity created by Brussels-based graphic design studio Kidnap Your Designer, and rejigged design routes using Google Maps. Meanwhile, to increase designers' visibility, WBDM and Flanders DC will team up for the first cross-regional booth showcasing both Flemish and francophone designers.

Those selected can participate in the showcase up to three times; while two of the five studios chosen – PaulinePlusLuis and Laurent Verly – are repeat visitors, AMORCE Studio, Gewoon David and Leila Boukhalfa x Rope Project will be making their debut. “As it’s our first time at the Salone, and also our first design fair, above all we want to familiarise ourselves with this new world and get feedback on our work,” explains William Fournié of Brussels-based AMORCE Studio.

Founded in 2015 by Fournié and Vincent Long, the studio’s pure, socially aware objects combine old-school craft and a modern sensibility. “The social aspect of our work is particularly clear in our spatial planning,” says Fournié. “In this domain we’ve worked with

various associations and public bodies.” Residents at MAD Brussels’ workshops, Mad in Situ, which combine coaching and socially responsible projects, they’ll show prototypes of modular shelving unit RACK, and AMAR, a foldable felt stool hemmed with yellow rope.

French natives Pauline Capdo and Luis Bellenger, who formed PaulinePlusLuis after meeting during their design studies at La Cambre and Saint-Luc Tournai, will be displaying the light Grenadine and sculptural floor lamp Luciole (Firefly), whose textile shade hovers in mid-air. “Our aim is to fix ephemeral moments by translating them into objects,” says Bellenger. “Because the shade is always in movement, it has a sort of magical quality.”

The greatest benefit of the Salone according to the pair, who are preparing for their third outing, is exposure to the press, public and brands already there for Milan Design Week. “There’s nothing you can compare it to,” says Bellenger. “It’s really the key annual rendezvous for the whole design world. What’s interesting is that it also gives you

credibility. When you approach brands, even outside the Salone, if they see that you’ve done Milan that really helps.”

Last year, on his Milan debut, interior architecture graduate Laurent Verly unexpectedly scooped a prize for his prototype O-line, a flexible 5m tube that can morph from a bedside light into a monumental floor lamp. “It’s not just about looking good, but adapting to users’ needs and desires,” he says. “One of the things that’s very important to me is that the lamp’s user isn’t passive, but becomes an actor.”

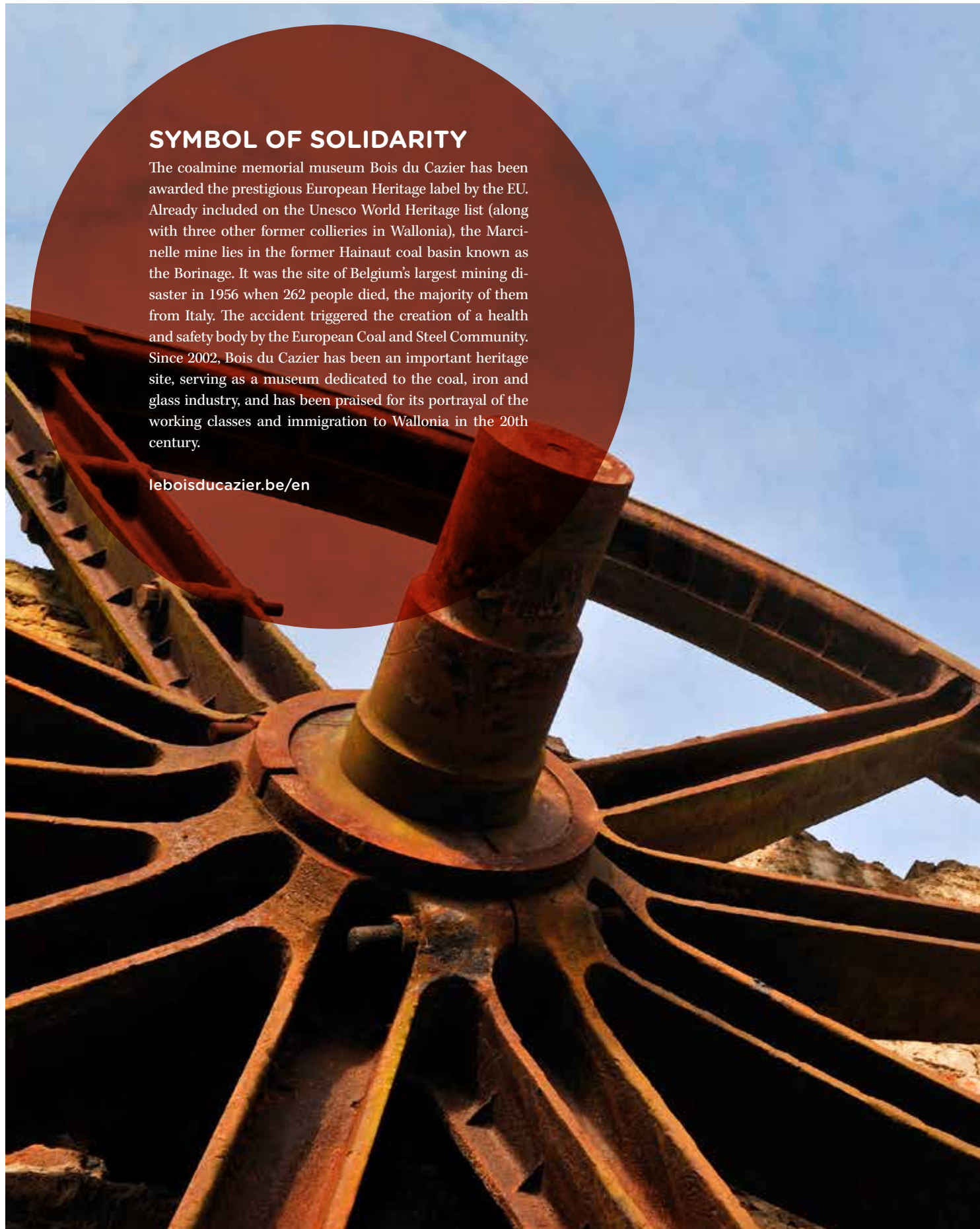
The same playful, multifunctional ethos informs his prototype of this year: the grid-like wall series dÔt, which can support everything from a desk to a mirror or bicycle rack. Despite winning acclaim, O-line hasn’t yet resulted in a manufacturing deal; this time Verly is determined to line up some fixed appointments. “Last year was great, but what’s important isn’t prizes,” he says. “Ultimately it’s that the object you design has an afterlife.”

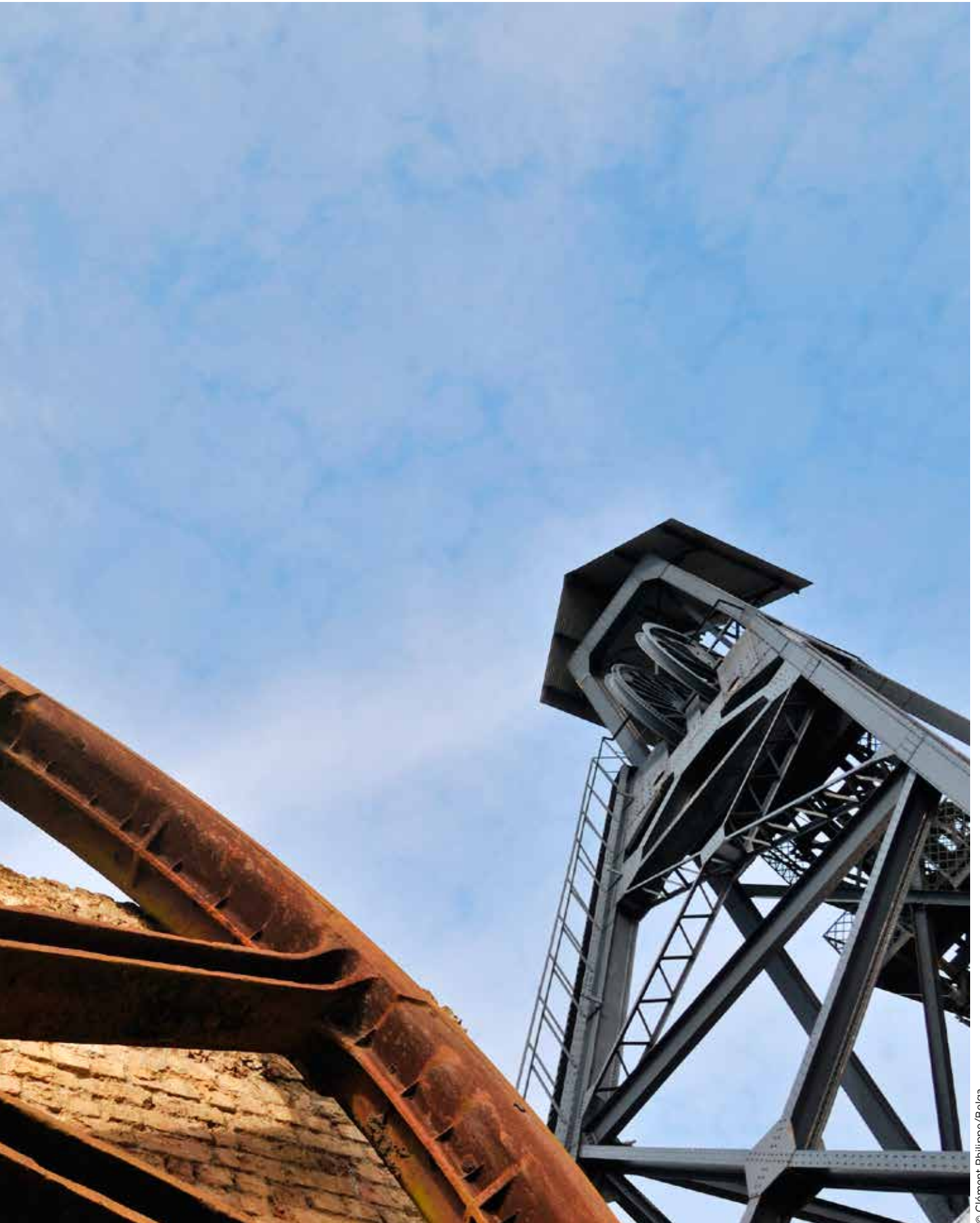
belgiumisdesign.be

SYMBOL OF SOLIDARITY

The coalmine memorial museum Bois du Cazier has been awarded the prestigious European Heritage label by the EU. Already included on the Unesco World Heritage list (along with three other former collieries in Wallonia), the Marcinelle mine lies in the former Hainaut coal basin known as the Borinage. It was the site of Belgium's largest mining disaster in 1956 when 262 people died, the majority of them from Italy. The accident triggered the creation of a health and safety body by the European Coal and Steel Community. Since 2002, Bois du Cazier has been an important heritage site, serving as a museum dedicated to the coal, iron and glass industry, and has been praised for its portrayal of the working classes and immigration to Wallonia in the 20th century.

leboisducazier.be/en





© Clément Philippe/Belga

The Forum © Robert Macpherson/Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum



Installation view Nicolas Party © Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow



Luna's Revenge

EVENT

1

ART BRUSSELS

Brussels continues to forge its reputation as a 21st-century artistic hub with the latest edition of its leading annual contemporary art fair. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, Art Brussels welcomes 145 international galleries with works on offer in a great diversity of styles and prices. As ever, numerous off-site events transform the city into a true art capital for the weekend.

• 19-22 APRIL, TOUR & TAXIS, BRUSSELS

artbrussels.com



EXHIBITION

2

VIVA ROMA!

Rome hasn't lost any of its power as a tourist Mecca since the days when budding artists as well as the sons and daughters of the wealthy were sent on the Grand Tour. This exhibition, in cooperation with the Louvre and other prestigious art organisations, puts the Eternal City in the spotlight, with works by European artists from the 17th to the 20th centuries. The exhibition is also a wonderful excuse to visit Boverie Island, where the museum sits.

• 25 APRIL-26 AUGUST
LA BOVERIE, LIÈGE

laboverie.com

FESTIVAL

3

LIÈGE INTERNATIONAL CRIME FILM FESTIVAL

With the ongoing influx of Scandinavian talent, crime thrillers have never been more popular. This festival is devoted to the genre, with movies from across the globe covering the gritty underworld of political intrigue, crooked cops and loathsome suspects. There are films for kids, too, in the more detective-oriented vein. Related events include galas and family breakfasts.

• 26-29 APRIL, PALACE CINEMA
AND KINEPOLIS, LIÈGE

fifpl.be

FAMILY

4

SMURF EXPERIENCE

One of Belgium's most successful comic strip properties is celebrating its 60th birthday this year. The Smurfs first appeared as guests in another Franco-Belgian series in 1958 before their creator, Peyo, gave them their own dedicated world. This vast immersive attraction recreates the Smurf village and surroundings with the help of holograms, enhanced reality, video mapping and other cutting-edge technology.

• 9 JUNE-2 SEPTEMBER
BRUSSELS EXPO

smurfexperience.com

DESTINATION ROME

The exhibition Viva Roma – 173 works from 50 international institutions – at La Boverie is an opportunity to discover an excellent selection of art by European artists united in their passion for the city, says Geoffrey Schoefs, project manager for temporary exhibitions in Liège

“While there have already been exhibitions on Rome in Europe and the US, we wanted to shine a light on the little-known period of the 18th and 19th centuries, to show how Rome has not lost its appeal. It remains a pivotal place for European culture and a place of learning for numerous artists.

“Many Belgian artists visited Rome, but we have focused on the journey of one Liège artist, Gilles Joseph François Closson. Thanks to a grant from the Darchis Foundation, he was able to study in Rome from 1825 to 1829. He made numerous paintings in oil of emblematic sites and panoramas of the countryside around Rome, and became a talented landscape artist. Visitors will also have the opportunity to discover Hubert Robert's passion for ruins. An admirer of Giovanni Pannini, he portrayed ancient monuments with theatricality. Many other Neo-classic painters are also honoured, including Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, who set up a landscape school in Rome, and Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who was to forge his reputation in the city.

“It's difficult to make a choice among so many works, but *Élégie romaine*, by Swiss artist Jacques Sablet, is a romantic vision of ruins that cannot leave you indifferent. Louise-Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont, a rare female artist, shows a mastery of light in her views of the Forum. Finally, Guillaume Bodinier and his representations of the Roman people make him a surprising anthropological artist. There are many events surrounding the exhibition, such as talks and concerts, but the most important is a festival of Italian cinema.”

laboverie.be



“

We wanted to show how Rome has not lost its appeal

Feel inspired



Wallonia, a world of opportunities

1250 FOREIGN INVESTMENTS
_____ in 14 years

400 M CONSUMERS
reachable
WITHIN ONE DAY _____

Very high density of
UNIVERSITIES and higher
education establishments



6 COMPETITIVENESS
CLUSTERS in
LEADING-EDGE sectors

an exceptional
**QUALITY
OF LIFE**



Highly skilled
AVAILABLE
WORKFORCE



70% _____ of business
turnover comes
from **EXPORTS**



Wallonia.be