

Together

magazine

BLACK CHRISTMAS

DRESS
TO IMPRESS
Shopping
in New York

INTERVIEWS
Mademoiselle Jean,
Xavier Delcour,
Céline Aron

MONEY
Which way out
of the credit
crisis?

COMPETITION
Win 5x100€ Kiehl's
cosmetics vouchers

POLITICAL
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Democrats Abroad:
'Obama's in, now
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Wave goodbye...

I launched *Together Magazine* two wonderful years ago, and it is with much pride that I now pass the torch on to a new publisher. A young man (but a little older than myself) and a dynamic leader (so that's exactly the same as me, then), David McGowan is synonymous with a European-integration success story in Belgium's beautiful capital.

For several years, this entrepreneurial fonctionnaire has held the prestigious post of International Sales Manager at Europe's leading expat website - *Expatica.com*. It took me several months to find the right person to take *Together* forward in its climb to the top, someone who would at the same time remain faithful to the magazine's values of quality, creativity and originality.

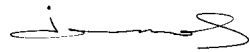
...say hello!

Jérôme, many thanks for the smooth, professional handover. Following in our former publisher's footsteps, this edition of Belgium's classiest bi-monthly brings you the usual blend of entertaining features, interviews, a fab competition, plus the sophisticated news analysis that has become the magazine's trademark.

You will, I'm sure, be as excited as I am about what our dedicated journalists have in store... our central theme for the last *Together* of 2008, 'Black Christmas', offers an intriguing blend of articles, plus there's a chance to win one of five 100€ vouchers from Kiehl's, the definition of Manhattan cosmetic chic, which has recently opened its second Belgian

In entrusting my 'baby' to David, the right choice has been made, as I am sure the future will prove. For myself, I will continue with *Together* as occasional editorial consultant, with the large part of my time now devoted to *Bespoken*, the biannual international magazine that I helped create for high-class fabrics and bespoke suits manufacturer, Scabal, www.scabal.com.

So, without further ado, I hand you over to David, but, as a final note, my thanks to you, dear readers, for the marvellous times we have shared together with, erm, *Together*! A very happy holiday season to you all, and remember to be good. Failing that, be careful...


Jérôme Stéfanski

outlet on Avenue Louise. And, as well as the Bahamas, New York was one of the locations for our exclusive December fashion photo shoot – enjoy.

As the new publisher, I would take this opportunity and invite you, our readers, to send us your comments, feedback and suggestions for future editions. Do you like what you see in *Together*? If not, why not? Let us know. Write to our editors, **Colin Moors** and **James Drew**, at feedback@togethermedia.eu - all emails will be answered. Forward, together! ●


David McGowan
Publisher

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Five 100€ Kiehl's vouchers up for grabs

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On the occasion of the opening of cosmetics king Kiehl's second outlet in Belgium, the moment seems perfect to spoil *Together* readers.

ABOUT KIEHL'S

Kiehl's was founded as an old-world apothecary in New York's East Village neighbourhood more than 150 years ago. Throughout the years, Kiehl's has remained dedicated to providing patrons with uniquely efficacious skin and hair products through the most attentive, personalized service. Kiehl's is committed to serving customers and communities alike through the highest service standards.

Now, just a year after the opening of its first Belgian store in Antwerp, Kiehl's comes to the capital, establishing itself in the classy environs of Senteurs d'Ailleurs on Avenue Louise.

HOW TO WIN

It's simple. For your chance to claim one of five 100€ Kiehl's vouchers, go to www.together-magazine.eu and answer the three questions below:

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- B. 1888
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3. What is the weight in grams of a copy of *Together* Issue 11, excluding wrapping and perfume sample?

For help with the questions, go to www.kiehls.com and www.senteursdailleurs.com.

Good luck!

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Competition organised under the supervision of a bailiff. Full rules available on request.
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Great and good

WRITERS: FEDERICO GRANDESSO

More movers and shakers – those who've visited recently, and those on their way...

BJORK

A recent climate-change workshop in Brussels, 'Road to Copenhagen', saw Icelandic singer Björk side-by-side with European Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström, Irish former president Mary Robinson and Gro Harlem-Brundtland, Norwegian former premier. Björk, to be fair, has long been involved with environmental issues, is a member of the 'CoolPlanet2009' campaign group and, recently, launched the climate-friendly movement 'Náttúra'.



SIR MICK JAGGER

Sir Mick Jagger was at the Berlaymont building in October, to take part in a consumer and industry round table on the opportunities and barriers to online retailing and the European single market, as promoted by Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes. Sir Mick submitted his thoughts on the meeting, which will form part of an upcoming Commission issue paper. So, there's likely to be another chance for Jagger fans to catch up with their idol in the corridors of DG Competition...

AMR MOUSSA

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa visited Brussels during Arab Week (3rd to 7th November) organized by the European Parliament and the Arab League. During the debate before the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee, Moussa analyzed the impact that US President-elect Barack Obama will have on finding a solution to the Middle East conflict.



JULIETTE BINOCHÉ

Brussels' La Monnaie opera house turned itself into a cinema for the first time on 12 November, with a showing of *Mauvais Sang* (1986) starring Juliette Binoche. Before the film started, the French actress came gave a half-hour interview about her work and life.

THE DALAI LAMA

Following months of debate with Chinese authorities, Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama visited the European Parliament at the beginning of December. The spiritual icon was warmly welcomed and had the occasion to address the plenary session – the Parliament had organized a Tibet photo-exhibition earlier in the year.



BARACK OBAMA

It appears that Brussels will very soon be welcoming the US President-elect Barack Obama - following his official appointment, expected on 20th January, he plans to fly to NATO headquarters for his first important meeting in Europe. A visit to the European institutions in Brussels appears likely...

TRACY CHAPMAN

Palais des Beaux-arts was the location, at the beginning of November, for an unforgettable show from this renowned singer.



SERZH SARGSYAN

On 5th November, the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan made a working visit to Brussels, to meet with Armande Decker, chairman of Belgium's Senate and House of Representatives. The President of Armenia expressed his satisfaction over political and economic co-operation established between the two countries, as well as the positive collaboration in multi-sided and international organizations. Sargsyan also had a meeting with European Commission Vice-President Jack Barro.

"Black holes are where God divided by zero."

- **Stephen Wright**, US stand-up comic

"I detest racism, because I regard it as a barbaric thing, whether it comes from a black man or a white man."

- **Nelson Mandela**, South African former president

"If I could find anything blacker than black, I'd use it."

- **J.M.W. Turner**, English Romantic landscape painter, 1775-1851

"Green and black go well together, don't they?"

- **Tiger Woods**, US professional golfer

"Colour television? I won't believe it until I see it in black and white."

- **Samuel Goldwyn**, Hollywood producer, 1879-1974

BLACK
CHRISTMAS

OFF THE BOOKS

WRITER: ANDY CARLING

Working 'on the black'?

Due to its secretive nature and the unwillingness of participants to discuss it, facts and figures on the black economy tend to be estimates. It is certainly an opaque phenomenon, rather like the elusive dark matter that CERN is spending billions seeking. *Together* takes a look.



No-one knows for sure just how pervasive it is or how many people are involved, but experts tend to agree that the shadow economy is growing and represents an estimated 20 per cent of Belgian GDP, some 75€ billion.

The main drivers for the growth are migration, fortified by EU expansion and Belgium's anti-immigration policy, combined with high taxes. For the consumer, the appeal of using the black economy is financial - off the books is cheaper.

Is it possible to get through a day without interacting with it? Do you employ a cleaner? Who is serving your food and drink in bars? Who is building and maintaining your home, your office? How many people would still employ cleaners and nannies if they had to go through official channels?

PROS AND CONS

This highlights why the shadow economy is good and bad. The state receives less tax, the consumer pays lower prices, and undocumented workers receive no protection. It also demonstrates why it is such a politically charged issue - not only does it affect the state's income, it also raises the divisive issue of migration and minority communities.

Racism forms an undercurrent to the debate - tax avoidance is generally seen by Belgians as being acceptable, no more than a bit cheeky, with the notion

of 'putting one over' on a government that taxes too much. But you don't have to talk long with people before they start bringing up 'Polish builders', 'Moroccan workers' and other stereotypes who tend to end up on the receiving end of the familiar 'Immigrants coming over here and taking our jobs' refrain. Migrant involvement in the black economy is seen as wrong, something that must be stopped.

One place where a little light shines on the hidden economy is on Brussels' Rue Dixsmunde - on the walls of buildings, 'work wanted' adverts are scrawled, with accompanying mobile phone numbers, while small groups of people of all ages wait patiently by the side of the road, waiting for someone to drive up and offer them work. The difference is that most have no permit or papers.

WAITING FOR WORK

Costin is a Romanian in his forties, who has been working in Belgium for six years. Along with up to 300 others, he hopes to find work every day. Most of the employment he finds is in construction where he earns 100€ per day. In his bag, he carries his tools and protective clothing. "It's hard because you don't know if you will find anything, so I come and wait," he explains. "It's getting harder with the banking problem, there is less work now."

Around the corner, outside Le Petit Chateau, an open reception centre for asylum seekers, Amadou, 22, from Guinea is also waiting for an opportunity to earn some money with a group of African friends. A car pulls up but, after a brief discussion, it drives away without anyone being offered work. Amadou takes it in his stride - he only manages to find work a couple of days a week anyway. His friends are also finding it harder. I ask what happens to him if he can't get work. "I have to go back inside there," he says, nodding towards the

centre. "I don't want to, I'd rather work. It's tough in there, but they were good to me and helped me find somewhere to live."

Danny Sriskandarajah, of the London-based Institute for Public Policy Research, says: "A cynic would conclude that Europe generally does well out of these people, who take work that most locals do not want. But another view is that governments do not want to do anything about them, because it is too politically risky to hold an amnesty for immigrants when their presence often triggers an emotional response from the public."

The credit crunch and the worldwide economic slowdown are going to affect the shadow economies and how they are perceived. It is predicted that the movement of people from poorer economies will increase and the pressure placed on stronger economies may cause a political crisis.

FAR-RIGHT RESURGENCE

The recent Austrian elections led to a resurgence of far-right parties, who campaigned on an anti-immigration platform, and won 30 per cent of the vote. It is feared that such campaigns will exploit the global financial situation, and next year's European parliamentary elections could see a record number of extremist MEPs sitting in Brussels and Strasbourg.

In Belgium, such developments could strengthen the Vlaams Belang and weaken the existence of the Belgian state.

Undeclared work has always been part of economic activity and, as long as people seek to cut costs and there are those unable to join the official economy, the black economy will always be with us and no attempt to stamp it out will succeed. The question is, how do we accept this fact of economic life? So far, there are no substantive answers. ❶



OILING THE WHEELS

WRITER: CILLIAN DONNELLY

We examine oil-lobbying policy in the heart of Europe.

Brussels is a politically charged city, and oil and politics are becoming increasingly inseparable; in America, the Middle East, Russia, China, Africa and, of course, the European Union.

As the climate-change argument continues, and with some quarters in the EU determined to take a lead on the issue, the multi-billion dollar petrochemicals industry has not neglected this corner of the globe, with a lobbying policy that is both overt and clandestine.

THE LOBBY IS POWERFUL AND ITS TACTICS VARIED, WITH TRADE ORGANIZATIONS, THINK TANKS AND THE MEDIA ALL BEING USED TO CREATE THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE THAT CAN PAVE THE WAY FOR AN INDUSTRY ASSAULT

DRILLING FOR POWER

The lobby is powerful and its tactics varied, with trade organizations, think tanks and the media all being used to create the political atmosphere that can pave the way for an industry assault.

"Right now, the oil companies are trying to conserve

their position in the market," explains Joris den Blanken, of Greenpeace Europe, who says that Royal Dutch Shell and BP are currently the most active oil lobbyists in the EU. "Shell is currently threatening to move out of Europe because of the carbon price issue. But moving refineries would mean new costs, new infrastructure, and things like that. This is their weakness."

But that still doesn't stop them, according to Paul de Clerck of Friends of the Earth Europe, a specialist in corporate accountability and lobbying. Recently, he says, Joren van der Veer, CEO of Shell and a member of the influential European Round Table of Industrialists, sent a letter to the European Commission arguing that under the EU's carbon-trading plans, the oil industry should be allocated certain exemptions from the rules.

BUCK PASSING ?

Furthermore, he continues, as well as preserving their own end of the market they are simultaneously trying to scupper the progress of rival industries: "With the Fuel Quality Directive, by which the EU wants to reduce greenhouse gases by 10 per cent, the oil companies are insisting that the EU can reach its targets by blending agrofuels with petrol, and not purely by the oil sector improving its own standards."

"Basically, they are trying to shift the burden onto another sector. But if they managed to stop gas flaring, the kind they experience in Nigeria for example,

they could almost reduce the 10 per cent on their own”.

As well as directly lobbying the Commission, oil companies also work via financially supported industry associations and, more subtly, think tanks. “A lot of these, such as Friends of Europe, work on joint activities with the oil companies to support the industry’s point of view”, says de Clerck. Friends of Europe is listed as an independent, Brussels-based think tank, which counts among its partners, BP, Exxon, Shell International and Total, as well as several vehicle manufactures, pharmaceutical companies and the European Commission.

MEDIA MANIPULATION ?

Working through these think tanks and large public relations firms, the oil companies also try to influence the media’s agenda. Some years ago, Chris Horner, an American industry player, with links to the Cooler Heads

Coalition, the Tech Central Station Foundation (who back a free-market news site), the Competitive Enterprise Institute and its Brussels offshoot, the European Enterprise Institute, as well as several climate change sceptic MEPs, approached Chris White, publisher of *EU Reporter*, with the idea of

setting up a Europe-wide network of journalists writing on free enterprise issues. A small amount of research funding was offered.

“I received assurances,” White explains, “that the journalists would be able to write in a balanced and unencumbered way, and in the newspaper we ran an article from America arguing that pharmaceutical companies based in the US should be allowed to advertise their products in Europe.”

“Then, Peter Skinner, the MEP who sits on the EU-US Delegation, approached me in the European Parliament, protesting that this was the last thing we needed in Europe. I allowed him to write a rebuttal, which was perfectly in line with my agreement with Horner. On the night the paper was uploaded to the web, I received a call from Horner, asking me what was I doing allowing a Socialist to respond. ‘All Socialists are Communists,’ he said, ‘you should know that. All offers are off’.”

Paul de Clerck also sees oil-company influence in the media. “If you look at any given issue of the *European Voice*, for instance, you will always see two or three pages of adverts for Exxon or Shell. Basically, they are not trying to sell their products, but to upgrade their image, and this is similar to the work they do with think tanks.”

“Through these joint activities they are trying to create an atmosphere and a political climate that will allow them to make things happen the way they want.”

**‘THROUGH
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ACTIVITIES [THE
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WHEN AMERICA SNEEZES...

WRITER: GRAHAM REID

Keep an eye on the markets

The credit crisis has dominated the investment scene during the third quarter of 2008 – which way now?

It is difficult to feel much sympathy, either for the US banks that have created the crisis, or for the international institutions that have let themselves be duped into paying for it. Unfortunately, once financial institutions en masse cease to observe prudent lending strategies, and regulators dare not intervene, there can only be one result - and it is you and I, rather than the real culprits, who will probably bear the brunt.

BANKS' BUSINESS RESPONSIBILITY?

However, over the longer term, some good may still come of this mess. At the very least, there should be a greater focus on corporate management

THERE SHOULD BE A GREATER FOCUS ON CORPORATE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FINANCIAL SECTOR

responsibility in the financial sector - perhaps banks will even start to exercise the same level of business responsibility towards their depositors that they now demand from those seeking even the smallest overdraft?

So, how can these crises occur? Who is to blame?

Poor regulation is a leading factor. It has long been my view that regulators prefer to take on smaller companies, who have relatively more to lose, in preference to addressing the real issues of abuses by the larger institutions with the political clout.

In the UK, the FSA has spent years regulating small investment advisory firms almost to the point of extinction to prevent perceived 'mis-selling', but has never banned large insurance companies from offering them inducements to do so. It is noteworthy that Equitable Life, for example, has always proclaimed that it never paid commissions to intermediaries, but it still had the highest-paid sales force in the country, so intermediaries were not the cause of their demise.

In Belgium, it has been an open secret for years that the CBFA was effectively dominated by the big banks that it was supposed to be regulating.

Another factor is inappropriate remuneration packages for senior management - a more general problem that does not affect the banking sector alone.

THE WRITER

Graham Reid is director of Classic Financial Solutions NV, 321 Brusselsesteenweg, 3090 Overijse.

RESULTS-BASED BONUSES

There is no reason why senior executives should not receive large bonuses based on real results. However, nothing should be paid until they can no longer exercise any influence on how those results are calculated and presented. My preference would be for all bonuses based on results paid by quoted companies to be held in an escrow account until at least three years have passed and then released in equal installments over another three years. This would leave reasonable time for any massaging of the results to be uncovered.

Investors egged on by the financial press must take some of the blame as well - in the relentless pursuit of high returns, the level of risk needed to achieve them has been disregarded. The high interest paid by Icelandic banks is evidence enough.

Those of you who remember the 1973 oil crisis will recall the gloomy predictions that, without cheap oil, the world would never be the same again. Indeed, it was not exactly the same but nonetheless the basic principles of investment, risk and reward did not change. It is the environment in which they have to be applied that alters.

Companies will still make profits for

the benefit of shareholders.

The main difference will be that the market leaders will come from different sectors.

In this respect, nothing has changed since Dutch tulip bulbs were all the rage.

The leading companies that make up the top 50 in the Footsie and other world indices can now change more frequently and dramatically.

So, picking the right sector has become more important and this is why good fund managers are worth their weight in gold, because few people have the knowledge or objectivity to identify the sectors with the most potential when they are cheapest.

DON'T PANIC!

So, what conclusions can be drawn?

The first thing is, DON'T rush to sell your shares. You are probably too late, anyway. Every time shares or unit trusts are sold in a panic, someone else will have bought them. Why? Because they have become a bargain at the price at which people are willing to sell. So, has a shrewd investor spotted something that you have missed? Almost certainly, the answer is 'Yes'.

For myself, I will start to buy shares if I can, provided it is not with money that I expect to need in the next five years. Everyone needs liquidity for emergencies, and I am no exception. However, above that level, the more that I can tuck away while there is still plenty of gloom and doom about, the better I like it.

A very good strategy would be to drip-feed money into shares and funds on a regular basis trying to target sectors with the most potential but not trying to be too accurate. Investment is not an exact science - you'll probably get it slightly wrong.

Looking back to the 1973 oil shock, there was a period of around five years when markets advanced very little before rising hugely, and this is a pattern that could well repeat itself, so don't expect too much too soon. ④

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COME TO KWANZAA!

WRITER: COLIN MOORS

As most of us look out on the Feast of Stephen's, as Good King Wenceslas did, millions of people around the world will be beginning their celebrations in an alternative end-of-year festival – Kwanzaa.

Kwanzaa is a winter festival celebrated that began in 1966, which runs from 26th December to 1st January. The founder of the feast, Maulana Karenga, took the word from a Swahili phrase, *matunda ya kwanza*, literally 'first fruits', a form of harvest festival. The addition of the extra 'a' is, according to Karenga, because "... there were seven children who each wanted to represent a letter of Kwanzaa. Since kwanza has only six letters, we added an extra 'a'".

SECULAR CELEBRATION

Kwanzaa is a secular festival, designed to give blacks an alternative to the existing holiday and an opportunity to celebrate their own history, rather than simply imitate the practices of the dominant society. But is there more to this pan-Africanist rejoicing? The basis of Kwanzaa lies in seven principles (Nguzo Saba): *umoja* (unity), *kujichagulia* (self-determination), *ujima* (collective work and responsibility),

ujamaa (co-operative economics), *nia* (purpose), *kuumba* (creativity), and *imani* (faith). The idea is to allow people to reconnect with their African roots, and meditate on African traditions and common humanist principles. From its beginnings in the Black Nationalist movement of the 1960s, Kwanzaa has evolved into something everyone can take part in, much like Chinese New Year.

BEGINNINGS

Maulana Karenga was born Ronald McKinley Everett in 1941 on a poultry farm in Maryland, USA. While studying for his master's degree at UCLA, he became interested in Black Nationalism, and formed a nationalist group known as 'Organization Us'. During this time, he adopted the Swahili names *Maulana* (master teacher) and *Karenga* (nationalist). Critics of the festival are quick to point out that Karenga himself was no angel - two members of his organization shot and killed two prominent members of the *Black Panther* movement in 1969 and, in 1971, he was imprisoned for three years for assaulting and falsely imprisoning two female members of Organization Us.

When released from prison, he resurrected the now-defunct Us, adopting a philosophy of 'secular humanism'. It was from this new organization that Kwanzaa first emerged. Right-wingers still decry the festival as a sham. Anne Coulter, a Republican not famed for her subtlety, was given to remark that Kwanzaa is a "phony non-



Secular celebrations

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Christian holiday invented a few decades ago by an FBI stooge". Other critics say it is divisive, anti-Christian and even that it's just another 'Hallmark holiday' – an opportunity for greetings card companies to swell their coffers.

A PARTY FOR ALL

However, there can be no doubt that Kwanzaa is here to stay, and is more popular than ever. It's a celebration with no national boundaries, which can be celebrated regardless of race, colour or sex, but hard-and-fast statistics as to how many people actually celebrate it are hard to come by. Conservative estimates put the figure at around 5 million, while the more liberal reckon on 25 million worldwide.

A mainstream event, Kwanzaa was first honoured by the production of a special

commemorative stamp by the US Postal Service in 1997, followed by another in 2004. The President of the United States sends a Presidential Kwanzaa Message each year before the beginning of the festival - George W. Bush, in 2006, declared: "Forty years after the first Kwanzaa, this hopeful occasion remains an opportunity to build the bonds of family, community, and culture and move ever closer to the founding promise of liberty and justice for all."

With such an endorsement, the practice has obviously been accepted and embraced by society in general. So, if you feel like joining in the Kwanzaa celebrations, go ahead. After all, you don't have to be Irish to celebrate St Patrick's Day, do you? ❶

KINGS' ROE

WRITER: FEDERICO GRANDESSO

A bit of background on the black ambrosia - caviar.

According to the main caviar retailers in Brussels, there's no doubt – the 'Oscietre' is the most popular. Ines Fecherolle, of La Maison du Caviar, told us: "Oscietre is the most popular with our clients - however, new trends in the market have also seen an increased interest for farmed caviar from Germany, Italy and Bulgaria." Ghaleghovand Davoud of Orient Exim confirms: "Our clients are very demanding, they ask mostly for our Iranian Oscietre (around 3,200€ for 1kg) but we also have the most expensive Beluga, at 6,000€/kg. So, it would appear that those in the know seem to prefer Iranian caviar to Russian - who are we to contradict the experts?"

HISTORY OF A DELICACY

It is said that the first people to taste caviar, on the shores of the Caspian, were the Azeri and Persians who lived on the Kura River in the area of the former Persian Empire - they named it 'khaviar' from the Persian 'khya', meaning 'egg'. The Persians believed that caviar was a medicine that could cure many diseases, and also a source of energy. Aristotle, the 4th century BC Greek scholar, described caviar as "a delicacy made from the roe (eggs) of the sturgeon fish".

During the Roman Empire, caviar was regarded as such a delicacy that it was presented among garlands of flowers, and trumpets heralded its presentation to Caesar. The Shah and his closest

friends also enjoyed caviar during the days of the Persian Empire - each year, the Shah would receive tonnes of the very best as an annual tax from fishermen and lavish it upon his guests. The Shah's caviar would be Golden Ossetra, a favourite of the Imperial dynasty, hence the name 'Imperial Ossetra'.

CASPIAN CAVIARS

Beluga is the world's most expensive caviar, followed by Sterlet. The Beluga is the largest of all sturgeon, at up to 6 metres in length, is also the species' only carnivore. An extraordinarily rare find - only around 100 Beluga are now caught in the Caspian Sea per year. Belugas have been known to weigh as much as 600kg but, unfortunately, because of over-fishing, Belugas of such size are extremely rare. Its roe is very large, ranging in colour from black to pale grey and has a smooth, buttery flavour.

The Osetra (also spelled Ossetra, Oscietra and Asestra) can grow up to 2m in length, and may weigh up to 200kg, although on average a mature fish will grow to only 1.5m, and will weigh 20-80kg. It has bony scales along the length of its body, and varies in colour from dark grey to brown, with a lighter-coloured stomach. Its caviar consists of medium-sized eggs, ranging in colour from dark brown to light grey, sometimes golden brown. Many prefer Osetra caviar's nutty, slightly fruity flavour over Beluga.

The Sevruga sturgeon produces the smallest roe of the three main caviar fish. The Sevruga, the smallest commercially caught sturgeon, can grow up to 1.5m in length and rarely exceeds 25kg. Like the Osetra, the Sevruga is an omnivore and feeds on algae and small



crustaceans. Distinctive, bony scales appear along its length, which resemble stars - for this reason, it is nicknamed the 'star sturgeon'. More plentiful than the other two, it is also the least expensive. Its roe is black to very light grey in colour and, like Beluga, has a buttery flavour, but is more salty and intense. Its unique flavour is highly valued.

CAVIAR PRODUCERS

As more than 95 per cent of the world's caviar comes from the Caspian Sea, there are two main producers - Iran and Russia, with its former satellite states. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia no longer controls its former states such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which are also caviar producers, located in the Caspian basin. Consistency of salting should be uniform, following the methods of the ancient Persian tradition, but some Caspian basin countries do not follow a set procedure and have many different processing methods, resulting in wide differences in quality and prices - Iranian caviar costs double that of roe from all other Caspian countries. ●

BRUSSELS CAVIAR HOTSPOTS

- Restaurant Ispahan Original

Avenue De Fré, 190
B-1180 Uccle, Brussels
T. +32(0)2 374 20 46

- Restaurant Les nouveaux Russes

Rue Haute, 4
B-1000 Brussels
T. +32(0)2 513 55 65

- Belga Queen

Rue Fossé aux Loups, 32
B-1000 Brussels
T. +32(0)2 217 2187

- La Maison du Caviar-BemkaLa Maison du Caviar-Bemka

Quai des Usines, 22
B-1000 Brussels
T. +32(02) 736 86 63

- Orientexim

Rue d'Assaut, 17-21
B-1000 Brussels
T. +32(0)2 414 77 78

WINGED WARRIORS

WRITER: ANDY CARLING

Our writer checks out a leading Brussels American football team.

Many Europeans regard American football as being nothing but rugby with padding, and therefore a bit wimpy. In reality, football is one of the toughest sports in the world, in which large, strong men smash against each other while trying to move the ball down the field to score. To be tackled in this game is akin to being hit by a car – this writer wouldn't consider stepping on the field in anything less than an armoured personnel carrier, and even then I'd be worried.

There is a thriving American football scene in Belgium with Brussels being represented by three teams. To find out more, I tracked down the most formidable of these teams, the Brussels

Black Angels. Head Coach Mo Jablonka and a couple of players spared some time in a break between practice sessions. According to Dan Casey, of the Pittsburgh Steelers Fan Club of Belgium, who has seen the game played at all levels, the Angels

compare to a small US university team and are "very good, very sound, and fun to watch".

VIOLENT OR NOT ?

Mo is a big guy with an easygoing manner - I ask how the team got its name. "Originally, we were called the Brussels Angels, named after Saint Michael, but we added the black to make us more aggressive four years ago." It seems to have worked - their senior team were runners up in the Belgian Bowl this year while the juniors (14-18 years) are current division champions.

Is the game as violent as it seems? Mo considers his response. "It's quite violent, it's a contact sport, but there are strict rules and the first thing everyone has to do is to learn to obey the rules." It does appear vicious, but looks can be a little deceptive - the aggression is very tightly focused and the game is as strategic as chess, with every player trying to concentrate on their part in the overall strategy every time the ball is played. But just how dangerous a game is it?

TEAM TALK

Each burst of action in the game lasts but a few seconds and players must have extraordinary concentration levels and reflexes to perform. The key is discipline and playing as a team - hotheads don't last long.

When I enquire what it is actually like to play, the players are wide eyed: "It's fun!" exclaims Bart Meys, part of the offense.



Getting ready to rumble!

Defensive lineman Johnny van Wezel is even more exuberant: "It's ecstasy! I get a real kick from analyzing what the other team are doing and completely wrecking their plans, all in one second. There's no room for error." I'm convinced - I've lived in houses that were smaller than Johnny.

BIG AND SMALL

So, what's special about the Black Angels then? Bart points towards the coaching staff, highlighting that, while there aren't that many really good coaches in Belgium, the Black Angels have a full complement of experienced staff.

Bart was drawn to American football because he felt there weren't any good team sports for big guys, and he was hooked as soon as he started playing. However, he insists the game isn't just for the larger chaps, as different physiques are suited for different positions: "It doesn't matter how big or small you are,

there's a place for anyone who listens to the coaches and works hard."

The Angels are always looking for new players, and Johnny explains that they look after them, making sure that they are properly trained and play 'flag' football, a version without the heavy tackling, before graduating to the full game.

This is an egalitarian sport where ability and discipline count above everything else. Coach Mo is proud that they have 17 different nationalities in their squad.

If you want to have a go at the game, why not attend one of the Black Angels twice weekly training sessions? For newcomers, the padding is provided free of charge while you decide if you want to carry on or not. After that, they'll hire you the kit and provide insurance for between 125€ and 175€ per season. ❶

www.brusselsangels.com

**'IT'S ECSTASY!
I GET A REAL
KICK FROM
ANALYZING WHAT
THE OTHER
TEAM ARE
DOING AND
COMPLETELY
WRECKING THEIR
PLANS, ALL IN
ONE SECOND'**



MADemoiselle JEAN: FETISHISTIC. FEMININE. 50s.

WRITER: KIMBERLEY LOVATO
PHOTOGRAPHER: JULIEN CLAESSENS

*Femininity
defined*

Stepping into Mademoiselle Jean, along Brussels' Rue Antoine Dansaert, is a bit like falling through the rabbit hole, into a fashion Wonderland. Together takes a peek...

Mademoiselle Jean is a 1950s-style boudoir, and visitors are at first greeted by music from an unseen record player. A black tufted wall with pink bows and a dainty vanity in the same shade resemble the set of a Marilyn Monroe film and, from somewhere in the background, the clicking of a sewing machine is steady.

ENTER AURORE

Fashion designer Aureore Jean appears from the doorway of her workshop - she is every bit as retro-chic as the decor. Her dark hair and alabaster skin are a sharp contrast to her red lips which match perfectly with the red, plaid pencil skirt that hugs her statuesque frame and hits just below the knee, above a pair of heels. Call it sexy, call it old fashioned, Jean's style is 100 per cent pin-up, 100 per cent feminine, and 100 per cent her own.

A graduate of Brussels' La Cambre Mode School of Design and nominee for the coveted Modo Bruxellae Prize in 2005, the 22-year-old brings a modern and sexy twist to clothes inspired by the past, and her predilection for vintage lingerie and music, fetish photographers, and the color black figure heavily in her designs.

"My universe is based on the fetishistic world of John Willie (fetish photographer and bondage artist), and the lines and elegance of the fifties," says Jean. "In my prêt-a-porter collection you'll find some spots of color but most of the time, my inspirations bring me back to black."

THANK HEAVEN, FOR LITTLE GIRLS...

Made with luxurious fabrics from Italy, and with ribbons and ruffles accenting form-fitting jackets, halter style dresses and pencil skirts, Jean's pieces are unabashedly feminine and not so subtly seductive. She creates two collections per year (Spring/Summer, Autumn/Winter) and in between she creates lingerie. Jean is well known for her corsets, which are all made-to-measure on site and expertly fitted to the contours of the female form.

Back in the workshop, Jean's finger traces the pink stitching of a black corset sprawled on a table below faded posters



*In love with
their bodies*

of 1950's beauties. This is one of three corsets she is creating for a shop in Brussels, Lady Paname, that will soon sell her designs, and Jean hopes to sell her clothes on her own website as well. Her clothes may not be for everyone but there is no doubt in Jean's mind as to the type of woman that wears them: "That would be someone that loves her own body," she explains. "Contemporary women today have forgotten how to dress feminine. Put a woman in a pencil skirt and, immediately, there is something there."

Any girl who loves being a girl will love falling into Jean's world, where her unquestionable talent and flair for the feminine remind us of the lost art, and style, of being a woman.

INTERVIEW EXPRESS

Together: If you could create something for your favorite starlet, who would it be and why?

AJ: *I would redesign the famous dress for Rita Hayworth in Gilda (1946). More recently, I would create some designs for Traci Lords for her part in the movie Cry Baby (1990)*

So who visits your shop?

Anyone. From the high class lady just going out to Chanel for some shopping, to the young neo-gothic teenager visiting with her mother to get her first corset.

Where did the name Mademoiselle Jean come from?

Mademoiselle was a classic way to name shops in the thirties and the fifties and Jean is my family name.

Is there a fashion icon you admire?

Vivian Westwood, of course.

What defines a person's style?

The shoes!

What item of clothing of your own could you never part with?

My pencil-skirt.

What's the best gift you have ever been given?

My 1965 Ford Taunus from my lover, and a trip to Las Vegas from my friends.

What do you like about Las Vegas?

It's all the best and all the worst in one place. ♡



Wow!

Mademoiselle Jean
Rue Antoine Dansaert, 100
T. +32 (0)2 513 50 69
www.mademoisellejean.com



BACK TO BLACK

WRITER: MARIE HOCEPIED

*Xavier Delcour:
Dark attitude*

He's a 'dark angel' designer who deserted the catwalks nearly two years ago, to work on his imposing style. Without doubt, the darkest of Belgian fashion artists – Xavier Delcour speaks to *Together*.

Together: You are dressed in pink today! Have you discarded your 'dark attitude'?

Xavier Delcour: *No, not at all! In fact, I set a rule for myself at the beginning of my studies - in each of my collections, there would be 95 per cent black and 5 per cent other colours. And here, as you can see, it's 5 per cent today! [Laughs] Seriously though, black is very important to me. But, rather than speaking about a 'Dark Attitude', I prefer to visualize the 'perfection' of black. On the catwalks, the outfits are presented like black drawings on white paper. Black is perfect - it makes everything sexy and glamorous.*

Isn't black a zero-risk design?

No, I don't agree. To work in black every season is a challenge – it has to be constantly renewed and reworked. It is something that I began in 1998 and which will continue with my next collection, in 2009.

You have been absent from the fashion world for two years. Why?

I needed time to retreat, to reflect, and to draw away from the fashion world a little.



Delcour's
black art

Do you intend to make a big comeback?

I am a Winter man, and I intend to show an Autumn/Winter collection next year in Paris. I believe that I have acquired a certain maturity as well, which I lacked before. After two years without presenting a collection, I'm thinking of naming my next one 'Reflection' - because the mirror is, in my opinion, the most beautiful object. It reflects, illuminates, and is much stronger, metaphorically, than diamonds...

Are you a Belgian fashion rebel?

I was very rebellious, certainly. First of all in La Cambre, which was a great disappointment, but today, it is an excellent school. It took real effort and

evolution on my part to be more creative, but I was helped enormously by the arrival of my friend from Tournai, Tony Delcampe. I can say that now that I began to create because I could not find any clothes that were appropriate for me, given my very upright and square build. Creation became my passion - even women buy Delcour for this reason.

Are you a night-owl?

I was very much before, but less now. As the time, I enjoyed spontaneous and improbable meetings at all times of day, but now I tend to find them tiring. But it is a phase - perhaps in three months, I will be saying the opposite!

BLACK EXPRESS

Black or white coffee?

Black with sugar.

Dark or light chocolate?

Very dark.

A bête noire?

Tom, my black cat.

Black holes?

One or two!

A film noir?

Funny Games (1997, 2008)


by Michael Haneke.

A black eye for...

designing clothes that do not emphasize the body's shape.

THE 'DEATH'S HEAD' LOOK

Delcour is collaborating with jeweller Thierry Holemans on a new shock project, 'Death's Head'. We had already designed a ring, but we were not satisfied. It was too *Star Trek* for our taste, so we are channelling our energies more towards an 'academic'

Death's-Head. All will be revealed shortly... 

CV EXPRESS

5/10/1970: Born in Tournai

1987: Begins studies at La Cambre

1989: Graduates from La Cambre

1993: Wins Male, Sponsor and Public prizes at Hyères Festival.

1997: First Paris show

2004: Designs a bag for Lancel

2006: Designs black shoes and mirrors for Weston

2009: The world awaits Xavier Delcour's next move...

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For addresses, see page 97

Chloé is wearing
Locket necklace
with diamonds:
EDWARDIAN

Satin and
silk blouses :
LES HOMMES

Belt:
CHANEL

Skirt:
ICEBERG

Cesar is wearing

Suit:
LES HOMMES

Shirt:
PRADA





Coat:
LOUIS VUITTON
Handbag:
CALVIN KLEIN
COLLECTION
Pink shoes:
MIU MIU
Gloves:
HERMES
Brooch:
ICEBERG
Sweater:
LES HOMMES
Rabbit-fur skirt:
TWIN-SET



Gloves:
PRADA
Boots:
VIKTOR&ROLF
Dress and
peacock-feather
collar
CHINE
Tights:
YVES
SAINT LAURENT



Locket necklace
with diamonds:
EDWARDIAN
Handbag:
BOTTEGA
VENETA
Shoes:
PRADA
Satin and
silk blouse :
LES HOMMES
Gold belt:
CHANEL
Skirt:
ICEBERG
Coat:
CARRACTERE



Boots:
SERGIO ROSSI
Handbag:
SWAROVSKI
Large belt:
OLIVIER
STRELLI
Blouse:
COMMA
Jacket:
ICEBERG
Head-band:
CHANEL



Headband
and shoes:
PRADA
Skirt:
YVES
SAINT LAURENT
Beige satin top:
ZEKI TRIKO
Gloves:
MIU MIU
Woolen jacket:
PAULE KA



Caped blouse:
PAULE KA
Tie:
LES HOMMES
Leather skirt:
PAULE KA
Belt:
ESCADA

DARK DELIGHTS

WRITER: JÉRÔME STÉFANSKI

Together shows you what's what for ladies and gentlemen of refinement.

FOR HIM

1. KITON BLACK

Since 1968, Italian Kiton fragrances have been recognized as among the world's most prestigious. Now, the brand is back in black...

Eau de toilette spray 125 ml : 75€, www.kiton.it

2. FRANCIS FRANCIS X8 BY ILLY

A classic design, the perfect espresso, chez vous!

299€, www.illy.com

3. BLACK RUBIS BY AQUAMASS

The Black Rubis concept bath – what better statement of the fine art of luxury life?

13,980€, www.aquamass.be

4. GRANDE VITESSE BY LONGINES

When sport and style are but one and the same...

1,850€, www.longines.com

5. 48 HEURES BY J.M. WESTON

Very light, stylish and simple, this bag is the perfect companion for business trips...

960€, www.jmweston.com

6. DS LITE BLACK BY NINTENDO

Lighter and more stylish, the new Nintendo DS is THE accessory for the fun man!

150€, www.nintendo.com

7. 007 SUNGLASSES BY TOM FORD

Good enough for James Bond - good enough for you!

275€, www.tomford.com

8. 100 BY ABSOLUT

The vodka of choice for men of the world who appreciate a little extra premium power in their drink, be it on the rocks or in cocktails.

25.99€, www.absolut.com

9. CHUCK TAYLOR ALL STAR BY CONVERSE

100 per cent sporting style, to celebrate 100 years of Converse.

200€, www.converse.com

10. HILLS ANGUILLA NERO BY NDC

Hand made to perfection - perfect for the New Year's Eve party!

475€, www.ndcmadebyhand.com

11. CUFFLINKS BY HACKETT

The ideal Christmas present for every globetrotter...

60€, www.hackett.com

12. HELMET BY PROTEST

This snowboard helmet lets you try your most challenging moves in safety.

87.90€, www.protestboardwear.com



FOR HER

1. BLACK COLLECTION BY RÉMINISCENCE

Onyx, jet and zirconia are the three stones that give life to this fabulous ring. 260€, www.reminiscence.fr

2. JASMIN NOIR BY BULGARI

A new perfume with much to enjoy: a sensual fragrance. Eau de toilette 100 ml: 112€ www.bulgari.com

3. ACTIVE CRYSTALS BY SWAROVSKI

A hi-tec accessory, blending fashion and work... Price on request www.swarovski.com

4. IPITONGA BY GERARD DAREL

An accessory to bring sunlight into Winter... 470€, www.gerarddarel.com

5. VICTORIA BY POMELLATO

To be worn only on the grandest of occasions! Ring: 4,255€ Earrings: 5,670€ www.pomellato.com

6. ORGANIZER BY ITALESSE

Be sure to impress your guests at Christmas! 82€, www.italesse.it

7. TRUE CHRONOGRAPH JUBILÉ BY RADO

A timeless timepiece, fashioned in diamond and ceramics. 2,050€, www.rado.com

8. SHOES BY ICEBERG

Refined and extravagant, these boots will guarantee you won't pass by unnoticed. 1.485€, www.iceberg.com

9. EPI BY LOUIS VUITTON

This leather wallet is an indispensable companion for your evenings with friends. 230€, www.louisvuitton.com

10. BLACK BY ERISTOFF

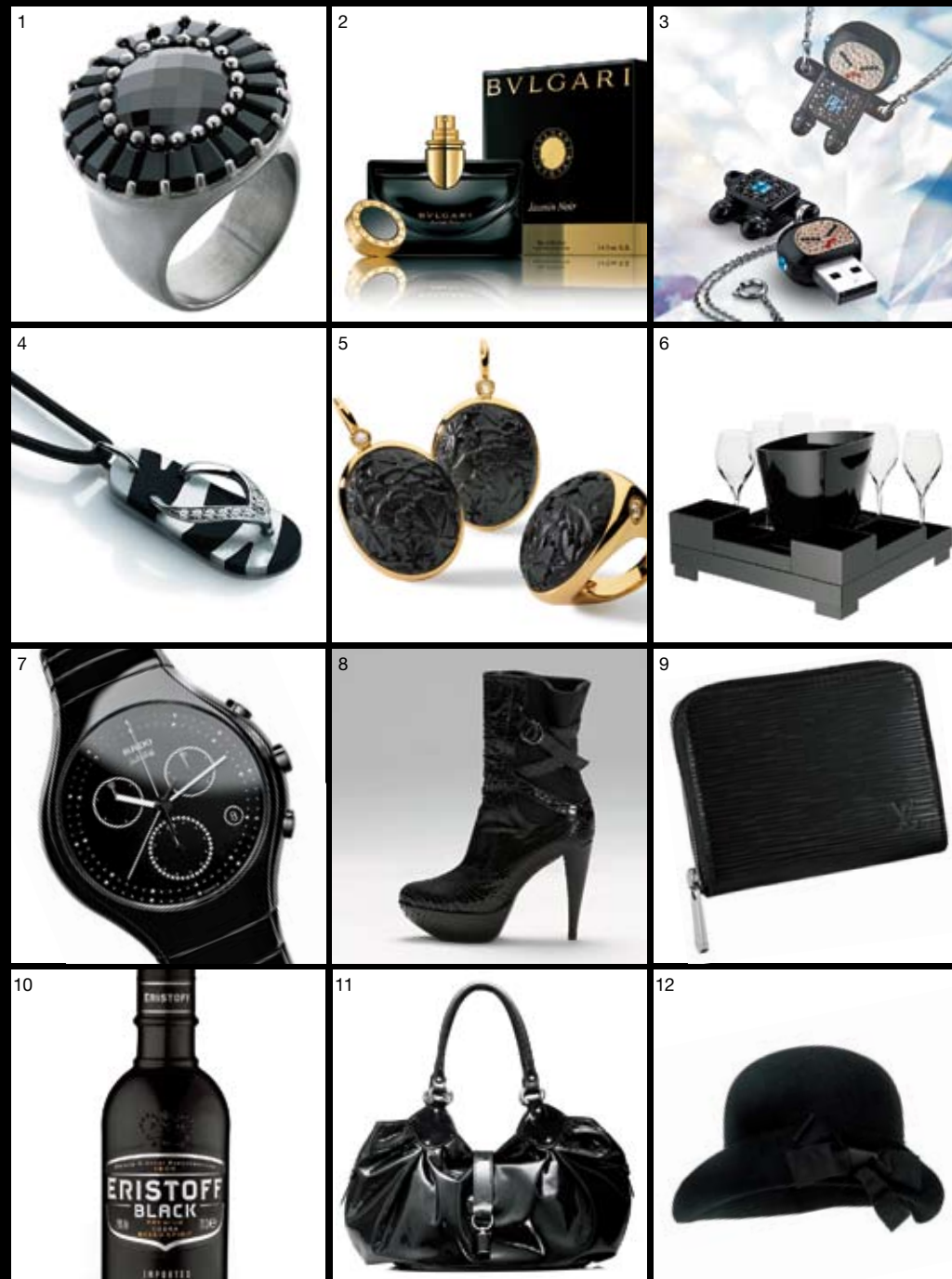
Mysterious by nature, dark as the forest, sharp to the last drop, Eristoff Black is a great-tasting premium vodka-based spirit. 11.55€, www.black.be

11. KAREN BY LILÙ

A must-have for Winter, this lacquered bag's look is inspired by Milanese style. Price available on request. www.lilu.be

12. HAT BY PAULE KA

Chic and relaxed, this charming Paule Ka hat will warm you when the temperatures drop below 0°C. Price available on request. www.pauleka.com





FROM BUDAPEST BEGINNINGS

WRITER: FEDERICO GRANDESSO

From the earliest times, one of Europe's most important trade routes has linked the Black Sea's shores with central Europe - we travel through some of our most beautiful landscapes, from the plains of Hungary, past the Carpathian Mountains to the delta lands of the Danube.

Beginning in Budapest, our first call is Kalocsa, founded by St. Stephen in 1009 as an archbishopric. The Archbishop's Palace and Kalocsa Cathedral dominate this quiet town that is best known for paprika and folklore art. Learn how paprika has been cultivated and prepared through the ages at the Paprika Museum, and then take a horse-drawn carriage to the Equestrian Center, where local craftsmen, folkloric entertainers and traditional Puszta horsemen demonstrate their time-honoured cultural traditions.

CROATIA

Proceeding south, we enter Croatia - diverse events and cultural influences have contributed to the country's history, poignantly illustrated in the 10th-century Baroque city of Vukovar, which, while once renowned for its elegant 18th-

century mansions, today bears the scars of the 1990s war with Serbia. Moving on to the fortified city of Osijek, dating back to Roman times, you can visit the Tvrdra Citadel, which has stood guard over the city for centuries, and the medieval Church of the Holy Cross. Entering Serbia, we are presented, in Novi Sad, with a spectacular view of the Danube and surroundings, in Marshal Vauban's unconquerable Petrovaradin Fortress.

BELGRADE

Reaching Belgrade, your first impression may be of a dark and cold city, but take your time - the capital of Serbia is situated at the confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers, and a local expert will be proud to show you its sights, which include the city's principal landmark, Kalemegdan Fortress, St. Sava, the world's largest Orthodox church and Marshal Tito's tomb and monument.

The city centre has a lively pedestrian area and charming outdoor cafés. The Turkish architectural influence can be seen everywhere, though the majority of Serbs are Eastern Orthodox. The region has seen centuries of intense fighting between Turks, Romans and various tribes. Leaving Belgrade, witness the most spectacular scenery that is the dramatic Iron Gates gorge, a narrow and formerly very dangerous passage dividing Europe's Alps in the north-west from the Carpathians in the south-east and forming a natural border between Serbia and Romania. The most spectacular section of this gorge is referred to by sailors as 'The Cauldron' because the water, caught between two towering walls, appears to be boiling.

BULGARIA

A brighter landmark, on the Serbian bank, is the 'Tabula Traiana', an immense marble plaque commemorating the 'imperial route' that linked Rome with



See the Black Sea

the province of Dacia. We are now in the 'Little Cauldron'. Entering Bulgaria, you can stop in the city of Vidin. Baba Vida Castle, built in the 9th and 10th centuries on the ruins of a Roman fortress, is Vidin's most important historical site and the best-preserved mediaeval castle in Bulgaria.

The castle houses a museum and theatre that uses its unique backdrop to present plays with historical themes. The route through Romania takes in the rich silt plains formed over the centuries by the river - here, we find an agricultural landscape teetering between traditional family-run smallholdings and large modern farms. The countryside is not spectacular, but the warmth of the people allows the visitor to enjoy a different facet of the diverse continent that is Europe. The route along the right bank is more hilly and varied.

Another remarkable town is Rousse, which is surprisingly multi-ethnic in nature - a careful mix of Bulgarian and Romanian cultures. It is impressive, with its broad avenues, large squares and wonderful buildings, which pay homage to the architecture of the 'national Renaissance'. Our trip is nearly over - we are almost at the gates of the Black Sea, and we arrive in Tulcéa, the largest city at the gates of the Delta. Tulcéa is the main gateway into the Delta. Almost as old as Rome, it is built on seven hills. The Danube Delta, an immense nature reserve, is classed as a world heritage biosphere site - take a trip along some of its numerous tributaries through almost tropical vegetation (the most northerly in Europe) amid particularly varied wildlife.

A trip to remember forever. ①

NEED A REST BEFORE THE BLACK SEA?

WRITER: JÉRÔME STEFANSKI

A Danube cruise is not necessarily a 'restful' voyage - before you set off, why not stay a few nights in Budapest and benefit from all the charms of Kempinski Hotel Corvinus? Dedicated to your wellbeing...

The Kempinski Hotel Corvinus

© Kempinski

As dynamic as the city that surrounds it, the Kempinski Hotel Corvinus Budapest sets the standard for exemplary service and five-star luxury.

The Hotel Corvinus opened in July 1992 following political changes in central and eastern Europe. Its modern edifice was designed by József Finta





The Presidential Suite

© Kempinski

and Antal Puhl, and it is situated across from Erzsébet Park downtown, just minutes from the main shopping street, the legendary Danube and the major attractions of this historic metropolis.

COMFORT AND WELL-BEING

Improvements to the hotel are constant, with the renovation of rooms, conference facilities and public areas. The Kempinski Spa opened in early 2005, and its 366 luxury rooms and suites boast the largest average room size in the city.

A full-service Business Center operates every day, and the hotel has established one of the fastest internet connections in Budapest - its technical conference support is second to none.

GASTRONOMY

The three dining venues and Lobby Lounge are headed by Executive Chef Roland Holzer, whose extensive international experience and professionalism imbue the restaurants of the Hotel Corvinus with an exciting range of seasonal, contemporary cuisine. The Bistro Jardin and Ristorante Giardino highlight a different region of Hungary and Italy each month, while the Kempinski Brauhaus is a casual Bavarian restaurant and sports bar with a lively Happy

Hour and convivial atmosphere, and the Corvinus Bar features a selection of the world's finest cigars and single-malt whiskies.

AN HONOURED HOTEL

The Kempinski Hotel Corvinus Budapest is the first hotel in Hungary to receive the 'Seven Stars and Stripes' Award, one of the most prestigious prizes in the luxury hospitality category. The Kempinski SPA and the hotel's Italian restaurant, Ristorante Giardino, also received the commendation from Global Awards, based in New York.

And the cherry on the cake? Internet access is free in all rooms, which are priced from 129€ per night. Two more good reasons to stay a while and relax! 🍷

Kempinski Hotel Corvinus Budapest
Erzsébet tér, 7-8
1051 Budapest - Hungary
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hotel.corvinus@kempinski.com
www.kempinski-budapest.com

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W!ZZ

ALL CHANGE IN CHONGQUING

WRITER: DAVE DERUYTTER

Chinese leaders are implementing a master plan to expand Chongqing, the country's enormous central economic hub, as our writer reports.



Chongqing by night

© Yung Chang

With this project, intended to stimulate economic development within the country, the Chinese leadership is aiming to counter massive migration from the populous north-west towards the thriving coastal areas of China.

MEGA-CITY

Chongqing, as the city-province is called, has become a huge metropolis with more than thirty million inhabitants, whose numbers continue to increase due to the many construction and factory workers arriving from surrounding cities and provinces, who are needed for construction and economic progress.

The scale of the project is breathtaking - I couldn't stop thinking about the idea of the equivalent of half of France's population, crammed into one metropolis. OK, there are other 'mega cities' across the world, such as Mexico City, the greater Tokyo area and

New York, but, unlike Chongqing, these were not 'built overnight'.

THE LANDSCAPE HAS BEEN ALTERED DRAMATICALLY, AS HAS THE LIFE OF LOCAL PEASANTS, WHO HAVE WORKED THE LAND FROM FATHER TO SON FOR MANY GENERATIONS

HUMAN COSTS

However, there is a price to be paid for change - such as the loss of the magnificent views over the gorges of the three tributary

rivers that flow into the Yangtze River near Chongqing. The landscape has been altered dramatically, as has the life of local peasants, who have worked the land from father to son for many generations. Not everyone wants to work in the (frequently harsh) conditions of the many factories springing up in the city's suburbs, as many Chinese peasants are forced from their land. The authorities are not exactly giving their official backing to new landowners and capitalists but, in a country where the rule of law is comparatively recent, how can impoverished land workers fight well-organized big business representatives without government assistance? External pressure is welcomed - it helps ousted local people acquire decent new housing.

Taking into account another dark side of rapid economic development, China is already looking likely to overtake the US as the planet's biggest polluter, albeit with a much smaller economy. This phenomenon can also be seen (and smelled) in Chongqing - grey, misty days begin with the odour of low-quality coal being burned, particularly in winter. Efficient energy and natural resources use is not yet a Chinese stronghold - but high petrol and raw material prices may yet force them to consider the alternatives. The Chinese authorities have successfully steered the country toward its present economic powerhouse, a process that began as far back as 1978 - I would not be surprised if, once again, they find an appropriate way forward. ①

OUR LADY OF DARKNESS

WRITER: CILLIAN DONNELLY

A close-up on a Brussels street with great historical and religious significance, which features a relative rarity in Europe, a 'Black Madonna'.

Despite its somewhat suggestive moniker, Rue de la Vierge Noire ('Street of the Black Virgin') is not so much sexually as religiously named. Indeed, more accurately, the street, sandwiched

between Place Saint Catherine and Boulevard Anspach, should be translated as 'Street of the Black Madonna', a name that more obviously highlights its origins within the Catholic faith.

DARKNESS VISIBLE

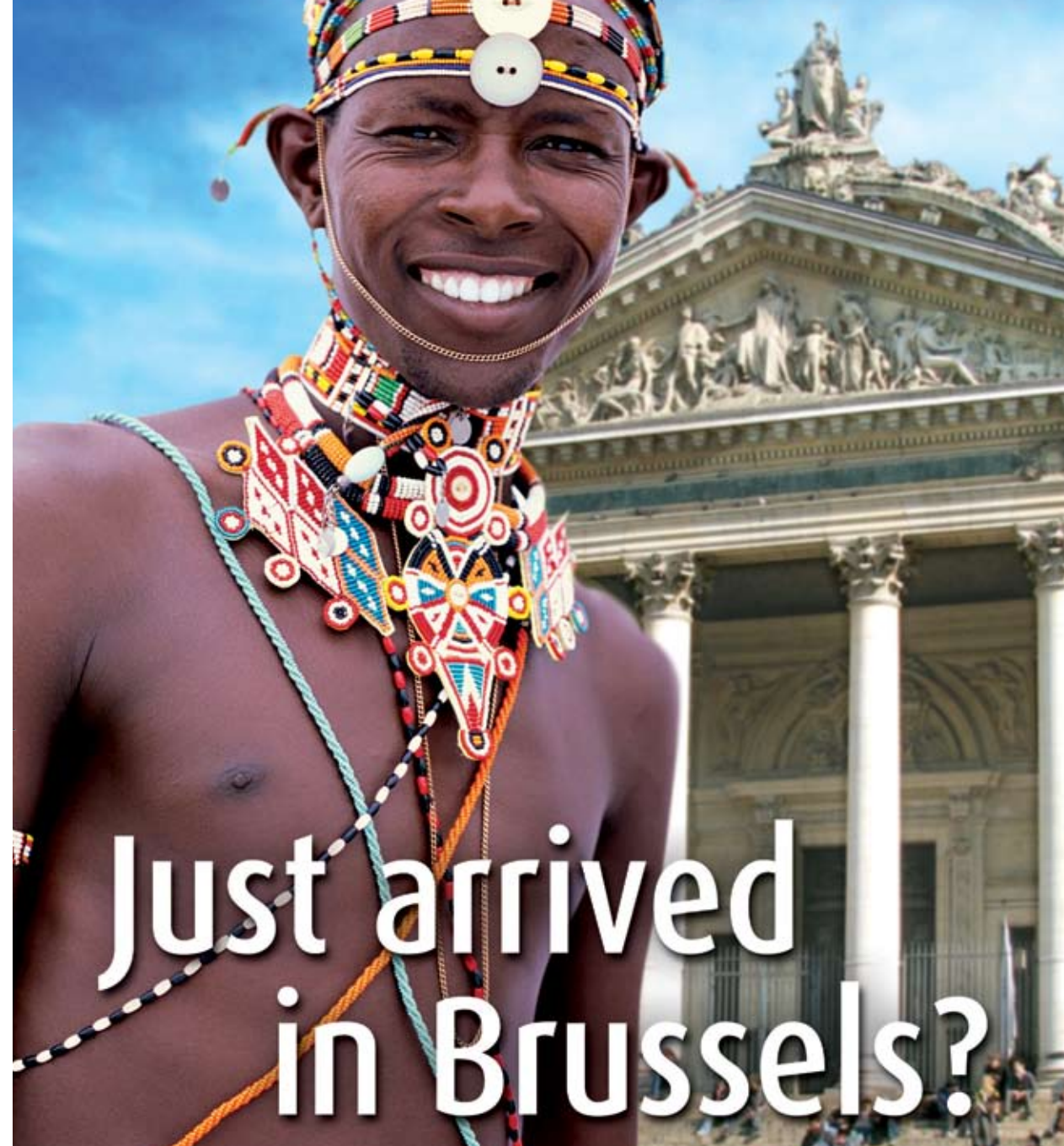
A Black Madonna, or Black Virgin, is an artistic representation, a painting or statue, of the Virgin Mary in which she is depicted as having dark or black skin. The reason for this particular colouring is the source of some debate as to whether or not it has cultural or ethnic significance but, on a practical level at least, it is due to the materials used in the preparation of the work, such as ebony in statue-making.

The Black Madonnas date mainly from the medieval period, between the 11th and 15th centuries and tend to be made of wood, or, occasionally, stone, and there are thought to be around 500 of them dotted around Europe, mostly in strongly Catholic areas such as France, the Czech Republic and Poland.

In Belgium, a famous example of a Black Madonna is to be found in the church of Saint Catherine, in the vicinity of Rue de la Vierge Noire, and it is from this particular icon that the street takes its name.

Dating from the 15th century (the tower was added in 1629), the church, overlooking one of the city's former quays, was redesigned and worked on between 1854 and 1859 by Joseph Poelaert in an intriguing mixture of styles; Gothic, Renaissance and Romanesque.

The Brussels Black Virgin



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Interestingly, the rebuilt Church was almost destined to become the city's stock exchange before it finally reopened its doors under its original purpose in 1867.

UNSINKABLE ICON

The statue of the Black Madonna, however, dates back to around the 14th century. It stands at around a metre, carved in stone and painted black.

The icons are commonly thought to possess miraculous properties, and, according to legend, in 1744 the Brussels Madonna was stolen by rowdy Protestant sailors and thrown into the River Senne. When it refused to sink (it was later found floating on a piece of driftwood) it was salvaged and taken as an object of worship by the faithful before later ending up in its current resting place.

Just to the east of Place Saint Catherine can be found La Tour Noire (the Black

Tower), part of the old city wall. Originally dating from the 11th century, and one of the few surviving remnants of the old town structure, the tower survived being destroyed along with the rest of the wall in the 16th century because it was found to be useful as a storage facility, and, latterly,

became the site of a small museum devoted to the history of Brussels' old port.

All of which makes this area perhaps the 'darkest' corner of Brussels - sadly, Rue de la Vierge Noire today is a nondescript part of the city, its blackness being confined to the soot and grime of traffic and urban living. One or two places do recommend themselves, however.

AFTER DARK


Café Kafka, one of the city's more lived-in bars, might be up your street.


Actually, for a bar named after the author of dark tales such as *The Trial*, *The Castle* and *Metamorphosis*, Café Kafka is a straightforward enough locale; sparse but arty in shades of brown, black and white, its bare space houses a clientele of would-be philosophers and curious onlookers. To be sampled after midnight, when the noisy daytime street quiets down and the obligatory jazz soundtrack complements the intellectual chatter, Kafka suits those night owls whose clubbing days are behind them. And, as a bonus, owner Patrice (three black and white portraits of whom hang above the small bar) is always on hand to entertain visitors with his phonetic renditions of Hamlet and strange grasp of international relations.


All in all, best enjoyed under cover of darkness. ☛


Café Kafka
Rue de la Vierge Noire, 6
1000 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 513 5489


**THE BLACK
MADONNAS DATE
MAINLY FROM
THE MEDIEVAL
PERIOD,
BETWEEN THE
11TH AND 15TH
CENTURIES
AND TEND
TO BE MADE
OF WOOD, OR,
OCCASIONALLY,
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FLASH

FACT: IN THE BLACK?

In these times of global economic slowdown, falling oil prices and the 'credit crunch', isn't it comforting to know that your government is working to protect your interests? Maybe – if you don't live and work in Belgium. The now-legendary taxation rate puts us firmly at the top of the league table, according to figures supplied by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Taxes on the average worker are 55.4 per cent of income. Taxation on goods and services (TVA) is hovering around the European average at 11.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). To top this off, the public debt in Belgium is running at 84.9 per cent of GDP. So what do you get for your money?

A very respectable per centage of GDP expenditure on education (6.1 per cent), and a sturdy 10.3 per cent public investment in healthcare (among the best in the world, both officially and anecdotally). If you're a man, you can expect to live to see your 76th birthday, and if you were born here this year and were a woman, you could statistically still be around for the beginning of the 22nd century.

FIGURE: 694 METRES?

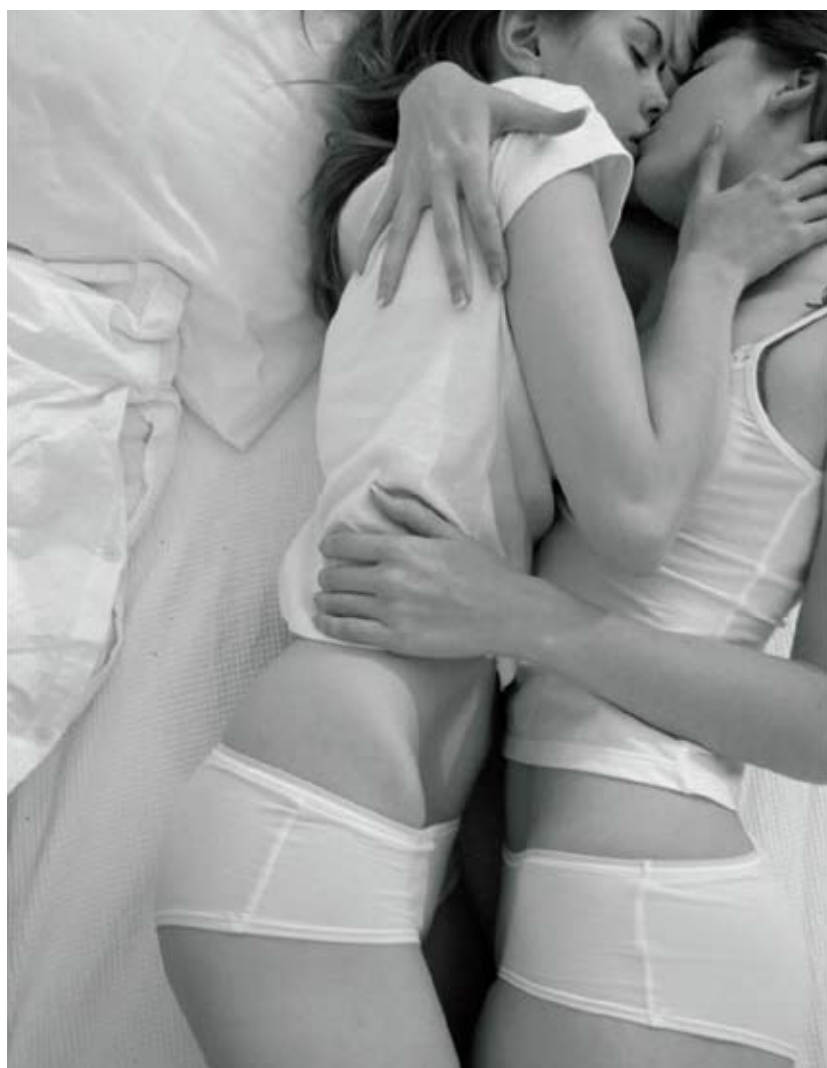
The highest geographical point in Belgium, the Signal de Botrange, situated in the Ardennes near the German border. Described by mountaineers as "a gentle walk", it still beats several other countries for height - Estonia, Lithuania and Denmark all fall short of Belgium's mighty peak. If you thought Belgium was flat, try climbing The Vatican City's highest point – a head-swimming 50 metres above sea level.

NEWS

Going gay at the flicks

WRITER: JAMES DREW

Brussels' annual celebration of the gay and lesbian film scene hits town in January - *Together* brings you a sneak preview.



© BBC THREE
- Flickr.com

Back for its 23rd edition in January 2009, the Belgian Gay and Lesbian Film Festival promises, as ever, to be a riot of culture, colour, and exotic excess.


The customarily diverse programme, in addition to a multitude of previously unseen gay films, will also bring music, painting and sculpture to the attention of festival-goers.

As ever, thousands of voluntary man (and woman) hours have been invested during the year, for another fabulous festival at Brussels' Botanique – it's a great opportunity to see unpublished feature films as well as reissues, documentaries and shorts.

In addition, an exhibition of gay photography and paintings, a must-see for any fan of the genre, will be on display. Panel discussions are also part of line-up, as well as parties, naturally.

The festival is also great opportunity for gay and lesbian travellers to visit Brussels, long renowned as a gay-friendly city, with many establishments, such as the karaoke bar Can Can and the Le Comptoir restaurant, on offer.

The Brussels Lesbian and Gay Film Festival programs film of GLBT interests and themes from all over the world - films that would never have the opportunity to be screened in Belgium otherwise. Features, short films, documentaries, animation films are all excepted. Films with a small or micro budget are encouraged to apply, as the Brussels Lesbian and Gay Film Festival looks for high quality stories and themes

Aiming to promote a positive portrayal of Belgian homosexuality is what it's all about, in the beautiful local of the Botanique Cultural Centre, with its spectacular glass structure of two orangeries, punctuated by small pools and bronze sculptures, created in 1826 by the Netherlands Royal Horticultural Society. 

Botanique
Rue Royale, 236
1210 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 512 45 87
www.fglb.org

At time of going to press, full festival details were yet to be confirmed. Keep an eye on the website for updates...

The avuncular American...

WRITER: ANDY CARLING

Gerald Loftus had every reason to be in a good mood when our correspondent tracked him down - as one of Belgium's Democrats Abroad Speakers Bureau, Barack Obama's victory left him elated and exhausted, but only too willing to share his thoughts.



the Caribbean and the Middle East. Nowadays, he's settled in Brussels, where he writes and consults on diplomacy and defence. Soft spoken, with a friendly and thoughtful manner, he has become a much sought-after commentator and his aptly named weblog, Avuncular American, is widely read by policy wonks on both sides of the Atlantic.

WORK BEGINS

Although the celebrations have ended, there's no respite for the President-elect, as we're now in the pre-inauguration phase and he has to build and prepare his new administration. The transition team has to fill around 7,000 posts that consist of Presidential appointments, including Cabinet, 200 Ambassadors, policy advisors and aides. Applicants for these positions are also some of the most vetted people on Earth, having to complete exhaustive background checks. It is in this that Loftus sees real change occurring. "Short of programmes that require legislation or funding, on the philosophy of government you can see real change."

"One of the reasons we got into this terrible position is in the laxity, the unwillingness to use the levers of

government regulation or supervision. The instruments were there, but they weren't used. Bush tended to appoint cronies or people who were ideologically opposed to regulation or intervention. For example, if you give the regulation of financial markets to someone opposed to the notion of government control, and that is what has happened, how can you expect to have proper controls?"

Loftus explains that Obama and the Democrats are not opposed to the role of government being involved in society as long as the proper oversight is in place, so a change of approach does appear likely. This is a more subtle phenomenon than a campaign promise, but deep and real change across the board in all areas of policy. "It's a change of gear, of direction, but it is a case of government doing its job."

NOT JUST THE ECONOMY, STUPID

It's accepted that Obama faces the inbox from hell, but what can he do straight away? The economy will be the top priority, but the situation is in flux. As British Prime Minister Harold Wilson said, a week is a long time in politics, and

the six weeks till the inauguration are looking like an eternity. Secondly, there's the Middle East and Afghanistan. Loftus sees resolving, or at least getting towards an end game in Iraq, as the first step. "For progress to be made on other issues in the Middle East, Palestine-Israel, US-Syria relations

and Iran, settlement in Iraq will be required. These are all really tough issues that can't be solved easily or quickly, but we've got to show from the start that we're interested. We've got to reinvigorate processes."

While the policy and the people are being put in place, attention is also being paid to the votes. Analysts are poring over spreadsheets, picking apart the results to see who voted for Obama and why. Was victory achieved by young voters, minorities and groups such as naturalized Americans (more than 300,000 new citizenships were granted in California alone last year) or by single women and blue-collar workers?

VEXING OVER VOTING

Of greater concern to Loftus is the issue of what has been termed 'voter suppression', that is, the removal of voters from the register. As large turnouts tend to favour the Democrats, Loftus alleges that there are efforts to discourage voters from turning out. "The high turnout, more than 62 per cent, is encouraging and needs to be built upon, but we still have the same laws and regulations that apply to voting and that system is extremely haphazard, decentralized and has led to a lot of things going wrong, so there are inherent dangers that need to be fixed. Almost all American elections in recent years have been flawed, contested and, while the news is good if you support Obama, this good news should not translate to complacency."

So, while it's clear that Gerald Loftus will be busy explaining US politics to Belgium, will anyone be volunteering to make sense of Belgian politics to Americans? Or to anyone at all, for that matter?

Check out Gerald Loftus's weblog at AvuncularAmerican.typepad.com

'Imagine waking up... to find that McCain had won. It doesn't bear thinking about.'

I ask Loftus what he sees as the world's reaction to the election and he replies: "Relief. I mean, imagine waking up that morning to find that McCain had won. It doesn't bear thinking about."

We've met to discuss the election and what happens next. Loftus has been in the US Foreign Service from 1979 to 2002, serving in Europe, Africa,

'ALMOST ALL AMERICAN ELECTIONS IN RECENT YEARS HAVE BEEN FLAWED, CONTESTED AND, WHILE THE NEWS IS GOOD IF YOU SUPPORT OBAMA, THIS GOOD NEWS SHOULD NOT TRANSLATE TO COMPLACENCY'

Six of the best

WRITER: JÉRÔME STÉFANSKI

In recent weeks, exceptional outlets have opened their doors in Brussels and, as usual, *Together* highlights a selection.



1. TEN

The famous Belgian children's brand has just opened its sixth shop, near Rue des Tongres in Woluwé. In a library environment, crowned with a small spiral staircase, you can find the colourful clothes unique to Ten creator Catherine Felstead.

Ten

Passage Linthout, 8
1200 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 742 9729
www.tenclothes.be

2. PRINCESSE TAM.TAM

Princesse tam.tam, liberated, glamorous and chic, has opened its doors in Woluwé Shopping Center, Brussels. An exclusive, beautiful arena of 70 square metres, dedicated to looking sexy down below! And there's more good news – Princesse tam.tam has opened another outlet in Fort Jaco, Uccle. To be noted, as St. Valentine's Day is approaching...

Princesse tam.tam

Woluwé Shopping Center
Rue Saint-Lambert, 200
1200 Brussels
T. +32(0)2 472 86 45
www.princessetamtam.com

3. FORMES & LIGNES

Dedicated to top-of-the-range living, Formes & Lignes has recently opened in the centre of Brussels. Completely dedicated to home improvements, Forms & Lines is now to be in a former private mansion - three famous brands of furniture are available: Steiner, Tréca of Paris and Maison Cape, in a refined and elegant atmosphere.

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T. +32(0)2 213 82 00

4. MIM

From 5th December, the French fashion moniker, the champion of 'low-cost pleasures', will be arriving in Brussels, in what will be the eighth store on Belgian territory for the brands that has more than 280 sales outlets in France. Mim – it's 'pleasure fashion'.

Mim
Rue Neuve, 122
1000 Brussels
www.mim.fr

5. NEW CLUB WORLD

New Club World is the name of the latest exclusive service on offer from British Airways – and it's more than first-class service on the aircraft. The experience begins from the moment customers decide to fly with British Airways to the moment they arrive at their destination. The top-of-the-range service includes checking-in online, priority boarding, a wide and comfortable single bed plus access to luxurious lounges, allowing you to enjoy refreshments, a shower and the benefits of an Elemis Health Spa. From Brussels to the United States for example, you can enjoy one of the three British Airways lounges in London Heathrow's recently installed Terminal 5. A unique experience!

New Club World
www.britishairways.com

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1020 LAEKEN	8.76 € ↗ 7.91	1,888.57 € ↗ 1,884.83	1,548.72 € ↘ 1,838.03
1030 SCHAERBEEK	8.16 € ↘ 8.40	1,795.05 € ↘ 1,997.25	1,644.81 € ↘ 1,771.18
1040 ETTERBEEK	10.79 € ↗ 10.36	2,335.99 € ↗ 2,293.71	2,340.55 € ↘ 2,456.29
1050 IXELLES	10.53 € ↘ 10.58	2,628.96 € ↘ 2,662.14	1,955.51 € ↘ 2,215.84
1060 SAINT GILLES	9.22 € ↗ 8.93	2,269.56 € ↘ 2,398.95	2,017.43 € ↗ 1,968.30
1070 ANDERLECHT	9.01 € ↘ 9.21	2,004.45 € ↘ 2,019.61	1,974.55 € ↗ 1,949.95
1080 MOLENBEEK ST JEAN	8.48 € ↘ 8.61	1,898.69 € ↗ 1,702.33	2,309.88 € ↘ 3,123.64
1081 KOEKELBERG	7.53 € ↗ 7.21	1,871.55 € ↘ 1,892.61	1,554.18 € ↗ 1,465.51
1082 BERCHEM STE AGATHE	8.24 € ↘ 8.93	1,778.43 € ↘ 1,809.63	1,890.49 € ↘ 2,018.36
1083 GANSOREN	8.11 € ↘ 8.61	1,959.36 € ↘ 1,982.51	1,906.25 € ↘ 2,214.07
1090 JETTE	8.55 € ↗ 8.41	1,920.40 € ↗ 1,871.89	1,439.39 € ↗ 1,589.24
1120 NEDER OVER HEMBEEK	9.85 € ↗ 9.37	1,996.36 € ↗ 1,968.93	1,620.54 € ↘ 1,628.53
1140 EVERE	9.98 € ↗ 8.25	2,198.25 € ↗ 2,046.59	2,269.05 € ↘ 2,693.67
1150 WOLUWÉ ST PIERRE	10.05 € ↗ 9.66	2,871.49 € ↗ 2,830.61	3,036.61 € ↗ 3,210.59
1160 AUDERGHEM	10.83 € ↗ 10.26	2,651.19 € ↘ 2,730.89	2,432.14 € ↗ 2,325.39
1170 WATERMAEL BOITSFORT	10.40 € ↗ 10.30	2,630.17 € ↗ 2,548.57	3,836.64 € ↘ 3,927.22
1180 UCCLE	9.97 € ↗ 9.38	2,444.44 € ↘ 2,554.51	2,157.02 € ↘ 2,211.86
1190 FOREST	8.02 € ↘ 8.21	2,135.44 € ↗ 2,020.23	2,252.72 € ↗ 2,022.69
1200 WOLUWÉ ST LAMBERT	8.47 € ↘ 9.11	2,441.95 € ↗ 2,439.16	2,635.80 € ↘ 2,884.81
1210 ST JOSSE TEN NOODE	7.48 € ↘ 8.07	1,667.74 € ↘ 1,727.92	1,808.89 € ↘ 1,850.67



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Have a capital New Year!

WRITER: JÉRÔME STÉFANSKI

New Year in style

Together presents the coolest locations in Brussels to bring in the New Year in style!

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Fancy celebrating the New Year in an off-beat but luxurious venue? Want an extraordinary adventure you'll never forget? OK – on 31 December, you'll need to be in the sumptuous surroundings of La Tentation, where a fabulous evening awaits. On the menu - a champagne aperitif and gastronomic buffet, and you can dance with DJ's Olivier Gosseries, and Simon LeSaint. A festival frenzy to take you through to the small hours of 2009!

La Tentation

*Rue de Laeken, 28
1020 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 543 44 40
www.nouvel-an.org*

LUXURY NEW YEAR'S EVE

As usual, the Hotel Conrad is laying on a superb evening to welcome the New Year. The de luxe 5-star hotel, to be found on Avenue Louise, will allow you first to discover the joys of winter in

the open air, on a specially installed skating rink. Then, point yourself in the direction of the prestigious hotel's ballroom dance floor, to boogie the night away in style. And, to finish, why not stay the night? You only live once...

Conrad Brussels

*Avenue Louise, 71
1050 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 542 42 42
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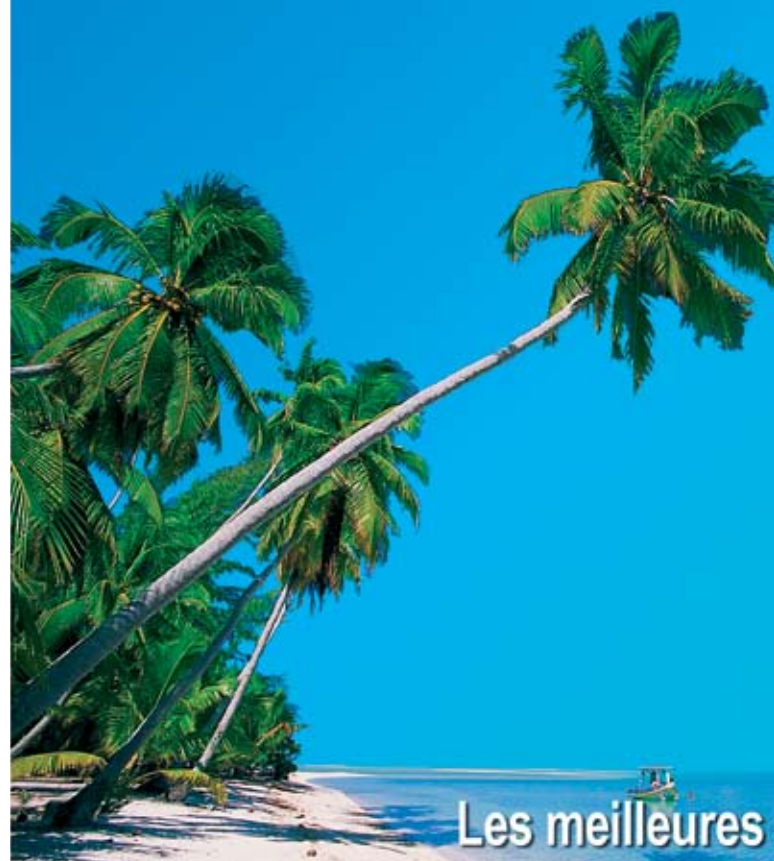
Grand Casino Brussels

*Rue Duquesnoy, 14
1000 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 289 11 30
www.grandcasinobrussels.be*

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DEEP SENSES BY DOM PERIGNON

As is customary, the end of November was marked by Dom Pérignon's Deep Senses soirée at Tour & Taxis. All Brussels' 'beautiful people' were there...
www.deepsenses.be



FASHION NOCES

On 12 December, the fashion universe came together in Mirano for the acclaimed Fashion Noces evening – it was the place to be to spot the latest trends...
www.nocesroyales.be



ANARCHIC PARTY

On 21 November, only the best-connected were allowed entrance to K-Nal, for the latest edition of Anarchic...
www.anarchic.be



Céline Aron
– the game's
blonde

BLONDE AMBITION

WRITER: MIRIAM GALEA

We meet up with Brussels-based DJ agent Céline Aron, to discuss some blonde issues, as well as her successful career in the house music scene.

Watch out guys, DJ agent Céline Aron is your proverbial 'head turner'. Tall, slim and stunning, I recognize her the minute she walks into the restaurant where we finally agreed to meet after days of chasing her around her busy schedule and travel in Amsterdam and Paris. But I can immediately see why Céline is one busy chick.

BORN TO BE BLOND

She is the owner of *Soblonde-management*, her own music-management company, fostering the career of prominent DJs such as Martin Solveig, Joachim Garraud and Laurent Wolf, as well as a selection of live acts ranging from solo artists to rock bands and MCs. Céline takes care of her clients' PR, image and events, working hard to promote their participation in big parties and getting a record deal.

'MY JOB IS MORE ABOUT NETWORKING THAN MUSIC'

Céline is a dazzling blonde, yet her steady eyes and determined voice indicate a very strong and assertive character

enhanced by years of experience on the club and music scene. She is open and fun-loving, but admits that she still needs to be tough.

She chuckles gleefully when I refer to the name of the agency: "*Soblonde-management* is just who I am," she says, "it's a philosophy of life! It's about being blonde, inside."

Apart from her obvious good looks, her energetic character has also undoubtedly contributed to her having already achieved so much. She claims that where she is now is simply the result of where life led her. Raised in a very small village called Nil St Vincent, close to Louvain, by parents who moved out of the city to lead a quieter life, Céline claims that she always knew she was a city girl. "My first big 'love story' was with a successful French music producer who was much older than I," she explains. This drove her to move to Paris when she was still very young, and she admits that surviving in the big city was not so easy at first. Working at the bar of a popular French club enabled her to meet a lot of new people and familiarise herself with the music scene. "My job is more about networking than music," she admits, "In Paris, I used to work at the bar, but I was always mixing with the people, having drinks and making contacts, so I gradually got into the whole scene and managed to build a network of prominent DJs and relevant people."

IN LOVE WITH BRUSSELS

Céline's free spirit allowed her to pursue whatever life offered. She tells me



she worked sporadically as a model and a TV presenter. "But I wasn't much good at it," she grins, "I was driving my mum crazy, as she thought I would never settle down." After living in Paris for six years, Céline moved back to Brussels and now insists that she would not trade Brussels for anything. "I'm in love with Brussels. I feel at home here," she says, explaining that the city also has a very good house music scene, "People living in Brussels are used to having foreigners around and are more approachable than Parisians." It was with this same spontaneous, life-embracing attitude that Céline began managing DJs and bands when, upon returning from Paris, she offered to help a rock band make a name for itself on the music scene. After flirting with this new pursuit for several months, Céline realised she could turn it into a profession, and took the leap to start her own company, backed by all the contacts and experiences she had accumulated so far.

Since then, *Soblondemanagement* has had nothing but success. Céline is very grateful to work with high-profile DJs,

who make her work more credible and continue to expand the company's reputation. But, as she explains: "It is not easy being a woman in this business. You're always in clubs, at parties, and you have to watch out you do not end up in dangerous situations and that the nightlife doesn't get to you...I also need to persuade the club owner and event organisers that I'm not just a pretty girl, but that I mean business."

It is clear that for Céline, the most important thing is having fun, meeting people and travelling. "I am happy I can afford to do that, thanks to a job which for me is a passion and not tedious." Checking her watch, she says that she needs to leave for a reception very soon - she simply can't afford to miss potential networking events. She leaves with a promise to give me tips on Belgium clubs, should I ever be at a loss about where to party - I am left with no doubt that she will be a font of knowledge on that score! ①

www.soblondemanagement.com

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CLASS CUISINE

WRITER: SENSUM.BE

In association with
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of dining experiences...



1. *Le Pain et le Vin*

2. *Switch*

LE PAIN ET LE VIN

OPEN: 12-14h30 and 19h30-22h.
CLOSED: Saturday lunch,
Sunday and Monday.

Olivier Morland, a young chef with proven culinary flair (l'Orangerie, la Villa Lorraine and le Negresco in Nice), is ably assisted by two comrades with fish cuisine expertise. The rules are simple - nothing but the finest ingredients, nothing but enticing dishes, nothing but the most the most intriguing wines from the renowned regions. Then, there's the spacious leafy terrace, a real hideaway, right in the middle of town. The result? Pure joy.

Le Pain et le Vin
Chaussée d'Alseberg, 812a
1180 Bruxelles
T. +32(0)2 332 3774
www.painvin.be

SWITCH

OPEN: 12-14h30h and 19-22h30.
CLOSED: Sunday and Monday lunch.

The name 'Switch' is appropriate for Marc Boutsen, a former food journo and TV producer turned restaurateur. Now open a few months, Boutsen and his team, trained by former owner Evan Triantopoulos, offer cuisine that 'switches' between traditional Franco-Belgian and the latest gastronomic trends, as well as variations on familiar themes, such as lobster, cod and Aubrac sirloin. In addition, diners may 'switch' between various set menus, allowing the opportunity to enjoy a gastronomic meal at a principled price per head (30-34€). And every lunchtime, French chef Christophe Lagadec offers a soup and vegetarian dish for 13€, a meat plate for 15€, or a fish dish for 17€. Time to make the switch?

Switch
Rue de Flandre, 6
1000 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 503 1480
www.switchrestofood.be



3. Bois Savanes

4. Museum Brasserie

5. Be Lella

BOIS SAVANES

OPEN: 12-14h and 19-22h.
CLOSED: Monday and Saturday lunch.

A Thai restaurant, Bois Savanes is among our favourites. This eatery has had a make-over, and not just superficial changes, but an in-depth transformation. The verdict? Magnificent. As soon as you enter, the tone is set. A genuine cobbled alley, reminiscent of Asia, tastefully alludes to Thailand. The walls are covered with fine wood

panelling, and a finely lit ambiance offers the very best setting to enjoy your meal, with two more very attractive rooms: a smoker's bar on the ground floor and a mezzanine with beams and roof decking. And the food? Mwwoah!

Bois Savanes
Chaussée de Waterloo, 208
1640 Rhode Saint Genèse
T. +32(0)2 358 37 78
www.boissavanes.be

MUSEUM BRASSERIE

OPEN: 12-14h30 and 18h30-22h30.
CLOSED: Monday.

The Royal Museum of Art schools in Brussels is now much more than a cultural window on Belgium – in recent months, renowned chef Peter Goossens (recognized as perhaps Belgium's best) has been sharing his culinary art. The chef thus offers regional culinary delights, with typically Flemish, Walloon and Brussels dishes all available. A must, even if you don't visit the museum...

Museum Brasserie
Place Royale, 3
1000 Brussels
T. +32(0)2 508 3580
www.museumfood.be

BE LELLA

OPEN: 12-15h and 19-23h.
CLOSED: Saturday lunch and Sunday.

Following on from the success of his superb Be Manos hotel, Constantin Poulgouras offers new delights on Square de l'Aviation, in the heart of a district enjoying quite a revival. The decor is sumptuous, to say the least, but as contemporary class can become insipid without culinary back-up, the menu more than lives up to expectations. Traditional Belgian cuisine, served with a master's touch.

Be Lella
Square de l'Aviation, 23-27
1070 Anderlecht
T. +32 (0)2 520 6565
www.bemanos.com

More restaurant reviews available at
www.sensum.be



Together's 'To Do' list

WRITER: JAMES DREW

Our round-up of the best events heading your way for the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009.

ILLYA DES GENS

12.12.08 > 21.01.09

Renowned photographic artist Illya Rozenbaum, who was awarded an honourable mention for his work *Stanislau Shushkevich*, which was taken on 11 March 2008 in the Strasbourg European Parliament, marking the 90th Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic. With this startling expo, Rozenbaum offers his unique perspective on people.

Goudblommeke

Rue des Alexiens 53, Brussels
www.rozenbaum.be
www.photoawards.com

WINTER WONDERS

To 28.12.08, 10h

Brussels' Winter Wonders has nothing to do with drab seasonal markets flanked by fake reindeers and artificial snow. The event does feature a Christmas market, but it's one of Europe's largest, and there's an ice-skating rink on the Marché aux Poissons, entertainers and live music. And don't forget to check out Grand'Place...

www.plaisirsdhiver.be

MEUNIER IN SEVILLE

To 04.01.09, 10h

An exhibition focusing on the period (1882-83) that Belgian painter Constantin

Meunier lived in Seville, and the works he created during those years. The artists paintings and drawings, and his return to sculpture in 1885, consecrated his reputation as one of the greatest creative artists of the genre.

Museum of Modern Art

Place Royale, 1-2
1000 Brussels
T. +32 (0)2 508 3211
www.fine-arts-museum.be

STAND UP BRUSSELS: SEAN MELO, STEWART FRANCIS, IAN MOORE

24.01.09, 20h30

Fancy a good laugh? Spend an evening at Stand Up Brussels, in the company of Sean Meo ('He can turn out intelligent material with a speed that many other comics can only gasp at' - *Time Out*), Stewart Francis ('You'll want to see him over and over again to catch the jokes you missed because you were laughing so hard' - *Toronto Star*) and Ian Moore ('Don't miss a single word ... Moore is a cultured comic' - *London Evening Standard*). Go on – treat yourself.

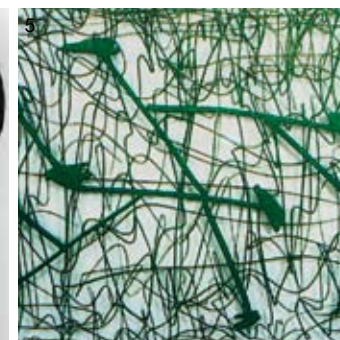
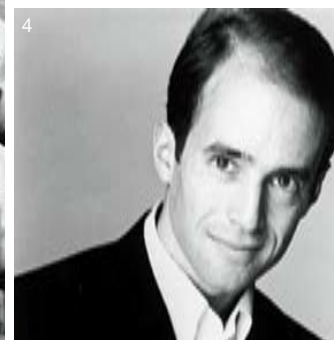
Theatre 140

Ave Eugene Plasky, 140
1030 Brussels
www.standupworld.com/index_tickets.html

THE HOLIDAY, TOURISM & LEISURE FAIR

05 > 09.02.09

Plan your vacation at Brussels' annual holiday fair, held at the city's major



1. *Illya Des Gens*

2. *The magic of Christmas in Brussels*

3. *La Maternité* - Constantin Meunier

4. *Stand-up comic Sean Meo* - Stand Up Brussels

5. *Panorama 99* - Jean Marc Bustamante

exhibition hall, Brussels Expo. Join in the fun with 110,000 holiday hunters!

Brussels Expo

Place de Belgique, 1
1020 Brussels
www.vosvacances.be

ISB ANNUAL GALA DINNER

07.02.09, 19h

The third annual International School of Brussels Gala Dinner and Auction Event comes to the beautiful Château du Lac Hotel in Genvil. All monies raised will go towards the ISB@ Play project.

International School of Brussels

Kattenberg, 19 - 1170 Brussels
T. 32 (0)2 661 42 11
www.isb.be/auction

BRUSSELS FOR LOVERS BIKE RIDE

10.02.09, 19h

Looking for love? Don your sexiest lycra and join the Brussels for Lovers night-time bike tour. Open to couples and singletons, the three-hour ride takes

in some of the city's most romantic sights. As the tour passes through the narrow streets of Brussels, there's commentary, romantic anecdotes and stories (in French), and no doubt a lot of flirting along the way.

T. +32 (0)2 502 7355
www.provelo.org

JEAN-MARC BUSTAMANTE - LE GRAND TOUR

To 15.02.09

Monographic expo from contemporary French artist Jean-Marc Bustamante, bringing together works old and new, with a selection created especially for the exhibition. Bustamante moves seamlessly between mediums, from photography to painting, abstract and realism, free and random form.

MAC's - Musée des Arts Contemporains

Site du Grand-Hornu
Rue Sainte-Louise, 82
B-7301 Hornu
T.+32 (0)65 65 21 21
www.mac-s.be

TOY STORY

WRITER: JAMES DREW

In Daniel and Geo Fuchs' latest exhibition, TOYGIANTS, a collection of toy-figure photographs present a perspective on our world drawn from the idealism inherent in comic book/superhero/famous-people subjects. The 'toys' are waiting for you at the Young Gallery...





Famous faces ?

What are we really looking at when we see toy figurines? A visual reflection of the zeitgeist?

The world through the eyes of a child? Or is it about something deeper, darker?

In German brothers Daniel (42) and Geo (39) Fuchs' exhibition, some 20 photographic prints, presented in translucent-white frames, explore the highly political world of toy figures on the international market.

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

The artists have created portraits of toys in large-sized prints – from American muscle-bound comic-book heroes of the 1960s, Japanese Manga superstars; actors and directors such as Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone and Quentin Tarantino, even world-leaders such as George W. Bush and his late opponent

Saddam Hussein, as well as artists such as Andy Warhol, are presented as toys.

With the superheroes, the belief in the essential progress of mankind is etched on the faces of the toys – a stark contrast with the worn-out, tired faces of a Willis-as-John McClane or a Stallone-as-Rambo action hero. Their wars seem to be long past – but what of the wars fought by a real-life figure such as our old friend 'Dubya', and his real-life (and death) nemeses such as Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden, who are both featured?

REALITY BITES

And what of the iconographic strategies as were famously represented by George W. Bush climbing out of a fighter plane garbed in military gear just after the US' invasion of Iraq? His motivations are scrutinised by a photograph of an 'originally packaged' 'toy president'. But, as with all their photographs, the interpretation of the empty, pale-white face is left up to the onlooker - what is real and what is staged?

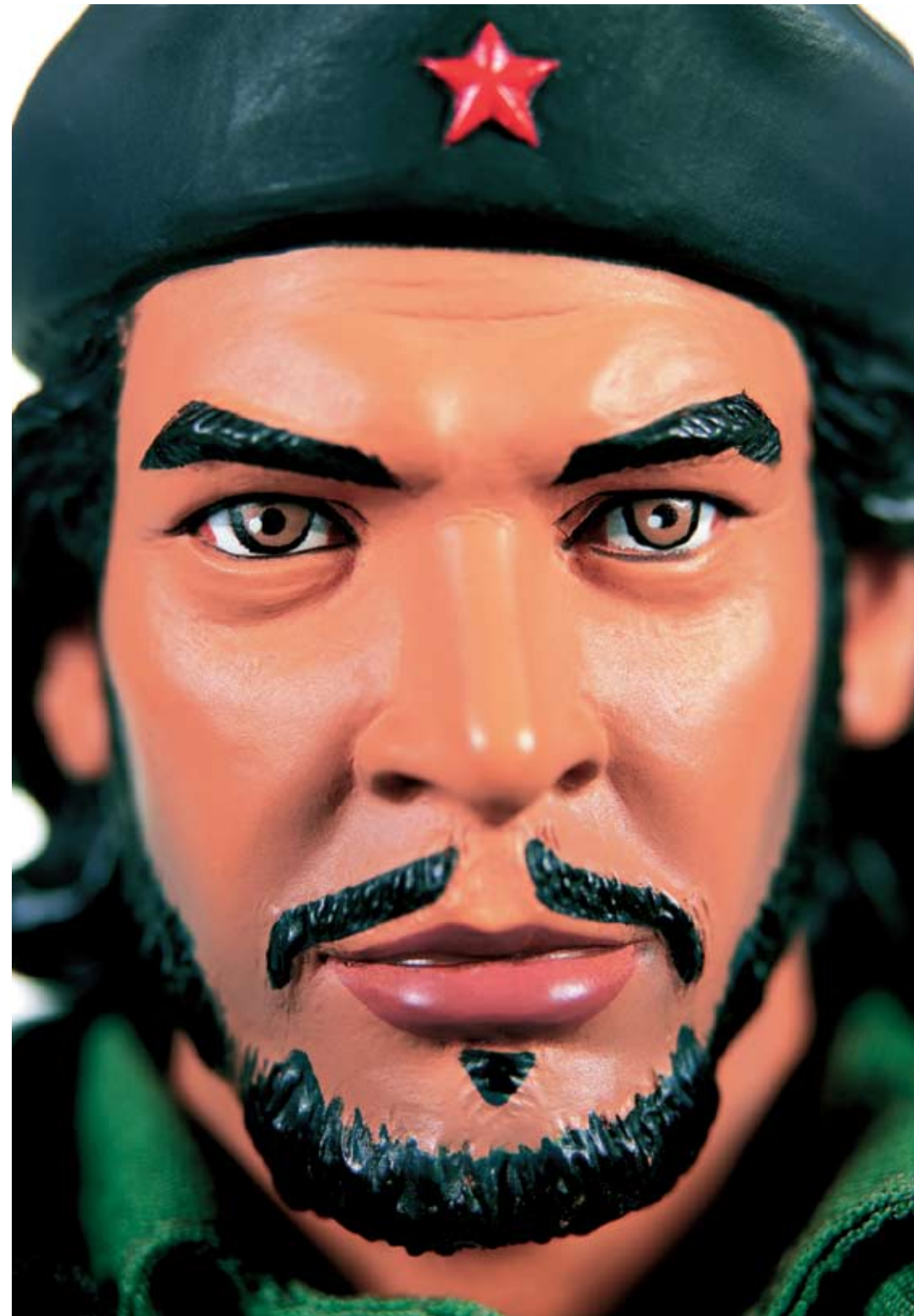
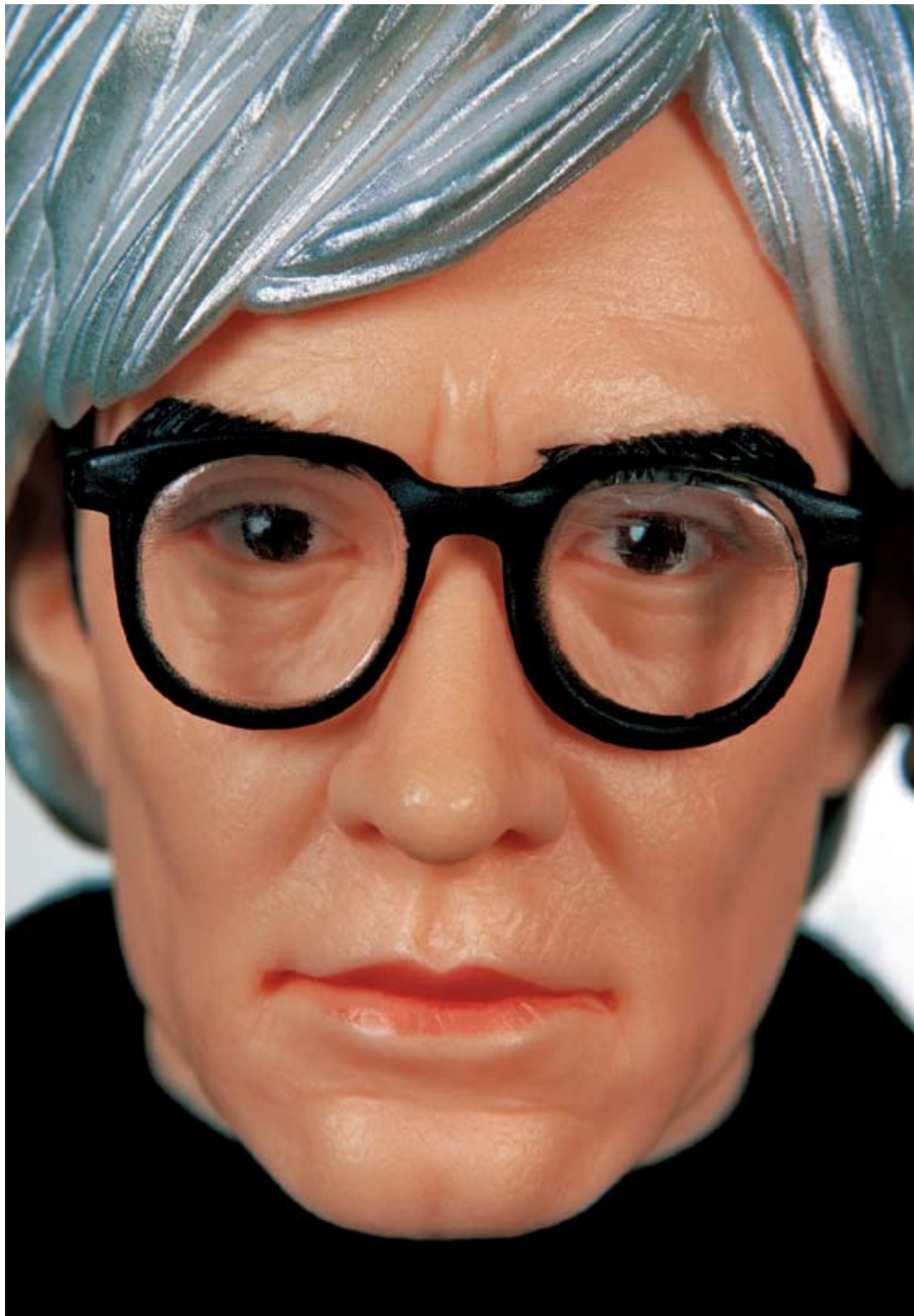
In putting us to the test, TOYGIANTS comments simply but dazzlingly on the impact that toy figures can have – and who exactly is to say where reality ends and fiction begins?

It's up to you.

Learn more about the artists at www.daniel-geo-fuchs.com.

TOYGIANTS runs from
12th December to 4th February 2009.
 Young Gallery
 Avenue Louise, 75b
 (Place Wiltcher's - Hôtel Conrad)
 1050 Brussels
 T. +32 (0)2 374 07 04
www.younggalleryphoto.com







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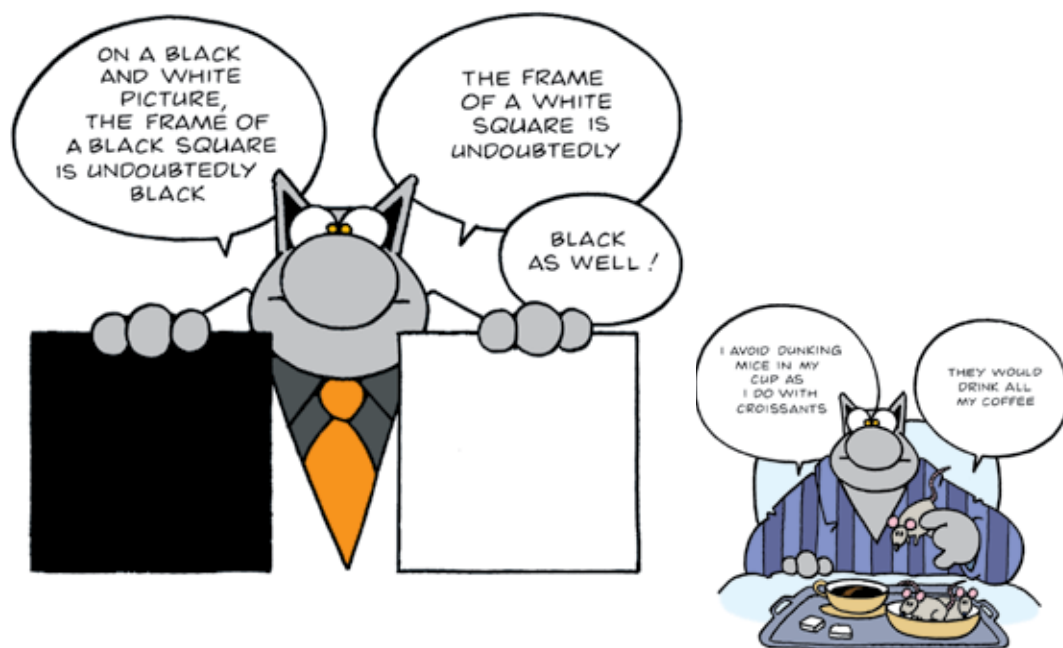
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