

Kay Walter and Rüdiger Liedtke

111 Places
in Brussels
That You
Shouldn't Miss



emons:

1 A la Mort Subite

The ultimate beers – Gueuze, Kriek and Framboise

The Vossen family have run this listed tavern at the back exit of Galeries Saint-Hubert for four generations since 1928. Since then, neither the name nor the Art Nouveau decoration has changed, while the menu also continues to be limited to small snacks: omelettes, salads and cheeses. Nonetheless, the pub is still an absolute must for fans of Belgian beer. Of course, the fruit beers Kriek and Framboise – cherry and raspberry – are highly recommended, even if real ale purists won't hear of it. Likewise, strong abbey and Trappist beers, both bottled as well as on draught, are available at the bar.

But the real specialities here are the house-brewed Lambic and Gueuze, both types of beer that are produced by spontaneous fermentation. For outsiders, the sour taste takes some getting used to. Fans, on the other hand, make pilgrimages here, as these beers are unrivalled throughout the world. They are produced without the use of cultured yeast, using only the natural yeasts that floats freely in the Brussels air. After fermentation, the beer is sealed, like Champagne, with a cork and stored in its bottle for two years. When the bottle is finally opened, it produces just the same satisfying sound as the popping of a Champagne bottle. Beware: Gueuze is considered a strong diuretic – the basis of a nice running gag in Asterix in Belgium.

The martial name A la Mort Subite – sudden death – has nothing to do with the effect of the beer, but rather a way to resolve a game of dice. Théophile Vossen's first pub, just like this one, was in the Belgian capital's banking district. If the bankers' lunch break ended before a round had finished, it would be decided on a single throw of the dice, the Mort Subite. The name stuck, for both the beer and the pub. Just to the right of the door is a photo of a former regular: Jacques Brel often liked to sit and drink here.

Address Rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères/Warmoesberg 7, 1000 Brussels, +32 (0)2 5131318, www.alamortsubite.com/en | **Getting there** Bus 29, 38, 63, 66 or 86 to Arenberg or Assaut | **Hours** Daily 11–1am | **Tip** At Rue des Alexiens 55, slightly off the beaten track for those from out of town, you will find La Fleur en Papier Doré (The Gold-Paper Flower), a Brussels institution and a former local for many artists including René Magritte.



3 The Africa Museum

The deceptive veneer of a dark colonial history

Belgium and the Congo are inextricably linked by a very brutal colonial history, which Belgium has to thank for a large part of its wealth. The former colony is now splintered into several states, which hit the headlines time and again with bloody wars over diamonds and 'rare earth'. The majority of Belgians only really began to recognise this in 2000, when the then Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt apologised several times for the historical crimes his country had committed.

The Africa Museum in the suburbs of Tervuren is closely related to this history. The 1896 building became the 'Royal Museum for Central Africa' in 1910. King Leopold II had financed the construction of the castle-like property solely from income from Africa. The 'Congo Free State' – officially proclaimed in 1897 – was the private property of the king from 1885 to 1908 and provided huge profits from trade in rubber and diamonds. Black Africans were not allowed to enter Belgium for the following 50 years. It wasn't until 1958 that some African families were brought to the country and presented in the museum as 'exhibition pieces' during the World's Fair.

In 2005, an exhibition on the colonial past was created in collaboration with Congolese academics. The themes covered were trade, administration, mission work and cottage industries, but not the suppression of the Congolese under Belgian rule. The museum closed in December 2013 and is due to reopen in mid 2018 with a new concept and new buildings by the architect Stéphane Beel. Then it must surely be time to address Leopold II's personal involvement in the Congo and Belgium's role in the murder of the first freely elected president of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba (1925–1961). The previous representation of Belgium's colonial history was more than questionable. A new, contemporary presentation is absolutely crucial for a museum of this kind.



Address Leuvensesteenweg 13, 3080 Tervuren, +32 (0)2 7695211, www.africamuseum.be | **Getting there** Metro 1 to Montgomery, then S 44 to Terminus | **Hours** The museum is due to reopen in June 2018. | **Tip** Just in front of the museum, a stone elephant, ridden by three naked Africans, makes manifest the old museum's prettified image of Africa. Albéric Collin created the sculpture in 1935 at the behest of the chocolate factory Côte d'Or, who have an elephant in their logo.

4 The Alleyway

The old-town alleyways that close for the night

Medieval Brussels was one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. This Brussels, however, was burnt to the ground, completely and repeatedly. Don't let anyone tell you there are still large parts of it standing. Even the Grand-Place was almost completely destroyed by French bombardment on 13 and 14 August, 1695. It was only after its reconstruction that it acquired the complete baroque façade that it still has today. But there are a couple of indications as to how the old centre, from Grand-Place to Sainte-Cathérine and Beguinage, may once have looked. House façades are not so useful as clues, but the course of streets is.

And some of them are clearly from the time before motorised traffic: alleyways, narrow even for pedestrians and definitely too tight for cars. Some things, which at first look like the entrance to a house, are in fact streets or impasses, which can mean both narrow passage as well as dead end. Impasse Schuddeveld, for example, is a cul-de-sac that leads straight to Théâtre Toone's bar. Impasse Ossen on the other hand leads to several residential houses. Most people accidentally walk past Impasse Cadeaux/Geschenkengang – apart from those who know this is the way to the pub L'Imaige Nostre-Dame. The same can be said of Impasse Saint-Nicolas, which leads to Au Bon Vieux Temps. Those who don't know any better assume the two small arches with the decorative statues and houses built over them are front doors. In fact, they are old-town alleyways, which have doors that still close them off during the night. This is also true of Rue de la Machoire/Kinnebak, which branches off from Rue de Flandre. Rue Du Chien Marin/Zeehondstraat and Rue du Nom de Jésus, a few steps further, which lead to the Fish Market, are also worth a visit. Probably the most beautiful and romantic of all the alleyways, though, is Rue de la Cigogne/Ooievaarstraat – 'stork street'.



Address Rue de la Cigogne/Ooievaarstraat, 1000 Brussels | **Getting there** Pedestrian zone best reached from Bourse | **Hours** Always during the day | **Tip** A chapter of Brussels' medieval monastic history can be viewed under the asphalt right next to the Bourse. The museum Bruxella 1238 has presented the remains of the Gothic chancels of the monastic church of the Minorites as well as the brick burial chambers since 1993 (Rue de la Bourse/Beursstraat, +34 (0)2 2794371; guided tours: first Wednesday of the month).

18 The Cemetery

The Cimetière du Dieweg and its celebrities

The attraction of this cemetery is its enchanted nature, offering the visitor a voyage of discovery of a special kind. You don't need to have a predilection for cemeteries, but what you will encounter here is unusual. The cemetery is completely overgrown, some of the graves overrun by plants, the gravestones broken and crestfallen, as if an earthquake had struck. Elsewhere the gravestones are sunk into the ground and you have to take care that you don't fall down a hole yourself. Is all this really intentional? The minimal upkeep does have its attraction. All that the two cemetery gardeners – also quite bizarre characters – ensure is that there is no vandalism and that plant life doesn't gain the upper hand on the graves, some of which are unusual and worth seeing. Among all the apparent chaos there are numerous people and important families buried here who have made their mark on the city and written history, particularly during the 19th century.

The cemetery was established in 1866 in order to take in victims of a cholera epidemic, when several other cemeteries closed simultaneously after reaching capacity. Ten years later, after the closure of the cemetery of Saint-Gilles, it also became a cemetery of the Brussels Jewish community. Imposing tombs of notable Jewish banking dynasties can be found in the rear part of the cemetery. The numerous Art Nouveau graves, such as that of the architect Paul Hankar, also stand out. Others were designed by Victor Horta.

When the cemetery finally became too small and a bigger one opened in nearby Verrewinkel in 1945, the cemetery on Dieweg closed in 1958. Only in a very few exceptional cases are people still buried here. The most prominent 'Dieweger' is the cartoonist and Tintin illustrator Hergé, who was buried here in 1983. The cemetery on Dieweg has been officially listed since 1997.

Address Cimetière du Dieweg, Dieweg 95, 1180 Brussels (Uccle/Ukkel) | **Getting there** Tram 92 or 97 to Dieweg or bus 60 to Chênaie | **Hours** Tue–Fri 9.30am–noon & 1.30–4pm; guided tours must be requested (+32 (0)2 3741750) | **Tip** Musée David et Alice van Buuren (Uccle, Avenue Léo Errera 41), an Art Deco villa with an astonishing art collection and a fantastic garden, is definitely worth a visit. And the impressive Uccle observatory is not far away either.



19 The Chalet Robinson

An island in the middle of the city

The large deciduous Forêt de Soignes/Zoniënwoud extends from the south, right into the city centre of Brussels like a wedge, with its tip, the Bois de la Cambre/Terkamerenbos, at the southern end of Boulevard Louise. The landscaped park was designed in 1861, in the English style, by the now largely unknown Belgian German landscape architect Friedrich Eduard Keilig (1827–1895), who was heavily involved in the development of Brussels as a green city. He also built the parks of Laeken, Saint-Gilles and Forest, the racecourse at Boitsfort as well as the Etangs d'Ixelles. But Forêt des Soignes, and in particular Bois de la Cambre, are the ultimate daytrip destinations in Brussels. On weekends the roads in the forest are mostly closed to traffic and are instead dedicated to walkers, cyclists, horse riders and skaters.

A walk in the woods is unthinkable without a place to stop for refreshment. This was also already the motto by the end of the 19th century, and the first Chalet Robinson was built in 1877: a two-storey wooden house in the style of a Swiss chalet, on an island in a manmade lake in the middle of the woods. The original building was burned down in 1991. It was rebuilt, true to the original, in 2009, again as a restaurant with a big beer garden. And because it is on a small island, it can only be reached by one of two electric ferries.

The Chalet Robinson is a popular and peaceful spot, despite being close to the city centre, as the destination of a walk or to round off a lovely summer evening. You can eat and drink, sit in the sun and enjoy the view or rent one of the many boats and row around the island. The house may appear rustic from the outside, but inside it is modern and functional. Arriving guests are greeted by a double portrait of the young Jackie Kennedy to the right of the entrance and there is a ballroom and events hall on the upper floor.



Address Sentier de l'Embarcadère/Steigerweg 1, 1000 Brussels, +32 (0)2 3729292 | **Getting there** Tram 25 or 94, or bus 41 to Brésil | **Hours** Mon–Sat noon–11pm, Sun 11am–11pm | **Tip** The meadow to the north of the lake near the ice rink and Jeux d'Hiver is called La Pelouse des Anglais (The English Lawn). A bronze plate recalls a cricket match that English soldiers played here on 17 June, 1815, on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo.

56 L'Archiduc

Jazz bar with a special past

L'Archiduc is a bit like the doorway into the neighbourhood of Dansaert, which is now very trendy again. And L'Archiduc has somehow always been there, even though the pub hasn't always seen good times. At the weekend, it can get really full, especially if there's a live concert.

A certain Madame Alice founded L'Archiduc in 1937, an establishment in which, they say, bankers and brokers from the nearby stock exchange would meet their 'secretaries' in order to frolic in the private booths. The glass-and-iron door, as well as the doorbell next to it, are still from the time when music was played and drinks were served but the business model was a different one. L'Archiduc was discreet and wives were not permitted. In 1953, the Belgian jazz icon Stan Brenders took over the bar. Brenders, who had played with Django Reinhardt and Nat King Cole, sat here at his piano almost every night, to the great joy of the guests. The private booths disappeared, but the rest of the interior – from the small bar and the deep leather armchairs to the semi-circular balcony – was maintained in the Art Deco style of the 1930s. Famous musicians have jammed in the rather small room behind the turquoise coloured façade, the late and great Toots Thielemans of course, but also Miles Davis.

In 1985 Jean-Louis and Nathalie Hennart took over the bar and have continued the tradition ever since. The piano still stands in the middle of the room. If you dare and can play, you are welcome to use it. Live bands regularly perform, especially on weekends, and play, first and foremost, jazz. In this case, jazz is seen as anything that does not belong definitively to any other musical pigeonhole. In winter, there is also 'jazz after shopping' on Saturdays and 'round about five' on Sundays, each between five and seven o'clock in the evening. L'Archiduc is also well known for the quality of its drinks.

Address Rue Antoine Dansaert 6, 1000 Brussels, +32 (0)2 5120652, www.archiduc.net | **Getting there** Tram 3, 4 or 32 and bus 86 to Bourse/Beurs | **Hours** Daily 4pm–5am | **Tip** Another jazz bar, Music Village, is a few metres away at Rue des Pierres/Steenstraat 50, and for bigger concerts there is Ancienne Belgique and Beursschouwburg next to Bourse.



60 The Lift

The great glass elevator between uptown and downtown

The two parallel elevator booths overcome the 30-metre difference in altitude between the upper and lower parts of the city in a few seconds. Accordingly, they are constantly moving, transporting locals and tourists, cyclists, flaneurs and school children, in fact anyone who wishes to avoid the exhausting climb or descent. They are free to use. The booths are also made of glass, so they offer – from the parts that aren't covered in stickers or scratches – a wonderful view. The upper platform is often used as a viewing point itself, as is the stone balustrade of Place Poelaert, from where you can reach the lift. The Ascenseur des Marolles was built in 2001 on behalf of the Ministry of Communication and Infrastructure: a good place to start a visit to Brussels or to round one off at sunset.

The view is one reason, but the elevator also makes the fractions within Brussels manifest: at the top is the French-speaking, elegant upper town, at the bottom the Flemish downtown in its hardest form, the Marolles. Behind you is the huge Palace of Justice by Joseph Poelaert (namesake of the square and the reason that 'schieve architect' – crooked architect – is seen as an insult in Brussels to this day) and in front the visual axis along the border between up and down, the Rue de la Régence to Place des Palais. To the west, you have a view over the whole of the old town, from Midi via the Kapellekerk to the top of the Town Hall tower on Grand-Place. You can see the Koekelberg with the National Basilica and all the way to Laeken and the Atomium.

In the past, the edge between uptown and downtown marked the language barrier between French and Flemish and the change from royal to commoner Brussels. The kindness of the locals often deceives guests, but the language barrier still exists and misunderstanding between Flemings and Walloons, stirred up politically, is actually growing.



Address Place Poelaert, 1000 Brussels | **Getting there** Metro 2 or 6 to Louise/Louiza or tram 92 or 93 to Poelaert | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** Once you've alighted down in the Marolles, follow Rue Haute to the right to some expensive antique shops or to the left to the Museum Art & Marges (312–314), which exhibits art by autodidacts and outsiders.

62 Maison Cauchie

A house as an advertising banner

Paul Cauchie (1875–1952) is certainly not the only painter to have designed their own home themselves. But his house is unique.

The façade of the house is graphical and strictly linear and modelled on Charles Mackintosh's (1868–1928) Glasgow style. Unlike what was otherwise normal for Belgian Art Nouveau – the house was built in 1905 – it has no floral elements, and expensive materials such as marble or bluestone were not used. Instead it is a special plaster that looks like a canvas painted with large pictures in the style of the British Art Nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898) that is captivating. It is actually what is known as sgraffito, a plaster and stucco technique, used in Italy since the Renaissance. The female figures around the round window in the upper storey symbolise architecture, fine art and the applied arts.

The house was a manifesto that exhibited the avant-garde art of Cauchie and his wife Caroline Voet (1875–1969), intended as an advertising measure for their collective work. The building was, on one hand, the artist couple's home and place of retreat – evident in the inscription 'par nous – pour nous' (by us – for us) on the façade picture of the first floor – but also their studio and sales exhibition. The two panels in the ground floor show what customers could order from the Cauchie company – from furniture and interiors to façade decoration.

After the death of Caroline Voet in 1969, this house was also almost torn down in favour of a new apartment building. The owners at the time, Guy and Leo Decissy, were able to purchase it and save it, literally at the last minute. The Tintin museum was supposed to move in here after elaborate renovations, but those plans were abandoned. And so the basement became a small museum, in which there is furniture and numerous other sgraffito works on display.

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Address Rue des Francs/Frankenstraat 5, 1040 Brussels, +32 (0)2 7338684 | **Getting there** Tram 81, bus 22, 27, 61 or 80 to Merode | **Hours** First weekend of the month 10am–1pm & 2–5.30pm | **Tip** The former Hôtel Cohn-Donnay has been the home of the brasserie De Ultieme Hallucinatie since 1981. The pub owner Fred Dericks, who has since died, had bought and carefully restored the vacant 1904 Art Nouveau palace (Rue Royale/Koningsstraat 316).



63 The Mall

A key feature of the 19th century

Some will find the term 'shopping mall' irreverent, but that is what this beautiful luxury arcade was built to be. It is made up of two separate buildings, the Galleries of the King and the Queen. The passages, measuring 213 metres in total, are divided in the middle by a street. Each is a straight arcade with shops on both sides of the ground floor, and two more storeys on top, the upper floor reserved to this day for private apartments. Natural light shines in through the curved glass roof, at the time a tremendous innovation, both visually and technically. Together with the arcade in St Petersburg built one year earlier, the Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert in Brussels became a blueprint for the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan and the GUM in Moscow, but also for all modern shopping palaces.

The Dutch architect Jean-Pierre Cluysenaar (1811–1880) had the idea of replacing the densely built up and highly disreputable section of the city centre around the herb market with a shopping street. In this way, downtown Brussels was to be made attractive for the 'upper social classes'. Cluysenaar and the banker Jean-André Demot founded the Société des Galeries Saint-Hubert in 1836. The project proved difficult and hung in the balance several times. The initiators had to negotiate for nine years in order to settle all the property rights in the quarter behind Grand-Place. The building work finally began in the spring of 1846.

Only one year later, in June 1847, King Leopold I opened the arcade personally, a real coup for the developers, who couldn't have dreamt of better advertising for their bold project. Brussels became chic overnight with its metropolitan flair. To this day, all of the city's big chocolatiers have their flagship stores here, as well as theatre shops, leather and fur shops, jewellers, the hatter Monsel and Brussels' oldest shop for lace.

Address Galerie du Roi/Koningsgalerij 5, 1000 Brussels | **Getting there** Metro 1 or 5 or bus 29, 38, 63, 65, 66 or 71 to Gare Centrale/Centraal Station, tram 92 or 93 or bus 27, 38, 71 or 95 to Royale | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** The film museum Cinematek at Rue Baron Horta 9 shows films in two auditoriums from an inventory of over 60,000 reels.



64 Marcolini

When chocolate becomes art

Apologies to the Swiss and the French, but the best chocolate comes from Brussels. And the grand artist among the numerous Brussels chocolatiers is Pierre Marcolini. Neuhaus may have invented secure packaging for pralines and thus the business model with the 'Ballotin' in 1915, the Greek-born Leonidas Kestekides may make the biggest profits, Wittamer, Godiva and Galler may be more well known, but the benchmark in terms of quality and taste is set by Pierre Marcolini.

Born in 1964 in Charleroi as the son of Italian parents, Marcolini became aware of his passion for patisserie at an early age. He learned the trade under some of the greatest and was elected world champion in 1995. In the same year he opened his first shop in Brussels, radically changing the world of chocolate and patisserie. There were no bars on offer here – Marcolini presented works of art.

The display makes it look more like a jewellery shop, and like a Parisian fashion designer, there are two collections every year, in summer and in winter, the flavours fitting to the seasons. There are always new aromas and combinations. From pepper and jasmine to green or black tea, many things go well together with chocolate, if you know how and if you really produce the chocolate yourself from the most select ingredients. Marcolini travels all around the world looking for the best cacao and buys it directly from the grower. His motto: the best cacao beans can only be produced with great care, and that has its price. The same goes, of course, for his products. A square of chocolate costs 7.50 euros, a homemade ice cream with fresh chocolate coating, 3 euros.

Today, Marcolini has become a small chocolate empire with 350 employees and 30 shops all around the world, 8 of which are in Brussels. But the centrepiece remains the original shop in Rue des Minimes on the corner of Place du Grand Sablon.



Address Rue des Minimes/Miniemenstraat 1, 1000 Brussels, +32 (0)2 5141206, www.marcolini.com | **Getting there** Tram 92 or 93 to Petit Sablon or bus 27, 48 or 95 to Grand Sablon | **Hours** Mon–Thu & Sun 10am–7pm, Fri & Sat 10am–8pm | **Tip** In La Manufacture (Grand Sablon/Grote Zavel 39) you can watch the production of not so sweet works of art. Different, rawer, but also highly recommended are the pralines from Laurent Gerbaud at Rue Ravenstein 2d.