

# Inspiring ART MUSEUMS

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## 1 VERBEKE FOUNDATION

Westakker 2

Kemzeke

East Flanders

+32 (0)3 789 22 07  
[verbekefoundation.com](http://verbekefoundation.com)

Here is one of the strangest spots in Belgium.

It looks like a junk yard next to a motorway, out in the middle of nowhere. But this unexpected location is home to one of the most astonishing private art collections in Europe.

It's not easy to find, even with the best map. You have to look out for the McDonald's sign poking above the trees. Then you might spot a small sign pointing to the Verbeke Foundation. Turn off the road here and look for a parking space among the rusting cranes and heaps of wood.

Geert Verbeke used to run a road haulage business on this site. He turned the place over to art in the summer of 2007. It has slowly evolved into a rambling, overgrown collection with strange rusting sculptures hidden among the trees and odd art creations stored in an enormous glass greenhouse. Verbeke has acquired some striking art works over the years, including a giant vase by Andrea Branzi that once stood in the courtyard of the Ghent Design Museum, a group of realistic horse sculptures by Ronald de Winter and a collection of Theo Jansen's curious moving creatures called *Strandbeesten*.

Visitors receive a little map to navigate around the site, which lists more than 60 works dotted around the wilderness. Some are so well hidden almost no one ever finds them, like Ryan Mendoza's The

White House, an abandoned Detroit building in a remote clearing in the woods.

The collection also includes the vast Archive for the Future by the Dutch artist Jacobus Kloppenborg, which occupies a warren of little rooms inside 13 stacked shipping containers. Most of Kloppenborg's works were destroyed by Amsterdam city council when it removed 52.000 kilos of art from his house in 13 containers. Here you can see all that remains. The Verbeke foundation provides space where artists can work on temporary projects while living in a small farmhouse. It also has a restaurant with a terrace, an artificial lake and two art installations where you can spend the night.



1 VERBEKE FOUNDATION



LAEKEN CEMETERY

## *Hidden* **PLACES** ⓘ

*Eccentric* **COLLECTIONS** ————— 114

*Curious* **FOLLIES** ————— 117

*Small and unusual* **MUSEUMS** ————— 120

*Strange* **VILLAGES** ————— 125

*Lost* **LANES** ————— 129

*Romantic* **CEMETERIES** ————— 133

## Independent BREWERIES

### 180 BRUSSELS BEER PROJECT

Rue Antoine  
Dansaert 188  
Brussels  
+32 (0)2 502 28 56  
[beerproject.be](http://beerproject.be)

This fantastic brewing concept has brought fresh vitality to the Brussels craft beer scene. Launched as a crowdfunded initiative in 2013, the project has developed several fine beers including Delta and Grosse Bertha. The team went on in 2015 to open a little brewery in downtown Brussels where they host beer tastings and concerts.

### 181 DE DOLLE BROUWERS

Roeselarestraat  
12-B  
Diksmuide  
West Flanders  
[dedollebrouwers.be](http://dedollebrouwers.be)

Here is a fantastic local brewery launched by three friends who call themselves 'De Dolle Brouwers', (The Mad Brewers). They took over a dilapidated brewery in the village of Esen near Diksmuide in 1980 and started brewing a limited range of six bottled beers. One of the Mad Brewers, Kris Herteleer, designs the quirky hand-drawn labels. The cafe is open most weekends.

### 182 OUD BEERSEL

Laarheidestraat  
230  
Beersel  
Flemish Brabant  
[oudbeersel.com](http://oudbeersel.com)

When the Oud Beersel brewery closed down in 2002, it looked like the end of the road for its distinctive Lambic beer. But two young enthusiasts have revived the business and won several international awards for their outstanding Oude Geuze Oud Beersel, including 'world's best Gueuze' at the 2011 World Beer Awards. Served in a chunky glass tumbler, this sour, complex beer has a rich flavour from cherries fermented in oak barrels.

### 183 BROUWERIJ KAZEMATTEN

Houten Paard 1  
Ypres  
West Flanders  
+32 (0)57 38 80 21  
brasserie  
[kazematten.be](http://kazematten.be)

This new brewhouse occupies ancient fortifications below the Ypres town walls. Launched in 2014 by the Sint-Bernardus brewery in Watou, it produces a golden ale called Grotten Santé and a light beer called Wipers Times (named after a World War One newspaper published here by British troops). You can drink the beers in a vast vaulted room below the city ramparts.

### 184 DE TROCH

Langestraat 20  
Wambeek (Ternat)  
Flemish Brabant  
[detroch.be](http://detroch.be)

This authentic 19th-century Lambic brewery is located in a brick farmhouse just outside Brussels. The friendly owners create Gueuze beers using ancient equipment. They sell bottles out in the courtyard or you can eat Flemish *stoverij* (stew) made with the brewery's prize-winning Chapeau beer in the relaxed local brasserie Leo's Bistro.



180 BRUSSELS BEER PROJECT



# Lost LANDSCAPES

## 217 LOMMELSE SAHARA

Lommel  
Limburg  
[toerismelommel.be](http://toerismelommel.be)

The Lommelse Sahara is a strange desert landscape of pure white sand planted with pine trees. It occupies an abandoned industrial site in the Kempen region where quartz sand was once mined and a polluting zinc factory killed off all the trees. This bleak wilderness was later used by a weapons manufacturer to test grenades, but it has been turned into a nature reserve, with hiking trails, an observation tower and a lake in the former quarry.

## 218 DOODE BEMDE

Start at Neerijse  
Flemish Brabant

The landscape of the Doode Bemde is quite different from anywhere else in Belgium. The River Dijle meanders sluggishly between waterlogged fields where little grows except poplars and reeds. Beyond a railway line, you can follow two marked trails (blue or red) through this ancient desolate landscape. A short detour off the blue route brings you to a secluded bird hide on the edge of a small lake. You may be wondering if there is anywhere for lunch. Look out for the large church with two Romanesque towers on a hill to the south of the nature reserve. It stands in the village of Neerijse, where the village brewery De Kroon has been revived by a professor from Leuven University. It's the perfect spot to stop for some Belgian food and a De Kroon beer.

## 219 HET ZWIN

Graaf Léon  
Lippensdreef 8  
Knokke-Heist  
West Flanders  
+32 (0)50 60 70 86  
[zwin.be](http://zwin.be)

A silent area of watery salt marshes and windswept dunes lies close to the beach town of Knokke. This was once the broad estuary of the Zwin, where 15th-century merchant ships carried English wool and Italian silk to Bruges. But the river silted up in the 16th century, turning Bruges into a dead port. The estuary slowly evolved into a desolate and watery landscape enclosed by dunes and pine woods. More than 100 different species of birds gather in this habitat, including Kentish plovers, crested larks and avocets. Several marked trails lead across this strange landscape on the border with the Netherlands.



219 HET ZWIN



## Creative CONCEPT STORES

### 266 CIMORNÉ

Alfred

Nichelsstraat 14

Aalst

East Flanders

+32 (0)491 34 85 67

[cimorne.be](http://cimorne.be)

An abandoned mirror factory on the edge of Aalst has been turned into a creative hub for local entrepreneurs. The striking 1920s industrial interior has been taken over by several small businesses including a bike store, a hipster barber and a plant shop with greenery hanging from an old canoe. But the most striking feature is a wooden indoor bike course. The space is lit by circular lamps made from bicycle wheels hung from the roof and the walls (even in the toilets) are covered with nostalgic photographs of Belgian cycling heroes. You can drop in for a coffee and maybe hit a day with a plant workshop or a concert on the programme.

### 267 PELOTON DE PARIS

Hoogstraat 49

Mechelen

Antwerp

+32 (0)15 64 48 26

[pelotondeparis.cc](http://pelotondeparis.cc)

[pelotondeparis.be](http://pelotondeparis.be)

Vincent Van Parys and Wendy Janssens quit their corporate jobs in 2013 to set up an inspiring new concept store dedicated to cycling. You can pick up cool bike clothing, find out about cycling events in the region and grab a coffee sitting out in the back garden. They also show bike races on a TV screen and do repairs.

### 268 MARK

Kleine Markt 14

Antwerp

+32 (0)3 336 46 11

It began as a pop-up shop in an Antwerp shopping arcade, but this unusual concept store eventually put down permanent roots in the summer of 2017. The idea was conceived by three local businesses specialising in bikes, books and design. They came together to create a stunning space filled with house plants, bike accessories, gifts, notebooks, children's books and travel guides.

### 269 MY EX BOYFRIEND

Onze-Lieve-

Vrouwestraat 106

Mechelen

Antwerp

+32 (0)472 68 50 21

[myexboyfriend.info](http://myexboyfriend.info)

It started out as a pop-up, but My Ex Boyfriend has now established a permanent store in Mechelen. The young owners sell an assortment of vintage desks and cabinets, along with cards, books, bags and gadgets. They also provide some helpful hints on interior design.



268 MARK

## Classic **BELGIAN FOOD**

### 296 **MUSSELS**

OESTERPUT,  
BLANKENBERGE

**Wenduinse-**

**steenweg 16**

**Blankenberge**

**West Flanders**

**+32 (0)50 41 10 35**

***oesterput.com***

No booking. Nothing fancy. Just perfect seafood. The Devriendt family runs a huge wooden restaurant on the Blankenberge quayside that resembles a New England clam shack. It is very basic, but they serve some of the best seafood on the coast, including dripping wet oysters, little whelks extracted from their shell with a pin and lobsters kept in large bubbling tanks.

### 297 **STEAK FRITES**

DE VEEHANDEL,  
ANTWERP

**Lange**

**Lobroekstraat 61**

**Antwerp**

**+32 (0)3 271 06 06**

***de-veehandel.be***

This restaurant is located in an old meat hall opposite the Antwerp slaughterhouse. It is a traditional Belgian place with wood panelling, mirrors and white table-cloths. They specialise in large steaks made from Limousin beef cattle. It's really not a place for a light lunch.



298 **ZWEZERIK**

### 298 **ZWEZERIK**

CIRO'S, ANTWERP

**Amerikalei 6**

**Antwerp**

**+32 (0)3 238 11 47**

***ciros.be***

Here is a classic Belgian restaurant dating from 1962. The wood-panelled interior has hardly changed since it opened and the menu lists old Belgian favourites, like the mysterious zwezerik (lamb or veal sweetbread). But you can also order Irish rib steak served with pepper sauce and a portion of frites.

### 299 **SHRIMP CROQUETTES**

'T WERFTJE,  
ZEEBRUGGE

**Werfkaai 29**

**Zeebrugge**

**West Flanders**

**+32 (0)497 55 30 10**

***twerftje.be***

This unpretentious Zeebrugge cafe lies hidden away in a dockside location. The Werftje has been around for more than a century, although the interior was gently renovated in 2016. It's a plain, friendly place with an ancient stove, wood-panelling and mirrors, where locals drop by for a bowl of fish soup or some simple homemade *garnaalkroketten* – croquettes filled with North Sea shrimps, served with a sprig of deep-fried parsley and a slice of lemon.

## Hip COFFEE BARS

### 330 MAISON JACOBS

Rue Grande 147  
Dinant  
Namur  
+32 (0)82 22 21 39

Nothing has changed in this Dinant tea room since the interior was modernised in 1948. It has kept its dark wood panelled walls, mirrors and folding tables. The coffee is still served in silver pots and the *Couques de Dinant* are made according to a recipe dating from 1860.

### 331 'T OUD SASHUIS

Hellestraat 20  
Astene  
East Flanders  
+32 (0)476 81 01 14  
astene-sas.be

It might be open. It might not. This is definitely one of the strangest cafes in Belgium. It occupies an old lock-keepers' house in a beautiful location on the River Leie. The dark interior is filled with a bizarre collection of maritime objects, including horns, maps and lamps. It could almost be a museum, apart from the dried sausages hanging from the rafters and the Edith Piaf record playing in the background. It's a friendly place popular with cyclists out on a Sunday morning ride and locals walking along the river bank. But it's quite primitive. The men's toilet out in the back yard is nothing more than a simple length of old drainpipe fixed to the wall.

### 332 KAFFEE INE

Onze-Lieve-  
Vrouwestraat 6  
Mechelen  
Antwerp  
+32 (0)475 48 58 14

The smallest coffee bar in Belgium opened in 2015 in Mechelen. It occupies a tiny 17th-century neoclassical gatehouse at the entrance to the botanical gardens. There is barely room to stand inside the building, so you will have to perch outside on a wall next to the River Dijle.

### 333 CAFÉ ENTREPOT

Vaartkom 4  
Leuven  
Flemish Brabant  
+32 (0)16 22 27 41  
cafeentrepot.be

This stunning cafe opened in 2012 in a renovated industrial building on Leuven's Vaartkom waterfront. It has a rough industrial interior with recycled wooden tables, iron pipes and a suspended silver sculpture by Pieter Jansen. The terrace on the waterfront is the perfect spot for a coffee or a chilled Hoegaarden beer.



333 CAFÉ ENTREPOT



## Hotels in HISTORIC HOUSES

### 346 GRAND HOTEL CASSELBERGH

Hoogstraat 6  
Bruges  
West Flanders  
+32 (0)50 44 65 00  
[grandhotelcasselbergh.be](http://grandhotelcasselbergh.be)

This impressive new hotel in the heart of Bruges is located in two restored buildings just a few steps from the Burg square. Named after a mediaeval palace that stood here, the hotel has spectacular 18th-century halls, old stone columns from the 15th century and a comfortable bar with a blazing fire. Some bedrooms occupy the old mansion, while others are located in a modern extension.

### 347 LES COMTES DE MÉAN

Rue du Mont  
Saint-Martin 9-11  
Liège  
+32 (0)4 222 94 94  
[lescomtesdemean.be](http://lescomtesdemean.be)

Located in two restored town houses, this is a gorgeous urban hotel looking down on the old town of Liège. You enter through a baroque courtyard dating from 1620, but there is an older 15th-century structure deep inside the complex. The interior design is cool, spacious and contemporary, with some striking spaces including a neoclassical ballroom, a lounge with views of the city, and a bar down in a vaulted mediaeval cellar. Somewhat confusingly, the entrance lobby is on the seventh floor, while bedrooms are on lower levels, but that's part of the charm of this ancient building.

### 348 THE FOURTH

Grote Markt 5  
Leuven  
Flemish Brabant  
+32 (0)16 22 75 54  
[th4th.com](http://th4th.com)

This stunning hotel opened in 2017 in a renovated Gothic building in the heart of Leuven. The curious name was chosen because the hotel is the fourth occupant of the building. Built in 1479 for the local guilds, it became a theatre in 1817 and a branch of the National Bank in 1930. The building has now been transformed to create a fabulous hotel where bedrooms have smart light switches and a personal supply of artisanal coffee beans from Bolivia.



348 THE FOURTH