

# bite

ROBYN BOYLE

## 't Verschil ★★★★★

As anyone watching the current series of *Mijn Restaurant* can tell you, it's sometimes tough to separate a "brasserie" from a "restaurant". Some locals from Aalst tried to tell me that 't Verschil was just your average brasserie, but after seeing it featured in a few magazines, I decided to find out for myself.

Having made reservations just hours before for a busy Friday night, my dining companion and I feel privileged to be getting the last available table, a little two-seater in the side dining room. After an *apéritif* of cava (a bit pricy at €7), we order a bottle of Chilean wine with an Italian name. Balduzzi is a robust, 14% cabernet sauvignon that tastes of dark red cherries, leather and spices. It pairs perfectly with all four courses.

We both opt for the Gourmand Menu at €35 per person because we're both in the mood for some proper autumn fare – wild game. The first course consists of thinly sliced venison fillet, bright red with smidgeons of goose liver cream, tart little redcurrant berries and virgin olive oil. This combination in itself is exciting, but then there's rocket salad, freshly ground black pepper and wispy fried onion on top to complete the irresistible dish.

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It's already apparent that this is not your average brasserie, which explains the name 't Verschil, or the difference. Sure, chef Peter Maertens puts classic dishes on the menu such as lasagne and Irish rib-eye, but there are plenty more refined, creative items as well, such as saddle of hare. The recipes are never too complex, though, because he likes to keep his food pure and simple, allowing the ingredients to speak for themselves. We start to fully appreciate his philosophy as we tuck into the second course. Mine is a bowl of wild pigeon *consommé*, a clear stock rich in flavour and accentuated with bits of lightly pickled pigeon breast, carrot, courgette and floating puffs of parmesan. It's light and delicious, but I am admittedly envious of the other second course at the table: buttery soft scallops that have been lightly crisped on the outside on a tepanyaki grill. Underneath are a rich slice of Duke of Berkshire pork belly bacon – sweet and salty at the same time – and creamy cauliflower puree with hazelnut butter.

Understandably, the third course has a hard time competing with the first two. The pheasant hen is slightly dry, but the surrounding Orval sauce, sprouts, homemade almond croquettes and

velvety orange butternut squash more than make up for it.

On to dessert: I enjoy a mason jar filled with green grapes marinated in Veuve Clicquot Champagne and lemon balm, with a scoop of Veuve Clicquot sorbet and crunchy, caramelised puffed rice.



Across from me, a spoon dives into a long-stemmed glass of caramel-chocolate mousse with white chocolate snow and fresh mint leaves. Apparently the portions get bigger with every course, as we find it difficult to finish off these amazing desserts.

When my dining companion asks for a tea, our smiling server brings over no less than ten tins of loose-leaf varieties from local tea and coffee specialist OR. My coffee is from the same shop and comes served with a brownie, chocolate beads and a silver antique cream and sugar set.

Finally, the €120 bill confirms for us that this is a restaurant, not a brasserie. But we still walk away positively content.

→ [www.hetverschil.com](http://www.hetverschil.com)

📍 Gentsestraat 70, Aalst  
0474.98.16.98  
🕒 Mon-Tues, Thurs-Fri 12.00-14.30  
Wed 12.00-14.30; Sat 18.00-22.00  
💶 Mains: €17-€32  
👉 Attentive service and classic brasserie fare mixed with refined, season-inspired dishes

## TALKING SPORTS

LEO CENDROWICZ

### New dedicated school for sports hopefuls

How does young sporting talent rise to the top? Do the athletes, footballers, cyclists and tennis players of tomorrow simply emerge at random or is an outside push needed to foster a breed of future stars to compete at the highest levels?

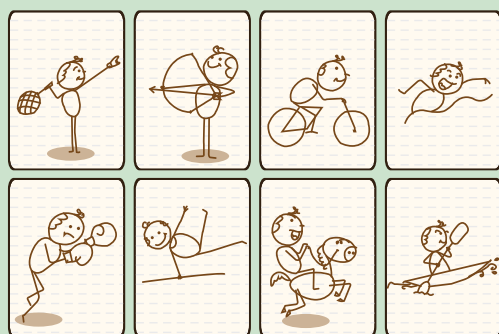
As in economics, the question of state intervention in free markets is also controversial in sport. It raises ethical issues of whether the support represents fair play. It inevitably prompts comparisons with dubious intense sport policies in East Germany or China aimed only at securing glory for the nation.

But not every such measure needs to be so sinister: targeted British aid, partly from the National Lottery, helped bring a sackful of Olympic medals in 2008 in cycling and swimming, yet it was mainly aimed at offering opportunities for communities rather than winning gold.

Flanders is now doing the same: promoting sport above all for the well being of the youngsters, even if a medal or two down the line would not go remiss.

Last week, Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet and Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters were in Wilrijk, a municipality of Antwerp, to unveil plans for a new elite sports school. The school, set to open in the autumn of 2014 as part of the Leonardo Lyceum, will be a modern glass structure on a concrete pedestal, carefully arranged around a courtyard.

The €12.7 million complex will focus on swimming, tennis, football and various martial arts. The school "aims to create an environment where young people can grow into true athletes," said Janssens. It will have



space for 116 secondary school pupils, but sports federations, local sports clubs and university students will also be able to take advantage of the new facilities.

Smet also pointed to the broader picture, saying that top sports had to work more with mainstream schools as well. "A flexible approach should also give individual athletes a chance in a regular school," said Smet, who consulted widely with athletes, clubs, federations and professional sports people from the schools themselves.

He pointed to the successful cooperation between the Anderlecht football club and Sint-Guido Institute, which produced Romelu Lukaku, who transferred this summer from the Brussels side to English giants Chelsea. "The elite schools do a great job, but the study and pupil appears no different than at other schools," Smet said.

So, by all means support emerging sports talent. But create a framework where everyone has a basic sports education and the chance to pursue their dreams.

## THE LAST WORD...

### Helping hand

"I find it a little bit peculiar."

Catherine Gernay, CEO of the Belgian Nuclear Research Centre in Mol, on plans to have male executives mentor women to take up executive roles

### Spenny surfing

"I may have read an article about it, but I wasn't really so concerned. It completely escaped me that you had to pay so much to surf the web in another country."

Mechelen mayor Bart Somers on receiving his data-roaming bill (see News in Brief)

### Food for thought

"As one hype blows over, another one takes its place. I don't think the cookbook hype is going to blow over."

Geert Joris, director of publishing industry organisation boek.be, at the opening of the Antwerp Boekenbeurs

### Long life

"That's enough. They can come and get me now."

Jan Goossenaerts of Essen is, at 111 years, somewhat reluctantly the oldest man in Europe

## NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #205

### Feature

Flanders Today is popping in on the tri-annual election of the Flemish Youth Council. We'll tell you about the priorities of this representative body of Flanders' young people and how they influence the Flemish government

### Focus

Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia is one of many extraordinary guest speakers at this year's Creativity World Forum, hosted by Flanders DC later this month

### Business

Not only is Bruges hosting this winter's highlight exhibition, *Imperial Treasures: Masterpieces from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna*, it's also where you'll find the Choco-Laté Festival this month. Taste and buy chocolate from one of dozens of vendors – or learn how to make your own