

*Hidden*

**BELGIUM**

DEREK BLYTH

# INTRODUCTION

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HIDDEN BELGIUM is an alternative guidebook that aims to inspire you with stories of more than 300 curious and unexpected places to visit. It takes you off the beaten track to look at sites most people don't know about, such as the tiny Belgian village where Hitler commanded the invasion of France, the ghost railway stations of Brussels and the eccentric grotto in an Ardennes village dedicated to the patron saint of lost things.

The aim is to awaken your senses, revive your curiosity and take you to places with a story to tell. You might be inspired to visit a small town that was once an independent country, wander through a garden dedicated to unpleasant smells, or eat lunch in a former science lab.

Some people argue that Belgium is a boring country, but this book sets out to prove that it is in fact one of the most interesting countries in Europe. It has a rich history, a stunning range of architectural styles and some fabulous places to spend a night.

The book doesn't cover everything there is to see in Belgium. You can find out about the popular places by dropping into a tourist office or reading through some Belgian blogs. The aim of Hidden Belgium is to tempt you to go a bit beyond the ordinary and explore places most people don't know about.

Some of these destinations can admittedly be a little frustrating to visit. They might be difficult to find, or they might only be open a few days a month. You might arrive to find a place has closed, or disappeared entirely. You sometimes need to be patient, but you will eventually come across something astonishing.

This is meant to be a book to pick up for inspiration on a rainy afternoon. It is meant for adventurous travellers, urban explorers and anyone who believes the world is still full of curious and forgotten places waiting to be discovered.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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D E R E K B L Y T H has lived in Belgium for more than 25 years. Working as a journalist, he knows the country intimately and has explored almost every corner, from the small beach towns on the North Sea to the sleepy villages deep in the Ardennes. Formerly editor-in-chief of *The Bulletin* magazine, he has written countless articles and several books on Belgium, including the bestselling *The 500 Hidden Secrets of Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp*. He also organises walking tours and lectures in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent.

The author could not have written this book on his own. He would like to thank all the people who have provided tips and suggestions over the years, including countless Belgians he has met in the street who have taken the time to share a story or point out an obscure detail.

Particular thanks must go to the editorial team at Luster, who have generously shared details of their favourite spots. He would also like to thank Mary Maclure who has been an enthusiastic companion on trips that sometimes ended up in peculiar places.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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The idea behind this book is to list places the author would recommend to a friend who was looking for a surprising destination or an unusual experience. It is different from other guidebooks in listing places by category rather than location. But the maps allow you to put together a journey linking several hidden places.

Most of the destinations mentioned in the book can be reached by train, bike or on foot. But occasionally a car is needed to get to the more remote spots. The author advises using trains where possible. Tickets are reasonably cheap in Belgium, especially at weekends, when you can buy half price fares across the entire country. You can also obtain special 10-journey tickets that make train travel affordable.

The author would also encourage the use of bicycles to get around. The cycling organisations in Flanders and Wallonia have developed a network of cycle routes based on numbered waypoints. This makes it simple to plan routes along quiet canal towpaths or abandoned railway lines.

But possibly the best way of getting around is on foot, especially in old Belgian cities dating back to the early Middle Ages. They were originally made to be explored at the human pace of three kilometres an hour. So pack an umbrella, turn off your phone and set off on a micro adventure. Only then will you discover the strange and inspiring places that are almost unknown.



## Hidden ART

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# 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 Kloppenburg, which occupies a warren of little rooms inside 13 stacked shipping containers. Most of Kloppenburg'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 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.



## 2 LA BOVERIE

**Parc de la Boverie**  
**Rue du Parc**  
**Liège**  
**+32 (0)4 238 55 01**  
**laboverie.com**

It used to be a forgotten art museum at the end of an island in the Meuse, but Liège's La Boverie has been reborn. The impressive domed building put up for the Liège World Fair of 1905 reopened in 2016 after a long restoration.

The collection had been neglected for many years. At one time, the city talked about selling a Picasso painting to pay its debts. But Liège is now working to improve its image and its art museum has become a landmark building with big windows looking out on the river and a new footbridge linking it to Liège-Guillemins station.

Built up over the centuries, the collection includes a beautiful painting of Le Havre harbour by Monet, along with works by Wiertz, Ensor and Magritte. But perhaps the most interesting room contains nine modern paintings declared 'degenerate art' by Hitler and sold in 1938 at an auction in Lucerne. A delegation sent from Liège snapped up the nine works, which included Picasso's sad portrait of the Soler Family sitting down to a picnic.

The museum cafe, cleverly renamed Madame Boverie, occupies a striking domed hall furnished with old industrial benches, assorted wooden chairs and plants in black metal pots. It is the perfect spot to experience the cultural renaissance of this old European city.

## 3 ROGER RAVEEL MUSEUM

**Gildestraat 2-8**  
**Machelen-aan-de-**  
**Leie**  
**East Flanders**

You might sometimes be the only person wandering around the Roger Raveel Museum. But it's worth making a trip to the sleepy village of Machelen where this neglected artist spent his life. The museum is a stunning modern building by the architect Stéphane Beel joined to a former

**+32 (0)9 381 60 00**  
**rogerraveelmuseum.**  
**be**

parsonage where temporary exhibitions are held in a warren of little rooms.

Raveel was an unconventional artist who created paintings incorporating chicken wire, mirrors, window frames and bicycle wheels. He even occasionally incorporated caged yellow songbirds into his works.

A short walk from the museum brings you to the cemetery where his grave is marked by a simple flat stone. His wife, who died a few years before him, has a more striking tomb overlooked by an enigmatic male sculpture with a mirror embedded in his stomach. The cemetery stands near a cut off bend in the old river Leie that would have been filled in if Raveel had not organised a protest.

## 4 MUSEUM MAYER VAN DEN BERGH

**Lange**  
**Gasthuisstraat 19**  
**Antwerp**  
**+32 (0)3 338 81 88**  
**mayervandenbergh.**  
**be**

A forgotten art collection occupies a sombre neo-Renaissance house in Antwerp. Overcome your caution and you will discover one of the finest private art collections in Europe. It was assembled by Frits Mayer van den Bergh, a rich art collector who died at an early age, leaving everything to his mother. She turned her son's empty house, which he never occupied, into a museum. The collection includes Pieter Bruegel's haunting painting *Dulle Griet* as well as a tiny sculptured head of Blanche de France, daughter of the King of France, who died before her third birthday, just 17 days after her sister passed away. Their devastated father commissioned a marble tomb with the figures of his two daughters. It was destroyed in the French Revolution, leaving just this one little head in a deserted museum in Antwerp.

5 **MARIEMONT MUSEUM**

**Chaussée de Mariemont 100 Morlanwelz Hainaut**  
+32 (0)64 21 21 93  
[musee-mariemont.be](http://musee-mariemont.be)

The striking Mariemont Museum is the last thing you would expect to find in the old industrial region around Charleroi. Located in a landscaped park where a 16th-century castle once stood, it contains an extraordinary collection created by the fabulously rich industrialist Raoul Warocqué. He accumulated thousands of objects on his travels, including a decorated room from Pompeii, a giant Egyptian God and dozens of classical Greek statues. The collection was gifted to the Belgian state when Warocqué died in 1917. But disaster struck when the old château was destroyed by fire in 1960, leaving just one wing standing. The collection survived and is now displayed in a severe concrete building designed by the Belgian architect Roger Bastin. The museum sits in a romantic park with the overgrown ruins of an 18th-century château, a hidden temple, rose garden and a version of Rodin's famous *Burghers of Calais*.

6 **MUSÉE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE**

**Avenue Paul Pastur 11 Mont-sur-Marchienne Hainaut**  
+32 (0)71 43 58 10  
[museephoto.be](http://museephoto.be)

This beautiful photography museum occupies a restored convent in the Charleroi suburbs. It is a wonderful building to wander around, with an outstanding collection of 80.000 photographs, along with a bright cafe and a shady terraced garden where you can eat a simple lunch.



## 7 LE GRAND-HORNU

Rue Sainte-Louise  
82

Boussu

Hainaut

+32 (0)65 65 21 21

[grand-hornu.eu](http://grand-hornu.eu)

The vast Grand-Hornu industrial site was founded in the early 19th-century as a utopian mining village in the heart of the Borinage district. The rugged brick architecture has been lovingly restored to house the contemporary art museum MAC's and the design museum CID. It is a little tricky to find, but worth making a trip out here to wander through the impressive neoclassical buildings, visit surprising art exhibitions and follow a wild nature trail to the top of the abandoned slag heap.



## ARTISTS' HOUSES

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## 8 WIERTZ MUSEUM

Rue Vautier 62  
Brussels

+32 (0)2 648 17 18

[fine-arts-museum.be](http://fine-arts-museum.be)

A French travel magazine once listed the Wiertz Museum in Brussels as one of the most beautiful in the world. And so it is. The only problem is almost no one knows about it. The museum is located in a forgotten corner of the city, hidden away behind the European Parliament. And it is filled with paintings no one likes.

The museum was originally built in 1851 as a studio for the Belgian romantic painter Antoine Wiertz. He chose to settle in an unfashionable location on the edge of the city, and came up with a cunning arrangement to pay for the house and studio. In 1850, he wrote to the Belgian interior minister offering to donate all his unsold paintings to the state if they funded the building. And so the former studio became a museum after his death, displaying more than 200 of his works – all fixed permanently to the wall, as he had instructed – along with his easel and other sentimental relics. The building is a rare example of a perfectly-preserved mid-19th-century museum, with rooms lit by natural daylight and paintings protected by low brass rails. But the collection includes terrifying paintings such as *Premature Burial*, in which a man struggles to escape the coffin in which he is about to be buried.

9 **ENSOR HOUSE**  
**Vlaanderen-**  
**straat 27**  
**Ostend**  
**West Flanders**  
[muze.be/en/ensor](http://muze.be/en/ensor)

This bizarre museum devoted to the eccentric Ostend artist James Ensor is located in a 19th-century building where his aunt and uncle once ran a souvenir shop. Ensor lived in the cramped bourgeois apartment above the shop until his death in 1949. The ground floor is filled with an odd collection of shells, masks and other seaside souvenirs, while the two upstairs rooms contain Ensor's battered harmonica, reproductions of his paintings and several creepy puppets. It is now run as a museum by the contemporary art museum Mu.zee.

10 **PANAMARENKO HOUSE**  
**Biekorfstraat 2**  
**Antwerp**  
BOOK AN APPOINTMENT  
TO VISIT THE HOUSE AT  
[www.muha.be](http://www.muha.be)

It's quite a challenge to get inside the former home of the Antwerp artist Panamarenko. Now owned by the contemporary art museum M HKA, it is open just two days every month for small groups of visitors. But it is worth trying to book a visit to see inside this eccentric artist's town house and garage, where he lived for more than 30 years along with his mother, six parrots and a collection of aircraft parts. Panamarenko (who took his name from Panam airlines) has spent his life building strange flying machines, replica submarines and mechanical chickens. His home is filled with odd dusty objects, old toys and haunting poetic works. The helicopter platform on the roof is a final touch of madness.

11 **MAGRITTE HOUSE**  
**René Magritte**  
**Museum**  
**Rue Essegheem 135**  
**Brussels**  
**+32 (0)2 428 26 26**  
[magrittemuseum.be](http://magrittemuseum.be)

The surrealist artist René Magritte lived for 24 years in a modest apartment in Brussels, along with his wife Georgette and a fluffy Pomeranian dog. The artist's former home, where he painted more than half his works, is now a fascinating little museum.

It lies in a quiet Brussels street where you would imagine nothing ever happens. But then you notice a small black nameplate marked Magritte and a solitary street lamp on the pavement copied from Magritte's painting *The Empire of Light*. Magritte and Georgette moved here in 1930, soon after they returned from an unsuccessful period in Paris. It is furnished with department store antiques, comfortable sofas and a baby grand piano. Magritte worked in the tiny kitchen at the back of the house, painting at an easel he had to move aside when Georgette served dinner. Several details in the house are familiar from famous Magritttes. His painting *The Forbidden Reading* includes the very staircase you see in front of you in the hallway. Another work called *Time Transfixed*, in which a steam locomotive emerges from a fireplace, includes a fireplace like the one in the couple's front room. The first floor of the museum is filled with documents, photographs and odd mementoes, including the plastic doorbell from the Magritte's final home in Schaerbeek.

12 **PAUL DELVAUX  
MUSEUM**

**P. Delvauxlaan 42  
Koksijde  
West Flanders  
+32 (0)58 52 12 29  
delvauxmuseum.  
com**

The Belgian surrealist artist Paul Delvaux lived most of his life in a whitewashed fisherman's cottage at the Belgian coast. The modest house is now connected to a modern museum filled with Delvaux's haunting and disturbing paintings of empty train stations and nude women with huge sad eyes. It is a quiet, enigmatic museum with rooms lit by a mysterious light.

## Creative CULTURAL VENUES

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13 **BPS22**

**Boulevard Solvay  
22  
Charleroi  
Hainaut  
+32 (0)71 27 29 71  
bps22.be**

The BPS22 museum offers a sneak preview of Charleroi's ambitious plans for the future. It occupies a massive neoclassical building on a rather desolate square in the upper town. The overbearing School of Labour on the other side has seen better days, but BPS22 has injected creative energy to this area of Charleroi since it opened a few years ago. Located in a building created for the 1911 Charleroi expo, the museum displays Hainaut province's contemporary art collection in a vast glass-roofed exhibition hall. It also organises provocative and inspiring exhibitions in its stunning industrial spaces.

14 **M HKA ENTRANCE  
HALL**

**Leuvenstraat 32  
Antwerp  
+32 (0)3 260 99 99  
muhka.be**

Antwerp's contemporary art museum M HKA was radically transformed in 2017 by Flemish interior designer Axel Vervoordt and Japanese architect Tatsuro Miki. The entrance hall is now a dark library furnished with bookcases and a reading table. Some 30 works from the permanent collection are displayed on open shelves, including Jan Fabre's tiny beetle sculptures and Robert Fillou's museum toilets for men, women and artists. The new spaces can be visited for free.

A huge mine complex on the edge of Genk

- 15 **C-MINE**  
**C-Mine 10**  
**Evence**  
**Coppéelaan 91**  
**Genk**  
**Limburg**  
**+32 (0)89 65 44 90**  
***c-mine.be***

has been turned into a magnificent centre of contemporary culture. The impressive old mine buildings from 1917 have been preserved, including an engine house full of oily machinery, the lamp room and managers' building, as well as two skeletal pit heads. The complex now incorporates a cinema, several restaurants, a tourist office and a huge metal maze.



- 16 **Z33**  
**Zuivelmarkt 33**  
**Hasselt**  
**Limburg**  
**+32 (0)11 29 59 60**  
***z33.be***

Here is one of the most exciting art spaces in Flanders. Named after its address (Zuivelmarkt 33), it exhibits works by international architects, designers and artists in a modernist exhibition hall dating from 1958. Temporary exhibitions make creative use of the building's vast empty spaces, but art is also displayed in the nearby Begijnhof houses, in the streets of Hasselt and out in the countryside between Hasselt and Genk.

- 17 **STUK**  
**Naamsestraat 96**  
**Leuven**  
**Flemish Brabant**  
**+32 (0)16 32 03 00**  
***stuk.be***

It started out in the 1970s as an experimental arts centre, but STUK is now one of the country's most vibrant art venues. Located in a renovated neo-Gothic building on a steep slope that runs down from Naamsestraat, it's a bustling place to catch contemporary theatre, dance and jazz. Or you can just drop in for a coffee in the huge cafe on the first floor.

- 18 **DE GROTE POST**  
**Hendrik**  
**Serruyslaan 18-A**  
**Ostend**  
**West Flanders**  
**+32 (0)59 33 90 00**  
***degrotepost.be***

Ostend's modernist post office closed down in 1999 and lay empty for many years until the city finally decided to turn it into a cultural centre. The Antwerp architects B-architecten lovingly restored the modernist details such as the post office counters and phone booths, but added some striking new elements. The building now draws audiences with an adventurous programme of theatre, dance, comedy and concerts.



19 **CONCERTGEBOUW**  
**'t Zand 34**  
**Bruges**  
**West Flanders**  
**+32 (0)50 47 69 99**  
**[concertgebouw.be](http://concertgebouw.be)**

The new Concertgebouw (concert building) in Bruges was built in 2002 by the Ghent architects Paul Robbrecht and Hilde Daem. The striking rust-red concert hall was the first truly innovative building in Bruges since the 15th century. But it came as a brutal shock for many in this old town of Gothic church spires and tiny almshouses. The concert hall still looks out of place, although it has established an inspiring cultural programme.

# Art in UNEXPECTED PLACES

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20 **GIANT  
CLOTHES PEG**  
**Parc de Hauster**  
**Rue Hauster 9**  
**Chaufontaine**  
**Liège**  
[festival5saisons.org](http://festival5saisons.org)

The quiet spa town of Chaufontaine has created an intriguing sculpture park next to the River Vesdre. Created in 2010 for an event called the Festival of the 5 Seasons, it has gradually added new works. The most striking sculpture is a giant clothes peg perched on a mound of grass created by Turkish artist Mehmet Ali Uysal. More than 20 other artists have contributed sculptures such as Charlotte Burtin's 2017 *Cyclotomique*.

21 **THE WALLOONS**  
**Jardins du Maieur**  
**Rue de Fer**  
**Namur**

No sign. Nothing. Only locals know about the mural hidden in the garden behind the new town hall in Namur. But it's worth taking a look at this trompe-l'oeil fresco by the French collective Cité de la Creation. Painted in 2004 to illustrate Walloon identity, it features celebrities such as Charlemagne and Georges Simenon. Other aspects of Walloon identity are represented by book titles, paintings and street festivals.

22 **MEMENTO**  
**Lambertusstraat**  
**Borgloon**  
**Limburg**  
[borgloon.be](http://borgloon.be)

A strange art installation stands in the middle of Borgloon's cemetery. The artist Wesley Meuris has created a circular steel pavilion with narrow openings that provide views of the surrounding countryside. The work forms part of a project by Hasselt art centre Z33 to place modern sculpture in the landscape around Borgloon. Located close to cycle point 152.

23 **MERODE METRO  
STATION**  
**Place Prince Jean**  
**de Mérode**  
**Brussels**

Many metro stations in Brussels are decorated with striking modern art, but most people barely glance at the art as they rush for a train. One of the oldest works is a 1977 mural by the artist Roger Raveel titled *Ensor: Vive la Sociale*. It incorporates details from Ensor's famous *Entry of Christ into Brussels* along with the figures of Adam and Eve from the Ghent altarpiece.

# Singular SCULPTURES

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## 24 THE DIVER

**Port des Yachts**  
**Boulevard Frère-Orban**  
**Liège**

Balanced on his hands on top of a giant steel arc, the muscular figure *Le Plongeur* (The Diver) was placed on the banks of the Meuse in Liège in 2000. But the work was actually made 60 years earlier by the young Romanian sculptor Idel Lanchelevici, who copied a figure he had made for the 1939 International Water Expo. When war broke out, the project was abandoned and the copy lay forgotten in the basement of the fine art museum until 1998. This spectacular modern sculpture now stands close to the original site on the banks of the Meuse.

## 25 LUCKY LUKE

**Parc Reine Astrid**  
**Boulevard Audent**  
**Charleroi**  
**Hainaut**

It is not easy to find *Mother Earth I*. The massive bronze nude lies half buried behind the town hall in the former artists' village of Sint-Martens-Latem. It was put here in 2007 by the Kortrijk artist Ann Deman in a quiet meadow planted with apple trees, next to a landing stage on the River Leie. A few years later, she placed a second version titled *Mother Earth II* in a park beside the Leie in Kortrijk.

The Flemish sculptor Arne Quinze constructed a massive wooden structure above a busy street in Mons in 2014. Titled *The Passenger*, it was made up of thousands of wooden struts painted bright

## 26 MOTHER EARTH I

**Dorp**  
**Sint-Martens-Latem**  
**East Flanders**

red. The work was a highlight of the city's year as cultural capital of Europe, but disaster struck when a truck crashed into the installation. It was rebuilt in 2015, but still looks a bit dilapidated.

## 27 THE PASSENGER

**Rue de Nimy 31**  
**Mons**  
**Hainaut**

The derelict industrial town of Charleroi is working on its image by installing bright statues of Belgian comic book figures in locations around the old centre. You can spot the cowboy Lucky Luke on the edge of the city park, the weird invented animal Marsupilami on top of a fountain and the comic characters Boule and Bill in the middle of a roundabout. Several metro stations are also decorated with scenes from comic books published in Charleroi.

# FORBIDDEN ART

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## 28 TEMPLE OF THE HUMAN PASSIONS

Cinquantenaire Park  
Brussels  
[kmg-mrah.be](http://kmg-mrah.be)

In 1899 the Brussels sculptor Jef Lambeaux carved an enormous frieze called *Les Passions Humaines* out of 17 blocks of pure white Carrara marble. It featured dozens of naked bodies symbolising human passions and sins such as joy, seduction, suicide and rape. Once the work was finished, it was placed inside a neat neoclassical temple built in the Cinquantenaire Park by the young architect Victor Horta.

But the work was controversial even before it was carved. When Lambeaux produced an early sketch, the art magazine *l'Art Moderne* condemned it as “a pile of naked and contorted bodies, chaotic and vague, bloated and pretentious, pompous and empty”. The Belgian public was equally shocked when the work was finally unveiled. Three days later, the temple was closed to the public and the entrance boarded up.

More than a century later, the frieze is still hidden behind a solid wall. But the building is now open on certain days in the summer. Otherwise, you can peer through the keyhole to see what caused all the fuss. Information on opening times at the Cinquantenaire Museum.

## 29 GHENT PANELS

Ghent Cathedral  
Sint-Baafsplein  
Ghent  
East Flanders

When Jan van Eyck unveiled his enormous altarpiece *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (*Het Lam Gods*) in 1432, it included two side panels with the naked figures of Adam and Eve. For several centuries, the figures offended no one, until Emperor Joseph II of Austria saw them during a visit to Ghent in 1781. He ordered them to be taken down, and replaced by copies with the figures dressed in ridiculous bearskins. The originals were put back in 1946, and the copies now hang in Ghent Cathedral in a spot where almost no one ever spots them.



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30 **FÉLICIEEN ROPS  
MUSEUM**

**Rue Fumal 12**

**Namur**

**+32 (0)81 77 67 55**

***museerops.be***

One of the most scandalous artists of the 19th century, Félicien Rops was born in Namur in 1833. A gifted artist, he shocked people with his erotic paintings of lecherous priests, Parisian prostitutes and women being molested by snakes. After his marriage broke up, he lived with two sisters in Paris. Some of his most decadent works now hang in an elegant 18th-century town house once owned by Rops' parents-in-law. Established in 1964, the museum displays his paintings and engravings in a series of dark rooms. You discover everything from early caricatures to his late decadent works, along with more risqué works hidden away in drawers. The museum occasionally organises exhibitions on Rops linking him to Symbolists such as James Ensor and Edvard Munch.

31 **HANGING MAN**

**Rue des Brigittines**

**Brussels**

Several obscene and violent works by street artists appeared on walls in Brussels in 2016. One artist modified an old Zanussi advert on a side wall to read ANUS. Another artist painted a huge penis on a wall opposite a girls' school. But the most harrowing work was a bloody corpse hung upside down, which appeared overnight on the side of an apartment building next to the railway viaduct. Some scholars believe the street artist was inspired by a Dutch painting representing the lynching of Cornelis and Johan de Witt in 1672.

## Wild STREET ART

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32 **FALLING GIANT**

**Doorniksestraat 57**

**Kortrijk**

**West Flanders**

The Brussels street artist Bonom created a striking work in 2016 on the side wall of an old apartment building in Kortrijk. Located next to the cafe De Gouden Aap, the artist painted a giant falling from the roof. The work was commissioned to mark a new season at the Kortrijk theatre, just around the corner.

33 **BRUGBERGPAD**

**Brugbergpad**

**Kessel-Lo**

**Flemish Brabant**

Some 40 street artists have created works in Leuven along a concrete wall next to the new cycle path Brugbergpad (between cycle points 33 and 73). Running beside the railway line in Kessel-Lo, the wall displays street art by local and international artists including Leuven's Din Din, Gijs Vanhee of Mechelen and French artist Mimi De Clown.

34 **BERCHEM STATION**

**Burgemeester**

**Ryckaertsplein 1**

**Berchem**

**Antwerp**

***streetartantwerp.***

***com***

Striking street art can be seen on walls of Berchem station in Antwerp. The Belgian street artist who signs his works Cahn has created large works inspired by Antwerp icons on the walls of platforms 6 and 7. Other artists have added works along the tracks leading to Antwerp Central Station.

35 **SLEEPING ANIMALS**

**Hofstraat and other locations**  
**Ostend**  
**West Flanders**  
*[thecrystalship.org](http://thecrystalship.org)*

Ostend is dotted with street art that appeared in 2016 during The Crystal Ship festival. You can find enormous works on the side walls of apartment buildings, but also tiny works hidden in unexpected spots. The Ghent artist ROA came to town to paint a heap of sleeping animals next to an abandoned site used as car park. On an adjacent wall, the Spanish artist Isaac Cordal attached a tiny figure of a man on a balcony. Elsewhere in town, you can spot details from Flemish paintings reproduced by Julien de Casabianca, along with tiny cartoon birds by Bué the Warrior. The tourist office has produced a free map pinpointing 38 works. Without it, you might not find anything at all.





FORT NAPOLEON

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## Hidden HISTORY ●

FORGOTTEN *history* \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Haunting* WAR CEMETERIES \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Lost* BATTLEFIELDS \_\_\_\_\_ XX

ENIGMATIC MONUMENTS \_\_\_\_\_ XX

REMARKABLE RUINS \_\_\_\_\_ XX

UNDERGROUND *places* \_\_\_\_\_ XX

# FORGOTTEN HISTORY

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## 36 BRÛLY-DE-PESCHE

Brûly-de-Pesche  
Namur

Brûly-de-Pesche is a tiny village in the Ardennes reached along a deserted road. You could easily pass through without realising anything about its extraordinary history. But stop to look at the information board near the church and you begin to realise the importance of this place.

It began in the early summer of 1940 when German troops evacuated 28 villages in the region, including Brûly-de-Pesche, forcing 27,000 people out of their homes. It was the start of one of the largest secret operations of the Second World War. For 22 days, this tiny village near the French border became Hitler's command centre for the invasion of France.

The village is still dotted with buildings briefly occupied by the Nazi leaders. The local school became a command centre where generals bent over large maps as tanks moved closer to Paris. The church was converted into a cinema where Hitler would watch German propaganda newsreels on a screen put up in front of the altar.

A massive concrete bunker was built in the woods to protect Hitler from air attacks. Two Bavarian chalets were constructed nearby as a canteen and officers' mess. The trees around the bunker were painted with white fluorescent stripes to mark a route through the woods in the dark. They led to a stone amphitheatre and a small pool in a clearing

where Hitler met military leaders such as Göring and Von Ribbentrop.

Most of these places where history was made are still standing, including the path near the church where Hitler performed a little dance after he was told France had fallen and the church where the surrender document was translated into French and typed out.

The site was forgotten for many years until a new visitors centre opened in 2015. Its focus is less on Hitler's brutal invasion plan and more on the lives of ordinary Belgian families forced to leave their homes in 1940. It includes a fascinating section on resistance fighters who hid in the forest at the end of the war. Once you have visited the site, you can follow hiking trails in the woods or eat lunch in the friendly local restaurant La Fontaine.

## 37 THE FATAL ROCK

Marche-les-Dames  
Namur

A quiet path runs through the woods to the rocks where King Albert I fell to his death in 1934. You get there across a railway line and then up a steep trail through the trees. The *rocher fatal* (death rock) is closed off by a low wall to stop people getting too close. There is nothing to say what happened in this haunting, forgotten spot.

The country woke up to hear the news on the radio on the morning of 18 February. The King had fallen while climbing alone near the village of Marche-les-Dames. It made no sense. He was an experienced climber who had tackled some of the hardest peaks in the Alps, so why did he fall during a simple beginner's ascent? Some people still believe in a conspiracy.

A small museum was created at the foot of the rocks, but it closed down some years ago. The only memorial is a cross on the slope marking the spot where the body was found and a hedge clipped to form the letter A.

38 **FORT LIEFKENSHOEK**

**Ketenislaan 4**

**Kallo**

**Antwerp**

**+32 (0)3 750 12 90**

**[fortliefkenshoek.be](http://fortliefkenshoek.be)**

Built by the Dutch in 1579, the old fort at Liefkenshoek is now surrounded by monstrous oil and chemical installations. But once you have crossed the moat, you find yourself inside a perfectly-preserved star-shaped fortification. A large semi-circular barracks from the Napoleonic period has been turned into a museum with rooms devoted to different periods in Liefkenshoek's history. The building was for a time used as a quarantine hospital for emigrants bound for the United States, then a barracks and finally a vacation centre for military families. The grounds have recently been planted with trees to create a little nature reserve in the menacing industrial landscape. And you can eat well in a dark Flemish tavern located in the former gatehouse. Free entry.

39 **CABLE CAR CABIN**

**L'Extérieur Nuit**

**Place du Chanoine**

**Descamps 6**

**Namur**

**+32 (0)81 23 09 09**

**[exterieurnuit.be](http://exterieurnuit.be)**

Look out in Namur for an old metal sign that reads *Téléférique 50m*. It leads into the courtyard of a former industrial building in the heart of the old town. Here you find a 1956 Swiss cable car cabin suspended above a restaurant terrace. The last of the iconic red cabins known locally as 'eggs', it used to carry tourists up to the Namur citadel. The cable car closed in 1997 due to falling rocks and was destroyed by fire in 2002, leaving just this solitary relic, which was bought by the restaurant owner and restored to working condition.



40 **MORESNET VIADUCT**

La Calamite  
Liège

The impressive iron viaduct near the town of La Calamite/Kelmis was constructed during the First World War to carry German troops rapidly to the Western front. The work was mainly done by captured Russian soldiers working in terrible conditions. The local museum in La Calamite contains odd ornaments made by the prisoners out of old shell cases, and the local cemetery has graves of nine Russians who died of unknown causes. The bridge was destroyed by the Belgian army in 1940 to slow down the German invasion. It was later rebuilt by the German army, but destroyed again in 1944. The third version, built after the war, is still used to carry goods trains high above the town.

41 **FORT NAPOLEON**

Vuurtorenweg 13  
Ostend  
West Flanders  
+32 (0)59 32 00 48  
[fort-napoleon.be](http://fort-napoleon.be)

Take the free ferry across Ostend harbour and follow the signs to Fort Napoleon. You come to a massive brick fortress built in the dunes by Napoleon and occupied by German soldiers in the Second World War. The building was superbly restored in 2006 by the Bruges architects Govaert & Vanhoutte to create a fortress museum and upmarket restaurant with a terrace looking out on the dunes.

## Haunting WAR CEMETERIES

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42 **SAINT SYMPHORIEN MILITARY CEMETERY**

Rue N. Dehon 32  
Mons  
Hainaut

A war cemetery in the fields outside Mons contains the graves of 284 German and 229 British and Commonwealth soldiers buried together in a romantic wooded setting. The cemetery was begun by the German army in late 1914 to bury soldiers from both sides who died near Mons. It contains the grave of the first British soldier killed in the war, but also, remarkably, the last British soldier to die. He was shot just two minutes before the war officially ended at 11 am on 11 November 1914. On 4 August 2014, leaders from Germany, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom gathered here in a moving ceremony to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of war.

43 **ARDENNES AMERICAN CEMETERY**

Route du  
Condroz 164  
Neupré  
Liège

The American Cemetery at Neupré on the edge of the Ardennes is normally deserted. But occasionally a visitor comes to wander among the neat rows of simple white stone crosses. They mark the graves of 5328 American soldiers who died in Belgium in the Second World War, mostly during the bitter 1944 winter offensive fought in the forests around Bastogne. A memorial chapel occupies a square white building decorated with a huge American eagle. Inside are three large wall maps showing the course of the war in Europe.

44 **HEDGE ROW  
TRENCH  
CEMETERY**

**Verbrandemolen-  
straat  
Zillebeke  
West Flanders**

This is possibly the most beautiful of all the First World War cemeteries in Belgium. Hidden in the Palingbeek woods, it is a silent, haunting place reached along a forest track. The original cemetery was destroyed by shellfire and the graves were laid out after the war in a circle. Three army packs are lined up outside the wall, with objects once carried by the soldiers, including gas masks, handkerchiefs and even makeup.



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45 **VLADSLO GERMAN  
WAR CEMETERY**

**Houtlandstraat 3  
Diksmuide  
West Flanders**

No country on earth has such a concentration of military cemeteries. All of them are carefully maintained, no matter who lies buried there. The German war cemetery at Vladslo is one of the most impressive, containing memorial stones with the names of thousands of young Germans who died in the First World War. Once they were the enemy, but now they are simply victims of war.

46 **ENCLOS DES  
FUSILLÉS**

**Rue Colonel  
Bourg 102  
Brussels**

No one knows about this cemetery hidden in a wood behind the Belgian broadcasting building in Brussels. A quiet cobbled lane leads to the spot known as the 'Enclos des Fusillés'. This forgotten spot is the site of a firing range where Belgian resistance fighters were executed during two world wars. A total of 342 small concrete crosses commemorate the victims, including the Belgian spy Gabrielle Petit, who was shot here in 1916, and the British nurse Edith Cavell, who died here in 1915.

47 **RECOGNE GERMAN  
WAR CEMETERY**

**Recogne  
Luxembourg**

A quiet road near the Ardennes village of Foy leads to a haunting German war cemetery with hundreds of dark stone crosses laid out among the trees. Created in 1947, the site marks the graves of 6807 soldiers killed in the attack on Bastogne in 1944-45. The crosses are each inscribed with six names, the youngest victim being 17 years old.

# Lost BATTLEFIELDS

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## 48 PALINGBEEK

**Palingbeekstraat 18**  
**Zillebeke**  
**+32 (0)57 23 08 40**  
**West Flanders**

The Palingbeek nature reserve stands on a ridge south of Ypres heavily shelled in the First World War. The landscape has been sensitively restored to create a beautiful nature reserve. You can follow trails to reach military sites and forgotten cemeteries deep in the woods, occasionally glimpsing the reconstructed spires of Ypres in the distance. Begin at the café De Palingbeek.

## 49 EBEN-EMAEL FORTRESS

**Rue du Fort 40**  
**Eben-Emael**  
**Liège**  
**[fort-eben-emael.be](http://fort-eben-emael.be)**

An enormous Belgian military complex is hidden below the Sint-Pietersberg near the village of Eben-Emael. Built in 1935 close to the Dutch border, this massive concrete fortification was designed to protect a weak point on the Belgian frontier. One of the largest military structures ever built, it comprised 17 bunkers linked by a network of underground tunnels. On the eve of World War Two, Eben-Emael was like an underground town, with kitchens, bedrooms, showers, a hospital and even a barber shop. It was considered the strongest fort in Europe, yet on 10 May 1940 a small team of German paratroopers landed on the roof in gliders and captured the stronghold in less than 15 minutes. The abandoned and crumbling fort is still owned by the army, but certain parts have been converted into a military museum. It is a rather cold, menacing place to explore. [Check the website for opening times.](#)

## 50 BAYERNWALD

**Voormezelestraat 2**  
**Heuvelland-  
Wijtschate**  
**West Flanders**  
**TICKETS AT:**  
**Sint-  
Laurentiusplein 1**  
**Kemmel**  
**+32 (0)57 45 04 55**  
**[heuvelland.be](http://heuvelland.be)**

The Bayernwald trenches were constructed in 1916 by German troops along the high ground to the south of Ypres. Forgotten after the war, the bunkers were uncovered in 1971 by a local school teacher. The site was restored as a museum in 2004, although it is not the easiest place to visit. Tickets have to be bought in advance at the Kemmel tourist office.

## 51 SINT ELOI CRATER

**Rijselseweg (near  
Eekhofstraat)**  
**Voormezele**  
**West Flanders**

You can track down the remains of 16 craters created along the Messines Ridge by huge underground mines detonated at 3.10 am on 7 June 1917. The Sint Eloi Crater was produced by the largest of the underground mines. It is now a quiet spot with an abandoned British bunker. Almost no one comes here, but you can enter the site by asking at the Ypres tourist office for an access code.

# ENIGMATIC MONUMENTS

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## 52 BIRCH TREE CIRCLE

Forêt de Soignes  
Drève de l'Infante  
Brussels

It's not easy to find this monument. Deep in the forest outside Brussels, 32 young birch trees were planted in a circle in memory of the victims of two terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016.

The memorial was created by the landscape architect Bas Smets in the middle of a clearing. The trees are equally spaced to create the impression of people standing in a circle holding hands. They surround a stone circle made of 32 blocks of polished blue limestone.

You can reach the site by a footbridge over a lake called Étang des Enfants Noyés, literally, the Lake of Drowned Children. The route across this quiet pond was inspired by the ancient Roman legend of the dead who are ferried across the River Styx. Take tram 94 to Coccinelles.

## 53 PEACE WOOD

Luxembourg

The area around Bastogne is dotted with relics of the Battle of the Bulge, including cemeteries, memorials and abandoned tanks. But the Peace Wood planted in 2005 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the battle is less well known. It is reached down a deserted road near the village of Foy. The trees were planted in the shape of Unesco's symbol of a mother and child. Several hundred trees have small stones next to them with names of former soldiers who have visited

## 54 CENTRE OF BELGIUM

the site. But perhaps the most touching memorial is a small group of 28 trees planted in memory of children and teachers killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre.

Located on a small road off the Foy to Bizory route.

Most Belgians have been taught that the village of Ittre, south of Brussels, is the geographical centre of their country. A large millstone in the centre of the village marks the precise spot. But it is wrong. The true centre moved slightly when the East Cantons were handed to Belgium in 1919. No one noticed the mistake until 1998, when a new monument was placed in a field near the village of Nil-Saint-Vincent. But the old monument has been left in Ittre.

## 55 CHRISTMAS TRUCE CROSS

Chemin du Mont  
de la Hutte  
Ploegsteert  
Hainaut

A small wooden cross stands next to a quiet country road near Ploegsteert Wood. It was put up a few years ago to commemorate the Christmas Truce in 1914 when soldiers on both sides stopped fighting and began to sing Christmas carols. Some climbed out of the trenches to bury the dead, shook hands with the enemy and exchanged little gifts. They also played a game of football in a cabbage field, which was apparently won by the German side. In recent years, this remote spot has become a shrine where people leave footballs, team strips and souvenir mugs.

## REMARKABLE RUINS

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### 56 FORMER CENTRE OF THE EU

Rue Roger Delizée  
102

Oignies-en-  
Thiérache  
Namur

+32 (0)60 39 96 93

A forgotten monument known as the Cathedral of Light stands in a forest clearing near the village of Oignies. Located in a remote area of southern Belgium near the French border, it marks the official geographical centre of the European Union between 1995 and 2004. A path leads through the trees to a glass monument, which is surrounded by 15 low columns marked with the names of the EU member states at the time. The columns are placed at different distances from the centre depending on when they joined the EU.

The only building in this remote forested area of Belgium is an abandoned roadside restaurant named Le Trou du Diable. Back in 1995, the owner tried to attract tourists, but business dropped off sharply after ten new countries joined the EU in 2004, and the geographical centre moved further east. The restaurant finally closed down in 2017. The Trou du Diable takes its name from a local rock formation known as the Devil's Hole. A battle was fought near this site in 1914 between French and German troops. The victims are buried in a remote cemetery near here.

### 57 MONUMENT TO THE FORESTRY WORKERS

Forêt de Soignes  
Grasdellepad  
Brussels

A quiet trail in the forest south of Brussels leads to a massive stone dolmen surrounded by a circle of 11 standing stones. It looks as if it might date from the same period as Stonehenge, but it was actually put up in 1920 in memory of Belgian forestry workers who died fighting in the First World War. The massive stones for this unusual war memorial were brought from a neolithic quarry in the hills above Wéris village in the Ardennes. Take the train to Groenendaal station.

### 58 IMPERIA CAR FACTORY

Rue Gomélevay 52  
Nessonvaux  
Liège

Built in 1907, the abandoned Imperia car factory dominates the village of Nessonvaux. It was established in the valley of the Vesdre by an engineer who invented one of the first hybrid car engines as well as the electric cigarette lighter. The factory originally tested its cars on local roads, but people started to complain. The owner then came up with the original idea of building a test track on the factory roof, a few years before Fiat built its famous rooftop track in Turin. The factory finally closed in 1958, leaving an impressive main building in the style of a mediaeval castle. Now there are just 34 Imperia cars left in the world, including four cars in a small museum a few kilometres down the road in the village of Fraipont. The fries shop La Friterie Imperia at Rue Docteur Heuze 339 has nostalgic photographs on its walls and the Rue Heid Mawet leads to a viewpoint where you can look down on the race track.

### 59 VILLERS-LA-VILLE

Rue de l'Abbaye 55  
Villers-la-Ville  
Walloon Brabant  
+32 (0)71 88 09 80  
villers.be

Hidden in a remote wooded valley, Villers-la-Ville was one of the great abbeys of Europe, but it is now a vast, silent ruin. Founded by Cistercian monks in the middle ages, this massive abbey was abandoned after the French Revolution. The buildings are now in ruins, overgrown with ivy, populated by wild birds. But the romantic setting comes to life on two summer nights every year when a choir performs in the floodlit ruins.

60 **ROYALE  
D'ARDENNE  
STATION**

Houyet  
Namur

The last train stopped at Royale d'Ardenne station in 1919, but the building is still standing in a field near the village of Houyet. The station was once linked to a huge luxury hotel built for King Léopold II by his favourite architect Alphonse Balat. The 200-room hotel, which opened in 1874, was intended to bring wealthy tourists to the Ardennes. But it was abandoned after the Second World War and destroyed by fire in 1968, leaving just the train station and a solitary tower inspired by Windsor Castle.

61 **NAMUR CITADEL  
STADIUM**

Namur Citadel  
Route Merveilleuse  
64  
Namur  
+32 (0)81 24 73 70  
[citadelle.namur.be](http://citadelle.namur.be)

*Ludus Pro Patria* – Games for the Fatherland, it says on an abandoned building on the hill above Namur. This enigmatic structure turns out to be a former sport stadium opened in 1910 by King Léopold II. His plan was to turn the old citadel site, which no longer served any military purpose, into a centre for culture and sport.

Modelled on an ancient Greek stadium, it was designed by the Brussels architect Georges Hobé in the style of the Vienna Secession. One of the earliest reinforced concrete buildings in the country, it could seat 4000 spectators. You can track down another perplexing building at the back of the stadium. Here, hidden in the trees, is a concrete open-air theatre that could seat 2800 people. Now it is totally forgotten.



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62 **SAINT BAVO'S ABBEY**

**Voorhoutkaai**  
**Ghent**  
**East Flanders**  
***sintbaafsabdij.stad.gent***

The ruined Saint Bavo's Abbey (*Sint-Baafsabdij*) is a strange, forgotten building near the River Leie. Founded in the 7th century, it takes its name from a local monk who lived as a hermit in a hollow tree near Ghent. It grew into one of the most important abbeys in northern Europe, but was largely destroyed in 1540 when Charles V built a fortress on the site for his Spanish troops. A few of the abbey buildings were spared, including the cloisters, a chapel and an impressive dining hall. The baffling, overgrown ruins became a lapidary museum in 1887 filled with unidentified fragments of old buildings. Open April to October on Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

## UNDERGROUND places

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63 **KEIZERSBASTION**

**Frankrijklei**  
**Antwerp**

The remains of a 16th-century renaissance bastion are hidden deep below the street in a new Antwerp car park. The stone structure, built during the Spanish occupation, was uncovered near the National Bank in 2003. The city decided to sacrifice a few parking spaces to create a small underground museum incorporating a stretch of the historic wall. Opened in 2017, it includes details from old maps, along with objects uncovered from the moat such as nails, coins and shoes. Entrance at Maria Henriettelei. Parking level minus 3. Open permanently.



64 **ANTWERP SEWERS**

**Ruihuis**  
**Suikerrui 21**  
**Antwerp**  
**+32 (0)3 344 07 55**  
**[ruien.be](http://ruien.be)**

Rows of green rubber boots are lined up at the entrance to the Antwerp sewers. You need to put on a pair when you take a guided walking tour through the hidden network of underground waterways known as *Ruien*. The two-hour visit offers a fascinating insight into these mediaeval canals that once ran through the city. There are signs along the way to indicate the streets above your head. Tours are sometimes cancelled after heavy rain, as the sewers can become flooded.

65 **BUNKER IN THE BRUSSELS PARK**

**Parc de Bruxelles/**  
**Warandepark**  
**Brussels**

Not many people know about the air-raid bunker hidden deep below the Parc de Bruxelles (*Warandepark*). Constructed in 1938 to protect the country's political leaders, it was later used by the Nazis and then converted into a nuclear bunker during the Cold War. Look behind the Cercle Gaulois building and you will spot steps under the green trellis leading down into the bunker, as well as several concrete ventilation shafts.

66 **NAMUR CITADEL TUNNELS**

**Namur Citadel**  
**Route Merveilleuse**  
**64**  
**Namur**  
**+32 (0)81 24 73 70**  
**[citadelle.namur.be](http://citadelle.namur.be)**

Located high above the river Meuse, Namur citadel is one of the most fascinating military complexes in Europe. You can wander above ground through a baffling maze of earthworks, bastions and barracks, but the most impressive fortifications lie deep below ground.

Most of the tunnels are closed off, but there is one place where you can walk through a secret passage inside a 17th-century bastion. The entrance signed Galeries de Boileau leads into a damp, dripping passage lined with narrow loophole windows, each with a horizontal iron bar to rest the gun.

**The tunnel closes October to March at 5 pm, April to September at 8 pm.**

67 **KEMMEL COMMAND BUNKER**

**Lettingstraat**  
**Kemmel**  
**West Flanders**  
**TICKETS AT:**  
**Polenlaan 1**  
**Kemmel**  
**+32 (0)57 45 04 55**  
**[heuvelland.be](http://heuvelland.be)**

For several decades, no one knew about the Nato bunker buried below the Kemmelberg hill. This vast underground complex was constructed as a command centre for Nato air forces in the event of nuclear war. Abandoned in 1995, it opened to the public in 2010. It's like a James Bond movie set, with military maps on the walls, austere metal cabinets and rows of old telephones from the 1950s, while above ground there is nothing apart from a fake farmhouse hidden in the woods. Tickets have to be bought in advance at Heuvelland tourist office.

68 **ST REMACLUS CAVE**

**Auby-sur-Semois**  
**Luxembourg**

The St Remaclus Cave is hidden deep in the Ardennes. You follow a forest trail near the village of Auby-sur-Semois, looking out for the word *Grottes* (caves) painted on trees in faded yellow letters, then pick your way carefully along a narrow ledge high above the River Semois. Eventually you come to a gothic arch cut out of the crumbling shale rock. It leads into a dark cave with a white limestone statue of St Remaclus tending two sick animals. According to a local legend, the hermit lived here in the 7th century. Many pilgrims have visited the caves over the centuries, including King Albert I who came here as a boy. A few burnt-out candles on the altar prove that people still come to this lonely spot looking for help.

69 **KANNE CAVES**

**Avergat 14**  
**Kanne (Riemst)**  
**Limburg**

The strange limestone hills around Kanne village have been quarried for building material since the middle ages. The mellow golden stone known locally as *mergel* has been used to build farms, houses and churches along the Meuse valley. The Kanne quarry is no longer worked, leaving behind a network of underground caves used for mushroom cultivation and candlelit wedding receptions. There is even a cycle route through the caves.



70 **COUDENBERG**

**Entrance:**  
**Musée BELvue**  
**Place des Palais 7**  
**Brussels**  
**+32 (0)2 500 45 54**  
**[coudenberg.brussels](http://coudenberg.brussels)**

For several centuries, the foundations of the Coudenberg Palace lay buried below the cobbles on Place Royale in Brussels. But finally the city restored the ruins to create a unique underground museum. You explore the spotlighted mediaeval spaces through a complex route of narrow passages and steep stairs. Along the way, you come across a buried street, a hidden mansion and the shattered stone paving of the great hall.



*Hidden* **BUILDINGS** ●

*Exceptional* **ARCHITECTURE** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Dream* **CASTLES** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Striking* **STATIONS** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Peculiar* **CHURCHES** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Remarkable* **BRIDGES** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Modern* **BUILDINGS** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Obscure* **INTERIORS** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

*Inspiring* **NEW ARCHITECTURE** \_\_\_\_\_ XX

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LIÈGE-GUILLEMINS

# Exceptional ARCHITECTURE

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## 71 WINTER GARDEN IN THE URSULINE CONVENT

Bosstraat 9  
Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-  
Waver  
Antwerp  
+32 (0)15 75 77 28  
[visitwintertuin.be](http://visitwintertuin.be)

The winter garden of the Ursuline Convent is one of the most beautiful art nouveau buildings in the country. The only problem is it is hidden inside a Catholic convent school. It used to be almost impossible to visit, but now you can book to join a guided tour on Sunday afternoons. The winter garden was designed to impress wealthy parents who were looking for a good boarding school for their daughters. It is a stunning art nouveau space with a vaulted iron roof, stained glass windows and palm trees in pots. The guided tour takes in other surprising spaces, including empire-style interiors, galleries with tiled floors, and a beautiful corridor lined with 35 neat little rooms where girls sat at pianos practising their pieces. Guided tours from March to October on Sundays at 2.30 pm, reservation is recommended.

## 72 PALACE OF THE PRINCE-BISHOPS

Place Saint-  
Lambert 18  
Liège

It can look forbidding from the outside. You have to squeeze past a barrier to enter the courtyard. Sometimes armed police block the entrance because the building is now occupied by law courts. But it was originally a palace built in the 16th century in the early renaissance style of Italy. The courtyard is surrounded by an arcade

## 73 ROYAL LODGE, GROENENDAAL

O.L.V. van  
Loretopad  
(near Groenendaal  
station)  
Hoeilaart  
Flemish Brabant

with columns decorated in grotesque style. The bizarre faces, monsters and vegetation add to the menacing atmosphere of the courts. Look carefully in the arcade near the entrance and you will find a bronze plaque embossed with the last letter Georges Simenon wrote before he died.

A strange forgotten pavilion stands deep in the forest to the south of Brussels. It was built by King Albert I in 1924 as a royal lodge overlooking the Groenendaal racecourse. The racecourse had been founded 35 years earlier by Leopold II. Once the haunt of European high society, it had its own railway station, elegant wrought iron grandstands and betting shops. But it closed in 1991, leaving just the isolated royal lodge, which was restored in 2016 as a venue for weddings and meetings. You can track down a training racecourse hidden in the woods to the north. Enclosed by earth embankments, this course is still used by horse riders. It lies near a former stable building converted into a B&B and cafe, where you can sit on the terrace with a beer after exploring the woods.

## 74 VAUX-HALL Parc de Bruxelles/ Warandepark Brussels

A narrow cobbled lane next to the Théâtre du Parc in Brussels leads to the forgotten Vaux-Hall. Hidden among tall trees, this intriguing neoclassical building was constructed on the edge of the park in the 18th century. Inspired by the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in London, it served at different times as a concert hall, ballroom and cafe. Now it is occupied by an exclusive club.

Walk around to the back of the building and you will see a curious green lattice arcade built around the courtyard. This was begun in 1913, along with the elegant music kiosk, but not completed until 1921. The kiosk was eventually taken over as a private residence, while the delicate arcade gradually rotted away. Finally, the city brought in skilled craftsmen from the Vosges region of France to restore the wood and metal structure. Completed in 2017, the arcade is occasionally used for concerts or film screenings in the summer. But it is normally deserted.

## 75 THE OLD CITY AT BOKRIJK

Bokrijcklaan 1

Bokrijck

Limburg

+32 (0)11 26 53 00

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

Created in the 1950s, Bokrijck open-air museum offers a nostalgic glimpse of Flemish village life. Located in rural Limburg, the museum brings together dozens of reconstructed buildings including farmhouses, a chapel and a windmill, along with several village inns where you can drink a local beer.

But there is one strange area almost no one discovers called 'De Oude Stad' (The Old City). Here you find 17 historic buildings that stood in Antwerp until the 1960s. This reconstructed urban district was never particularly popular with visitors, so the museum came up with a plan to turn it into a sixties experience. Now there is an Esso garage squeezed next to old brick houses, along with an early supermarket and a 1960s bar. It makes no sense.

## 76 SQUARE COGHEN

Square Coghén

Brussels

This hidden enclave of art deco and modernist houses lies off Avenue Brugmann. It dates from 1929 when Belgian architects were experimenting with bold new forms of construction. Some of the houses have interesting details such as round porthole windows, jagged profiles and curved balconies. But few people ever discover this forgotten corner of Uccle, where the architecture harks back to a lost golden age of jazz music and ocean liners.

## 77 CITÉ MIROIR

Place Xavier-

Neujean 22

Liège

+32 (0)4 230 70 50

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

An ambitious project has transformed a modernist swimming pool in the heart of Liège into a cultural centre. The original pool was located at the top of the building with huge glass windows looking out on the old town. This impressive space, which reopened in 2014, is now used for temporary exhibitions. The centre also incorporates a socialist library and a cafe.

## 78 DE NOTELAER

Notelaerdreef 2

Hingene/Bornem

Antwerp

+32 (0)3 889 69 20

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

The d'Ursel family once organised parties and feasts in a hunting lodge looking out on the River Scheldt. The elegant octagonal building was designed by a French architect in the style of an Italian belvedere. The salon on the first floor was decorated with beautiful parquet floor and reliefs illustrating mythological scenes.

During the North Sea storm of 1953, the River Scheldt flooded the little pavilion behind the dike. The building was rescued by the Belgian artist Vic Gentils, who turned it into a studio. Here he created quirky sculptures out of old wood and scrap iron. The pavilion is now a protected monument with a cafe on the ground floor and a [small museum above](#).

## 79 LUCAS HUYS

Minderbroeders-  
straat 10

Bruges

West Flanders

The black wooden mansion facing the Astridpark in Bruges is something of a mystery. Dated 1573 on a small stone tablet, it looks authentic enough, but it is actually made from fragments of other buildings. Local historians claim the wooden façade originally stood somewhere in Brussels, but no one in the Brussels city archives can confirm this. It was apparently brought to Bruges in 1889, where it was incorporated into a house designed by Louis Delacenserie. The little spy mirror attached to the wall adds a sinister touch to a building no one really understands.



## Dream CASTLES

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## 80 SENEFFE

Rue Lucien

Plasman 7

Seneffe

Hainaut

+32 (0)64 55 69 13  
[chateaudseneffe.be](http://chateaudseneffe.be)

The beautiful bluestone Château de Seneffe lies at the end of a long drive in a forgotten corner of Belgium. It is not too well known, yet this is one of the most intriguing castles in the country.

It was built in the 18th century by a wealthy arms dealer from Brussels. The nouveau riche owner set out to impress his visitors with a classical château, formal gardens and Palladian theatre. Abandoned in the 20th century, the building came close to being demolished, but was eventually restored by the Belgian government as a museum of silverware.

The intimate interiors on the ground floor were recently redesigned to evoke the intellectual and sensual mood of the Enlightenment. After slipping on shoe covers to protect the parquet, you can wander through the rooms experiencing the sounds, smells and fabrics of the 18th century. It is an astonishingly rich and erotic experience, inspired by rococo paintings and the novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

You can also watch a film inspired by old scientific experiments, eat lunch in the former orangery and listen to philosophical discussions in the little theatre in the garden. But perhaps the most decadent moment comes on Sunday afternoons when visitors can drink hot chocolate from a silver pot in a quaint Chinese salon.

81 **GAASBEEK**

**Kasteelstraat 40**  
**Gaasbeek**  
**Flemish Brabant**  
**+32 (0)2 531 01 30**  
***kasteelvangaaasbeek.be***

The romantic Gaasbeek Castle lies just outside Brussels in the rolling Pajottenland countryside. Built in the middle ages, it has been attacked many times and rebuilt in various styles. In the 16th century, it was owned by Count Egmont, the tragic aristocrat executed on Grand'Place. After lying abandoned for many years, Gaasbeek was acquired in the mid-18th century by the Italian landowner Paul Arconati-Visconti. Its last inhabitant was Marie Peyrat, a romantic aristocrat who turned the building into a mediaeval dream castle. When she died in 1923, the building was left to the Belgian state. It is now the setting for inspiring art exhibitions held in romantic mediaeval rooms, dark corridors and an unexpectedly glamorous art deco bathroom. Along the way, you glimpse old oil paintings, sad letters and faded photographs. After a visit, you can wander around the wooded estate, visit the walled vegetable garden and drink a beer in a tavern near the entrance.

82 **D'URSEL**

**Wolfgang**  
**d'Urselstraat 9**  
**Hingene**  
**Antwerp**  
**+32 (0)3 820 60 10**  
***kasteeldursel.be***

This elegant summer residence is full of secret messages. They were written on the walls by the calligrapher Brody Neuenschwander in 2007, but now lie hidden beneath the delicate wall fabrics. The idea emerged during renovation work in 2016 when decorators discovered inscriptions and collages hidden beneath the old wall fabrics. They were written on the wall in French by two young aristocratic women, Sophie and Juliette, who were staying here in the summer of 1877. "As long as this beloved castle is standing," they wrote, "where so many generations have been happy, we will bless these rooms with our shadows."

Now owned by the Flemish government, the castle decided to copy the idea by inviting the public to send in messages to go on the walls. A local priest wrote a long sermon, a seven-year-old girl sent a letter to Father Christmas and a young couple asked for their initials to be inscribed for ever on the wall.

The messages are now hidden under the new wall fabrics, but they will be revealed at some time in the future. Meanwhile, the castle is funding further renovations by brewing its own beers with honey from the castle's beehives and oak from local woods.

83 **HORST**

**Horststraat 28**  
**Holsbeek**  
**Flemish Brabant**  
***horstartsandmusic.com***

Horst castle has been left untouched since the last owner, Maria Anna van den Tynpel, died more than 300 years ago. Built in the 12th century to defend Leuven, it was largely reconstructed in the 17th century. Maria Anna added a beautiful stucco ceiling decorated with scenes from Ovid copied from a book of engravings. But the rooms are now abandoned, the window panes broken and the old stone tower too dangerous to climb. The castle grounds are used every year for a stunning art exhibition and festival of electronic music. Maybe one day the castle will be restored, but for the moment it is a crumbling ruin set in a wooded landscape like a painting by Bruegel.

## Striking STATIONS

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### 84 ANTWERP DAM STATION

Damplein  
Antwerp

You might not think Antwerpen-Dam looks different from any other Belgian station. Located near Park Spoor Noord, it's a typical Flemish Renaissance brick building standing alongside a railway viaduct. But an exhibition of old photographs in the tunnel under the viaduct tells an astonishing story. They reveal the entire station was moved 36 metres in 1907 to make space for a new railway line. The work was done using an ingenious system of mechanical jacks and rails. The company in charge of this exceptional engineering project hoped it could sell the technology elsewhere, but the concept never took off, leaving Dam station as a unique experiment.

### 85 LIÈGE-GUILLEMINS

Place des  
Guillemins 2  
Liège

Liège was until recently an old industrial city few tourists would dream of visiting. But the city began to change in 2009 with the opening of a sleek new station designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. It's an astonishing futuristic building with a swooping steel and glass canopy poised above the tracks like a gigantic wave. Now it is worth travelling to Liège just to admire the architecture.

Start at the top level, high above the trains, where you can admire a neighbourhood slowly emerging from urban decline. Then go down to the ground



floor where cafes and ticket offices occupy curious round glass pods. The station neighbourhood is still far from finished, but one day you will be able to walk into town along a magnificent waterfront promenade.

### 86 DE HAAN TRAM STATION

Nieuwe Rijksweg 1  
De Haan  
West Flanders

The tram pulls up in De Haan next to a beautiful art nouveau station built in 1888. It was designed by the Brussels architect G. Dhayer in a fanciful style with steep overhanging eaves, elegant carved wood and the French name Coq-sur-Mer in decorative letters. A sign recalls that Albert Einstein stepped off the tram here in 1933 at the start of his stay at the coast.

87 **RONSE STATION**  
Winston  
Churchillplein 6  
Ronse  
East Flanders

The oldest surviving railway station in mainland Europe stands near the language border in Ronse/Renaix. But it wasn't always here. It was built by a Brussels architect in 1841-48 on 't Zand square in Bruges. Eventually the classical building became too small to cope with the tourists visiting Bruges. A new Gothic station was constructed in 1881 and the old station was rebuilt in Ronse/Renaix.

88 **GHOST STATIONS ON THE NORTH-SOUTH LINE**  
Bruxelles-Chapelle  
Rue des Ursulines  
Bruxelles-  
Congrès (closed at weekends)  
Avenue Pacheco  
25  
Brussels

The busy rail tunnel running through Brussels has five official stations but most trains only stop at three. To cut journey times, most trains ignore Bruxelles-Chapelle and Bruxelles-Congrès. These deserted underground stations are like the creepy abandoned stations in East Berlin during the Cold War. The Chapelle station in the Marolles district is now occupied by the alternative arts centre Recyclart, which organises art exhibitions and concerts.

The other station, Bruxelles-Congrès, is harder to find. You might spot the huge ventilation tower dating from the period when steam trains passed through the tunnel. It's worth going down the steps to admire the modernist interior which has barely changed since the station opened in 1952. You can still see the polished wood panelling, ticket office and abandoned station bar. But it is strangely silent, apart from the gentle vibration of a passing train.

## Peculiar CHURCHES

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89 **READING BETWEEN THE LINES**  
Grootloonstraat 2  
Borgloon  
Limburg

You have to hike through apple orchards near Borgloon to reach the strange transparent church called *Reading between the Lines*. Designed in 2011 by experimental Belgian architects Pieterjan Gijs and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh, it sits on a hill with a sweeping view across the lush landscape. Modelled on local churches in the region, the installation is made from horizontal steel plates that almost disappear when the building is seen from certain angles. The visual confusion continues when you stand inside the church looking out at the landscape. It's a strangely poetic spot where local



people sometimes gather in the evening to watch the sun go down.

Located between cycle points 154 and 155.

A walking trail runs from the Markt square in Borgloon to the *Doorkijkerk* (Transparent Church).

## 90 OOSTERWEEL CHURCH

Kastelweg  
Antwerp

An abandoned and overgrown church in Antwerp's port area is all that survives of the lost village of Oosterweel. Hidden from view in a sunken area of woodland, the mediaeval church can only be reached by scrambling down a muddy embankment. The 13th-century village of Oosterweel once had more than one thousand inhabitants. It gave its name to a sea battle fought in 1567 at the start of the Eighty Years' War. But the village disappeared in 1958 when the port expanded, leaving just this forgotten church, lost in the middle of a vast industrial zone.

Located near cycle point 55.

## 91 OLD HOSPITAL CHAPEL

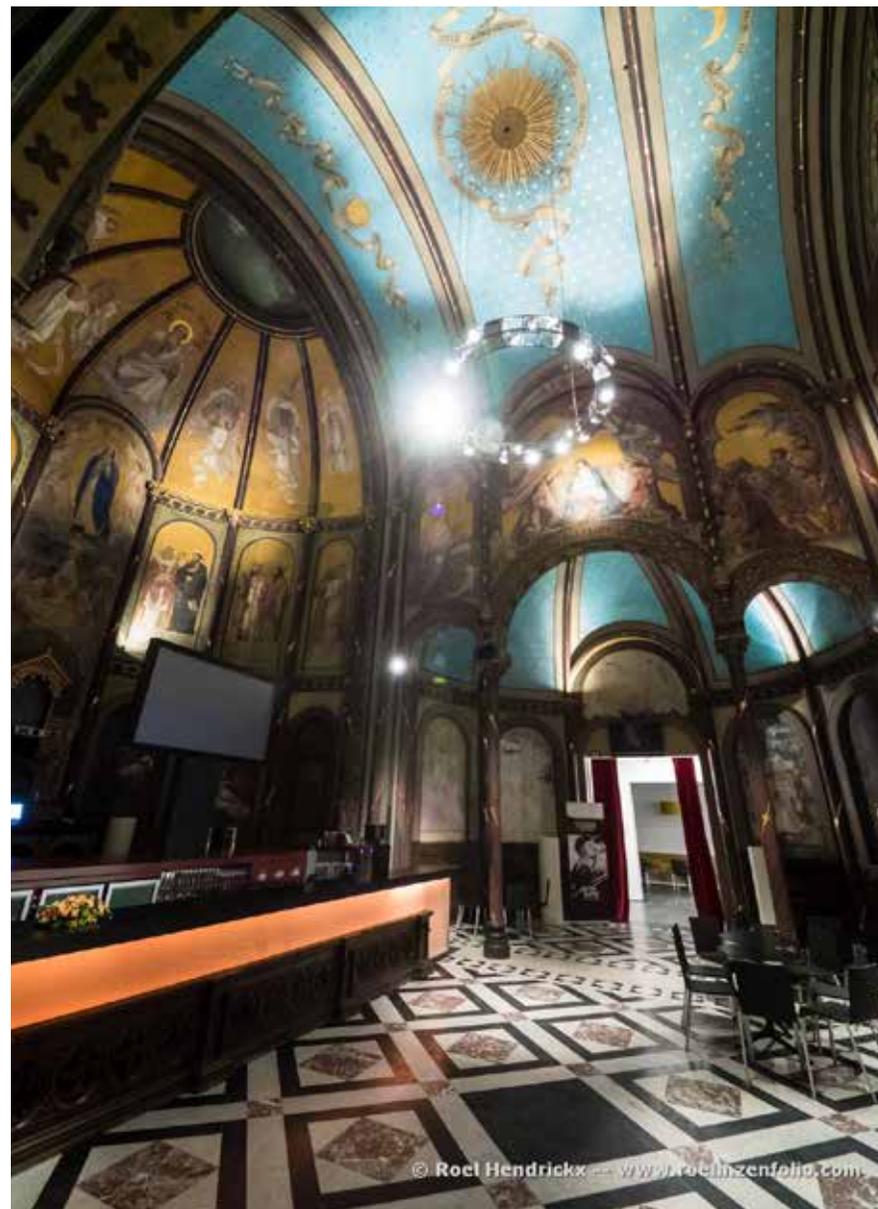
Budastraat 37  
Kortrijk  
West Flanders

A forgotten baroque chapel stands on an island in Kortrijk next to an ancient hospital. This tiny historic chapel is reached down a long, dusty cloister. The interior contains old paintings, statues and marble tombs of former sisters. A curious statue to the left of the altar shows the obscure Saint Donatus who is said to protect against lightning.

## 92 AMUZ FOYER

Kammenstraat 81  
Antwerp  
+32 (0)3 202 46 69  
[amuz.be](http://amuz.be)

A mysterious little chapel lies off the trendy Kammenstraat in central Antwerp. Built in 1857 in neo-Byzantine style, it was used in winter for services when the larger baroque church next door became too cold. The startling interior is decorated with colourful murals and stained glass. The main



© Roel Hendrickx - [www.roelinzentfolio.com](http://www.roelinzentfolio.com)

church has now been converted into a concert hall (with modern underfloor heating), while Sunday brunch is served in the winter chapel.

93 **CANADIAN CHAPEL**

Avenue de la  
Vecquée  
Namur

A strange painted wooden chapel stands next to the main road in the village of Malonne. Known as the Canadian chapel, it was built by a local aristocrat. Abandoned for many years, it is now used by the local Russian community for Orthodox services.

94 **LOUISE-MARIE CHAPEL**

Petrus en  
Paulusplein  
Ostend  
West Flanders

Ostend's dark neo-Gothic church contains a beautiful chapel hidden behind the altar with a sad marble monument dedicated to Queen Louise-Marie. She died in Ostend at the age of 38 in a house now occupied by the city museum. The statue shows the dying queen gazing up at an angel while a weeping woman symbolising the people of Ostend sits at her feet.

95 **WEAVERS' CHAPEL**

Kortedagsteeg 12  
Ghent  
East Flanders

It's easy to walk past the beautiful weavers' chapel in Ghent. It looks like an ordinary shopfront until you step through the door. You suddenly find yourself inside a 14th-century chapel with whitewashed walls and a high vaulted roof. Originally built for the Guild of Weavers, the chapel has been used in the past as a cinema, reading room and garage. Converted into a retail space in 2002 by the Antwerp architect Christine Conix, it is currently occupied by the Danish design store Bolia.

## Remarkable BRIDGES

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96 **PONT DE CLAIES**

Vresse-sur-Semois  
Namur

A temporary footbridge called the Pont de Claies is constructed every summer at a quiet spot on the River Semois near the village of Vresse-sur-Semois. It is the last surviving example of a traditional hurdle bridge built out of wooden posts supporting a wicker deck. These bridges originally allowed workers to reach the tobacco fields along the river. Once the bridge has been constructed, you can cross the Semois to the beautiful village of Laforêt. But it only survives a couple of months. By early September, nothing remains except a little sign on a tree to say the bridge has been dismantled.

97 **ROMAN BRIDGE**

Rue du Pont  
Romain  
Erquelinnes  
Hainaut

It isn't Roman and it isn't really a bridge, but it is called the *pont romain*. Located in a quiet wooded valley close to the French border, the bridge crosses the little River Hantes on 13 stone arches. It stands close to the ancient Roman road from Trier to Bavai, but was built in the Middle Ages as a barrage. Repaired many times over the centuries, it is now closed to traffic. A shrine to the Virgin Mary stands in a little grotto nearby. Covered with teddy bears and urgent prayers, it adds to the mystery of this strange spot.

98 **LA BELLE LIÉGOISE**  
Parc de la Boverie  
Boulevard Frère-  
Orban 180  
Liège

A new steel footbridge with a timber deck sweeps across the Meuse to connect Liège-Guillemins station with the Parc de la Boverie. Built in 2016, it is named La Belle Liégoise after an 18<sup>th</sup>-century woman called Anne-Josèphe de Méricourt who played a leading role in the French Revolution, dressing as a man while calling for women's rights.

99 **GENK CYCLE BRIDGE**  
Kuilenstraat/  
Westerring  
Genk  
Limburg

A striking cycle bridge crosses the busy Westerring (West ring road) in Genk in a series of gentle loops. The white steel structure, which looks like a roller coaster, was constructed in 2014 to connect two districts separated by a busy four-lane highway. Located between cycle points 560 and 29.

100 **LICHTENLIJN FOOTBRIDGE**  
Elisabethlaan  
(On the municipal border between  
Knokke and Zeebrugge)  
West Flanders  
Knokke

The Brussels engineering firm Ney & Partners built a beautiful swooping steel bridge in Knokke in 2008. Inspired by the shape of a hammock, it carries cyclists and pedestrians across a busy coastal road separating the beach from the inland polders. Located between cycle points 36 and 38.

101 **COLLEGEBRUG**  
Diksmuidekaai/  
Ijzerkaai  
Kortrijk

Kortrijk is building seven new bridges over the River Leie as part of a bold plan to revitalise the city's historic waterfront. The most striking is the shiny steel Collegebrug designed by architects Sum Projects to carry cyclists and walkers over the river in a series of sensual curves. The architects also created a park next to the bridge on the Ijzerkaai called Buda Beach where a summer cafe spreads out along the waterfront.



# Modern BUILDINGS

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## 102 ATELIER JESPERS

Avenue du Prince  
Héritier 149  
Brussels  
[atelierjaspers.com](http://atelierjaspers.com)

The modernist architect Victor Bourgeois built this white building in 1928 as a house and studio for the expressionist sculptor Oscar Jaspers. The striking curved front sparked off a furious reaction in this quiet bourgeois neighbourhood. But it became a meeting place for Europe's avant-garde artists such as Kandinsky and Klee, and passed through various owners after Jaspers died in 1970. In 2016 it was bought by an art collector who opened it to the public as a gallery, so it is now sometimes possible to get inside one of the most stunning architectural spaces in Belgium.

## 103 GUIETTE HOUSE

Populierenlaan 32  
Antwerp

A striking white house designed by the French architect Le Corbusier stands out from its neighbours in a quiet street in Antwerp. Built in 1926 as a private home and studio for the obscure modern artist René Guiette, it is one of Le Corbusier's early works. The design is based on Le Corbusier's innovative idea of the Maison Citrohan – an efficient modern house modelled on a mass-produced Citroën car. Restored in 1988, the house is one of just 17 buildings by Le Corbusier listed as Unesco world heritage.

## 104 LA MAISON DE VERRE

Rue Lejeune  
Brussels

Brussels promotes its art nouveau architecture, but forgets all the other styles that can be found in the city. La Maison de Verre gets little attention, yet it is an exceptional example of the modernist style that emerged in Europe in the 1930s. Designed by the young architect Paul-Amaury Michel in 1935 as his own home, it was inspired by Le Corbusier's ideas as well as the Rietveld-Schroder House in Utrecht.

## 105 ST RITA'S CHURCH

J. Sabbestraat 43  
Harelbeke  
West Flanders

One of the most extraordinary buildings in Belgium is located in the quiet town of Harelbeke, just outside Kortrijk. Begun in 1963, St Rita's Church is dedicated to the patron saint of impossible causes. And this church does look as if it should not exist. It was designed by Léon Stynen and Paul Demeyer in a bold brutalist style inspired by Le Corbusier. It took three years to construct the striking concrete structure, which rises above the surrounding houses like a huge tent. The austere interior is illuminated by a shaft of light that streams through a large round window in the roof.

## 106 MUSÉE L

Place des  
Sciences 3  
Louvain-la-Neuve  
Walloon Brabant  
[museel.be](http://museel.be)

A strange brutalist building stands on the main square in the university town of Louvain-la-Neuve. Designed by the architect André Jacqmain in 1970, the building was planned as a science library at the heart of the utopian new town. The interior spaces are crafted out of raw concrete moulded into mysterious, sensual curves. Recently restored to its original state, it opened in late 2017 as a museum dedicated to art and science.

107 **LA COUR SAINT-ANTOINE**

Rue Hors-Château

114

Liège

You could easily walk straight past it. Two classical columns mark the entrance to a secret courtyard in the heart of Liège that was once an abandoned back yard filled with old junk. The architect Charles Vandenhove restored the courtyard in 1979 to create an almost Italian square. He also renovated the 17th-century houses and added little details of his own including classical columns, tiles in the style of Charles Rennie Macintosh and a pink postmodern temple. The French artists Anne and Patrick Poirier later added a curious fountain and a stream called Tikal inspired by Mayan temples.

## Obscure INTERIORS

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108 **HOFKAMER**

Oude Beurs 27

Antwerp

The curious 18th-century Hofkamer lies hidden behind a grand Antwerp mansion Den Wolsack. Forgotten for many years, this remarkable interior was finally revealed to the public in 2017. It is not always open, but you should try to get inside if you can. Reached through a courtyard, the Hofkamer has a large ballroom on the ground floor with a huge painted ceiling illustrating *The Gods on Mount Olympus*. A spiral staircase leads up to a room decorated with contemporary art by Koen van den Broek. But the strangest space is a curious bookcase toilet lined with fake volumes made from leather and wood.

109 **HOTEL D'HANE-STEENHUYSE**

Veldstraat 55

Ghent

East Flanders

Located on the narrow Veldstraat in Ghent, this gorgeous rococo palace takes its name from the D'Hane de Steenhuyse family. It was occupied in 1815 by King Louis XVIII of France during the 'Hundred Days' when Napoleon seized power. It is now an empty, forgotten building, rarely open to the public. But you can sometimes take a guided tour through the echoing interior to see the dining room where Louis ate supper while locals peered through the windows, and the glittering ballroom where the exiled King entertained British officers before they marched off to Waterloo. Tours on Friday and Saturday afternoon at 2.30 pm.

110 **WOLFERS SHOP  
INTERIOR**

**Cinquantenaire  
Museum**

**Cinquantenaire  
Park**

**Brussels**

+32 (0)2 741 73 31

[kmg-mrah.be](http://kmg-mrah.be)

A stunning art nouveau shop interior has been reconstructed inside the Cinquantenaire Museum in Brussels. Victor Horta designed the art nouveau interior in 1912 for the Wolfers jewellery shop. He created the counters and cabinets out of expensive black marble and rare Cuban wood. When the store closed down, its dazzling interior was saved. It went on show for the first time in late 2017.

## *Inspiring* **NEW ARCHITECTURE**

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111 **PORT HOUSE**

**Zaha Hadidplein 1**

**Antwerp**

+32 (0)3 205 20 11

[portofantwerp.com](http://portofantwerp.com)

Antwerp Port Authority occupies a stunning building in the industrial docklands to the north of the old town. Located on a remote waterfront site, it is not particularly easy to reach, but it is worth the trip, especially on a weekday when the huge inner courtyard is open to the public. The building was originally a 19th-century fire station modelled on a 16th-century Renaissance



© Roel Hendricks - [www.roelh.zenfolio.com](http://www.roelh.zenfolio.com)

building owned by the Hanseatic League. Shortly before her death in 2016, the British architect Zaha Hadid transformed the fire station by adding a glass structure perched on the roof like a ship. Once inside the courtyard, you can admire the massive steel struts supporting the glass superstructure. Embedded in the floor is an enormous aerial photograph of Antwerp port, along with three anamorphic paintings by Italian street artist Vera Bugatti. Located near cycle point 54.

## 112 DE KROOK

Miriam  
Makebaplein 1  
Ghent  
East Flanders  
+32 (0)9 323 68 00  
[dekrook.be](http://dekrook.be)

The new Ghent city library is a sleek building of black steel and glass located on a bend in the Schelde known as De Waalse Krook. Designed by local architects Coussée & Goris working with the Catalan firm RCR Arquitectes, the library is a quiet, understated building in a neglected urban neighbourhood. The architects have created some striking interior spaces including a viewing room on the third floor where you can sit on armchairs gazing out at the city skyline. They also added terraces around the building where concerts can be organised and a stylish cafe with sober black furniture.

## 113 M

Leopold  
Vanderkelenstraat  
28  
Leuven  
Flemish Brabant  
+32 (0)16 27 29 29  
[mleuven.be](http://mleuven.be)

The old cabinet of curiosities once known as Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens is now called M. Simple as that. In 2010 the Ghent architect Stéphane Beel brilliantly transformed the creaky town museum in Leuven into a stunning contemporary art venue. The building incorporates a kids' area, cafe and rooftop terrace. The museum puts on interesting temporary exhibitions as well as displaying paintings and religious sculptures in a series of intriguing spaces where modern works are hung next to Old Masters.



## 114 BLUE TOWER

**Boulevard Pierre  
Mayence  
Charleroi  
Hainaut**

The French architect Jean Nouvel was invited to Charleroi to design a new police station in 2014. Working with the Brussels firm MDW Architecture, Nouvel came up with a striking 70-metre blue tower rising above a 19th-century cavalry barracks occupied by the acclaimed dance company Charleroi-Danses. The neighbourhood is likely to get a further boost when the Museum of Fine Art moves here, along with a new brasserie.



## 115 TYNE COT VISITORS CENTRE

**Vijfwegenstraat  
Zonnebeke  
West Flanders**

Tyne Cot Cemetery is the largest British military cemetery in the world, with 12,000 graves and a further 35,000 names of missing soldiers carved on a long wall at the back. As you approach this overwhelming spot, you hear a haunting woman's voice slowly recite the names of the dead. You then enter a simple modern pavilion designed in 2006 by the Bruges architects Govaert & Vanhoutte with a glass wall providing a sweeping view of the former battlefield.

## 116 EUROPA BUILDING

**Rue de la Loi 155  
Brussels**

A striking new building has gone up in Brussels to accommodate the powerful European Council, which brings together the EU's political leaders. Designed by the Belgian architects Samyn and Partners and the Italian Studio Valle Progettazioni, it has a central meeting hall in the shape of a giant egg enclosed in a large cube made from recycled window frames salvaged from demolished buildings across Europe. The building was commissioned by Belgium's former Prime Minister Herman van Rompuy while he was president of the European Council.