



GOESTING!

Traditions Get Creative in Flanders



by TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY
ELYSE GLICKMAN

IN FLANDERS, the food scene is a delicious dichotomy where Michelin-star restaurants, wine bars and traditional upscale brasseries co-exist with frituurs (Belgian fry restaurants, many with at least a dozen dipping sauces), waffle vendors, cheesemongers, mustard producers and establishments dedicated to vegans and vegetarians. It is a region where no casual traveller or self-respecting gourmand will ever go home hungry or thirsty.

This is thanks partly to “The Ambassadors of Goesting,” a collective of restaurateurs, artisanal food producers, farmers and chefs devoted to elevating Flanders to a culinary destination as distinctive as counterparts in Spain, Italy, France and elsewhere. They have a lot of fun demonstrating inventive ways to prepare home-grown comfort foods and staple ingredients. The Flemish word *goesting* translates to “a deep desire or craving for chocolate, beer, comforting bites and the music and friendship that go with them.”

But how does one explain *goesting* to travellers from abroad? The ambassadors’ approach reminded me of visiting Alba, Italy in 2003 and learning about the Slow Food movement at its headquarters. The conversation focused on truffles, wines and other hand-wrought and cultivated foods specific to the area and the importance of consuming food in its freshest and most authentic forms. It also brought to mind Swedish lifestyle-driven words with no direct English translations, such as *lagom* (“not too little, not too much”), that have caught on internationally.

Ostend Odyssey

Every region of every European country has at least one everyday dish that evolved from humble to *haute*. In the coastal city of Ostend, defined by its fishing and North Sea gray shrimp cash crop, it is shrimp croquettes. While meat was cost-prohibitive in centuries past, shrimp provided an affordable source of protein that was personalized in family recipes. Today, Ostend restaurants at every price point adapt some of those recipes into satisfying mouthfuls that are a source of local pride. This gave way to the Ostend Shrimp Croquette Festival, launched in 2020 and sponsored by Ostend Tourism. Even with obstacles brought on by that year’s unforeseen events, it caught on with locals and powered forward.»

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Fishing trawlers in Ostend Harbour; Baker Joost Arjis; Balls & Glory meatballs; Balls & Glory cooking class; Belle du Jour Pot au feu; DOK brewing cool can designs; Croquette Festival contenders; RØK BBQ platter; Beer historian Jasper Pollet.

ALL PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: ELYSE GLICKMAN





DESTINATIONS

GOESTING!

BELGIUM



... Protecting the region's legacy is a bittersweet pursuit...



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Frituur selection; Frituur Tartaar owner Sven De Ville; Ghent Bridge; Holy Cow chocolate shop; ONA Wine Bar interior; Making shrimp croquettes; ONA Wine Bar mural; Jeremy Levecke aboard an Ostend shrimping boat.



«“When we posted the idea on our social media page, there were a lot of reactions, giving hearts to the idea,” said Pieter Hens, the tourism office’s marketing officer. “We realized a festival like this would either sell out quickly or be a small disaster. Thankfully, the tickets sold out in about two days and allowed for the festival to continue and grow in duration from one to four days. For the fourth edition of the festival, we sold 7,000 for all four days — and now have 11 restaurants in town competing producing 49,500 croquettes.”

The festival’s fourth edition was at once a high-brow food festival and neighbourhood street party. Long lines for every participating restaurant and the showmanship of every team preparing, finishing and plating their unique croquette expression made it a feast for the senses. Some of the chefs stuck to traditional recipes while others mixed things up with curry, tomatoes, chile and other unexpected seasoning. In addition to Fort Napoleon, the 2023 jury winner, the offerings from Bar Foubert, Cafe Botteltje and Leffe Beach were clear favourites among my fellow travellers.

Chef-restaurateurs Els Vanbiervliet and Jeremy Levecke helm Michelin-star rated Belle du Jour, counted among the restaurants making Ostend an essential destination for seafood lovers. A casual yet elegant white tablecloth bistro, its interior design celebrates Ostend’s seafaring history with a whimsical Belgian contemporary art aesthetic. Levecke is proud of Ostend’s shrimping heritage and committed to showing it off on his menus and beyond. It’s a palpable devotion, whether he’s teaching a class about making his version of the shrimp croquette or guiding an informal tour of Vistrap Ostend, an open-air market whose origins date to the commercialization of the port in the 19th century.

As Levecke teaches croquette-making technique, he focuses on the recipe’s origins, down to having us shell each one-inch shrimp by hand. Next, we combine the flour and seasoning, create the buttery chowder-like stock, and hand-form the croquettes to ensure perfect texture once they are fried. Our main course is a French *pot-au-feu* made Belgian with plaice (a whitefish similar to grouper), Brussels sprouts, turnip and green cabbage. The rustic dish is elegantly plated, reflecting Ostend’s culinary evolution in recent years.

Levecke’s immersion continues next morning with a city tour that includes several murals painted for the city’s “Crystal Ship Project” (an annual art festival with an international roster of street artists), Vistrap Ostend, and the port where ships owned by some of the remaining family fisheries are docked. Next to one of the working boats, we sample fresh gray shrimp from the four remaining families doing business at the fish market. Even with Ostend generating excitement among seafood connoisseurs, protecting the region’s legacy is a bittersweet pursuit, Levecke explained. There were 40 shrimping families at one point. Today, there are four families working at the harbour, adding a sense of urgency to preserving Ostend’s legacy even as its fishing village and beach retreat history has long given way to a modern, artsy city.»

Cook



BELGIUM

SERVES 4–6

Shrimp Croquettes

CHEF JEREMY Levecke of Belle du Jour restaurant in Ostend shared his recipe for the popular Belgian snack.

Shrimp in Shell
330 g

Vegetable Oil
1 Tbs

Onion
1 small, diced

Carrot
1 small, diced

Thyme 1 sprig

Cognac 20 ml

White Wine
200 ml

Milk 800 ml

Juice of 1 Lemon

Butter 80 g

All-Purpose Flour
20 g

Gruyère or Emmental Cheese
100 g, grated

Cayenne a pinch

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

Gelatin Leaves
100 g, soaked in cold water

Parsley Sprigs
for garnish, fried

Lemon Wedges
for garnish

- 1 PEEL** the shrimp, chop the meat and set aside. Reserve the shells.
- 2 IN** a heavy bottomed saucepan, heat the oil until shimmering then add the shrimp shells, onion, carrot and thyme. Sauté until starting to colour.
- 3 DEGLAZE** the pan with the wine, then stir in the milk and lastly the cognac. Bring to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes.
- 4 STRAIN** the stock into a jug and discard the solids.
- 5 MELT** the butter in the saucepan, then add the flour, stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Gradually add the reserved shrimp stock, stirring constantly, until the mixture starts to thicken.
- 6 STIR** in the chopped shrimp, grated cheese, lemon juice and cayenne. Season to taste with salt and pepper, then stir in the soaked gelatine.
- 7 POUR** the mixture into a rectangular baking dish and cover with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap onto the surface of the mixture. Refrigerate overnight or at least for a few hours until firm enough to shape.
- 8 FORM** the mixture into croquettes of your preferred size, roll in breadcrumbs and deep fry until golden. Drain on paper towel.
- 9 SERVE** with the parsley and lemon wedges.

Cook
&

SERVES 4 AS A SIDE DISH

Grilled Belgian Endive

Belgian Endive
4 heads

Extra Virgin Olive Oil
for brushing

Coarse Sea Salt 1 tsp

Garlic
1 clove,
minced

- 1 CUT** the heads of endive in half lengthwise. Brush the cut surfaces generously with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and garlic.
- 2 GRILL** over high heat for 5–7 minutes, turning halfway through, until scorched on top but not burnt.
- 3 ALTERNATIVELY**, you can roast the endive in a 400°F oven, until softened and slightly charred, about 20 minutes.

«Goesting in Ghent

Luxury-minded travellers will feel right at home at Pillows Grand Boutique Hotel Reylof in the city of Ghent. A former 18th-century mansion expanded and enlivened with contemporary interiors, it features a gorgeous central courtyard, and high-end restaurants LOF by chef Paul de Groote and Olivier le Petit Bistro. Both restaurants are popular local hangouts thanks to an artful mix of Belgian and French influences flowing from the decor to the menus.

In keeping with the Flanders *goesting* mission, ONA Wine Bar sets itself apart as one that serves “wine with a message.” A rotating selection of 30 small-production wines from around the world are served. The warmly lit, modern art-adorned rooms make it a regular meet-up spot for Ghent wine lovers. Wintercircus, a circus and performance venue built in the 1880s, is now a multi-purpose space with contemporary and international restaurants as well as cafes specializing in hand-crafted edibles. Its top grazing spots include Bar Bougie, Bakker Klaas (fresh pastries, bread and coffee), and trendy rooftop bar Toast.

Given Ghent’s brisk climate, casual comfort food reigns supreme. *Frituurs* not only offer fries as Belgians intended but also other snacks that warm the soul and pair effortlessly with beers from local independent brewers. Frituur Tartaar updates the time-tested concept to include a range of sandwiches and snacks including vegetarian and vegan options.

“We want to do things other fries shops don’t do,” owner Sven De Ville explains. “While others fry in meat fat, we use vegetarian

oil and fry batches several times. Doing it this way is important to getting the most out of the potato’s flavour. We also point out that as potato season is September to December or January, this is when fries are going to taste the best, especially as we don’t freeze potatoes. Beyond that, we make most of the other items, including falafel, veggie burgers, beef burgers, and bread, in-house. As ‘Tartaar’ is the name of our shop, we make all the dipping sauces here, including our signature tartar sauce.”

With its to-go offerings, food trucks and cooking classes, Balls & Glory shakes up everything one thinks they know about meatballs. Takeaway selections have a global slant (falafel, chicken curry and more) while the Balls & Glory signature ball is meal-sized, stuffed with a savoury filling blending Flanders-cultivated chicory, herbs and mustard, and finished with walnuts and julienned apples. It is perched on mashed potatoes, surrounded with two types of gravy, and served with roasted vegetables and green salads.

Hal 16, an industrial building repurposed as a food hall in the Dok Noord neighbourhood, is home to the Dok Brewing Company and RØK BBQ & Burgers. While its aesthetic is reminiscent of similar establishments in North America, the theme of old and new Flemish influences is strong, especially if you pair the craft beers on tap (up to 30 at any given time) with barbecued meats and root vegetables cooked in a Texan smoker but served up in a hearty “Old Europe” way with mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables.

When introducing the small-but mighty Dok Brewing Company brewery on his tours, beer historian and tour guide Jasper Pollet provides a strong argument on why serious beer lovers need to expand their vocabulary beyond Stella Artois and Leffe. Although he acknowledges their international influence and debunks some myths about Belgian beer origins, he encourages beer enthusiasts to look beyond the big brands.

“With the exception of Dok’s five (staple beers), Dok never brews a recipe twice,” Pollet says. “We want the consumer to find his or her specific taste preference and to continuously challenge brewers in their creativity. Using different styles, techniques and ingredients, we help our customers to navigate the great beer labyrinth. Even with international influences shaping modern Ghent, many of its other artisanal food producers work hard as brewers do to ensure what they create has a meaningful connection to our region’s origins and traditions.”

Other gems embodying the *goesting* spirit are hidden in plain sight throughout Ghent’s city centre. Many chocolate shops are so attractively presented that without the help of city guide Elly Dermout, it would be easy to be drawn into places engineered for tourists. While some shops stock high quality products, Dermout points out that it takes extra effort — or knowing somebody in the know — to find special places built on a foundation of authenticity and small-batch production. Although some chocolate shops operate under noted prestige brands, places she cherry picks embody heritage, environmentally conscious operations, and fair-trade sourcing.”



DESTINATIONS

BELGIUM



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Sampling Belgian beer; Planting chicory with precision; Pillows Hotel chef Paul de Groote; Temmerman Confiserie; Sauces selection at Frituur Tartaar; Pillows Hotel Happy Hour snacks.



«A chocolate shop adjoins the The Bakery by Joost Arjis, but as it has been anointed Ghent's top bakery, the delicate, flaky pastries are the main reason to go. The selection is deceptively simple, but the acclaimed baker's attention to detail makes the rest of the sensory experience unforgettable. We sample milk bread as well as the Ghent take on a cinnamon roll, combining croissant flakiness and brioche texture, best enjoyed with a smear of butter.

"We really want to promote our Belgian-Flemish here and are proud of what our own cuisine has to offer," Arjis says, adding that using only local ingredients ensures environmentally sound production as well as Flemish authenticity. "We're committed to putting the spotlight on our food culture and history," he continues. "Everything here revolves around the purity of the ingredients, refined flavours and textures."

Jannes and Karen Deduytschaever's eponymous shop has a luxury street cred and a posh location, earning Jannes the title of best chocolatier in Flanders by Gault&Millau in 2022. Another chocolatier couple, David Maenhout and Isabelle Hertsens, is making waves with Chocolatier M, an edgier take on ultra high-end chocolate and a new location with brutalist architectural influences. Maenhout also garnered kudos from Gault&Millau in 2023 as 'Chocolatier of the Year,' and is continuing to pile up awards and accolades.

Vegans and vegetarians will appreciate the offerings at Holy Cow Chocolate. The bean-to-bar recipes are so smooth and rich that one won't miss the milk. The story of the shop's origins is as fascinating as the origins of the cocoa beans that go into the products. Ellen Taerwe and Luca Beltrami, two engineers by profession, met in 2011 in Hyderabad, South India. They take Belgian chocolate in a worldly direction.

"We started very small with our monsoon cacao and dry season cacao beans," says Taerwe. "One can taste the seasonality of cacao, and there is a very different flavour profile for each, although you have the same recipe, which is 85% cacao, 15% sugar. Now our assortment is a bit larger, and there's a lot more demand. However, we strive to keep our approach very pure and natural in flavour, where the nuances of different cacaos can be tasted. We have studied and perfected the harvesting, fermentation and drying processes to bring out the flavour nuances of the various local beans and terroirs."

WAY Coffee's Ghent locations have a chic minimalist sensibility. The way they present and serve coffee is pulled right out of founder Charlene De Buysere's book "The Smart on Specialty Coffee," defining the standards that ensure the quality and flavour of fair-trade coffees (sourced from a curated group of small producers). Beans at its Dok Noord area roaster are roasted to those standards and in the coffee shops, shelf tags and coffee bags are labelled with symbols that tell the buyer how sweet, strong, and acidic the flavour is once the coffee is brewed the correct way.

"We focus on flavour development," De Buysere says. "In winemaking, the fermentation process is essential to develop flavour precursors. In coffee, you develop a coffee's unique flavour profile through the roasting. Above the word 'filter' or 'espresso,' on the bags, you can see a list of the flavours and aromatic notes in a certain coffee. Every week or ten days, we change up our espresso and have a 'filter' coffee of the week. Our nitro coffees look a bit like Guinness when dispensed, as layers will form and there will be a lot of creaminess."

Two places deeply rooted in history are Temmerman Confiserie, a confectionery and specialty tea shop established in 1904, and Tierenteyn-Verlant, a little shop in Ghent's Groentemarkt Square that sells pickles, spices, sauces, teas, and most notably, mustard. Tierenteyn is a mustard producing company that's been around since its founding by Petrus Tierenteyn in 1790.

Nowadays, it's one of the only ones left. Their traditionally made mustard is a product special to the region and something you can't elsewhere, as it doesn't ship. The mustard is bottled or packed for you directly from the barrel with a wooden spoon (as is traditional), and there are samples of their mustard, mayos and sauces to be tasted with the help of breadstick crackers.

Chicory is another regional product with a deep local heritage. Thomas Cools, who represents the fourth generation operating the family-owned agricultural company, explains that chicory and Belgian endive are close relatives but not the same thing. They are different species of *Cichorium* genus. Cools stresses that in order for the plant to be designated Brabant *grondwitloof*, the plant's delicate white heads must be grown underground in a Flemish Brabant soil. Counterparts grown with hydroponic techniques or not fully under the ground are not considered the real deal. Farmers are also required to grow Brussels *grondwitloof* from their own seed.

"Chicory grows underground, making the heads more compact in texture than that of other forms," says Cools.

THIS PHOTO
Ghent
historic
centre.





Visit Flanders
www.visitflanders.com

OSTEND

Belle du Jour
www.belledejour.be

Vistrap Oostende
www.oostende.org/en/sight/9598/fish-market.html

GHENT

Pillows Grand Boutique Hotel Reylof
LOF Restaurant & Oliver Le Petit Bistro
www.pillowshotels.com/ghent

Balls & Glory
www.ballsglory.be

Chocolatier M
www.chocolatier-m.be

Deduytschaever
www.deduytschaever.be

Dok Brewing Company/
RØK BBQ & Burgers at Hal 16
www.dokbrewingcompany.be/en

Grondwitloof Familie Cools
www.rechtvanbijdeboer.be/cool-jos

Holy Cow Chocolate
www.holycow-chocolate.be/en

The Bakery by Joost Arijs
www.thebakery-joostarijs.be

ONA Wine Bar
www.ona.gent/belfort

Frituur Tartaar
 Heilige-Geeststraat 3
www.frituur-tartaar.be

Temmerman Confiserie
www.temmermanconfiserie.com/en

WAY Coffee
www.way.gent/pages/home

Wintercircus
www.wintercircus.be/en

VVE Tierenteyn-Verlent
www.tierenteyn-verlent.be

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AURORA MIRABELLA

BELGIUM

MAKES 16 PIECES

Black Tea Brownies

IN THIS recipe from Temmerman Confiserie, black tea gives brownies a subtle taste of mystery. For best results, use only the best quality loose-leaf tea.

Butter 115 g
Sugar 300 g
Cocoa Powder 75 g
English Breakfast
 or **Russian Caravan**
Loose-Leaf Tea 2 Tbs
Eggs 2 large
Vanilla Extract 1 tsp
All-Purpose Flour
 65 g
Salt ½ tsp

- 1 PREHEAT** the oven to 350°F. Grease an 8-inch square pan.
- 2 IN** a medium saucepan, melt the butter and stir in the sugar, cocoa powder and black tea.
- 3 BEAT** in the eggs one at a time, followed by the vanilla extract.
- 4 STIR** in the flour and salt until just combined.
- 5 POUR** the mixture into the baking pan and bake for 20–25 minutes.

"The authentic cultivation method of chicory, outside under cover soil, has been passed from father to son. Quality is held in high regard here, and we approach chicory cultivation with patience and hard work even as we strive to offer our customers a tasty, high-quality product at a fair price. Growing chicory in soil is also slower, but if the chicory is given enough time and not forced to ripen too fast, the resulting flavour is mellower."

Cools took us through the process, from chicory painstakingly sorted and covered in black earth to the correct way to remove outer leaves and preserve the head for packaged versions. As he felt it would be a shame to waste the leaves, he considered different ways to repurpose them rather than allow them to become compost. A colleague suggested using them as an ingredient in croquettes, as snacks or a side dish, and a collaboration with a fellow *goesting* food company was born.

Our exploration of Flanders' micro-local food culture and cottage industries culminated in a large barn on Cools' farm, with croquettes made from this special chicory, topped with ham and cheese sauce, accompanying meatballs from Balls & Glory's food truck. **T&T**