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Belgium

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Antwerp

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WORD OF MOUTH

"I am now under the impression that Antwerp has superior shopping to London. The diamond quarter, and the diamond museum are worth exploring, the museum in particular offers one to view some relatively impressive stones, as well as learning about the process involved in grading/selecting/cutting the stones. I enjoyed Antwerp's almost Dutch atmosphere, very different from the French ambience that envelops Brussels. It's a small city, so it's very easy to walk from one side to the other—I even walked all along the dockside on the Sunday, lots of locals, and very pleasant indeed."

—m_kingdom2

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By Mei-Yin Teo

ANTWERP TODAY IS EUROPE'S SECOND-LARGEST PORT and has much of the zest often associated with a harbor town. But it also has an outsized influence in a very different realm: that of clothing design. Since the 1980s, Antwerp-trained fashion designers have become renowned for experimental styles paired with time-honored workmanship. Several designers, such as Dries Van Noten and Véronique Branquinho, stay firmly rooted in the city; others have filtered into major European couture houses. On their home turf, you can experience the fascinating mix of tradition and innovation that influences their work.

In its heyday, Antwerp (Antwerpen in Flemish, Anvers in French) played second fiddle only to Paris. Thanks to artists such as Rubens, Van Dyck, and Jordaens, it was one of Europe's leading art centers. Its printing presses produced missals for the farthest reaches of the Spanish empire. It became, and has remained, the diamond capital of the world. Its civic pride was such that the Antwerpen *Simjoren* (patricians) considered themselves a cut above just about everybody else. They still do.

The Flemish Antwerpen is very close to the word *handwerpen*, which means "hand throwing," and that, according to legend, is exactly what the Roman soldier Silvius Brabo did to the giant Druon Antigon. The giant would collect a toll from boatmen on the river and cut off the hands of those who refused, until Silvius confronted him, cut off the giant's own hand, and flung it into the river Scheldt. That's why there are severed hands on Antwerp's coat of arms.

Antwerp is often called the City of the Madonnas. On almost every street corner in the old section, you'll see a high niche with a protective statuette of the Virgin. People tend to think that because Belgium is linguistically split it is also religiously divided. This emphatically is not so. In fact, the Roman Catholic faith appears to be stronger and more unquestioning in Flanders than in Wallonia.

Great prosperity came to Antwerp during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Born in Gent and raised in Mechelen, he made Antwerp the principal port of his vast domain. It became Europe's most important commercial center in the 16th century, as well as a center of the new craft of printing. The Golden Age came to an end with the abdication of Charles V in 1555. He was succeeded by Philip II of Spain, whose ardent Roman Catholicism brought him into immediate conflict with the Protestants of the Netherlands. In 1566, when Calvinist iconoclasts destroyed paintings and sculptures in churches and monasteries, Philip II responded by sending in Spanish troops. In what became known as the Spanish Fury, they sacked the town and killed thousands of citizens.

The decline of Antwerp had already begun when its most illustrious painters, Peter Paul Rubens, Jacob Jordaens, and Anthony Van Dyck, reached the peak of their fame. Rubens's tie to the city is a genial, pervasive presence. The artist's house, his church, and the homes of his benefactors, friends, and disciples are all over the old city. His wife also seems to be everywhere, for she frequently posed as the model for his portraits of the Virgin Mary. Rubens and fellow Antwerper Van Dyck both dab-

\$\$\$\$ ✕ **Gin Fish.** In a house on a narrow street, this tiny two-level restaurant serves some of the best, most sophisticated fish dishes in the city. Chef Didier Garnich serves four-course meals in a relaxed environment—in fact, you don't even have to decide among dishes. There's no menu; instead, the daily meal is driven by the morning's market purchases. You might be served langoustines in a light curry sauce or sea scallops cooked in a mushroom-sorrel stock. The crème brûlée is outstanding. It's open for lunch with reservations of at least four people. ☒ *Haarstraat 9, Oude Stad* ☎ 03/231-3207 📅 *Reservations essential* ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed Sun., Mon., and June.*

\$\$\$\$ ✕ **'t Fornuis.** In the heart of old Antwerp, this cozy restaurant, decorated in traditional Flemish style with heavy oak chairs and beamed ceilings, serves some of the best (and priciest) food in the city. Chef Johan Segers likes to change his French-accented menu at regular intervals, but roasted sweetbreads with a wild truffle sauce are a permanent fixture. Take a look at the wonderful collection of miniature stoves while you're waiting to be seated. ☒ *Reyndersstraat 24, Oude Stad* ☎ 03/233-6270 📅 *Reservations essential* 🍷 *Jacket and tie* ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed weekends, last 3 wks in Aug., Dec. 25-Jan. 1.*

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ ✕ **Dome.** Architecture and food aficionados will appreciate the classic French cuisine and somber decor in this splendid Art Nouveau building. This former teahouse, sewing school, and police office maintains its original floor mosaic, and the whitewashed walls and dome-shaped roof parallels its haute cuisine. French chef Julien Burlat and wife Sophie Verbeke, former stylist for Dries Van Noten, set up this restaurant (and its marine version, *Dome sur Mer*, just a stone's throw away) in the upscale Zurenborg neighborhood. Enjoy the monkfish with fresh spinach, pumpkin oil, and red wine sauce, or saddle of lamb and eggplant caviar in wild thyme sauce. ☒ *Grote Hondstraat 2, Zurenborg* ☎ 03/239-9003 ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed Mon. and Tues. No lunch Sat.*

★ **\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$** ✕ **Euterpia.** Owners Marc and Marijke Tombeur turned this gorgeous Art Nouveau building into a restaurant favored by a chic, arty set. House specialties include *coucou de Malines*, chicken in puff pastry with truffle sauce and wild mushrooms. Try for a table in the garden, but if the weather's not cooperating you can still dine alfresco on the closed terrace. ☒ *Generaal Capiaumonstraat 2, Berchem* ☎ 03/235-0202 ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed Mon., Tues., and 3 wks in Aug. No lunch.*

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ ✕ **Het Nieuwe Palinghuis.** The name means The New Eelhouse, and sweet-fleshed eel, prepared in a variety of ways, is the house specialty, along with grilled turbot, grilled scallops, and sole in lobster sauce. Fittingly for an Antwerp landmark, the restaurant has dark wood and a comfortable, deep-rooted air. ☒ *St-Jansvliet 14, Oude Stad* ☎ 03/231-7445 ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed Mon. and Tues., and June.*

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ ✕ **P. Preud 'Homme.** In a location that has served as a pastry shop and a gun shop, this exquisite restaurant mixes Art Nouveau design, antiques, and a 400-year-old Spanish ceiling. The food is on a par with the decor. Chef Dimitri serves up such delicacies as terrine of goose liver, fried scallops in tomato-basil sauce, and ice cream with hot chocolate sauce. ☒ *Suikerrui 28, Oude Stad* ☎ 03/233-4200 ☑ AE, DC, MC, V ☺ *Closed Jan.*

Where to Stay & Eat in Antwerp



Restaurants		't Hofke	Hotels
De Kleine Zavel	13	Tops	Antwerp Hilton
Dome/Dome Surmer	32	Zuiderterras	Classic Hotel
Euterpia	36		Villa Mozart
Flamant Dining	27		Corinthia Antwerp
Gin Fish	4		Hotel
Hecker	14		Crowne Plaza
Het Hemelse Gerech	10		Antwerp
Het Nieuwe Palinghuis	11		De Witte Lelie
Het Pomphuis	1		Hotel Firean
Horta	26		Hotel Julien
Hungry Henrietta	24		Hotel Rubens
In de Schaduw van de Kathedraal	9		Hyllit
Neuze Neuze	20		International
O'Kontreir	33		Zeemanshuis
P. Preud 'Homme	6		Plaza Hotel
Sir Anthony Van Dijck	7		Prinse
Spaghettiworld	16		Radisson SAS
't Brantyser	21		Park Lane Hotel
't Fornuis	15		Rubenshof
			Scoutel
			t'Elzenveld
			t'Sandt