



FLANDERS KITCHEN REBELS  
Flanders State of the Art

### OUT AND ABOUT IN TURHNOUT

At Marjanne's suggestion, and with little resistance, we headed off down the street and along a lane to where, in the middle of a new housing development, the cafe De Penge clings on like a remnant of comfort and warmth in a cold and steely environment.

De Penge ([www.de-penge.be](http://www.de-penge.be)) claims to be the oldest cafe in Turnhout at just shy of 125 years old, named after a rascally character in a book (set in Turnhout) by René Daniëls. It's a typical old-fashioned brown cafe, so called because of the heavy wood panelling, bar and furniture – and also the decades of nicotine stains that colour the walls and ceiling.

There's no smoking any more, of course, and the walls are anyway festooned with every sort of village memorabilia: prize certificates, photos, de-

crees, musical instruments from some forgotten brass band, items of uniform, you name it. Prime among its artefacts: the genuine coat of arms that used to hang on the front of the old city hall of Turnhout, which was demolished in 1962, after which the blazon disappeared until 2008, when it came to its new home.

Nostalgia aside, the main thing De Penge has to offer the visitor is its insanely comprehensive beer menu. All of the classics are there, and some more rare and recherché species into the bargain. From the cafe's own De Penge beer, created in 2005 for the 115th anniversary, to the range of beers named after playing cards and brewed by local brewers Het Nest – Turnhout has long been the centre of the world's playing card manufacturing industry; the world's largest playing card maker, Cart-amundi, started there and still has its HQ in town.

The Playing Card Museum ([www.speelkaart-museum.be](http://www.speelkaart-museum.be)) is one of the main attractions in Turnhout, within walking distance from Amu and De Penge, and open daily except Mondays. The exhibit features not only playing cards of many sorts but also a beautiful steam machine made by Charles Nolet of Ghent in 1896, and a Stanhope printing press made by Bouhoulle in Antwerp in 1829. You'll notice what appears to be a large bin full of cards in the middle of the floor: Feel free to take home any card that takes your fancy.

Elsewhere there's the castle of the Dukes of Brabant, dating from the 12th century, the 13th-century beguinage, and the Taxandria museum ([www.taxandriamuseum.be](http://www.taxandriamuseum.be)) of the history of Turnhout and the surrounding area. It's open afternoons only, and closed on Mondays. ■

“Before, the cuisine was pure Italian. I still tend in that direction, but I try to bring in other influences”



Marjanne is one of the Flanders Kitchen Rebels. These are the new generation of young promising Flemish and Brussels chefs. You can find these chefs on [www.flanderskitchenrebels.be](http://www.flanderskitchenrebels.be)



# All hands to the pump

Frances Robinson joins a band of savvy female apprentices as they make Huyghe's annual Deliria brew



**E**arly one morning, an unusual crowd of apprentice brewers assembles in Huyghe Brewery's tasting room. These beer-loving women have come from far and wide to make Deliria, a special once-a-year brew. They're not interested in fizzy pink beers with girly names – the finished product is a blonde ale with 8.5% alcohol, balanced out with fruity, crisp flavours.

Head brewer Joris Dheedene leads his band of merry women – along with marketing manager Catherine de Laet and beer sommelier Sofie Vanrafelghem – to the brewhouse. It's a picture of gleaming modernity – and a surprise for those who were expecting a day of stirring ingredients in giant copper vats. Instead, Joris controls much of the process at the touch of a button with a custom-made software system. Just when it looks like it might be too easy, the physical work starts: 20kg sacks of rice need to be tipped into a silo, to keep the beer light, while the rest of us get to work opening sacks of oats, to make it creamy.

Next, beneath the brewery's trademark bright pink elephant, it's time to clean the filters. While we take it in turns

with a giant spatula to scrape squished ingredients off them, the conversation, naturally, turns to beer. "I'm so happy when I go to a party and there's a good beer," says Caroline Bottequin. Other topics include the general superiority of good beer to bad wine, how well Bourgogne de Flandres goes with chocolate, and how international the group is, with participants from Bolivia, China and all over Europe. Jackie Crawford, an American, even braved an airport strike in Germany – not exactly a beer desert – to be here. "We once drove two hours to France to get Delirium," she recalls. "It's not as heavy as German beers."

Under Joris's watchful eye, we add in three kinds of hop, plus milled coriander. He cautions against dropping the most expensive ingredient: "Remember, it's a kind of gold you have in your hands." Heidi Edmonds, who's come over from Devon in the UK, is taking hundreds of photos and plans to buy "half the gift shop" for her Belgian beer-loving boyfriend. "There's no comparison to Belgian beer," she says, while outlining plans to serve more in the pub she runs. Another brewer, Mercedes Huang, brings Chinese tourists on Belgian brewery tours, and is clearly enjoy-

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ing asking Joris plenty of technical questions. Women don't just enjoy drinking beer: they're forging careers in it.

Next, it's time to try the mix of water and grains, known as wort – reactions are mixed, from "yum, Horlicks" to tipping it straight down the sink – and then we empty a tonne (literally) of sugar, sack by sack, into the next tank. After cleaning the filters again, there's a tour of the fermentation tanks, where the aroma proves challenging for those who enjoyed the full range of beers the previous night. We try Delirium Tremens, the brewery's flagship beer, at various stages of fermentation, tasting how the brash bitterness of the initial blend mellows

into the refreshing final product.

Back in the tasting room, Sofie and her Dutch counterpart, Fiona de Lange, talk us through a range of Huyghe's beers with dainty gourmet food pairings from Steven Buelens of L'Esco in Wetteren. Slivers of salmon and wasabi pack an umami punch that offsets the restrained gluten-free Mongozo buckwheat beer. Averbode, an abbey-style beer launched last year, goes superbly with lacy buckwheat crepes.

"Women are not just drinking more beers, they're drinking better beers," says Alain de Laet, Delirium's chief executive. It's the third year his brewery has made Deliria, and demand is

huge: 300 hectolitres of the 450 being produced are being shipped to the US in time for International Women's Day in March. As the market grows, it's all about creating interesting beers that appeal to female tastes. "They're looking for something special," he says. "They're not just going for pilsner." ■