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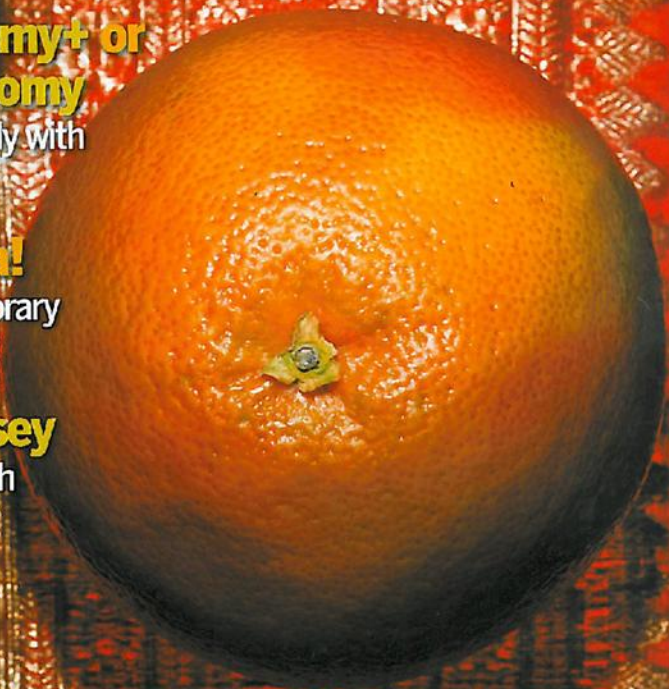
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Communist-era products were once shunned in favour of their Western counterparts, but Kofola Cola and Tisza tennis shoes are among those back in fashion and becoming cult bestsellers

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Irish actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers has received rave reviews for his latest movie role in *August Rush*, but less welcome are the tabloid stories of his drinking troubles and recent arrest at Dublin airport

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Rome has always been proud of its rich culinary traditions, but a new wave of cutting-edge chefs are shaking things up and creating exhilarating new menus – nothing like Mamma used to make

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How would you like to learn the skills of an ancient Roman gladiator? Or become an expert DJ? We take a look at some of the best holiday courses on offer in Europe

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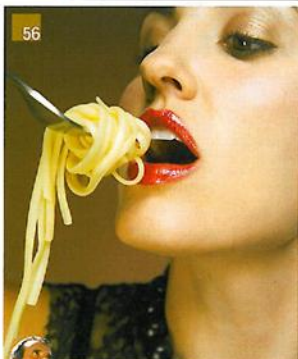
Head to St Niklaas to sample Belgium's best-loved beers at the Zythos Festival. Then visit nearby Antwerp's dazzling diamond district or fashion museum

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Buying a 14th-century Tuscan property outright may be beyond your budget, but fractional ownership provides a way for investors to enjoy the high life for less

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A round-up of the latest news, including a hassle-free mobile phone tariff and the new Google tool set to help out frequent flyers



“It’s true that in this business you’re a young architect when you’re 50.”

**Left** This development period is similar to that to provide 1,000 new units in Denmark’s capital. **Below** Julien De Smedt inspects a model of one of the many projects his team is working on.

**J**ulien De Smedt is a prodigy. Aged just 32, this Brussels native is already an acclaimed architect, with a Golden Lion from the Venice Biennale under his belt. He also manages his own firm – his second – which employs 35 people. In contrast, most of his colleagues have to wait until they’re middle aged to get a first taste of recognition or the chance to become independent.

“It’s true that in this business you’re a young architect when you’re 50,” smiles De Smedt, as he welcomes us into his office on a snowy Sunday in Copenhagen. Situated in the Nørrebro district, at the back of a quiet residential courtyard, IDS Architects looks more like a trendy design collective than a successful architectural firm. Huge paintings by the Belgian graffiti artist Pablo Gonzalez adorn the walls. De Smedt’s desk is separated from the others by a bright yellow plastic curtain, and hip young things in funky T-shirts are hard at work. De Smedt, who is Belgian on his mother’s side and French on his father’s is wearing a black hat and skinny jeans.

The young architect has built his

reputation on several projects, among them the VM housing blocks, completed in Copenhagen in 2006. One of the buildings is V-shaped and features fun triangular balconies, while the other is M-shaped and has smooth facades. “They were shaped that way as they afforded the best views and light, given the environment,” explains De Smedt. They also look fun and playful. “I think of them as a three-dimensional game of Tetris,” he says.

He designed the buildings together with the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels. The two met while working for the renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in the late 90s. They left, originally to direct a movie together. “We got some funding from [Danish director] Lars Von Trier’s production company, which is why we came to Copenhagen,” explains De Smedt. “But the project fell through and we went back to what we knew.”

They founded their firm, called Plot, in 2001 and parted ways in 2006 to concentrate on their own projects – but not before they had designed acclaimed schemes such as the Copenhagen



Top: Gonzalo Pacheco  
Images: IDS Architects, Nikky Valdes

Brussels Airlines: The Architect  
February 2008

## FROM SKATEBOARDS TO skyscrapers

Belgian architect Julien De Smedt first found his place in the urban environment as a skateboarder – now he’s transforming how we live in it





I think skateboarding is the reason why I became an architect

**Van skateboard tot met behouder**

Julien De Smaet is een Belgische architect die bekend staat om zijn unieke ontwerpen. Hij heeft een passie voor skateboarden, wat hem heeft geïnspireerd om deze sport te integreren in zijn architectuur. Zijn ontwerp voor een skatepark in Brussel is een voorbeeld van zijn creatieve aanpak.

**Above** The Maritime House in Copenhagen may have boats, but it's not the reason he became an architect. Below is a floating island with a roller coaster. It's being developed as a spa resort, but you can imagine other uses for it. My projects as how it evolved, they're not aesthetic achievements or genius coups with no grounding in reality, explains De Smaet. They are studies that can be adapted to different environments and conditions, so they can be easily exported.

Perhaps his most important project is that of the vertical city, a glass tower making housing and minor public parks. "It is using promotes offer terraces on condominium projects as a luxurious option, but they're usually too small and if they're 30m off the ground, they become unusable because of the wind," he explains. "I instead I want to create common indoor parks that can be used year round. You could have a barbecue in December, for instance. They would also be naturally ventilated and you could have turbines that provide free energy."

The environment is an important concern, too. "Green building is the current buzzword in architecture, with every one not having to respect guidelines such as good insulation. But you can imagine that these buildings in addition to being sustainable in a passive way could be actively sustainable by creating their own energy. For instance, you could have buildings with windmills. That's one of the things we're working on."

One project De Smaet is particularly excited about is the opening of an office in Brussels this past New Year's Eve. "The thing that drew me away from Brussels, a sense of stagnation in the city, seems to be disappearing. There are signs of renewed energy, with young architects opening off-sets and fashion designers moving in from Antwerp... things are happening in Brussels."



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