Belgium was the partner country of the Business of Design Week (BODW) in Hong Kong last December, an amazing event which put Belgium on the map of Hong Kong for a whole week and attracted huge media and political attention.

Under the banner the “Belgian Spirit”, Brussels, Wallonia and Flanders showcased the best of their design artists and companies.

The presence of our new Queen Mathilde, who gave an inspiring speech at the opening of the BODW, provided undoubtedly a boost to the Belgian participants and demonstrated that Belgium’s diversity is an amazing trump card if it is played with practical and political skills.

Participating in the many functions during this event, I felt proud to be a Belgian. It is extraordinary to see how Belgians are appreciated, even liked in places such as Hong Kong. Belgian chocolate, waffles, beer and food are fabulous marketing tools for our country.

But marketing is a means to show the real strengths of our country: creativity and entrepreneurship.

The contribution of the Belgium Hong Kong Society in the success of Belgium’s participation in the BODW was meaningful. BHKS was one of the first to press the idea of the three regions working together in Hong Kong, and its Education Fund supported a project by the Flanders District of Creativity to send a delegation to Hong Kong as part of a “Belgium Hong Kong Design Education Program”. At the Chinese New Year reception end of January 2014, one of the participants gave a resounding testimony of his experience in Hong Kong.

When I was in Hong Kong in December, I attended for the first time in many years the Hong Kong Forum, an annual event organised by the Federation of Hong Kong Business Associations Worldwide, chaired by our good friend and Vice Chairman of BHKS, Georges Legros.

This Hong Kong Forum is now a well-established fixture in Hong Kong’s international agenda, bringing together from all over the world Hong Kong’s best friends. I enjoyed every moment of the Forum with high level speakers and unprecedented network opportunities. Thank you Georges, for such a good job. I will be back in December for the 15th Forum.
BHKS Activities in 2013-2014

By Lily Lee
Secretary, Belgium-Hong Kong Society

Under the leadership of our board members and with the support of BHKS members, we had a fantastic 2013-2014.

Meeting with Hong Kong senior officials

Mr Gregory So, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of Hong Kong, visited Brussels on 28 May. He met the BHKS Board Members to update them on the latest Economic developments in Hong Kong and to listen to their views on operating businesses and working in Belgium and Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Film Panorama in Brussels

During the 7th edition of the Hong Kong Film Panorama on 26 August - 5 September 2013, BHKS presented along with Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Brussels (HKETO, Brussels) four Hong Kong movies. Around 140 Hong Kong enthusiasts attended the opening reception.

Hong Kong Designers’ Night

A delegation of Hong Kong designers visited Brussels from 18 to 22 September 2013 to participate in the Design September festival. On 20 September, HKETO, Brussels and BHKS hosted a special evening event at The Egg, a fashion show featuring creations of the Hong Kong designers and a performance of Belgian contemporary dance. Around 250 guests attended.

Mid-Autumn Hong Kong Reception

On 2 October, the BHKS co-organized the Mid-Autumn Hong Kong Reception with HKETO, Brussels. Around 100 guests including members of the BHKS attended the event. Participants had the chance to exchange with a high-level delegation from the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation led by its CEO Mr Allen Ma.

Hong Kong Forum 2013

The Hong Kong Forum 2013 took place on 3-4 December 2013, assembling 34 Hong-Kong business associations in 24 countries and more than 11,000 individual business executives and professionals from around the world. BHKS Chairman Mr Piet Steel and Vice-Chairman Mr Georges Legros (who is also the Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Business Associations Worldwide) attended the event.

BHKS Annual Dinner

The BHKS Annual Dinner was held at Confucius Restaurant, Brussels on 6 January 2014. Over 20 members enjoyed a relaxing chat and networking opportunity with great Chinese food.

Chinese New Year Reception

On 29 January 2014, the Chinese New Year Reception co-organised by the HKETO, Brussels, BHKS and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council was held at Albert Hall in Brussels. Over 500 guests enjoyed the inspiring speech by the guest of honour, Minister of Finance Koen Geens, the excellent piano performance by young pianist Aristo Sham, as well as the wide variety of Chinese and European cuisines.

Every year, we organise lucky draw at the reception to raise money for the BHKS Education Fund. The raffle ticket sale raised a total of EUR 2,610. Adding the EUR 1,700 sponsorship in cash, the total amount raised for the BHKS Education Fund this year was EUR 4,310. BHKS would like to take this opportunity to thank all our generous sponsors and donors for supporting this meaningful cause.

More information about the BHKS Education Fund could be found on page 9.
Chinese New Year Reception 2014, Albert Hall Brussels

... in pictures

Hong Kong Film Panorama 2013
The worst day for becoming an entrepreneur is tomorrow. But, becoming an entrepreneur is not easy. One has to leave behind the security of a job, a salary, a status, a company car, mealvouchers, pensionsavingsplans, bonus-plans, nice colleagues, to the insecurity of being on your own, with no one who calls you to have a meeting.

Why do you think companies give their employees all these benefits? They do it because they know that you will not leave them to start up on your own. You have too much to lose.

Walking over to the other side of the street is so difficult because you are afraid you will fail or once you’re there you will never be able to come back and earn as much as you did before. So how does one overcome the fear? How do you deal with failure? And what can fuzzy logic do for you as an entrepreneur?

In order to overcome the fear of being on your own, many people decide to invest in an existing business. I did that. I took a 30% stake in a furniture business. Furniture is great! Everybody needs it and with 4 shops in top retail locations this was a no brainer! The business was indebted but with my money and skills it would soon become a money machine.

Taking a minority stake in a business sometimes works but in my case after 1,5 years the business I had invested all my savings in, went bankrupt. I was back on my own.

What did I learn? Do not invest in a business that you do not know, and definitely do not think that somebody else is there to make you successful. Also if someone comes up to you with an investment idea and tells you: “this business is a no–brainer” … start using your brains!

Having no money, I had to cross over again to become an employee… I had left a large multinational where I was liked as factory manager to become an entrepreneur where I was respected (although as a minority shareholder but still with a large company car), to an unemployed failure. Twice a week I went to the unemployment office to get a stamp on my unemployment card. How low could I get! I had to go back to the job market and find a job.

After 6 months I was hired by a company and landed in a team where my boss was a woman who was 2 years younger than me. I had to follow procedures and had to report on a daily basis what I did and what I was gonna do tomorrow to get customers. 3 years later I decided it was time to try again.

This time no minority stakes, no debt financing, no employees. Just me, a phone and a computer. On September 1st 2006 I started my new company. ADM Financial Casting. My office was my attic and my car and old Citroen Xantia bought for 1200 € on the internet. This time I was going to make it! I knew the business, I had no costs and surely, customers would see that I could do the same what my competitors did but then at a lower price!

Four months later, I had no customers and no more cash. I was depressed and was thinking how foolish I was to think that I could be successful. If it would have been so easy why was nobody else doing it? How come I did not see that? What was I thinking? Why did I ever leave my job?

As it often happens with fuzzy logic, you’ve got to hit rock bottom before you can start climbing back up. You really
have to go through the valley of darkness feeling lost. And then suddenly, just when you start thinking that it cannot get any darker, there is light.

On December 21st 2006 I landed my first contract and 10 days later sent my first (and only) invoice of that year. Moreover, it was a project in Hong Kong which made me extra confident about the fact that I had partnered with one of my old classmates of the University of Hong Kong to execute this project. A month later my second and third contract were signed and since then I have not looked back anymore.

I have talked about fear and failure. Let me tell you now about fuzzy logic. We are taught in school that in order to solve a problem or a difficult situation one has to break up the problem into small parts, solve that and then put everything back so it becomes a solution. Problems are binary: it is either yes or no. Black or white. Often though, the small parts do not fit completely back into each other and you create more problems. Or the solution is not the one that you expected. Also often you have no time to break up the problem and because there is no yes or no answer you do nothing and the problem blows up in your face even before you have solved it.

My experience is that often the best solution comes from an approach where you kick the problem around. Apply several solutions until you find the one that fits the problem. Sometimes by applying a first solution the problem changes and you’ve got to go into a different direction. It takes more time and some sleepless nights but you are moving forward during the process. Also, when you cannot find a solution maybe that problem will lead you to other issues which you never thought of. By taking another path, moving away from what you initially planned you sometimes come back on the main path, finding that the problem is not relevant anymore. Fuzzy logic is about connecting dots. It is about trying different paths to get to your goal. When you have tried everything you could, and it seems there is nothing left to do but quit your dream of being an entrepreneur, try the next thing that comes to your mind.
Belgium - Hong Kong Design School Exchange Program: the start of a new network

By Carlo Vuijsteke
Member, Belgium-Hong Kong Society
Project Manager, Flanders District Creativity VZW

In December 2013, Belgium was the official partner country of the Hong Kong Business of Design Week, one of the most important and prestigious design events in Asia.

A unique opportunity to put the spotlights on Belgian design and related industries and to build closer ties with Hong Kong’s creative industries. With the support of the Education Fund of the Belgium – Hong Kong Society, a Belgian delegation of talented design students and teachers was able to participate in a unique exchange program with the Hong Kong Design Institute.

The Belgium-Hong Kong Design Education Program proposed design, fashion and architecture students and teachers a 3 day full exchange program with lectures on the (business of) design in Hong Kong/Asia, a design co-creation workshop with students and teachers of the Hong Kong Design Institute, portfolio pecha kucha sessions and a visit to the Business of Design Week Forum. “The focus of this program was to promote a better understanding between young design potentials of Belgium and Hong Kong, to give them the chance to showcase their work, exchange knowledge and build a network” explains Carlo Vuijsteke of Flanders District of Creativity, the organisation that coordinated the program together with various partners.

With the financial aid of the Belgium-Hong Kong Society a group of 11 students and teachers of the Royal Academy of Arts in Ghent, University College West-Flanders, the Media, Arts & Design Faculty in Genk, the Antwerp University, the Ecole de Recherche Graphique of Brussels and Saint-Luc Liège took part in the program.

On the first day of the program they were welcomed at the Hong Kong Design Institute, attended a series of lectures by Hong Kong students and teachers, but also presented their own work and got to know the various programs of the Hong Kong Design Institute through a campus tour. But the most exciting part of course was to get really interactive! On the second day the Belgian delegates took on the challenge together with Hong Kong students to co-create a modular shoe concept. In a workshop led by teachers of the Royal Academy of Arts (Ghent) the group was introduced to the theoretical principles of “intuition driven design” and then challenged to apply their creativity to come up together with a new kind of shoe.

On the last day the delegation was able to attend the Business of Design Week Forum, visit the Inno Design Tech Expo and get to know Hong Kong designers and companies.

Meanwhile, throughout the program, the group was invited to several network opportunities, such as the Belgian Spirit reception and the official opening of the Business of Design Week Forum and the Dress Code and Design in Motion exhibitions at the Hong Kong Design Institute. And of course they also got the opportunity to discover the city of Hong Kong and sample some of its culinary delights!

“My week in Hong Kong was much like taking a walk in the city: bursting with opportunities and different experiences at every corner” says design student Thomas Michiels, who also gave a presentation on interaction design. Teacher Clara Vankersschaver of the Royal Academy of Arts agrees: “The trip was mind-blowing: I developed a taste for the Far East and I will definitely keep in touch with the contacts I made”.

In December 2013, Belgium was the official partner country of the Hong Kong Business of Design Week, one of the most important and prestigious design events in Asia.
The BHKS Education Fund

The BHKS Education Fund was established by the BHKS in 2010 to sponsor Exchange activities of young people between Belgium and Hong Kong with a view to promoting stronger and more sustainable ties between the two countries.

The BHKS Education Fund aims at supporting projects such as familiarization visits to Hong Kong, study tours and short-term academic Exchange programmes between Belgium and Hong Kong, non-profit making projects to enhance cultural Exchange between Belgium and Hong Kong.

Application is open to any student organisation and association formed in universities and other tertiary institutions in Belgium. The BHKS invites application for financial sponsorship from the BHKS Education fund.

For more information, please visit our website at www.bhks.be
Belgium's contribution to the Luxury goods scene in Hong Kong

By Sheila Arora
Board Member, Belgium-Hong Kong Society
Director, The Source Public Relations & Communications

Belgium’s contribution to the Luxury goods scene in Hong Kong received Royal endorsement by HRH Queen Mathilde at the hugely successful Business of Design Week held at HKTDC in December 2013.

As partner country for largest design event held annually in Hong Kong, the delegation of politicians and designers led by the Queen of Belgium ensured due credit to Belgium’s status as a world leader in the field of luxury and design.

Belgian Fashion, architecture and design have long been present in Hong Kong. Just 10 years after the opening of his ModePalais store in Antwerp, Dries van Noten opened his first boutique in September 1997 to much acclaim. Like his fellow Antwerp 6 designers, he continues to count Hong Kong as one of his most loyal and successful markets.

May the same be true for Delvaux, the luxury leather goods makers, in which Hong Kong’s Fung Brands Limited acquired a majority stake (80%) in 2011. After last year’s star-studded opening at Lane Crawford in IFC, the brand took full advantage of their Royal patronage and presence to offer a unique 100-limited edition bag designed by Charles Kaisin, available only in Hong Kong.

The ICE watch global phenomena also found pride of place at BoDW, where the Belgian founder and CEO, Jean-Pierre Lutgen spoke proudly of the success of his brand, started only in 2007 but today present on 5 continents, with 12,000 retail outlets, 5 of which, including a flagship store, are in Hong Kong.

At BoDW, Lutgen’s Belgian pride was matched by the impressive display of just what Belgian designers can achieve. Antwerp’s A.F. Vandevorst presented the ‘world’s most expensive shoes’, black leather wedge ankle boots boasting 39,083 champagne, pink and grey diamonds totaling 1,550 carats and set in 4,783 grams of gold. Chef Pascal Devalkeneer of the 2 Michelin Star Le Chalet de la Forêt in Brussels catered a sumptuous banquet for a Surreal evening for Hong Kong’s VIP’s as well as a who’s who of celebrity Belgians including urban furniture designer Xavier Lust, hat-maker Elvis Pompilio and CEO for Ann Demeulemeester, Anne Chapelle. Godiva, now with 7 chocolate boutiques in Hong Kong, is testament to the success of Belgium in Hong Kong.

Long live the legacy of Belgium and the Belgian Spirit, the brand under which Belgium featured to present the work of some 50 established as well as upcoming designers at Business of Design Week 2013.
Belgian Wines in the SAR – When Strategy meets Design

By Cédric Thiry
Member, Belgium-Hong Kong Society
General Manager, SEED Advisory Ltd Belgium Hong Kong

Together with our Partner ADM Financial Casting, SEED Advisory sponsored the Surreal Dinner on December 5th organized in the Context of Belgian Spirit and Business of Design Week (BoDW) in Hong Kong in December. This VIP dinner took place in the Hong Kong Design Institute where Belgian and Hong Kong Officials together with Hong Kong VIPs were invited to a very special dinner occasion.

Being renowned for its hospitality and joie de vivre, Belgium offered its Hong Kong based contacts a taste of Belgian Haute Cuisine in a surrealistic setting. The dinner, designed like a daydream, a meeting between Alice in Wonderland and Belgian Surrealism, was challenging all senses of each individual guest.

Inspired by the paintings of René Magritte and James Ensor, Designer Charles Kaisin, who was appointed as scenographer and organizer for this very special experience, offered a culinary journey through Belgian cuisine, with Chef Pascal De Valkeneer leading the kitchen team. In that context SEED and ADM served a unique selection of Belgian sparkling wine, wines, beer, liquor and alcohol pairing with Pascal’s exclusive cuisine.

As a participant to this VVIP dinner it was an extraordinary feeling of witnessing Belgium represented as one country and presenting one of our most representative creative and artistic movement which is surrealism. Imagine a 30-meter long table, every dish served by one waiter per two guests, each waiter dressed in fashionable attire or wearing luxury accessories, all designed by Belgian Ventures. This visual composition was complemented by a set of eclectic music styles ranging from Stromae to live representation of a Belgian opera singer.

Proposing and serving Belgian beverages from the opening drink to dessert was a great challenge to us: a creative challenge to brainstorm with Chef Pascal, Charles and our Beverage Creation Expert at SEED; a technical challenge to select and pair the best bottles among a large scope of “precious gems” and sometimes not so known exceptional Belgian wines, produced in our vineyards of Flanders and Walloon Region or brewed in our Brussels cellars. This is how strategy has met design: be creative in allying the originality of Belgian beverages-making skills with Hong Kong’s support to creative industries hype.
“No future for Hong Kong, she is just a dying gone by glory.”

By Thomas Ronse
Board Member, Belgium-Hong Kong Society
Market analyst Asia-Pacific AWEX

Thirty years ago, at the time of the Sino–British Joint Declaration, there was for many a great deal of pessimism regarding Hong Kong future.

Until the 1997 Handover many were scrutinising Hong Kong to see if there was still some future. It was even worse during the Eldorado gold rush to mainland China. People were openly questioning the good value for money of Hong Kong compared to the rapidly rising newcomer Shanghai.

2014. After thirty years of doubts, pessimism or bashing, Hong Kong is still thriving. So what when wrong? Well nothing for Hong Kong itself, it still has its own world known qualities. When you are number one it is not always simple to get a better ranking. There are for sure things to improve but improvement is a never ending process.

The facts are there: if you look at risk levels analysed by Delcredere/Ducroire – Belgium’s public credit insurer – commercial risk is the highest in China (C rate) while it is the lowest in Hong Kong (A rate).

Some people did for a long time argue that China is much cheaper than Hong Kong. Let us be honest, it was true but it is less and less the case. Indeed China is now more and more expensive but does not match yet the quality of services in Hong Kong. It takes a long time to improve the quality of workforce, services, rule of law and especially law enforcement and to lower levels of red tape, institutional uncertainty and pollution.

And the competition? Well, to be kind, the room for improvement is still very big. Quite a lot of people lost illusions while doing business in China: many Chinese businessmen are more interested by a quick win – rarely a win-win – rather than long term cooperation. Many people lost their illusions on the great China Wall of reality.

You cannot go alone conquering China especially if you are a Belgian SME. Its size, differences in culture and business practices are so huge that it is paramount to have a good and reliable partner. Hong Kong with its mixed cultural heritage is for sure the best place to go and it will be for a long time to go. Sorry for the pessimists.
Cathay Pacific Shares the joy of flight!

By Laura Percy
Board Member, Belgium–Hong Kong Society
Country Manager Benelux and Scandinavia, Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd

CX8795 carried the spirit of Hong Kong inside and out when it took off from Chek Lap Kok on 26 January.

The plane bore the new “Spirit of Hong Kong” livery, which features the silhouettes of the winners of a recent campaign that called on the public to submit images illustrating the city’s essential character. Its passengers were less-advantaged, single-parent families who had all demonstrated how they embodied the spirit of Hong Kong in various ways. Many of them had never flown before, and they had certainly not flown together as a family. For participants, the flight was made all the more memorable by a special passenger – HKSAR Chief Executive C Y Leung, who was the guest of honour. Also on the flight were CX’s Chief Executive John Slosar, Director Corporate Affairs Chitty Cheung, and some 40 volunteers who ranged from ground staff to cockpit and cabin crew.

The families spent quality time with each other for 90 minutes 25,000 feet in the air, enjoying bird’s-eye views of the South China Sea and the city, tucking into inflight meals and checking out the programmes on the in-flight entertainment system. The general excitement peaked when Mr Leung and John made their way to the Economy cabin to chat and give out traditional Chinese New Year cookies to participants before the plane landed back in Hong Kong.

The flight was unforgettable for everyone involved for very different reasons. For first-time flyer Ho Jai, who lives in Sham Shui Po with his mother and sister, the flight was literally a dizzying experience. “I was so excited when the plane was in the air. I’ve never been this close to clouds before, and the ships were tiny from above, like models,” the 11-year-old enthused.

Twelve-year-old Kelly was just happy that she got to spend time with her mother and sister. “I don’t get much time with my family ordinarily. I’d love to go with my family on a trip. I don’t mind where we go as long as we are together,” she said. CX worked with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and four NGOs to select the flight’s participants. This was the airline’s fourth community flight.
Hong Kong Trade Outlook 2014

By David Marsden
Board member, Belgium–Hong Kong Society
Director, Hong Kong Trade Development Council (Uk & Benelux)

Hong Kong’s total trade with the world rose by 3.7% in 2013 to US$ 977 billion. Total exports grew by 3.6% to US$ 456.4 billion, while Hong Kong imports were up by 3.8% to US$ 520.6 billion.

Hong Kong’s trade with Belgium increased by 4.7% last year to US$6.7 billion. Imports from Belgium rose by 6.2% to US$3.7 billion, with strong growth in sales of precious and semi-precious stones, perfumes, photographic supplies, meat, chocolates, road vehicles, computer parts and telecommunications equipment.

Hong Kong global exports in 2014 are expected to grow by 5.5%, according to the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC). Global trade should benefit from a synchronised upturn in the developed economies, heightened reforms on the Chinese mainland and the positive outcome of the WTO trade talks in Bali.

The EU is showing signs of recovery, given its ultra-loose monetary policies, fiscal consolidation and the structural reforms in a number of countries.

In Europe many retailers now source direct from manufacturers and suppliers, so it is increasingly important for Hong Kong exporters to establish direct links with low-cost European Union retailers. There is a favourable sales outlook across Europe for exporters of stylish, environmentally friendly, competitively priced products.

Hong Kong suppliers can capitalise on their ability and flexibility to produce customised designs superior to their competitors elsewhere in Asia.
The Belgium-Hong Kong Society

The Belgium-Hong Kong Society was formed in Brussels, Belgium in 1986 to promote bilateral economic, social and cultural exchanges between Belgium and Hong Kong. The society comprises Belgian business leaders who are connected with Asia, Mainland China and Hong Kong.

Being a member of the Belgium-Hong Kong society will enable you to enjoy various events from networking receptions and business seminars to the Chinese new year and film events.

Members of the BHKS are guaranteed free entry to all BHKS events and will be granted free membership to the Federation of Hong Kong Business Associations Worldwide, which connects you to over 11,000 businessmen in over 24 countries who are also interested in Hong Kong and many other business benefits.

Application for membership of the Belgium-Hong Kong Society can be done online on our website (www.bhks.be) or by phone (+32 2 775 0093). The Belgium-Hong Kong Society offers three types of memberships: Corporate (€ 200 per year), individual (€ 75 per year) and Young memberships (€ 20 per year; age under 35).

If you would like to have more information on the Belgium-Hong Kong Society, the Board Members listed below would be delighted to hear from you. Contact details can be obtained by calling: +32 (0)2 775 0088.

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