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WAB

WAB MAGAZINE 50 | SUMMER 2026

WALLONIA AND BRUSSELS

BIG PICTURE | Sophie Houtmeyers : Director of Skechers' EDC
FOCUS | Walloon companies working behind the scenes of the World Cup
TECHNOLOGY | I-care: Prediction is better than cure

editorial



EVERYTHING COMES TO THOSE WHO WAIT*



© Christophe Ketels

Of course, we crave the immediacy of success, that moment of glorious achievement! In today's world of rapid communication, transport and manufacturing, we'd love to believe it's just round the next corner, behind the next door. And yet: when it comes to cutting-edge, high-quality services and products, such as those which have made Wallonia famous, it seems that taking the time to get it right is ultimately worth far more.

An idea takes shape; a project is implemented. Small-scale at first, then it grows, is subsequently refined, becomes more precise, adopting a different angle of approach—or several—until it becomes the thing that makes all the difference. Even more so if it's on an international level or at a large scale. If you want to be involved in the hype and buzz surrounding the Football World Cup, you will need to equip yourself with the same constant tenacity, both in-house, at the development stage, and externally, by listening ever more closely to your client's objectives. Technique, of course, but it's also about culture, influence, reaching across countries and sectors.

Is there a lesson to be learned here? No, just making an inspiring observation linked to the feature in this issue. Kicking the ball and scoring an awesome goal takes years of training for the national teams. And for the companies involved, it means constantly re-evaluating their approach and refining their positioning. What we are attempting here is to offer encouragement in this quest for the grail.

Please enjoy WAB 50!

Pascale Delcomminette
CEO of Wallonia Export & Investment Agency

*François Rabelais, *Quart Livre*, Chapter 48 (mid-16th century).

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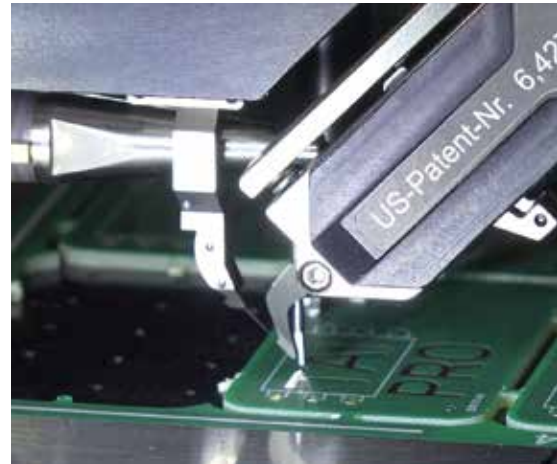
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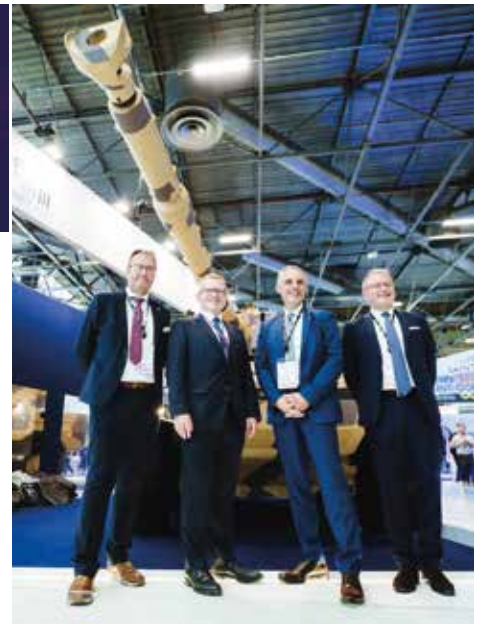
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an interactive experience



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WALLONIA MAKES A STRONG SHOWING AT EUROSATORY 2026



Global defence tradeshow Eurosatory, held in Paris from 15 to 19 June, hosted a Wallonia Export & Investment Agency stand for the first time, bringing together around ten Walloon SMEs (ALX Systems, AnyShape, IDDEA, Pix Coating, Sobelcomp, etc.) alongside industry heavyweights FN Herstal, John Cockerill and Thales. Stay tuned – we'll be covering this in the next issue of the WAB.



WALLONIA EXPORT & INVESTMENT AGENCY LAUNCHES TWO NEW DIGITAL PORTALS

Buy in Wallonia and Invest in Wallonia are now online. The first provides a free directory of Walloon export companies for international buyers and partners. The second highlights the region's geographical and economic appeal, with personalised support provided by Wallonia Export & Investment Agency.

<https://buyinwallonia.be/en>
<https://invest.walloniaexportinvestment.be/en/>



THE CASTER FOOTBRIDGE LINKS WALLONIA AND THE NETHERLANDS

A joint initiative of Walloon municipalities Visé, Bassenge and Oupeye, and with support from the Walloon Region, this suspended footbridge aims to strengthen cross-border relations and raise awareness of environmental conservation. A remarkable technical achievement, it promotes soft mobility and leisure activities in the region.

<https://www.vialta.info/>



GSK INVESTS €150 MILLION IN RIXENSART

The pharmaceutical giant has opened a 6,000 m² clinical laboratory in Walloon Brabant. Here, around 300 staff will analyse clinical trial samples from around the world to help speed up the development of future vaccines. The site will be fully operational in 2027.





23 years of supplying shoes across Europe

She speaks of Wallonia as a territory to defend, to promote and to raise to greater heights. Sophie Houtmeyers, Director of Skechers' European Distribution Centre (EDC) at Herstal, heads their biggest European logistics hub.

She started working at Skechers in 2002, in an empty building with no office and no team. That is where she had her interview, at a table with three chairs. 23 years later, the same warehouse has become the biggest EDC owned by the American brand.

Although she is Flemish, she has spent most of her career in Wallonia, and she is proud of

it. "I want to take Wallonia to the next level." She has spent 30 years in the logistics industry, with 23 of them at Skechers. The American company, won over by her experience and vision, entrusted her with the simultaneous responsibility of multiple countries: Brazil, Chile, Japan, UK, and Belgium. Her multi-faceted experience, particularly through her role as President of Logistics in Wallonia, is recognised worldwide. "I provide advice and a business plan whenever the company calls me regarding overseas sites or relocations."



Pictures © Gregory Halliday





The Herstal site has expanded several times. It is a whole ecosystem that works round the clock to supply Europe, involving Jost, the biggest Walloon transportation company, training agencies, the multimodal operators at Liege Airport, and much more. The site currently employs over 1,000 people of 20 nationalities. “Some of them have been around since Day 1, and their children have now joined them. Sometimes, we have multiple generations working for Skechers Belgium.” It is no coincidence! While Sophie understands that the US-based parent company demands results, she inspires her teams with her unique leadership style, and unwavering optimism. “I consider everyone to be equal, whether an employee or a director. People are proud to be working here, and that is evident from the results.”

The next chapter is being written not far from Herstal, in Bierset. A 230,000 m² automated complex has been planned right next to Liege Airport. “It will be one of Europe’s most significant logistics projects in the next few years.” It was Sophie Houtmeyers who convinced the California-based parent company, with the winning argument being the retention of over 1,000 jobs. “I travelled to the US several times to make this point. Staying in Wallonia meant keeping the people there.”

“

I consider everyone to be equal, whether an employee or a director.

SOPHIE’S TIPS

- “In Japan, for example, a meeting takes about 4 hours, whereas here in Belgium, it lasts about an hour. I learnt that the journey is not always the most important thing.”
- “One must step outside one’s comfort zone, in the search for new experiences, to meet new people and to pursue one’s passions.”



For over 24 years, the American company Skechers has been sending sport and casual footwear throughout Europe from Wallonia.

As one of Wallonia's largest employers, the site comprises over 1,000 staff.

Opened in 2002, the centre has grown and become the largest distribution centre in Wallonia.

Pictures © Gregory Halliday





I-care

PREDICTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

When Fabrice Brion and Arnaud Stiévenart founded I-care in Mons in 2004, artificial intelligence did not yet exist as a mainstream concept in the industrial domain. Two decades later, after becoming a unicorn in 2025, the company is valued at 1.16 billion dollars and monitors its clients' machinery in over 55 countries.





What is predictive maintenance?

Predictive maintenance involves monitoring and analysing the condition of industrial equipment with the aim of anticipating failures and planning maintenance well before a breakdown occurs. I-care is able to pull off this Herculean feat through its Wi-care™ sensors and its AI I-see™ platform, which monitor over 500,000 machines worldwide. “Prediction is better than cure”, says Fabrice Brion.

Having been transformed from a final-year project to a global leader in predictive maintenance, I-care has banked on artificial intelligence for a long time. And despite the current developments, Fabrice Brion says, “My relationship with AI remains unchanged. AI enables us to make the best decisions, just like a calculator or Excel in their heyday.” As a pioneer in its field, the company has built a sustainable lead over its competitors while retaining exceptional customer loyalty. “We have never lost any strategic clients.”

I-care’s leading position was built up methodically, with 8 acquisitions in 8 years and over 35 offices in 15 countries. And yet, the staff turnover rate remains below 2% for over 1,000 employees. The company’s position is also built on solid internal foundations. “It is important to define one’s values, uphold them, and above all, to be consistent with them.” Performance, sustainability and respect: 3 words that govern everything from hiring staff to day-to-day decision making. I-care has 350 employee shareholders as well. “It is a way of saying that we are building something together.” Their headquarters remains at Parc Initialis in Mons, a deliberate choice. “The advantage of technology is that one can work from anywhere in the world. And Mons works perfectly well.”

The next phase is on par with the company’s ambitions: opening up the capital to external investors in 2026 and aiming for an initial public offering (IPO) in 2027. The predictive maintenance market is estimated to grow tenfold. “We want to retain our leading market position, which means we must grow tenfold. We must get everything in place from a technological and organisational point of view, whilst preserving our Belgian roots, maintaining a low turnover rate and having a majority of employee shareholders.



BE-VOLT

A GIGAFACTORY BANKING ON COBALT-FREE LITHIUM

Noshin Omar, a professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and energy storage specialist, founded AVESTA Holding in 2019 on the basis of a bold technological gambit: building high-performance lithium iron phosphate (LFP) batteries in Europe without nickel or cobalt. With Avesta Battery & Energy Engineering, AVESTA Holding decided to build its first BE-VOLT gigafactory in Wallonia.



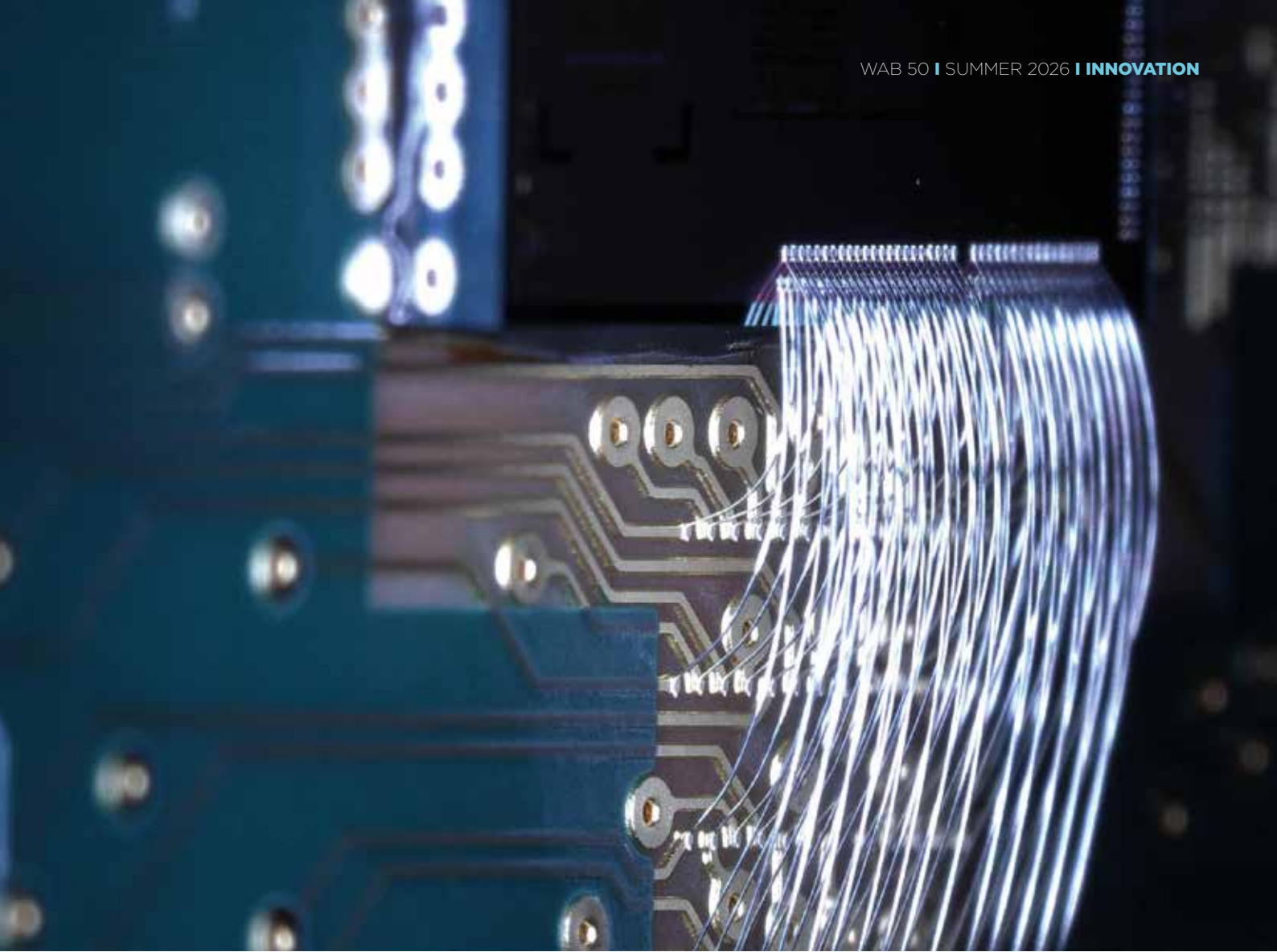
While the Flemish holding company is investing in LFP technology, the sector is dominated by Chinese manufacturers. "We are proud to have believed in this technology from the start and to have been able to build this project using our own resources," AVESTA Holding CFO Shilan Omar told us. With the active support of Wallonia Export & Investment Agency, the project is taking shape. The single permit for the factory at Seneffe-Manage was granted in August 2025 and construction work has begun.

"BE-VOLT will be the first LFP battery gigafactory in Benelux." With an initial capacity of 3 GWh per year, the aim is to reach 10 GWh by 2030, and its output has already been sold out before opening. The batteries will power domestic energy storage, light electric vehicles, maritime and hospital equipment in a 500km area, prioritizing logistical uses with the least possible environmental impact. "We predict we will recruit about a hundred people in phase 1, eventually employing a total of 200 to 300 staff in the long term."

But BE-VOLT is not just an assembly line. "Any company that brings LFP batteries to the market must be able to recycle them, and Europe is currently lacking in this respect." A 30,000-tonne capacity recycling centre is being planned, which will use a mechanical approach that is much more energy-efficient than the one for processing nickel cobalt batteries. R&D is based at AVESTA's headquarters in Ninove, which houses laboratories and development capacities that are used by the whole group.

And Seneffe is only the start: AVESTA is also launching projects in several European countries at the same time. "Wallonia is our shop window. We are aiming for four to five European gigafactories within the next ten years."





Taipro Engineering

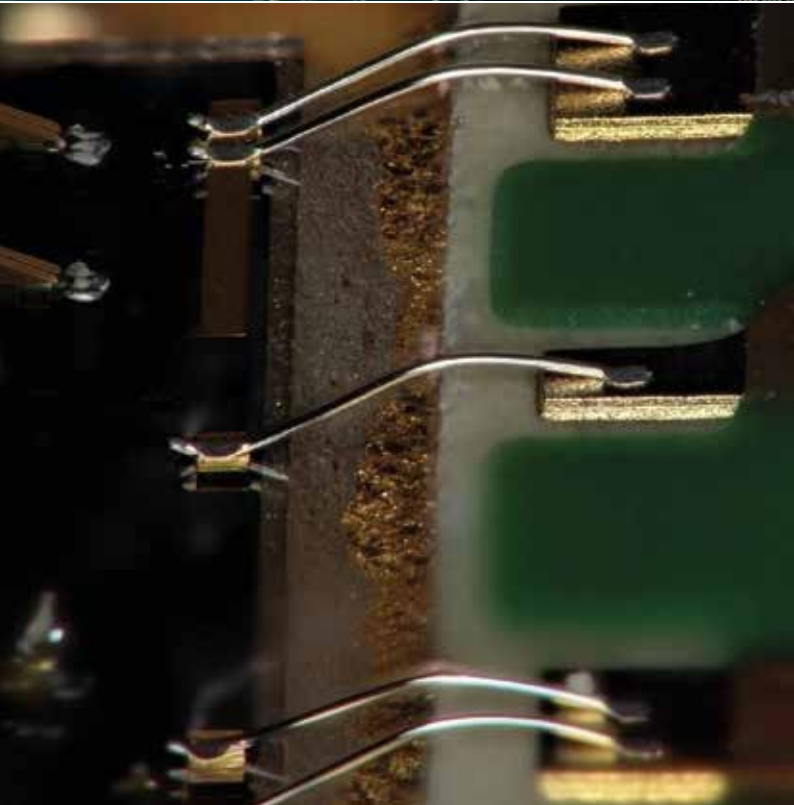
SCALING UP THE MICROSCOPIC

Somewhere on the Lambremont industrial park, the smallest pressure sensors in the world are manufactured. 1.2 mm in diameter. 100,000 data points per second. Capable of withstanding up to 185 °C. Taipro cofounder Michel Saint-Mard knows that he provides a technology that no one else can.

Founded in 2009 as a spin-off from the Université de Liège, Taipro follows a model that is easy to explain but hard to achieve: designing and producing tailored microelectronics from start to finish, under the same roof. “Our clients do not find what they require from off-the-shelf products. As a rule, we always have the solution and can always make a better version of what already exists by creating a tailored product.” This one-stop-shop is the only one of its kind in Western Europe and provides solutions to Formula 1 as well as the aviation, medical, defence and space industries.

Sensorade, created in 2019, is another part of the story. While Taipro provides tailored solutions, Sensorade develops MEMS sensors and markets them through a network of distributors which now spans four continents.

On average, Taipro carries out about 130 projects and produces 40,000 units every year. An impressive output for a team of just 12 to 13 people. This figure might take readers by surprise. “At the start, we produced about 100 units a year and there were 3 or 4 of us. Without automation and some crucial

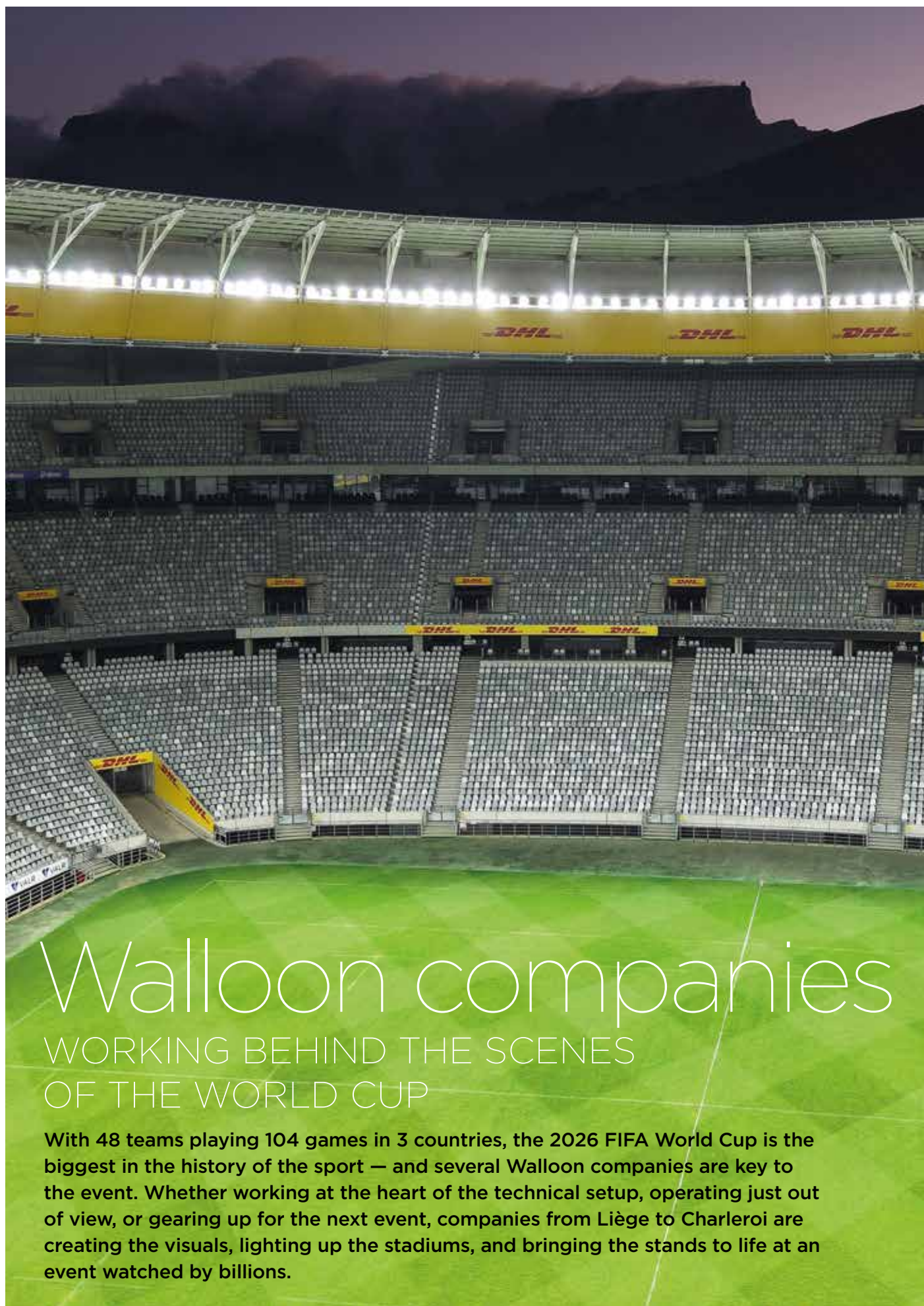


investments, we wouldn't be where we are today." Their expertise is paying dividends: 6 world firsts in 17 years, 5 European projects in progress and a consistently high conversion rate for bids.

This year will likely be a major milestone for the company: a new ISO 7 cleanroom, the doubling of production capacity, and discussions are well underway on creating a technology platform that would be shared with an industrial partner which could open up new opportunities. "It is a real source of pride in terms of Walloon technological expertise."

TAI PRO
Engineering





Walloon companies

WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES
OF THE WORLD CUP

With 48 teams playing 104 games in 3 countries, the 2026 FIFA World Cup is the biggest in the history of the sport — and several Walloon companies are key to the event. Whether working at the heart of the technical setup, operating just out of view, or gearing up for the next event, companies from Liège to Charleroi are creating the visuals, lighting up the stadiums, and bringing the stands to life at an event watched by billions.



EVS AND DELTACAST bringing images to the world from Liege

No modern sport, especially football, can forego slow motion technology. Since 1994, Liège-based EVS has mastered this awe-inspiring effect, which was made famous during the 1998 World Cup and has been used ever since by the biggest international sporting events. EVS has certainly not lost its touch since, as it won the contract with HBS, the host broadcaster for the tournament, to cover all 104 games. From slow-mo and action replays to content management and distribution, EVS provides a complete technological and service ecosystem. "This World Cup notably includes VIA MAP, a platform that enables the remote production and management of content to be centralised in London, thereby avoiding the need to move whole teams to the American continent," CEO Serge Van Herck said, "it is the first time this technology has been used on such a scale." EVS teams are working within the system both on site and remotely. Their promise: "Delivering excitement for billions of viewers."

The sport-focused branch of the Liège-based DELTATEC group, DELTACAST is involved in the World Cup in two distinct ways. In Belgium, RTBF, the francophone public broadcaster, uses the DELTA-highlight software for its studio commentary. On the other side of the globe, the Argentinian TORNEOS, one of the region's biggest production companies, makes use of the full DELTACAST suite: live augmented reality and statistics inserts. In Mexico, the Akron stadium, which will host four World Cup games, uses DELTACAST software to manage the content on all its LED screens. According to Lionel Dutilleux, Marketing Manager: "Quality is non-negotiable, especially when we provide our software and train our technicians on-site. Everything has to work correctly and effectively." From live augmented reality to content and LED screen management, DELTACAST's solutions are also frequently used by major concerts.



SCHRÉDER

lighting that makes everything possible

The quality of a 4K slow-mo replay also hinges on how the pitch is lit. That's where Schröder comes in. Established in 1907 in Liège, the company is not directly equipping the stadiums of this World Cup. What it has managed, however, is a methodical recovery. After a period of recentring, the Schröder sports department was rebuilt, and a new lighting platform was developed and then submitted to the FIFA Quality Programme for Floodlights. This is not an easy process: the company, its factories and suppliers were audited; laboratory testing was carried out to ensure technical validation; and on-site measurements and tests were conducted at the Cape Town DHL Stadium. Then, a seat on the FIFA technical committee for lighting. "We ticked all the boxes and have been awarded the FIFA QUALITY PRO label for our BRITELINE and OMNIBLAST solutions," Schröder Sports Segment Manager Cédric Collard — who had been in charge of the application for 18 months — proudly told us. "This seat means Schröder is involved in the discussions that are shaping the global standards for sports lighting. We are a bit like the 12th man." Schröder is already setting its sights on upcoming international events such as the 2030 World Cup in Spain/Portugal/Morocco and the 2034 World Cup in Saudi Arabia, a country in a permanent state of construction, erecting stadiums and airports, as well as a market the company already knows well. "Our priority is to light up every kind of sport. Seeing where we're headed is a great motivator!"





DREAMWALL behind the scenes at the stadium

Created in Charleroi in 2007 from the marriage of RTBF and publisher Dupuis, Dreamwall is an animation and creative production studio. Twenty years later, the company is now deploying its virtual technology for replacing advertising boards at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta (a top-of-the-line stadium with a 360° screen), which will host a semi-final for the 2026 World Cup. By overlaying, camera by camera, graphic elements on the broadcast in real time, this technology enables TV viewers to see regional advertisements rather than the ones seen by the fans in the stadium. “It was not straightforward,” admits CEO Thibault Baras, “we struggled to

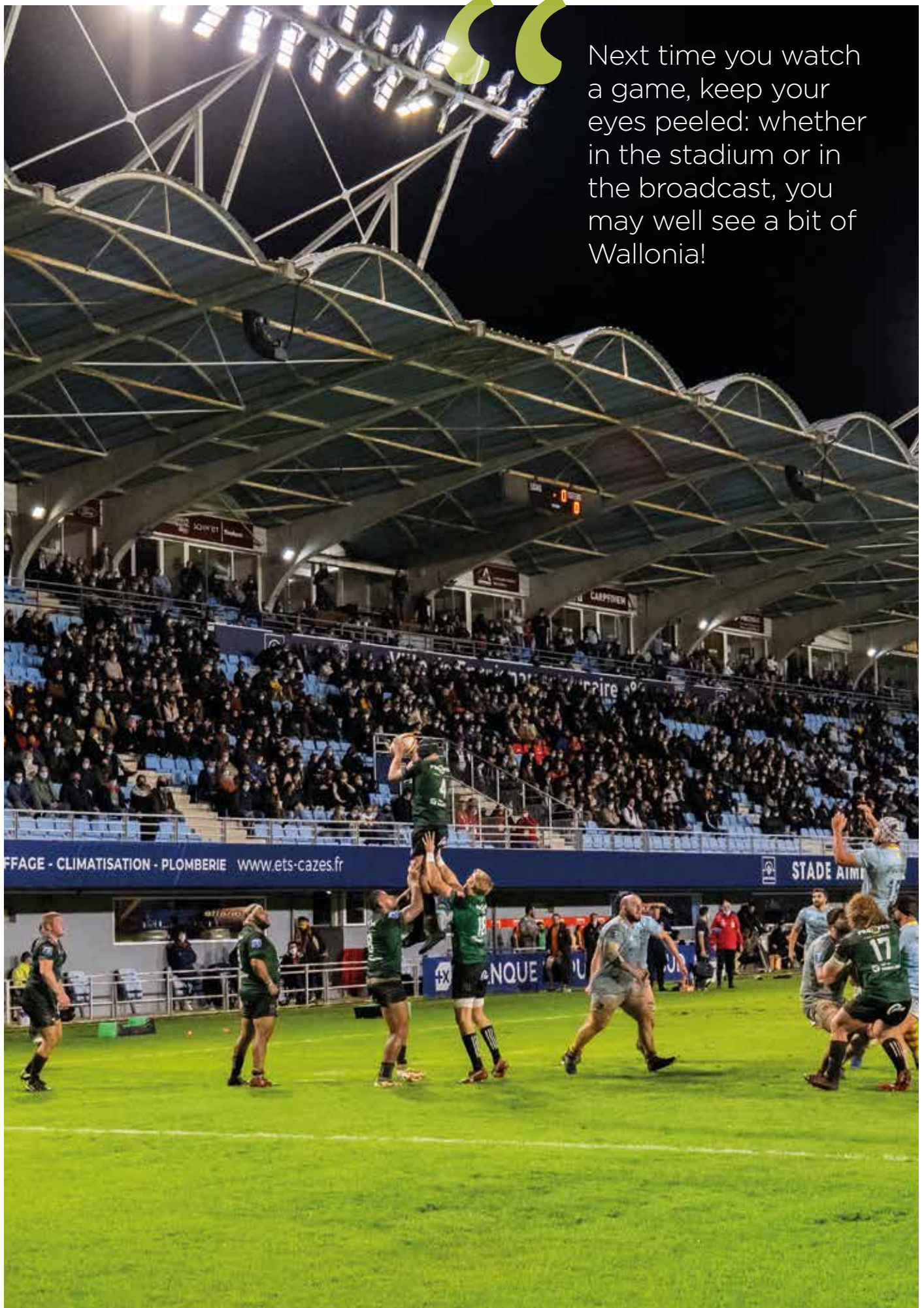
avoid covering up the players and the ball. But we have recently made a breakthrough!” By partnering with an Australian company, they can use its AI to recognise and differentiate between these elements in real time. “Our experience is paying off! We would not be succeeding in what we’re doing now without our previous innovations.” Dreamwall is the creator of Keywall, a subsidiary specialising in virtual green-screen studios, which, among other things, projected augmented reality in the Chamber of Deputies during the French presidential elections and worked with French TV Channel TF1 during the 2018 World Cup. The test in Atlanta sparked business discussions with the stadium regarding a rollout for the American soccer league. “We have always been bold, thanks to our in-depth technological knowledge and expertise.”





COMITTY large-scale cashless technology

Comitty Founder Thomas Farrauto did not watch the World Cup from his sofa — he studied it. Born in Mettet and an alumnus of University College HENALLUX, he has participated in Wallonia Export & Investment Agency missions to Saudi Arabia to see how major stadiums are handling cashless payment systems — or rather, what they are not doing yet. Comitty combines ticketing, bars, supplier orders, and merchandising into a single interface. It has already outfitted the Easi Arena, stadium of the RAAL La Louvière club, and provides the BarTrack module which monitors the volume of draft beer dispensed in real time, already in use by NFL stadiums. “We started with a student fair, and today we equip major stadiums. You have to aim high.” And Comitty certainly is: it is in discussions with Atlanta and has set its sights on Pairi Daiza, the Spa-Francorchamps Grand Prix and the 2030 World Cup.



Next time you watch a game, keep your eyes peeled: whether in the stadium or in the broadcast, you may well see a bit of Wallonia!

Heritage on show

LET'S GO!



In 2026, the Agence wallonne du Patrimoine (AwaP) and VISITWallonia are launching “Patrimoine en spectacle” (literally “Heritage on show”), a series of festive events taking place across many prestigious heritage sites. The goal, as explained by VISITWallonia, is “to reposition our rich cultural and natural heritage to boost attractivity, inclusion and innovation, and make it a major asset for tourism.”

After a call for proposals launched last winter, fifty or so events have been selected. From June to September, “Patrimoine en spectacle” invites us to see places steeped in history in a new light through concerts, unusual tours, theatrical reconstructions, sound and light shows, etc.

Throughout the summer, everyone will be able to enjoy these festive events. The Patrimoine en spectacle programme began on 12 June with the European Archaeology Days and will continue through to the European Heritage Days on 12 and 13 September.

[VISITWallonia.be/patrimoineenspectacle](https://www.visitwallonia.be/patrimoineenspectacle)

VISITWallonia.be



© Fabrice debatty



© Sébastien Roberty



© Agence Voilà



Siroperie Meurens

FROM LIEGE PROVINCE TO THE REST OF THE WORLD

In 1902, the Meurens brothers hit on the idea of slowly cooking surplus pears and apples, giving birth to their syrup. 125 years later, Siroperie Meurens' recipe remains unaltered, and they have expanded their production further, with Le Vrai Sirop de Liège®, a fruit-based spreadable syrup made with or without added sugar and aimed at the retail market, and Solufruit®, a company specialising in the processing of dried fruit and the production of fruit juice concentrates and purées for the food industry.

While their competitors mainly rely on sugar beet, notably in the Netherlands and in Germany, Meurens works exclusively with fruit, which sets them apart in the Dutch and German markets. "Belgium is seen as a benchmark for quality," says Jurek Ciechanowski, Head of Marketing.

With the B-Corp certification process underway, and aiming for carbon neutrality, this SME of about 20 employees can proudly boast of a century-long track record on the international stage.





Opportunities can be found everywhere. What's truly life-changing is opening that door.

Julian Quintart

SEOUL, THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

When he was 17 years old, Julian Quintart left Aywaille, in the Liège region, to go to South Korea as part of a Rotary exchange – the first of its kind between the two countries. After a few months of learning the language, doors started to open for him: television, music, modelling, and acting opportunities. 21 years later, his fame serves as leverage for even greater projects.

“You don't realise just how much Wallonia gives you, and how much it has to give, until you leave it.” Following in his parents' footsteps, who owned a business selling natural products, Julian now heads the Nono Shop, a zero-waste grocery shop and vegan café. Committed to the cause, he also hosts workshops for Climate Fresk within Korean companies.

www.nonoshop.co.kr



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NOVEMBER 2022

VOGUE

ARABIA

QATAR
SPECIAL

GUEST EDITOR
SHEIKHA
AL MAYASSA
BINT HAMAD
BIN KHALIFA
AL THANI

His proudest moment to date was in 2021, when Naomi Campbell presented him with the **'Debut Talent' award** at the Fashion Trust Arabia in Doha. A year later, she wore one of his designs on the cover of Vogue Arabia.

DESERT CHARMER

NAOMI CAMPBELL
ON MOTHERHOOD
& MENTORING THE
NEXT WAVE OF
AFRICAN TALENTS





Pictures © Abdel El Tayeb



El Tayeb Nation

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Abdel El Tayeb is a Franco-Sudanese designer who trained at La Cambre Mode[s] after stints working at Margiela and Bottega Veneta. He settled in Brussels for one simple reason: “La Cambre shook me out of what I knew, out of what I thought I was, so that I could better reconnect with who I am.”

His brand was born in the wake of this. El Tayeb Nation is a fictional nation, neither French nor Sudanese, where figures dressed in military officer’s uniforms feature traditional embroidery and basketry, skills inherited from his grandmothers. The underlying significance goes beyond aesthetics: “In Sudan, these traditional skills are under threat. Passing them on through design is also a way of saving them.”

He was a double winner at the 10th Wallonia-Brussels Design Mode (WBDM) Fashion Programme, which for the last 20 years has been providing support to Belgian designers preparing for international markets. El Tayeb is currently preparing a furniture and accessories collection for Doha Design Week in November. “This support is a huge opportunity, especially at this stage.”

<https://www.wbdm.be/fr/agenda/fashion-programme-2026/>



[abdel.el.tayeb](https://www.instagram.com/abdel.el.tayeb)

EDENYA

WALLONIA'S PARADISE



In February 2026, in the decidedly temperate Belgian Province of Hainaut, Pairi Daiza opened its tenth marvel: Edenya, the world's biggest tropical greenhouse according to Guinness World Records. Under 4 hectares of glass, blue butterflies flutter among giant orchids, resplendent jaguars prowl next to waterfalls, and peaceful manatees, ferns and rare palm trees create a lush jungle.

According to Founder and President of Pairi Daiza, Eric Domb, it is by observing the natural wonders of the world, such as those in Edenya, that people grow to love the idea of protecting them.

With 90% of the work carried out by Belgian companies, Edenya is also a showcase of the country's expertise.



Thomas Docquir

ON THE WORLD STAGE

He is the first Belgian to become *Danseur Étoile* at the Paris Opera Ballet. Named Walloon of the Year 2025, he embodies a subtle but powerful Walloon excellence on one of the most prestigious world stages.

At the age of 12, he left his small village of Stave (Namur) to join the Paris Opera Ballet School. This decision would have been impossible without a teacher of the Dinant Academy. « She supported me and pushed me in this direction. »

Ten years later, in 2024, he was promoted to *Premier danseur* - a first! In his own words, Thomas came equipped "with all the necessary tools" and feels right at home. Then, on 21 June 2026, during a performance of « La Bayadère », came the ultimate recognition: he was named *Danseur Étoile*, becoming ready for « the beginning of greater responsibility for a dancer. »

Thomas hopes that young people in Wallonia will think, « The Paris Opera is accessible. With determination, anything is possible ».



Pictures © Yonathan Kellerman





THE ROYAL GREENHOUSES OF LAEKEN A TIMELESS JEWEL IN THE CROWN

Designed at the behest of King Leopold II by architect Alphonse Balat - tutor to Victor Horta - and constructed towards the end of the 19th century at the heart of the royal park, the greenhouse complex showcases an Art Nouveau style that would inspire the new architecture in Belgium and around the whole world.

To this day, their metal and glass pavilions provide a backdrop to an ever-surprising trail featuring a variety of botanical species - some of which are original specimens - and lush vegetation. Together with many other features, these elements combine harmoniously to delight a host of interested visitors who greatly revere this remarkable heritage site.

<https://www.koninklijke-serres-royales.be/en/>

Pictures © Palais Royal /Koninklijk Paleis

Wallonia, your gateway to Europe



“ One must step outside one’s comfort zone, in the search for new experiences, to meet new people and to pursue one’s passions. ”

Sophie Houtmeyers, Director of Skechers’ European Distribution Centre



Contact us to explore opportunities in Wallonia
contact_wallonia.be@awex.be



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