



# 72 *hours* in Brussels

*While the glitterati flock to the prestigious BRAFA fair next month, take time to visit other hidden gems in the Belgian capital, writes Nicholas Martin*

**F**or art lovers, especially those with a penchant for art nouveau, Brussels is a must. There are more than 1,000 art nouveau buildings in Brussels, including houses, shops, cafes, schools and hotels, with the city being home to two of the style's greats: Victor Horta and Paul Hankar. It also lays claim to the world's first art nouveau building – the Hotel Tassel, built by Horta in 1893 for the Belgian scientist and professor Emile Tassel. Horta's own house in the Saint-Gilles district is also worth a trip.

Despite its size, Belgium has a long and distinguished artistic tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages, considerably pre-dating the foundation of the current state in 1830. The diversity is reflected in the Royal Museums of Art and History, a group of museums in Brussels including the Cinquantenaire Museum, the Musical Instruments Museum, the Museums of the Far East and the "Halle Gate". And, with many of the city's Christmas markets continuing until December 31, now is the perfect time to visit.

Friday Morning



Visitors look for bargains at the Place du Jeu de Balle

## 1 THE FLEA MARKET ON THE PLACE DU JEU DE BALLE

Start your visit at the flea market at Place du Jeu de Balle, in the heart of the Marolles district in Brussels, definitely the capital's most famous flea market with 450 dealers selling everything from antiques to collectables.

Rumour has it Thursdays and Friday are the best days to visit, but you might still unearth a gem at the weekend.

Normal market rules apply: get there early – dealers start setting up at 5am.

### Fact file

+32 (0) 470 54 12 25  
[www.marcheauxpuces.be](http://www.marcheauxpuces.be)  
 Place du Jeu de Balle  
 1000 Brussels  
 Underground: Porte de Hal  
 Open every day from 6am-2pm  
 (3pm on weekends)

Friday afternoon

## 2 RUE HAUTE AND RUE BLAES

In the same district, the antiques haven of the Rue Hautes and the parallel Rue Blaes is a must. The area was originally named after the nuns that lived there centuries ago – and locals today are still known as "Marolliens". Both streets are lined with an eclectic selection of quirky shops, both new and antique. Haute Antiques on Rue Haute is one of the largest, with 25 dealers spread across 2500 m<sup>2</sup> of space. Over on Rue Blaes, Via Antica boasts 2000 m<sup>2</sup> of stalls, with more than 30 antique exhibitors spread across three floors. Pop in on Marie-Cecile François who specialises in art nouveau and art deco, while the ABAC bookshop is the place for rare second-hand books.

Don't miss a visit to Stef Antiek, located at the Kapellemarkt (Napoleon's old stables), at the end of the Rue Blaes. This



Vendors beneath their trademark red and green canvas

### 3 MARCHÉ DES ANTIQUAIRES DU SABLON

Saturday morning

For decades the premier address for fine antiques, the Place du Grand Sablon remains the site of a weekend antiques market, hawking goods from jaunty red and green-striped canvas stalls. The market is also renowned for its setting, which alone is worth a visit, with some of the buildings surrounding the Place du Grand Sablon dating back to the 16th century. Nowadays, most of these buildings house antique shops, and some very fine restaurants and chocolatiers.

#### Fact file

+32 (0) 475 44 36 19  
[www.sablon-antiques-market.com](http://www.sablon-antiques-market.com)  
 Place du Grand Sablon  
 1000 Brussels  
 Underground: Louise  
 Saturday 9am-5pm, Sunday 9am-2pm



The area is home to a number of antiques shops

secondhand store showcases 950m<sup>2</sup> of antiques, vintage pieces, original lighting, art deco items and old building materials.

#### Fact file

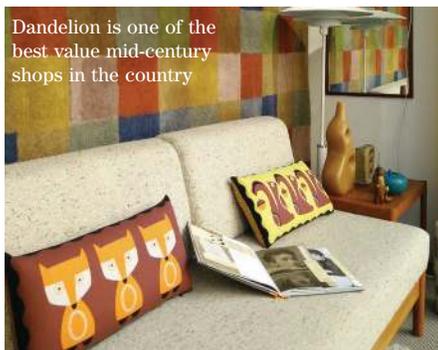
+32 (0) 254 94 80  
[www.hauteantiques207.be](http://www.hauteantiques207.be)  
 Rue Haute, 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
 Underground: Porte de Hal  
 Opening times vary

Saturday afternoon

### 4 DANDELION

Located in Saint Gilles, precisely one mile away from the madness of the Rue Haute and Rue Blaes, Dandelion is without doubt one of Brussels' best-guarded secrets.

Launched in 2014, this amazing shop is the brainchild of two antique dealers both passionate about mid-century modern furniture and design who browse Belgium



Dandelion is one of the best value mid-century shops in the country

on a regular basis for treasures to add to their own collection. Furniture, lighting, ceramics, drawings, paintings, and highly-desirable decor are all on offer at reasonable prices. For the owners, Kim and Madeleine, money is not an end in itself, more of a means of growing their beautiful collection.

#### Make a visit

Dandelion is near the newly-reopened Horta Museum on the Rue Americaine in the area of Saint Gilles

#### Fact file

+32 (0) 497 22 08 20  
 Twitter @dandelionvintagedesign  
 187 rue de la Victoire  
 1060 Brussels  
 Underground: Louise  
 Thursday, Friday and Saturday  
 11am-6.30pm

### 5 THE WATERLOO FLEA MARKET

Sunday morning

The Waterloo flea market is a weekly flea market located near the eponymous battlefield where French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte met his fate in 1815. Get there by taking a train from the Central Station to the Brocante de Waterloo, trains leave every 20 minutes and the journey takes just under an hour. Once a week, every Sunday, around 120 flea market vendors and antique dealers gather on carpark of the Carrefour supermarket in Waterloo, where they meet thousands of buyers, some of whom drive as far as from the Netherlands to attend this event. The Waterloo flea market offers a little bit of everything, from antiques and retro items to junk and just the plain bizarre.

#### Fact file

+32 (0) 497 341 842  
[j2.brocantedewaterloo.be](http://j2.brocantedewaterloo.be)  
 Parking du Carrefour  
 1410 Waterloo  
 Sunday 7am-1pm

More than 100 vendors meet every Sunday



Anderlecht is the place to head to on Sunday

### 6 BROCANTE WESTLAND D'ANDERLECHT

Sunday afternoon

For more than 27 years, the Westland Shopping in Anderlecht has been the weekly gathering place for between 350 and 400 second-hand dealers, luring up to 10,000 visitors.

Come rain or shine merchants are on the look out for potential buyers of anything from second-hand appliances and clothing, jewellery, crockery to knick-knacks. And, if the idea of a chilly day deters you from going flea market foraging, fret not: the flea market is partly located in a covered area, and hosts a snack bar where you can warm up.

#### Fact file

+32 (0) 477 83 88 34  
[www.brocantewestland.be](http://www.brocantewestland.be)  
 Boulevard Sylvain Dupuis 433,  
 1070, Anderlecht  
 Metro Saint-Guidon

Auderghem in south east Brussels boasts four flea markets

# Q&A

We asked Tobias Desmet, from the Gallery Desmet, based in the heart of Brussels' art and antiques district, for his tips on visiting the capital



## Q Where is best in Brussels for collectors?

**A** For a UK collector coming to Brussels I think best would be to look at the list of art dealer members of the Chamber of Experts ([www.artexperts.be](http://www.artexperts.be)). Conveniently, most are based close to each other in the Sablon area. Check before you visit as some are appointment only. You should make a beeline for the Harmakhis gallery, Gallery Desmet and Gisele Croës.

If you go to the Ixelles part of the city you'll find another cluster of art dealers in a more residential part of town. The third category is the hidden gems. Just like the city, you will be surprised by how many nice places are hidden off the beaten track.

The strong niche areas on the Brussels' collecting scene are contemporary art and tribal art. For the latter I would go to Didier Claes, for contemporary try Xavier Hoefkens, Office Baroque and Rudolph Janssen Gallery.

## Q What is currently selling well at Gallery Desmet

**A** Objects which tick all the boxes, but have an unexpected twist. Not necessarily the academic pieces, but something which stands out. The idea in contemporary art of something needing to shock is now also present in antiques.

For pieces to sell well they need to amaze beyond quality. We often see clients who buy an item as a pure indulgence, so it needs to be attractive enough to spark love at first sight. Philosophical objects, or pieces which leave a lot to the imagination, also tend to sell easily.

## Q Where is your favourite antique hunting ground?

**A** The Sablon galleries on a Saturday morning. Almost all the galleries are open and there's always something new to see. Galleries in Brussels are always looking to do business.

Belgians are known to be good dealers – they want things to move, so will help you do business that will benefit both buyer and seller.

## Q What is the most memorable piece you've sold?

**A** I think it must have been a large drawing by the Welsh sculptor John Gibson (1790–1866). Gibson was a fabulous neoclassical sculptor, but even more celebrated as a draughtsman. It was certainly not the most expensive piece I have ever sold, but it was one of my first. I bought it for very little money, from under the noses of anybody involved in the trade. I did extensive research on the drawing, to the point I almost felt friends with the artist. Eventually I sold it making a nice profit. But, when parting with the drawing, it felt as if I was giving a part of myself away with it. It would also be the piece I would go to extreme lengths to buy back. It would be like finding a lost son.

## Q Your favourite 'non-antique' places in Brussels?

**A** I grew up at the Sablon, I went to school there and, after living abroad for a while, I moved back. It is by far my favourite place in Brussels. It is a village: an island in the city. There are plenty of very good galleries; there's the Saturday and Sunday fleamarket; you're a one-minute walk from the major museums; there are loads of very good restaurants, and bars and, above all, exquisite chocolate shops. One of my favourite non-antique places is the Flagey area in Ixelles, where you can catch the last sun of the day on a terrace, overlooking the park with two big lakes.

## Q Which galleries and museums would you recommend?

**A** My favourite is the KMGK Museum, which is the Royal Museum of Art and History at the Cinquantenaire. It is one of Belgium's grandest museums, but few people visit it. Every time I go, it feels like I have the place to myself. And, of course, the Magritte Museum, is a must for any art lover, or anybody who wants to understand the complex and surreal mind of people from the kingdom of Belgium.

## Q Your tips for collectors spending 72 hours in Brussels?

**A** Don't stick to the historical centre of Brussels. Venture to Wiels in Forest, Flagey or the Bois de la Cambre. Check the calendar of the Bozar and the opera house La Monnaie. They have an extremely good programme with world class artists. Brussels is also perfectly located for a daytrip to any other Belgian city, including Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Namur and Liège.

*The Gallery Desmet is located at 39 Rue des Minimes, Sablon, [www.gallerydesmet.com](http://www.gallerydesmet.com). The gallery will be exhibiting at next month's BRAFA fair, from January 27 to February 4, for more details visit [www.brafa.art](http://www.brafa.art)*

## 7 AUDERGHM FLEA MARKETS

Sunday afternoon

Auderghem, a municipality in the south east of Brussels, is famous for its flea markets. The two most renowned are the Grande Brocante d'Hermann-Debroux (the great Hermann-Debroux flea market) and la brocante du parking du Carrefour d'Auderghem (Auderghem junction flea market) that take place once a month; then there is the Carrefour market on the third Sunday of the month, and the Hermann Debroux on the first Sunday.

All four boast a relaxed atmosphere, which is perfect for an easy Sunday.

Note that since 2016, the flea market on Place Pinoy focuses exclusively on items for children, such as second-hand clothes and toys. Expect to find pleasant neighbourhood flea markets, not necessarily high-end antique bargains.

Nicholas Martin is the founder of [fleamarketinsiders.com](http://fleamarketinsiders.com) an online guide to the world's best flea markets and brocantes.

### Fact file

+32 (0)2676 48 11  
[www.auderghem.be](http://www.auderghem.be)  
 Rue Emile Idiers  
 12-1160 Auderghem  
 Metro: Hermann Debroux  
 Various Sundays: 7am-1pm