

MANSION

THE MARKET

Brussels District Lures Affluent New Admirers

Prices rise in corner of Belgian-EU capital; some commute to Paris; home with indoor pool for \$6 million

BY J.S. MARCUS

FINICKY FRENCH expatriates and buyers reacting to Brexit are helping to boost prices in Belgium's Ixelles municipality, southeast of the center of Brussels.

Rich in 20th-century townhouses and landmark Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture, Ixelles has seen residential prices soar, says Bart van Opstal, spokesman for Fednot, Belgium's national organization of notaries, which reports on the country's real-estate transactions.

Mr. van Opstal says there was a surge in 2016 after the U.K.'s vote to leave the European Union, known as Brexit. Prices for Ixelles' single-family homes, which make up the bulk of the district's luxury-housing stock, rose more than 15% since 2015, says Mr. van Opstal. With one in 20 residential sales exceeding €850,000, or about \$1 million, Ixelles is the Brussels region's most expensive inner district, he adds.

Ixelles comprises several distinct neighborhoods. East of Avenue Louise, the leading upscale shopping thoroughfare in Brussels, are Matonge and the formerly scruffy Flagey. Both diverse neighborhoods are seeing a wave of gentrification. Near Matonge, a new 3,100-square-foot, two-bedroom, eighth-floor penthouse is on the market for \$2.27 million. The unit has a 1,500-square-foot terrace.

"Flagey is 'bobo,'" says Arnaud Pitz, a longtime Ixelles resident, using the French expression for "bourgeois bohemian" to describe Flagey's thriving nightlife, popular produce markets and rising prices.

Mr. Pitz, 49, a photographer and lighting designer, and his wife, Diane Maters, 47, a psychotherapist,



FROM TOP: BEA UHART FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL; JASMINE VAN HEVEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (2)

are selling their five-story Ixelles townhouse for \$2.89 million. The 6,600-square-foot 1905 home is on the western side of Avenue Louise, near Place Georges Brugmann.

Brugmann, as locals call it, has been transformed by new arrivals from France. In search of lower taxes and a higher quality of life, they are drawn to the Belle Époque townhouses—which can rival those in prime areas of Paris—plus a bounty of small shops, fine restaurants and green spaces. Frequent high-speed trains put Brussels less than a 90-minute commute from Paris, where some work. Mr. Pitz says his yoga class is now 80% French.

He and his wife spent about \$614,000 in 2006 to transform a rundown, three-bedroom, two-bathroom, 6,600-square-foot townhouse into a six-bedroom, five-bathroom home for the couple and their four children. (Abraham de Bettencourt, director of Lecobel Vaneau, a real-estate agency with offices in Ixelles, says similar properties were selling for about \$1.1 million at the time of their original purchase.)

Their update includes a new open-plan kitchen on the second floor, and getting rid of a servants' back staircase for extra room. The former basement kitchen is now a



party/playroom. The couple also created a split-level master suite on the third floor. The top floors hold the children's bedrooms.

Now that their two eldest children are grown, the couple and their two teenagers plan to move to Uccle, the villa district south of Ixelles. Their new home will be half as big but have a lot nearly five times the size of the current one.

Karin de Ceuninck, 57, an Ixelles native, has long had her eye on Brugmann's bucolic boulevard lined with chestnut trees and imposing townhouses. "I would love to live

on Louis Lepoutre, but parking is a nightmare," she says.

She and her partner, architect Dominique Boniver, 50, are selling their own Ixelles townhouse now that their family of four children from earlier marriages are grown. They want to divide their time between their home in Provence and a new place in Ixelles.

Ms. de Ceuninck has listed her home, an urban mansion, for \$6 million. The 7,500-square-foot townhouse fronts a 1/8th-acre yard with a new garden house. It also has a luxurious indoor pool. She

FOR SALE Arnaud Pitz and Diane Maters have listed their Ixelles townhouse, above, for \$2.89 million. Karin de Ceuninck plans to stay in the area after the sale of her home, left and below, listed at \$6 million.



Home for Sale



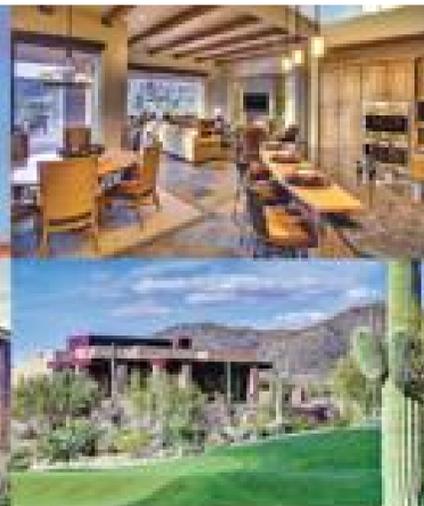
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\$2.67 million**Ixelles-Brugmann**

Five bedrooms, three bathrooms

This 4,400-square-foot 1936 townhouse has a library in its master suite. Agent: Bertrand de Moffarts, Belgium Sotheby's International Realty

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