

## Behind the Scenes

# The Surrealist Meatifesto

Don't believe everything you see: the Belgian meat industry is nothing like the way it's portrayed in the Oscar-nominated 'Rundskop'. We meet a Brussels butcher with a proud heritage

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PHOTOS BY BART DEWAELE



**M**ind-bending juxtapositions: that's what the Surrealists were after. And Magritte's spirit need look no further than his home commune of Jette, where passers-by are greeted with the combination of a butcher's shop and a sign declaring 'This is not Daisy the Cow' in French. But if the idea of a butcher who is also a practising Surrealist worries you, rest assured that the boss of Cortoos, Patrick van den Berge, is a safe pair of hands. If anything, he's a typical Belgian, marrying fine humour with a discerning palate.

Magritte wouldn't have seen Van den Berge's homage, though he probably saw the original butcher's shop that opened on the site in 1932. While Cortoos itself

has existed for almost 40 years, everything around it has changed. When the supermarkets arrived, the round-the-block queues disappeared. Of the 25 butchers in Jette when Van den Berge arrived, 20 have been forced to lay down the cleavers for good. And yet business at Cortoos is booming. When I visit, it's 8.00 and the shop is bustling with activity.

"We've diversified," says Van den Berge, explaining the key to his success. "We've started delivering to restaurants and catering, while in the butcher's shop we've focused on quality." It shows: Limburg pigs raised lovingly in Lilbosch Abbey rub shoulders with Blonde d'Aquitaine veal and spring lambs from the Basque Pyrenees.

After arriving at Cortoos in 1976, Van den Berge worked his way up to partner and then owner. Butchery appears to run in the blood: "My father was a butcher, as was his father before him." The business remains a family affair: Van den Berge joined the company at 15 and his daughter now runs the shop. "I have grandchildren and, who knows, maybe them too?" he muses. If family professions spanning five generations are the exception nowadays, then so too are thriving high-street businesses. Cortoos is happy to break both moulds.

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