

**MABUHAY, ANTWERP!**  
From Page K-1

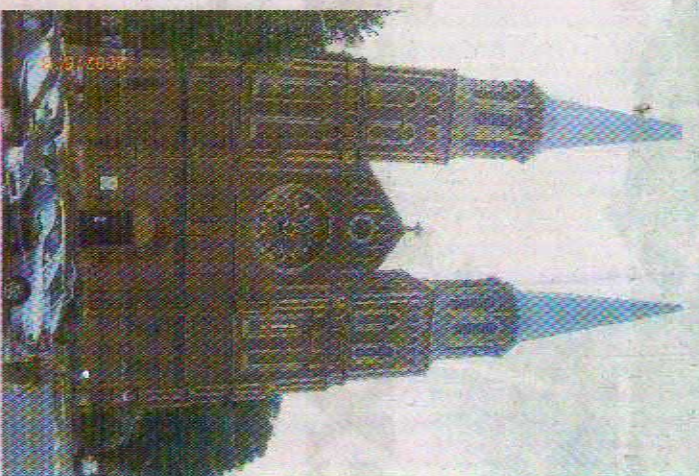
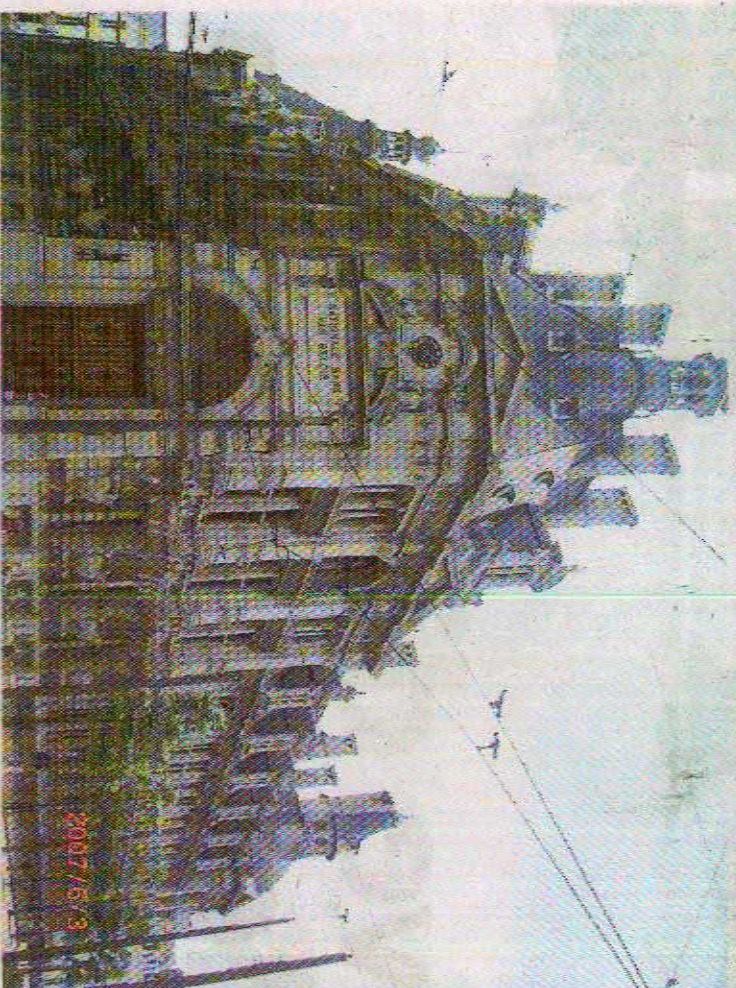
ing the domain of this scintillating gemstone, there is much more than "a woman's best friend" that abounds here.

A very amusing website of the Mabuhay Bed and Breakfast caught my fancy while planning my trip. It read "Antwerp Mabuhay Lodgings: Experience Asian Hospitality in a European Setting. A bed and breakfast in the heart of the home of the many artists of Antwerp." Intrigued by the unique combination of a quaint lodging in Antwerp with Filipino influence, I corresponded with the owners Eric de Guzman, a Filipino, and Herman Dejongh, a Belgian, who both turned out to be more precious than diamonds.

We were welcomed to their very cozy haven where several rooms and a studio apartment on Draksstraat Street have a



Rows of art nouveau houses at the Cogy-Osy Lei are a sight to behold.



Two minutes away from Mabuhay Antwerp Lodging is the Catholic Church.



The Opera Building: An architectural marvel for the arts and

On Sundays, ballroom dancing takes place under the br Zurenborg District.  
Photos by ROMELDA MA

potential for development, O Cogels sold it to a company whicided to build new houses.

By the end of the 19th century, solutely unique main avenue was Cogels-Osy Lei and it became th of the new "rich" area. Many v photographers and filmmakers h tempted to capture the soul, spi anima of this enigma. Some hav expressed that their photography them cold upon witnessing such a tural wonder. Here, houses hud together as in a collection of pett-bo dreams. We learned that old v families spend a fortune to preser ancestral homes, which they c synonymous with their family h and pride. Restoration and ren seem endless on turrets, dormer dows, bays, balconies and mosaa haust fumes and general air pollu such that the work has to be re every five or six years, but pri weighs monetary considerations.

Each home has distinctive crest linguish the profession of the c Most of the edifices of grandcar are by a variety of professionals such yers, doctors, journalists, philo writers, poets, designers, artists, s photographers, architects and the



A hearty meal of pasta and prawns at Brasseri Moskou



Green plaits in the historic h Antwerp where cafes, restaura shops abound.

**The National Bank**  
spectacular view of the city. Over a hearty breakfast of freshly cooked eggs, cheeses, jams, breads, orange juice and robust coffee graciously prepared by this dynamic duo, we exchanged stories of home as well as their experiences living in Antwerp.

A graduate of De La Salle University and former member of the Whiplash dance troop, Eric explained that since *Mabuhay* means "Welcome," it was the perfect name for their bed and breakfast. A simple, very phometric and easy to remember Filipino word that could make guests feel at home and experience how hospitable Filipino and Belgian hosts can be.



Mabuhay's Asian hospitality in a European setting: Seated are Mel Martinez, author Christine Deyrit, and Laili Suzara; standing are owners Eric de Guzman and Herman Dejongh.

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**FLY THAI TO BANGKOK**

Herman speaks Dutch, French, English, German and Spanish and Eric speaks English, Dutch, French and, of course, Filipino. Since Belgium is just a small country, most of their guests use their place as their base. The gracious business partners are more than willing to help their guests with their travel plans and queries. With the train, making a day trip to other cities — such as Brugge, Ghent, Oostende, Brussels and even to Paris and Amsterdam — is very easy.

Eric, who recently acquired his master's degree in international management in Brussels, disclosed that Filipinos are more accustomed to staying with their relatives or opting for hotels. He pointed out that the experience in a bed and breakfast includes fostering friendships with the local people and acquiring tips on where and where not to go. He has traveled extensively and has stayed in both hotels and B&Bs, and prefers the latter.

"Posh hotel rooms cannot beat the family atmosphere, warm welcome and hearty meals that a bed and breakfast offers," he added.

The weather was cool and crisp as we embarked on a scenic tour of the surrounding district. Being an old soul, I must confess I have an intense penchant for centuries-old homes. These antique structures that reek of old-world charm, culture and pride in one's heritage have taken me to far and distant lands. From the grandest central station and oldest railway line in Belgium, created from metal, glass and marble, I felt as though I was disembarking at the train station in a *Harry Potter* book. Transported back to a precious moment in time, it was exhilarating to imagine how elegant and progressive life was during that era.

Just observe the stock exchange close