

# firma newspaper

firma 01 — winter '23



firma



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# firma the story

not just an office

Firma opened its doors back in 2015. Anne - designer by heart and entrepreneur *pur sang* - wanted to create a space where makers, freelancers, creative businesses could find their own spot, while inspiring each other at the same time. More than 'just' a coworking space, emphasis was on community, inspiration and flexibility from the beginning. Eight years and two locations later,

those same ideals still seep through all things firma. Shared desks or a private studio, one-off meetings or long-term plans, space for only a laptop or for an entire atelier: individual options make for a solid community-driven environment.

In 2016, firma's little foodie sister cantine opened its door in the same building. Serving coffee, sweets and

healthy dishes, this lunch bar was an ideal addition for the co-workers at firma, as well as for meetings and for anyone who happened to drop by. In addition to the usual opening hours during the week, regular events like brunches, workshops, ... make sure there's always something happening.

WORK



# manifesto

what we're all about

Coworking isn't about efficiency or crunching hours. To us, it's about meeting like-minded people, about sharing the same goals and ideas, about inspiration and motivation. That's why we can firmly say firma is not just an office. Our communal events, our flexible plans, our connection with cantine, our interior and branding: everything is part of the puzzle, everything has its own purpose.

Firma is not just an office, it's a lot more. Host meetings, grab lunch, set up an exhibition, plan a fashion shoot, have your birthday bash: there's (almost) nothing we won't look into. If you have an idea, we probably have a perfect spot for it.

Firma is not just an office. It's who we are.





## meet

Firma is not just an office. We want to bring people together, whether it's because you happen to book a desk on the same day or because you're attending the same event. We're not just about doing hours and sitting side-by-side in silence, but want to create a community, foster collaboration and evoke new ideas.

## work

Firma is not just an office, but you can definitely do some work here. We've got different plans available: by the hour, day, month or longer.

## host

We regularly host our own events, but our spaces are also available for others to rent. Looking for an exhibition space, a place for a big party or an intimate gathering? Inbetween Vilvoorde and Brussels, there's definitely something that matches your wishes.

## shoot

Our multifunctional spaces have proven to be excellent shoot locations. Fashion, adverts, video or photo, keep it simple or go wild on props and styling: it's your call.

## eat

There's no firma without cantine, serving excellent coffees, healthy dishes and delicious desserts on a daily basis. Cantine is also available to cater all types of meetings and events.

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# locations

## firma times two

Looks aren't everything, but they do mean a lot. That's why the concept and design of each firma location is always carefully thought through. To create an environment in which people want to work, gather and create, we pay enormous attention to detail. Welcoming but not distracting, inspirational but with room for interpretation, simple but definitely not boring. Both locations are rooted in the industrial heritage of the sites, with a signature firma touch on top.

## vilv

Right in the middle of a former industrial site, firma I is a welcome change of scenery in the midst of warehouses and new developments.

The big and bright spaces of the original buildings were reviewed and revived, while keeping their raw character intact. Think: concrete, white-washed bricks, metal accents. Cantine is housed in a former showroom while the former warehouses in the back now serve as picturesque event spaces. The meeting rooms and office spaces are a prime example of firma's eye for design: elegant pops of colour, classic pieces blended with new names, own designs combined with well-known other brands and creators. With the famous viaduct and the Brussels-Schelde canal as backdrop, firma I is conveniently located in the vicinity of highway, train, bus and with plenty of parking spots available.

## bxl

After a temporary stay at Blvd. Anspach right in the city centre, firma found a permanent spot just a short walk away. Hidden in a quiet street in between the canal and Sainte-Catherine, firma II's central location is easy to reach by public transport and by car. After a thorough renovation, the characteristic five-story-building now hosts different private offices, shared desks, meeting rooms, an event space and an in-house co-work café on the ground floor. The architecture is an ode to the history of the building and the area, to which we added a contemporary vibe using steel, mirrored surfaces and cool colours.





# five questions

## to Stefanie and Maarten from Konrad & Fraay

Meet Stefanie Ampe and Maarten Groven from interior design studio Konrad & Fraay. Curious about what gets them out of bed in the morning and what rings their bells?

### 1. How would you describe what you do?

SA— Konrad & Fraay is an interior design studio developing strategic, conceptual and tailor-made interior projects for hospitality, retail and office. Together with our clients, we create impactful interior experiences that work and push companies and brands forward.

MG — Our approach isn't just about making things look good. It's about finding the sweet spot where functionality and emotion harmonize perfectly. A well-designed space should strike the right chord, instantly influencing and enhancing our clients brand image. We prioritize a holistic design methodology, ensuring that every element works in sync. This approach guarantees that the interior experience isn't just aesthetically pleasing, but also delivers maximum benefits for all involved parties. It's more than just design; it's a thoughtful strategy that adds significant value to your brand and its surroundings.

### 2. What makes you so passionate about your job and what or who is your source of inspiration?

SA — It is our mission and passion to deliver impactful interior experiences while being a professional and trustworthy partner for our client. Konrad & Fraay revolves around the power of extremes, rooted in our different professional backgrounds as interior designer and lawyer. We are determined to combine the best of two worlds and to give our clients the service they need and deserve. My primary source of inspiration in this context is derived from the principle I absorbed during my time as a lawyer: "treat every client as if they are your only client". Challenging to attain, yet worthy of pursuit.

MG — Drawing motivation from our creative counterparts, success stories around us inspire our agency to reach new heights. Their achievements serve as a practical guide, encouraging us to innovate and carve our own path. In this collaborative journey, we appreciate the shared brilliance that propels the creative community forward.

### 3. At what time do you start your work day and what is the first thing you do?

SA— Although I usually check my mails soon after getting up in the morning, the 'real' working day usually starts somewhere between 8.45 and 9.15, depending on traffic (long live the closed Buda Bridge) and what's on the agenda. Site meetings or on-site client meetings - as for recent projects in Nieuwpoort, Ardoorie or Heist-op-den Berg - sometimes require an early start, lightened by a good podcast & breakfast-on-the go.



MG — Same here. I think we more or less start working at the same time. For me, kickstarting the day begins with a good cup of coffee. Big cliché, I know, but it is what it is. A warm blanket that fuels my inspiration.

### 4. What are you most proud of up until now? And what would you still want to achieve in the future?

SA— On a professional level, it surely is the jump from the legal profession to the interior design sector. After six years of being a lawyer, I decided in September 2014 to change course and fully threw myself into the Interior Design programme at Thomas More, in combination with a job as Business Manager at a Brussels architectural firm. Challenging and exciting, especially since our private life was rather hectic as well with the birth of 3 children in only 3,5 years (of which 2 were born during my studies – great timing indeed). Keeping all balls in the air without losing my mind involved the proverbial blood, sweat and tears but today I am proud to say that I completed my study with great distinction while raising 3 happy & healthy kids together with my husband.

Looking ahead, I'm not setting myself any major work-related "must-achieves"; I prefer to stick to manageable goals such as expanding Konrad & Fraay in a positive way and realizing great projects

for great clients. Simply enjoying going to work every day and realizing that I am meanwhile making a valuable difference to the people and projects around me is what drives me!

MG — Setting up and starting a design studio is one of those steps I've taken that I'm very proud of. Just because it's one of those things I dreamt of doing but never had the courage of doing it by myself. Further building on that courage I want to keep on going, exploring the inspirational landscape of design, innovation, strategy and more.

### 5. If you could give your younger self one single piece of advice, what would it be?

SA— "Focus on progress, not on perfection". One thing I've come to realize is that embracing improvement and growth is a crucial part of the journey and that we are all navigating through identical processes.

MG — "Don't be too hard on yourself". Everything is an experiment and everyone is in it. Keep on looking for better ways and optimizations, and you will eventually land where you want to.



# neighbourhood watch

by Sean Vanonckelen

At firma we're all about exploring and getting to know our neighbourhood in Vilvoorde and Brussels, because isn't Brussels just one big village where nothing is really far away? We asked member, host, public speaker and trainer in public speaking Sean Vanonckelen of Speaking Change about his favourite spots in the city. Sean is in love with Brussels and makes it his mission to make other people fall in love with Brussels too as a bike tour guide.

## His favourite spots

### COFFEE BAR CAFE CAPITALE ZUIDSTRAAT 45, 1000 BRUSSEL

As a freelancer, you often work by yourself. Before setting up at firma, I usually worked from home. To bust the rut of working on my own, I often headed to a coffee bar. Café Capitale - just a few blocks from where I live - is my favourite coffee spot in the city. Why? Because you can work there in both winter and summer. In the summer, I sit outside under a parasol. In winter, there's still plenty of daylight inside. Many coffee bars are quite dark, especially in winter, but Café Capitale doesn't have that problem. There's a coming and going of locals, expats and tourists: Brussels in miniature, great to people-watch while working! What do I usually order besides a regular black coffee? Definitely try the freshly baked chocolate chip cookies!

### ROOFTOP BAR 58.BXL BISSCHOPSTRAAT 1, 1000 BRUSSEL

Almost out of nowhere, a new must-visit appeared this summer: the terrace on top of the new city hall. The first time I took the elevator up and saw the view I literally said "wow!". It's wonderful how you can admire all corners of the city from here. You get the feeling you can freeze time, just sitting and watching city life happening beneath your feet. Everyone who came to visit this summer received a visit to the rooftop from me as a gift. When standing there, I am really proud of our city and happy that I live here. And it's free too!

### DINNER CASPIAN VIOLETSTRAAT 26, 1000 BRUSSEL

My best friend has Iranian roots and took me here for the first time a few years ago. Without her, I would never have discovered this hidden gem near Central Station. But what a discovery! Caspian serves Iranian specialties: juicy meat, oven-roasted vegetables and delicious saffron rice. If I don't know where to eat, I always go back to Caspian. The owners are also super friendly, which makes the experience even better. Recommended!

### ARK TRIOMFBOOG IN HET JUBELPARK CINQUANTENAIRE

I am in love with Brussels and want to make other people fall in love too. As a guide, I take groups



WORK

along Brussels' nicest stops several times a month. By bike!! We cycle through the most important places in the centre and then go uphill to the Marolles and the European district. The place where I always have the feeling: "now I have them completely in my pocket" is the Triumphal Arch in the Cinquantaire Park. The monument in honour of Belgium's 50th anniversary is more imposing and beautiful than the Branderburger Tor in Berlin and yet hardly any Belgians have ever seen it. You should see the reaction of the groups when we cycle around the block and the Triumphal Arch suddenly appears. "Oh my gosh! This is nice! I've never seen this before?" That reaction is what I do it for. Then take a group photo of the group in the park in front of the Triumphal Arch. Just frame it!

### SPOT IN THE CITY DE BASSINS VISMARKT, 1000 BRUSSEL

My first studio was in the Sint-Katelijnestraat, just next to the bassins or two empty ponds on the

Vismarkt. During my very first evening in Brussels, I went to the bassins with a beer from the night shop. Sitting on the edge, feet dangling just above the water surface, watching people, enjoying the sun. As soon as the weather permits, you'll find me hanging out here.

### BEST SANDWICHES CAFE LULU KANAL KOOLMIJNENKAAI 78, 1080 MOLENBEEK

Now that I no longer work from home, I eat sandwiches more often and it has me rediscovering the good Belgian tradition of eating a 'broodje' or a sandwich at Café Lulu Kanal, near Firma Brussels. My favourite? The Bruxellois! A sandwich with boulette, red onion, hard-boiled egg, salad and mayonnaise. Definitely not healthy, but oh so tasty. I'm hooked!





# fuel tools

## from The Social Club

New apps and tools pop up every day and they all promise us life changing experiences. We're sure they do, but which ones really make a difference? Lies and Sarah from The Social Club, specialized in business coaching and supporting entrepreneurs in optimizing their business by offering one-on-one coaching, tell us which 3 apps or tools they cannot live without. If anybody knows how to make our lives just a little bit easier, they sure do!

**Lies** — Business coach at The Social Club.

Loves daily beauty, fashion, numbers, systems, bicycles and poodles.

### Her favourite apps

#### ASANA

Because I work on different projects at the same time, I need to be able to keep track of all the things that are currently in progress. With Asana, I get the feeling that I won't miss any deadlines which gives me some peace of mind.

#### MOONBIRD

To disconnect after a busy day at work, I use this meditation app to guide me in breathing exercises. It also helps to keep my stress level under control and improve my quality of sleep.

#### SCANNABLE

I am often on the go, including when I want to quickly scan a ticket or form. Thanks to Scannable, I always have a scanner in my pocket.

**Sarah** — Business coach at The Social Club.

Loves modeling, styling, social media marketing and a good dance!

### Her favourite apps

I'm all about apps that make my life easier and save me time.

#### LIGHTROOM

The Lightroom app is perfect for some quick photo editing on the go!

#### 4411

This parking app makes buying a parking ticket so much easier. It saves time and fines when I'm on my way to a meeting.

#### ISCANNER

This is my favorite scanner app, making it so easy to scan and email documents.

WORK

# what's on your desk?

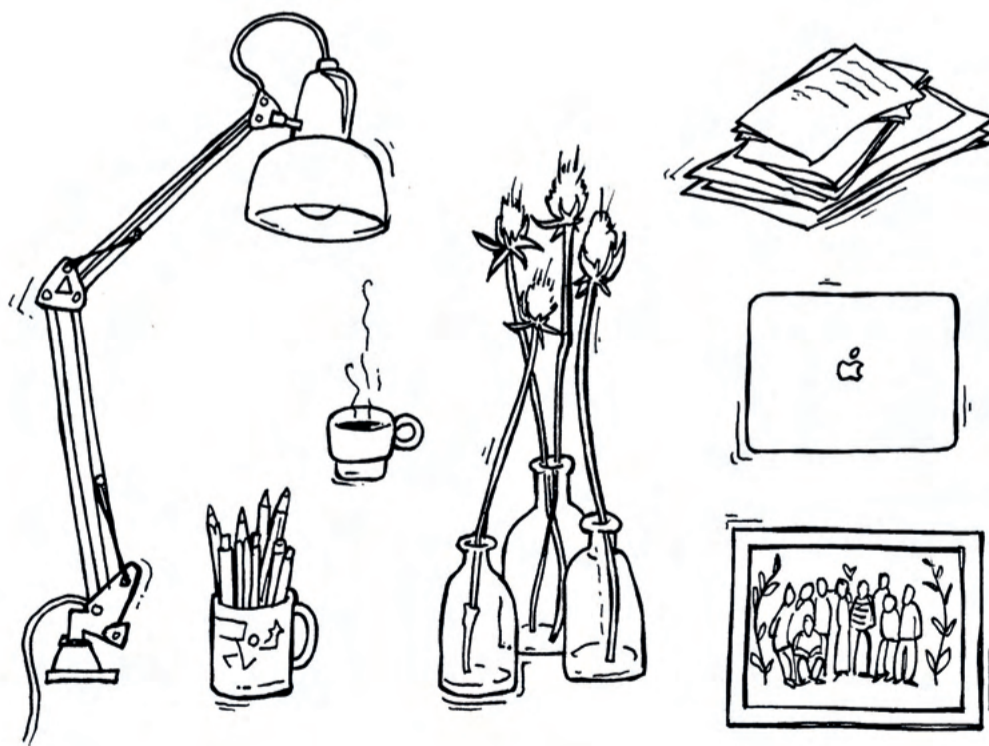
Anne Cornut is a mom of five and now even seven. You might know her from her blog and Instagram with the same name, 'Mama Van Vijn'. She's also the founder of Maison Slash, an online magazine for parents who're not afraid of some rock 'n' roll in their lives. Curious as we were about how rock 'n' roll her desk looks like, we just asked!

Hey Anne, what's on your desk?

I'm a digital nomad, so I commute between different workspots. I don't need much to work with, so I'm a very happy woman when I can start off my work day with a chair, WiFi and a good cup of coffee. When I work from home, it gets a little more cosy and personal.

The framed drawing colouring my desk depicts my blended family. Together, we have seven kids and to me, the drawing embodies what life is all about. It reminds me of what it all comes down to in the end!

I bought the mug that serves as a pen holder at the thrift shop. I thought it as funny and it reminded me of



the mugs we had in our cupboard at home as a kid. The dried flowers are a leftover from a bouquet I once got. No big story there, I just like them. The papers piled on my desk and in the letter tray are a hoard of collected and forgotten papers. We all have a pile of must-check paper somewhere, no?

I love colours and I'm always looking for colour in my life. The yellow lamp and blue chair are the eyecatchers on my desk, and the pop of colour makes me happy. The window above my desk adds a lot of daylight. On a rainy day, the ticking of the rain on the window makes a great soundtrack while working.



# meet sofie

If you're a member at firma, you must have met Sofie.  
She's our Swiss knife know-it-all, our plant person, and our go-to food and drinks expert.  
Any questions? Sofie's your girl.

## When did you join the team?

I started in March 2017. At the time, I ran my own restaurant with my boyfriend, but realised I wanted a bit more variety. At the same time, Anne was gradually growing firma and cantine, and it seemed a good opportunity to be part of a new story. At the start, cantine was my biggest focus but over time I took on other responsibilities as well.

Anne and I actually go way back. We met at school when we were 13 years old. Really, that's when our career started. We did a lot of group work together, and we always made an effort. Usually, we'd get better grades on creativity than on content, but we made it in the end.

## What do you actually do?

Now, I'm in charge of all things catering. Firma and cantine work together closely, and I make sure both

teams are aligned so everything runs as smoothly as possible. In addition, I also take care of a few other practical things related to events and day-to-day maintenance.

## And when you're not at work?

I love taking care of my plants! Indoor, outdoor, big or small: there's not a plant I won't love. At firma too, everybody knows I'm always ready to get my green fingers working. Mainly house plants though, digging up weeds is less of a passion :)

## What's your favourite firma spot?

Anne's office in Vilvoorde, mainly because of the memories. When I started, we shared this space with just the 3 of us. We could easily check up on each other, both professionally and personally. Maybe a bit too personal, because after a while we decided

separate offices might be better for productivity. Still, Anne's office is a cosy place to get together, have a chat or make some very important decisions.

## Any moments you look back to in particular?

Working here for 6 years now, I can look back on quite a few fun memories. Busy periods, with one event after the other, were always chaotic but in a good way: not sure if things would work out, but doing them anyway. The relief after such a period is so rewarding. One moment in particular comes to mind, during our popup bar at Interieur Kortrijk in 2018. After a super busy shift and a small mental breakdown, we ended up at a party in the basement of a former hospital. We were all so tired, but danced the night away anyway!



## Sofie in short

### BIRTHDAY

08.01.1990

### FAVOURITE COLOUR

Green

### FAVOURITE DRINK

Hugo, our signature drink when something needs celebration at work

### FAVOURITE DISH ON THE CANTINE MENU

Chili sin carne with lots of coriander and sour cream

### FAVOURITE SONG

'Zo ver weg' by Guus Meeuwis

### WATCHES

Both Familie and Thuis, no shame

### COLLECTS

Cuttings from plants, whether their owners know or not

### DRINKS HER COFFEE

Black



# what's up

## throwback Maiwe

Beauty and biology: on Tuesday 28th of November, you could discover the story behind skincare brand Maiwe, as told by the founder Maayke herself. Starting with a bountiful breakfast and ending with the chance to test some of the products, Maayke turned an ordinary Tuesday morning into an inspiring moment of care.

Maiwe is the result of a long search for products that actually suited her own reactive skin. When in Chile, bio-engineer Maayke Ruyffelaere discovered the benefits of wild rosehip. Named after a magical lake in the southern Andes, Maiwe is on a mission to amaze with the unique benefits of natural ingredients in skincare. The rosehips used for the range of products are harvested from wild roses, growing in the untamed, protected indigenous surroundings of the lake.



HOST

## 30.11.2023 — 21.12.2023 expo Sculpting surfaces by Murmur

Founded by Atena and Eva in September 2022, Murmur wishes to provide a platform to emerging and mid-career artists. Blending their backgrounds and current locations, they focus on artists based in Belgium, Luxembourg and Greece. On November 30th, they warmly welcome you at firma II for the opening of 'Sculpting Surfaces', presenting selected works by Brussels-based artists Charlotte Stuby and João Freitas.

"We wanted to bring Charlotte and João together because they both have a unique way of working with materials," says Atena. "Charlotte uses fabric and threads to tell her stories, while João transforms found material into new pieces. We're intrigued by how they can give a new meaning to the materials they work with, going beyond the typical use and purpose." The exhibition at firma is the first one since the launch of the platform, and Atena and Eva are of course very happy with this new step: "We met during our studies in Lisbon and quickly had the idea of launching a new platform. We started as online-only but realized we wanted - and needed - a physical translation as well." In the search for a place to host pop-up exhibitions, an open call from firma was just what they needed. "We presented our project in September, and are happy to open just a few months later. Of course it's been hectic and challenging to organize an exhibition in such a short time frame, but we're very happy to have met Anne, Sofie and the team and to be able to invite people to our very first exhibition."

### timing

5pm — doors open + aperitivo

6pm — welcome by curators and artists

Charlotte Stuby & João Freitas

all night long vernissage of murmur's  
exhibition 'sculpting surfaces'.



## 24.01.2024 erased

Set design, architecture and creative direction all come together in Erased Studio's projects. Paying particular attention to research and context, Erased Studio celebrates artistic experimentation grounded in technical knowledge. Focussing on ephemeral structures, their concept-driven work is characterized by designs that transcend the usual temporary set-up and create something entirely different. Erased thrives where lines are blurred and unexpected resonances can occur. Whether it's a stage for a festival, the scenography of a photoshoot, or the high-end styling of a wedding, Erased's rigorous yet highly aesthetic approach plays with experiment and technical knowledge, with the contrast between robustness and airiness, with light and dark. While many projects play with temporality and only exist for a limited time, Erased also works on other architecture and interior projects. On 24 January 2024, Elliott & Paul-Emile drop by firma to give us a glimpse of who they are, how they started and how they work.

### timing

6pm — check-in  
6.30pm — firma talk with Paul-Emile  
and Elliot from Erased  
7.30pm — drinks x bites



HOST



## 08.02.2024 beerstorming

Beerstorming is a brewery unlike any other, and you can get to know all about it on February 8th 2024.

In their workshop in Saint-Gilles, guests can take part in masterclasses or (private) brewing sessions to get to know the ins-and-outs of beer brewing. Every 3 months, 5 creations are subjected to the taste buds of a jury. The winning concoction is then brewed in a large batch and available in select shops, restaurants and cafés. A happy coincidence: firma and Beerstorming share a birthday, and we can both blow out 8 candles this year. Drop by on February 8th to have a toast!

### timing

6pm — check-in  
6.30pm — firma talk with arthur, co-founder  
beerstorming  
7.30pm — beer tasting x bites



# the ultimate winter season playlist

by Disco Naïvité

Did you know the music you hear in cantine isn't just any random playlist we plucked from a streaming platform? Behind the cantine and firma playlists there's flesh, blood and most of all the warm hand and great musical knowledge of musical tastemaker Jarri from Disco Naïvité.

Disco Naïvité started as a music blog and turned into a one-man-company that manages a handful of artists (including Charlotte Adigéry & Bolis Pupul) and takes on other music-related projects such as feedback sessions and playlist curation.

We asked Jarri to compile the ultimate playlist with songs you should definitely discover this winter season. Warm, cosy and comforting on the one hand and full out party mode on the other.

## FULL OUT PARTY MODE

Caroline Polachek  
*Dang*

James Blake  
*Loading*

METTE  
*For The People*

Noname  
*balloons*

Roisin Murphy  
*The House*

## WARM, COSY, COMFORTING

Sufjan Stevens  
*Will Anybody Ever Love Me?*

Loverman  
*Tinderly*

Mitski  
*My Love All Mine*

Cleo Sol  
*Desire*

Boygenius  
*Not Strong Enough*

Follow the FIRMA playlist



Scan this image by clicking the photo camera on the right in your search screen in Spotify.



HOST



## good to know

### family affair

The building in which you can now find Firma and Cantine in Vilvoorde has been in the Van Assche family for years. Anne's grandfather bought this burnt-out carpentry workshop in the 60's, as he needed space for his growing business in American kitchen appliances. An uncle later continued the B2C sales in the showroom where Cantine now is housed. Later, Anne's father added a professional section, focussing on industrial catering equipment. Times change, and so do the ways of doing business. The need for XL stock rooms (and private events spaces) diminished, and the now-unused warehouses and rooms needed a different destination. Enter: Anne, taking the opportunity to turn the spaces into a welcome creative hub. Adding a co-working space and lunch bar turned out to be a plus for the mainly industrial area, and for many creatives and companies around. Together with her husbands' architectural studio KEPER, she redesigned the spaces into office units and a cool but cosy lunch bar, connecting entrepreneurs in many different ways.



## come on in!

In addition to the one in Vilvoorde, cantine now also has a venue in our Brussels location. Both locations are very much open for walk-ins, with or without booking a desk, office or meeting room. Drop by for a morning coffee, lunchtime vitamins or an afternoon pick-me-up

## love thy neighbour

A good neighbour is worth more than a distant friend. Both firma and cantine, we firmly believe in supporting our locals. That's why we source our suppliers as near as possible. MOK coffee is roasted in Vilvoorde, Rish Kombucha is brewed in Brussels, as is our beer range from Beerstorming.



# MOK

Originally hailing from Leuven, MOK is one of Brussels' (and Belgium's) most interesting players in the current coffee scene. Consciously small-scale, they work with a keen selection of small producers year after year, fostering long lasting relationships to source the finest coffees on the planet. From the day-to-day blends to the one-off batches: each bag of beans has its own story and flavour. Our partnership with MOK goes back a few good years now, and we're very happy to be part of their vision and story. MOK's roastery is now located just a stone's throw away, in the back of one of Brussels' most interesting food spots, Nightshop.

EAT

## fresh bunch

We don't see flowers as a treat for special occasions but as a permanent part of our interior. Our weekly bunch of fresh flowers from young Brussels florist Davide Capasso adds the finishing to our spaces according to the season or feeling of the moment.

After studying photography at LUCA Brussels and working for various art galleries both in Belgium and abroad, Davide finally turned to the creation of floral designs. With his bouquets, inspired by contemporary art and the tradition of Japanese ikebana, we share a vision on design and aesthetics.



## colophon

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# firma newspaper

firma 01 — winter '23



firma