

Honorary Reporters

For Korean-Belgian interior designer, life in Belgium and Korea are united by four values

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Korean-Belgian Kimi Swinnen used her experience in Interior Design to build her own business and set the Belgian tables up with premium products from Korea. (Photos = Viviane Vaz)

By Honorary Reporter Viviane Vaz from Belgium

Kimi Swinnen has always seen herself as a world citizen. She was born in South Korea, studied Arts and

Interior Architecture in Brussels (Belgium), worked in a Art museum in Venezuela, travelled the world and established herself back in Belgium. Eight years ago, Kimi reconnected with South Korea during a leisure travel and since then comes back there at least once a year. She realized her birth land was not only about centenary traditions, but also very modern, creative and with a sense of aesthetic that was simple, solid and elegant.

Four years ago, she decided to use her experience in Interior Design to build her own business and set the Belgian tables up with premium products from Korea. First she starts importing the seasoning of Myeongin Myeongchon (which means hidden treasures) such as bamboo salt, Jeju's tangerine vinegar and plum soybean paste. According to Kimi, the latter has been the favourite food ingredient among her Belgian clients so far. Perhaps because traditional Belgian cuisine also loves to add red fruits such as cherries, raspberries and plums in some dishes. Later, Kimi brought to Belgium the handmade ceramic by KwangJuYo, that meets her aesthetic taste of chic and simple.



For Kimi, four principles guide her life both in Korea, as in Belgium. “Beauty, dignity, human encounter, and quality. And I wanted all my work to reflect these four values. For me, this is very important”, she says. No wonder one day the name for the company came to her

naturally: “Sa” (사), that means 4 as Sino-Korean number. Besides, “Sa” is also Korean slang for people (사람, saram), a hidden remind that Kimi is connecting different people from the four corners of the world in Brussels through her professional and personal life. “My Belgian friends are always surprised when I organize a private party. How come you gather guests from so many different countries?” she tells, laughing.

One party in 2017 became a special memory. In order to launch Myeongin Myeongchon in Belgium, Kimi organized a food event in Brussels together with two big names of haute cuisine. They were the native Korean chef, Jaesung Noh, and the Belgian-Korean chef, Sanghoon Degeimbre, who holds two Michelin stars with his restaurant L'Air Du Temps near Brussels.

Christmas time



This is the second Christmas that Kimi decides to challenge her business to leap from online to offline. Together with Christa Reniers, a well-known Belgian jewelry designer, she opened a pop-up store in the center of Brussels. The concept is simple: the physical shop is opened just for the weekends of this festivity period, from November 30 to December 29. “At first sight, jewelry and food may not match, but I think we both want to offer beauty and quality, and that's what our clients are looking for as well,” explains the Belgian-Korean businesswoman.

I visited Kimi's shop by chance, with a friend from Janggu class who was curious to see the new pop-up store in the city. The door opens and a bell rings. Kimi does not know us and welcomes us with a genuine friendly smile. She takes time to explain us about each product with passion. Her eyes shine as the stories she tells us bring herself back to Korea. We leave the shop with empty hands at this first time, but full of a gastronomic dream. Imagine asking for more soju by ringing the cute ceramic bell cup, while eating Korean food seasoned with bamboo salt and plum paste in such beautiful table ware? The night is cold, I pass by the decorated Brussels Grand Place with a warm feeling of a true Belgian-Korean Christmas tale.



LIST

