

# Get connected

Four expats tell us about how they came to Belgium



Valérie is French and lives with her Dutch husband and two sons, Jacob, 13, and Myles, 10, in Watermael-Boitsfort

## Valérie Maraud

**“We chose to come to Belgium to give our son the best possible school”**

“We moved to Belgium six years ago after living and working in the United States, Kuwait, Germany and Switzerland. We chose to come to Belgium to give our son the best possible school as he needed special education. I am a life coach specialising in nutrition and breathing and I have a private practice at home. We like the fact that Brussels is a green and international city with a high standard of education. It has excellent facilities for kids with special needs. The disadvantage is the weather and the low, grey sky.”

## Maria Fenlon

**“Belgium is a fantastic place to live from a design point of view”**

“I have been running my own interior design company since 2002. I help my clients transform their vision for their homes into a reality. The majority of my work is still in Ireland, so I commute there to oversee projects once a month. We specialise in private residential homes, but I have also done some large-scale retail projects and recently finished an exciting renovation of a church in Dublin with an Irish architect, where we discovered some priceless tiled stations of the cross by the renowned Irish stained-glass artist Harry Clarke. Shortly after I moved to Brussels, I had a chance meeting with the Italian architect and interior designer Manfredi Nicoletti, who had just set up practice here. We are working together on several projects. Belgium is a fantastic place to live from a design point of view as it really is the centre of Europe. I have been able to visit many international trade shows and have learned a lot about new products and techniques. I also love the architecture, in particular the work of Victor Horta, who saw his interior fittings and furniture as integrally linked to the Art Nouveau style he helped develop. The Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert is one of my favourite buildings. The shop fronts and windows are like works of art. From a family perspective, the move has been hugely beneficial, as my girls are learning new languages and meeting students of different nationalities. One of the difficulties of living in Brussels for me is the impatience of drivers on the road. However, Manfredi has told me that it doesn't even compare to Italy!”



Maria and husband Michael are from Ireland. Michael works for the Belgian building materials company Etex. They live in Wezembeek-Oppem with their three teenage daughters, who study at the British School of Brussels in Tervuren