

The inscrutable Jewish soul

Minjan

MARGOT VANDERSTRAETEN

The Orthodox-Jewish community continues to capture the imagination. In 'Minjan', Margot Vanderstraeten gives the reader a glimpse into this world by interviewing several prominent figures. As she reports on her Hasidic neighbours, who live so close yet whose lives are so different, her tone is sometimes serious, sometimes light-hearted, but always genuinely involved.

Chef Mosje at famous Antwerp restaurant HOFFY's introduces Vanderstraeten to the secrets of the kosher kitchen. And for decades, photographer Dan has been the only one who's been allowed to cast his sharp, humorous gaze on the Hasidic community from the inside. Vanderstraeten also strikes up a remarkable friendship with the unconventional Esther, who defends the need for taboos and argues with the author about ultra-orthodox parenting and schooling. Vanderstraeten's personal life also gets a look-in, when in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic her friend Martinus is diagnosed with cancer and the chicken soup made by a Jewish friend offers some solace.

Whether you call it literary journalism or journalistic literature, Vanderstraeten has found her niche.

DE MORGEN

Vanderstraeten has managed to enter this unique world as an outsider. The key to her success? She is sincerely interested in the orthodox way of life and approaches it respectfully, precisely by criticising aspects that she does not agree with. She has the guts to keep asking questions, even when things become very personal. Her easy-going and compelling style, the fast pace and the ingenious narrative structure pull you in as a reader.



AUTHOR



Margot Vanderstraeten (b. 1967) is a freelance journalist and author. She debuted with the novel 'All People Bite' in 2002, which won the Flemish Debut Prize. 'Mise en place' offers the reader a fascinating glimpse into the world of haute cuisine. The novel was nominated for the Halewijn Prize. 'The Butterfly Effect', her fourth novel, tells a human story behind international terror. 'Mazel tov' tells the story of Vanderstraeten's experiences as a tutor in an Orthodox Jewish family. *Photo © Tom van Nuffel*

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