

Blue Flag



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**With great respect for their vessel's history and character, Chris and Charlotte Huber spent twelve years perfecting Kinette above the waterline
 but the time had come to look below.**

We love that our 1922 Dutch-built barge Kinette has such a colorful past. Originally called Hoop op Welvaart and built to be easily handled by a couple, she carried freight off and on for over 70 years. At one point, her rear cabin was extended to support a merry-go-round and her owners cruised from one village fair to the next. During WWII, she served as a hideaway for fugitives and the Dutch Resistance. Then, in 1995 she returned to the Leimuiden shipyard of de Bock & Meijer where she was built. There she was converted to a well-planned liveaboard pleasure vessel and has been happily cruising in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany ever since.

Traditional lines, contemporary refit

As classic and lovely as she was when we bought Kinette in 2004, we still saw room for improvement. What can I say, it's a Swiss thing!

Over the last 12 years, we not only refitted cabins, added ensembles and put in a new galley, but also upgraded behind the walls with a total rebuild of the electrical,

plumbing and gas systems. We added central heating and hydraulic steering.

We updated all her safety equipment, including a new heavy anchor and winch, new mast with certified position lights, plus a new propulsion system including prop shaft, stuffing box, stern box. We installed solar panels, a self-positioning satellite-dish and AIS (Automatic Identification System). Kinette received EU certification in 2009, recently renewed to May 2023 after another inspection.

We worked hard to make the boat easy to handle, comfortable, safe, reliable and self-sufficient. She was close to our idea of the perfect liveaboard barge . . . and yet . . .

Lurking below the waterline

For many years Kinette's underbody was treated with tar, a common practice until tar became disapproved for environmental reasons. More recently, the hull has been treated at regular intervals with an anticorrosive primer and antifouling. But with those old, tough layers of tar underneath, this coating didn't stick to the hull as it should have. Our Swiss

sensibilities (there's that "thing" again) were dissatisfied – from both the technical and aesthetic points of view.

So we discussed the various possibilities to get rid of those old tar layers. Basically, there are two options: sanding the entire hull manually or sandblasting it.

To blast or not to blast

We put the question to our experienced barging friends. The feedback could not have been more contrary. There was the faction that insisted, "Sandblasting plus several layers of epoxy is the best thing you can do for your boat!" Just as adamant were those who said, "Sandblasting a riveted hull is merciless – one undiscovered thin bit and you'll blast right through it. And you'll end up with leaking rivets." For sure, before welding, newly riveted hulls used to leak until tar, rust and muck had filled the gaps. Sandblasting removes all that stuff right down to the bare steel.

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Oh, what to do?

In summer 2015, we saw the beautiful 25-metre barge *Veranderen* in Berlin. She had been blasted and painted three years earlier, we were told by her owners Thesi and Martin Eberhard. She still looked as though she had just come from the shipyard. No leaks. Obviously a convincing reference. Our decision scale began to tip.

After much thought, research and review of references, we finally made a date with DURLO painters, part of an industrial complex in Harlingen



The ship is carefully placed on a heavy stand

(Friesland) in the Netherlands, where all facilities plus the expertise for sandblasting, welding and coating are close together. On a beautiful morning in May 2016 *Kinette* was hauled by Multiship's 100-ton-crane, softly placed on a heavy stand and then transported into a covered shipyard by a remote controlled hydraulic 100-ton-lift.

First, a close inspection

But before exposing the vessel to the sandblasters we wanted to have the hull



Preparation before measuring the thickness of the hull

thickness measured by an expert. With a meticulous hammer-and-ultrasound inspection the surveyor found no suspect areas, but could not totally exclude a weak spot.

His recommendation? Sandblasting. "No other method will free the hull from those old layers of tar." The rivets, we learned, should present no problem – an experienced and careful boat painter will thoroughly fill all the gaps with special material. And if we blast through a thin spot? Well, wouldn't you want to know if you had such a weakness? Nothing is easier to repair than a steel barge when it's hauled out in a shipyard!

"Once blasted, if the hull then gets a professional two-component coating system you will spend quite some money," the surveyor went on to say. "But you will be free from corrosion problems for many, many years. Let alone the floating beauty you will have!"

Imagining long, leisurely summers with no hull maintenance, our beautifully painted vessel the envy of our friends, our decision was clinched.

We go for it

The vessel stayed for two days in the sandblaster's shop. When she was rolled out we learned that naked steel is light grey. Now with the old tar layers



Hull inspection after sandblasting

thoroughly removed, the surveyor measured the hull as meticulously as before the sandblasting. And indeed he found a thin spot that had been masked by paint and tar. Sooner or later we would have had a leak there – according to Murphy's Law, far away from any repair facility. Now it was a simple job for the welder before the barge was rolled to the painters' workshop.

After first spraying a layer of two-component epoxy, all rivets and interstices between the riveted steel plates were covered with two-component filler. Why first one layer of epoxy and then the filler? Due to its viscosity, paint penetrates every tiny space, but does not even out all the joints and little gaps, even when sprayed. So after the first layer of epoxy, the painter

Meticulous steps



Tar and rust before blasting



The same spot revealing bare steel after 94 years



Filler has been applied



and then ground clean



now with two layers of epoxy primer



and the final topcoat, lovely!



Applying the two component filler

sees exactly where he has to apply filler.

After hardening, the filler was ground before the second and third layers of epoxy were sprayed. After a layer of sealer, antifouling was sprayed. The hull looked so great, we had them paint the roofs, the gunwales – everything we always painted




to have graced the covers of French Fluvial, German Kloenschnack, and this magazine. On which cover will we see her next?

Before we started this process, we had vague ideas of putting her on the market – you know, the pull of the grandkids at home, the inevitable health issues as

for us, we like the feeling when people admire our beautiful vessel, knowing we made no compromise regarding quality.

It's a Swiss kind of thing

 Some helpful hints. Before sandblasting, have the thickness of the hull measured by an experienced surveyor.

Repeat this procedure after sandblasting and weld or plate any thin or holed areas.

Inspect rivets meticulously before painting and seal any gaps or looseness with two-part epoxy filler.

Choose a firm of experienced craftsmen for the paint job. Their workshop should be covered and air-conditioned. Open-air painters are cheaper but exposure to the elements can compromise your paint system.

Make sure your painter is familiar with both modern coating systems and old riveted hulls. A shop only experienced with new boat or automobile spray painting probably does not have the expertise to properly deal with your old barge.



The shining results!

ourselves, as “real” bargees used to do. For once we wanted to have it done carefully and professionally.

As a kind of archeological discovery the painters found the original ‘brandmerk’ (brand) on the hull, corresponding with the original ‘meetbrief’ (letter of weight and measures) – a beautiful addition to Kinette’s known history!

What's next?

Who could describe our pride when after six weeks, Kinette was transported out of the workshop looking like a glittering pearl! Even before our posh paint job, Kinette was eye-catching enough

one gets older, etc. But now with the repainting done we do not think we can detach easily from our floating beauty. At this moment, we plan to take it one day at a time and see where life – and the waterways – shall lead us!

Have a blast

We can only encourage you to seriously consider our route if your hull is of a certain age: treat your boat to a blast and a professional coating system. Of course it is not a cheap proposition, but preventing corrosion for many, many years is worth the investment, saving time, work and cash in the future. Moreover you keep or even increase the value of your boat. As

*Christian Huber with credits to Karen Greenfield
www.kinette.ch*

