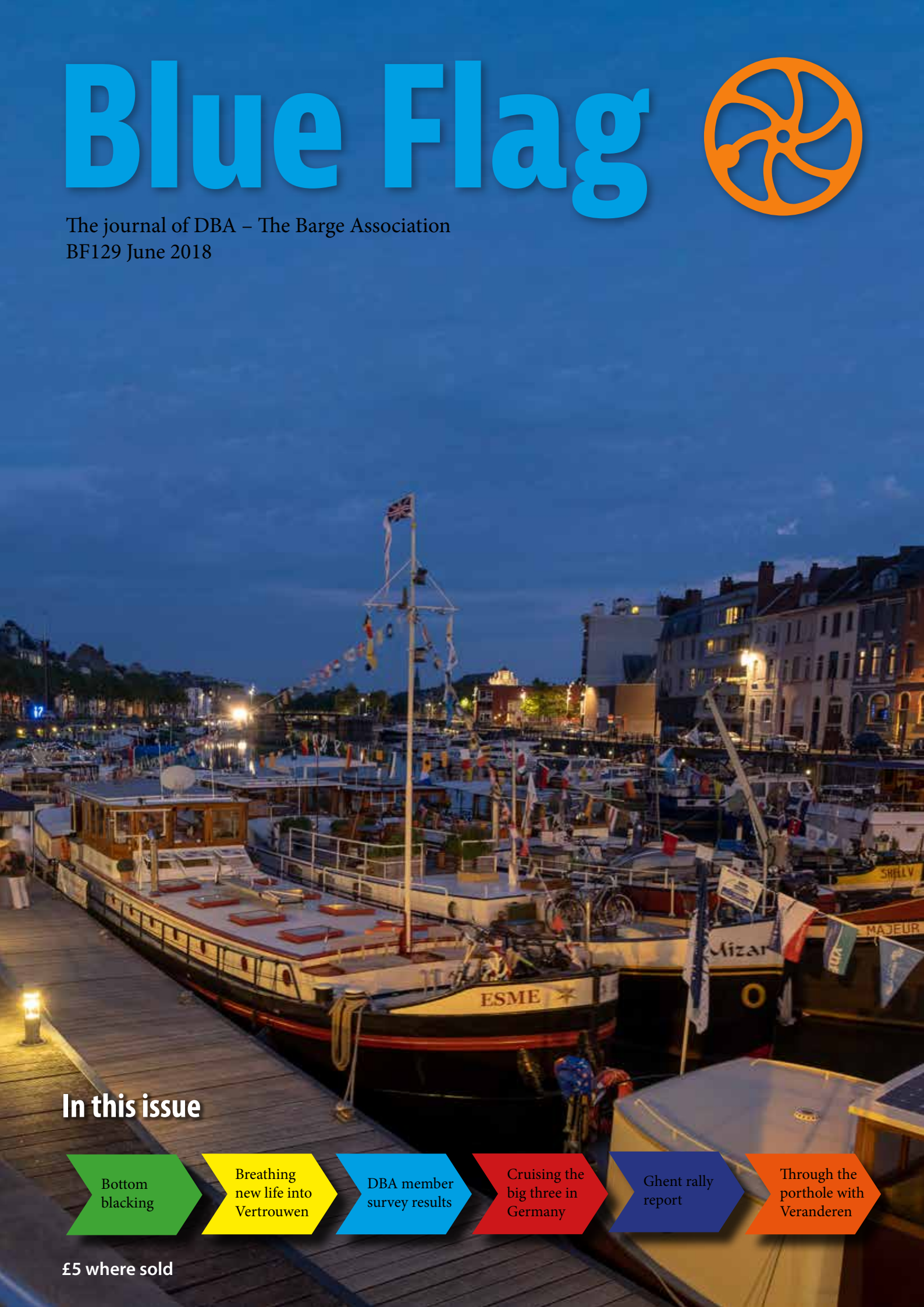


# Blue Flag



The journal of DBA – The Barge Association  
BF129 June 2018



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# Cruising the Big Three, Bremen

**After 13 years of adventure on the waterways of Europe, Chris and Charlotte Huber have sold their 22.5 metre Luxemotor, Kinette . . . but not before one last climactic voyage exploring a trio of Hanseatic port cities in Germany**

Before us loomed the great sea lock of Herbrum, final lock of the tidal section of the river Ems in East Friesland, Germany. It is a place of such extremely fast tides, churning such huge amounts of silt and mud, it is known to commercial skippers as “The Gate to Hell.” There was nowhere to tie off, and nearly 2 hours to wait before the next opening. But we’d planned our departure from our winter mooring in Weener to pass the town lock one hour after low water, then surf the tide to Herbrum to arrive at slack water. Thanks to this precise timing – dare I say it, our “Swiss thing” again! – we floated calmly before this notorious lock enjoying a cup of tea.

Thus began our thirteenth -- and possibly final -- year of messing about on the European waterways in our classic Dutch barge, Kinette. We’d advertised our intention to sell Kinette at the end of the 2017 season in the previous winter’s Blue Flag. But knowing there were hundreds of barges on the market versus a handful of buyers, we were philosophical about our chances of selling. Still, we planned as if this would be our last cruise, and we wanted it to be the mother of all our voyages on the water!

## A Hanseatic Itinerary

From our winter mooring in East Friesland, we were well situated to reach the canals and rivers of northern Germany. We planned an itinerary that would take us to cities of history and culture with a unique connection to the waterways we could visit with our own boat: the Hanseatic cities of Bremen, Lubeck and Hamburg. We began researching and booking moorings – preferably in historic harbors which suit our beautiful old boat better than yacht marinas!

As a bit of background, the Hanseatic League (simply Hanse in German) was a medieval confederation of merchant guilds and their market towns, stretching from the North Sea to the Baltic. For over 300 years their trade activities were

inseparably bound up with shipping. Aspects of culture in these towns today still embrace this history, making them of particular interest for us barges.

## First Objective: Bremen

After leaving Weener and transiting “The Gate of Hell”, we cruised a short distance on the Dortmund-Ems Canal until we headed sharply to starboard into the Coastal Canal to Oldenburg. “Boring” does not describe this canal sufficiently. For 50 kms it’s straight, no locks, no

than 20 mtrs and required to report regularly, we decided to hire a pilot. That turned out to be a good idea as he knew literally everybody in nautical Bremen and provided us a grand luxe mooring in the brand new Europahafen. It used to be the mooring of the three-masted SS Alexander von Humboldt, flagship of Beck’s Brewery. The electricity and water supply is generous, the mooring fee moderate. By the way, cruising from Elsfleth to Bremen we passed the world-famous Lurssen Shipyard, known for its mega yachts built for Arabian oil sheikhs



*Schnoor quarter (Bremen)*

change. But Oldenburg is a beautiful town, we stayed for a week. From Oldenburg, the tidal river Hunte heads North, then at Elsfleth empties into the Lower Weser, also tidal, heading south. We calculated our cruise so that we started in Oldenburg after high tide and would reach the Lower Weser with changing tide so we could cruise upstream to Bremen with the tide. Note: After Oldenburg there is a railroad lift bridge, which follows the railroad timetable -- it’s wise to avoid waiting for a lifting of the bridge in the current.

The Lower Weser is a sea waterway between Bremerhaven and Bremen and it is radar surveyed. As Kinette is longer

and Russian oligarches. The money invested in these floating palaces is in opposition to our sense of good taste . . . but perhaps a billionaire doesn’t care about other peoples’ taste.

We reached Bremen -- something the “Town Musicians of Bremen” never succeeded doing according to the city’s favorite Grimm’s fairy tale. With our perfect mooring, the moderate mooring fee and without any obligations we stayed a whole month in Bremen, visiting museums, churches, galleries, theatres, boutiques, restaurants, and touring by bike and by tourist boats.



# Bremen, Lubeck and Hamburg

Bremen's oldest part dates from 15th and 16th century with narrow and winding streets. Dating back to Hanseatic times, Bremen was an important commercial harbour. But with the change from piece goods to containers it lost its prominence. The big container ships now head to Bremerhaven with its big storage areas and deep shipping lanes. The old warehouses in Bremen now are transformed into generous lofts, event spaces, and business areas full of life – and in the Europahafen we were in the centre of this development.

## “Queen” Lubeck

Leaving Bremen, we cruised upstream on the river Middle Weser to Minden. Weak current, little commercial traffic and no pleasure crafts, but idyllic landscape. We stopped in Minden, Hannover and the Volkswagen town of Wolfsburg before we headed to Lubeck via the Elbe-Lubeck-Kanal with its impressive 23-metre lock in Uelzen and the 38-metre ship lift Lüneburg in Scharnebeck.

Our mooring in Lubeck was in front of the historic “Shed 6”, a former warehouse remaining witness of the time when today's old harbour was a port of transshipment. Indeed, Lubeck was known as the “Queen” of the Hanseatic League. The city, in our eyes, is the most beautiful town in North Germany, birth place of Thomas Mann, Guenther Grass and Willy Brandt, and is the capital of marzipan. Moreover the town is very attractive with its cobblestone streets and



Arriving in Lubeck

the most picturesque hidden side streets with gaslights, accessible only by small gates designed to be as wide as a coffin. The Schiffergesellschaft (brotherhood of skippers) is said to be the oldest restaurant in Germany, dating from 1538, in a building existing since the 13th century. A dinner in this historic place is a must for every bargee visiting Lubeck.

We left Lubeck after three weeks, cruising back over the Elbe-Lubeck-Canal to Altenburg where we reached the river Elbe. Some kilometers downstream we passed the huge lock of Geesthacht and from here on the Elbe is tidal. Due to the strong tides, the sands in the shipping lanes change constantly, so neither charts nor plotter helps. You have to orient

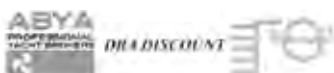
toward the land-based navigation marks, yellow crosses and red and green squares which indicate where you have to change from one bank to the other.

## Exploring Hamburg

We arrived in Hamburg exactly with the changing tide. In Hanseatic times, the city was second to Lubeck in importance, but it has long since surpassed the “Queen” to become Germany's leading port and commercial center. Hamburg harbour is enormous, but we had no problem finding the harbour for traditional ships -- it is just beside the world-famous Elbphilharmonie concert hall (designed by the Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron). The harbour

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'Toplicht' - supplier for traditional ships (Hamburg)

master was waiting for us and showed us our mooring place at the head of the pontoon – the tidal range being 4 metres. At the very moment we moored, a vessel of the Wasserschutzpolizei docked near us. We expected the usual check of our documents and licenses, but soon we learned it would be a full border control. Kinette being registered in the Netherlands, we fly the Dutch flag. Since the violent troubles during the G20 summit, Hamburg police are hyper-nervous. The officers did a painstaking job, very bureaucratic but very friendly, and then: “Welcome to Hamburg, just feel at home!”

Within walking distance from the harbour for traditional ships is the fantastic Maritime Museum, a collection of thousands of ship models in every scale and thousands more other nautical items displayed on four floors of a historic warehouse. One day is not enough for a visit and the same goes for a visit of Miniatur Wunderland, the world's largest model railway with 14 kilometres of tracks and model trains up to 14 metres in length. Advice: Buy your tickets by internet, download them on your cell phone and start your visit at 9 a.m. Boat trips around the harbour are of course a must, be it by sightseeing boats

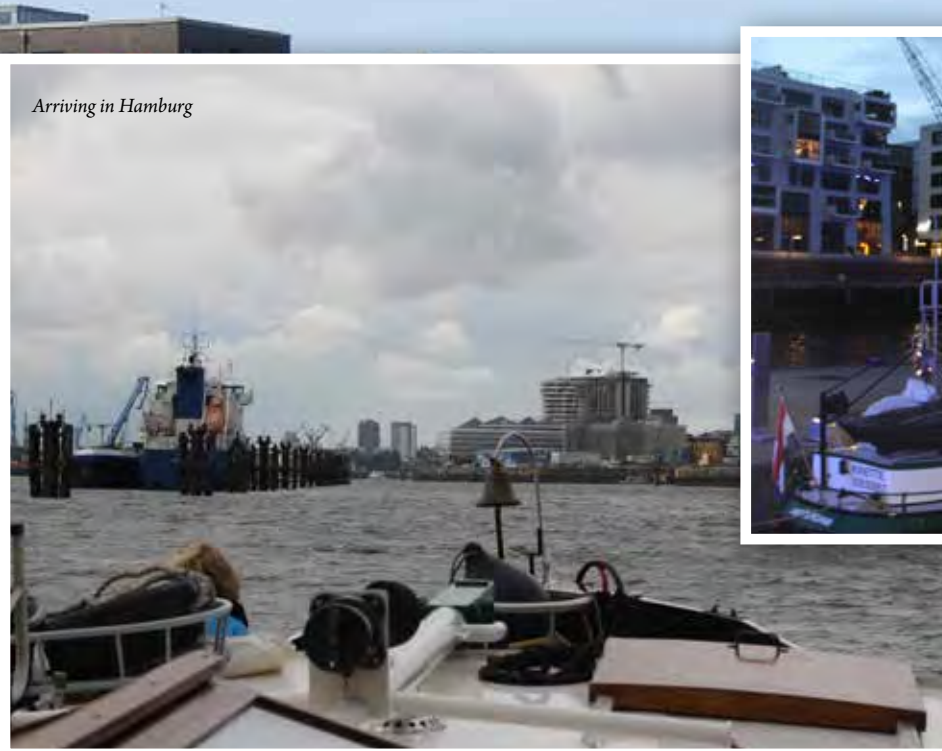
(expensive), by the regular passenger ferries (cheap) or on the keel of your own (exciting).

It is useless to enumerate what you have to see or to visit in Hamburg, we could fill a whole Blue Flag and the same applies for Bremen and Lubeck. But I hope our report whets your appetite to visit these cities on your own vessel. For sure our season of exploring these three cities of the Hanse became the peak of our cruising life . . . a bittersweet experience, as we showed the boat to potential buyers as we cruised and at the end of the season, Kinette was sold.

We feel privileged to have experienced our years as Inland Waterway skippers. What other lifestyle lets you criss-cross the European countryside and visit the most exciting towns, live in their centre and sleep in your own bed! I hope our experiences help encourage you: don't just dream the dreams, realize them!

*By Christian Huber with credits to Karen Greenfield.*

*Blue Flag would like to thank Christian and Charlotte for the many stories they have shared over the past years. We wish them all the best for the future and hope they will stay in touch. It's good to know that Kinette is in new and safe hands.*



Arriving in Hamburg

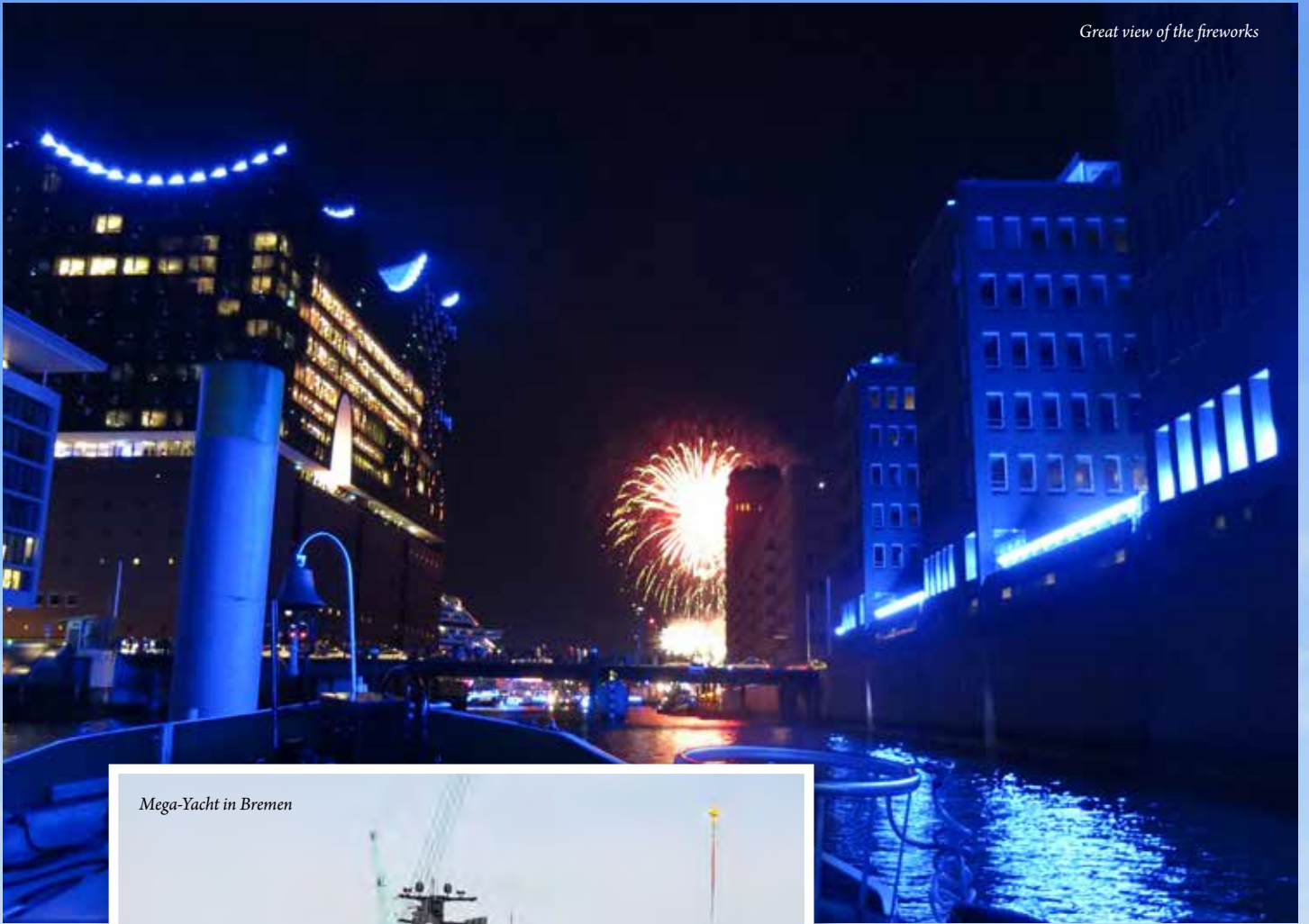


Mooring close to Hamburg Concert Hall





Great view of the fireworks



Mega-Yacht in Bremen

