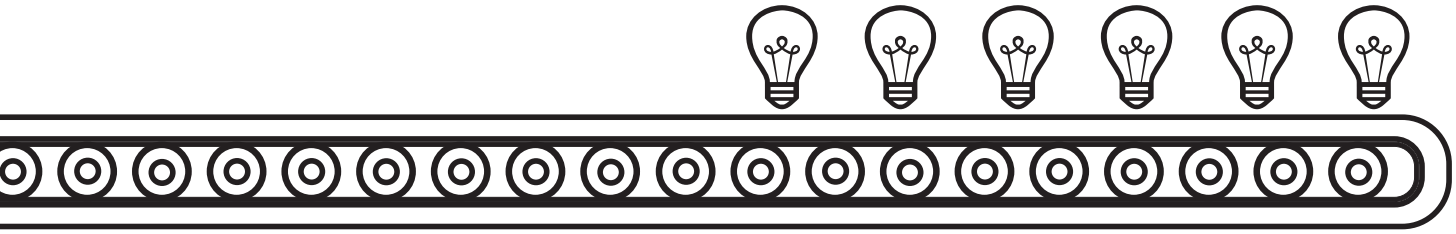
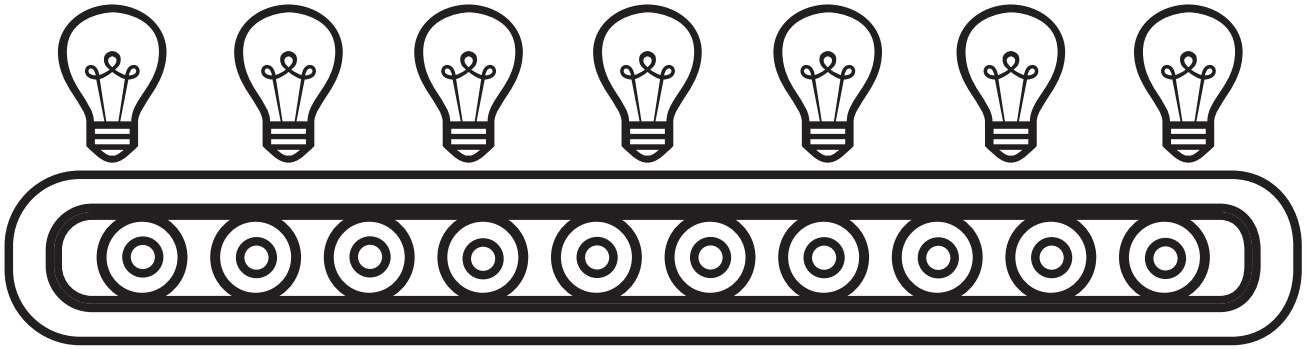
PROJECT STYLE
FACTORY REPORT

BEGA | GLASHÜTTE LIMBURG

10 October, 2017





project STYLE

BEGA

GLASHÜTTE LIMBURG



Brian and Sarah Ridout travel to Germany to visit the BEGA and Glashütte Limburg factories to discover what makes their products so special

BY BRIAN RIDOUT

As anyone from the UK who spent time on the continent over the summer holidays knows it is inevitable that any conversation will turn to the issue of Brexit. And this was the case when we at Project Style recently journeyed to Germany to visit the BEGA factories for a company update and to take part in some product training.

Before setting up Project Style with my wife Sarah, I worked for BEGA in the production and export departments, which meant that this trip provided an opportunity to catch up with some old colleagues as well as the latest product developments. As this was Sarah's first visit, it gave her the opportunity to observe the production process first-hand and finally meet the export department staff, particularly UK manager Karl Heinz Kissing.

Arriving in the late afternoon at the BEGA exterior product factory in Menden, our trip began with some fine German hospitality in the bar, with delicious food, beer and wine available. However, the work was just about to begin! As the sun sank in the sky, Patrick Loesse, the export director, gave a talk covering the history of the company, before leading the guests into the now dark BEGA night garden.

The night garden is an area approximately 65 metres by 20 metres, populated by nearly 200 individually-controlled, outdoor luminaires. This allows for all imaginable aspects of garden illumination to be provided - newly-designed bollards for pathways, ingrounds, up-lighting for trees and bushes, water feature lighting and specific zoning for task, ambient and accent impact - which were ably demonstrated by Mr Kissing.

The evening did not end there though, with the groups being split up and given a tour of the entire grounds to illustrate the variety of the lighting range available. This allowed us to immediately observe the superb controllability of the bollards, floodlights, spotlights, drive over in-grounds and recessed wall luminaires which all illuminated the grounds and building to wonderful effect.

After a good night's rest it was back to the factory the next morning where, following some coffee and a short seminar watching some films on new products, there was an in-depth tour of the showroom with Mr Kissing, Mike Wilson, the UK managing director, and Russell Mills, BEGA's UK business development manager.

THE PRODUCTION LINE

We were then shown every aspect of production, from metal fabrication, component assembly, powder coating and the final production line, through to quality control and stock holding. This was a great opportunity for Sarah to observe and take in the exacting production processes that distinguish BEGA as a quality brand. Particularly impressive was the warehouse area that can hold up to 80% of the available product, as BEGA builds to stock not orders.

Above: The BEGA night garden

Below: The BEGA cafeteria
Bottom: Sarah Ridout with BEGA Export Manager, Karl-Heinz Kissing







A tasty German lunch of schnitzels in the cafeteria gave me a chance to catch up with some old colleagues - particularly Roy Nicholls, senior production manager, George Karukas, who looks after QC, and Timo, also from production - before the afternoon session concentrating on training and hands-on experience working with product began.

This took place in the "Hangar", a space holding an array of products which can achieve total darkness in order to illustrate the efficacy of BEGA's sizeable array of floodlights, spots, bollards and wall lights, which were all demonstrated in this area. The session also provided the chance to take the products apart and examine the high standard of the build quality.

Before we prepared to leave to for the 2-hour drive to Limburg, home to the glass furnaces and where the interior products are made, we were welcomed back to the showroom for farewell coffee and to watch a short film demonstrating the strength and integrity of BEGA bollards (https://youtu.be/GvoJgXwuS0c).

GLASHÜTTE LIMBURG

The second part of our German trip began at the Limburg factory at 8am the following morning, following a wonderful (working!) get-together the previous evening at a local restaurant organised by Ulli Voelpel, Natalie Lamard and Andrej Janzen of the export team. First off was a training session in the showroom covering the recent updates to the Studio Line range, which was followed by a walk around highlighting particular product lines and giving an explanation of the techniques used.

Then came the highlight of our trip - a tour of the three production furnaces that are the central element of any trip to Limburg. It is here the experienced and skilled team of glass-blowers and craftsmen produce the different types of glass used. Every aspect of the production was covered, from the chemistry workshop, which analyses and tests the raw material each day, to the glass production itself and then observing the unique cooling processes in place.

Watching this, Sarah turned to me and said that the glass production and blowing was like seeing a ballet in slow motion: each worker knew his exact role and had total confidence in their fellow workers. Surrounded by molten glass and furnaces working at over 2000 degrees, this was a picture of teamwork in the extreme.

The tour continued as we observed the cleaning, smoothing, cutting and finishing of the hand made pieces, before taking in the metalwork areas and production lines, which construct each luminaire in controlled areas to prevent static build up. Finally we were shown the packing area, where we saw each piece checked for quality control before being boxed up and sent to the dispatch area.

The break for lunch provided an opportunity to ask questions and find out how BEGA reacts to specific challenges in the production process. Unlike the cafeterias in most factories, the one at Limburg is beautifully lit by hand made glass pendants above each table. This was also where the issue of Brexit was tackled, and it was pleasing to hear that BEGA is committed to the UK market and will continue to support its partners.

With a last viewing and final questions in the showroom the visit drew to an end. With Limburg only a 17 minute train journey from Frankfurt airport on the ICE train we were back with plenty of time to catch the flight back to Heathrow.

▪ *Brian and Sarah Ridout are directors of Project Style Ltd*

Above: A Glassblower skillfully inflates the molten glass ready for shaping

Below: Sarah Ridout and Michael Wilson of BEGA UK examine the final products
Bottom: Limburg glass quality control

