

Professor Dr. Kurt Schaffner celebrates his 90th birthday

It is a great pleasure for me congratulating my friend and mentor Kurt Schaffner on the occasion of his 90th birthday on October 6th. Kurt Schaffner completed his PhD under the guidance of Oskar Jeger at the ETH Zürich, where he worked on mechanistic photochemistry. After a post-doctoral stay at Brandeis University, he returned to the ETH in 1958, and in 1970 he accepted a call as Professor and Director of the Department of Organic Chemistry at the University of Geneva. Here, he and his group developed special techniques, such as the “electronically integrating actinometer” and flash photolysis with IR detection, for the study of mechanistic questions in organic photochemistry. During Kurt Schaffner’s stay in Geneva, the Department of Organic Chemistry was significantly expanded and consolidated.¹

In 1976 Kurt Schaffner became a Member of the Max Planck Society (MPS) and Director in the "Institute for Radiation Chemistry at the Max-Planck-Institut für Kohlenforschung" (later autonomous MPI for Radiation Chemistry). He appointed young researchers with diverse background and abilities and started a risky and ambitious scientific adventure into the difficult and (for him and co-workers) novel field of biological photoreceptors. Kurt Schaffner built an important team of colleagues performing pioneering research on various spectroscopic and, later, biochemical techniques. Interesting results were obtained in the area of phytochrome(s) as well as on photosynthesis and light-harvesting antennas.² Kurt Schaffner supported these groups with enormous generosity, enthusiasm, and scientific dedication. A stimulating, but also demanding, intellectual atmosphere was created with many students, post-doctoral fellows, and sabbatical visitors from several countries. During Schaffner’s period, the Institute was one of the most important centres in the world for the various aspects of photochemistry.

Early in the ‘80s Kurt Schaffner recognized the need of creating a common language between biochemists, biologists, and spectroscopists working on biological photoreceptors. A Symposium series on “Spectroscopy of Biological Photoreceptors” financed by the DFG and the MPS, was started at the Ringberg Castle, owned by the MPS. Notably, this biennial Symposium series continues until today. The symposia widely furthered the cooperation between researchers of many countries, but mainly within Germany and between the German-speaking countries and represented a turning point in the research in these areas.

Mülheim an der Ruhr, February 8, 1985: Search Meeting

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J.Piette A.van den Vorst W.Shropshire C.T.Jansen H.Hönigsmann



R. Tyrrell

F. Wilkinson

T.M.R. Dubbelman

For Kurt Schaffner international scientific cooperation was essential; in 1970 he was one of the founders of the European Photochemical Association (EPA), in 1980 he started the IUPAC Committee on Photochemistry, and in 1985 he was a co-founder of the European Society of Photobiology (ESP). The first meeting was held in Mülheim (Picture).² He was during many years a Member of the Organic Chemistry Division of IUPAC and was very engaged in the Council of the Minerva Centre (Hebrew University, Jerusalem).

Kurt Schaffner has been invited to hold numerous lectures in institutions around the world, and was awarded many prestigious prizes and honors. He is a member of the Nordrheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und Künste, The New York Academy of Sciences, the Academia Europaea and the Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina. He has

received the Havinga Medal (Leiden), the M. L. Dewey & C. H. Kelly Award (Nebraska University, Lincoln, USA), as well as the Theodor Förster medal of the Bunsen Society and the German Group of Photochemistry within the German Chemical Society (GdCh).

On the occasion of his 90th birthday, we wish Kurt Schaffner and his wife Gertraud good health and many more years of a happy life together.

Photo: 2002

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¹ Schaffner, K. *Chimia* **63** (2009) 846–850.

² Gärtner, W. *Photochem. Photobiol. Sci.*, **11** (2012), 872-880.