



Gerhard Ertl wasn't expecting to receive quite so much attention on his 71st birthday. Of course the Director emeritus of the Department of Physical Chemistry at the Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society was long considered by peers to be a strong candidate. His research laid the foundations for modern surface chemistry and thus created the know-how needed to optimize, for instance, fuel cells and catalysts. When he actually received the call from Stockholm, though, Ertl was surprised and overwhelmed. For 20 long minutes before the official announcement, he was not allowed to share his news with anyone – not even his wife Barbara. As it turns out, those 20 minutes were the proverbial calm before the storm: when the Nobel Committee announced him as the winner of this year's Nobel Prize in chemistry, he was inundated with a deluge of media attention. Nevertheless, the newly minted Nobel laureate in chemistry – who is actually

a physicist – is imperturbable. Perhaps because he has often opened himself up for new things over the course of his life. Born in Stuttgart in 1936, he first studied physics at the Technical University of Stuttgart and the University of Paris. After completing his degree, he continued his studies at the Technical University of Munich, where he obtained his doctorate. He then took a job there as an assistant at the Institute of Physical Chemistry, and acquired his German post-doctoral lecturing qualification in 1967. The following year, he accepted an offer from the Technical University of Hanover, and in 1973, from Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, where he remained until 1986 – interrupted only by several visiting professorships in the US. Finally, in 1986, Gerhard Ertl was appointed a Scientific Member and Director of the Department of Physical Chemistry at the Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society in Berlin.

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