

NOBLE ALFRED MEETS ALFRED NOBEL

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Images: Heineken



Alfred Heineken



Alfred Nobel

Heineken Prize winners have gone on to win even more accolades, even Nobel Prizes

Small countries, big prizes

There are two Alfreds in the world of distinguished awards: one a Swede; the other a Dutchman. They say one man invented dynamite; the other invented “global beer marketing as we know it.” One Alfred bequeathed his fortune to five international prizes, for physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace. The other founded awards in biochemistry and biophysics, medicine, environmental sciences, history and art. The first man, Alfred Nobel, never lived to see the legacy of his bequest. The second, Alfred “Freddy” Heineken, saw over 30 prizes awarded over the last four decades of his life.

Similar, but distinctive, the legacies of the two Alfreds live on in the awards bearing their names: the Heineken Prizes and the Nobel Prizes. Today there are six Heineken Prizes, including a new one since September those for cognitive science, history and art. Nobel’s will stipulated that his original five prize categories remain. The Bank of Sweden added a sixth

prize, for economic science, in Nobel’s name in 1968.

The awards are separate, but they are not unrelated: seven of the Heineken Prize winners have gone on to win Nobel Prizes later in their careers.

Setting the standards high

Dr. Christian de Duve, 1973 Heineken Prize winner for his discovery of the cell organelles called the lysosome and peroxisome, set the expectations high for future winners when the following year, he won the Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine (with Albert Claude and George Emil Palade.). De Duve’s Heineken award was the Dr. H. P. Heineken Prize for biochemistry and biophysics.

That award for biochemistry and biophysics is also the Heineken Prize which has produced the most Nobel Prize winners—three in addition to de Duve: Dr. Aaron Klug (1979) won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1982;

Dr. Thomas Cech, winner of the 1988 prize, won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1989; and in 2001, Sir Paul Nurse was awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine after winning the Heineken Prize in 1996.

Both de Duve and award-founder Heineken shared a vision of what such prizes might mean to the greater society. Speaking in 2000 at a meeting of Nobel Prize winners in Germany, de Duve commented on the role of the Nobel Prize and other distinguished awards: “For the relationship with the scientific community and the outside world, I think the Nobel Prizes have been tremendous because they have caught the collective imagination of the world, so that the respect of the Nobel Prize winners [...] becomes translated in the general community into some kind of respect for science.”

De Duve’s comments must have pleased Heineken. He admired science and its practitioners, but from an early age felt that they were not given the appreciation they deserved. This led him to create the Dr. H.P.

Heineken Prize for biochemistry and biophysics in 1964, named for his father, Dr. Henry Pierre Heineken, who was a chemist.

Alfred Heineken said, before his death in 2002, “I want the prizes to act as a stimulus to researchers, as well as a reward for past accomplishments.”

A legacy of excellence

Dr. Paul C. Lauterbur, the inventor of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was the first Heineken Prize winner in medicine (1989) to go on to win a Nobel Prize, also in medicine, in 2003. He was followed by the two most recent Heineken/Nobel recipients, both of whom also won in the discipline of medicine.

One of those winners, Dr. Eric Kandel, pioneered research in the molecular mechanisms underlying learning processes and memory. Autumn 2000 was a busy season for him. In September, he was awarded the A.H. Heineken Prize for medicine.

“The Heineken Prize is a wonderful award. I felt very honoured to receive it. My children and grandchildren came with me [to accept the award],” Kandel recently recalled. “It provided a perfect prelude to the Nobel ceremony.” Just two weeks after receiving his Heineken Prize at the

Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam, Kandel received the news of his Nobel Prize in medicine.

From Heineken to Nobel—a direct route?

Not all trips between Heineken and Nobel are as short as Kandel’s. On average, the seven dual winners have taken three years to make the trip. And, of course, winning a Heineken Prize is no guarantee that a Nobel Prize will follow. There is, however, a relationship.

“Both prizes fish in the same pond. The same names come forward for both prizes, so the Heineken Prizes can be seen as a forerunner or indicator of the Nobel Prizes,” says Madelon de Ruiters, project officer for the Heineken Prizes 2006 at the Communications Department of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Academy selects the winners of the scientific Heineken Prizes on the basis of nominations received from other scientists or from learned institutions throughout the world. Nominees for any of the Heineken science prizes are typically active researchers who “are expected to continue their research activities for at least ten years” and whose achievements in their field are “outstanding and a source of inspiration to others.”

Dr. Barry Marshall is the latest Nobel Prize winner to come from Heineken stock. He won the Heineken Prize for medicine in 1998 and in October of this year he was tapped for the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for 2005 (jointly with Dr. J. Robin Warren). The two Australians discovered the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* and its role in gastritis and peptic ulcer disease.

Marshall commented on the selection process, and the supposition that one prize leads to another: “It must be a very heavy responsibility for the Nobel selection committee to choose a winner amongst so many worthy candidates. However, some of their work is assisted, I believe, by the earlier reviews in other prestigious academies. The Heineken selection committee at the Academy goes to great lengths to select the winners so the prizes are well respected by other academies.”

What can be said for the Heineken selection process can be repeated about other major prizes, of course. The International Congress of

Helicobacter pylori and its role in gastritis and peptic ulcer disease was discovered by Heineken Prize winner Dr. Barry Marshall

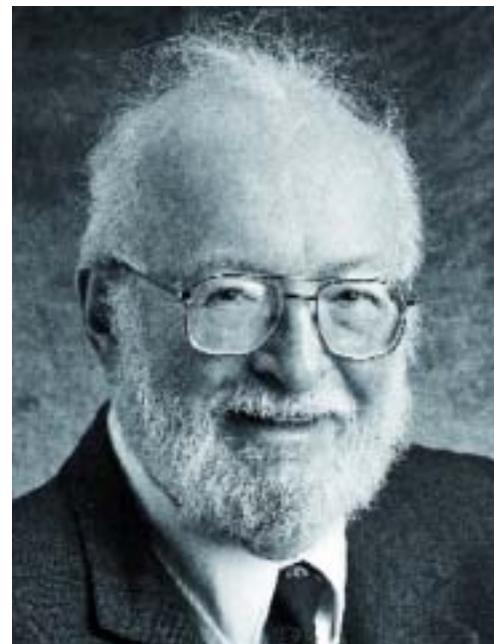
“The Heineken prize is a wonderful award. I felt very honoured to receive it. It provided a perfect prelude to the Nobel ceremony.” Dr. Eric Kandel



Sir Paul M. Nurse accepting his Nobel Prize



Dr. Thomas Cech, winner of the 1988 prize, won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1989



Dr. Paul C. Lauterbur, inventor of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was the first Heineken Prize winner in medicine (1989) to go on to win a Nobel Prize, also in medicine, in 2003

Distinguished Awards lists more than 20 science awards with prizes above USD 100,000. Many of those could be considered precursors to the awarding of a Nobel Prize.

Where the money goes

The Heineken scientific prizes award each USD 150,000 every two years. There are no restrictions on how that money can be spent. "As far as we know, most has been spent on scientific research, developing programmes, hiring doctoral students, etc. Some money has also been used to develop a laboratory," says de Ruiter.

At the time of his Heineken Prize in 1998, Marshall was moving his lab to Perth: "The award eased the transition back to Australia and assisted a travel scholarship I funded to Dr. Hans Kusters' research laboratory in Amsterdam," he recalls.

But when it comes to spending prize money, nobody tops Sir Paul M. Nurse, the 1996 Heineken recipient in biochemistry and biophysics. When asked about what he would do with his Nobel Prize award in 2001, he famously answered, "Buy a motorbike." He explained later in a *New York Times* article. "They always ask you what you are going to do with the money. They want to know if you are going to do something worthy or pay off the mortgage. I thought responding in a human way, saying you could do something you always wanted to do, would make science more human." And, yes, he bought the bike.

A new prize with an old name

Although the first Heineken Prize was named for his father Dr. H.P. Heineken (for biochemistry and biophysics), the others bear Freddy Heineken's own name, the Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize for medicine, for environmental sciences, for history and for art. This was, at first, uncomfortable for the founder of the prizes. "We have named the prize, but it disturbs me nevertheless to have my own name attached to it," the

modest Heineken professed. "I see Mr. Nobel already has his own prize," he once grumbled.

In fact, at one point he was asked if it really was such a coincidence that the prizes were both named after an Alfred. "I find it amusing, but don't make much of it."

As he became more comfortable with his name on the prizes, he soon realised that being "the Dutch variant of his namesake, Alfred Nobel," allowed him to "set a good example" for other people of means—wondering in a humorous bent at one point, why journalists didn't give him the name of "Noble Alfred." (Of course, at this prompting from a genius in branding, the journalists took up the nickname.)

The newest Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize, for cognitive science, was announced in September. Cognitive science is a relatively new field of research, which is enjoying its first successes with answers to the age-old question of the working of the human mind. Although both the Kyoto Prize and the Nobel Prize have recognised work in the field, the Heineken Prize is the first important international award for research into how intelligence comes about.

This is the first time that a prize has not been created by Mr. Alfred Heineken himself. With regard to the new prize, his daughter, Mrs. C.L. de Carvalho-Heineken, who succeeded him as chair of the Alfred Heineken Fondsen Foundation committee, says, "My father was fascinated by the working of the human mind. If, by instituting this prize, we can make a contribution to the development of scientific research in this field, it will be entirely within the spirit of the Heineken Prizes."

Deadline for nominations for this newest prize is January 1st, 2006.

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