

## FOC Grand Prix Design 2011: encomium for Walter Steiger

My dear Walter Steiger  
prizewinners and guests

Walter Steiger's shoes are not adorned with decoration. Their beauty comes from other sources: shape, choice of materials, colour, master craftsmanship and his way of resolving technical difficulties. Walter says that, for him, the beauty of design is in "finding solutions". Shoes created thirty years ago can still be found in his boutiques alongside extremely contemporary pieces of avant-garde footwear. The two do not conflict with or detract from each other, they walk side-by-side in harmony out of the door. I think that sums up Walter's personality rather well. This is where I start to mix things up a little. When I talk about the man, I think of his creations; when I describe the creations, I think of the man. This inextricable connection illustrates the unstinting passion and the authenticity that are singular to Walter and his design approach.

The common thread that guided Walter throughout his career and now informs my speech, too, is the dream of a young boy of 15 who grew up in Geneva: "I want to leave Switzerland behind and create the world's most beautiful footwear!" That dream has motivated him all his life.

And so it was that he set off in search of adventure, heading out into the big, wide world...all the way to Appenzell, where he became a cobbler's apprentice.

This became the foundation of his approach to working, his design philosophy and his creativity. Even today, his connection to the master cobbler in Appenzell comes through just as naturally as his relationship with such style icons as Thierry Mugler, Claude Montana and others. Only a man like this, who considers his life and his career to be one and the same and takes his strength from this fact, is capable of adopting an attitude like this.

On completing his apprenticeship in Appenzell, his motivation took him out of Switzerland and launched him into the Paris fashion scene. Then came a spell in swinging London. He followed his shoes wherever they led him, designing for Bally, Mary Quant and so on.

Returning to Paris after a brief detour via Zurich, he witnessed the decline of *haute couture* and the birth of *prêt-à-porter* at first hand, playing an active role in this shift and enriching this new branch of fashion with his own creations. He is a sort of walking, talking encyclopaedia of the fashions of that period as well as a keen observer of the latest trends. He has never had trouble finding his place in the world. In 2004, he launched ".....", a boutique-workshop where the shoes are made to measure by hand. It is typical of Walter that his artisanal *savoir-faire* should find a home in Paris's most exclusive shopping district! Paris meets Appenzell, if you will.

He would have been at home anywhere, to be honest. Nothing could have held his career back. Indeed, career ambitions have never been foremost in his mind, but rather the desire to create the world's most beautiful footwear! Thus, his profession has never felt like work to him. As he puts it: "When I'm creating shoes, I'm at peace."

Are there any limits to his motivation to create the world's most beautiful footwear? No, it is what keeps him going. It is the driving force behind his footwear, his brand and his personality. Of course, he travels a lot – Geneva, Paris, London, New York, Italy. However, he insists that, rather than feeling like he is on the move all the time, it feels more like he keeps coming home again and again, one way or another. National borders and geographical distances are clearly no obstacle to the world's most beautiful footwear.

Will he perhaps discover the world's most beautiful footwear within himself, and then only by moving around?

So, Walter Steiger, this Grand Prix is for you and your career, but also for the world's most beautiful footwear that you have yet to design. We hope that you will not create it too soon and that you will continue to influence the world of fashion and design, to enrich it with your marvellous creations and to inspire others with your unique personality.

Christoph Hefti, Federal Design Commission, 2011