

Pierre Potier at 70.

“Bon anniversaire, Pierre !”

It is a great privilege to be able to wish Pierre many more active years, and to do it via a journal which symbolises two of his fields of activity : it is a journal published in Japan, and it is a journal specialised in heterocyclic chemistry.

Pierre's chemical career was initially devoted to heterocycles : he was a student of Maurice-Marie Janot, at the time this very distinguished colleague initiated a revival of natural products chemistry in France by his studies of alkaloids of many different families, with Le Men, Goutarel, and many others. Pierre's first claim to fame was the discovery of a very simple modification of the “Polonovski reaction” of N-oxides with acetic anhydride, by replacing it by trifluoroacetic anhydride, which led to the well-known and useful “Polonovski-Potier reaction”. This was promptly used in the first syntheses of several bis-indole alkaloids such as those isolated from the Madagascar periwinkle *Catharanthus rosea*”, and of some of their structural variants, including the unnatural Navelbine® (“Vinorelbine”), a useful therapeutic agent used against several types of cancers. A few years later came the discovery of the taxol-like properties of an unnatural derivative of taxol, obtained from the abundant diterpenes of the European yew. Taxotere®, (“Docetaxel”) has also been introduced into medical practice, making Pierre Potier one of the very few discoverers of two major anti-cancer drugs used world-wide in medical practice. On the occasion of these discoveries, he has also managed to involve quite astutely Industry, and thus to obtain for his Institute, ICSN, in Gif-sur-Yvette, a very substantial source of revenue, making it, now in the hands of his successor, Jean-Yves Lallemand, one of the best equipped European Institutes.

Pierre Potier has also put his business acumen to the service of the Fondation Internationale de la Maison de la Chimie, a unique institution superbly located near the Invalides in Paris, which he has turned into a major site for meetings, chemical and otherwise.


Pierre Potier has very early been very successful in building bridges across the World, in particular with Japan. He and his friend Yoshio Ban have launched the Franco-Japanese Society for Fine and Medicinal Chemistry, which has organised regular meetings in both

countries, bringing together academic and industrial chemists ; the success of this initiative has next led him to launch a similar French-American Society.

It would be preposterous to conclude this Preface without mentioning one of the most remarkable qualities of Pierre Potier : the warmth and depth of his friendship. Not only does he cherish and constantly extends the circle of his personal friends, but he demonstrates unusual closeness to them in their personal crises.

"Bon anniversaire, Pierre", and many happy returns !

Guy Ourisson

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Guy Ourisson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.