“I’m passionate about ETH!”



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Roland von Ballmoos has felt a close bond with ETH ever since the days of his chemistry doctorate. So close, in fact, that he has named the ETH Zurich Foundation in his will.

How would you describe yourself?

Roland von Ballmoos – I’m someone who enjoys a challenge. When other people say “that’s impossible”, it just makes me all the more determined. My partner sometimes says to me: “Can’t you sit back once in a while?” No, I can’t. When I put my mind to something, I’m there, every inch of the way – who needs sleep? (Laughs) It’s an approach that has proven successful, from my first job at Mobil Oil (now ExxonMobil) to my later career as a consultant.

What memories do you have of ETH?

Roland von Ballmoos – Earning the degree and the doctorate was very tough. I did nothing but work, work, work, with the odd trip to the mountains to go skiing. I wasn’t the best student. Maths definitely wasn’t my forte. But I enjoyed working in the lab.

You were born in 1952 – why have you decided to write a will now, outlining what is important to you for the future?

Roland von Ballmoos – I've suffered my fair share of personal tragedies, lost people who were close to me. So at first, I just wanted to turn a blind eye to the whole subject. But my partner kept telling me how important it is to put your effects in order. And, of course, she's right.

Why are you leaving a legacy to the ETH Zurich Foundation in your will?

Roland von Ballmoos – Without ETH, I wouldn't be where I am today. So I knew straight away that I wanted to include the ETH Zurich Foundation in my will. Also, I lived in the US for 15 years and I was impressed by the philanthropic tradition they have of giving something back to your university. I'm passionate about ETH: it's been at the top of the international rankings for years now – that's great and I want it to stay that way! Whenever I attend events at ETH – Meet the Talent or Industry Day, for example – I always leave feeling vindicated in my commitment to this university. I hope to inspire others to follow suit.

You seem to spend a lot of your time travelling – what projects are keeping you so busy?

Roland von Ballmoos – First, there's CabinCracks, the start-up I founded in 2017. We have programme managers and software in place to take the way that aircraft cabins are planned and produced to a new level. My USP here is that developed pneumatic cushions for aircraft with the company Lantal Textiles. These cushions, incidentally, were also used in Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg's "Solar Impulse"! Alongside my start-up, I have also a huge passion for skiing and classic cars. I love driving over mountain passes at five in the morning – and sometimes I take part in rallies too!



A place he was very familiar with during his time here: the former ETH chemistry building, known as “CAB”. Today, an old laboratory in the listed building serves as a study room for students.

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I hope to inspire others with my commitment to ETH Zurich.

Roland von Ballmoos
ETH Zurich donor

Legacies & bequests

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