

Dietrich Fengel (15 September 1931–14 November 2021)

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On 14 November 2021, Prof. Dr. Dietrich Fengel passed away at the age of 90.

After his school education, Dietrich Fengel studied chemistry at the Technical University of Darmstadt from 1952 to 1959. In 1962, he received his doctorate at the “Institute for Cellulose Chemistry” under Prof. Georg Jayme, and became a leading member of the electron microscopy department. On 1 October 1963, he joined Prof. Kollmann at the “Institute for Wood Research and Wood Technology” at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich (now “Holzforschung München”). With great pioneering spirit and professional competence, he thoughtfully and steadily built up the working area “Chemistry and Ultrastructure of Wood” and gained high recognition worldwide through numerous pioneering publications of this group. A special feature of many of his works was the close linking of classical wood chemistry with the possibilities of high-resolution electron microscopy, which already proved to be a fortunate move in his habilitation thesis (1968) and led to a much-noted model of the structure of the lignified cell wall in 1970. In addition to diverse basic research on the cell wall components, the range of research topics extended from fossil woods and Egyptian tomb linen to practical issues in the pulp and paper industry. In 1974, he was appointed Professor.

A particular highlight was the publication of the comprehensive monograph “Wood—Chemistry, Ultrastructure, Reactions” (with co-author Gerd Wegener) in 1984. This textbook is still used today by students and scientists worldwide as a valued reference work.

Numerous research trips abroad, lectures at international congresses and international reviewer activities, in addition to a publication list of about 200 titles and a large number of doctoral students, testify to Fengel’s successful teaching and research activities in a highly specialized field within the former Faculty of Forest Sciences.

With his retirement in 1994, Dietrich Fengel ended his academic activities with his characteristic consistency. He moved back to his home region in Southern Hesse and spent happy years with his wife and a large circle of friends with diverse activities and experiences in nature and in the world of theatre, music and art. Many small works of art made of wood in combination with other appreciated materials, in addition to his academic legacy, bear witness to the craftsmanship of a great scientist.

Klaus Richter and Gerd Wegener

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