

Some facets of the mathematician and of the person Günter Ziegler

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Günter Ziegler has an extraordinarily broad approach to mathematics as a whole. He is an engaging teacher and communicator with a contagious enthusiasm, and he remains approachable with a sense for what is fun in life.

Let me illustrate with a (very) personal anecdote. It is 1996 and I want to finally finish my Master's thesis: I am to compute topological invariants of certain specific 3-manifolds. Most certainly, this term I should not attend additional lectures.

Well, there is this class "Topological Methods in Discrete Mathematics" by a certain professor Ziegler which does sound tempting. I have not seen any discrete math thus far, so let me talk to this professor to gauge if this is feasible. I arrive at the Ziegler office, but there is only what seems to be an assistant: with bleached hair (like myself) and in Birkenstock's.

Long story cut short: the "assistant" was Günter Ziegler, I did attend the course and was so hooked that I ended up working toward my PhD under his guidance and pursuing an academic career at the intersection of combinatorics and algebraic geometry.

With his broad view of mathematics, Günter Ziegler set me on track to work in toric geometry which he identified as an important, future oriented field, even though he did not focus on this connection himself. Via his engaging lectures, he did not only convince me to change from topology to his style of discrete mathematics. Via his many academic children, Günter Ziegler has a lasting impact on the science of mathematics – beyond his seminal papers, his influential books, and his personal work for the community.

Häppie Geburtstag, Günter!