

## Obituary: Piet Schellekens (1941-2023)

**Piet Schellekens, emeritus professor of Precision Engineering at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) since 2004, died at the beginning of this year. Below are two excerpts from texts dedicated to his memory.**

*From the obituary on the TU/e website by Klaas Struik (assessor at RvA and BELAC), who was among other things head of the department of Geometrical Metrology, with professor Schellekens in the TU/e Precision Engineering department, and Henny Spaan (founder of IBS Precision Engineering), who obtained his Ph.D. degree under the supervision of professor Schellekens.*

“After his education at the Philips company school, Piet Schellekens went to work as an instrument maker at Philips Research (‘Natlab’). Soon afterwards, in 1964, he transferred to TU/e, where he became a technical assistant for education and research in the Production Technology group, under the direction of professor Veenstra.

In 1983, following the departure of his graduation professor Koning, Schellekens became head of the Section of Geometrical Measurement Techniques under professor Van der Wolf’s Chair of Processing Technology, enabling him to expand his field with the help of students and Ph.D. candidates. Seven years later, he was able to set up his own chair of

Precision Engineering, which grew into a world-class group with exceptional academic results and an excellent connection to industry.

With his enthusiastic (and typical) approach, he set an example for his students. As taught by Piet, metrology was the basis of precision engineering and this is still the case 30 years later. Driven by his passion for lasers and metrology, Piet created one of the pillars of the current success of the Eindhoven Brainport region. A man with drive and passion who will be sorely missed.”

*From the speech at the funeral by Han Haitjema, professor of Dimensional Metrology at KU Leuven (Belgium) and Schellekens’ assistant professor in 1997-2004.*

“I came into contact with Piet when I joined the Dutch Measurement Institute in Delft in 1989. At the time, the Dutch standard of length was realised at the institute by two stabilised lasers from TU/e. These were designed, developed and built by Piet. His Ph.D. thesis was based on this.

Later on, he asked me to come to Eindhoven. Under his leadership I had a great time at TU/e. Together we came up with new Ph.D. projects and were able to implement them, resulting in many successful promotions and publications. He introduced me to CIRP – the leading

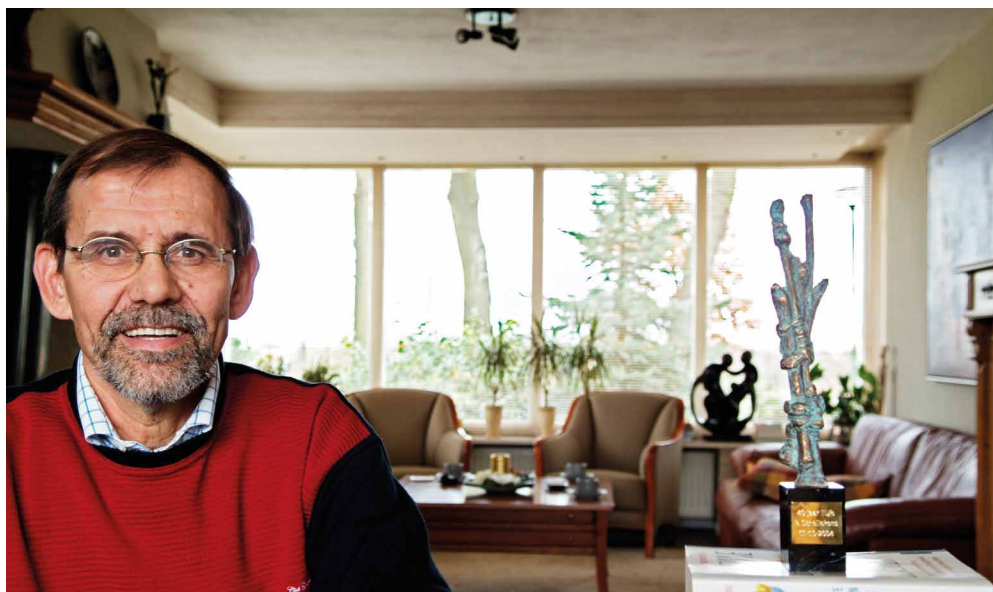
international production engineering research organisation – and helped me with my contacts with Mitutoyo, the leading manufacturer of measuring equipment. Mitutoyo’s measuring machines still contain software that was developed in Piet’s group at the time. He was appointed a fellow at CIRP in 1999 and served as secretary and chairman of the technical-scientific committee for Precision Engineering and Metrology between 1998 and 2006. At that time, he was also involved with the foundation of euspen, the European Society for Precision Engineering and Nanotechnology, which was initiated at a CIRP conference.

After Piet’s retirement in 2004, I became director of Mitutoyo Research Center Europe in Best. Mitutoyo had chosen this location (near Eindhoven, ed.) thanks to its proximity to Piet and his students and employees. In 2018, I became a professor at KU Leuven. I could never have got that far without Piet introducing me at Mitutoyo, euspen and CIRP.

Piet was always enthusiastic, enthusing and straightforward, averse to political games. He gave his opinion loud and clear whether it was convenient or not at the time. Because of his career through all phases of technical education (ing., ir., dr., prof.), he got along well with everyone at all levels and he also achieved a lot in companies, something that fellow professors looked at with envy. He took his duties very seriously; in publications and reports he always checked all equations.

His merits in his field are illustrated by the fact that euspen wanted to award him the Lifetime Achievement Award. He had already refused it once when I was approached to ask if I would try to persuade him to accept this recognition for the following year. He again refused very firmly; he did not consider himself comparable to the greats in his field. I contradicted that but could not convince him.

He can no longer contradict me and that is why I will say it here once again: he was one of the greatest in his field, a Lifetime Achievement Award for him would have been fully deserved.”



*Piet Schellekens after his retirement in 2004. (Photo: Bart van Overbeeke)*