

Martin Schlauri started his milling career with a millers' apprenticeship program with his first work experience as a young miller outside Europe, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Martin joined Bühler in 1980 after graduating as a milling technologist at the Swiss School of Milling (SMS). After completing assignments in process development and plant commissioning in various countries, he was made responsible for the flour milling business in Egypt followed by Italy.

Back to the headquarter in Switzerland, Martin Schlauri took over the management of the grain milling training centre and later headed Bühler's worldwide grain milling activities. In 2015 Martin took over the management of the African Milling School in Nairobi, Kenya, where he also taught technology and quality control. In 2020 Martin returned to Switzerland, taking care of specific milling groups and projects for the company.

What brought you into milling in the first place? As a young man there must have been lots of opportunities besides milling.

Martin Schlauri: On my way to school I always passed a beautiful mill with a silo. And I got the smell of wheat and flour. So one day I entered and asked what would it take to become a miller? They handed me out a nice brochure with an introduction to milling. At the top was written that for a miller the world was open. That's when I went wow. So, it was a bit of a combination of this really great looking mill and that as a miller you would be able to go outside your country. I wanted to see the world.

Did you not have an individual to help you get started on your milling career?

Martin Schlauri: Yes, but later. At that time, it was my decision, with the real motivation coming during my apprenticeship. My mentor was an experienced miller with worldwide experience and had been travelling for about 20 years outside Switzerland. He told me stories of when he had been working in places such as South America, Morocco and Myanmar/Burma. He was the one that prepared me for seeing the world as a miller.

You also attended the Swiss Milling School? Did you have any work experience prior to join the Swiss Milling School?

Martin Schlauri: After I had done my apprenticeship, which is always first for a young miller in Switzerland, I applied for a job in Africa. I got the job as assistant production manager in a mill in Nigeria. That was my first experience in leadership, managing 200 staff members, people who needed to be guided but in a positive way and we all got along. I learnt such good things in milling but also from the human interactions. When I came back to Switzerland, I joined the Swiss Milling School in 1979.

At what point did you join Bühler? Training was already a big part of your motivation early on but when did you realise that it was going to be a bigger part of your career?

Martin Schlauri: I joined Bühler immediately after graduating, as a milling engineer, from the Swiss Milling School. My first five years with Bühler was going outside of Switzerland as a start-up engineer and commissioning mills. I went to many projects in different countries and continents to commission plants. And it was during this time that I learnt how important it was to have trained people around me. It was clear that training is still not available in every part of the world.

By commissioning plants, the local people had a chance to

get trained. I invested a lot of time in training the local staff during those trips and particularly during mill commissioning. And I got such a positive reaction from the people, so it has become part of my life. Wherever I went, I passed on skills to the people who may not have had the same chances I was given.

Was training an activity in the milling industry at that time and how the training of millers was done?

Martin Schlauri: I came to realise - at that time I was five years in Egypt where we had a number of mills under construction - that to bring all these millers to Europe for training was not feasible. You needed to have facilities and something like local training. And that was at a time when the US Wheat Association together with Bühler built a milling school in Egypt. So it was the start of the training of Egyptian millers in their own country. That was a win-win situation with regard to travel but as well teaching in their mother language Arabic.

Is there sufficient resources being given over to training and support from governments?

Martin Schlauri: That is the point. Behind every school there has to be people committed to keeping the school running at a high level and that often proves too difficult to maintain.

Do you think the milling industry is well served with training or do you think we need more structured training?

Martin Schlauri: Almost every region of the world has training facilities for millers. What is still missing is how to see inside the minds of the companies concerned. How are they looking at training? So it's usually an issue of how to pass know-how to the right group of new millers. Mill owners or managers are afraid to invest in their people because there is such a shortage and the opportunity for trained millers is big. All they want are experienced millers and millers with the right skills and experience. It's a spiral. If you don't train your people, the market does not have sufficient millers with the skills needed. So we need every company to be investing in training.

We hear a lot about big data, smart equipment, IoT and the development of sensors and the smart mill. Is training a critical part for the industry to make that transition from where we are now - which is very hands on - to where we are likely to be in the future?

Martin Schlauri: You're right. It's an evolution. Digitalisation is creating a new base for our industry. In the past the miller

had just one number to understand and that was flour extraction. Now with different raw materials and flours that have different properties, which require more data and more information in order for the miller to reach the product his customer wants. Operational excellence or milling excellence can now be measured. Millers should ask every day: Am I on top or am I average? With digitalisation Millers are getting the kind of data and information that helps guide you to operate and control a mill correctly.

So, do you feel that training must include more focus on digitalisation knowledge and understanding?

Martin Schlauri: I've just received a comment from a former student who says it is now much easier for him to understand what is going on in the mill. Milling in the digital world means the basics are still the same but it's easier to achieve the results you want. This is helping to achieve the ultimate end product given there is so much invested in today's mills. It's the value of the whole installation from the raw materials going in and the end product coming out and how we can achieve better output.

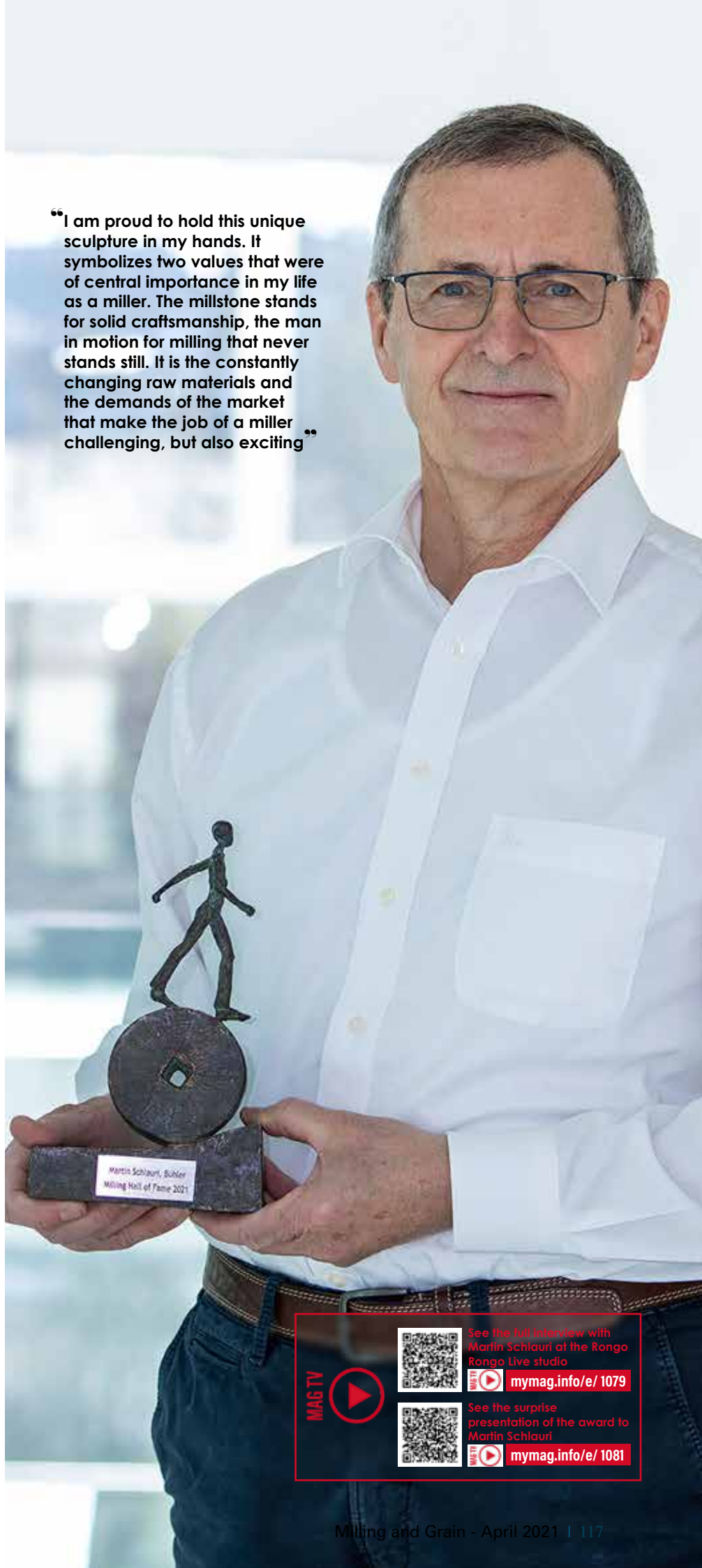
How do you view the future of the milling industry? What the feeling for the future of the industry?

Martin Schlauri: Milling is local, raw materials are international. Local companies are driving production of flour and serving the local community downstream of the industry. These companies need to be strong in three things: they need to be internationally connected with regard to the grain supply because it impacts their business; they need to have experts in the processing of wheat to flour and at the end they should always understand the demand of the market and their customers. You see in every country that those millers with a better understanding get a premium for their products.

Finally, what are your views on flour fortification given your experience of milling in countries and culture around the world?

Martin Schlauri: In many countries, carbohydrate is the staple food of most people. They are missing minerals, vitamins and proteins. And in many countries, I see the positives from flour fortification. For it to be introduced and adopted it just needs the governments to give directives and see that it is properly done. Fortification is a must, for everyone. Millers know flour needs fortification.

“I am proud to hold this unique sculpture in my hands. It symbolizes two values that were of central importance in my life as a miller. The millstone stands for solid craftsmanship, the man in motion for milling that never stands still. It is the constantly changing raw materials and the demands of the market that make the job of a miller challenging, but also exciting”



Martin Schlauri, Bühler
Milling Hall of Fame 2021

MAG TV 

 See the full interview with Martin Schlauri at the Rongo Rongo Live studio
mymag.info/e/1079

 See the surprise presentation of the award to Martin Schlauri
mymag.info/e/1081