Mr Hans Michael Jebsen

If the image of an owner of a Porsche car reveals more glamour than modesty, it is certainly a stark contrast to that of the one who brings the brand into Hong Kong. Porsche is, however, only one of the many household names that are carried by the products Jebsen & Co Ltd distributes. The company’s Chairman, Mr Hans Michael Jebsen, whom we honor today, is well known for his modesty in maintaining a low profile in spite of the celebrated success of the business he runs. As the South China Morning Post put it in an article on the centenary celebration of Jebsen & Co Ltd: “Mr Jebsen’s low profile is a little unusual for the territory where the cult of the plutocrat reigns, and the businessmen figure as prominently on the social pages of newspapers as they do in the business section”. “I never wanted to be a movie star,” that same article reported Mr Jebsen saying, “I leave that to other people.” One has to decide in life what the priorities are. Mr Jebsen’s priority is unquestionably meeting the family at the dinner table rather than appearing in front of the television camera. “The best way to handle celebrity status is for people to retain ties to where they came from - religion, family, hobbies - things that rooted them to life before they became celebrities,” is an advice that Mr Jebsen has certainly taken to heart.

Make no mistake. Behind his modesty is a man with a colorful background that can feature in many a movie. Mr Jebsen was born to a family descended from generations of courageous Danish seafarers, adventurers, and entrepreneurs that could be traced back to the 16th century. From the first part of the 19th century, members of the Jebsen family were among the earlier captains to have involved with China trade. After years of trading experience with China, foundations were laid for the establishment of Jebsen & Co, a partnership between Mr Jacob Jebsen, Mr Hans Michael Jebsen’s grandfather, and Mr Heinrich Jessen, in Shanghai in 1895. Since then, the company has continued to evolve and grow, withstanding the tests of two world wars and the turbulent periods of modern Asian history. The company’s business profile covers China, Southeast Asia, Denmark, Germany and the USA. The center of Jebsen & Co’s business remains firmly rooted in Hong Kong and the Mainland, a place that Mr Jebsen and his family call home.

As the eldest son Mr Jebsen was groomed to be the heir to the family business at an early stage. The unfortunate and untimely decease of his father Mr. Jacob Jebsen in 1979 made it necessary for him to leave his studies in Switzerland midstream to join the business at the age of 24. He became the company’s Managing Director six years later in 1985. The company continues to thrive under his leadership. Today, Jebsen & Co employs well over a thousand staff, with businesses run by twelve specialized divisions under four main areas: Motor Trade, Consumer Goods, Industrial Trade, and...
Services. The company maintains active business activities in the Mainland through nine representative offices, two affiliated companies, six joint ventures, and various other direct investments. The distinctive Jebsen emblem of three mackerels now covers the supply of Porsche, Renault, Bosch auto parts, Pentax cameras, Akai audio gear, Blue Girl beer, and many others. Despite the diversity of products ushered into Hong Kong and China by the company and its phenomenal growth spanning more than a century, the company has not changed its character since inception. Jebsen & Co retains its long-standing culture as a family-owned, family-run and close-knit business and has every intention to remain so. Such an environment enables the company to value the respect for the individual and sensitivity to personal relationships.

Success in business is not Mr Hans Michael Jebsen’s only virtue. He follows his family’s long tradition of active public service. Way back in the mid 19th century his great-great-grandfather set up a pension fund for widows and orphans of seafarers from Aabenraa, the place where the early Jebsens took citizenship. Although Mr Jebsen seeks to be spared from the social pages of newspapers and the limelight of the society glossy, he does not shy away from supporting meaningful causes. Sustainable development and protection of our natural resources is close to his heart. He has been serving as Chairman of the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong since 1995, and Trustee of WWF International, Switzerland since 1998. Four years ago, as part of his company’s centenary celebration, Mr Jebsen set up an education foundation to help students from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong to pursue their studies at HKUST. So far more than 480 students have benefited from such generosity. Mr Jebsen serves as a corporate advisor to the University’s School of Business and Management. On music and art, Mr Jebsen is no philistine. "Music in my mother’s family was as natural as the air to breathe," he professed. He started putting how to strings on the violin at the age of eight and relished the joy of music and the fun of team effort through his student days, playing at various chamber music ensembles. He is a member of the Asia Cultural Council of Hong Kong and a life member of the Academy of Performing Arts of Hong Kong.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, I have the honor to present to you, on behalf of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Mr Hans Michael Jebsen, Chairman of Jebsen & Co Ltd, Hong Kong, for the award of Honorary Fellowship.