



News Release

For Immediate Release

April 23, 2010

FINLEY'S JACQUES COMBAULT AWARDED FRANCE'S HIGHEST DECORATION

TALLAHASSEE, Florida – World-renowned bridge engineer Jacques Combault, technical director of Finley Engineering Group (FINLEY), was inducted into the National Order of the Legion of Honour, the highest decoration in France, in a recent ceremony.

Presented for the honor by his friend and mentor, Jacques Mathivat, Combault recalled some of the great projects and personalities he encountered in his career. “At the risk of sounding pretentious, I am very proud of the things I have been able to do over the course of my career. It would be impossible however to rate my greatest satisfactions in a top 10 list, so I will just list the most recent ones,” he said.

These recent projects included the Rion Antirion Bridge in Greece, the Sutong Bridge in China, and the work he did with Craig Finley on a “prize-winning solution to a challenging motorway exchange problem in the heart of Miami.”

Finley, founder and managing director of Finley Engineering Group, says it was an honor to attend the ceremony for his friend and colleague. “Entertainers and athletes are always receiving awards, so it is refreshing to see Jacques be recognized for his monumental contributions to improving the state of global transportation infrastructure. His intense creativity and precise technical expertise are unique among practitioners of our trade. I can't think of anyone more deserving of this distinguished honor from his countrymen.”

Looking back on his 40-plus-year career, Combault said, “With regards to my studies, you may be surprised to learn that I wanted to be a doctor – more precisely a surgeon. I was passionate about math, physics, chemistry and biology and didn't decide until my final year of high school to study engineering. It is a choice I don't regret. Isn't there great joy in doing what one believes is profoundly important?”

Napoleon Bonaparte established the National Order of the Legion of Honour in 1802 to recognize outstanding achievement. Past honorees include scientist Jacques Cousteau, sculptor Auguste Rodin and author Jules Verne. Foreign recipients include author J.K. Rowling, filmmaker Stephen Spielberg and activist Elie Wiesel.

Mathivat was a director for French engineering and construction company Campenon Bernard when Combault joined the firm in 1967. “From the beginning, your enthusiasm and your passion for bridge design and construction led me to entrust you with the detailed planning of the Givors bridge deck over the Rhône, which you carried off with confirmed professionalism,” Mathivat said in a statement read by his daughter, Catherine. “A long and fruitful collaboration followed.”

Mathivat added that Combault was ahead of his time in his willingness to embrace new technologies, including early adoption of computer programs and calculations. Mathivat quipped, “You just might have given Bill Gates a run for his money in other circumstances!”

In addition to Mathivat, Combault thanked two notable mentors who have since passed on – Jean Muller and Jan Chaudesaigues. Both held significant positions at Campenon Bernard and greatly influenced his career. With Mathivat, Combault called them “the magic trio.” He also recognized his family’s contribution to his career, including his wife, Danièle, and his three children and seven grandchildren.

“For me the most important quality is common sense,” concluded Combault in his acceptance speech. “I have taught principles and I have perfected complicated calculations, but at the end of the day, I have come to realize that nothing can replace good, common sense.”

About Jacques Combault

Jacques Combault is one of the world’s leading experts in the design and construction engineering of cable-stayed and long-span bridges. During his distinguished, award-winning career, Jacques played a major role in some of the most innovative bridge projects of the past several decades, including the Sunshine Skyway Bridge in Tampa, the Brotonne Bridge on the Seine River in France, the Rion-Antirion in the Gulf of Corinth, Greece, and the Sutong Bridge Project in China. A frequent collaborator with legendary bridge designer Jean Muller, Jacques is a two-time nominee as *ENR* magazine’s Man of the Year.

His long list of honors and recognitions also includes the Federation International du Beton Medal of Merit Award in 2004, the Award of L’Association Francaise pour la Construction in 1991, and three Innovation Awards from Groupe GTM. He is president of the International Association for Bridges and Structural Engineering (IABSE) and has been a keynote speaker at many industry conferences and meetings.

In addition to serving in key design and technical advisory roles on some of the most complex bridge projects in the world, Jacques is recognized for developing far-reaching innovations in the fields of pre-fabricated concrete and steel-concrete composite bridges. He has a master's degree in engineering from the Ecole Centrale de Lyon, spent many years as a professor at the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées in the field of construction techniques, and has published more than 30 scientific and technical papers.

About Finley Engineering Group

Founded in 2004, Finley Engineering Group is recognized, nationally and internationally, as a leading engineering and construction consulting firm specializing in complex bridge projects of all kinds. For more information, contact Dawn White at 602-368-6065 or via e-mail at Dawn.White@finleyengineeringgroup.com.