

Geological Society of America Structural Geology & Tectonics Division

2023 Career Contribution Award

Presented to John Platt

Citation by Darrel Cowan

I am distinctly honored to present the citation for our division's 2023 Career Contribution Award to John Platt, professor earth sciences at the University of Southern California. This welcome task is made much simpler because John's research is so diverse and widely known that I am sure that everyone here has read his publications and is familiar with his contributions. I suspect that John would characterize himself first as a field geologist, and if so, I would add that he epitomizes how field observations can provide new insights into the mechanics of deformation of the Earth's crust and lithosphere.

He and his students and collaborators have worked worldwide. To name just a few places: the Betic Cordillera and western Mediterranean, Basin and Range Province, the Makran, and the Western Alps, the California Coast Ranges. Two themes that emerge are the processes that construct and exhume collisional orogens and the evolution of accretionary wedges at convergent plate margins.

John may comment on what has motivated his research and teaching. To me, I think he has nurtured his curiosity, found problems and questions that are important to our community, and has had the instinct to seek solutions using an arsenal of techniques and tools, including some that had not even been invented when he began his PhD research on the Franciscan in California.

Response by John Platt

First, my thanks to Darrel Cowan for his generous citation. Darrel has been a good friend and role model for more years than I can remember, and I deeply appreciate his words.

My thanks go also to Cliff Hopson and John Crowell, my dissertation advisors at UCSB, for their depth and breadth of geological interests, for encouraging me to think for myself and explore widely, and for supporting me intellectually in my research. I was fortunate to have landed in California just as the plate-tectonic paradigm shift was underway – this was due to encouragement from Ron Oxburgh, my tutor at Oxford. Interactions with Gary Ernst, Tanya Atwater, and John Suppe were very important to me at that time. Subsequently I was lucky to have had opportunities to work in the Alps, in the Betic Cordillera of southern Spain, and in the Makran, giving me a broad view of orogenic processes and a wide range of field experiences. I also owe much to Gordon Lister, Reinoud Vissers, Philip England, Peter Molnar, Greg Davis, and Thorsten Becker, all of whom have greatly influenced my thinking in very different ways. More than anything else, I'm deeply indebted to a succession of brilliant graduate students, who kept me on my toes with questions, ideas, and the adoption of new research techniques: much of my research would not have been possible without their contributions.

One thing I've learnt in an overly long career is the importance of undergraduate teaching. Having to communicate the intricacies of our subject to beginning geology students forces us to focus on essentials, avoid unnecessary jargon, and explain concepts simply and clearly, which in turn leads us to new insights. Field teaching is particularly important: structural geology in particular is best taught in the field, where you can examine structures in the round, and see their relationships to larger-scale phenomena, and you are always surprised by the unexpected.

If I can offer advice to younger researchers, it is – give yourself time to think. Try to get off the treadmill of grant applications and publish or perish. Most of my best ideas and investigations were unsupported by grants (maybe because I'm terrible at writing proposals). My underlying interest has always been in the mechanics and physical significance of deformation at all scales, and developing new concepts requires the time and patience to piece all the information together.

Once again, my thanks to Darrel Cowan and Peter Hudleston for nominating me for this award, and to the Board of the Structural Geology and Tectonics Division of GSA for their support.