



# BEYOND THE NAME: A MODERN DEFINITION OF LEGACY



*Ulrich Schmid-Maybach (Uli Maybach) sat down with Vahe Vartanian for a wide-ranging interview about his background, his values and what drives him to continue building upon his family's legacy.*

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**U**li is an investor, philanthropist, and steward of the Maybach family legacy. Based in Silicon Valley, he is closely engaged with emerging technologies and the capital structures that support them.

He is the great-grandson of Wilhelm Maybach and grandson of Karl Maybach, whose work alongside Gottlieb Daimler helped define modern mobility across air, land, and sea. He was the last family shareholder connected to Maybach-Motorenbau and played a role in shepherding its IPO on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange in 2007, after which he built a diversified family office platform spanning investments, entrepreneurial ventures, and philanthropic initiatives. He co-founded Maybach Icons of Luxury in 2010 and established the Maybach Foundation in 2006 (launched at the United Nations in New York), a global platform dedicated to mentorship, leadership development, and the preservation and continued relevance of the Maybach archive.

**Vahe:** As a 4th generation member of such an illustrious family how much pressure or pride did you feel carrying the name?

**Uli:** Both are present, but neither is productive if you focus on them. Over time, the question becomes simpler: are you adding substance, or just benefiting from what was built? The pride is in what the name stands for: discipline, engineering rigor, and respect for people. The pressure is to not dilute that.



Uli Maybach © Mercedes-Benz USA

**Vahe:** How difficult was it to carve out your own path? Did you benefit from any mentors in your life?

**Uli:** The difficulty was not choosing a different path, it was building one that is credible. Once the business went public, there was a change of focus. That forced a different question: where can I contribute in a way that is both authentic to the legacy and relevant? Mentorship was central, informed in part by my great-grandfather's early life and the role guidance played in shaping his trajectory. Not formal mentorship, but through people who challenged assumptions and accelerated judgment. That directly informed how we built the Foundation.

**Vahe:** Your stance is unusual amongst the heirs to great industrial dynasties such as the Porsche-Piech family, the Agnelli family or the Ford family. How did your family's values shape your upbringing and your future philanthropic interests?

**Uli:** The values were straightforward: do your work properly and treat people with respect. My grandfather Karl Maybach was known to walk the factory floor where the engines were built and address both managers and line workers by name. That was not symbolic, it was operational. You understand systems better when you respect everyone in them. That translates directly into philanthropy. The focus is not on giving, it is on enabling capability and access.

**Vahe:** Uli your name is still associated with Mercedes-Benz but I understand you like to draw a distinction with the legal reality. What do you consider the Maybach family legacy to be?

**Uli:** The association is real, but it is not ownership. That distinction matters. The legacy is not the current product, it is the underlying principles: quality, engineering under constraint, long-term reliability, and clarity of purpose. It was never just cars. It was engines, power, systems, mobility across air, land, and sea.

**Vahe:** Tell us about the Maybach Foundation and its mission of mentorship.

**Uli:** The Foundation is built on a simple idea: capability develops through relationships. I often say your best future is helping someone else find theirs. My great-grandfather's trajectory was changed through mentorship at a critical moment. We take that principle and structure it, connecting emerging leaders with experienced mentors across sectors. The approach has evolved and we are now largely working with a mentoring organization to build scale. This is not charity in the classic sense. It is capability building. ▶



Karl Maybach in front of two of his achievements © Maybach Foundation



**Vahe:** What do you believe are the benefits of mentorship?

**Uli:** Mentorship accelerates judgment. You can acquire information on your own. What you cannot easily acquire is perspective, how to interpret situations, and how to make decisions under uncertainty. One example is Nicole Tung, who as one of our protégés worked alongside professionals documenting the reconstruction of the World Trade Center. Through that experience, and within her cohort, she developed a disciplined eye for narrative, what to capture, and why it matters. She carried that forward into her work covering the Arab Spring, where she found herself at the center of rapidly unfolding events. The question is not just technical skill, but judgment: how do you know, in real time and under pressure, which images will ultimately shape public understanding? That is the role mentorship can play, developing not just capability, but the ability to make consequential decisions in uncertain environments.

**Vahe:** What projects have you been particularly proud of?

**Uli:** One of our earliest projects focused on building in-country medical competency in East Africa. We worked with Dr Conrad Muzoora over a period of more than five years, supporting his development within a constrained clinical environment. Over time, he became Chief of Medicine at his hospital and one of the most published medical researchers in the region. In this case, the intervention was not primarily financial but exposure. He was able to engage with peers and institutions beyond his immediate environment, materially expanding his frame of reference. There is a persistent misconception that poverty reflects a lack of capability. More often, the constraint is access to networks, information, and context. That is where mentorship can have disproportionate impact. In parallel, I am particularly focused on the Maybach Schaudapot in Friedrichshafen in southern Germany, a small, disciplined museum project in the hometown of Maybach-Motorenbau. The intent is not nostalgia, but to reconnect the historical context with a broader audience and anchor the legacy in a relevant physical setting.



Photography Project: Documentary of the Rebuilding of the World Trade Center © Vicky Roy

**Vahe:** What lessons did you learn from your family's business that you then applied to the foundation?

**Uli:** Quality over scale. Long-term orientation. Systems over one-off initiatives. In the words of Klaus Obermeyer the oldest CEO in America still running his own company (and Maybach Motorworks Alumni) "Quality, Quality, Quality"

**Vahe:** What is your vision for the Foundation's next decade?

**Uli:** To make mentorship structured and scalable without losing quality. That includes integrating platforms like MentorCloud, improving matching through data, and embedding mentorship into organizations where it affects performance. If done correctly, mentorship becomes part of how institutions operate, not an add-on. As to our Museum Schaudapot, I am interested in how the core principles of the Maybach legacy, its DNA, can be expressed in contemporary contexts without losing their integrity.

**Vahe:** How does this enterprise reflect the maxim to create the very best from the very best?

**Uli:** Maybach Icons of Luxury is grounded in craftsmanship and material quality. The focus is not on novelty or scale. It is on working with the best materials available and executing at a very high level, often with traditional techniques, in small volumes. The restraint is intentional. We do not try to do too many things, we try to do a few things properly.

**Vahe:** How do you define true luxury, is it more than just price and exclusivity?

**Uli:** Price and exclusivity are byproducts. True luxury is integrity in execution, time, precision, and restraint. The more interesting shift now is driven by AI. We are entering a world where it's possible to produce, communicate, and distribute at scale with almost no friction. You can be everywhere, all the time. That removes scarcity from many traditional domains. The counter-position, and where I see a new moat forming, is restraint and authenticity. Choosing not to produce endlessly. Choosing not to optimize for visibility. Maintaining a point of view that is consistent and grounded. That is harder to replicate than scale.

**Vahe:** Does it give you great satisfaction to take co-ownership of your family name again for both the Foundation and the Icons of Luxury business?

**Uli:** It is not satisfaction, it is responsibility. You have to be selective about where the name is used. It should add credibility, not just attention.

**Vahe:** How involved are the 5th generation in both these ventures?

**Uli:** They are still young, so operational involvement is limited. What was encouraging recently was a family governance discussion where the next generation articulated their own time horizon, thinking in decades, not years. Statements like, we will be the generation that deals with this in 20 or 30 years. That is the right framing. What matters now is exposure to values and context, not premature responsibility.