

'Pleased as punch,' Nobel winner celebrates with sushi (Update)

October 4 2016



Winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics John Michael Kosterlitz poses at Aalto University in Espoo, on October 4, 2016

One of the British scientists who won the Nobel Prize for Physics Tuesday said he was "pleased as punch" and celebrated with a sushi lunch and a glass of wine.

Michael Kosterlitz, a professor of physics at Brown University, Rhode

Island and currently a visiting scholar in Finland, said he found out that he had won while in a "rather noisy underground car park."

"I was rather surprised to get the message from my wife," the modest academic told a news conference at Brown via video link from Helsinki. He then promptly left the parking lot.

"I went upstairs and had a sushi lunch with a glass of wine."

Kosterlitz shared the prize with fellow British scientists David Thouless and Duncan Haldane who like him are all based at universities in America.

They were awarded the prize for their study of "strange states" of matter, which may one day yield superfast computers.

"I'm pleased as punch about the whole thing," said Kosterlitz, who was born in Aberdeen, Scotland and completed his university education in Britain.

He and his wife celebrated with dinner and "a nice bottle of wine" at a restaurant, where to his "surprise and somewhat embarrassment" he was recognized. "Being famous has its draw backs," Kosterlitz joked.



British-born scientist F. Duncan Haldane speaks to guests during a press conference after winning the Nobel Physics Prize 2016 for revealing the secrets of exotic matter in Princeton, New Jersey, on October 4, 2016

"It all feels a little bit unreal right now. Maybe a good night's sleep will allow things to sink in," he said. "I feel like I've entered an alternate universe where reality has taken a long vacation."

When he first came to the work that won him the Nobel, as a post-doctoral student, he said he had a "lot of fun" in tackling the theoretical problem, describing his priorities at the time as mountaineering, physics and family in that order.

"There was no pressure and I could think about weird and wonderful things at leisure and it turned out that it worked," he said.

Apart from joking he could now "pay off some debts," Kosterlitz said life would go on as normal.

He advised students to pursue a career in physics if they were fascinated by the subject, and urged them to have fun. "The only trouble with going for a career in physics is that the pay is lousy," he quipped.

"You're better off becoming a trader in the stock market or something like that but if you want intellectual satisfaction it is a pretty good subject."

"You may or may not be successful but without loving your subject you'll never be successful and even if you do love it, the probability is you won't be successful," he said to laughter.

The only problem now, he quipped, was working out how to get to and from Stockholm for the prize giving in December from South Korea, for which he has only a single-entry visa for a three-month working visit over the winter.

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