

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Norman Foster 1999 Laureate Ceremony Speech

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President
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Thank you very much, Carter, appreciate it. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, we're here in Berlin at the end of a remarkable century for architecture. We're here in a city that has truly seen both the best of times and the worst of times. Yesterday's tour left no doubt that we are witnessing the construction of a unique built environment. We saw the fundamental rebuilding of a city by the great architects of this moment at the end of the twentieth century.

Not coincidentally, the beginning of this same century saw the reconstruction of our hometown of Chicago after its great fire. That rebuilding saw the beginning of high rise architecture and it set the standards for all other modern cities. Today, and for the coming century, Berlin sets a new standard.

As you know, the Pritzker has taken on a tradition of being a ceremony that has traveled to places of historical value. We've gone to the eighth century Buddhist temple of Todai-ji in Nara, Japan, in order to present the prize to my friend, Frank Gehry. We've gone to the Palace of Versailles, which was the venue for the presentation to Tadao Ando, in 1995. In other years, we visited the works of previous Laureates that had been executed subsequent to their receiving the prize. In Bilbao, in 1996, we pre-inaugurated Frank's Guggenheim Museum for the purpose of inducting Sverre Fehn as a Laureate. Our ceremony at Richard Meier's unfinished Getty Museum was to honor Rafael Moneo, who incidentally has designed tonight's dinner venue at the Grand Hyatt, Berlin.

I would just like to point out because Rafael designed the hotel here that we're having dinner in, if there's a problem with the food, if it's not so hot, don't worry about calling Rafael in his room after dinner.

Well, you can see the Pritzker has traveled from the White House to now Berlin, or perhaps this will become the site for future venues. Tonight we have a group that is truly a remarkable set of the best. Many of our Laureates are here tonight and I would like to introduce them and thank them for their contributions to our built environment.

Ladies and gentleman, I would like to introduce the past Laureates who are here tonight. I would ask that you remain standing after you've been called, and for the audience to do two things: First, I'd like you to hold your applause till we're completed, and second, I'd like you to think about the fact that every one of these Laureates is either working on a new project or has recently completely a project here in this wonderful City of Berlin. To each of you, I hope you've got those construction projects correctly.

In order of seniority as a Laureate, we begin with our seventh Laureate, Hans Hollein of Austria. Gottfried Boehm of Germany. We then go to Frank Gehry of the United States, and Jose Rafael Moneo of Spain. And finally, last year's recipient, Renzo Piano. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a hand to our millennium pioneers.

Before discussing Norman, I want to say that tonight could not have taken place without the gracious help of Wolf-Dieter Dube. And thank you very much. He has orchestrated our use of this magnificent rotunda of the Altes Museum, as well as an opportunity to experience the New National Gallery as we progress through the evening. By using these venues, we pay homage to Karl Friedrich Schinkel, as an architect from the previous century, and to Mies van der Rohe, whose post-war buildings can be seen throughout our hometown of Chicago. And of course, when we talk of the Pritzker, we must pay homage to our chairman Carter Brown. Who has provided a guiding spirit to all of us who have been involved since the inception of the prize in 1979. He and his jurors over the years have defined the Pritzker by the character of their selections. Thank you all very much.

Speech by Thomas J. Pritzker (continued)

And now there's Norman, Sir Norman. He is Norman Foster of the United Kingdom, but actually he's Sir Norman of the world. Listen to the works he's done. He's done two major works in Hong Kong, a bank and an airport. He has given us beautiful office towers in Japan and here in Germany. In England, he continues to redefine daily life for museums, commerce and industry. He's engaged in infrastructure; works such as bridges and urban planning that will change traffic patterns, I'm told, in central London. And as a result, we can all assume that the day of congested traffic in London will be put to an end.

In addition to the above, Sir Norman is doing the new Wembley Stadium and has mustered the courage to lay his hand onto the Round Reading Room in the British Museum. The list goes on with works underway from a university in Kuala-Lumpur to prehistory museum in France, and a recently received commission for an addition to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. But quantity does not get you the Pritzker. No, the mantra requires consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment to the art of architecture. So let's see how Sir Norman has addressed this requirement. It has been 35 years since Sir Norman's first commission. By the early 70s, he had pioneered the idea that the work place could actually be a pleasant environment. His work continues to reflect his commitment to that idea. He's also pioneered the use of cutting-edge technology to make buildings, provide an uplifting experience for its users and for generations of the future. These were both conceptual leaps at their time, but that wasn't enough. No, what he really did that put him over the top, was he did these things and then as Carter has said, he did them "downright beautiful."

I need to tell you quickly that last night the past Laureates took Norman out to dinner. Each gave him way too much advice for his speech this evening. As the wine flowed, the gauntlets got larger and larger. To me, Sir Norman you should just hold up the picture of the Reichstag. That picture tells a thousand words. And then you should ask your friends and colleagues to go experience this millennium class building, and you cube those thousand words several times over.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Sir Norman Foster. This year's jury citation states that Sir Norman Foster's pursuit of the art and science of architecture has resulted in one building triumph after another. Each one in its own unique way. For his steadfast devotion to the principles of architecture as an art form, for his contributions in defining in architecture with high technology standards, and for his appreciation of the human values involved in producing consistently well-designed projects, for all of these things and more, we take great pleasure in presenting you the 1999 Pritzker Architectural Prize.

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