

## Lord Palumbo 2007 Laureate Richard Rogers Ceremony Speech

This evening is a very special occasion, for London, for British architecture; and most especially, for Richard Rogers, as this year's winner of the Pritzker Prize for Architecture. It would be difficult to imagine a more perfect setting for a prestigious architectural Award ceremony than the Banqueting House in Whitehall Palace, designed in 1619 by Inigo Jones, the architect to King James I, with its magnificent ceiling painted by Pieter-Paul Rubens.

Almost three hundred years later, an imperceptible ripple on the River of Time, another architect of international renown, Frank Lloyd Wright, famously coined his motto 'Truth Against the World'. It is a bold motto that could be applied with equal effect, to Richard. It says 'This is where I stand, without fear or favour'. It is certainly a position that commands respect. And yet, Mr Wright, god-like as he was in his chosen profession, was forced to endure years of frustration in the wilderness; whilst Richard's first patron is recorded as having said to him: 'You won't draw what I want: you demand more money and worst of all, you don't even wear a tie!' Now, it is no secret that Richard's interest in the academic side of life was minimal, either because he was bored stiff, or because those teaching him completely failed to capture his attention, let alone his imagination, or both. In any case his school reports were equally as hopeless as Winston Churchill's had been, and similarly, seemed to predict an unspectacular future! One comment, in particular, comes to mind: 'He may turn out alright in the end, but not in any of the subjects that I teach'! It was not an auspicious start to a brilliant career. But perhaps Richard took heart from the words of Andrew Carnegie, at the beginning of the last century. 'It takes a first class brain', he said 'It takes a first class brain, to overcome a good education'.

Against this background, it is not unreasonable to ask how such a personality comes to gain, and richly deserve, this most coveted Prize?

I think that the answer lies in three parts: First, in Richard's deep sense of commitment to his family, and to those close to him: he makes into an extended family those who are privileged to work with him. He inspires his team to bring forward their ideas to join with his own as the work is pushed to a daring and colourful conclusion. This was never more so than at Beaubourg in 1971 when the team was rewarded by participating in the preparation of the competition that propelled Richard to the forefront of public attention, together with his close friend and equal partner in the project, Renzo Piano.

But Beaubourg was only the first of many such triumphs. It was followed, in due course, by the Lloyds of London building in the City, a world-class institution operating out of a world-class building; the Welsh Assembly Building in Cardiff; the new terminal at Madrid Airport; and a whole raft of other notable and beautiful buildings, too numerous to mention, both in this country, and abroad. It is no wonder that such buildings are eminently suited for people in which to live and work happily and comfortably. Integrity is surely the key: not to try to shock, but to say what you have to say without fear or favour, and not be deterred if some people are shocked.

The second great influence in Richard's professional life has undoubtedly been the empathy he feels with his native Florence, as well as with Venice, and the hill-towns of Northern Italy. He was quick to assimilate and absorb the Renaissance Ideal of the City State, with its strong, well defined, identity; and its concept of cities, emphasising citizenship, civility, and civic responsibility. And it was that assimilation that formed the basis of the development of his own individual style, underpinned, of course, by the technology of the day, and buttressed by his twin pre-occupations with sustainability and an exploration of the spaces between buildings.

**Lord Palumbo, 2007 Laureate Richard Rogers (continued)**

Richard is linked in yet another way to Florence as a true Renaissance figure in the best Humanist tradition. He has delivered the Reith Lectures; he has been Chairman of the Tate Gallery and the Architecture Foundation. He is currently Chief Adviser on Architecture and Urbanism to the Mayor of London. These are the visible and public manifestations of Richard's commitment, and contribution to the artistic life of these Islands. Less visible, less publicised and therefore less well known, has been his humanitarian work over the last forty years, as a social activist campaigning against poverty, and injustice, wherever he has found them, without regard to race, colour, or creed. Throughout this long odyssey, he has demonstrated at all times that integrity to which I have already referred. He has always been very much his own man.

The third and final component part, and the essential characteristic of Richard Rogers' success as an architect stems from that vitality, that always youthful determination, and that extraordinary gift of bringing to any given situation an appropriate sense of enjoyment. Richard understands people and he understands entertainment, and this is nowhere more apparent than the space in front of Beaubourg, always a magnet and a mecca for performers and audiences alike. Whilst others have been dreaming, Richard has been building. As success has brought ever more commissions, so his work has maintained a fresh and urgent optimism. An optimism that has never been allowed to be compromised in the course of implementation – so frequently the case with men of lesser authority. It is an optimism that has illuminated a path forward on behalf of a whole generation of architects. He is, in every way, a worthy and outstanding Laureate of this year's Pritzker Prize for Architecture.

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