

Martha Thorne 2008 Laureate Jean Nouvel Ceremony Speech

Good evening. As executive director of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, I'd like to extend a very cordial and warm welcome to the Pritzker family, Pritzker laureates, past and present, Pritzker jury members, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. Thank you very much for attending this, the 30th celebration of the Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Tonight we honor the work and contributions of Jean Nouvel, but it is also an opportunity to look back at some of the rich history of the Prize. This is the sixth time that the ceremony has been held in Washington, D.C. It's noteworthy to recall that the very first Pritzker Prize ceremony honoring Philip Johnson was held here in Washington at Dumbarton Oaks, as was the second. The third year was celebrated at the National Building Museum. The 1984 ceremony took place at the National Gallery of Art, and the 20th anniversary was also held here in Washington at the White House when Renzo Piano received the award. So, it is significant that on this occasion, this momentous occasion of the 30th year, the ceremony should come back to that city where was it first celebrated. At that ceremony, Cesar Pelli, representing the jury, spoke some words (and Cesar, if you're here, perhaps you will remember them). He said, "I think it's a very important occasion for architecture. I'm particularly moved to be here. I think it is very appropriate that architecture, the mother of all the arts, be honored with this award, with which we are celebrating at that time, the first annual award. This is thanks to the generosity of the Pritzker family." I would like to echo those words and say it is an honor and a privilege to be here and it is quite astounding and quite wonderful that this is the 30th year. And once again, it is thanks to the generosity of the Pritzker family.

In 1987, Jay Pritzker spoke, as was the custom at the ceremony, and he said, again, words that are perhaps worth recalling tonight. He said that, "In the few years since we began the Prize, we've been delighted to see it achieve the stature it has, but a prize, any prize can only be as great as it is by virtue of the people it honors and those who are capable of selecting the honorees." Over its 30 years, Pritzker Laureates have shown great diversity in their approaches to architecture. Certainly diversity can be seen in the buildings they've designed, the countries from which they hail. However, all of the laureates reflect the highest qualities of the profession and excellence in architecture. And with us tonight, we have several past laureates present who are certainly worth recognizing once again and again and again. We have Kevin Roche, Hans Hollein, Richard Meier, Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano, Zaha Hadid, Thom Mayne, and Richard Rogers.

The Pritzker Prize was originally established to annually honor a living architect whose built work demonstrates a combination of those qualities of talent, vision and commitment, which has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture.

Martha Thorne, 2008 Laureate Jean Nouvel (continued)

I think that you'll agree with me that the prize has done that admirably, while it has also fostered other goals: of recognizing the importance and commitment of the profession of architecture as a whole; of encouraging the discussion and debate about architecture in many spheres; and last but not least, by providing a yearly venue in an outstanding site such as this, where we gather for a wonderful evening in the spirit of cordiality and of celebration. With that, I would like to introduce our second speaker, Jeremy Adamson, Director of Collections and Services of the Library of Congress. Thank you.

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