

Thomas J. Pritzker 2007 Laureate Richard Rogers Ceremony Speech

Each year, I have the great pleasure of introducing the Pritzker Laureate. Frequently, as is the case tonight, the ceremony is held at a venue possessed of a great history and architectural significance. My remarks typically describe that history and hopefully they do eventually come around to the Laureate. But tonight, I don't want to talk about the great contributions of Inigo Jones in whose more than 400-hundred-year-old Banqueting House we celebrate tonight's Laureate. I would only suggest to Richard that if you read the contemporaneous poems of Ben Johnson, you will see that criticism of contemporary architecture has a long and hallowed history. I would also point out to Richard that in spite of Johnson's criticisms, today we sit in one of London's most glorious venues.

Instead of talking about the past however, tonight I want to talk about the future and the role that architecture can and must play in addressing the challenges that lie ahead for humanity and civilization. Instead of celebrating Richard by drawing parallels to a great architect of the past, we do him a higher honor by learning well the lessons that his work teaches.

In 1979 when the Pritzker Architecture Prize was established, the stated purpose was to honor a living architect whose built work has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture. You will see this language on our website and in our literature going back almost three decades. When this language was formulated, the phrase about the built environment was rather obvious, but it is the concept of "contributions to humanity," that we are going to need from the field of architecture going forward.

The future is not what it used to be. The contributions needed by humanity are not what they used to be. While globalization has brought us some unique and wonderful opportunities, it has also focused our attention on important global problems. The issues of climate change, maintaining our ecological balance and a sustainable environment are amongst our most crucial challenges. It is not my purpose to go into the challenges faced by the environment. It is my responsibility, however, to note that the field of architecture can play a vital and necessary role in addressing these issues, particularly in the urban environment. Let me illustrate with one small statistic: In the United States, commercial and residential buildings are responsible for more energy related CO2 than all transportation CO2 emissions combined.

The hope for humanity lies in human creativity and resolve. Humans created some of our problems and human ingenuity can solve them. As I look out in the audience tonight, I see more Pritzker Laureates than we have ever hosted at this annual celebration. These are the men and woman who have the creative genius that is being applied to the needs of humanity.

While our family has no part in the jury's deliberations or selection of laureates, we are particularly delighted this year that the Prize honors an architect who has been at the forefront of those advocating for more environmentally-friendly buildings. Because these problems must be solved on a global basis, it is our hope that the Pritzker Prize will continue to encourage creative minds to wrestle with such problems throughout the world.

Tonight's Laureate has said it best. In a series of lectures for the BBC, our 2007 laureate, Richard Rogers, emphasized that very point. He said: "Other societies have faced extinction. The extinction of some, like the Easter Islanders of the Pacific, the Harappan civilization of the Indus Valley and the Teotihuacan in pre-Columbian America, were due to ecological disasters of their own making. Historically, societies unable to solve their environmental crises have either migrated or become extinct. The vital difference today is that the scale of our crisis is no longer regional, but global; it involves all of humanity and the entire planet."

Thomas J. Pritzker, 2007 Laureate Richard Rogers (continued)

With these words Richard makes a point that needs to be made to this audience and to others. Lord Rogers is described by the jury as “a champion of urban life” as well as a believer in “the potential of the city to be a catalyst for social change.”

Among the projects singled out by the jury is the Pompidou Centre in Paris, designed in partnership with another Pritzker Laureate, Renzo Piano, who is with us tonight. The jury characterized the Pompidou as “revolutionizing museums, transforming what had once been elite monuments into popular places of social and cultural exchange.” What we have seen in Richard’s work is that he builds and designs not just structures, but he uses the design of buildings to shape neighborhoods and to make cities more wonderful and accessible to larger numbers of people. Lloyd’s of London established Richard as a “master not only of the large urban building, but also of his own brand of architectural impressionism.” In Madrid, his extensive use of bamboo demonstrated his commitment to the use of renewable materials. In Richard we have a Laureate who builds for today and speaks to tomorrow. Richard, can I sum up my thoughts by saying thank you. You have made a difference.

And now I ask you to come up here with me so I can present you with the 2007 Pritzker Architecture Prize.

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