

Thomas J. Pritzker 2012 Laureate Wang Shu Ceremony Speech

His Excellency Li Keqiang, Vice-Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Liu Qi, Secretary of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee, Mr. You Quan, Deputy Secretary General of the State Council, Mr. Jiang Weixin, Minister of the Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Mr. Guo Jinlong, Mayor of Beijing, The Lord Palumbo, Chairman of the Pritzker Architecture Prize Jury.

"Da Jia Hao!" (Welcome everyone"). Welcome to the 2012 Ceremony of the Pritzker Architecture Prize.

I'm Thomas Pritzker, Chairman of the Hyatt Foundation. On behalf of the Pritzker Architectural Prize, our esteemed jury and the Pritzker family, we are very grateful for your presence at the 34th Annual Pritzker Prize Award Ceremony in Beijing.

I also want to express our deep gratitude to the leadership of China and the city of Beijing for their warm hospitality. From the first moment we began discussing bringing the Ceremony to China, they were generous with their guidance and support.

I foresee that this Ceremony will be long remembered a landmark in the rich history of the Prize. In Chinese, there is a saying, "Right time, right place, right people" which perfectly captures the Ceremony today. China is at the heart of the global architectural development. It is especially appropriate that our Ceremony this year is at the prestigious Great Hall of the People as architecture at the core is about people.

It is a special pleasure for me to be standing in front of you in this hall because of its significance, not just to China, but also to the world. This prize ceremony has taken place in many places around the world including the White House in Washington, a public square in Rome that was designed by Michelangelo, by the wall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and an ancient Buddhist temple in Nara, Japan.

So now we are here in the Great Hall of the People.

I first visited China in 1976 so I have had the great privilege of having watched its evolution. Like this hall, China's evolution has been about its people and that is what enlightened architecture is also about. It is about serving people from all walks of life.

The story of the Prize is interesting. It came out of an unsolicited call by a man who had a good idea. His idea was to find someone to sponsor a prize in an area not covered by the Nobel Prizes. He wanted to also work for that prize. In fact, he did both. We created a prize and he became our first Secretary to the Prize. We selected architecture because we had the experience of seeing how great architecture could lift the spirits of a community. For our family, the Prize presented an opportunity to give something back to society and to improve the lives of the people that architecture touches. For us, it was an opportunity to improve our society.

Our mission is to raise the awareness of the importance of architecture to our daily lives. Our idea is to use role models to describe a standard of excellence. These are not the only excellent architects in the world, but hopefully with wise selections by our jury, we are able to lift the standards of architecture throughout the world.

Thomas J. Pritzker, 2012 Laureate Wang Shu (continued)

How do we do this? We do this by selecting a jury that is completely independent and letting them do their work. The people who are on the jury have one thing in common, a passion for architecture. Otherwise they come from different walks of life, different cultures and different stages in their careers. If there is a secret sauce in having created a special prize, it is in the quality of the jurors over the past several decades.

For many years I have wanted to bring the ceremony to China. It was an opportunity to help contribute to a great country with a remarkable culture and history. I was fortunate to meet China's leadership when they came to Chicago and they encouraged us to develop our idea of bringing the ceremony to China.

But today's ceremony goes beyond what I had thought about more than a year ago. Today's ceremony is to honor one of China's own architects, Wang Shu. By honoring Wang Shu, we honor not only a man, but we also honor a country and a culture that over the past 49 years was able to foster an architect of such skill, intellect and vision. Wang was born in China 49 years ago, he was, educated here and this is where he has turned his ideas, energy and effort into buildings that serve their communities. By honoring Wang, we have an opportunity to honor someone whose architecture respects the past, works with the present and helps to forge the future.

We celebrate one of China's own sons as a great and world-class architect today and his built work. Our chair, Lord Palumbo, has eloquently and honorably described his accomplishments.

Architecture is the most public of art forms. No other art form serves as many billions of people as does architecture. Architecture expresses a society's understanding of its responsibilities, a community's commitment to its people, and its vision of itself in the world.

In the next 15 years China and other countries will undergo urban development that is unprecedented in world history. It is critical, not just for China, but for the world itself that this evolution be successful.

Architecture is central to the large-scale urban development that lies before China. Over the centuries China has developed a very special relationship to nature, one that has not sought to dominate nature. Out of a sense of reverence for nature it has worked with the natural environment. It has seen nature as enduring in the face of human civilizations that come and go. Now China will need a sustainable approach and architecture should be at the core of that mission.

Indeed, today's Laureate, Wang Shu, is noted for his deep reverence for nature and natural harmony. He is a man in who respects ancient Chinese traditions and integrates them into contemporary realities and styles.

You who sit in this audience today will be the people who in profound and complex ways will interact with Wang Shu, his colleagues, and the architects, who will, in the coming years, create sustainable growth in China for the benefit of its people. That is what architecture is about. That is why we are in the Great Hall of the People. There is no other art form in which the artist and his or her audience are in such a profound and powerful relationship. The architect creates for you the people, and you the people guide the architect in what you need and what you dream.

Thomas J. Pritzker, 2012 Laureate Wang Shu (continued)

Wang Shu, can I ask that you come up.

On behalf of our family and our jury, I congratulate you on being the Pritzker Laureate for 2012.

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