

## Wang Shu 2012 Laureate Ceremony Acceptance Speech

Winning this award is something that I had not expected. For many years, I have been pursuing my dream on a solitary course. Before this award, I had never published any architectural design collections or designed any buildings outside of China. I always see myself as an amateur architect, so it was a huge and pleasant surprise for me to receive this honor. I wish to thank the judges for their insight and comments.

As the first architect born and educated in China to win this award, I accept with both honor and reverence. You should know that China, despite its great architectural tradition, has not had an official system for professional architects over the past thousands of years. Modern architecture as a profession, starting from my teacher's teacher, has only been in existence for three generations, making this award one of special importance for Chinese architects. A young architect myself, I have to say that I owe this award to the age we now live in. It is in this golden age that China has achieved unprecedented prosperity and openness, giving me so many opportunities to make difficult architectural experiments in a short span of time. Here, I wish to thank my partner Lu Wenyu and all my friends who have helped me before. Yes, I can see some of you in this room today.

Maybe it is because the professional architecture system in this country is still in its infancy stage, or maybe it is because so many things have happened in the past decades, but I still remember that 30 years ago, when I was studying at the architecture department of Nanjing Institute of Technology, "What is architecture?" was the question most often raised. Once, Mr. Tong Jun, my respected professor, who is also the first architect in modern China to study traditional gardens, was asked this same question by a humble student. His answer was simple, "Architecture is just a small thing."

Yet, it is this small thing that has profoundly changed the outlook of China and the lives of the Chinese people over the past 30 years. It has been a process full of experiments and confusions. As an architecture student who had read too much philosophy at school, I first embraced modern architecture with full passion, and then quickly turned my attention to post-modern architecture. Just as I was starting to feel bored about the extensively artificial features of the modern buildings, I fell in love with deconstruction philosophy and architecture. I was so excited that I even designed and built several deconstructive buildings myself. But throughout the process I was confused by the same question, "Are my buildings deeply rooted in my own culture?" This was one of the reasons why I chose to live in seclusion in the 1990s. I withdrew from the professional architecture system, and turned to the renovation of old buildings. I spent days and nights working with local craftsmen. And I realized that compared with modern buildings that are more about fabrication, there is another type of building that recognizes things that are already in existence. Unlike modern buildings that focus on abstract space, this other type of building focused on creating a sense of place and connecting with the past. And compared with buildings carrying a strong human imprint, traditional Chinese buildings are closer to nature, taking architecture to a whole new horizon. It is an entirely different world of architecture that I had never seen or learned before, but it contains something more valuable than what modern buildings can offer. If modern architecture is all about the professional architecture system, I would rather call myself an amateur.

All my architectural activities so far have taken place in and for China, but the issues involved in these activities are not confined to China. Many of the architecture-related issues that have emerged in China amidst tectonic changes in the past decades have all been experienced in other parts of the world, although they are taking place in China on a larger scale, with a stronger impact and at a faster speed. In a country that only had craftsmen but not architects just 100 years ago, such changes have resulted in a sharp conflict of civilizations. Therefore, architects should not just see themselves as professional technicians, but also demonstrate a wider perspective, deeper thinking, clearer values and conviction.

**Wang Shu, 2012 Laureate (continued)**

In all of my architectural design activities I have constantly asked myself the following questions: How can an architecture founded on craftsmanship survive in today's world? What is the relevance of the traditional Chinese landscape system in a world filled with gigantic artificial structures? In a society undergoing massive city-building campaigns, how should urban development be handled without resorting to major demolition and reconstruction? How can new urban buildings connect with memories of the past—that might be otherwise lost as structures are demolished—and re-establish their cultural identities? What can be done in the realm of architecture to overcome the stark contrast between urban and rural areas in China? Is it possible to ensure that alongside the top-down professional system of modern architecture, ordinary people's right to initiate their own building activities is also protected? Is it possible to find smarter ways for addressing environmental and ecological challenges by drawing on the wisdom found in traditional architecture and grassroots building activities? Is there a way for us to express our architectural pursuit with stories and feelings without resorting to gigantic, symbolic and iconic structures? How can an independent architect maintain the attitude and work style against the background of a powerful modern system?

I always say that I am not just designing a building, but a world of diversity and difference and a path that leads us back to nature. These are the questions I was asking myself when I learned I was given the award, and these are the questions I will continue to focus on in my future endeavors.

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