

J. Carter Brown 1998 Laureate Renzo Piano Ceremony Speech

Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, thank you so much. It really has been fun to see this gal in action. When it comes to preserving the White House, she has all kinds of original ideas and they're all good, and we try to follow along as best we can. It is, also, a tremendous privilege to be in the same space with this extraordinary panoply of architectural talent. I think since the lobby of the Teheran Hilton at the time of the Shah, there has never been quite such an assemblage of architectural talent.

I'm here, really, just to thank the Pritzkers, first of all for their perseverance in this extraordinary undertaking that has, I think, done so much for recognition of architecture as an art form and as something essential to our lives. The Nobel Prize mysteriously did not include architecture, and they have filled this gap in the most extraordinarily hands-off and yet supportive way. I think they deserve our warmest applause.

The jury has, as Mrs. Clinton said, not an easy task. The hardest part is *not* giving the Prize, because there are so many deserving people out there in any given year. But I would like to take this opportunity to ask each member of the jury who is here tonight to stand and ask you all to forbear any applause until we have gone through them all. The first would be Charles Correa, multi-prize-winning architect of Bombay, India. The next is Ada Louise Huxtable, the legendary art critic and writer. Toshio Nakamura from Japan, whose A+U formed us all, and his knowledge itself is so encyclopedic. Jorge Silvetti, the Chairman of—saving your presence, Clintons and Professor Scully—of the Harvard Architecture Department. Jorge stand up wherever you are. Good. In addition, Bill Lacy is the real heat pump that keeps it all operating. It is unbelievable that you could ask somebody to do this and also run one of our major universities in the arts at Purchase, New York. But Bill, thank you so much.

The others I want to recognize are the Pritzker Laureates up to now, who have joined us tonight. Kevin Roche, U.S.A.; Ieoh Ming Pei, U.S.A.; Hans Hollein, Austria; Gottfried Boehm, Germany; Frank Gehry, U.S.A.; Robert Venturi, U.S.A.; Christian de Portzamparc, France; Rafael Moneo, Spain; and Sverre Fehn, Norway. Now, congratulations to you all. *Bravi, bravi, tutti.* And you will be hearing in a minute from the most recent member to join this august company, Renzo Piano in whose honor this event is tonight.

He has long been one of my favorite architects. I can't say—it's like those Hollywood romances that start badly—I can't say it was from the beginning. Because I was involved for ten years with another laureate you met tonight, Ieoh Ming Pei, in building a building down the street here. And it came on the scene at the same moment as the Pompidou, and two buildings more different at the same moment you cannot conceive. So much for *Zeitgeist* or international style. Kaput! I had my own opinion as to which museum worked better as a museum, but I have grown to rather love that Beaubourg building as one loves a wayward child who eventually came into the fold. Since then, I have seen his range. He has been able to pull off one of the largest airports in the world, Kansai, which I went through a monsoon in order to see first hand, and it was thoroughly worthwhile, and I'm here, still, to tell the tale. That he can do a soccer stadium in Bari. That he can do a cultural center, with these extraordinarily imaginative great baskets, in New Caledonia—which I bet a lot of you don't even know where it is.

J. Carter Brown, 1998 Laureate Renzo Piano (continued)

And he can do intimate, wonderful art museums. Houston had two reprises for the extraordinary late Madame deMenil. Most recently, a museum for Ernst Beyeler in Basel. The *New York Times* was absolutely right, it is one of the great museums in the world. So here is someone who can cover the whole landscape, and we are very, very lucky to count him among the Pritzker laureates.

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For more information, please contact:

Eunice Kim
Director of Communications
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
Tel: +1 240 401 5649
Email: eunicekim@pritzkerprize.com