

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Christian de Portzamparc 1994 Laureate Ceremony Speech

Jay A. Pritzker

President
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Tradition has it that as we move around the world with these ceremonies, I try to say a few words in the honoree's language. I trust you French speakers will restrain your snickers.

(The following paragraph was spoken in French.)

I would like to welcome Mr. Toubon, Minister of Culture of France, Christian, his parents, his children, his sister, his colleagues and his friends from France. We are thrilled to welcome you here in Columbus, Indiana for the presentation of the Pritzker Prize for architecture. Columbus is a jewel unique in the world. It is a Mecca for the greatest architectural talents of the century. It is a great pleasure to welcome Christian to the rank of Laureate in this beautiful city.

What a wonderful confluence of people and events focusing attention on architecture: the Pritzker Architecture Prize being presented to a French architect in a community that has become an architectural Mecca in America's heartland; and an exhibit of all the previous Pritzker Laureates' works; and tomorrow extending the activities with a seminar and architectural tour.

Architecture is all around us. At the time we established the prize, we felt it was the least acknowledged of all the arts. We wanted people to become more aware of their surroundings, and in turn, stimulate architects, builders and developers to greater achievements. This is what The Hyatt Foundation was attempting to do when we established the prize in 1979.

Columbus had a head start on us. Several decades before, the Cummins Engine Foundation worked out an arrangement with the local school board providing that as long as a distinguished architect was selected to design the project, the Cummins Foundation would pay the architectural fees.

Over the years, other public groups applied, and the program was extended to other public structures and landscaping. You can see the result all around us—scores of exceptional buildings. And encouragement to others not only to build well, but to preserve what was built before and to maintain a culture in the community that I think is most unusual in America, or any place in the world.

This past weekend, Columbus proved to the world that it has heart and soul, as well as being beautiful. The city was honored by being named one of the top ten All American cities, a recognition for its progressive, socially aware thinking meant to improve the quality of life for all its citizens. We salute you all for this latest achievement.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Indianapolis Museum of Art for instigating the process of bringing the touring exhibition of Pritzker Laureates' works, which you can see upstairs, in their new Columbus gallery.

As you know, we move the ceremony each year to pay homage to something or someone of architectural significance. Last year, it was in Prague, honoring that city's past architectural achievements, and the fact that it remains largely intact in spite of wars and rebellion.

Another year, as Bill mentioned, we were in Todai-ji, a Buddhist temple, in Nara, Japan. It's the world's oldest and largest wooden structure. We went to Fort Worth, the Kimball Museum in 1987. It was in homage to the memory of the late Louis Kahn, who designed that structure. It's one of the most beautiful museums in America.

Other locations have included the Harold Washington Library in Chicago. I believe that the architect, Tom Beeby is with us here tonight. In our founding days, we went to Dumbarton Oaks in Washington. And

Speech by Jay A. Pritzker (continued)

we've revisited Washington twice more, at the National Building Museum and the National Gallery of Art East Building, which was a tribute to I.M. Pei, another laureate.

Tonight, of course, we call attention to a great many architects, whose works are in Columbus, the most obvious being Cesar Pelli. We're occupying one of his buildings for this ceremony. Cesar also served as one of the Pritzker jurors in the early years of the prize.

I cannot over emphasize how important the jury is to this prize. The quality of the jurors is paramount in giving credibility and recognition to the choice of the laureates each year.

J. Carter Brown, director emeritus of the National Gallery of Art, as both founding juror and chairman of the jury, bears a lion's share of the responsibility. For his continuing guidance, he has our heartfelt gratitude.

The guidance of another man whose vision and interest in architecture made him indispensable in our founding jury is the same man who conceived the architectural commission idea for Columbus in the first place, Irwin Miller. As you already heard, we promised not to honor Irwin, but we can offer our sincere thanks to both Xenia and him for their extraordinary hospitality.

The man we are honoring is a young architect from Paris, Christian de Portzamparc. The jury describes his work as both "new," and "of our time, bound neither by classicism nor modernism." They further describe him as a "powerful poet of forms and creator of eloquent spaces, aware of the past, but true to himself and his time."

As the first French architect to be awarded this prize, the jury honors him as an individual, as well as the rich tradition of French architecture.

I'd like to read at this time a message we just received regarding Christian's selection:

"Dear Christian, I am delighted to congratulate you as you receive the 1994 Pritzker Architecture Prize for your contributions to humanity, to your bold vision and your enormous talent. The art of architecture is an essential component of our society. It powerfully influences the design and structure of our homes and places of work. It transforms our cities and it stimulates our imaginations. At its best, architecture beautifies the landscape, encourages economic and social development, and profoundly affects our lives. You deserve to be proud of your lifelong work, exemplifying the highest standards of structural achievement.

Your commitment to the significance of style and function have produced such notable buildings as the City of Music in Paris, the exceptional apartment complex in Fukuoka, Japan, and the water tower in Marne-la-Vallee, all stunning contributions to our world. Blending the discipline of classical architecture with the genius of modernism, you have perfected a truly international style of design that fulfills the unique needs of individual cities and adds to the splendor of our urban regions.

I am pleased that you've been selected for this most prestigious award. You've personified the dedication to cultural advancement for which the Pritzker family has always stood, and I congratulate you for a job well done. Hillary and I extend best wishes for continued success. Sincerely, Bill Clinton."

Christian, if you would be good enough to step up here, I will try to put this symbol around your neck without choking you.

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