

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Renzo Piano 1998 Laureate Ceremony Speech

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Thank you, and please be seated once again. This is the formal welcome to the White House on behalf of the President and myself. We are delighted to be hosting the 1998 Pritzker Architecture Prize. You know it was at Dumbarton Oaks, just a few miles from here that the first Pritzker Prize was awarded. Now on its twentieth birthday we are very pleased to bring this extraordinary prize back to its Washington roots to celebrate the celebration of architecture that it has helped to nurture. There are many, many people in this audience who have made a great contribution to not only architecture, but to our understanding of architecture, our appreciation of architecture, to the support of great architecture, and to the quality of life that our architecture around us represents. But there is no group of people who are more responsible for our being here this evening than the extraordinary Pritzker family. I would like to thank the Pritzker family who like a certain basketball team, come from my home town of Chicago. And who like that basketball team, the Bulls, keep proving time and time again that they are champions, champions of architecture, champions of all that it represents and so committed to preserving, improving and recognizing significant architecture. This event this evening combines not only the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize but also our efforts to celebrate and acknowledge the millennium.

Now, whether we do anything or not, the century will turn and the millennium will come to pass. But the President and I believe that it provided us an opportunity here in our country to perhaps take stock of where we are and where we've come from and where we are going. So to that end, we've had a series of events and efforts, that are designed to help us as Americans and we hope even internationally, mark this passage of time. We have had a number of millennium evenings and we have tried in those evenings to highlight issues of importance. Whether or not they are the kinds of issues that would make headlines, or be carried on the television news, but nevertheless, they were ones that were of significance in defining who we are as a people.

For example, when Professor Steven Hawking spoke, we talked about and speculated over the future of cosmology going into the twenty-first century in front of the largest group of physicists ever to assemble in the White House. Then when Robert Pinsky, and our two former poet laureates gathered to read American poetry and celebrate the importance of poetry in our history, we hosted the largest group of poets ever in the history of the White House.

I have not done an official head count, but I'm fairly certain we have the honor of welcoming the largest group of architects ever in the White House. I want to recognize all of the Pritzker laureates who are with us this evening and thank them for joining us from literally across the globe. Each of you, with glass, metal, stone and imagination have helped to shape not only the history of architecture, but the physical and spiritual landscape of our civilization. I also want to say a personal word of appreciation to Vincent Scully whom you will hear from in a few minutes. Professor Scully has made extraordinary contributions to our understanding of the communities that create and are created by the structures, the buildings, around us. And we are very grateful that he brings his knowledge and experience to us tonight because in addition to the awarding of the Prize, we will have the special treat of hearing from Professor Scully who will in a short lecture tell us something of the significance of what we are gathered here to honor. I also want to thank and recognize all the cabinet members, the members of Congress, the leaders of cultural institutions, members of the media, other distinguished guests who are here with us this evening. I want to say a special word of appreciation to the members of the jury who have the difficult task of choosing the award winners, not only this year, but in years passed and years to come.

As some of you may know, we have recently launched a program as part of the White House millennium council entitled "To Save America's Treasures." We decided that we wanted, as part of our celebration of marking this passage of time, to recognize the contributions of the past and what better way to do that than to honor, preserve and protect the artifacts, the documents, the monuments and historic

Speech by Hillary Rodham Clinton (continued)

sites that express the spirit of our nation. And so in the next weeks, I will be visiting, as I have already done, a number of these sites to bring public attention to them, their historical significance and also their needs because so many are in need of repair and other help so that they do not further deteriorate. But I also hope to make the point that we are not just honoring the past when we visit, for example, James and Dolly Madison's home, Montpelier, or the simple adobe churches of New Mexico, or the cobblestone buildings of upstate New York, or the shotgun houses of the Farish Street historic district in Jackson, Mississippi.

These monuments also can help guide us toward the future. They comprise the fabric of our everyday lives and they tell us about who we are and what our aspirations were and give us both information and guidance about where we go from here. Now we are on the grounds of a monument of American architecture that for almost two hundred years has been the most powerful symbol of our democracy. I think it is a delicious coincidence that in the year 2000, the White House will celebrate its 200th birthday, the Capitol will celebrate its two-hundredth anniversary of holding a meeting of our Congress, the District of Columbia will celebrate two-hundredth anniversary as our capital city, and the Library of Congress will similarly mark its two-hundredth birthday, as well. I'm hoping that we can draw attention of Americans to our capital city and all that it contains. This particular house is here in part because of the vision of George Washington. Also, he understood how important it was to have a symbol of this new democracy. Now for all of our British friends, we have long forgiven you for burning it in 1814.

Although, I am very fond of telling the story about how that occurred and I will again. President James Madison was the last of our Presidents, actually, to be the Commander in Chief of the field, and he was out attempting to prevent the British soldiers from taking Washington. Dolly Madison, one of my favorite predecessors, was here and awaiting the return of her husband and she'd prepared a great meal for her husband and his officers, when word came that the British had broken through the lines and they were on their way to Washington.

She had a very little time to prepare herself to flee. I like pointing out that she didn't take the account books, but instead she took works of art. She took documents that were essential to our founding principals and she did flee. The British broke through the lines, they got to the house, they sat down and ate the meal she had prepared, and then they burned the house. I've always thought that was very poor form, to eat first and burn later. But we rebuilt this house and we have lived with it ever since and we have seen it as the great symbol of democracy that it represents. Now this house owes a lot to many, many people and there are many of you here tonight who have contributed to its preservation. And one of the people who has made such a contribution, is our next speaker, J. Carter Brown. As the past Director of the National Gallery of Art and the current Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, he has always taken an active interest in the White House for which I am very grateful. He is now a member of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, and he has helped me immeasurably in the last five years. I have enjoyed working with him and he has helped bring about many of the dreams that I have had for the White House including the sculpture garden. I am very grateful to him, as those of you who are here to honor our honoree tonight are, because of his role on the jury. So it is my distinct honor and great personal pleasure to introduce the one and only Chairman of the Pritzker Prize jury, J. Carter Brown.

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For more information, please contact:

Martha Thorne, Executive Director
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
71 South Wacker Drive
Suite 4700
Chicago, Illinois 60606
email: marthathorne@pritzkerprize.com