

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Glenn Murcutt 2002 Laureate Ceremony Speech

Thomas J. Pritzker
President
The Hyatt Foundation

Thank you very much. Every year, we bring this ceremony to a different location. In addition to having the pleasure of presenting the prize, I have the honor to be able to make a few comments about the venue in which we present the prize. Once again, we gather at an incredibly important site in a great city to celebrate the Pritzker Architectural Prize and its recipient, Glenn Murcutt.

There's something about the City of Rome and this place, the Capitoline Hill, that sets it apart from virtually any other site in which we've had the honor of presenting the prize. This is the hill of Romulus. This is the hill of Jupiter. This is the hill of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. This is the hill from which Marcus Aurelius, a man who is standing up above us, ruled Rome when Rome was the center of the world and this hill was the center of Rome.

But as Rome went, so went the Capitoline Hill. Both would fall into decline over the coming millennium. Some 1400 years later, our story turns to Pope Paul the Third who is the last of the Renaissance Popes and the first Pope of the Counter-Reformation. He recognized that the medieval church was in need of reformation, but not in the way that Luther would have it. This Pope's most critical challenge was to find a way to move the Church into modern times. In order to open this pathway, Pope Paul turned to the world of aesthetics, of art and of architecture. It was at this time that Pope Paul the Third commissioned Michelangelo to transform this great hill from what had been the seat of an ancient Roman, of a Pagan Empire, to a place that could herald in the coming reforms. In 1536, Michelangelo created what we see here tonight. He designed Rome's first piazza. This was the Renaissance, and so he rebuilt these façades. He designed the patterns that you see beneath you, and he had the bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius placed in the center of this great piazza. This is truly an awesome place to stand and be able to give this prize. Tonight, we owe the use of this historic place to Mayor Veltroni whose offices are here in Capitoline Hill. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for all you've done and for loaning us your staff to help arrange this evening. We must also thank one of our jurors for not only his dedicated service to the prize in helping make the choices of the laureates for the past 18 years, but also for his assistance in making it possible for us to hold the ceremony here in Italy. I speak, of course, of Avvocato Giovanni Agnelli and Mrs. Agnelli as well. I want to thank them. I'm sorry they're not able to be here tonight.

There's one more person that you've heard of that I have to speak to, and that is singling out J. Carter Brown. Carter has been Chairman of the Jury since its inception 24 years ago. This is the first ceremony since he helped found the prize that he's missed, and we all wish him well and a speedy recovery. When we began moving these ceremonies to different locations around the world, it was an effort to enlarge the scope of the prize by not just honoring one living architect for his lifetime achievements, but rather, we wanted to carry forward the underlying goal of the prize which is focusing the public's awareness on great architecture and what it can mean to people's lives.

All you need to do is look around you tonight to understand the potential impact of great architecture. Tonight, we stand in the midst of the era of globalization. We are an American family. We're giving a prize to an Australian architect here atop one of the great sites of Europe. We speak here of history, but Glen Murcutt is about the present. We talk of globalization, but our laureate looks to humanize and adapt his work to very, very local conditions.

While these are seemingly contradictions, in fact, our laureate's work can reconcile some of the ideals of globalization with the needs of the individual. The honoree tonight has studied the past. He has visited most of the great architecture here in Europe and in other parts of the world. He's absorbed the knowledge and distilled it into his own unique way of designing buildings in his own land of Australia.

Speech by Thomas J. Pritzker (continued)

That vast country, a continent unto itself with a tremendous range of climates and environments, calls out for architecture to suit each of its various regions. Glenn Murcutt, working as a one man operation, has tackled the task, and over the past four decades has accomplished some remarkable, scrupulously energy conscious houses and buildings. They are so remarkable that the jury chose him for this year's honor. While his primary focus is on houses, one of his public building projects which he did in collaboration with his wife, Wendy, is called the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre. Critics have called this a masterpiece. The jury in their citation describes Glenn Murcutt as a modernist, a naturalist, an environmentalist, a humanist, economist, and an ecologist, and that's all before they even get to the word architect. The reason for all of these qualities being mentioned is, of course, that his houses are fine tuned to the land and to the weather. He selects the materials he uses, whether they be metal, wood, glass, stone, brick or concrete, with a consciousness of the amount of energy required to produce those materials in the first place. And he takes into account the sun, the moon, the stars, light, water, and wind in working out the details of how his house will function and how it will respond to the environment.

Ada Louise Huxtable, one of our capable jurors who has a certain way with words, has summed it up by writing "Glenn Murcutt has become a living legend, an architect totally focused on shelter and the environment, with skills drawn from nature and the most sophisticated design traditions of the modern movement." There's no way I could improve on Ada Louise's words.

Glenn has often said that growing up, his father was a profound influence on him. And one of his father's favorite quotations from Thoreau's writing was, "since most of us spend our lives doing ordinary tasks, the most important thing is to carry them out extraordinarily well." Glenn, the Pritzker Jury finds that you are more than living up to that adage. Please join me. On behalf of the Pritzker family and the Hyatt Foundation, we present the 2002 Pritzker Architecture Prize to Glenn Murcutt.

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