

## Fumihiko Maki 1993 Laureate Biography

Fumihiko Maki, chosen as the 1993 Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, is the second architect from Japan to be so honored—the first being Kenzo Tange in 1987.

Maki, who was born in Tokyo on September 6, 1928, studied with Tange at the University of Tokyo where he received his Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1952. Maki then spent the next year at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan where Eliel Saarinen's influence on the curriculum and as designer of the school's buildings was significant.

He then took his Master of Architecture degree at the Graduate School of Design (GSD), Harvard University. His first apprenticeships were with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, New York and Sert Jackson and Associates in Cambridge.

In 1956, he took a post as assistant professor of architecture at Washington University in St. Louis, where he also received his first design commission—for the Steinberg Hall (an art center) on that campus, which remains his only completed work in the United States. Following his four years there, he joined the faculty at Harvard's GSD from 1962 to 1965, and has been a frequent guest lecturer at numerous other schools.

In 1965, he returned to Japan to establish his own firm, Maki and Associates in Tokyo. In the 28 years since, his staff has grown to approximately 35 people, with an equal number having passed through to begin their own practices. "I was never attracted to the idea of a large organization. On the other hand, a small organization may tend to develop a very narrow viewpoint. My ideal is a group structure that allows people with diverse imaginations, that often contradict and are in conflict with one another, to work in a condition of flux, but that also permits the making of decisions that are as calculated and objectively weighed as necessary for the creation of something as concrete as architecture."

While he was preparing to open his own office, Maki worked at, or observed, numerous offices in Japan and other countries. One of the conclusions he drew was that an office, and by extension, design itself, is a matter of individual character, and that an office is itself a work of art. "Architectural design is perhaps the strangest activity undertaken by the many professions, and a group that engages in architectural design is likewise a curious organization. Architecture is a highly ambiguous field," Maki continued.

Most of Maki's work has been accomplished in Japan, although he is currently working on a number of commissions both in Europe and the United States. When his office building complex for Isar Büro Park near Munich is completed in 1994, it will be his first realized European project.

Later this year, a second realized work in the United States will be completed—the Yerba Buena Gardens Visual Arts Center, part of a large scale redevelopment in downtown San Francisco involving a number of prominent architects (Mario Botta, James Polshek, Mitchell/Giurgola, I.M. Pei). The Visual Arts Center by Maki is currently under construction, literally on top of the Moscone Convention Center.

Maki is the first to acknowledge that as a student, he came under the influence of post-Bauhaus internationalism. That plus ten years of study and work in the United States afforded him the ability to step back and take a view from a distance of both Japan and America, as well as other parts of the world. It is to this experience that he attributes what people have called an aesthetic sense that is intelligible to a world audience.

Maki calls himself a modernist, unequivocally. His structures tend to be made of metal, concrete and glass, the classic materials of the modernist age, but the canonical palette has also been extended to include such materials as mosaic tile, anodized aluminum and stainless steel. Along with a great many other Japanese architects, he has maintained a consistent interest in new technology as part of his design language, quite often taking advantage of modular systems in construction. He makes

**Fumihiko Maki, 1993 Laureate** (continued)

a conscious effort to capture the spirit of a place and an era, producing with each building or complex of buildings, a work that makes full use of all that is presently at his command. As far as post-modernism is concerned, Maki has been quoted as saying, "In the West it might be all right, but in Japan, post modernism using historic motifs would simply evaporate." And with it, so evaporates the modern/post-modern debate as an issue of style. "The problem of modernity is not creating forms," says Maki, "but rather, creating an overall image of life, not necessarily dominated by the concept of modernity." For him, this overall image is in essence a question of space for human activity rather than a vision of a constructed facade. Maki often speaks of the idea of creating "unforgettable scenes"—in effect, stage settings to accommodate and complement all kinds of human interaction—as the inspiration and starting point for his designs.

As a founding member of the Metabolists in 1960, his name became associated with the group's large-scale urban designs and plans. However, his buildings are not "megastructures," a term he invented. As Bill Lacy, in his book, *100 Contemporary Architects* states, "His gigantic Nippon Convention Center in Tokyo shows how a huge building can possess qualities missing in the vast megastructures of the modernist years. The center...is modeled on the prototypical Japanese community nestled among hills and was intended to set the tone and direction for future urban growth in the area. Its vast volume and distinctive silhouette becomes a man-made mountain range in an otherwise flat, waterfront topography. The facility is organized along a central spine nearly one-third of a mile long and its vast exhibition hall is covered with a curved roof ... elements as background forms for a diversity of human-scaled components."

Most critics agree that even with his most enormous buildings, Maki's works are at ground level, scaled appropriately to provide human warmth and excitement. In *Contemporary Architects*, Ching-Yu Chang wrote, "While Maki has rightly gained considerable notoriety as a theoretician, he has clearly not allowed his thinking to become clouded with esoteric ideas. He applies his belief in module, standardized parts and adaptability for change in a very utilitarian, pragmatic way. It is apparent that the thrust of his design attention is not the glorification of these concepts, but the successful employment of them to create inclusive highly contextual architecture that is in strict accord with human, psychological preferences."

Maki wrote as early as 1960, and it is still relevant today, "There is no more critically concerned observer of our rapidly changing society than the urban designer. Charged with giving form—with perceiving and contributing order—to agglomerates of buildings, highways, and green spaces in which men have increasingly come to work and live, the urban designer stands between technology and human need and seeks to make the first a servant, for the second must be paramount in a civilized world."

In Maki's Osaka Prefectural Sports Center, he unifies many separate spaces with a central spine, much like a street with different levels—in this case allowing access to the gymnasium at one end and to a restaurant, observation deck at the other. Here the diner can look back over a roof garden to an entrance plaza, in effect, looking through a layering of transparent planes and spaces—a concept that relates to many of Maki's buildings.

In his Hillside Terrace Apartments, a complex of buildings developed over a period of 25 years (and thus nearly spanning the firm's entire history), a strategy of transparent layering creates a series of shared scenes or landscapes within an urban context. Wandering through the complex, one encounters intimate courtyards hidden away amid greenery, linked by meandering passages and discovered only by accident of a sideways glance. By articulating several layers of threshold spaces between the busy street edge and the densely wooded interior of the block, Maki is able to impart a sense of depth to spaces that physically are quite compact.

## **Fumihiko Maki, 1993 Laureate** (continued)

Gymnasium is particularly illustrative of this freer sensibility—its sharp, stainless steel clad roof seems virtually to float above the main arena, separated from the spectator stands by a ribbon of light and supported only at four points. Some critics have likened its complex metallic form to a spaceship or a beetle, while others have deemed it reminiscent of a medieval samurai helmet.

New York architect Emilio Ambasz wrote, “There is in the Fujisawa project a serene majesty, an elegant dignity which forces us to admire the extraordinary generosity of a reticent artist who loves his material more than himself; who has reduced the building to its essential core so that when touched, it will not be the instrument we admire but rather the sound which emanates from it. In Fujisawa, Maki calls forth the gods of Japanese architecture.”

Bill Lacy, describing Maki’s YKK Guest House, wrote of great architects understanding that their designs begin with the premise that stone, glass, steel and concrete are only the means by which light is allowed to create form and space. “YKK Guest House is a striking example of the manipulation of light to artistic purposes by a master architect,” he explained, and continued that the YKK Guest House is the three dimensional representation of the maxim attributed to Michelangelo: “There should be nothing superfluous, yet, nothing wanting in sculpture.” Lacy concluded, “It is a building that grows from the inside out and whose exterior composition is so carefully balanced that its appearance works equally well in all seasons—day or night. The overall impression is one of appropriateness—to program, to site and to the special cultural aesthetics that is distinctively Japanese.”

Because he is convinced that public places—both interior and exterior—are the best catalysts for generating human interaction, he places great importance on the spatial design of the public realm. Nearly all of his projects have interior and exterior spaces that interact visually—for example the Tepia Science Pavilion (1989) whose first floor exhibition spaces and second floor cafe enjoy a view out to a broad courtyard garden.

One of Maki’s most significant projects is the Hillside Terrace complex which he began to design in 1967 and has continued to work on right up until the last year when the final phase was completed.

Nothing like it had been seen in Japan before. It was to be primarily residential with shops. With Maki’s overall plan, it represents “a graceful and appropriate architectural interpretation and channeling of existing trends,” said David B. Stewart, writing in *Space Design*.

Hillside Terrace is an example of small-scale town planning as it was practiced nearly a century ago. The fact that it has been designed and built over 25 years makes it unique in that it was being accomplished while architectural fashions were changing, as well as the architect’s own views. Nearly every aspect of the original master plan, from the layout of open space to the typology of apartment buildings and distribution of commercial spaces, went through radical revisions over the course of twenty-five years, developing as a series of improvisations on a theme. Nevertheless, the intimate scale of courtyards, the open character of public space enhanced by axial views and transparent layering, and the subtle adaptation of existing topography were basic to the first designs and have followed through the design of the last phase.

According to Hiroyuki Suzuki, Architecture Professor at the University of Tokyo, “Following the orthodox tradition by which the city has taken shape in Tokyo, Maki applied the modernist architectural methodology to a process of construction that lasted longer than any other project of this kind, elevating it into an original technique of townscape building. Here we can see for ourselves what the seemingly self-contradictory concept of memory of modernity means.”

As a student of two cultures whose fusion of the two influences has been greatly acclaimed, Maki recently wrote of his native Tokyo with nostalgia and hope. “Tokyo is the place where I was born, raised, and educated. It was also in Tokyo that I became familiar with some of the few works of

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modern architecture that existed in the 1930s in Japan—the white houses of such modern pioneers as Kameki Tsuchiura (who was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright when the latter was in Japan designing the old Imperial Hotel), Sutemi Horiguchi, Antonin Raymond. Tokyo has changed greatly in the half century since then.” He continued that his office will have left an architectural imprint in at least 30 places in Tokyo and environs—ten houses or apartments, two embassies, four universities, two schools, three cultural facilities, one gymnasium, three office buildings and three commercial buildings.

He likens his Tokyo to Manhattan, where dynamic and static elements are in continual conflict, “and being in its midst is like standing on the beach as waves ceaselessly advance and recede.” He confides, “It is in this context that architecture must be built. Architecture can no longer provide the old order of traditional townscapes but it may have an even greater influence today as the nexus between human beings and a constantly changing environment.”

In 1970, Maki wrote: “The ultimate aim of architecture is to create spaces to serve society, and in order to achieve this, the architect must understand human activities from the standpoints of history, ecology, and changing trends. He must also know the relationship existing between human activities and architectural spaces and processes by means of which these relationships develop.”

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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](mailto:marthathorne@pritzkerprize.com)