

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Richard Rogers 2007 Laureate Acceptance Speech

Good evening. I am honored and delighted to receive the Pritzker Prize for Architecture. First—I must say that I accept it, not for me alone, but for the community of designers who have inspired me, and collaborated with me through the years. I want to thank Ken Livingstone, Lord Palumbo and Tom Pritzker for their praise, and for the great contributions that they, Cindy Pritzker and her family have made, to architecture and the arts.

It is deeply emotional for me to accept the award—surrounded by the friends and family I love—in the Banqueting Hall of Inigo Jones—a building that marks the first flowering of the Renaissance in Britain and a truly revolutionary building in its time. The architecture of Inigo Jones was inspired by his visits to Florence. I too owe a debt to that city, the city of my birth, the city where Donatello, Masaccio and Brunelleschi revived and rediscovered the classical tradition.

Florence set the standards for cities that we still aspire to. It is also where my parents instilled in my brother Peter and me a love of beauty, a sense of order, and the importance of civic responsibility. Cities are the heart of our culture, the engines of our economy and the birthplace of our civilization. There is little that makes me happier than getting lost in a beautiful city: following its narrow passages to the grand tree lined avenues; stumbling across street theatre, sitting in a café with Ruthie watching people go by. This is my idea of heaven.

But cities do not just happen—they are made. Designed and managed well they civilize. Neglected, they quickly lose their vitality. And where cities become run-down, they brutalize. There are neighborhoods in cities all over the world that lie derelict because the wealthy and skilled have moved out, leaving behind only the poor—The people who have no choice—in desolate, and fearful spaces.

Our present Government was the first to encourage people to move back into our cities, rather than letting them spill out into sprawling suburbs and the countryside. John Prescott's powerful leadership and creation of the Urban Task Force, which I chaired, helped start this Urban Renaissance.

I am proud to be a citizen of London. I am awed by our great parks and by the beautiful Thames, and I rejoice at London's human scale, at the vitality of the South Bank and at Wren's Royal Hospital, which I see every morning from my home. Under our brave and visionary Mayor, Ken Livingstone, London has a growing population, economic success and a progressive outlook. To me, the city has never been more exciting than it is now.

London is also where I have watched my children grow into the extraordinary adults they are. They and their partners are my pride and my joy—Bo, Ben, Harriet, Zad, Lucy, Ab, Sophie, Roo, and Bernie. You can see my contribution to London's population growth! All of them play their parts as citizens, too. Now it is their children who go to local schools and play in London's parks.

It was Milan Kundera who said "history looks sunlit, clear, and obvious only in hindsight." The same could be said of any career, including my own. Looking back I realize that it is the people I have worked with—not just architects, but enlightened clients, and brilliant engineers like the late Peter Rice—who have taught me the most.

Norman Foster has been an inspiration and a close friend, since the first day we met at Yale in 1961. We took a road trip across America, excited by everything—from Frank Lloyd Wright in Wisconsin to the Case Study Houses in California. Fuelled by Norman's intellectual rigor, we passionately discussed everything we saw, forging an architectural language that has evolved through my career. You can see that language in the work of Team Four, the practice Norman and Wendy Foster, Su Rogers and I set up when we came back from Yale, and later in the partnership Richard and Su Rogers with John Young and Laurie Abbott. Our architecture was born of social change and the excitement of new technology, which could create buildings that were legible in structure and flexible in use. As technology developed, we opened up the possibility of realising these forms on a larger and more complex scale. But the

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fundamentals have remained constant. One of those fundamentals in my life and work has been John Young. We have worked together on every project. His love and understanding of the process of construction, the quality of materials, and the beauty of design make him unique.

The Pompidou Cultural Centre in 1971 gave me the good luck to work with Renzo Piano. Renzo is a brother to me, a constant source of inspiration, fun and friendship. Hardly a week goes by without us exchanging ideas. In the universe of architecture, he is a true poet. The Pompidou was our first major commission. It is perhaps less well known that I nearly stopped us entering. Fired up by the political tumult of the late sixties, I wrote a memo arguing that we should not get involved in anything as elitist as a Centre for Culture commissioned by a President. Fortunately, I was outvoted. You can imagine our excitement at winning a competition of this scale. It is a credit to the French Government that they kept faith with this young team, and let us re-model a whole piece of city, designing a public space that extended from a great square to the escalators that snaked up the steel-framed open façade. The first sentence of our submission still describes accurately how we approached the project: “as a place for all people, all ages, and all creeds—a cross between the British Museum and Times Square.”

The building aroused strong emotions from the outset. I remember one rainy day just after it opened, standing proudly outside, next to an elderly, elegant Parisian woman. She offered me a place under her umbrella, and asked me what I thought of the building? I proudly told her I was the architect. She paused—looked at me—and then—hit me over the head with her umbrella. If Pompidou was a colorful fun palace standing in a great piazza, Lloyds of London was a private club squeezed into the City’s medieval street pattern, its vertical service towers breaking up the mass of the building. It was the first big project for the Richard Rogers Partnership, and a tribute to the genius of John Young.

However different these two early projects were, they shared a common intention: to open buildings up to the street, creating as much joy for the passer-by as for the people who work inside. Thirty years later, Barajas Airport in Madrid continues the spirit of the Pompidou: the fun and adventure of travel are expressed in its sweeping roof, its steel structure, and rainbow of colors.

When John Young, Marco Goldschmeid, Mike Davies and I set up the Richard Rogers Partnership in 1976, we wanted the practice to be a community, a place that reflected our values. The practice is owned by a charitable trust. Partners own no equity, and earn a multiple of the lowest paid architect. Profits are divided between a profit-share for all staff and donations to the charity of their choice. The vision of my partners, Mike Davies, Graham Stirk, Ivan Harbour, Andrew Morris and Lennart Grut has shaped our designs in recent years. They will play an even more critical role in the future, together with: Amo Kalsi, Richard Paul, Mark Darbon and Ian Birtles.

There is my best friend still to mention. Ruthie and I do everything together, our lives are totally intertwined. We share our work—the River Café is next door to my office—and I eat there every day. It is rare for me to make a decision without her. (As a matter of fact this is the only part of my speech she hasn’t helped me with) She is brilliant. She is beautiful. She is, quite simply, the love of my life.

I have always believed that a humane and progressive architecture is one that creates beauty out of function. Not just for the sake of beauty in itself, but because beautiful buildings and public spaces help people achieve their potential, as citizens as well as individuals. Architects cannot be apolitical we have a duty to engage.

Today there is a new architectural imperative: not just to complement the urban environment, but also to respect the global environment. Neither architects nor anyone who is concerned about the future can ignore the effects of climate change nor the widening gulf between rich and poor. Both are destabilizing our already fragile world, triggering conflicts from Darfur to Iraq, wasting human potential and tragically destroying human lives. We know what needs to be done, and we are finding the tools.

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We can create a new Renaissance—where civic and environmental responsibility come together, embodied in the work of planners and architects. These are the challenges that face my practice, as we begin a new chapter as Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners. We are committed to playing our part

I am excited at the prospect and I am humbled by the honor bestowed on me tonight.

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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