

Bill Lacy 1994 Laureate Christian de Portzamparc Ceremony Speech

Good evening. I am Bill Lacy, Secretary to the Pritzker Architecture Prize. We have held our ceremonies over the years in castles, palaces, museums, and libraries, and once in a wooden Buddhist temple eight hundred years old. But Columbus, Indiana, surpasses all of them for sheer density and intensity of remarkable architecture. We're delighted to be here.

One of the conditions of the generous invitation to come here from Irwin Miller, founding jury member of the prize, was that we not mention his name during the course of the festivities. You can see how well we have lived up to that already tonight.

And I must say that it's not that easy a condition to abide by, when the taxi driver, on entering the city limits, says, "that's Mr. Miller's church and that's Mr. Miller's fire station, that's Mr. Miller's bank." He is the only cab driver that I've ever met that knew the difference between I.M. Pei and Robert Venturi.

Irwin, thank you for the invitation and for Columbus' special architectural nature. It has been a pilgrimage for many of us that we would not have missed.

This past spring, the jury toured, as they have in the last several years, various parts of the world, to look at buildings by prominent architects, because that's really the only way you can experience architecture, by looking at it and walking through it. And we had the opportunity to see projects in Paris by tonight's Pritzker Prize winner, Christian de Portzamparc. Many of us had seen his work on other visits, had experienced firsthand those remarkable spaces and forms which he created in his School of Dance and City of Music. But no photograph or slide can really convey the feeling of actually walking through a Portzamparc building. It is, to use a very tired musical analogy, like strolling through a symphony of spaces, solids and voids, always with a well-composed three-dimensional view ahead, above, and to either side. Portzamparc's architecture has been called: "iconoclastic, idiosyncratic and lyrical..." by *Time* magazine; "an urban synthesis of modern and traditional forms..." by the *New York Times*; "fifties modern and streamline," by the *Boston Globe*. And our own jury member, Ada Louise Huxtable, describes his work as "a joyful architecture, which leaves the rigidity of modernism and the cartoonish decoration of post-modernism far behind."

Later, on that same tour, after leaving Paris, we made a nostalgic detour to visit a modest chapel at Ronchamp. It is an iconic building that is at once small and monumental, and at least for architects, always magical.

It was designed by another Frenchman, Le Corbusier, whose built works, though relatively few in number, have inspired generations of architects the world over, including a young architect named Christian de Portzamparc. Like Corbusier, Portzamparc is a painter as well as an architect, and like him, he had to withstand established Beaux Arts traditions to find his own "voice." In March, our jury met, deliberated, and eventually selected Monsieur de Portzamparc. It is my role and privilege not only to solicit names and present them to the jury for consideration, but also to notify the laureate that he or she has won. No call has ever given me more pleasure than to inform Christian of this honor and to hear his jubilant "Fantastique!" as a response.

Several weeks after the official announcement, he wrote to me and said, "Dear Bill: The effect of the prize is great and wonderful. The young feel that it is a recognition of a certain "idea" of architecture, one that is not always understood here. There was a surprise birthday party," he continued, "my fiftieth, at the Cafe Beaubourg. Instead of four friends, as Elizabeth had promised, it became an ovation by 150 persons, important figures in French architecture, including the Minister of Culture, and they were singing 'the first French Pritzker'."

Bill Lacy, 1994 Laureate Christian de Portzamparc (continued)

The person who wrote the words and produced that hit French song, is a gentleman who I have the pleasure of introducing next. Jay Pritzker and his wife, Cindy, with the blessing of the entire Pritzker family, set this prize in motion in 1979. Since that time, it has brought heightened public awareness and recognition to the profession, and has become the preeminent prize in the field.

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