

Jay A. Pritzker 1992 Laureate Alvaro Siza Ceremony Speech

As many of you know, these ceremonies are held at landmarks around the world—the Temple at Nara in Japan, the Goldsmiths’ Guild Hall in London, the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, and many beautiful museums in our own country.

Tonight, we add this landmark by Tom Beebe and Bernie Babka to that illustrious list of venues. We congratulate you gentlemen. This is a great opportunity to introduce our new library to a wider audience. As is often the case, we have more than one reason to celebrate on these occasions. First and foremost, we are here to honor this year’s Laureate, Alvaro Siza from Portugal.

But tonight, for the first time we are putting on an exhibit, which I hope most of you have seen; it’s a retrospective of the works of all the Laureates. Tonight was the first time Cindy and I had seen it, and we think the designers and Keith Walker have done an absolutely superb job. It’s wonderfully done and we hope that it will be quite effective as it travels through the world. We cannot review what has happened with this prize without mentioning again our founding jury chairman, J. Carter Brown. When anyone asks us what makes the Pritzker Prize so unique and prestigious, our answer is always: the quality and integrity of the jury. Carter has consistently been the jury’s guiding light, and we are delighted that although he has decided to retire from his post as Director of the National Gallery of Art, he is continuing as Pritzker Jury Chairman.

It seems like yesterday that we were getting ready for the first presentation to Philip Johnson at Dumbarton Oaks. He called architecture the “mother of the arts,” and yet “the most difficult of all the arts” lamenting the fact that unlike writers or painters, an architect can’t tear up his mistakes.

He also held out the hope that architecture could be the “art that saves,” saying that we have the capability to rebuild not just our own country, but the world, if we can just harness the will to do so.

The next year when we honored the late Luis Barragan of Mexico, it was for architecture as a sublime act of poetic imagination. He firmly believed that any work of architecture that did not express serenity was a mistake. At that ceremony, J. Irwin Miller, one of our esteemed jurors spoke of the importance of rewarding excellence in architecture with prizes, because “first we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us.” We hope, with this prize, to inspire those who shape our buildings to even higher standards.

The late James Stirling, 1981 Laureate, said that the “art” of architecture was always *the* priority in his own work, and historically.

Cesar Pelli, one of our jurors at that time, said that the “art of architecture is possible only through the understanding of the limitations and possibilities of building.” The prize celebrates the transformation of “building into art.”

On a much more cautious note, 1982 Laureate Kevin Roche said that we have the evidence of history that architecture is an art, but whether it is art in our time we cannot judge, “we can only desire to make it so,” and urged that we not confuse art with fashion.

leoh Ming Pei, honored in 1983, declared that to become art, architecture must be built on a foundation of necessity, urging that we remember Leonardo’s counsel that “strength is born of constraint and dies in freedom.” Richard Meier, 1984 Laureate said he preferred to think of himself more as a master builder than as an artist, “for the art of architecture demands this,” saying further that his goal is presence, not illusion.

Jay A. Pritzker, 1992 Laureate Alvaro Siza (continued)

Austrian Hans Hollein spoke of his responsibilities—as an artist, only to himself, but as an architect—to the needs of man and society.

Gottfried Boehm of Germany in 1986 did not want to overestimate the influence of architecture on people, but he was certain that the physical alienation of our cities contributes to our inability to live together harmoniously, urging that new buildings fit naturally into their surroundings, both historically and architecturally. Leaping to the other side of the world in 1987, Laureate Kenzo Tange of Japan accepted saying that he was still searching for the answer to what buildings could best serve society.

In 1988, when we honored two totally diverse talents—Oscar Niemeyer of Brazil and the late Gordon Bunshaft of this country—Niemeyer spoke of “a concern for beauty, a zest for fantasy and surprise” bearing witness that today’s architecture is not bound by rules. Bunshaft was described as setting the standard for corporate architecture, a standard to be judged with acclaim. Frank Gehry, accepting the prize in Japan in 1989, said “Architecture must solve complex problems, using technology and facing issues of social responsibility, even pleasing the client. But then what? Answering his own question: then comes the selection of forms, scale, materials, color—the same choices facing the painter and sculptor. He elaborated, “Architecture is surely an art, and those who practice the art of architecture are surely architects.”

In 1990, Kurt Forster, Director of the Getty Center in California, wrote of Italian Laureate Aldo Rossi, “he manifests his profession, a profession that is nothing without mastery of the crafts, but never masterly without the arts.”

Last year, the jury spoke of Robert Venturi combining two aspects of architecture—the one being the physical elements of wood, glass, bricks, and steel—and the other, the art form based on words, ideas and concepts. And now the present: The 1992 Laureate’s work is described as being a joy to the senses and uplifting the spirit, with each line and curve placed with skill and sureness. Characterized as shy and modest, Alvaro Siza maintains that he *invents* nothing, rather he makes *transformations*. In any case, he certainly practices the art of architecture.

On behalf of the Pritzker family and The Hyatt Foundation, we honor Alvaro Siza for his past and wish him well for the future by presenting him with the 1992 Pritzker Architecture Prize.

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For more information, please contact:

Eunice Kim
Director of Communications
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
Tel: +1 240 401 5649
Email: eunicekim@pritzkerprize.com