

Jay A. Pritzker 1995 Laureate Tadao Ando Ceremony Speech

Monsieur Le Ministers, Madame L'Ambassador, Ladies and Gentlemen. I will not make it difficult for the interpreter by attempting to fracture French.

There are many definitions of architecture, but one of America's outstanding writers on architecture Vincent Scully, defined it as: "The continuing dialogue between generations which creates an environment across time." I think that applies to architecture and to all the arts. And it's not just from generation to generation, but from culture to culture, and country to country. A continuous cross-fertilization, often traveling full circle over the centuries.

Just as the great Impressionist painters—late in the last century and early in this one—were influenced by the wood block artists of Japan, American architects at the turn of the century, were influenced by the Beaux Arts school here in France. They then absorbed other influences, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, who acknowledged Japan as one of his sources of inspiration. Our Laureate tonight, closes the circle, by acknowledging Wright as an influence on his work. The French master architect, Le Corbusier, has been cited by virtually every Laureate since the prize was established. It's been said that Corbusier did for concrete, what Michelangelo did for marble. Tadao Ando not only acknowledges Le Corbusier, but takes the process one step further, by making his concrete "smooth as silk" on his structures.

The late Lord Clark was one of the founding jurors of this prize. He spoke of how architecture can conjure an image of history in our imagination, using as an example the Egyptian pyramids. Variations on that theme are appearing thousands of years later, not only in the Louvre, but in a number of cities in the United States, as convention and entertainment centers.

In some cases, imitation or duplication is nearly impossible. Such is the case here in Versailles. Costs would be prohibitive, and the artisans don't exist who would have the capacity to do it. Baroque was carried forward to new heights here. It evolved into Rococo. All of Europe found Versailles an example to emulate. I understand that King Louis XIV dabbled in architecture, and that he originated the idea for the peristyle where we had our reception earlier this evening. We offer our gratitude not only to French Royalty for this structure, but to the French Republic for making it possible to present the prize here in the Grand Trianon this evening.

It's particularly appropriate since America has had longstanding ties to France since 1777 when Benjamin Franklin was our first Minister, right here in Versailles. In fact, this was the first diplomatic mission established by the just-born United States.

As we move our ceremony from city to city each year, paying homage to architects of other times and honoring current architects, there's never really been a relationship with such significance as this one. A few years ago, we were at Todai-Ji in Nara, Japan, where we honored an American architect. Last year, Christian de Portzamparc received the Prize in Columbus, Indiana, a small community famed for its architectural patronage, in the middle of America.

Tonight we've come full circle again, presenting the Prize to Tadao Ando, a Japanese architect who's a rare combination of artistic and intellectual sensitivity; who produces buildings that both serve and inspire. He confesses to being self-taught, having spent many hours studying books about architecture, visiting structures around the world, to learn by example, listening to those dialogues between generations and cultures.

Jay A. Pritzker, 1995 Laureate Tadao Ando (continued)

As the Pritzker jury said in its citation, and I quote: "Ando's architecture is an assemblage of artistically composed surprises in space and form. There's never a predictable moment as one moves through his buildings. He refuses to be bound by convention. Originality is his medium. And his personal view of the world is his source of inspiration."

Ando-san, would you join me here on the platform? I want to present you with this medal. We wish you well. We congratulate you.

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