

Martha Thorne 2009 Laureate Peter Zumthor Ceremony Speech

Good evening and welcome to the ceremony for the presentation of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. It is the first time that this event is celebrated in South America, and it is an honor to be in such a beautiful and friendly city as Buenos Aires. I would like to extend special thanks to the Head of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Mr. Mauricio Macri, and the President of the Legislature, Mr. Diego Santilli, for all their support in organizing this event and for hosting us in this building, which is a beautiful setting for the ceremony.

As many of you know, the Pritzker Architecture Prize was founded in 1979 for the purpose of annually recognizing an architect for the exceptional quality of his/her body of built work. The Prize has remained loyal to its original objectives. This is a testimony to the vision and strength of the initial ideas developed and fully supported by the generosity and dedication of the Pritzker Family, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Pritzker, who are with us tonight.

I would like to briefly share with you some facts about the Pritzker Prize and the reasons that it is such a special and internationally recognized prize. Please allow me to change languages and continue in English. (First part spoken in Spanish.)

Each year since 1979, one architect or two, as was the case in 1988 and in 2001, have received the award. The youngest at the time of receiving it was Richard Meier, who was 49 years old, followed by Christian Portzamparc, age 50. To respect the modesty of our laureates, I will not reveal who was the oldest. They have come from 17 different countries and represent a rich variety of approaches to architecture. Tonight we are honored to have with us, representing the community of past laureates, Glenn Murcutt, the 2002 winner.

The high quality of the Prize is in large measure, undoubtedly due to the independent jury. There were 19 past jury members who, in addition to the eight current ones, have had the enormous responsibility to select a laureate each year. Jorge Silvetti is here tonight representing the past jurors, as is Bill Lacy, Executive Director and Secretary of Jury for some 18 years until 2005. We are delighted that they are here and thank them once again for their service and for getting the Prize off to such a good start.

The Prize is also special because of celebrations like these. Ceremonies have been held all across the globe in historic sites as well as contemporary ones. For example, from the Jerusalem Archeological Park representing thousands of years of history and Todai-ji Temple originally founded in the eighth century to two very contemporary sites that hosted the ceremony while under construction—the Getty Center and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. All are selected for the outstanding quality of the place and the possibility to experience the warmth and joy of the setting. I am certain that Buenos Aires will be remembered as one of the most memorable sites in the life of the Prize.

Tonight you will see that the 2009 laureate will receive a bronze medallion commemorating the Prize. The first eight laureates received a Henry Moore sculpture. Or, I believe that they did. The reason I say this is that during the ceremony for Jim Stirling in 1981, the founder of the Prize, Jay Pritzker, much to the chagrin of his wife, Cindy Pritzker, admitted that he had forgotten the sculpture at home in Chicago, and Jim Stirling would have to wait for a future date to receive it. Tom you have the medal and check, don't you?

Martha Thorne, 2009 Laureate Peter Zumthor (continued)

Levity aside, I would just like to close by paraphrasing some words by a former laureate Kevin Roche from 1982. When speaking at a ceremony such as this about the enormous challenges faced by all those involved in the making of architecture and those who seek to inspire, such as the Pritzker Architecture Prize does, he said:

“We should accept the responsibility to create our environment and use the opportunity we have to lead and educate society into improving its habitat. We should, all of us, bend our will to create a civilization in which we can live at peace with nature and each other. To build well is an act of peace.”

Now, it is my pleasure to turn the podium over to the Head of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and Civil Engineer, Mr. Mauricio Macri.

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