

Peter Zumthor **2009 Laureate** **Ceremony Acceptance Speech**

Thank you. It's a wonderful moment, of course, to get such a prize. There was a journalist, a couple of weeks ago back in Switzerland, asking me: "Now that you're getting the biggest prize in architecture, will this change your life?" Then I said, "Of course not." And then I added, "Maybe, I don't know." Maybe something will change, but I would like to say it wouldn't. So, I'm a little bit older now—a couple of weeks older—and something has changed a little bit. Let me try to explain.

As you just heard, when I was a boy, there was no architecture. There were architects. Some of them my father liked, some of them he didn't like. But architecture didn't exist. Only later looking back I asked myself, was there architecture in my life? At first I thought, "I don't see anything." Perhaps just our house... But architecture? A school? I grew up in a village, in a town five kilometers outside of the city of Basel. So, I looked around, and there was not much. Keep in mind that this is me later looking back. And then all of a sudden, one Saturday evening, we took the little train and went to the movies. Then I started to remember there were all these movie theatres in the streets, and they had a beautiful kind of feeling. They had a beautiful feeling when you got in. There was a really marvelous world of kitsch, really marvelous. And when you went down to the bathroom, the colors were yellow and black. And then all of a sudden, I realized there were this and that, and the balustrades, which had polka dots—polka dot kind of holes—and so on. So, I imagined that this must have been architecture. It was something special. And then later, I remembered that once a year we went to a monastery, a baroque church, nearby. And there were monks singing Gregorian chants in this beautiful Baroque church. Architecture. And then—this was the best—at the end of the service, the family always went down into the rocks, and you came to a very small chapel built or excavated in the rocks. There were a lot of candles and those typical smells and all these things. Architecture! Architectural atmosphere! So, I was glad to discover it. There are other things, of course. But I was glad to discover there was architecture in my youth. I just didn't know it.

A little bit later—10 years or 15 years—all of a sudden I decided that I wanted to become a real architect, which was sort of a lonely decision in the kitchen. And I started to do my work. I started to enter competitions. I won a competition. I did my first two buildings. The two buildings started to grow. And I remembered at the time we looked at these two buildings, Annalisa and I. I got really depressed. It was terrible. I saw the buildings, and I could see the models of the buildings. This was terrible. I could hear the architectural discussion of the time in my buildings. This was the last time that this should happen to me. The last time that I'm not being myself.

So what is this being myself? It is interesting that in these buildings, which gave me this headache, heart ache, there were things I liked, such as things that did not come from a magazine or from a discussion that I can talk about with somebody. Rather, this is me! What is this "me"? Of course, I don't know exactly. But I can try to explain a little about the process of what I feel when this happens, when I have the feeling "this is me." Maybe those of you who play tennis, you know. You have to concentrate on the ball. If you start to think just for a moment, "Oh, my friend is looking at how I play," then you are lost, right? You have to keep this total concentration on what you want to do. This is one thing. The other thing is you have to be loose. Now, I'm talking about myself. I should say I have to be loose. I go to the place. I listen to the client. I walk around. I hang around. I'm not going to do research.

Peter Zumthor, 2009 Laureate (continued)

When I start to do research, I'm really bad. This I know from studying. No research. You are just hanging out, listening, feeling, having the place resonate a little bit. And then all of a sudden, ideas come naturally. I don't know when and where. I think this is a very natural process. Everybody—all of you, all of us—we experience this. And what I discovered was that when I have these feelings, it is like being a boy again. All of a sudden, I think this is me when I was 10 years or 12 years old. I'm dreaming. I'm there and something comes to me, but it's not, of course, naïve dreaming. Everything, which is part of my biography, is there. But it's not there as a research product or as reference material. It went into me, as part of my life. Then it comes out from somewhere—from my emotions or whatever, my feelings.

So, I'm at the same place as at the time when I experienced architecture as a boy without knowing it. This is what I love. These beginnings, these moments of the beginning. And then comes the really hard task when I have to take care that nobody destroys my first image. Because, as you know, we're doing a job as architects. We are surrounded by politics, by laws, by money, by clients who have weak moments, and all these things. Sometimes people want to take away or harm my image, my baby. So, this needs a little bit of persistence. Maybe that's where my reputation comes from that I'm a stubborn guy, which I'm not, of course.

As I get older, I think I got some kind of a... I'm sort of secure that I can do this—be a boy, and in being a boy and dreaming, doing something. Then I say, "When I like it, you will like it, too, because I'm not so special." Now comes this moment when I get this prize. And I think now, and I start to feel that dreaming becomes even easier. Maybe I can. You help me to go on dreaming even stronger. Thank you.

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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