

Thomas J. Pritzker 2005 Laureate Thom Mayne Ceremony Speech

I'd like to thank Lord Palumbo for assuming the chairmanship of the Pritzker Prize Jury. It is a job that requires frequently a lot of skill and nuance because we have some preeminent jurors each of has very strong and educated opinions. And Lord Palumbo's job is to navigate us to the point at which the jury is able to come to a decision and choose a laureate each year.

Today, we bring the Pritzker Architecture Prize back to its birthplace and to our home, Chicago. It has wandered the globe, from the power centers of the White House to Versailles and from spiritual centers of Japan's great Buddhist Temple of Todai-ji to the Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem. Last year this ceremony was held in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia. There is a bit of irony in this as our family settled in Chicago as a result of fleeing the pogroms in Russia in 1881. We, like hundreds of thousands of other immigrants landed in Chicago and we settled in Chicago, and for several generations, have built a wonderful life in this great city.

We bring the Prize home today, to this place, Millennium Park, bordered on one side by Lake Michigan and on the other side by the city where the skyscraper was born. Today, thanks in no small part to Mayor Daley, we live in the midst of one of America's greenest cities. And perhaps most exciting, we gather underneath the visual wonder of Frank Gehry's pavilion, which is dedicated to the memory of my father, Jay Pritzker.

While I know that tonight we celebrate Thom Mayne, I would like to take a moment to reflect on Chicago and particularly on our family's relationship to the city and to Millennium Park. For more than a century, Chicago has given our family a home and a community. As a family, we believe that we have an obligation to give back to that community. We have come a long way from our early days in Chicago and this pavilion is an opportunity to express our appreciation for the opportunities that this city has afforded our family. It is not so much a gift from us to the City, as it is a wonderful occasion to say thank you to the people of Chicago for creating a vibrant community of unlimited opportunity.

Chance makes it possible for us to work throughout the world, yet we have never forgotten our home base and its values; hard work, warmth, and the obligation to touch the life of each person whom we serve. For those of you who are not from Chicago, look around you. This Park is the result of the drive and vision of our mayor. He recognizes the value of a partnership between the City, the private sector, and the community and what you see is the realization of that collaboration.

What could be a more fitting place in which to honor Thom Mayne. I can think of no better way to give voice, to this space and the moment it makes possible, than to quote from Chicago's poet Carl Sandburg. Sandburg had an eye for architecture, and in his famous poem "Skyscraper" he celebrates the skyscraper that has made Chicago America's first city of architecture:

Hour by hour the girder's play as ribs and reach out and hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted.

And whom do we celebrate today? A man who has voted and voted clearly. We celebrate the ninth American architect to be honored as a Pritzker laureate, Thom Mayne.

Thomas J. Pritzker, 2005 Laureate Thom Mayne (continued)

Critics and scholars of architecture have told us that he has carved out a territory beyond the limits of modernism and even post-modernism. Thom Mayne is also an academic who reflects philosophically on his art. He has written, "We have attempted to unite two prevalent ideas regarding the production of architectural form, ideas that are generally considered to be mutually exclusive." He then proceeds to consider architecture based on universal systems and principles, and architecture based specifically on the locale, its culture, and its historic precedents. Universalism vs. Particularism. The yin and the yang. Each is limited. Rightfully, he argues that taken alone, the universal approach tends to homogenize the singularity of the human experience and suppress the idiosyncratic. On the other hand, an architecture that focuses exclusively on the particular, on the local circumstance, will remain narrow. We live in a world in which cultures excite each other. Thom Mayne sees the universal as negating that which is unique in each circumstance, and he sees the particular as functioning in isolation from the world, and hence incomplete. His mission is the union of these two ideas.

And so Thom Mayne has written, "Our methodology proceeds through a constant oscillation between what exists and what could be, realism and idealism."

His firm and its regular publication bear the same name, Morphosis. Thom Mayne rises to the challenge of Kafka's "Metamorphosis." He creates buildings that acknowledge and celebrate the excitement of urban chaos, and yet at the same time provide space created for the individual to celebrate his or her uniqueness. He has articulated this vision in buildings so very diverse in purpose, yet so necessary to achieve the qualities of decency and enlightenment that we seek from our cities. He has lent his architecture to education, to athletics, to mass transportation, to research, to government—in short, the fundamental elements of what we know as contemporary urban culture. Ladies and Gentlemen, here in Chicago, in this exciting urban space, we celebrate an architect who does not shrink from the urban challenge, instead immersing himself in it for the sake of the individual, for the sake of the community, and for the sake of culture itself. Thank you very much. Thom Mayne, please come forward.

© The Hyatt Foundation / The Pritzker Architecture Prize

For more information, please contact:

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