

Lord Palumbo 2012 Laureate Wang Shu Ceremony Speech

There is a special resonance in the decision of the jury this year to award the 2012 Pritzker Prize for Architecture to Wang Shu which is why I would like to introduce to you, first of all, the members of that jury, who I will ask to stand now for your approval.

Next, I wish to pay tribute to the Pritzker family. The Prize that bears their name was the brainchild of Mrs. Cindy Pritzker and her late husband, Jay Pritzker, in 1979. Most unfortunately, Mrs. Pritzker is unable to be with us this afternoon, but we are delighted to see her son Tom together with his wife, Margot. All three work tirelessly to support the Prize, now in its 33rd year, in one of the most outstanding long-term acts of cultural patronage that it is possible to imagine. What is certain is that the architectural community the world over owes them a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

In the last 20 years, the world has been enriched by China's remarkable progression of success in commerce and industry. This rate-of-change can only be described as phenomenal. The vitality of the economy has found expression in architecture. In China, it is possible to build with confidence, optimism and on a scale that is rarely seen elsewhere. With an entirely healthy, burning ambition, China has become an architectural laboratory for the world; and consequently the most competitive market in the world for those who design buildings. To ensure global credibility, an architect must have projects in China; equally, students, wherever their location, must travel to China to experience first hand the full potential of contemporary architecture. This competitive activity is stimulating the creation of a new Chinese architecture that respects tradition and locality, but that also recognizes and responds to the urgency of current needs.

This is a difficult balance to achieve, but in the works of Wang Shu, the jury saw the emergence, for the first time, of truly authentic contemporary Chinese architecture; for here are buildings of compelling originality that address the future but draw meaning and value from the past. If the architecture of Wang Shu is rooted in China's long and honorable culture, tradition, and locality, it also sends important signals to the rest of the world as a result of his distinctive architectural language that speaks to everyone.

That language is both subtle and rich, new and old, modern and traditional, improvised yet meticulously considered; and like all great architecture in any period, in any culture, it both expresses and directs the spirit of the age. It also teaches us important lessons: Pragmatism is not the same as compromise; the ordinary is not the same as the commonplace; the truly modern is that which makes the most of contemporary possibilities; or as the poet T.S. Eliot put it "Only the genuinely new can ever be truly traditional". In the final analysis, the buildings of Wang Shu are bargains between monumentality and intimacy; between past and future; between painterly and tectonic; between public and private space.

For all these reasons, Wang Shu is a worthy Laureate of the world's most prestigious architectural accolade. We also believe that he will be the first, but by no means the last in a line of great contemporary Chinese architects.

Lord Palumbo, 2011 Laureate Eduardo Souto de Moura (continued)

In awarding the prize to Wang Shu, we celebrate his achievements and not least his long, loving and immensely fruitful partnership with his wife and 'life spirit' Lu Wenyu. At the same time, we salute the vision, courage, and commitment of his patrons who have done so much to make possible this happy day.

It now gives me great pleasure to ask Mr. Tom Pritzker, the Chairman of the Hyatt Foundation to present to Wang Shu, the 2012 Pritzker Prize for Architecture.

© 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