

President Bill Clinton 1998 Laureate Renzo Piano Ceremony Speech

Thank you very much. Mr. Piano, congratulations and thank you for your marvelous remarks. Professor Scully, thank you for the almost breathtaking education in such a short few moments. I thank, J. Carter Brown and the Prize jury and Jay and Cindy Pritzker, and indeed the entire Pritzker family for this Prize and for their many contributions to our nation.

Frank Lloyd Wright once said that every great architect is necessarily a poet. He must be a great original interpreter of his time, his day, his age. Renzo Piano has certainly done that and we congratulate him and thank him for his many gifts to our age. Your creations will endure as some of our century's most timeless gifts to the future.

As Hillary said, we have invited all the American people to take part in a national celebration of the coming millennium, challenging individuals and communities across our country to think about what values and heritage we carry with us into the future, what gifts we want to leave to the future, what kind of millennium we want to build. I invite all of you to lead us in that celebration.

Professor Scully once said that architecture is the continuing dialogue between the generations. Well, tonight I thank all of you who have shaped that dialogue and I ask you to help to tell the American story in a new Century. Our buildings, our monuments embody our frontier spirit, our exuberance, our optimism, our determination. In honoring the past, you can help us to imagine the future that will continue to be full of all those good qualities. Let me say tonight I listened carefully to what everyone else said.

I couldn't believe that Professor Scully remembered the story I told him about the Jefferson Monument. I don't believe anyone pointed out that while James Hoban is the relatively unknown, young, Irish architect, that actually built this White House, he did it by defeating an anonymous plan presented by Thomas Jefferson. But it is just as well because Mr. Jefferson, was the architect of something even more important than the White House. He built the American Creed. And I might say parenthetically, in America ever since then, all politicians have tried to convince people that they were architects. If you listen to them speak long enough, you would be convinced that we were all born in log houses that we built ourselves.

But on a serious note, think of the American creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that we are all created equal, endowed by God and with the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. We have bonded together ourselves because we cannot fully pursue, protect or enhance these rights alone, as individuals. And we dedicate ourselves to form a more perfect union. In other words, we dedicate ourselves to an act of creating and building that will never be finished. An architect conceived of that.

And I say that to you tonight on the edge of the millennium, because Hillary and I, and the members of our Administration who are here, many in the Congress and others — we've worked very hard these last five and a half years to build a good house for America, where everybody has a home. Where we share the same foundation, the protection of the same roof and the same walls where we respect our differences and value our unity. And now together we have to build at least the foundations for America's home and the world's home in a new century. Yes, it will need steel and stone and wood and glass and light and air and trees and gardens, music and quiet. It also will need a lot of vision and hope.

President Bill Clinton, 1998 Laureate Renzo Piano (continued)

The longer I serve in public life in many ways the more idealistic I become. But I see day in and day out that the world is composed of builders, wreckers and idlers. And most people in politics are either builders or wreckers. All of you are by nature, instinct, training, and will, builders. The country and the world needs its builders. Those with imagination and hope and heart who understand that with all the differences that exist in the world, our common humanity and our common relationship to the eternal and to our earthy home is far, far more important. In the end that is what we have honored tonight and America is in your debt. Thank you and God bless you.

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