

Lord Palumbo 2011 Laureate Eduardo Souto de Moura Ceremony Speech

Thirty-three years ago, in 1979, in the City of Chicago, Jay and Cindy Pritzker breathed life for the very first time into the Prize that bore their name, and 'the Pritzker', as it has been affectionately known ever since, was well and truly on its way. Like a child prodigy, it just couldn't wait to get going, moving forward in leaps and bounds and vaulting across continents in spectacular fashion like unearthed electric current, to such an extent that it became an article of faith with the family to tether it to a global platform. This was achieved by virtue of the nature of the Prize itself, but also by the masterly decision to alternate the location of these annual Award Ceremonies between the United States as the mother country and selected capital cities overseas. Widespread international recognition generated by this initiative was a major factor in endowing the Prize with the almost mythical status that it has enjoyed until today when that qualifying adverb 'almost' finally vanished into the ether as a result of the generosity of the President and First Lady, in attending and participating tonight in the presentation of this most coveted Award. The Prize represents an astonishing record of long term enlightened patronage by the Pritzker family, and in particular by Cindy Pritzker, who has been a tower of strength and a dynamic driving force throughout its history, and who is with us this evening, together with her son Tom (as we have seen) and his wife Margot. All three work tirelessly to support and maintain the high standards of the Prize; whilst the architectural community and by extension countless peoples the world over owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

The winner of this year's Prize, Eduardo Souto de Moura, is a Master who has the advantage of approaching the complexities of his demanding profession against the background of impeccable credentials, counting as his mentor, guide, best friend and father figure, Alvaro Siza Vieira, a Laureate of this Prize in 1992; and before him the legendary figure of Mies van der Rohe; and before them both, into the far distant reaches of time, the great classical traditions of Greece and Rome. Having absorbed the lessons of history bequeathed to him by these titans of his art, he reinterprets them in his own idiom not only to reflect the technology of our time, but to demonstrate in the process the supremacy of craftsmanship in the art of building and attention to detail: In the mix and use and range of colour and materials; in the integration of landscape and the man-made object; and in the graceful and sensitive resolution of civic and social pressures which have always been his major preoccupation, whether in the design of a small single family dwelling or major urban projects such as the majestic and justly acclaimed Stadium in Braga, Portugal; the Santa Maria do Bouro State Inn; the Subway in Oporto; or the Burgo Tower. He accomplishes all this with a deceptive ease, simplicity and serenity, as if his pencil morphs somehow into a magic wand. Now we know very well that in reality such characteristics represent the distillation of a lifetime's experience, masking and then eliminating all traces of the blood, sweat and toil that go into their creation. By such means, Eduardo Souto de Moura is able to effortlessly meld the new with the old, so that both live together in harmony, with no hint of confrontation, but in respectful, mutual acknowledgement one to the other.

He has the additional advantage of being surrounded on all sides by the tradition of Portuguese architecture that provides him with constant inspiration, and an inexhaustible seam of references, which he reinterprets, once again, in his own idiom, to enlarge and enrich that tradition.

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

I have always believed that the character and personality of an architect tend to inform the work that he or she creates. Eduardo Souto de Moura is no exception. He is intelligent, heroic, loyal, funny, profound, generous, kind and committed. He combines the outlook of a visionary with an instinctive understanding of humanity. His work speaks of absolute values and lasting truths. When he speaks it is with modesty and without side or pretension. In this he echoes the words of the famous American writer John Steinbeck who said towards the end of his life that perhaps his greatest wisdom was the knowledge that he did not know. The purity and economy of line in the architecture of Eduardo Souto de Moura reminds me of the poetry in Pushkin's prose, whilst at the same time reflecting the dictum of Goethe, no less, who said that architecture is frozen music. The fact is, of course, that artistic disciplines have all been interdependent from time immemorial and that consciously or sub-consciously they are linked as if by some invisible golden thread. When they come together, as they do in the work of Eduardo Souto de Moura, their resonance is as glittering and compelling as it is possible to imagine, "enlarging our sensibilities and purifying our instincts"; - in the words of John Maynard Keynes, - leading us to the inescapable conclusion that Art exists not simply to give us a sense of our own presence, but to help us recover the sensation of life itself.

It is for these reasons, and because his example will illuminate the path forward for those who follow him, that we are honoured this evening to name Eduardo Souto de Moura as the 2011 Laureate of the Pritzker Prize for Architecture.

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