

The Pritzker Architecture Prize

Jørn Utzon 2003 Laureate Acceptance Speech

Jan Utzon speaking on behalf of his father, 2003 Laureate.

Your Majesty, your Royal Highness, we are greatly honored by your presence here. I want in the name of my father Jørn Utzon, to apologize for his absence. It is for reasons completely independent of his own wish that unfortunately he cannot come here today. I thank you all for your wonderful and kind words to him and about my father. Words I'll convey to him, words he will cherish as part of the prize.

It is with great joy I stand here today receiving the Pritzker Prize for Architecture on my father's behalf. My father has asked me to express his happiness and his gratitude to the Pritzker family and to the members of the Pritzker jury for honoring him this way.

As his son for nearly 60 years and his professional associate for more than 30 years, I feel deeply grateful to represent him as some of the honor of the Pritzker Prize also rubs off on the past and present staff in our office and myself.

When my father was in his final year in school after a not terribly successful time in that institution he told one of his teachers that he might want to try to become an architect. The teacher responded that she thought that that was possibly the only profession he might be able to cope with.

However, as he entered The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen he entered a whole new world. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by like minds and subjects that he was able to soak up like intellectual nourishment after the boring school years.

His career is indebted to many things, other architects, artists, nature, diversity of cultures and of course his parents who infused him with a healthy outlook on life. He would also be the first to point to my mother Lis, his wife for more than 60 years, as the one person who has supported him throughout his whole career enabling him to pursue his profession with the intensity needed to achieve the results we can all enjoy today.

It is indeed my father's good fortune that enables me to stand here today. When he commenced practicing architecture in the early post war years in Denmark, the country's economy was at an all time low and work was hard to come by. He therefore participated in a lot of architectural competitions and winning the competition for the new Sydney Opera House was a major turning point in his career. From practicing in a small Nordic country with little possibility of working outside Denmark, even though inspired by a multitude of other persons and cultures, he experienced that the world suddenly opened to him in a way, unheard of at the time.

This project has been the stepping stone, admittedly a large one, for an international practice which has brought him and us as a family in contact with a multitude of opportunities around the world. My father has always been very inspiring for people around him and for us, his children. His joy over other people and peoples, over beautiful places, over nature, color, light, etc. spills over onto those surrounding him. The enthusiasm he always expresses over things that he likes or admires has had a very positive effect upon the rest of us. I often hear from former employees how positive an influence in their lives it has been to have worked with my father.

But when you grow up in such an environment you hardly recognize the situation as a special one. And it was not until we approached Sydney that I began to realize that my childhood environment was unique. From then on our lives were filled with a succession of wonderful experiences only temporarily to be interrupted by the unfortunate termination of my father's work in Sydney. It is therefore a great joy for my father to have been asked back to Sydney to act as a consulting architect in the planning of the future of the Sydney Opera House.

Jørn Utzon Acceptance Speech (continued)

When I hear him speak of the then Premier of New South Wales Joe Cahill with great fondness and when I think of how his love for Australia and the many wonderful people he encountered while we were living there, it makes me very happy on his behalf that he is again involved in this most important work in his life. As his son and his associate it has been a great privilege working with him for all these years and it is my great fortune to be involved in the continued development of the Sydney Opera House as his partner.

After our family left Sydney my father worked in Denmark, in Switzerland and, the United States. Following some years teaching at the School of Architecture in Honolulu he won a competition for a new parliament building in Kuwait. Around this time my parents decided to build their first home in the beautiful island of Mallorca. This was first to be a holiday home but it soon turned out to be the permanent residence. My father loved working with the local craftsmen among whom he found a parallel to the many craftsmen he knew from his boyhood in Denmark.

When my father appeared at the building site with some bottles of wine the craftsmen knew that he had new ideas during the night and that some of the work already done would have to be changed. And the mild climate, the generous people, the nature and culture of Mallorca and Spain became an integral part of my parent's lives. And after living in this wonderful place for about 25 years they can think of no other place they would rather be. So I would like to end this speech by reading to you my father's own words of thanks for the Pritzker Prize:

"This is indeed a wonderful day. I am deeply grateful and happy for the recognition of my work I have received via The Pritzker Prize. The prize means so much to me because the group of architects who received the Pritzker Prize before me are all architects I admire very much, and whose works are so important for the future of architecture. My two sons and my daughter with whom I work, my wife Lis, the architects with whom I work in our office and my good clients are all very happy. We see our work in a new light and we feel that the Pritzker Prize heightens people's awareness to the importance of architecture and that it creates a benchmark of excellence in architecture. The Pritzker family and the Pritzker Prize jury are the strongest exponents for the highest standards of architecture. I thank you with all my heart and send you all my best wishes for the future success of the Pritzker Prize."

©The Hyatt Foundation

For more information, please contact:

Martha Thorne, Executive Director
The Pritzker Architecture Prize
71 South Wacker Drive
Suite 4700
Chicago, Illinois 60606
email: marthathorne@pritzkerprize.com