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# Renzo Piano: 1998 Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize

**(pd) Renzo Piano, has been named the 1998 Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. In making the announcement, Jay A. Pritzker, president of The Hyatt Foundation, which established the award in 1979, quoted from the jury's citation which describes Piano's architecture as a «rare melding of art, architecture, and engineering in a truly remarkable synthesis.»**

Piano is the twenty-first architect in the world to be selected for his profession's highest honor which bestows a \$ 100 000 grant and a bronze medallion. He is the second Italian to become a Pritzker Laureate, the first being the late Aldo Rossi who was honored in 1990.

Piano first achieved international fame for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris completed in 1978, a collaborative effort with another young architect from England, Richard Rogers. Since then, Piano has gone on the higher critical acclaim for a much wider range of building types with greater diversity and subtlety, that include among many others, the Menil Museum and its Cy Twombly addition in Houston, and the Beyeler Museum in Basel. Perhaps one of his most remarkable projects is the Kansai Air Terminal, the world's largest, built on a man-made island in Osaka Bay, Japan.

Born and raised in Genoa, Italy, Piano divides his time between a home there and another in Paris when he is not traveling to the many world-wide sites of his projects. He currently is working in Berlin on the Potsdamer Platz redevelopment; in Sydney, Australia on a mixed use tower; in New Caledonia on a Cultural Center; with projects just beginning at Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Padre Pio Pilgrimage Church in Foggia, Italy; and other continuing projects in Rome, Paris and Stuttgart.

Bill Lacy, the executive director of the Pritzker Prize and who is an architect himself, said, «Renzo Piano's body of work is reminiscent of the Roman god Janus, represented by two conjoined heads facing in opposite directions, one looking forward, the other backward. This year's Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate embodies that dichotomy. It was appropriate on this occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Prize, to select an architect whose work is

such an apt representation of the purpose of the prize.»

The purpose of the Pritzker Architecture Prize is to honor annually a living architect whose built work demonstrates a combination of those qualities of talent, vision and commitment, which has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture.

The distinguished jury that selected Renzo Piano as the 1998 Laureate consists of its founding chairman, J. Carter Brown, director emeritus of the National Gallery of Art, and chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; and alphabetically, Giovanni Agnelli, chairman of Fiat from Torino, Italy; Charles Correa, architect of Bombay, India; Ada Louise Huxtable, author and architectural critic of New York; Toshio Nakamura, architectural writer/editor of Tokyo, Japan; Jorge Silvetti, chairman, department of architecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design; and juror emeritus, Lord Rothschild, chairman of the National Heritage Memorial Fund of Great Britain and formerly the chairman of that country's National Gallery.

The field of architecture was chosen by the Pritzker family because of their keen interest in building due to their involvement with developing the Hyatt Hotels

The Kansai Air Terminal, Osaka Bay, Japan  
(Photo: Sky Front)



around the world; also because architecture was a creative endeavor not included in the Nobel Prizes. The procedures were modeled after the Nobels, with the final selection being made by the international jury with all deliberations and voting in secret. Nominations are continuous from year to year with over 500 nominees from more than forty countries being considered each year.

## Citation from the Jury

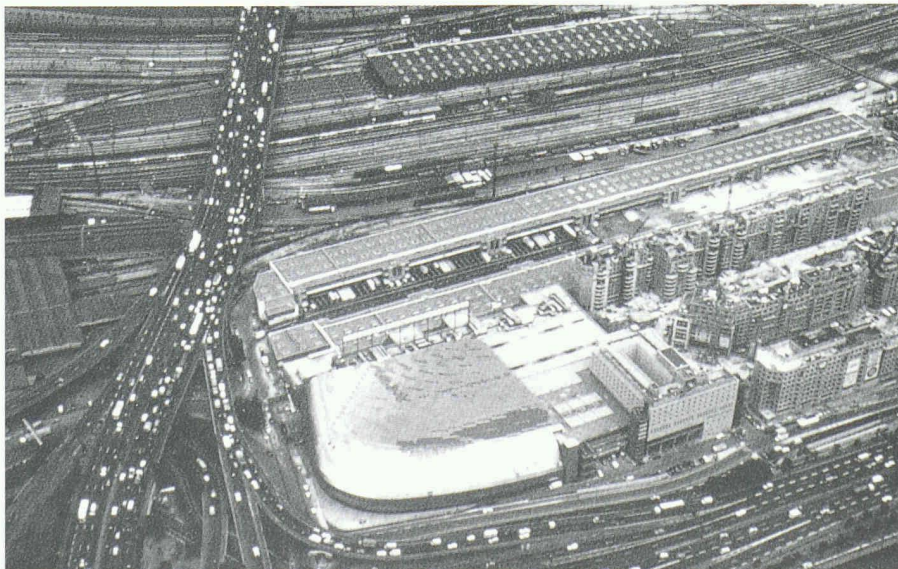
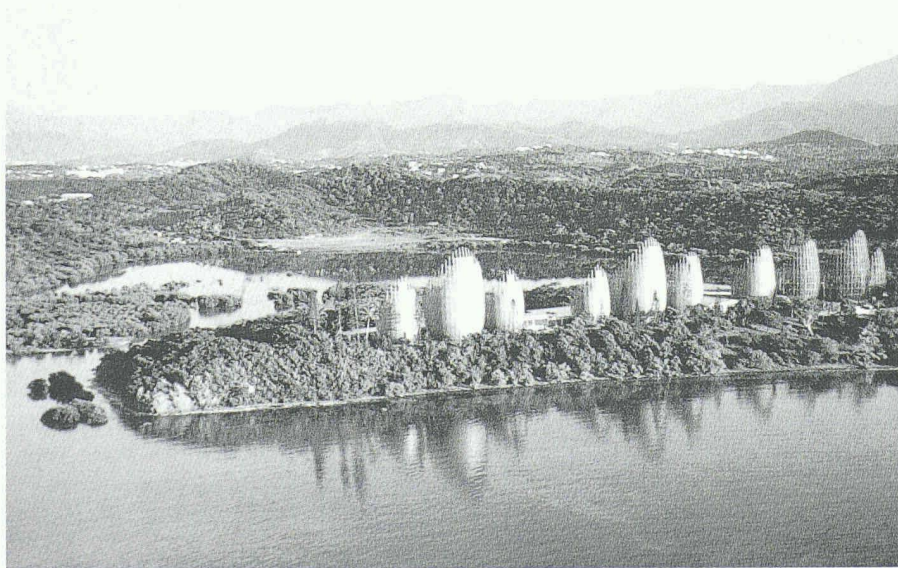
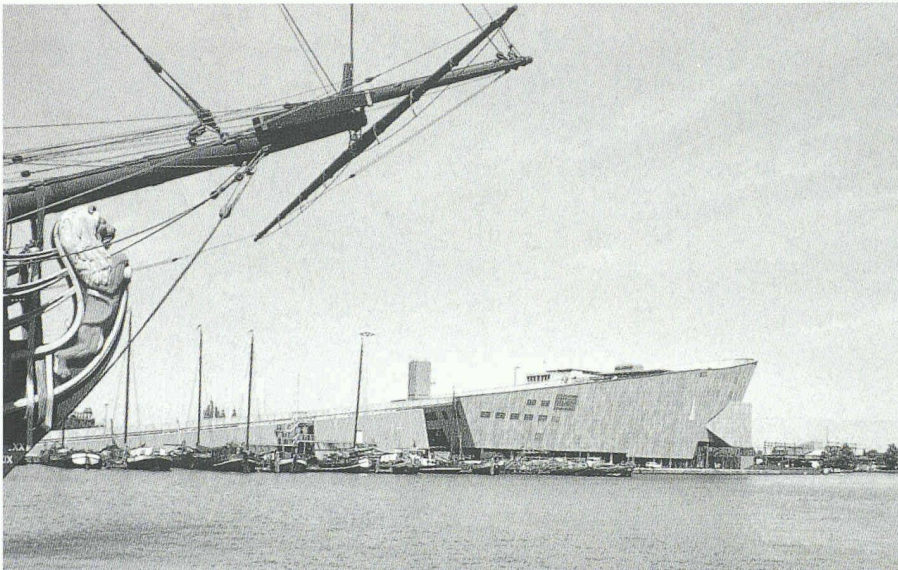
**(pd)** Renzo Piano's architecture reflects that rare melding of art, architecture, and engineering in a truly remarkable synthesis, making his intellectual curiosity and problem-solving techniques as broad and far ranging as those earlier masters of his native land, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. While his work embraces the most current technology of this era, his roots are clearly in the classic Italian philosophy and tradition. Equally at ease with historical antecedents, as well as the latest technology, he is also intensely concerned with issues of habitability and sustainable architecture in a constantly changing world.

The array of buildings by Piano is staggering in scope and comprehensive in the diversity of scale, material and form. He is



National Center for Science and Technology, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (Photo: M. Denance) [above]. Tjibaou Cultural Center, Noumea, New Caledonia (Photo: Gollings) [middle]

Bercy 2 Shopping Center, Charenton le Pont, Paris, France [below]



an architect whose sensibilities represent the widest range of this and earlier centuries – informed by the modern masters that preceded him, reaching back even to the 15<sup>th</sup> century of Brunelleschi – he has remained true to the concept that the architect must maintain command over the building process from design to built work. Valuing craftsmanship, not just of the hand, but also of the computer, Piano has great sensitivity for his materials, whether using glass, metal, masonry or wood. Such concepts, values and sensitivities are not surprising for someone whose father, uncles and grandfather were all builders.

By choosing a career as an architect rather than contractor, he may have broken with a family tradition in one sense, but in fact, he has enhanced that tradition in ways his forebears could only have imagined. Always restless and inventive, Piano has, over three decades of his career, relentlessly searched for new dimensions in his structures, both literally and figuratively. His early Pompidou Centre in Paris, which brought the first international recognition of his talent and promise, could have been a stylistic end in itself. Instead Piano persevered with unrelenting experimentation that resulted in subsequent works that included the Houston Menil Museum along with its exquisite Cy Twombly addition, and the more recent Beyeler Museum in Switzerland. These three museums show his unerring sensitivity for site, context and a remarkable mastery of form, shape and space.

Piano proved himself a master of the gigantic project with Kansai, the world's largest air terminal in Osaka Bay, Japan, and again with the imposing Bercy Shopping Center in Paris, as well as a massive and beautiful National Science Museum in Amsterdam. His soccer stadium in Bari, Italy, is like no other in the world, with its great swaths of blue sky interrupting the usual monotony of stadia seating.

His versatility is displayed further in such projects as the beautiful sweep of a nearly one thousand foot long bridge that curves across Ushibuka Bay in Southern Japan; again with the design of a 70 000-ton luxury ocean liner; an automobile; and with his own hillside-hugging transparent workshop. All of his works confirm his place in the annals of architecture history, and the future holds even greater promise.

The Pritzker Architecture Prize applauds Renzo Piano's work in redefining modern and postmodern architecture. His interventions, contributions, and continued explorations to solve contemporary problems in a technological age, add to the definition of the art of architecture.