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News:

Pritzker Prize Awarded in Miami A Celebration of Frei Otto, Laureate 2015

By Suzanne Stephens
May 18, 2015



Photo ©John Parra/Getty Images for Pritzker Architecture Prize

The Pritzker Architecture Prize is not given posthumously. But it was this year due to an accident of fate. Frei Otto was notified that he was the recipient (<http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2015/03/150310-Frei-Otto-Wins-2015-Pritzker-Prize.asp>) of the 2015 award in January, but died on March 9, just before his 90th birthday. The official ceremony, scheduled for May 15 in Miami, became a celebration of his life— a black-tie occasion attended by Pritzker laureates, Miami dignitaries, leading architects, academics, and others, and held at the New World Center, the symphony hall designed by absentee laureate Frank Gehry [RECORD, May 2011 page 114].

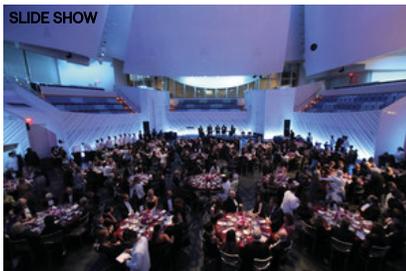


Photo ©John Parra/Getty Images for Pritzker Architecture Prize

The evening's ceremonies fittingly heralded the achievements and influence of the German architect and engineer who had led the way for the development of lightweight structures. On a warm, sunny evening, guests drank champagne on the entrance plaza to the white stuccoed concrete structure, where 2014 Pritzker Prize winner, Shigeru Ban (who had worked with Otto), recreated for the occasion a white four-point tensile tent designed by Otto in 1955. Inside the trapezoidal concert hall enclosed by a white acoustical lattice and featuring movable stages

and seating, a makeshift dining room was installed with a bit of help from red table cloths, flowers, and votive candles. Later during the program (which was introduced by Pritzker Architecture Prize's executive director, Martha Thorne), jury chair Peter Palumbo eloquently pointed out that Otto's first name stands for "Free." Adding that "His free spirit imbued architecture... with literature of life," Lord Palumbo said, he likes to think of Otto as having gone off to an architects' Valhalla, where he could stroll around with Mies and Gropius, dreaming of "new worlds to conquer in galaxies unknown."

Tom Pritzker, chairman and president of the Hyatt Foundation, which sponsors the \$100,000 prize, showed a video-taped interview with Otto made in February, when the laureate declared, "You see a happy man.... My only dream, the oldest dream of humanity in time ...is to give paradise to everyone." Otto promised presciently, "I don't know how many years I have ... but I will work every day." The architect's humanitarian mission was underscored by Otto's daughter Christine Otto-Kanstinger, who studied architecture at the University of Stuttgart and collaborated with her father for 32 years. Accepting the prize for Otto she said that he "wanted to build not for eternity, but for living people."

An ensuing conversation with Pritzker laureates Richard Rogers, Shigeru Ban, Norman Foster, and Zaha Hadid, led by architecture historian Francesco Dal Co, highlighted Otto's influence on succeeding generations of architects. Rogers stated that the core of what architects do is to give shelter and this "life-giving intention" was what most interested Otto. Hadid talked about her early days trying to figure out how to capture the dynamism of speed, when she looked to research undertaken by Otto "to discover what you did not know was possible." For his part, Foster cited Otto's ability to "create works of beautiful form" using natural laws. Ban invoked Louis Kahn's well-known admonition to ask a brick what it wants to be, and said "Frei asked air 'what you would like to be?'"

On May 16, the day after the ceremony, developer Craig Robins facilitated a panel discussion among Pritzker prize winners at the de la Cruz Collection Contemporary Art Space, in the Miami Design District, which he has been turning into an art and high fashion and furniture enclave. The topic "Can Architecture Make a City?" drew a full house to hear laureates Thom Mayne and Glenn Murcutt, along with Rogers and Hadid. Basically the answer to the question in the title was a qualified yes —although it helps to have an urban infrastructure, landscape, and planning.

All in all, the event, held in a city that prizes landscaping as well as architecture, old and new, proved to be a good choice in which to honor the ethereal achievements of Frei Otto. The only gloomy note was the choice of lighting for the auditorium where the main ceremony and dinner were held. It was "bathed in blue light out of Picasso's sad period of the same hue," noticed one guest, Alexander Gorlin. The architectural Valhalla around which Palumbo imagines Otto to be traipsing, we hope is brighter.

KEYWORDS: Frei Otto ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Frei Otto&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Frei%20Otto&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Pritzker Ceremony ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Pritzker Ceremony&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Pritzker%20Ceremony&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Zaha Hadid ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Zaha Hadid&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Zaha%20Hadid&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Shigeru Ban ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Shigeru Ban&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Shigeru%20Ban&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Norman Foster ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Norman Foster&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Norman%20Foster&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Pritzker Architecture Prize ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Pritzker Architecture Prize&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Pritzker%20Architecture%20Prize&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance)); Craig Robins ([http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Craig Robins&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance](http://archrecord.construction.com/Search/SearchResult.asp?searchTerm=Craig%20Robins&domainName=archrecord&sortOrder=Relevance))