

Speech

Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo

Ambassador of Japan to Australia

**On the occasion of the Conferral of the Praemium Imperiale Award on Mr Glenn Murcutt AO
Ambassador's Official Residence, Canberra – Tuesday 14 December 2021**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to welcome you all to my residence for the conferral of the Praemium Imperiale Award upon Mr Glenn Murcutt.

Before I begin, I would like to convey a message from His Imperial Highness Prince Hitachi, Honourary Patron of the Japan Art Association on this occasion.

"Originally, I would have liked to see you in Tokyo and present you with the medal. But due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Awards Ceremony was cancelled, which is of great regret. I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to you on receiving this award."

The Japan Art Association established this prestigious award in 1988.

And since its inception, the conferral ceremony has taken place in Tokyo in the presence of His Imperial Highness Prince Hitachi.

However, due to the cancellation of this year's ceremony, His Imperial Highness asked me to confer this award upon Mr Murcutt on his behalf.

The Japan Art Association confers the Praemium Imperiale Award on an exceptionally talented few out of a number of already renowned artists each year.

And with Mr Murcutt receiving this award, he is in the good company of several of his peers, including Kenzo Tange and Frank Gehly.

What is most exceptional about this time is Mr Murcutt is the very first Aussie to ever receive this award.

We can all acknowledge just how special today's ceremony is and I'm sure this is just one of the many milestones in Mr Murcutt's illustrious career as an architect.

His architectural style is lauded and celebrated for his signature philosophy that is strongly rooted in and respectful of the Australian landscape.

I would like to share with you a quote by Mr Murcutt upon being recognised for his contributions by the Japan Art Association.

"You live *with* my buildings; you don't live *in* my buildings. Because my buildings live *with* the environment, bringing the light in, bringing the sun in, bringing the wind in."

This particular quote has deeply resonated with me.

This importance of working in unison with your natural environment, and not against it.

Embracing the strengths of your surroundings to negate its negatives.

Parallels can be drawn between the signature style of Mr Murcutt's approach to architecture and that of traditional Japanese design.

You can see this in Kyoto where traditional wooden houses perfectly harmonise with the surrounding environment.

Typified by wooden structures, traditional Japanese architecture values sustainability, harmony and deep connections to nature.

This traditional approach is still alive and well in the signature designs of modern Japanese architects, such as Kengo Kuma who designed the Japan National Stadium, the centrepiece of Tokyo 2020.

There is something else Mr Murcutt has said that also resonates deeply.

"No air conditioning is about environmental issues... the buildings perform to a very great level by themselves".

While I try to leave the air conditioner off during summer when I can, I'm not sure how I will go when I experience my first Aussie summer this year.

However, there are words by Mr Murcutt that I find truly enlightening and thought provoking.

"Architecture is not created, it is discovered".

We easily assume it is man who creates these buildings when in fact it is our environment.

We just simply discover them.

The term 'modest' is often used to describe Mr Murcutt's designs.

And modesty is a virtue deeply rooted in Japanese tradition.

It is widely acknowledged today that harmony with our natural environment is essential for our survival.

The insight shown in Mr Murcutt's designs is something we must embrace for our future.

I look forward to your continued success and contribution in the field of modern architecture.

Congratulations on being named the 2021 Praemium Imperiale laureate in architecture.

END