

Romaldo Giurgola AO

a speech in presentation of Romaldo Giurgola AO
for the degree of
Doctor of the University of Canberra *honoris causa*
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by Professor Don Aitkin
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Chancellor, I present to you Romaldo Giurgola, architect, designer, urban planner, consultant to universities, philosopher and friend of the University of Canberra, on whom the University is pleased to bestow the honorary degree of Doctor of the University. I do so in the major setting of the major building of his career, the Great Hall of the Parliament of Australia. But I could have done so with no less justice on our own campus, for there he has been responsible for three of our buildings, for the reshaping of the room in which the Council of the University meets, and for much of the look of the campus. Wherever he works (and he works all over the world) and whatever the work is (and he works across the whole field of architecture) his work has a quality and a validity which is unmistakable. We are fortunate that his career brought him to our country and to our campus.

But he is not in any sense a stranger to universities. Born in Rome, and a graduate in architecture of the University of Rome, he won a Fulbright Fellowship and studied at Columbia University in New York and taught at Cornell and at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1969 he was appointed to the Ware Professorship of Architecture at Columbia. By that time he had become a famous architect in partnership with Ehrman Mitchell, and the partnership has completed work for sixteen major universities in the USA.

In 1980 he came to Australia as the senior partner of Mitchell/Giurgola and Thorp, the architects of this building, the new Parliament House of the Commonwealth of Australia. He liked Canberra so much that he has remained here, and his firm has become a major architectural influence in Australia and Asia where, once again, his influence over the look of universities has become widespread.

I said that he had played a major role in the decisions about the way in which the University of Canberra campus should be developed. And that is only right, because he has played a similar role in the redevelopment of the city of Philadelphia, the redevelopment of the inner harbour of Baltimore, the master plan for the United States Capitol, and the future of the parliamentary zone in Canberra itself. He has a special quality of seeing at once not only the setting but the building in its setting, and not only the building but its detail, and not only the detail but its finish. There is a rightness about his work that compels respect in the university world, because that rightness is what we aspire to in all our work.

Romaldo Giurgola has been honoured many times in both his adopted countries, and is regarded as one of the foremost architects of his age. We honour him again today, not only for the quality and abundance of his work but for his continued interest in students and their work, his generosity in providing prizes as an encouragement to the best of them, his preparedness to make his time and advice available to them, and his role as an Adjunct Professor of Architecture of the University. A community and a University which has him as a member is doubly fortunate.

Chancellor, I present to you Romaldo Giurgola, whose achievement and contribution to society amply warrant the award of the degree of Doctor of the University.