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Francis Kéré Receives the 2022 Pritzker Architecture Prize

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Written by [Christele Harrouk](#)

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The 2022 laureate of architecture's highest honor, the [Pritzker Architecture Prize](#) is [Diébédo Francis Kéré](#), known as [Francis Kéré](#), Burkina Faso-born architect, educator, social activist, receiver of the [2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture](#) and designer of the [2017 Serpentine Pavilion](#). Recognized for "empowering and transforming communities through the process of architecture", Kéré, the first black architect to ever obtain this award, works mostly in areas charged with constraints and adversity, using [local materials](#) and [building contemporary facilities](#) whose value exceeds the structure itself, serving and stabilizing the future of entire communities.

"Through buildings that demonstrate beauty, modesty, boldness, and invention, and by the integrity of his architecture and geste, Kéré gracefully upholds the mission of this Prize," explains the official statement of the [Pritzker Architecture Prize](#). Announced today by Tom Pritzker, Chairman of The Hyatt Foundation, [Francis Kéré](#) is the 51st winner of the award founded in 1979, succeeding [Anne Lacaton](#) and [Jean-Philippe Vassal](#). Praised "for the gifts he has created through his work, gifts that go beyond the realm of the architecture discipline", the [acclaimed architect is present equally in Burkina Faso and Germany](#), professionally and personally.



+ 23

"I am hoping to change the paradigm, push people to dream and undergo risk. It is not because you are rich that you should waste material. It is not because you are poor that you should not try to create quality, [...] Everyone deserves quality, everyone deserves luxury, and everyone deserves comfort. We are interlinked and concerns in climate, democracy, and scarcity are concerns for us all."
– [Francis Kéré](#), 2022 [Pritzker Architecture Prize Winner](#).



Born in [Gando, Burkina Faso](#) in 1965 and based in [Berlin, Germany](#), [Francis Kéré](#) works towards "improving the lives and experiences of countless citizens in a region of the world that is at times forgotten" as Pritzker explains. The oldest son of the village chief and the first in his community to

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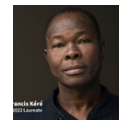
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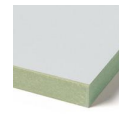


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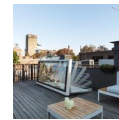
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attend school, the architect's first sense of architecture stemmed from his childhood classroom that lacked ventilation and light, on one hand, and from the little illuminated yet safe space where his grandmother would sit and tell stories, on another. In 1985, he traveled to [Berlin](#) on a vocational carpentry scholarship, learning to make roofs and furniture by day, while attending secondary classes at night. He was awarded a scholarship to attend Technische Universität [Berlin](#) (Berlin, Germany) in 1995, graduating in 2004 with an advanced degree in architecture.



“We have to fight to create the quality that we need to improve people’s lives.” – Francis Kéré, 2022 Pritzker Architecture Prize Winner. ”

Younger, Kéré had vowed to one day make schools better in extreme climates, allowing for “true teaching, learning, and excitement”, and in 1998, he established the Kéré Foundation to fundraise and advocate for a child’s right to a comfortable classroom. His first building, [Gando Primary School](#) in 2001, was built by and for the locals, who crafted every part of the establishment by hand, guided by the architect’s “inventive forms of indigenous materials and modern engineering”. This project awarded him the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2004, and led to the inception of his own practice [Kéré Architecture](#), in [Berlin, Germany](#), in 2005. Following this success, other primary, secondary, postsecondary, and medical facilities followed throughout [Burkina Faso](#), Kenya, Mozambique, and Uganda.



“I grew up in a community where there was no kindergarten, but where the community was your family. Everyone took care of you and the entire village was your playground. My days were filled with securing food and water, but also simply being together, talking together, building houses together. I remember the room where my grandmother would sit and tell stories with a little light, while we would huddle close to each other and her voice inside the room enclosed us, summoning us to come closer and form a safe place. This was my first sense of architecture.” – Francis Kéré, 2022 Pritzker Architecture Prize Winner. ”



“A poetic expression of light is consistent throughout Kéré’s works. Rays of sun filter into buildings, courtyards, and intermediary spaces overcoming harsh midday conditions to offer places of serenity or gathering”, adds the official statement of the Pritzker Architecture Prize. Other than schools and medical facilities, Kéré’s work in Africa includes, in progress, two historic parliament buildings, the [National Assembly of Burkina Faso](#) (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) and [Benin National Assembly](#) (Porto-Novo, Republic of Benin), as well as the [TStartup Lions Campus](#) (2021, Turkana, Kenya), an information and communication technologies campus, and the [Burkina Institute of Technology](#) (Phase I, 2020, Koudougou, Burkina Faso) composed of cooling clay walls.



With an architectural expression deeply rooted in his upbringing and experiences in [Gando](#), Kéré communicated to the world West African tradition, especially the practice of “communing under a sacred tree to exchange ideas, narrate stories, celebrate and assemble”. In fact, for the [2017 Serpentine Pavilion](#), the architect imagined a structure that takes its shape from a tree, with a detached roof and disconnected yet curved walls formed by triangular indigo modules, the color representing strength in his culture and more personally, a blue boubou garment worn by the architect as a child. Inside the pavilion, rainwater is funneled into the center, highlighting water scarcity that is experienced worldwide. Beyond creating for the African continent, his built works also include structures in Denmark, [Germany](#), Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Some of his significant works are [Xylem at Tippet Rise Art Centre](#) (2019, Montana, United States), [Léo Doctors’ Housing](#) (2019, Léo, Burkina Faso), [Lycée Schorge Secondary School](#) (2016, Koudougou, Burkina Faso), the [National Park of Mali](#) (2010, Bamako, Mali) and [Opera Village](#) (Phase I, 2010, Laongo, Burkina Faso).



A visiting professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (Massachusetts, United States), Yale School of Architecture (Connecticut, United States), [Francis Kéré](#) holds the inaugural Chair of Architectural Design and Participation professorship at the Technische Universität München

(Munich, Germany) since 2017. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (2018) and the American Institute of Architects (2012) and a chartered member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (2009). Additional awards granted over the years include the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine's Global Award for Sustainable Architecture (2009), BSI Swiss Architectural Award (2010); the Global Holcim Awards Gold (2012, Zurich, Switzerland), Schelling Architecture Award (2014); Arnold W Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts & Letters (2017); and the [Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Architecture](#) (2021).

The 44th [Pritzker Prize](#) ceremony, honoring 2022 Laureate, [Diébédo Francis Kéré](#), will be held at the Great Hall of the newly opened [Marshall Building, The London School of Economics and Political Science](#) (London, United Kingdom), designed by Grafton Architects, led by Farrell and McNamara.



Jury Citation

What is the role of architecture in contexts of extreme scarcity? What is the right approach to the practice when working against all odds? Should it be modest and risk succumbing to adverse circumstances? Or is modesty the only way to be pertinent and achieve results? Should it be ambitious in order to inspire change? Or does ambition run the risk of being out of place and of resulting in architecture of mere wishful thinking?

Francis Kéré has found brilliant, inspiring, and game-changing ways to answer these questions over the last decades. His cultural sensitivity not only delivers social and environmental justice but guides his entire process, in the awareness that it is the path towards the legitimacy of a building in a community. He knows, from within, that architecture is not about the object but the objective; not the product, but the process. [Francis Kéré's](#) entire body of work shows us the power of materiality rooted in place. His buildings, for and with communities, are directly of those communities – in their making, their materials, their programs, and their unique characters. They are tied to the ground on which they sit and to the people who sit within them. They have presence without pretense and an impact shaped by grace.

Born in [Burkina Faso](#) to parents who insisted that their son be educated, [Francis Kéré](#) went on to study architecture in [Berlin](#). Over and over, he has, in a sense, returned to his roots. He has drawn from his European architectural formation and work, combining them with the traditions, needs, and customs of his country. He was determined to bring resources in education from one of the leading Technical Universities in the world back to his native land and to have those resources elevate the indigenous know-how, culture, and society of his region.



He has continuously pursued this task in ways at once highly respectful of place and tradition and yet transformational in what can be offered, as in the primary school in [Gando](#) which served as an

example to so many even beyond the borders of [Burkina Faso](#), and to which he later added a complex of teachers' housing and a library. There, Kéré understood that an apparently simple goal, namely, to make it possible for children to attend school comfortably, had to be at the heart of his architectural project. Sustainability for a great majority of the world is not preventing undesirable energy loss so much as undesirable energy gains. For too many people in developing countries, the problem is extreme heat, rather than cold.

In response, he developed an ad-hoc, highly performative and expressive architectural vocabulary: double roofs, thermal mass, wind towers, indirect lighting, cross ventilation and shade chambers (instead of conventional windows, doors, and columns) have not only become his core strategies but have actually acquired the status of built dignity. Since completing the school in his native village, Kéré has pursued the ethos and the method of working with local craft and skills to elevate not only the civic life of small villages but soon also of national deliberations in legislative buildings. This is the case of his two projects underway for the Benin National Assembly, in advanced construction, and for the [Burkina Faso](#) National Assembly, temporarily halted by the current political situation in the country.



Francis Kéré's work is, by its essence and its presence, fruit of its circumstances. In a world where architects are building projects in the most diverse contexts – not without controversies – Kéré contributes to the debate by incorporating local, national, regional, and global dimensions in a very personal balance of grassroots experience, academic quality, low tech, high tech, and truly sophisticated multiculturalism. In the Serpentine pavilion, for example, he successfully translated into a universal visual language and in a particularly effective way, a long-forgotten essential symbol of primordial architecture worldwide: the tree.

He has developed a sensitive, bottom-up approach in its embrace of community participation. At the same time, he has no problem incorporating the best possible type of top-down process in his devotion to advanced architectural solutions. His simultaneously local and global perspective goes well beyond aesthetics and good intentions, allowing him to integrate the traditional with the contemporary.



Francis Kéré's work also reminds us of the necessary struggle to change unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, as we strive to provide adequate buildings and infrastructure for billions in need. He raises fundamental questions of the meaning of permanence and durability of construction in a context of constant technological changes and of use and re-use of structures. At the same time, his development of contemporary humanism merges a deep respect for history, tradition, precision, written and unwritten rules.

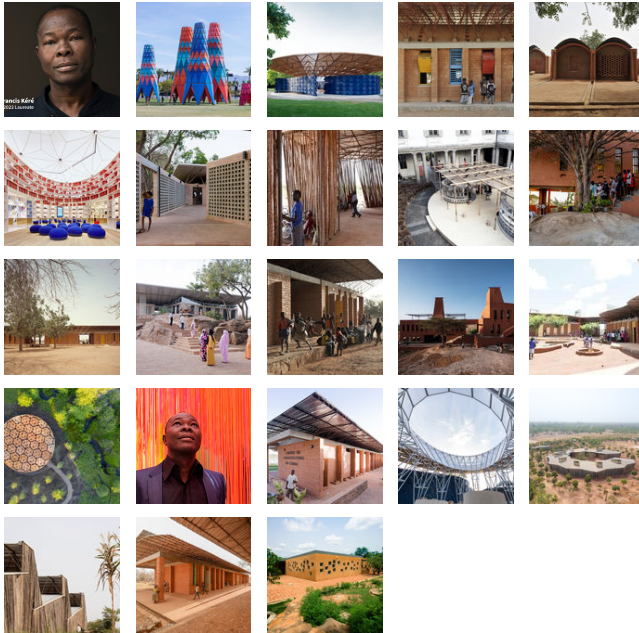


Since the world began to pay attention to the remarkable work and life story of [Francis Kéré](#), he has served as a singular beacon in architecture. He has shown us how architecture today can reflect and serve needs, including the aesthetic needs, of people throughout the world. He has shown us how locality becomes a universal possibility. In a world in crisis, amidst changing values and generations, he reminds us of what has been, and will undoubtedly continue to be a cornerstone of architectural practice: a sense of community and narrative quality, which he himself is so able to recount with compassion and pride. In this, he provides a narrative in which architecture can become a source of continued and lasting happiness and joy.

For the gifts he has created through his work, gifts that go beyond the realm of the architecture discipline, [Francis Kéré](#) is named the 2022 [Pritzker Prize](#) Laureate.

Stay tuned to ArchDaily's coverage of the [Pritzker Prize](#).

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