

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS (RIBA) PRESS RELEASE

Media contact: Press.Office@riba.org

Images: <https://riba.box.com/v/RIBA2023RoyalGoldMedal>

Yasmeen Lari to receive the 2023 Royal Gold Medal for architecture



Image: Yasmeen Lari © Anam Baig

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) is delighted to announce that Pakistan's first female architect, Professor Yasmeen Lari, will receive the 2023 Royal Gold Medal for architecture.

This award - the first to be personally approved by His Majesty The King - acknowledges Yasmeen Lari's work championing zero-carbon self-build concepts for displaced populations.

One of the world's highest accolades for architecture, the Royal Gold Medal is personally approved by the monarch and awarded to a person or group of people who have had a significant influence on the advancement of architecture. Presented since 1848, past Royal Gold Medallists include

Balkrishna Doshi (2022), Sir David Adjaye OBE (2021), Dame Zaha Hadid (2016), Frank Gehry (2000), Lord Norman Foster (1983), Frank Lloyd Wright (1941) and Sir George Gilbert Scott (1859).

The Royal Gold Medal will be officially presented to Yasmeen Lari in June 2023.

With a long and illustrious career, Lari has been a revolutionary force in Pakistan. She has had immeasurable influence on the trajectory of the architecture and humanitarian work in the country. Since officially retiring in 2000, she transferred her attention to creating accessible, environmentally friendly construction techniques to help people below the poverty line and communities displaced by natural disasters and the impact of climate change. In 1980 she co-founded the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan with her husband, Suhail Zaheer Lari, pioneering the design of self-build sustainable shelters and housing, creating 50,000 dwellings. Lari is also known for the design of the Chulah Cookstove, of which there are now over 80,000. An eco-alternative to a traditional stove, it significantly reduces emissions, tackling unfavourable environmental and health issues associated with cooking on an open fire.

Born in 1941 in Pakistan, Lari moved to London with her family aged 15. After finishing school, she studied art for two years before being accepted into the School of Architecture, Oxford Brookes University, then Oxford Polytechnic. After graduating in 1964, Lari returned to Pakistan at age 23 with her husband, Suhail Zaheer Lari, to establish her own architecture firm Lari Associates, going on to work for major government, business, and financial institutions. Since her 'retirement' in 2000, Lari has focussed solely on her humanitarian work, which has levered international recognition.



Images from left clockwise: Mud Brick One Room House, Moak Sharif, Tando Allahyar, Sindh –2011 © Heritage Foundation of Pakistan; Zero Carbon Cultural Centre (ZC3), Makli, Sindh–2017 © Heritage Foundation of Pakistan; Prefabricated Bamboo LOG (Lari OctaGreen) One Room Home, Mirpurkhas, Sindh – 2022 © Heritage Foundation of Pakistan.

On hearing the news, **Professor Yasmeen Lari said:**

'I was so surprised to hear this news and of course totally delighted! I never imagined that as I focus on my country's most marginalised people — venturing down uncharted vagabond pathways - I could still be considered for the highest of honours in the architectural profession.

‘RIBA has heralded a new direction for the profession, encouraging all architects to focus not only on the privileged but also humanity at large that suffers from disparities, conflicts and climate change. There are innumerable opportunities to implement principles of circular economy, de-growth, transition design, eco-urbanism, and what we call Barefoot Social Architecture (BASA) to achieve climate resilience, sustainability and eco justice in the world.’

RIBA President, Simon Allford said:

It was an honour to chair the committee that selected Yasmeen Lari. An inspirational figure, she moved from a large practice centred on the needs of international clients to focussing solely on humanitarian causes. Lari’s mission during her ‘second’ career has empowered the people of Pakistan through architecture, engaging users in design and production. She has shown us how architecture changes lives for the better.

Lari’s work in championing zero carbon and zero waste construction is exemplary. She has reacted imaginatively and creatively making affordable projects that address the real and often urgent need for accommodation, and basic services, but with generosity and an eye for the potential of everyday materials and crafts to make architecture at all scales. Her way of working also sets out to address the physical and psychological damage caused by major natural disasters – disaster that sadly inevitably will be ever more prevalent in our densely populated and climate challenged planet.

The 2023 Royal Gold Medal selection committee was, chaired by architect and RIBA President **Simon Allford**, and comprised: **Ivan Harbour**, architect and senior partner at RSHP; **Cornelia Parker** CBE RA; **Neal Shasore**, Chief Executive and Head of School at the London School of Architecture, and **Cindy Walters**, architect and partner at Walters & Cohen.

Official citation on Yasmeen Lari by the 2023 RIBA Honours Committee:

Having studied in the UK at Oxford Polytechnic (now Oxford Brookes), Yasmeen Lari took the decision to return to Pakistan where she became the country’s first female architect. She then overcame considerable challenges to establish her own commercially successful practice working for major government, business, and financial institutions.

Whilst recognising the importance of her role in practice, as a symbol of change in Pakistan, it is the work she has undertaken since her retirement in 2000 that the Royal Gold Medal celebrates.

In the last twenty-three years Lari and The Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, which she founded with her husband, has reacted imaginatively and creatively to the physical and psychological damage that a number of major natural disasters; earthquakes, floods and conflicts have inflicted on the people of Pakistan. Her work is distinguished by the fact that it has focused on developing robust, intelligent yet simple, architectural designs that allow those who are in distress to build for their own needs using the available debris of disaster. This is a very different, but also very relevant, model of re-use and reinvention that engages and empowers.

Continuing to test the potential of this architectural activity further, Lari has developed and shared a design and construct self-build model for shelters, using readily available bamboo to create economical and beautiful braced frames for inhabitation. This is a model of structure and enclosure that fulfils the need for long life, loose fit, and in her case, zero carbon architecture. There is an inherent generosity in Lari’s architectural activity that responds to need, helps communities develop artisanal skills and always utilises available resource.

Lari's design for 60,000 Chulah Cookstoves structures are a self-build version of the traditional Pakistani stove that enhances food preparation, hygiene and quality while creating a place for community. Always working to empower the most challenged communities at the most difficult times, Lari has most recently developed designs for a system that allows the construction of 100 emergency shelters in four days.

Now working on the repair and regeneration of a key district of historic Lahore, Lari's work builds on her commitment to recycling materials and buildings. This suggests another model of conservation and builds on the promise of her important early work in Lahore: the Anguri Bag housing scheme.

Lari's vital contribution identifies different ways of working which suggest how the international architecture profession can play an ever more useful role in helping communities to help themselves, while also responding to climate change.

It is Lari's focus on architecture as a complete and vital social, cultural, economic and aesthetic model, as well as her mantra of 'low cost, zero carbon, zero waste' that makes her hugely relevant to all who practice today.

RIBA's Royal Gold Medal is sponsored by [Arper](#).

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Notes to editors:

1. In 2002, the Heritage Foundation received the UN Recognition Award for its work in promoting cultural and historical conservation. Lari was awarded the Laurea Magistrale ad honorem in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano (2021), the first female recipient in 158 years. She has received the Jane Drew Prize (2020); World Habitat Award (2018); the Islamic Development Bank Prize for Women's Empowerment (2013); Fukuoka Prize for Arts & Culture (2016); Hilal-e-Imtiaz (2014); Sitara-e-Imtiaz (2006).
2. For more press information contact: press.office@riba.org
3. Images can be downloaded here: <https://riba.box.com/v/RIBA2023RoyalGoldMedal>
4. For more information on the Royal Gold Medal, which was first awarded in 1848, go to: <https://www.architecture.com/awards-and-competitions-landing-page/awards/royal-gold-medal>
5. More on the 2023 Royal Gold Medal Honours Committee, chaired by RIBA President Simon Allford can be found here: [LINK](#)
6. [The Royal Institute of British Architects](#) (RIBA) is a global professional membership body that serves its members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Follow [@RIBA on Twitter](#) for updates.
7. [Arper](#) believes in promoting an intercultural dialogue across arts, architecture and design, and has been sponsoring the RIBA Awards programme since 2015. At Arper, we make spaces and systems for the project of living, rethinking physical spaces and relationships whilst tracing a new direction. As new boundaries between home and work emerge, everything is in flux and anything is possible. We all want to live more seamlessly, more flexibly, more sustainably, more inspired. Arper creates new spaces that explore these possibilities, with harmonious forms, dynamic colour, and versatile systems that allow us to change and grow. Diverse perspectives and ideas that shape what's next, with responsive design that helps us live better with the planet.