



The Getty Villa's new museum store and cafe building (left)

Outer peristyle, looking towards the original theme-park villa (below)



GETTY VILLA

17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu.
(310) 440 7300.
www.getty.edu

Free entry, but advance time-allocated tickets are required. Groups of nine or more must be reserved via phone. Parking \$US7 (\$9) a vehicle.

Roman around LA

WORDS AARON PEASLEY

The new-look Getty Villa showcases classical antiquity in southern California.

LOS ANGELES IS A TOWN FOND of a comeback. When the art collection of eccentric billionaire J Paul Getty was moved to its new Richard Meier-designed digs in 1997, many thought its previous home, a Mediterranean-inspired villa, would become another of the city's many obscure architectural has-beens.

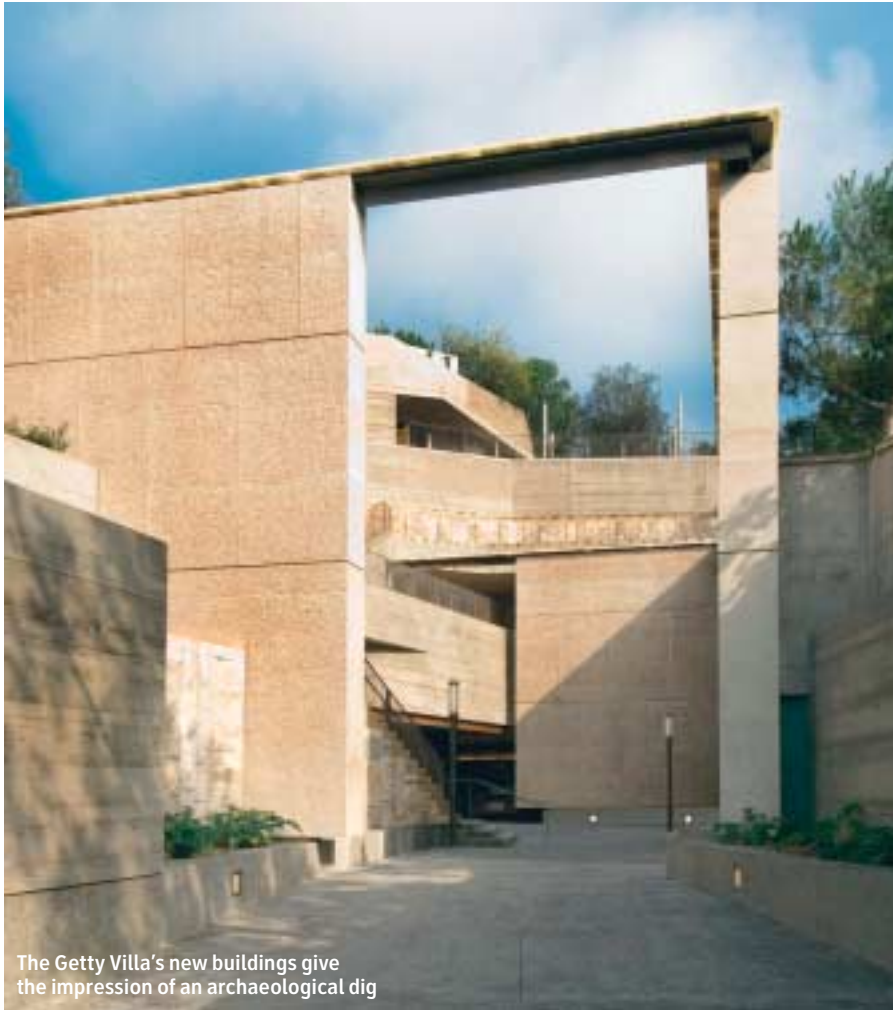
Tucked away in a canyon off the Pacific Coast Highway, the Getty Villa is a loose re-creation of the first-century Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum, which was buried

by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD79. Both at home and at odds with the southern Californian landscape, the Getty Villa has always been viewed ambivalently by Angelinos, many seeing it as a kitsch Roman theme park.

Named the world's richest man in 1957, businessman, oil tycoon and philanthropist J Paul Getty was obsessed with art, particularly pieces from the ancient Mediterranean. In 1954, with a strong belief that art should be available to the public, Getty transformed

the Malibu site into his first-ever museum. The Getty Villa opened 20 years later as an expanded home for his collection.

Reopened this year with an ambitious facelift that took more than eight years and \$US275 million (\$370 million), the Getty Villa is back as one of LA's many world-class cultural attractions. The task of re-imagining it was a grand one. The job was entrusted to Machado & Silvetti Associates, who set out to put a modern stamp on the 26ha site as well as to revitalise the villa. >



The Getty Villa's new buildings give the impression of an archaeological dig


Their approach was to provide a modern context for the villa. Entry is via a partially buried, open-air pavilion. From there visitors ascend to a scenic path that overlooks the site and offers glimpses of the Pacific Ocean. The effect is that of approaching an archaeological dig, with the villa as the centrepiece. Structural work has transformed it into a light-flooded space, perfect for displaying the J Paul Getty trust's artefacts and statues.


The villa has now been dedicated to the Getty collection of more than 44,000 Greek, Roman and Etruscan artefacts. Some 1200 pieces are currently on display. Organised according to themes like Monsters & Minor Deities and Women & Children In Antiquity, the 23 galleries provide an insight into various facets of the classical world and their relation to the modern day.

Close attention has been paid to the grounds and landscaping, reflecting the importance of gardens and outdoor space

to the ancient world. Designed by the late landscape architect Denis L Kurutz, the villa's four gardens follow ancient European models with cypress and olive trees, herbs and also more than 100,000 shrubs, flowers and plants.

The 450-seat Barbara & Lawrence Fleischman Theater is a highlight of the site, an outdoor amphitheatre nestled into the canyon and dedicated to classical drama and concerts. If you're unable to obtain a ticket to the villa, the theatre is a great way to experience its spectacular setting.

Curiously, Getty, who left the US for England in the early 1950s and died in 1976, never visited the villa. You get the feeling that if he could see it now he'd be rather impressed. 

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