

The Getty Villa

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ARCHITECTURE

THE GETTY VILLA REIMAGINED: BRINGING THE ANCIENT WORLD TO LIFE THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

LOS ANGELES—The Getty Villa's renovation and expansion has transformed the Los Angeles landmark, preparing it for its new purpose as an educational center and museum dedicated to the study of the arts and cultures of ancient Greece, Rome, and Etruria. Here, the classical world is represented in the permanent collection, changing exhibitions, conservation, scholarship, research, and public programs, as well as in the physical surroundings. Through architecture, the Getty Villa offers visitors the experience of visually and spatially relating to the past, bringing them closer to the ancient works of art and giving them a deeper sense of connection to the important cultures that still resonate today.

The design architects, Machado and Silvetti Associates, Inc., along with SPF:architects, the local architects of record, fused contemporary design ideas and elements with architecture inspired by antiquity to create a versatile site for the J. Paul Getty Trust's programs, to serve students, scholars, specialized professionals, and general audiences. The project included the renovation of the two existing buildings on the campus, new construction, and expanded and improved amenities, in addition to plumbing, electrical, security, and other core upgrades. The design solves the challenges of the difficult topography, unites the pre-existing and new structures in a cohesive spirit and form, and addresses the Villa's past, present, and future.

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Uncovering the Ancient Past

At the heart of the site is the J. Paul Getty Museum, conceived in 1968, based on the Villa dei Papiri, a first-century Roman country house in Herculaneum. Buried, along with Pompeii, by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79, the ancient Italian villa remains only partially excavated, but the architects took inspiration from this in their concept for the new Getty Villa—reimagining the Museum building as an archaeological find itself.

One of the key new elements is the addition of the Entry Pavilion. Partially buried in the walls of the canyon, this space is enclosed on its sides but open to the sky, creating the ideal conditions for a transitional experience. Through the Entry Pavilion, visitors ascend stairs or an elevator, reaching the Path to Museum. This scenic walkway, cut into the hillside, offers an expansive view of the entire site, setting the stage for the rest of the visit. From this perspective, the visitor looks down on the Villa as one looks down on an excavation to discover an artifact within the landscape.

"We worked to reverse the difficulties created by the steep topography, transforming it from a barrier into a virtue of the overall campus," says Jorge Silvetti, principal, Machado and Silvetti Associates, Inc. "Now, visitors can wander through the lush site, following the contours of the design and terrain, to experience the drama of an archaeological dig. Here we have uncovered, as it were, previously hidden artifacts that are presented to visitors as if they were his or her discovery."

After the journey along the Path to Museum, visitors encounter another key addition—the dramatic, 450-seat Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater, an outdoor classical theater inspired by ancient prototypes, which fits discreetly into the natural slope. In this open-air space, audiences will be able to experience classical plays and performances as they were originally staged. This new structure doubles as steps leading visitors down to the central plaza in front of the main entrance to the J. Paul Getty Museum. It also provides access to various public areas, including a new 250-seat Auditorium, the Cafe, Museum Store, and Education Court.

Strata Walls

The concept of the Getty Villa as an archaeological site is expressed visually in the walls of the new architecture. Layered horizontally with different materials to evoke the geological and historical strata of an excavation, these walls are built upward with successive layers of concrete, bronze, thin red porphyry stone, and teak, with a high foundation of travertine. The inclusion of travertine, the iconic material used at the Getty Center, links these two Getty locations in spirit, while the strata walls that run throughout the Getty Villa site provide a sense of continuity and unity among the newly added features, the existing buildings, and the Villa's different programs.

A Classical Flow

With the addition of the Entry Pavilion and Path to Museum, the architects altered the entry sequence to facilitate pedestrian traffic in a clear and logical way. The new design guides visitors entering the J. Paul Getty Museum first to the Atrium, which leads to the first floor galleries, and then to the Inner Peristyle, and finally to the Outer Peristyle, the large formal garden.

The addition of the grand East Stair provides the Museum with a striking visual anchor and a new sense of orientation. The structure connects the two main floors, providing distinct entryways and easy access to all areas. Conceived as an independent architectural piece, the staircase is detailed in bronze and faced with a distinct, warm, buttery-colored marble from southern Spain known as Amarillo Triana.

Merging Interior and Exterior

Ancient Roman homes were known for their interplay of interior and exterior, and light and shadow. The renovation expands on this idea by bringing substantially more natural light into the Museum building and opening it up to the breathtaking surrounding vistas of the coastal mountains. A large bronze-framed window installed in the east wall floods the new East Stair with sunlight. An additional 58 windows, cut into the existing solid concrete structure of the Museum, introduce more light into the

galleries and provide a visual connection among the different interior areas of the building, as well as with the exterior landscape. Thus, visitors inside the galleries will always be able to determine their location in reference to other galleries and the scenery outside. Three skylights were also added. Of particular note is the one in the Atrium, which replaced a former purely decorative "skylight." True to the spirit of ancient Roman atria, it can now remain open to the sky during good weather.

Custom Built for Art

During the renovation, the existing J. Paul Getty Museum building was stripped to its structural concrete and reinforced where necessary. A custom-built art support and anchor system was concealed in the Museum's walls and floors to ensure the safety of ancient works of art on view. This consists of a network of threaded steel plates embedded in the concrete and incorporated into the floor patterns, and a dense structural steel framework hidden behind the gallery walls that is designed to "invisibly" secure large objects weighing up to several thousand pounds. New bronze anodized aluminum and glass exhibit cases provide safeguards such as seismic isolation, microclimate controls, fiber optic lighting, and non-reflective, low iron security glass. Plumbing, electrical, security, and other support systems were upgraded to comply with current codes. Newly constructed loading and unloading docks facilitate the safe and efficient transportation of works of art.

Decorative Details from the Past

The architects designed floor patterns inspired by actual floors found in Roman houses, but updated in terms of materials and dimensions. The new floors are composed of terrazzo in various color combinations, with bronze, mosaic, and marble motifs and detailing, and with larger patterns than would have been found in antiquity.

Authentic colors, based on an ancient Roman palette, were introduced inside and outside the building. Actual color selection took place over several years in

collaboration with the curators in the antiquities department at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

In addition, the architects enhanced decorative elements already in existence, such as the floor of the Temple of Herakles, which was modeled after one used in the Villa dei Papiri. Composed of alternating triangles of Numidian yellow and africano or dark gray Lucullan marble, this floor is one of the most elaborate in the Museum. The walls of this room, formerly faced with brick, have been covered with Venetian plaster in a vivid gold to complement the floor.

Ranch House and Additional Facilities

The Ranch House, which was the location of the original J. Paul Getty Museum before Mr. Getty built the villa, has also been completely renovated and expanded to house a reading room, the UCLA/Getty Classroom, seminar rooms, and the 20,000-volume Research Library. New state-of-the-art scientific facilities for the conservation of ceramics, stone objects, and the GCI Analytical Laboratory, as well as offices for antiquities curatorial and conservation staff, are also located here.

New construction includes a two-story Office Building. The architects designed this non-public complex with simple forms finished in concrete and stucco, organized around two distinctive courtyards. This part of the campus offers a relaxing work environment for staff and visiting scholars, completing the arc of new buildings that surround and frame the renovated Museum.

ARCHITECTS AND THE SELECTION PROCESS

Based in Boston, the award-winning architectural firm of Machado and Silvetti Associates, Inc. was selected in 1994 after an extensive international search led by Bill Lacy, then president of the State University of New York at Purchase, who also oversaw the search for the architect of the Getty Center. A selection committee was formed that included key leaders of the J. Paul Getty Trust. The distinguished New York-based architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable and the respected Roman architectural historian William MacDonald also served as outside consultants.

The pool of potential architects was ultimately narrowed down to six contenders. To encourage creativity and test compatibilities between architects and the Getty team, the competing firms were required to submit only sketchbooks with their ideas. This eliminated the need for expensive presentation displays. Machado and Silveti Associates, Inc. was selected for its design vision and concept, site planning skills, experience with difficult terrains, and familiarity with Roman architecture.

Led by principals Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silveti, the 40-person firm has distinguished itself by combining urban design with a civic consciousness. Their work covers museums, cultural centers, university buildings, public libraries, parks, and urban design planning for cities around the world. Recent projects include a new branch of the Boston Public Library, a museum for the University of Utah, the South Boston Waterfront park, a mixed-use building at the Boston Center for the Arts, and an adaptive re-use project converting the Rockefeller Stone Barns in Pocantico, New York, into an educational food and agriculture center. Among the honors they have received are the first award in architecture given out by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and three national prizes from the American Institute of Architects. Both Machado and Silveti are tenured professors at Harvard University. In addition, Machado is an overseer at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Silveti has served as a juror for the Pritzker Architectural Prize since 1996.

Working with Machado and Silveti Associates, Inc. is SPF:architects, the local architects of record. Established by principals Zoltan E. Pali, Judit Méda Fekete, and former principal Jeffrey Scott Stenfors, now with his own firm Stenfors Associates Architects, the 30-person multidisciplinary architecture firm features an award-winning design team and one of the world's most accomplished technical workshops. SPF:architects has been involved in many area landmarks, including education, arts, residential, and civic structures. Their work includes technical construction drawings for Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral and Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that features the Getty Conservation Institute, the Getty Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Getty Research Institute. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

Visiting the Getty Villa

The Getty Villa is open Thursday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Tuesday and Wednesday, and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Villa is always free. Advance, timed tickets are required for each individual. Tickets can be obtained online at www.getty.edu or by phone at 310-440-7300. Parking is \$7 per car. Groups of nine or more must make reservations by phone. For more information, call 310-440-7300 (English or Spanish); 310-440-7305 (TTY line for the deaf or hearing impaired).

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