The Villa dei Papiri Reimagined

J. Paul Getty wanted visitors to experience Greek and Roman art in a setting that would bring the objects to life. He decided to build a new museum on his property overlooking the Pacific, a site that closely resembles the ancient Mediterranean coast.

The resulting Getty Villa was modeled on the Roman Villa dei Papiri, a grand country residence on the Bay of Naples that was buried by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. Most of the Villa is still underground, but Getty’s architects adapted a plan of the exposed part drawn by 18th-century excavators and incorporated details from other ancient houses in nearby Pompeii and Herculaneum to realize his vision.

The Getty Villa, which opened in 1974, embodies Getty’s love for classical art and architecture. Today the museum provides an enduring home for his collection, evoking ancient spaces filled with art, fountains, and aromatic gardens.