GARDENS AND LANDSCAPE OF THE GETTY VILLA RECREATE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

LOS ANGELES—The Getty Villa's gardens and landscaping create a dramatic backdrop for the site's classically inspired architecture, with groves of olive trees, flowering shrubs, cooking herbs, and other plant species known from the ancient Mediterranean. The setting supports the Villa's new mission as an educational center and museum dedicated to the study of the arts and cultures of ancient Greece, Rome, and Etruria.

Designed by Denis L. Kurutz Associates, and implemented by kornrandolph, inc., the Getty Villa landscape takes into account the lush topography of the Malibu canyon. In addition to the historically accurate species found in the four gardens and in areas closest to the J. Paul Getty Museum building, the landscape design also features a mix of Mediterranean and native California varieties, local plants of the Santa Monica mountains, and plants from other parts of the world that grow in climates similar to that of Southern California. These four distinct natural communities exist harmoniously to create an environment that evokes the ancient Mediterranean without compromising the Los Angeles landmark's surroundings. Approximately 1,200 trees were added to the site's existing 1,500 trees, along with about 100,000 new shrubs, flowers, plants, and groundcover.
Gardens

Gardens were important features of ancient life, with most houses containing both formal gardens used for pleasure as well as household gardens filled with practical plantings. The Getty Villa’s four gardens include the Herb Garden and East Garden, which are located outside the exterior walls of the Museum building; and the Inner Peristyle and Outer Peristyle, the Villa’s two formal gardens that occupy courtyards within the compound. Around 300 different flowering plants can be found in these four gardens.

The Herb Garden: This informal garden features plants that were staples in gardens of ancient Roman homes, grown for their religious significance, use in cooking, and for medicine. Spices and herbs such as thyme, oregano, and basil are arranged in long beds along the north end of this garden, which is framed by an olive grove at its western edge. Fruit trees bearing plums, apricots, figs, and peaches are arranged at the south end, along with a range of plants from catmint and spearmint to sage and chamomile, and a peeled cyprus grape arbor. At the center of the garden is a fountain filled with tropical lilies, a prized element in an ancient Roman garden. Three large date palms, which were also greatly valued as ornaments, provide a vertical focus.

The East Garden: This private and quiet space is orientated around a circular lily fountain. The highlight of the garden is a replica of an ancient niche water feature from the House of the Large Fountain in Pompeii, decorated with shells and theater masks. Surrounding the garden are tall white plaster walls, which have a clipped boxwood hedge and a border of feverfew lining their base. Around the garden are eight mulberry trees and eight laurel trees, large terracotta pots with strawberry trees and myrtle, as well as plantings of Madonna lily, larkspur, and cyclamen that accent holly bushes and acanthus.

The Inner Peristyle: This is the smaller of the two formal gardens within the compound. The space is surrounded by 36 columns and separated down the middle by a long, narrow pool. Bronze statues stand at its edges and ivy topiaries provide a formal symmetry to the space. At each of its four corners, a white fountain overflows
into a pool outlined with gravel and creeping jenny. This garden is predominantly green, filled with plants such as acanthus, hart's tongue fern, myrtle, butcher's broom, and ivy, highlighted with colorful spots of lavender, iris, allium, lily, hellebore, and other flowers.

**The Outer Peristyle:** This is the Villa's main garden, the largest and grandest of the four. Bronze sculpture and replicas of statues discovered at the remains of the first-century Villa dei Papiri have been placed in their ancient findspots. In classical Rome, this formal space would have offered a peaceful spot for conversation and contemplation. Just like its smaller neighbor, the Outer Peristyle is dominated by a large pool running down the center. Trimmed ivy topiaries frame the edges of the pool, which is crowned at its north end with two sculptural pomegranate trees and enclosed by 24 Grecian laurels on either side, mirroring the structural columns of the building. Four benches are available—two located in arbors draped in grape vines, and two nestled in pockets surrounded by hand-crafted wood trellises. Clusters of rose gardens are filled with ancient gallica, damask, and musk roses, while much of the ground is covered with a layer of sweet violet. Flowering perennials such as chamomile, daisy, rosemary, and sage are planted in abundance for variety and color, along with tulips, iris, Madonna lily, cyclamen, and narcissus.

The decorated walls of the Outer Peristyle are one aspect of the Getty Villa that is most characteristically Roman. The 1000-by-13-foot trompe l'oeil (fool the eye) mural on the north side of the peristyle, done in a painting style typical of the first century A.D., depicts a three-dimensional walkway with columns, painted doorways, and garlands hanging against an open sky. Mural artist Garth Benton, who painted the Villa's outer peristyle walls three decades ago, has returned to paint this scene. The new mural was necessitated by the addition of a wheelchair lift.

**Landscape**

Visitors will experience the Getty Villa’s distinctively Mediterranean landscape upon entry, from the Roman cobblestone roads and the hand-crafted stone pillars, to the scenic views of the hillside planted with cypress, cedar, oak, sycamore, and olive
trees. Walking along the elevated Path to Museum, they will discover that the trees, plants, and flowers create framed views of the J. Paul Getty Museum below, presenting it as if it were an artifact. The pathway cuts through a Mediterranean cascade including St. John's wort, periwinkle, white rose, sage, rosemary, and morning glory. In the Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater, an outdoor classical theater based on ancient prototypes, audiences will experience classical performances against a backdrop of lush trees, surrounded by planters overflowing with a profusion of flowers and framed by potted citrus trees and ivy that hug the walls.

Surrounding the Museum and the four gardens, the plantings include species thought to have been prevalent in the ancient Mediterranean that help blend the gardens into the surrounding coastal vista. These plants give way to California natives at the grounds perimeter. In the north campus, where the Ranch House is located along with new buildings that house offices, meeting rooms, and laboratories, the landscape maintains the Mediterranean focus while introducing other varieties that hint of the world beyond. Scattered throughout are more exotic plantings such as the toog tree from the jungles of Asia, and the pink trumpet tree from the tropics of South America.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Denis L. Kurutz Associates, in association with kornrandolph, inc.

Denis Kurutz, who had worked on the landscape design of the original villa in the early 1970s, returned as the primary architect of the new Getty Villa’s gardens and natural surroundings. Following his death in 2003, Kurutz's work and vision for the Villa was implemented by kornrandolph, a company founded by Amy Korn and Matt Randolph, who had worked with Kurutz on the new Villa landscape design. kornrandolph's role in the creation of the landscape at the Getty Villa involved the administration of Kurutz' design as well as the design of specific areas such as the entry at the pacific coast highway. Located in the Playhouse District of Pasadena,
California, kornrandolph is a landscape design studio that combines ecology, art, and social sensibility to find design solutions that are responsive to both the site and to the people who experience it.

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