

Pre-Visit Activity: Video Introduction to the Getty Center

The J. Paul Getty Museum — Background

J. Paul Getty



The J. Paul Getty Museum was created for the public through the generosity of oil millionaire J. Paul Getty. Mr. Getty was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on December 15, 1892. He spent part of his youth in Los Angeles and lived most of his adult life in Europe, where he began collecting art in the 1930s. J. Paul Getty viewed art as a civilizing influence in society, and strongly believed in making art available to the public for its education and enjoyment. He founded the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1953. This small museum, established in his ranch house in Malibu, housed collections of Greek and Roman antiquities, 18th-century French furniture, and European paintings. Fascinated with the ancient world of the Mediterranean, he later built a Roman-style villa to house his art collection, modeled after the 1st-century AD Villa dei Papiri. He died June 6, 1976 at age 83 in his home at Sutton Place, Surrey, England.

The Getty Center

When most of Mr. Getty's personal estate passed to a trust in 1982, the trustees sought to make a greater contribution to the visual arts through an expanded museum as well as a range of new programs in support of conservation, philanthropy, and scholarship. Planning for the Getty Center began in the mid 1980s, when the J. Paul Getty Trust acquired property in the Brentwood area of Los Angeles and the architectural firm of Richard Meier & Partners was awarded the design commission. The Center is home to the Getty Research Institute, Conservation Institute, and Foundation in addition to the Museum.

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Today the J. Paul Getty Museum, at the Getty Center and the Getty Villa, collects in seven areas including: Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, decorative arts, as well as European and American photographs and sculpture. The J. Paul Getty Trust is recognized as an international cultural and philanthropic organization serving both general audiences and specialized professionals.

The Getty Villa

In 1945, J. Paul Getty purchased a site just above Pacific Coast Highway and began to use its "Ranch House" as both a residence and a space for the display of his personal art collection. In 1953 he established a trust to operate a museum in the ranch house and added a wing for the display of his growing collection. In the late 1960s Mr. Getty decided to recreate a first-century Roman country house—based on the plans of the ancient Villa dei Papiri just outside of Herculaneum—as a separate museum on the property. This building, which opened to the public in 1974, is now called the Getty Villa. It served as the museum's sole location until it closed in the summer of 1997 in preparation for the opening of the new museum at the Getty Center in that same year.

The Getty Villa reopened in January 2006 on a site that has been expanded by the architectural firm of Machado and Silvetti Associates. It occupies a unique place among American cultural institutions as the only museum dedicated solely to the exhibition and study of Greek and Roman art.