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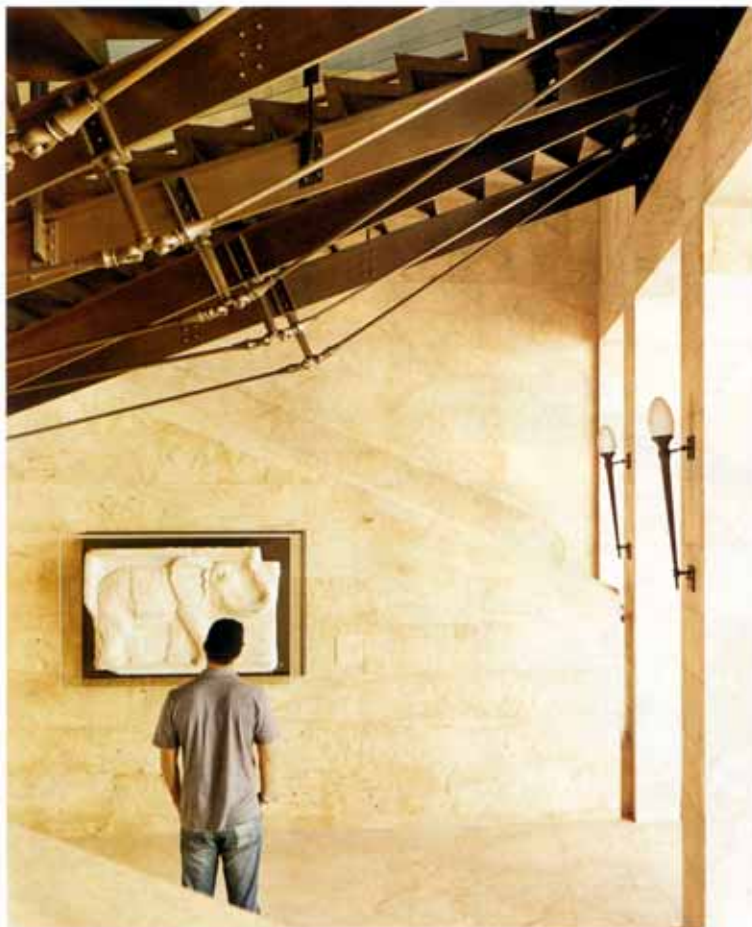
# ARCHITECTURE UP AT THE VILLA

Amid controversy about the provenance of some of its classical antiquities, Los Angeles's Getty Villa opens after a 12-year renovation. By Raul Barreneche

The new Entry Pavilion at the Getty Villa in Malibu, California, designed by Machado & Silvetti.

With the creation of the Getty Center, the Richard Meier-designed, billion-dollar acropolis inaugurated in 1997 in Los Angeles, the much-loved Roman-style villa the Getty Museum had called home since 1974 began to fade from the city's cultural memory. This was hardly surprising: The old museum, housed in a loose re-creation of a first-century villa on oil tycoon J. Paul Getty's Malibu ranch, was hidden in a »





**Classical L.A.**  
Clockwise from  
above right: A Roman  
wall relief of an  
elephant, under the  
new bronze staircase;  
the Inner Peristyle;  
the marble-mosaic  
floor in the Temple of  
Herakles gallery.

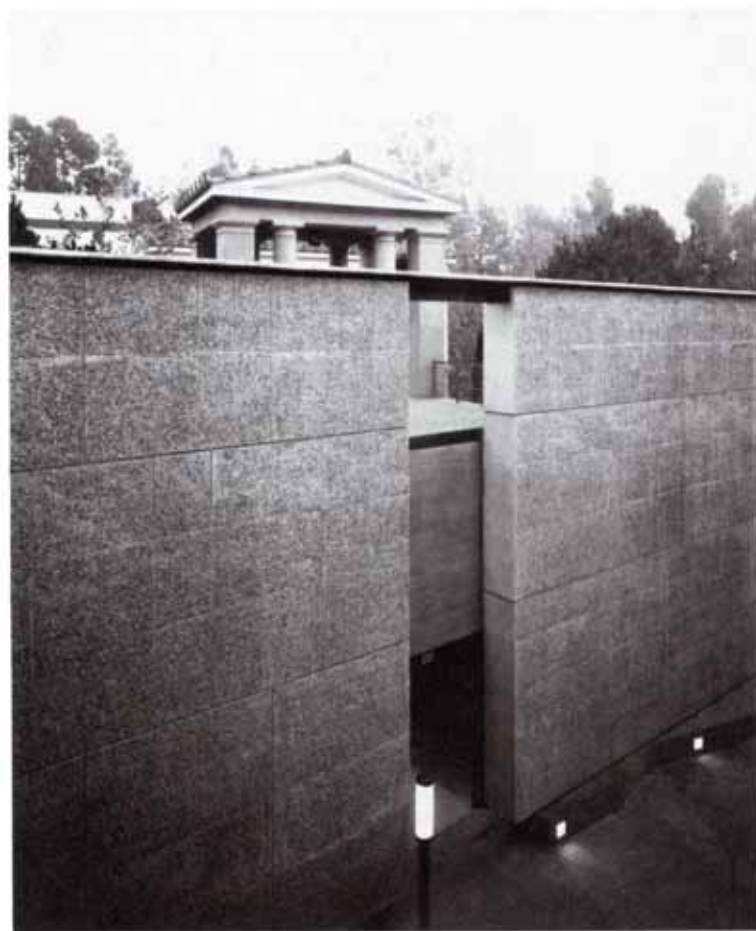
canyon off the Pacific Coast Highway; the new, unabashedly modern Getty crowned a hilltop above the 405 Freeway in Los Angeles, as visible a part of the city's sprawling landscape as the Hollywood sign. But with the late-January reopening of the renovated Getty Villa and a greatly expanded research and conservation campus devoted to preeminent collections of Roman, Greek, and Etruscan antiquities, classical architecture is once again front and center in the institution's public image.

The J. Paul Getty Trust selected the Boston firm Machado & Silvetti Associates to plan the 64-acre site overlooking the Pacific. Argentine-born architects (and Harvard professors) Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti were entrusted with renovating and upgrading the villa, which had been shuttered since 1997 when the art collection moved to the Getty Center; remodeling the Spanish-style ranch house that Getty had turned into his first museum, in 1954; and building new facilities and conservation labs to accommodate a range of research and scholarly programs. The \$275 million project was complicated by steeply sloping topography, difficult neighbors, and the inescapably imposing presence of the existing museum. "It was difficult to give it unity," says the

scholarly, erudite Silvetti. "Our greatest struggle was figuring out what kind of architecture to put next to a Roman house. We had to defer to the old villa as the prima donna of the place."

The villa undoubtedly remains the focus of the Malibu property. The earlier transfer of European painting, sculpture, and decorative arts to the Getty Center allows the entire villa to be dedicated to the institution's collection of more than 44,000 Greek, Roman, and Etruscan artifacts—one of the finest in America, alongside those of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The villa displays more than 1,200 of these pieces, some of which have made headlines in recent months: former curator Marion True went on trial in November in Rome, charged with conspiring with two dealers to receive illegally excavated antiquities. Italian authorities, who have been cracking down on a number of major museums, are demanding the return of a small selection of vases, urns, and statues from the Getty's collection (the trial is expected to continue in June).

**MACHADO AND SILVETTI STUDIED EVERY INCH OF THE** campus, from the landscaping of rosemary and thyme, olive and cypress trees, and other flora »



**Timeless Design**  
Clockwise from above: The Entry Pavilion; the Men in Antiquity gallery; the 225-foot-long reflecting pool of the Outer Peristyle, lined with replicas of ancient statuary found at the first-century Villa dei Papiri, on which the Getty Villa was modeled.

evocative of the ancient Mediterranean to the carefully considered approach that guides visitors to the front door of the museum. The design was created by the late landscape architect Denis L. Kurutz and implemented by Kornrandolph of Pasadena. "We wanted the buildings to be part of a garden," Silveti says, "and as the plantings grow, the villa will recede into its surroundings."

The first structure visitors see is the new Entry Pavilion, a two-story space open to the sky, lined by towering walls of poured concrete with horizontal bands that suggest the stratified layers of an archaeological dig. A bold cornice of onyx defines the "ceiling" of blue overhead. A staircase leads from the pavilion to an elevated path overlooking the entire compound: a new multistory building housing a café, shop, and 250-seat auditorium; a 450-seat amphitheater for performances of classical drama against the backdrop of the villa's two-story Corinthian colonnade; and, beyond, the new conservation labs and J. Paul Getty's former house, transformed into offices and a 20,000-volume research library. Along the way, cinematically framed views unfold of architecture, landscape, and the Pacific Ocean in the distance.

Working with the company SPF:architects, from Los Angeles, Machado and Silveti created



the new modern structures from a rich variety of materials whose colors allude to the palette of ancient Roman architecture: buttery yellow *amarillo triana* stone from Spain, black marble from China, red porphyry stone, teak-like *afrosmosia* wood. The base used for many of the walls is the iconic travertine that Meier employed at the new Getty Center, striking a common chord between the two campuses. "The stone has become identified with the Getty—they even sell pieces of it as souvenirs," Silveti notes.

The star attraction is, of course, the villa. The original structure was inspired by (though it's not an exact replica of) the first-century Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum. The luxurious seaside dwelling, thought to have belonged to Julius Caesar's father-in-law, was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. "It's an odd building, but a fairly good hypothesis of what a Roman house was like," Silveti says. Although some of the villa's original details were adapted from the Villa dei Papiri, most were drawn from other houses at Pompeii and Herculaneum, including decorative floor and ceiling patterns and the frieze surrounding the roof opening in the atrium.

Machado and Silveti continued this approach, mining multiple classical sources. "We tried to >>



A colonnade of the villa's Outer Peristyle, which flanks the largest of the museum's four gardens.

make the villa even better, improving what we could and making it more classically correct. We tried to be accurate whenever possible." Still, they took liberties—with the dramatic bronze, glass, and yellow-marble staircase linking the Inner Peristyle to the second-floor galleries ("There were no grand stairs in Roman houses," Silveti admits) and the playful, intricately patterned new terrazzo and mosaic floors in the renovated galleries, which Silveti calls "pure invention." Because the building itself doesn't purport to be a historically exact re-creation, Machado and Silveti's informed additions seem an appropriate strategy.

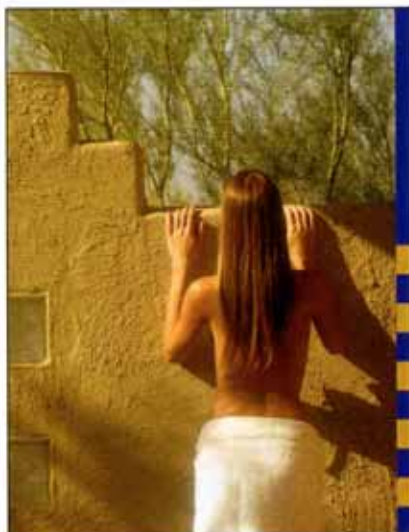
The villa museum's curatorial shift away from displaying a mix of paintings, decorative arts, and ancient artifacts meant that once-dark galleries where fragile canvases and armoires had been displayed could be filled with natural light from windows, which is preferable for viewing classical statuary. Indeed, architectural fragments and marble busts and sculptures—such as a prized marble statue of Faustina the Elder—take on new vibrancy in such daylight. There are no diffusing scrims or other visible controls to reduce sharp contrasts in light and shadow.

One of the most dramatic transformations is in the second-floor gallery surrounding the villa's Inner Peristyle gardens. Machado and Silveti turned what was a series of dark enfilade gal-

leries with heavy brocade wallpaper and parquet floors into spacious, vaulted, light-filled halls overlooking the courtyard through dozens of new windows. The architects also added windows overlooking the atrium, which they painted in a more appropriate palette—in classical terms—of gold, robin's-egg blue, and brick red, and exposed the compluvium to the sky, as it would have been in ancient times, when the cutaway let in rainwater, which was collected in a cistern, or impluvium, below. (At the Getty Villa, a retractable skylight can be drawn shut in inclement weather.) "In the old building, you never knew where you were—you were always moving through closed rooms. Now you have a very clear sense of orientation," Silveti explains.

The 23 permanent galleries are organized thematically, rather than chronologically or by cultural or geographic origin. There are now intriguingly titled galleries such as Dionysos and the Theater, Monsters and Minor Deities, and Women and Children in Antiquity. One room, devoted to prehistoric Cycladic art, features stark, surprisingly modern-looking sculptures that could be mistaken for works by Brancusi. On the second floor, five galleries will host rotating and on-loan exhibitions.

Much of the effort and expense involved in the renovation will be invisible to visitors, including a complete upgrade for disabled access and a reinforcing >>



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## ARCHITECTURE



The 450-seat classical theater, based on ancient prototypes, used for performances of drama and music, left. Right: The Five Maidens, statues overlooking the pool in the Inner Peristyle.



web of steel hidden behind the gallery walls and embedded in the floors. "You could hang a Bentley on them," jokes Silveti about the newly strengthened and shock-resistant walls. Curators are able to suspend heavy marble friezes from the walls and bolt statues to the terrazzo floors through an unseen system of anchors designed to protect these artifacts in an earthquake. Many of the Getty's more delicate treasures, including Hellenistic jewelry, silver drinking vessels from the time of Alexander the Great, and a collection of Greek vases, are displayed in exquisitely detailed, German-built bronze and glass vitrines incorporating the latest in antiseismic technology. Every case conceals a ball-bearing base isolator that will allow the artifacts to "go with the flow" during a tremor—that is,

slide along with the side-to-side shaking so they won't break while resisting the quake's motion.

The huge cost and care that have gone into the project are invisible in another way: notably, admission to the villa is free. However, tickets must be booked prior to a visit, either on-line or by telephone. (No walk-ins are permitted.) But the planning will be worth it. Though museum officials expect to accommodate about 1,500 visitors a day, entries spaced at 30-minute intervals will allow for smooth circulation of guests. Visitors will be treated to a quiet, intimate experience with these treasured antiquities that so beguiled their collector, J. Paul Getty, in a setting worthy of a Roman emperor yet thoroughly up-to-date. The ancient world has never looked better. +

### THE FACTS GETTY VILLA, LOS ANGELES

Located 25 miles west of downtown Los Angeles and one mile north of Sunset Blvd., the Getty Villa is open Thursday–Monday, closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays and major holidays. 17985 Pacific Coast Hwy., Malibu. Admission is

free (\$7 to park), but advance, timed tickets are required; these can be obtained on-line at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu) or by calling 310/440-7300. (Reservations for groups of nine or more must be made by phone.)

**OPENING EXHIBITIONS**  
**"Antiquity & Photography: Early Views of Ancient Mediterranean Sites"**  
(Through May 1)

**"The Getty Villa Reimagined"**  
A look at the development of the

expansion and renovation project.  
(Through May 8)

**"Molten Color: Glassmaking in Antiquity"**  
An extraordinary collection of glass dating from 1400 B.C. to the 7th century A.D.  
(Through July 24)