

The Getty Villa

HISTORY

LOS ANGELES— In 1945, businessman and philanthropist J. Paul Getty purchased a home on 64 seaside acres in Malibu, California, which he filled with a growing art collection. Nine years later, Mr. Getty began opening his home periodically in order to share the collection with the public, exhibiting his Greek and Roman antiquities, 18th-century French furniture, and European paintings.



In 1968, fascinated with the ancient world of the Mediterranean, Mr. Getty began his plans to build a Roman-style villa on the Malibu site to serve as a museum. Ground was broken in 1970, and the new museum opened in 1974, becoming one of Los Angeles' cultural landmarks.

The J. Paul Getty Museum was modeled after the Villa dei Papiri, the largest and most luxuriously furnished seaside villa that had been found during the early excavations at Herculaneum in Italy in the 1700s. A large cache of carbonized papyrus book rolls found on the premises point to Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, the wealthy father-in-law of Julius Caesar, as a possible owner of the house. The ancient home remained completely covered by volcanic debris until the end of the 20th century, but exploratory tunnels dug in the 18th century by a Swiss engineer allowed the villa to be mapped. These ground plans became the basis of the museum's design.

Fascinated by the classical world, Mr. Getty envisioned that such a Roman-inspired villa would provide an appropriate setting for his art collection. Even though these holdings included works from many different historical periods and places, Greek and Roman antiquities were an important element. He liked the idea that the villa would be based on an ancient residence—he wanted visitors to feel as if they had been invited into an intimate setting to view and enjoy art. To help him accomplish this, Mr. Getty hired the respected historian of ancient architecture, Norman Neuerburg.

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From the beginning, the villa that Mr. Getty built was meant to be based on the first-century model, not to be a copy of it. Neuerburg drew upon his knowledge of houses, public buildings, and tombs from various Roman sites for the building's architectural details. He adapted First Style wall decoration and the "tumbling blocks" pattern from the House of the Faun at Pompeii for the Atrium and Inner Peristyle. He also used the mosaic floors from the Villa dei Papiri itself as inspiration for the floors of the Temple of Herakles and Basilica. The decorated walls of the Outer Peristyle are one aspect of the Getty Villa that is most characteristically Roman. Artist Garth Benton painted the trompe l'oeil (fool the eye) murals in a style typical of the first century A.D.

In 1997, the Getty Center opened in nearby Brentwood. Much of the collection was brought from Malibu to the new 105,500 square-foot J. Paul Getty Museum. The Malibu museum closed for remodeling, opening again in 2006 as the Getty Villa, an educational center dedicated to the arts and culture of ancient Greece, Rome, and Etruria. The museum building retained its original design, and contemporary architects Machado and Silvetti added 76,000 square feet of structures surrounding it, nearly doubling the facility's size and adding new parking, an Entry Pavilion, a classical outdoor theater, and other enhancements.

Today the Getty Villa houses one of the world's most prominent collections of antiquities, serves as a center of scholarship and conservation, and offers performances, family activities, lectures, and other events designed to make the ancient world come alive for visitors

Jean Paul Getty (1892–1976)

Born in Minneapolis on December 15, 1892, Jean Paul Getty moved with his family to California in 1905. He attended the University of Southern California and the University of California at Berkeley before enrolling at Oxford University in London, earning a degree in economics and political science in 1914. At 21, he joined his father in the family oil business and soon made his own fortune. Over the years, Getty expanded his empire, holding interests in hundreds of concerns beyond Getty Oil, including hotels, real estate, and restaurants. In 1957, *Fortune* magazine named him the world's richest person.

In addition to his talent for business, Getty harbored a passion for art, which he began collecting in the 1930s. He was fascinated with antiquities, and his collection of classical art soon grew to become one of the finest in the country. He housed his collection at Sutton

Place, his residence in the United Kingdom, and also at his ranch in Malibu, California, which he opened to the public in 1954 as the first J. Paul Getty Museum.

J. Paul Getty died in 1976 at the age of 83 in England, where he had lived for nearly 25 years. He never saw the Malibu museum that bore his name, although he oversaw its construction closely. His will, which calls for "the diffusion of artistic and general knowledge," led to the creation of the J. Paul Getty Trust, one of the largest supporters of the visual arts in the world, with programs in exhibitions, conservation, research, and grantmaking.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. 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 Pacific Palisades.

Visiting the Getty Villa

The Getty Villa is open Wednesday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Tuesday and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Villa is always free. A ticket is required for admission. Tickets can be ordered in advance, or on the day of your visit, at www.getty.edu/visit or at (310) 440-7300. Parking is \$15 per car; \$10 after 5pm for evening events. Groups of 15 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). The Getty Villa is at 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades, California.

Additional information is available at www.getty.edu.

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