



**T**he landscaping at the new \$1 billion Getty Center flows with the construction details of the world-class facility. The elements of landscaping and architecture unite to create a seamless design.

Eighty-six acres of landscaped gardens and terraces, including the Central Garden designed by artist Robert Irwin, provide sweeping views of

the Los Angeles basin, the mountains, the ocean, and the surrounding 600 acres preserved in their natural state.

Architect Richard Meier collaborated with landscape architects Emmet Wemple, Laurie Olen and Dan Kiley to develop a master plan for the landscape that, according

to Meier, "is, in some ways, as important as the buildings themselves."

The design naturally invites visitors to wander indoors and out, exploring galleries and gardens alike. The plan encourages visitors to come and go as they please, making their own routes, and pausing in the courtyard to listen to a fountain.

Inspired by the garden traditions of California and the ancient Mediterranean, the landscaping

contributes to the Center's mix of ancient and modern artistry. Visitors are surrounded by recurring colors, textures and scents.

Under the direction of the design team and grounds superintendent Richard Naranjo, the landscape will evolve, "with the intent of creating an intimate, ever-changing tableau that enhances the visitor's experience of the Getty's artistic and educational mission," says Meier.

**The view**

Perhaps the most important element of the Getty Center is its hilltop site in the Santa Monica Mountains, just off the San Diego Freeway. From there, visitors can take in prominent features of the Los Angeles landscape—the Pacific Ocean, the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains, the vast street-grid of the city, the Palos Verdes peninsula, plus sunsets over the Pacific Ocean.

Inspired by this interplay, architect Richard Meier sought to design the new complex "so that it highlights both nature and culture," he says.

**The buildings**

When approached from the south, the modernist complex appears almost to grow from the 110-acre hillside. Two three-car, computer-operated trams ferry visitors from street-level parking to the hilltop site. The campus, clad largely in cleft-cut, Italian travertine, is organized around a central arrival plaza, and offers framed panoramic views of the city. The Getty Center's six buildings follow a natural ridge in the hilltop. Working with this natural topography, Meier's plan suggests a connection between the organization of the Center and the layout of the city's grid. Galleries, offices and the Auditorium lead out to courtyards and terraces; all offices receive natural light. Because the Getty's neighbors requested that the complex be no more than two stories above grade, all of the buildings extend underground and are linked with subterranean corridors that facilitate the moving of artwork and other materials.

**Stones**

The use of stone—1.2 million square feet of it—is perhaps one of the most remarked-upon elements of the new complex. "This beige-colored, cleft-cut, textured, fossilized travertine catches the

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**Getty project  
a mountain  
masterpiece**

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bright Southern California daylight, reflecting sharply during morning hours and emitting a honeyed warmth in the afternoon," according to Meier.

The 16,000 tons of travertine used in the project were quarried in Bagni di Tivoli, Italy, 15 miles east of Rome. Split along its natural grain, detailed impressions of leaves, feathers, fish, and shells can be seen in the Canter's travertine; one particularly unusual piece holds the fossilized remains of a deer antler. Meier and his staff worked for a year with the Bagni di Tivoli quarries to invent a "guillotine" process that would result in a rough, textured finish. "About a dozen of these stones," Meier explains, "are incorporated into the regular grid for a change of scale and color—to break things up—and mark a key point."

Travertine panels cover not only the retaining walls and the bases of all buildings, but also serve as paving stones for the arrival plaza and Museum courtyard.

### **Dramatic arrival**

Upon entering the front gate, visitors may notice the groves of sycamores planted by the entryway. The trees are meant to evoke the Getty Villa in Malibu, whose Canyon Drive entryway is also lined with sycamores.

The Lower Tram Station introduces visitors to the lush plantings that await them at the top of the hill. Beyond the station, picnickers can lounge on the grass, shaded by white-flowering wisteria on a lavender-colored trellis. Purple blossoms hang from the jacaranda trees, while across the tramway, a row of crepe myrtles bloom white. Through the leafy screen of a California pepper tree grove, one can see a view of the Getty Center.

From the tram, visitors can see the more than 8,500 native oak trees planted in rows on the hillside; deer, birds and other local wildlife are sometimes visible there as well. The hillside's ground layer has been planted with poverty weed,

local chaparral and shrubs, in order to prevent erosion and fire and to preserve the natural environment. More than 100 Italian stone pines are planted along Getty Center Drive. The grid pattern of the oak plantings sets the tone for the organic order of the architecture on the hilltop.

Four tall stone pines stand at the center of the open Arrival Plaza. In years to come, these pines, which will be trimmed flat so as not to obstruct views from other points of the Center, are expected to produce a 50- to 60-foot wide canopy that will shade visitors from the Southern California sun. To the north, toward Mt. St. Mary's College, Aleppo pines appear just beyond the travertine wall; they are expected to reach 60 to 70 feet in height.

Along the left side of the Museum steps, water cascades down into a fountain. A bed of blue-flowering ceanthos and rosemary follows the water's path, tumbling down, to and over the lower wall. Visitors ascending the stairs to the Museum catch glimpses of the foliage through portals in the travertine wall.

The cooler temperature of the campus' north side is reflected in the cooler colors of the plantings—pale greens, blues, purples and grays being the dominant hues. On the north side, in between the grass-covered helipad and the Auditorium, a series of terraces serve as shaded, outdoor "rooms"—separated by trimmed hedges and Italian stone pines—from which to observe the hillside and the southern face of the Getty Center.

At the Auditorium Plaza, a stand of purple- and white-flowering jacarandas echoes the colors of the Lower Tram Sta-

tion. In the cool, shady "canyon" between the North and East Buildings, tree ferns, tall kantia palms, and Asian jasmine groundcover create a lush palm court. The East Building features its own outdoor courtyard—an open lawn shaded with flowering trees—where staff can gather and eat lunch. The walkway between the North and East Buildings to the Museum is connected by an "aerial" hedge of white crepe myrtle, Spanish

lavender and star jasmine, all of which accent the colors and scents of the campus.

The star jasmine that borders the North Building walkway ends at the Museum's entrance with a grove of California sycamores. Inside the Museum courtyard, graceful Mexican cypress trees hang over the 120-foot linear fountain. A small grove of camphor trees rises from the dark green phittosporum

groundcover. Come spring, hundreds of yellow daffodils will bloom here. Boston ivy climbs up one of the pavilion's travertine walls from a bed of fragrant jewel mint.

On the Museum's South Terrace, near a trellis covered with classic California red bougainvillea and hundreds of birds of paradise (Los Angeles' official flower), visitors can take in views of the city—a cactus garden is located at the southern end of the courtyard, the hottest and driest point on the Getty Center campus. Here, the warm yellow-orange of the agave and fresh green of the cacti are positioned to remind visitors of the desert environment from which Los Angeles has grown.

### **Restaurant/Cafe and Upper Central Garden**

Located to the west of the Museum entrance, the Restaurant and Cafe build-

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ing is set apart by a distinctive, lavender-colored trellis covered by white-blooming wisteria. Beside the trellis, at the Restaurant Terrace, diners can enjoy the shade of leafy London plane trees. During the winter, these deciduous trees allow sunlight in to warm the setting.

They were chosen for this location, in part, because they are close relatives of the sycamores planted at the Getty Center entryway and the Museum entrance. This theme continues in a line of sycamores that extends from the Restaurant Building to the Central Garden.

### Central Garden

Robert Irwin's 134,000-square-foot Central Garden was commissioned by the Getty Trust as a work of art. The garden offers visitors constantly changing experiences, conditioned by the weather, the hour of day, the time of year, and the use of seasonal plants. A tree-lined walkway traverses a stream planted on each side with a variety of grasses and gradually descends to a plaza where bougainvillea arbors provide scale and a sense of intimacy. The stream continues through the plaza and ends in a cascade of water over a stone waterfall or "chadar," into a pool in which a maze of azaleas floats. Around the pool is a series of specialty gardens, each with a variety of plant material. All of the foliage and materials of the garden have been selected to accentuate the interplay of light, color and reflection. While Irwin's plan for the garden sprang from the powerful, controlled geometries of the architecture and from the site itself, he conceived the garden as a "conditional" work of art: In contrast to the more static nature of the buildings, the Central Garden is always in flux.

### Water Gardens

The sound and movement of five dis-

tinct fountains and water features are at the heart of the architecture of the Getty Center. In addition to heightening the visitor's sensory experience, the location and design of each fountain and water feature is geared towards accentuating an important axis running through the site.

- The first water feature encountered by visitors is the cascading waterfall alongside the grand stairway connecting the Arrival Plaza to the Museum Entrance Hall. The water flows directly into a long narrow pool, built so shallow as to seem an extension of the Plaza floor. Within that pool, fountain jets shoot streams of water directly upward, creating a

soothing sound which, Meier explains, "helps create the sense that one has indeed arrived in a refreshing place." The placement of this fountain is in perfect alignment with both fountains in the Museum Courtyard and the center of the round Museum Entrance Hall.

- In the Museum Courtyard, 46 jets shoot streams of water from right to left forming perfect arcs over the 120-foot linear basin, situated beside a row of Mexican cypress trees. The eye is directed both to the left edge of the fountain, which is the center axis of the site, and back along that same elongated line to the center of the large boulder fountain, whose center is in perfect alignment with the center of the Museum's circular entrance hall, the linear basin's edge, and the edge of the cascading fountain at the Arrival Plaza.

- In the tradition of Asian gardens, the boulder fountain at the south end of the Museum Courtyard is part sculpture, part reflection. The circular pool, with its sculptural boulders and "playful" water, is meant to contrast with the geometric design of the surrounding archi-

ture, yet is placed not only on the center line to the Museum, but also the axis to the Scholar offices in the Research Institute.

Each boulder comes from Columbia, Calif., the heart of gold country, and was hand-picked by a design team that included Meier and the main landscape architects, Hickok and Olin, and staff members of the Getty. Blown smooth by the heavy blasting of old gold mining techniques, each rock was chosen for its sheer sculptural form, as a contrast to the rough textured grids of travertine stone. A calm pool reflects the curvature of the West Pavilion, outside the circular divide that separates it from the splashing waters of the fountains. Travertine blocks, spaced across the water like lily pads, form a floating bridge; with the water's surface less than half an inch from the edge of each block.

- Tucked between the East and South Pavilions, a smaller boulder fountain rests at floor level, almost an extension of the East Pavilion's lobby.

- The final water feature is located west of the Museum entrance, at the top of the Central Garden. It begins with a travertine headstone, designed by Meier, where a constant flow of water rises as if from an eternal spring. The water runs down the front of the headstone and along a dramatic chute, finally emptying into a hole that delivers the water to the Irwin's Central Garden. From below, the water trickles into a grotto of chiseled travertine. The extra-rough texture of the large dome shape "recreates the tranquil sounds of springtime rain," according to Meier. Aligned perfectly with the centerline through the Central Garden, the fountain not only connects the garden to the buildings, but serves as the source of its own stream.

*An intimate, ever-changing tableau that enhances the visitor's experience.*