

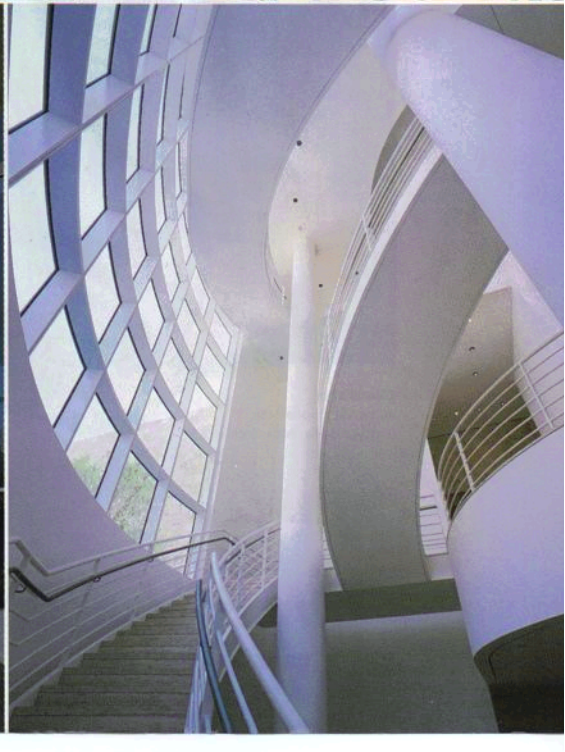
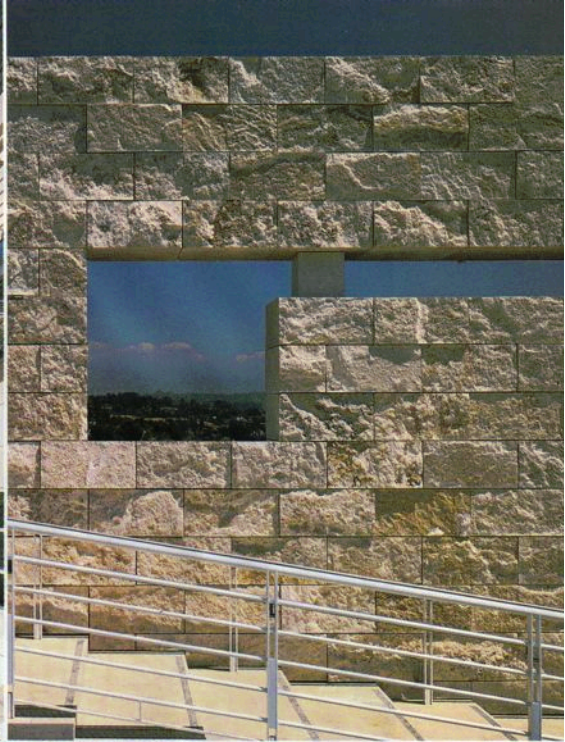
In designing the massive Getty Center (below), which stretches along a ridge high above the San Diego Freeway, architect Richard Meier had an Italian hill town in mind. Opposite page: There are many open walkways and courtyards in the complex (top left), which comprises a series of linked pavilions and piazzas. Meier uses other strategies to lighten the mass of the Center, like placing a view-framing cutout in a travertine wall (top right). The pristine museum lobby (bottom right) is flooded with bright California light, while the curving facade and sunstriped terrace of the cafeteria (bottom left) soften the building's hard edges.

The Getty Center is a masterpiece of modern architecture, designed by Richard Meier. It is a complex of five pavilions and a central courtyard, all built on a hillside overlooking Los Angeles. The building is a prime example of the "California Modern" style, characterized by its clean lines, white surfaces, and integration with the natural environment. Meier's design emphasizes light and space, creating a sense of openness and connection to the surrounding landscape. The building's unique form and materials, such as travertine and glass, contribute to its iconic status as a landmark of contemporary architecture.

Edifice Complex

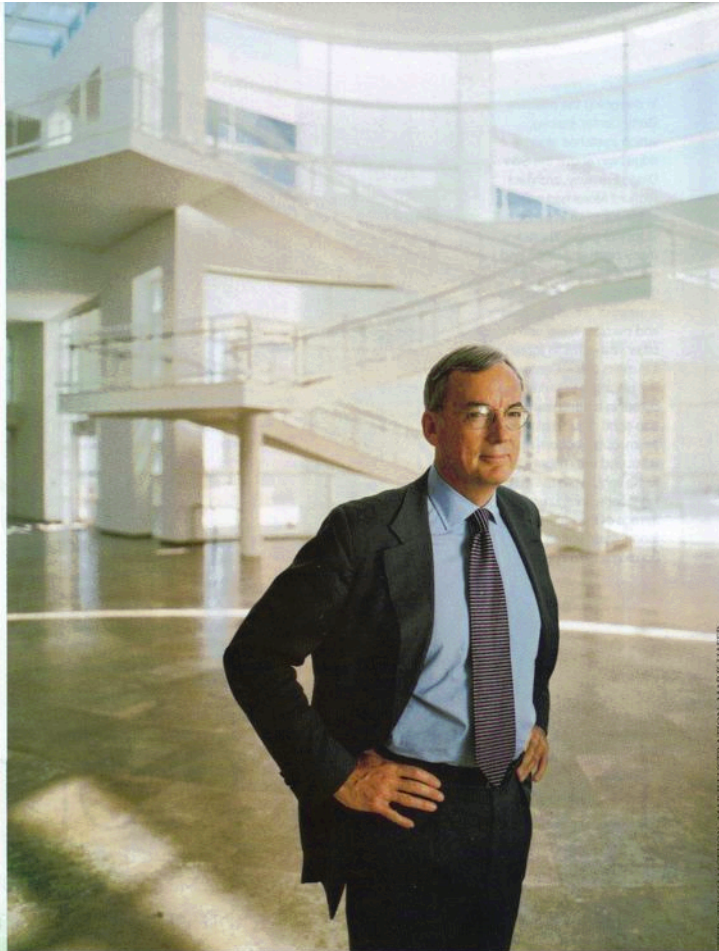
The monumental Getty Center, the most audacious act of museum building in decades, opens next month in Los Angeles. By Jeff Book





This December, after more than a dozen years of planning and construction, the world's most richly endowed museum unveils its new home, the crown jewel in a monumental complex perched on a hilltop in West Los Angeles. If, as André Malraux said, museums are America's cathedrals, then the new Getty Center is destined to become an art-lover's Lourdes—although, given its vast wealth and far-reaching influence, a more apt comparison might be the Vatican.

In many ways the Getty seems a glorious anachronism, a rare addition to the list of classic American art museums founded on huge private fortunes and hung with dazzling donated core collections. (The last major institution to become a member of this club was Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art in 1937, a gift to the nation from the Mellons.) But the Getty arrives in a world much different from the one that nurtured its distinguished predecessors. Most of the important pre-20th-century works of art that define the arche-

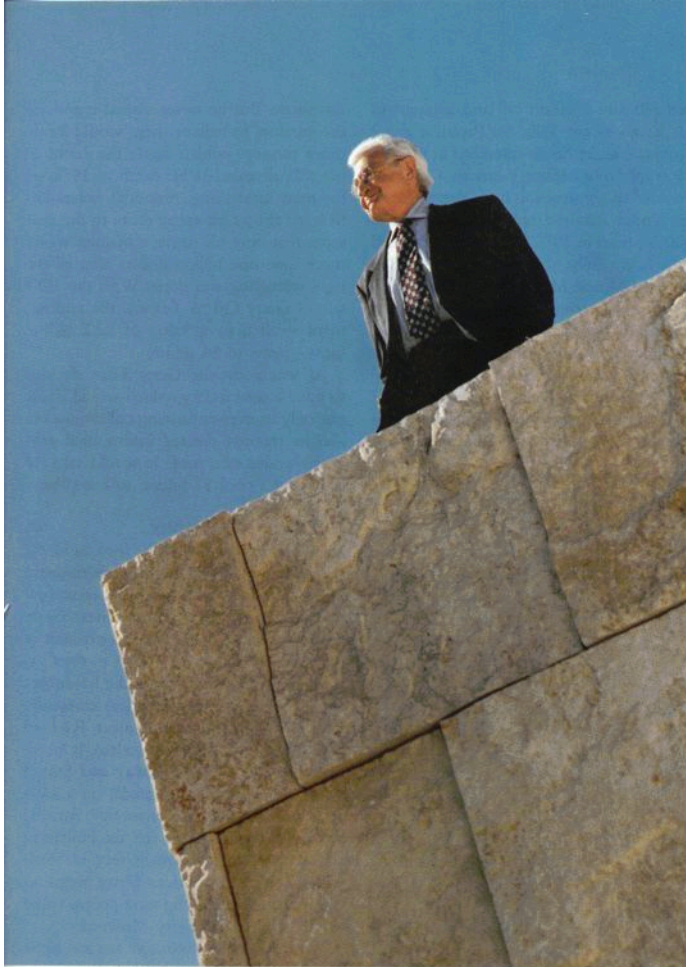


BOB THOMAS/ART STREIBER. GROOMING BY NATALIE MILLER FOR CLOUTIER. TRUSH ACTIVITY. ILLUSTRATIONS: MARK HAYER



typal Western museum are in very short supply, since they already reside in major collections. The very idea of a magnificent Temple of Art sufficient unto itself is passé—today's art institutions go into the community as cultural activists and aesthetic proselytizers. Though it evokes the classic museum model, the Getty's grand edifice represents an unequalled expansion of it, one that fosters community outreach on a global scale. With the new Getty Center—as alluring a monument to European art history as there ever was—what you get is considerably more than what you see.

What the average visitor sees, of course, is a first-rate collection of antiquities, European paintings, drawings, sculptures, decorative arts, and photography housed in



Harold Williams (above), president and CEO of the Getty Trust since 1981—and former head of the Securities and Exchange Commission—retires next year after having steered the construction of the Center from its conception in 1983 to its completion this December. The director of the J. Paul Getty Museum since 1983, John Walsh (opposite page) stands in the institution's main entrance hall, an imposing space that gives access to five pavilions of galleries—which together constitute the Center's largest building.

gleaming new galleries. But the Center is also home to entities less visible to the casual museumgoer: institutes with ambitious programs in digital-age art information, conservation, education, research, museum training, and grantmaking. The Getty is very committed to these programs, even though they hold little glamour for the general public. In July at the New York press luncheon for the Center, journalists heard more about these various institutes than they did about the museum itself. Given the avalanche of publicity attendant

on the opening, it's ironic that the Getty's most significant contribution to high culture may well prove to be the work it does through these less attention-grabbing programs. To understand how this has come about, you need to know a little history.

The Past

Despite its monolithic image, the J. Paul Getty Museum is much younger than many realize. Director John Walsh—a tall, genial scholar of 17th-century Dutch painting who came to the museum in 1983 from

TIMELINE

1954 The J. Paul Getty Museum opens its galleries at Getty's Malibu ranch house (right).



1974 The museum moves into a re-creation of an ancient Roman villa next to the ranch house (left).



1976 J. Paul Getty (below) dies, leaving the bulk of his vast fortune to his museum.



1982 After numerous legal challenges, the Getty Trust receives Getty's bequest, now worth more than \$1 billion. The museum begins expanding its collections in earnest, while the Getty Trust launches programs in conservation, research, education, and other art-related fields.

1983 John Walsh is appointed director. The museum buys the Ludwig Collection of illuminated manuscripts.

1984 Texaco buys Getty Oil for \$10 billion in a record-setting corporate merger that boosts the Getty Trust's endowment to \$2.2 billion.



Architect Richard Meier is hired to design the Getty Center.

Acquisitions include important old-master drawings from the Duke of Devonshire's collection,

including Titian's *Pastoral Scene* (1565; left) and more than half a dozen important photography collections.

1985 The museum acquires paintings by Cézanne, Mantegna, Bouts, and Millet.



1987 James Ensor's proto-modern work *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (1888; left) is added to the collection.

1988 The

Getty buys a large *Aphrodite* (ca. 400 B.C.; right) for \$18 million, the highest price ever paid for an antiquity; controversy results from unproven charges that the statue was illegally excavated from an Italian archeological site.



1989 Pontorno's

Portrait of a Halberdier (ca. 1537; left) is purchased by the Getty for \$35 million.



1990 The museum buys van Gogh's *Irises* (1889) from beleaguered Australian tycoon Alan Bond for an estimated \$30–\$34 million.

1992 Acquisition of Titian's vibrant painting *Venus and Adonis* (ca. 1555–60).

1993 The Getty purchases paintings by masters like J.M.W. Turner, Goya, and Rubens.

1995 The Getty Museum buys two Rembrandts: *The Abduction of Europa* (1632) and *Daniel and Cyrus Before the Idol Bel* (1633).

1996 The Getty acquires the Fleischman collection of antiquities, much of it donated.

1997 The billion-dollar Getty Center opens in L.A.

the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and, before that, New York's Metropolitan Museum—explains: "The evolution of this museum has been very rapid. It's only existed half a lifetime." The museum began in classic American fashion, as a rich man's indulgence. Founded in 1953, it was for two decades located in J. Paul Getty's Malibu ranch house. Open two afternoons a week, it featured the oil magnate's worthy collections of French furniture and Greek and Roman antiquities, and an uneven group of old-master paintings.

Faced with the need for a larger, more fitting structure to house his treasures, the imperious plutocrat ignored advisers and

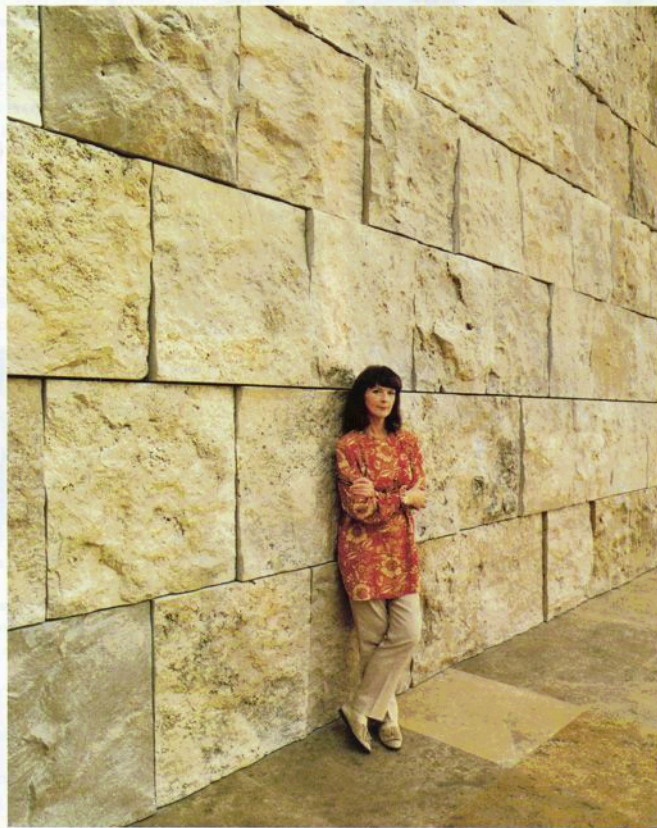
ordered a re-creation on land adjacent to his house of the Villa dei Papiri, a grand Roman country house entombed in the A.D. 79 eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Getty supervised its construction from Sutton Place, his Tudor mansion outside London. The villa, opened in 1974, was widely ridiculed as a vulgar folly, the illicit spawn of Ben Hur and Minnie Mouse. (The vilified building has since come to be appreciated as a painstaking tribute to classical architecture, a precursor of postmodernism; now closed for renovations, it will be devoted entirely to antiquities when it reopens in 2001.)

Getty spent more than \$17 million building the villa and gave it a \$55 million en-

dowment. But he never visited it and led the curators to believe there would be no more money—which made the terms of his will, revealed at his death in 1976, all the more astonishing. America's richest citizen left almost his entire estate to the museum that bore his name, a bequest worth more than one billion dollars after all the legal wrangling was done. With the 1984 sale of Getty Oil to Texaco, the endowment vaulted to a value of \$2.2 billion (now grown to \$4 billion).

At that point the Getty Trust decided to build a new facility, which would house not only its ever-expanding collections but also its recently created institutional programs under one roof. It would take 13 years and a cool \$1 billion to complete.

Gillian Wilson (below), has been curator of the Decorative Arts Department since 1971, when she was hired by J. Paul Getty himself to expand the collection. At that time it comprised about 30 objects, while today there are more than 400, including particularly fine examples of late-17th- and 18th-century French furniture.

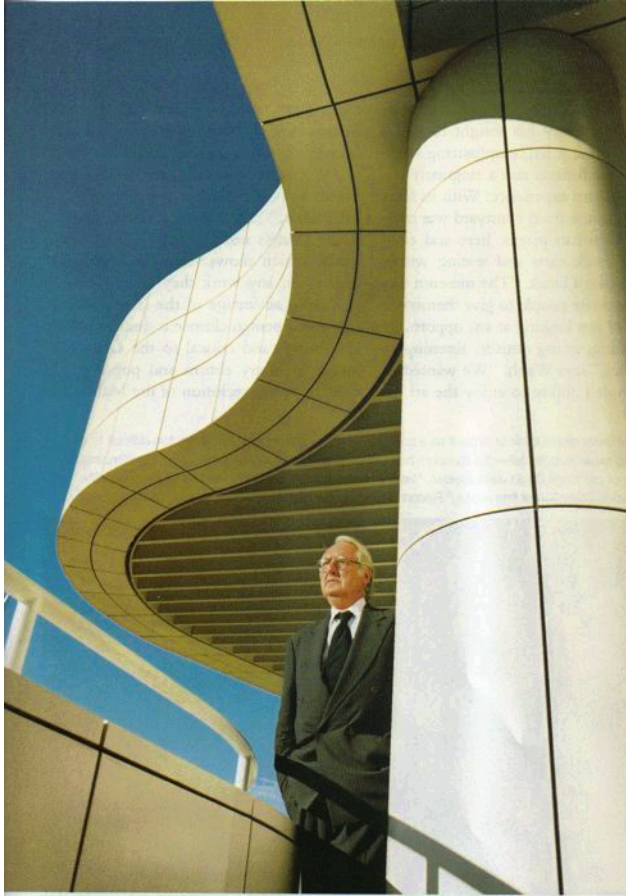


The New Getty Center

Awash in capital, the Getty took as its ultimate paradigm not the modern museum but the modern multinational corporation. It makes sense, then, that the new Getty Center—clad in crisply detailed expanses of metal, glass, and stone, vibrant in the California sunshine—looks like the headquarters of a major pharmaceutical company. Designed by eminent architect Richard Meier (See Pavilions in a Garden), it looms over the San Diego Freeway and Sunset Boulevard, a modernist citadel on a 110-acre site high above the urban fray. Arrayed around a central plaza are six buildings, almost one million square feet in total, which contain the various Getty programs and, of course, the thing most people come to see: the J. Paul Getty Museum.

"Apart from the decorative arts and some of the paintings Getty bought, almost everything people will see here has been purchased in the last fourteen years," says Walsh, nattily professorial in brown suit, striped shirt, and knit tie. "Some of the works will be on display for the first time, and all of them will be presented under ideal conditions." The director's enthusiasm for his new showplace is apparent as he escorts a visitor through the high atrium lobby, with its skylit rotunda, and out into the long central courtyard. Around it are pavilions, connected by bridges and walkways, that limn a clockwise chronology of art, from pre-Renaissance paintings in the North Pavilion to the photography galleries of the West Pavilion.

Having decided early on that it couldn't hope to match the encyclopedic collections



PAVILIONS IN A GARDEN

In 1984, when leading American architect Richard Meier (above) was chosen to design the largest fine-arts-related commission of this century, one critic predicted, "They'll end up with a big white refrigerator on top of that cliff." A refrigerator built by committee, at that, since the complicated specification included not only the Getty's still-evolving requirements but also those imposed by the politically charged site: a raw, rugged hilltop located between the über-NIMBY enclaves of Brentwood and Bel-Air. The 63-year-old Pritzker Prize-winner has designed a raft of museums—in Atlanta, Barcelona, Frankfurt, and elsewhere—and run many a bureaucratic gauntlet, but the Getty Center was a broken-field marathon. (Silver-maned now, Meier notes wryly that his hair was brown at the time he won the commission.)

The project was subject to more than 100 conditional-use permits. Early on, Meier cited Italian hill towns like Tuscany's San Gimignano as his design's inspiration, but height limitations ruled out towers and forced more of the construction below grade. Restrictions on soil removal meant that mountains of dirt had to be shifted around the site during construction. Had Meier been allowed to sheath the Getty Center in brilliant white metal panels—his favored architectural cladding—it might not have suggested a refrigerator so much as an enormous ocean liner left high and dry by a tsunami. The local gentry, however, felt that the Center's proposed exterior would generate too much glare, so Meier settled for ivory ones and acres of tawny, rough-cut travertine. "The travertine is the color of the soil here—it connects the buildings to the earth," he observes. "The workmen put the stones

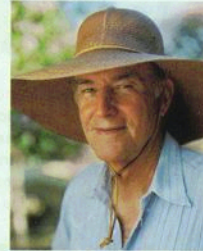
with the most interesting fossils lower, where they can be seen."

A white tram carries visitors from the 1,200-car parking garage at the bottom of the hill up to the central plaza, which had to be big enough to accommodate fire engines. The plaza is the hub of a so-called campus—distinct but interrelated buildings that house the J. Paul Getty Museum, the various Getty institutes, offices for the Getty Trust, a 450-seat auditorium, and a 650-seat restaurant-café. To temper the Center's daunting mass, Meier says he "pulled apart" volumes and juxtaposed large- and small-scale spaces inside and out, mixing galleries and soaring atrium spaces, courtyards grand and intimate. "The museum pavilions are based on the same cubic volume, manipulated and pared away differently in each one," explains the architect. "Most museums are hermetically sealed, but the climate here allowed us to make the outside part of the experience, so you move in and out of the pavilions, in a sort of syncopation."

The Center's buildings are united by Meier's modernist vocabulary and by shared materials: 2.5-foot-square enameled metal panels, travertine, glass, glass block, pipe railings. A broad stone staircase bordered by a watercourse, a piano-curve facade, and a cantilevered overhang announce the museum entrance with suitable fanfare. The most coherent building is the Research Institute, a doughnut with a bite out of it, containing a 750,000-volume library. Meier has been praised for forging architectural harmony and a balance of solidity and airiness from a brief book the size of an L.A. phone directory. But the ensemble has also been criticized as overdesigned, and lacking any overarching element. "There probably can't be a single iconographic image for the Center because it's such a large, complex institution," he insists.

Meier admits to being no fan of French architect Thierry Despont, calling his style "recherché." Despont, whose clients include Calvin Klein and Bill Gates, was hired to design richly colored gallery interiors—a decision critic Martin Filler described as "an astonishing loss of nerve." For nonpurists, the gussied-up galleries successfully mediate between premodern art and modernist architecture, just as the 3,000 row-planted oaks on the surrounding slopes smooth the transition between chaparral and the buildings' gridded order.

Key to the Getty Center's appeal is Meier's pavilions-in-a-garden concept, which takes numerous forms: flower-trimmed lawns, steel arbors bearing wisteria and climbing roses, hardscape shaded by trees and cooled by fountains, and a cactus garden. Architecture aside, the Getty's largest work of art is the 134,000-square-foot garden created by artist Robert Irwin (right)—another choice initially protested by Meier.



"It's a site-generated work that will engage all the senses," Irwin says. A zigzagging path descends through a grove of London plane trees—planted geometrically, in deference to the architecture—and around a sort of terraced floral amphitheater encircled by crape myrtles, its focus an azalea maze set in a pool. The stream that runs through the upper grove cascades into the amphitheater over a granite wall flanked by retaining walls of Cor-Ten steel. Working with a palette of more than 500 species of plants, Irwin has orchestrated pattern and texture, color and fragrance. "This will be one of the great gardens of the world," he says. "It will change constantly, from lushness in summer to a sculptural quality in winter, when the trees shed their leaves."

Rather than overdesigned, Meier says the Getty acropolis is, if anything, overengineered. Seismic considerations resulted in larger-than-usual structural columns and window mullions and beefed-up steel-frame connections. Pointing to an adjacent slope, the architect says, "All of that hill could disappear, and the Getty Center would still be standing."

**HIGH-PROFILE WORKS
AT THE GETTY MUSEUM**

Still Life with Apples 1893-94, Paul Cézanne. A monumental, richly observed still life, from the later oeuvre of the pioneering Post-Impressionist.



Apollo 1781-82, Antonio Canova. Inspired by a scene from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, this is the first neoclassical sculpture by the influential sculptor who championed that style's idealized virtues.



The Holy Family with the Infant Saint John the Baptist ca. 1530, Michelangelo. The hand of one of the supreme masters is powerfully revealed in this superb chalk-and-ink rendering with pentimenti.



Cabinet on Stand ca. 1675-80, attributed to André-Charles Boulle. Heroic figures support an extravaganza of rare veneers and ornate marquetry glorifying the victories of Louis XIV.



Prayer Book of Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg ca. 1525-30. Comprising 41 full-page miniatures—colorful scenes from the life of Christ by Flemish illuminator Simon Bening—this manuscript is a high-water mark in German Romanesque art.



Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait 1923, Alfred Stieglitz. This image of the artist who was Stieglitz's lover and muse is one of more than 325 photos he made of her.

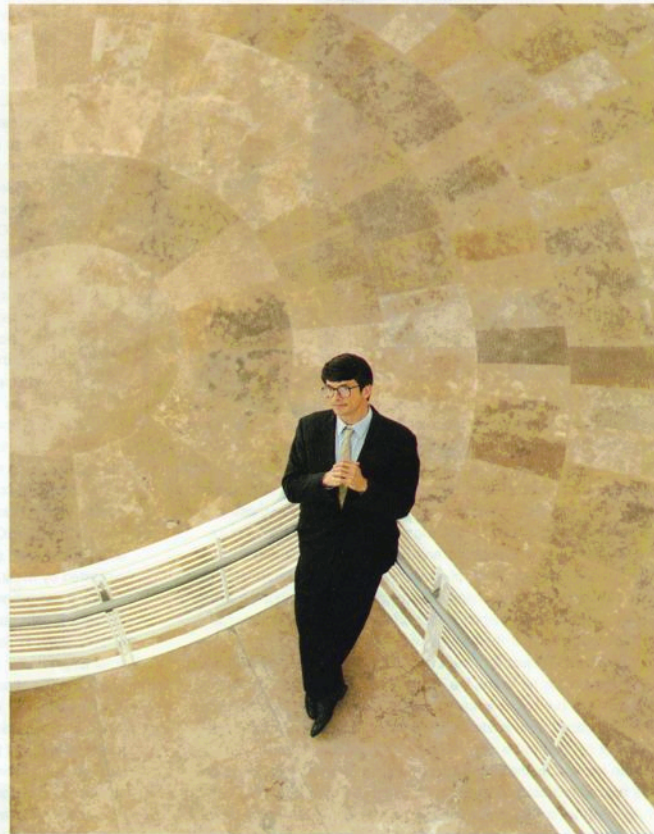


of the great old American and European museums, the Getty has sought to make the most of what it has, emphasizing state-of-the-art installations and a singularly rewarding museum experience. With its trees and fountains, the main courtyard was conceived as an urban piazza; here and elsewhere are snack carts and seating where visitors can take a break. "The museum was designed to invite people to give themselves interludes of not looking at art, opportunities for resting, going outside, listening to the fountains," says Walsh. "We wanted to stretch people's ability to enjoy the art, to

make them more receptive." Three information centers, featuring docents and user-friendly computer stations, reflect the director's view that "great objects can take your breath away but don't necessarily speak for themselves." (The next best thing, it seems, is the Getty's nonlinear, CD-based audio guide, which allows visitors to hear information on any work they select.)

Taking advantage of the latest technology and a benign climate is quintessentially Californian and critical to the Getty's attempt to marry elitism and populism. In contrast to the seclusion of the Malibu vil-

While J. Paul Getty didn't think of himself as a collector of paintings—good ones were too difficult to acquire and too expensive, he felt—the museum has expanded his collection substantially, transforming it, says curator of paintings David Jaffé (below), "from a relatively small personal holding to a moderately sized but choice collection of fine works." Recent acquisitions include an important Poussin landscape.





Weston Naef, curator of photographs (above)—shown with one of his prize acquisitions, Julia Margaret Cameron's *The Angel at the Tomb* (1869)—came to the Getty Museum in 1984 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Almost immediately he acquired a number of outstanding private collections, virtually overnight creating a world-class photography department that now holds some 60,000 images.

la, the new museum is its own billboard, visible to the multitudes motoring on the freeway below (who won't be able to just drop in, however: Parking reservations are required). After ascending in a Disney-like tram, visitors may experience the artful acropolis and its Olympian diversions as a kind of high-culture theme park (call it Gettyworld). "We hope to attract people who have never thought to come to the Getty, or even to any art museum," declares Walsh. "They'll have a great time in the galleries, but if they don't care about art, they'll enjoy being in the gardens and looking at the views." The latter, which encompass a hawk's-eye panorama from Mount San Geronio to Catalina Island, may offer the best argument against critics who

insist that the Getty should have claimed a patch of the urban crazyquilt below.

Few will find fault with the sumptuous galleries. "Their function is to flatter the works of art, to put them in the best light, literally and figuratively," says Walsh. "Before any design had been put on paper, Richard and I went to the world's greatest daylighted galleries, like England's Dulwich College Picture Gallery and the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. We found that all of them used a combination of rectangular galleries capped by a high, coved ceiling, topped by a skylight." The Getty's lanternlike skylights are crowned by computer-controlled metal louvers that adjust throughout the day to the sun's changing position, diffusing and deflecting its rays.

(Only at dusk does daylight-colored electric lighting come on, almost imperceptibly.) "Daylight is what painters used in their studios, and it provides a correctness and a vibrancy that electric light doesn't," Walsh explains.

One of the galleries was completed early and used to test lighting, details, and materials. Wall surfaces were chosen to complement the artworks. The gray-pigmented plaster in galleries devoted to Renaissance bronzes and Early Renaissance Italian paintings is "light enough so the gilded panels don't look dingy," notes paintings curator David Jaffé. Florentine and Venetian Renaissance works like Titian's *Venus and Adonis* hang against fabric of a rich red traditionally used as a background for 16th-century paintings. Olive-green fabric sets off Italian Baroque canvases, while photography is shown against walls of brownish-gray.

Meier was reportedly chagrined that another architect, (continued on page 273)

Edifice Complex

(continued from page 223)

Thierry Despont, was hired to design the gallery interiors, but the result serves the works well, particularly in the 14 galleries of chiefly French decorative arts. Traditional architectural detailing and silk wall fabrics custom-woven in France set the stage for a superb collection of furniture, porcelains, tapestries, and other *ancien régime* trappings. Gillian Wilson—curator of Decorative Arts and the only remaining curator to have worked with Getty himself—has overseen the growth of this collection from 30 objects to more than 400, of which 95 percent will be on view. At the end of the 90-foot-long great hall—designed, explains Wilson, “so wherever you look you see something fabulous”—is a *Régence bibliothèque* originally installed in a house on the Place Vendôme. Of four period paneled rooms, this one and a salon designed by Ledoux (redolent of courtly repartee and seduction) have never been exhibited. One gallery that showcases porcelains could be dubbed “Sèvres heaven”; in another, pieces made by André-Charles Boulle dazzle the eye. Overall, the decorative arts galleries constitute a virtual 18th-century time machine.

For the first time the Getty has galleries devoted solely to sculpture. Over the last 15 years, curator Peter Fusco has assembled a choice group of Renaissance bronzes as well as Baroque and neoclassical sculptures, the latter displayed on antique pedestals and socles, as was once common. Most striking is a lofty, two-storey high gallery that evokes a sculptor’s atelier with a variety of terra-cotta models placed on a workbench and modeling stands at the center of the room.

The exhibition space for photography has more than doubled, with two medium-size galleries and a more intimate cabinet gallery primarily to show works such as daguerreotypes and illustrated books. Photography curator Weston Naef is particularly excited about the spacious study room, where scholars and nonspecialists alike can explore the holdings by appointment. “We have a very international collection that starts with the invention of photography,” he notes. “Many people don’t realize that we lend photographs to other institutions for exhibition, and that we’ve received significant donations, including collections of work by Max Yavno and George Hurrell.”

FATHER AND SON

The world knew J. Paul Getty as a penny-pinching billionaire with the face of an undertaker, but he was also a cultivated man of the world who in his day socialized with Charlie Chaplin, Cecil B. De Mille, Cary Grant, and other luminaries. Born in 1892 in Minneapolis, Getty studied at Oxford and traveled widely in Europe before he was persuaded to enter the family oil business. Making his mark in the rough-and-tumble oilfields of Oklahoma, he was a millionaire by the age of 23. By gambling big and winning—first in a hard-fought takeover of the much larger Tide Water oil company in the 1930s, later with a potentially ruinous bid for Saudi Arabian oil rights—Getty created a global enterprise uniting oil wells and refineries, tankers and service stations. For much of his life he conducted his affairs from various European hotel rooms, with nothing but a telephone, a shoebox of papers, and his razor-sharp business acumen.

In love as in business, Getty was a lone wolf. Married five times, he was a compulsive philanderer, as well as a hypochondriac who feared flying and fires. In 1957, after *Fortune* magazine touted him as the richest American, Getty settled in Sutton Place, a Tudor mansion in Surrey where Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn had trysted. He equipped it with warring mistresses and a pay phone. Although he had a keen, decades-long interest in art, his purchases were determined more by price than by passion. The canny collector focused on undervalued categories like antiquities and decorative arts, generally shunning major paintings, which seemed to him overpriced (but available then for a fraction of their price today).

No one ever accused Getty of being a sentimental fool—“The meek shall inherit the Earth,” he once declared, “but not the mineral rights”—and he proved a cold, distant father, blamed with sowing dysfunction among his heirs. Victims of the so-called Getty curse include his sons George, who committed suicide, and J. Paul Getty II, who was addicted to heroin for almost 20 years (and whose own son, J. Paul Getty III, not only lost an ear when Italian gangsters kidnapped him in the 1970s but also suffered a crippling drug-and-alcohol-induced coma). A longtime adoptive Englishman with a passion for rare books and cricket—a sport Mick Jagger introduced him to—J. Paul Getty II inherited \$750 million in 1984, making him the sixth-richest man in Britain. Shortly after, he unexpectedly gave \$750,000 to the Manchester Art Gallery specifically to save a small Duccio from being bought by the Getty Museum. “I’m fed up with everything streaming to Malibu,” he said. “It’s about time someone stopped it.” Many speculated that he was getting even with the ghost of his father or San Francisco-based brother, Gordon—a Getty Museum trustee—from whom he was estranged.

In 1985 Getty got serious. He gave Britain’s National Gallery \$75 million to create an endowment fund for the acquisition of paintings, particularly those works of art that might otherwise go abroad—quite possibly to the museum founded by his father. Now worth well over \$100 million, the endowment has been instrumental in the purchase of nine major paintings, mainly old masters. (Among Getty’s other philanthropic efforts: a one-million-pound contribution that was essential in keeping Canova’s statue *The Three Graces* in Britain—and out of the Getty Museum.)

Getty’s inheritance arrived at a moment of acute crisis in his personal life, as he entered a London drug-rehabilitation clinic for what was of necessity a lengthy stay. It was there, sitting on the edge of his bed, that the onetime hippie received a visit from then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who thanked him personally for his generosity. But an even greater show of thanks awaited him: In 1986 Getty was knighted by the queen in Buckingham Palace. The investiture, a sign of acceptance from the normally America-phobic British establishment, was the first time the reclusive Getty had appeared at a public event since a London memorial service for his father in 1976.

Encouraging donations (the most prominent to date: the prize Fleischman Collection of antiquities) is just one way in which the Getty is coming to resemble other museums. In addition, it now has space for temporary exhibitions. The first, titled *Beyond Beauty: Antiquities as Evidence*, will per-

mit some antiquities to be seen while the Malibu villa is being renovated. The temporary-installation galleries may even show works from other institutions says Walsh, “but not touring spectacles—we don’t have to make the turnstiles spin.” And with the acquisitions budget report

LESSER-KNOWN GEMS AT THE GETTY MUSEUM



Head of Christ ca. 1530, Correggio (Antonio Allegri). When he depicted the miraculous image of Christ on Saint Veronica's veil, after the relic disappeared some said the artist was trying to outdo God.

An Athlete ca. 1845, John Adamson. Through the use of artful illusion, this work transcends the stasis of early photographic portraits, becoming the first photographic image to depict someone in motion.



Mercury 1570-80, Johann Gregor van der Schardt. This exemplary late-Renaissance bronze embodies the Mannerist style prevalent in European courts in the second half of the 16th century.

Six Tapestries from The Story of the Emperor of China series ca. 1690-1705. Made in Beauvais for the Comte de Toulouse, bastard son of Louis XIV, these tapestries are being shown for the first time since their acquisition in 1983.



Le Chat, or The Cat at the Window ca. 1857-58, Jean-François Millet. The artist displays his deft draftsmanship in this dreamlike illustration of a La Fontaine fable.

Concerning the Fates of Illustrious Men and Women ca. 1415, Boucicaut Master and his workshop. These illuminations of Boccaccio's cautionary tales are by the preeminent Parisian painter of the period (on view for the first time in the opening exhibition).



edly reined in to allow for the increased cost of operating the Getty, curators must make a strong case for the objects they desire, competing for funds through the "beauty-contest" process that's the norm at less wealthy museums. But if the Getty is becoming more like other museums, many of them are becoming more like it, adopting interactive information stations and other high-tech Getty features.

The Getty and the Art Market

When the Getty received its colossal windfall, the art world trembled with fear, expecting it would drive prices through the roof and plunder the patrimony of Europe. J. Paul Getty was perceived as ungenerous, grasping, and ruthless; it was as if these traits had been transferred to the museum along with his millions. In the early 1980s, when the money started flowing into its coffers, the Getty Museum began a series of dramatic, multimillion-dollar acquisitions that continues today. Far from blitzing the art market, however, the museum has shown a shrewdness and sense of proportion that its founder would have applauded.

It ventured into entirely new categories of art by discreetly snapping up stellar private collections; such *en bloc* acquisitions typically made big splashes without swamping the market. In 1983 the Getty bought the 160-piece Ludwig Collection, gaining an outstanding group of illuminated manuscripts, surpassed in this country only by those of New York's Pierpont Morgan Library and Baltimore's Walters Art Gallery. The cream of London dealer Reiner Zeitz's holdings became the core of the Getty's collection of Renaissance majolica second only to that of the Metropolitan Museum. With characteristic secrecy, the Getty used New York-dealer Daniel Wolf to broker the 1984 purchase, for almost \$20 million, of more than six important photography collections, which in one fell swoop gave it a world-class collection of some 50,000 images (now 60,000).

A red-chalk study by Rembrandt bought in 1981 launched the museum's drawings collection, which now numbers some 400 works by artists such as Dürer, Holbein, Raphael, Watteau, and Cézanne. George Goldner, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was the curator responsible for acquiring most of the drawings as well as several paintings. "I always felt you should buy the best things, or you shouldn't bother,"

he says, scoffing at concerns about Getty's effect on the market. "It's not like you're taking food from the mouths of a beggar's children. It's a rich museum competing with rich people. An inflationary impact was inevitable and to our advantage. It eliminated competitors and drew more things to the museum."

"They have first refusal on almost anything they are interested in," says art critic Hilton Kramer. "It's hard to pinpoint whether any particular price was higher because of the Getty, but their presence certainly hasn't depressed prices. It's rather like having a well-behaved elephant in your living room." Still the '80s boom in art prices had less to do with the Getty's deep pockets than with an infusion of wealthy collectors from Japan and elsewhere, and the acceptance of art as a bankable asset. The consensus is that when the Getty wants something, it goes after it tenaciously, but not at any cost. ("There's no particular heroism in outbidding someone into the stratosphere," observes Jaffé.) "They've played it very cannily," says the noted English journalist Peter Watson, who tracks the international art market. "They haven't thrown their money around, haven't bought a lot of the very expensive things. The Getty is no longer the brash upstart. It's won respect for its acquisitions."

"They're very businesslike, not at all stuffy, but bloody hard negotiators," confirms London antiques dealer John Hobbes. (Among the objects he's sold the museum is a lavish 18th-century marble table he discovered in a used-furniture shop in Dallas; it will be exhibited for the first time in the neoclassical sculpture gallery.)

At the time of Getty's death, connoisseurs tended to dismiss the museum's paintings as a "study collection," with few first-rate works (among them, Van Dyck's *Portrait of Agostino Pallavicini* and Rembrandt's *Saint Bartholomew*). In the intervening years, the Getty has sold off lesser paintings and acquired important, big-ticket ones by Correggio, Mantegna, Titian, David, Manet, and others. In 1990 it scooped up van Gogh's *Irises* at a distress-sale discount, paying perhaps \$20 million less than the record \$53.9 million it had fetched in 1987 (see *Two Hits and a Miss*). More recent coups include a late Cézanne still life (for a reported \$25 million) and a High Renaissance masterpiece by Fra Bartolommeo, *The Holy Family with the Infant St. John* (\$22.5 million).

COURTESY J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES (6)

TWO HITS AND A MISS

The Getty Museum, the world's richest art institution, doesn't always get what it wants.

VAN GOGH Painted in 1889, while he was confined in the asylum at Saint-Rémy, *Irises* (left)



is a renowned example of the soulful vibrancy of the art Vincent van Gogh produced near the end of his turbulent life. It was selected by his brother Theo to be exhibited (with *Starry Night*) at the Salon des Indépendants in September of that year. A century later, the painting became the emblem of a red-hot art market when Australian mogul Alan Bond paid \$53.9 million for it at a 1987 auction in New York (still the highest price ever paid for a work of art). It was later revealed that Sotheby's had lent him half the purchase price. By 1990 the global economic tide had turned and Bond, \$5 billion in debt, had no choice but to sell *Irises*. The Getty quietly stepped in, acquiring what is perhaps the most famous painting in its collection for an undisclosed price (estimated at \$30–\$34 million).

REMBRANDT One of Rembrandt's relative handful of mythological paintings, *The Abduction of Europa* (1632; below) is a luminous depiction of the famous story in which Zeus, disguised



as a white bull, spirits Princess Europa away to the continent that will bear her name. A potent evocation of the dramatic moment, the smallish panel painting reveals the 26-year-old master in full command of his talent. Owned by New York-collector Paul Klotz and on loan to the Metropolitan Museum for more than a decade, it was called the most sought-after privately owned old-master painting in America (the Getty first made a run at it in

1976). After Klotz's death in 1993, the museum was able to purchase the work from his estate for a price estimated at between \$25 and \$40 million when art consultants advised the executors that a negotiated sale would reap a larger amount than an auction.

CANOVA *The Three Graces*—a trio of life-size female nudes carved in marble by the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, and a touchstone of neoclassicism—was the object of a long and ultimately fruitless attempt at acquisition by the Getty. In what director Walsh has termed "a sorry saga," the museum offered to buy the statue in 1989 for \$11.8 million from a Cayman Islands company that owned it, only to have the British government delay an export license repeatedly, until a consortium of British museums and private donors (including Anglophile J. Paul Getty II) was able to match the price. As the standard six-month waiting period stretched to five years, the British press assailed the government for playing fast and loose with its own rules in order to hold on to a sculpture it could have acquired from the previous owner a decade earlier in lieu of \$2 million in back taxes. The Getty lost the prize but won the public-relations war.



Where the necessary degree of diplomacy involved in acquiring art abroad is concerned, few museums approach the well-financed scope of the Getty's corporate-multinational model. Harold Williams, longtime president and CEO of the Getty Trust, cites a 1983 example: "Before *The Gospels of Henry the Lion* went to auction in Germany, John Walsh and I met with Herman Abst, the then-chairman of the Deutsche Bank, and told him we wanted it, but wouldn't bid against them if they were sure they had the resources to acquire it." The stunning illuminated manuscript was bought by the German government for \$11.3 million—then the highest price ever paid for a work

of art. (It might well have gone higher if the Getty had weighed in.) With a smile, Williams points to a black case resting on a shelf near his desk and says, "The Germans presented us with a facsimile of it." Like oil deposits and airport landing rights, works of art are seen as national assets—especially in Britain, which has routinely held up export licenses while British buyers attempt to raise funds to match Getty bids. (Ironically, one of the main angels in such efforts is J. Paul Getty II, the Anglophile son of the museum's founder, who has been knighted for his trouble. See *Father and Son*.) Nonetheless, in the last four years, the Getty Museum has spent \$80 million

on works of art from Britain for which export licenses were deferred and then granted, representing 70 percent (by value) of all such works for the period.

The Invisible Getty

Under Harold Williams—former head of the Securities and Exchange Commission, corporate player par excellence—the non-profit Getty Trust has applied classic for-profit strategies: diversifying, investing in R&D, leveraging resources, seeking outside funding, even spinning off assets (to say nothing of practicing astute investment management). But it has been by encouraging its major programs to function like corporate divisions with a global reach that the Getty has had its most profound effect.

J. Paul Getty's will stipulated only that his bequest be used "for the diffusion of artistic and general knowledge." Under this mandate in 1982 the Getty Trust instituted six major art-related programs independent of the Getty Museum: the Getty Conservation Institute, the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, the Getty Education Institute for the Arts, the Getty Grant Program, the Getty Information Institute, and the Getty Leadership Institute for Museum Management.

Several of these programs have had a global impact. The Conservation Institute is committed to the preservation of the world's cultural heritage and has been shoring up crumbling sites of civilization from Buddhist grottoes in China to 3.5 million-year-old hominid footprints in Tanzania, while the Grant Program has funded projects in more than 135 countries, making it a routine necessity for the Getty Trust to deal with multinational concerns such as exchange rates, governmental relations, and restrictions on overseas investment.

If the ballooning of the Getty's capital and clout since the early '80s alone isn't enough to qualify it as the Microsoft of the art world, then there's the wealth of digitized art data made available online and via CD-ROM by the Getty Information Institute. Getting up to cyberspeed is just one area in which Getty programs aid other museums—a good thing, too, since none of them can match the Trust's resources. For example, the museum's acquisitions budget—the lion's share of an overall collections budget that totaled \$110 million in 1996—is not made public, but it dwarfs the purchasing power of other museums

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(the Metropolitan Museum spends less than \$10 million on art annually, the Art Institute of Chicago, slightly more). Required by U.S. tax law to spend 4.25 percent (currently \$170 million) of the market value of its endowment three out of every four years each year the Getty Trust has exceeded this amount each year.

A polished, avuncular presence, Williams apologizes for speaking softly after a larynx-straining day of meetings, while giving the impression of one so accustomed to wielding power that he never needs to raise his voice. Interestingly, he states that the Getty Trust's diversification wasn't simply a result of fears that all those millions would have played havoc with the art market. "We could have spent all the money on art, for example, by expanding into other areas of collecting," he avows. "But we felt we had a responsibility to make a difference in the visual arts, to do more than just collect art." Williams adds that the Getty's programs have evolved to become more effective, citing the Education Institute's shift from theory and practice to influencing public policy, and the vastly expanded agenda of the conservation program, which began by concentrating on museum objects. "We've developed experience and credibility and become accepted as doers and collaborators," he observes. "As a consequence, we're able to be much more of a catalyst in key areas."

In 1995 archeologists, museum professionals, and government officials representing every Mediterranean country except Libya attended a shipboard conservation conference sponsored by the Getty Conservation Institute and the museum. "This is probably the only institution that could have hosted something like that," says Williams. Less dramatic are the Getty Information Institute's efforts to create comprehensive art-related databases, which after long gestation are bearing fruit, with a boost from the Internet. Overcoming a certain coals-to-Newcastle resistance, the Getty has received outside funding—for instance, from foreign governments for conservation projects abroad, and from the Annenberg Foundation for a Getty Education Institute art-education program in American schools. And Williams, who's retiring at the end of this year, has said the museum itself may one day resort to conventional fundraising.

Hilton Kramer is not alone in noting that Getty Trust programs have bought a lot of

goodwill—in effect, quelling criticism with cash. The Getty Research Institute has underwritten fellowships for dozens of visiting scholars, while the Getty Grant Program has funded a wide range of arts-related projects. Where Getty supporters see innovative programs that serve art in many ways, others see waste and bureaucracy, and a hugely extravagant building whose upkeep will cost dearly. The Getty's edifice complex, they say, has resulted in limits both financial and physical, since expanding the hilltop Center will be all but impossible. "It's *not* a corporation," fumes one well-placed critic, speaking on the condition that he remain unidentified. "They made a decision to build a *good* museum with many programs instead of a *great* museum with fewer programs. It was a historical error. They were the last museum with the chance to build a great collection. You don't go to a museum for the building."

"The Getty Center is a monument to Williams, Walsh, and Meier," grumbles another observer. Maybe so, but more important, it's a monument to high culture in a city still widely, if erroneously, perceived as lacking in it. The multicultural capital of pop has a proudly Eurocentric new palace of fine art, a spectacular showplace for collections that many visitors will be viewing for the first time. Few of them will be aware of the impact that the Getty billions are having on art far beyond its walls, which may yet be J. Paul Getty's greatest legacy. To the museum's traditional role as a stately zoo preserving rare works of art, the Getty adds an ecological imperative—going out into the wild to save threatened art where it lives. Rather than pillage Europe's private treasures, the Getty conspires to digitize the art world and enhance the study of culture. Its critics have a point, but outgoing chairman Williams insists that time will tell in the Getty's favor. "The Getty Center is not an end," he declares. "It's a beginning." ■

JEFF BOOK, BASED IN L.A., FREQUENTLY WRITES ON ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN. *The Getty Center opens December 16, 1997. Admission is free, but there is a \$5 fee for parking. Advance parking reservations are required and will be taken beginning this fall. Hours: Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Tuesday and Wednesday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.; Thursday and Friday 11 a.m.–9 p.m. The Center is closed on Monday and on major holidays. For reservations and information, call 310-440-7300.*