

TRAVEL

L.A.'s Getty Museum is great place to view art, city

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE  
SPECIAL WRITER

For some months, we had planned a trip to California around two major themes: taking a couple of days to drive with our San Francisco-based daughter south on U.S. 1 to Los Angeles, and, once in L.A., visiting the new Getty Center.

But a week before we got hit with a double whammy.

Our daughter called to report that El Nino had washed out the most scenic part of Route 1 — south of Carmel to San Simeon.

And the New York Times served warning that at the Getty — "the hottest cultural attraction in the nation" — restrooms were few and far between. In fact, according to the Times, just two of the nine sets of restrooms are in the museum proper.

Next week I will detail our derailed drive along the coast. Meanwhile, let me assure you that with a little planning "getting to the Getty" and "going at the Getty" both can be handily accomplished.

Ads run in the Los Angeles papers urging residents to "look ahead, plan ahead, call ahead ... and visit the Getty a little later." Yes, they admittedly have been overwhelmed by the number of visitors flooding their gates since the high-profile complex opened in December.

Parking reservations are a necessity. They are your own guarantee of getting into the museum proper. But our experience was that if you go on a

**What: The Getty Center**  
**Where: Los Angeles**  
**Museum hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday and Sunday; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday; and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Thursday and Friday.**  
**Closed Mondays and major holidays.**  
**Admission: Free, but may be denied to those without a parking pass when more than 5,000 visitors are on site.**  
**Parking: By reservation only, \$5 charge.**  
**Information: (310) 440-7300**

weekend and arrive well ahead of the museum's 11 a.m. opening — by either car, bus or bike (there are bike racks) — you won't encounter lines at the Pacific Ocean, the San Gabriel Mountains and the Los Angeles street-scapes.

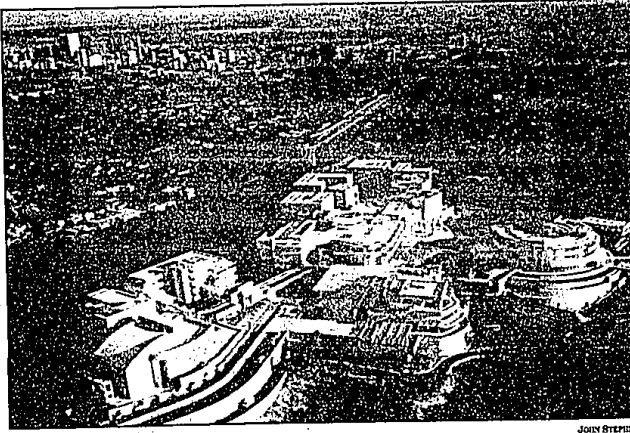
We, in fact, had a parking reservation for 9 a.m. The early hour allowed us to zero in on a rest room, which — as we were warned — was small and tucked into an out of the way spot. But once you know where it is, you just factor it into your museum-going (pun intended).

Also, if you are planning to eat at the Getty Center restaurant, you should make a reservation as soon as you arrive. Even if you choose to eat at any of the numerous carts offering drinks and light refreshments, stop into the restaurant to see the intriguing artwork which spans several walls by L.A. collagist Alexis Smith. Entitled "Taste," it explores images associated with the word "taste" and its definitions — from culinary to nesthetic.

An important part of our Getty experience was that 9-10 a.m. hour we spent in the 134,000-square-foot Central Garden, the site-specific work of artist Robert Irwin. My husband, daughter and I were the only visitors along with a couple of gardeners. In the quiet of the morning, the gurgling sound of water, as it streamed downward along a mosaic-tiled river-bed toward the heart of the garden, where it cascaded over a stone waterfall and into an azalea pool, seemed as important to this three-acre garden as its more than 500 varieties of plants and trees.

And we were completely dazzled as the six low-lying Getty Center buildings, designed by American architect Richard Meier and constructed of 1.2 million square feet of beige-colored, cloth-cut, Italian travertine stone, caught the bright morning sunlight. I don't know of another city where the light is such an incredible factor. If you leave even the smallest smidgen of space between your draperies, the resulting razor-thin ray of sunlight will light up your entire hotel room.

The use of that light is key to the outside architecture and the inside design of the Getty Center. Travertine panels cover not only the retaining walls and bases of all buildings, but also serve as paving stones for the arrival plaza and museum courtyard, as well as on indoor walls in transitional spaces between galleries. Sky lights and other glass elements allow the California sunshine to light the interiors. The galleries on the museum's upper level are all naturally lit, using computer-assisted louvers and shades to adjust the intensity and quality of light.



Sky high: The Getty Museum sits on a hill overlooking Los Angeles.

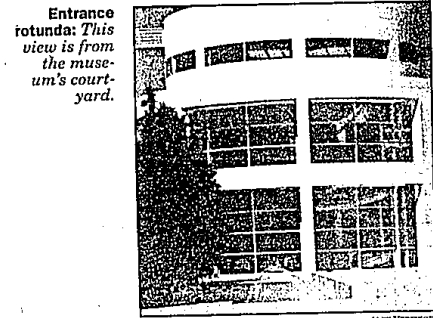
At the Getty Center, the light is such an incredible factor. If you leave even the smallest smidgen of space between your draperies, the resulting razor-thin ray of sunlight will light up your entire hotel room.

Major collections of paintings and decorative arts take up most of the permanent exhibition space. The paintings are displayed on walls of muted color, rather than the usual museum white. And each decorative arts gallery resembles an actual room, with the walls lined in rich fabrics appropriate to the furnishings.

The adjacent Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities has a small space for rotating exhibits, including photography. We were enchanted by the current exhibition of photographs taken by Europeans working in the Ottoman Empire. From July 28 to Oct. 25, the space will be devoted to the photography of three artists whose work examines the Alameda Corridor, an area south of downtown Los Angeles.

It's been 15 years since I spent any time in Los Angeles. I had no real desire to go back until the Getty opened. It's ample reason to return.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. Now that she has time to travel, she is a frequent contributor to this section.



Entrance rotunda: This view is from the museum's courtyard.

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