I have been driving Southern California’s 405 freeway for the past 15 years, and in that time, I have seen a monument being built. It looked as if a castle for a monarchy was being created.

The new $1 billion Getty Center is Los Angeles’ newest landmark Los Angeles Times Magazine calls it a “shining city on a hill,” and Architecture magazine says it is one of “the most important cultural commissions of our era.” The center is comprised of several exquisite areas:

- After parking your car in the 1,200-space garage, you take the tram to the top of the hill, the Arrival Plaza, where the museum is perched.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum, which opens into a glass-walled rotunda and houses pre-20th century European art and photography.

- The 134,000-square-foot Central Garden.
- The horseshoe-shaped Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, which includes an 800,000-volume library, 2 million study photographs of works of art and other archival collections.
- A full-service restaurant and cafe.
- The 450-seat auditorium.
- The T-shaped North Building, which houses administrative offices.
- The East Building, which overlooks the 405 freeway.

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At the end of November 1997, the Getty Center hosted a reception for those who had participated in the construction of this 15-year project. Because Nathan Kimmel’s green tarps were hung around different buildings under construction, I was invited to attend.

The horseshoe-shaped Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities includes an 800,000-volume library, 2 million study photographs of works of art and other archival collections.

At the reception, mannequins wore the clothing of most of the companies that participated in the construction of the museum. Dressed in their company T-shirts, hard hats, safety vests and other work paraphernalia, they honored those people responsible for designing, creating and building this great complex.
The fireproofing, drywall, lath and plastering were done mostly by a joint venture of Raymond Interior Systems North of Concord, Calif., and Martin Bros.-Marcowall, Inc. of Gardena, Calif. Other Southern California companies that worked on the Getty Center included Berger Bros., Inc. of Azusa and Anning-Johnson Company of Hayward, to name just a few. In several of the main galleries, Ora Hopper Co. of Arizona created a system that made a splendid wall surface for displaying certain works of art. Eddie Carrillo of Southern California did the actual work.

In touring the complex, I was very impressed by the huge walls of
travertine from Bagni di Tivoli in Italy, where stone deposits 300 feet thick have been quarried for more than 2,000 years. An automated guillotine system developed for the Getty Center project split blocks of travertine on their fault lines.

An automated guillotine system developed for the Getty Center project split blocks of travertine on their fault lines. Nearly 300,000 pieces of travertine were installed.

Nearly 300,000 pieces of travertine were installed as either building cladding or paving. Stone is used for retaining walls and all the buildings’ bases, and repetitive metal is used for the upper stories and curvilinear elements.

Upon entering the main museum, you will find artwork from pre-1600 artwork to the present from various countries. The floors throughout the complex are mostly wooden parquet, the travertine graces the stairs. The old and new join together in an elegant yet peaceful manner.

About the Author
Carol Kimmel-Schary is president of Nathan Kimmel Co., Los Angeles.