

# The Architecture Traveler

A Guide to 263 Key American Buildings

REVISED EDITION

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**WAKEFIELD HOUSE, 1997**64 Wakefield  
Atlanta, Georgia*Scogin Elam and Bray*

A visit to the galleries of Atlanta's High Museum, where Scogin Elam and Bray designed the installation for the permanent collection, conveys how it feels to be in this house—all movement so effortlessly choreographed it's like gliding. The rooms of the house dissolve into a series of spaces that Mack Scogin refers to as "situations." The few interior walls exist as pure planes, as in the museum displays. The furnishings underscore the exhibit-like quality. In the almost-bare interiors, practically every piece of furniture is a work of art.

From the street, the Wakefield house also resembles a gallery. Its main façade consists of a concrete shell inset with large glass panels. The clear glass on the first floor reveals the interior with astonishing candor, since the residence sits near the street, across from a busy but beautiful neighborhood park. (Its inspired transparency was also displayed in the "Un-Private House" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1999.) The upper level is more private. A low balcony wall of opaque glass spans the front of the house; it shields the bedroom, the lap pool beside it, and an outdoor terrace.

The pool desired by the owners became the design's organizing principle. The new house had to follow the outline of their former dwelling, which was damaged by hurricane, so the architects decided to raise the pool to the second story. This inspired innovation not only solved the spatial dilemma but also allowed the architects to design the pool as yet another art object in a gallery-like house. The long, narrow pool seems to float between the clear-glass-walled bedroom and the frosted-glass balcony wall. Perched in the treetops, the bedroom and pool levitate together in a leafy paradise.

The see-through house is a hold exception in Brookwood, an idyllic enclave of traditional brick houses, gently winding streets, and luxuriant trees. Even though the house is constructed of industrial materials—glass, concrete, and steel—it is surprisingly compatible. The new house respects the setbacks and scale of the neighborhood, and grand old trees lining the street go a long way toward establishing continuity.



Behind the 3,600-square-foot house, the property is bounded by a studio and a guesthouse. These structures make a

triangular courtyard of the old backyard, which springs to life every summer as the owners' personal watermelon patch.

The Brookwood section of Atlanta is located in "midtown," off Peachtree Road and Brighton, about two miles from Richard Meier's High Museum. The house is a private residence, and visits are by appointment only. For information, call (404) 525-6869.

The Getty Center gives new meaning to the term "art world." Richard Meier's travertine-clad art acropolis resembles a self-contained city-state glowing on a mountaintop. Even from the freeway far below, it looks immense, and half the space is buried underground.

The Getty's artistic universe includes all facets of art exhibition: museum, conservation, research, education, grants, and management. Each entity is housed in a separate structure. Almost a million square feet of buildings are spread across 110 acres. It's an awesome experience of scale—big scale—an experience further heightened by the cinematic views of the city and the sea. Conversely, this is also a place to see a great variety of design and detail. As a museum official wryly notes, "no thousand square feet are the same as any other thousand square feet." In all its grandeur, after 13 years and a billion-dollar budget, The Getty Center is a monumental public place.

Richard Meier mastered this enormous commission by dividing and conquering. He breaks the center into its six component parts and arranges the individual buildings around a central

**THE GETTY CENTER, 1997**1200 Getty Center Drive  
Los Angeles, California*Richard Meier*

entrance court. The museum proper consists of two-story pavilions separated by gardens. It's a pleasure to move between the gallery and garden spaces, relieving impending museum fatigue.

Meier achieves continuity with the exterior cladding, an off-white travertine, left rough cut, that covers most of the buildings. The architect was prohibited by

contract from creating one of his signature all-white metal buildings; nevertheless, he clad some walls in enameled aluminum panels, but in off-white.

Meier has designed extremely elegant galleries: rooms rather than open-plan exhibition spaces, illuminated with natural light coming in from above. There is, however, a jarring disruption of Meier's crisp purity in the picture galleries. They are decorated in 18th-century French style by the architect Thierry Despont, who asserts that his style is more compatible with the traditional art.

Given the Getty's formidable mass and aloof siting, it could easily have appeared impenetrable and forbidding. Meier's complex geometry redeems it, as does artist Robert Irwin's vividly colored garden.

A visit to the Getty requires advance planning, for this "billion dollar art theme park" has been overwhelmed by crowds. You must have parking reservations (which may take months) or get dropped off at the tram that runs up the hill. Los Angeles Bus #515 and Santa Monica's "Big Blue Bus" #14 will take you there. The museum is open Tuesday to Thursday, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM; Friday and Saturday 10:00 AM to 9:00 PM; and Sunday 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM; closed Mondays and major holidays. For reservations and information, call (310) 440-7300.