



The Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation has embraced with enthusiasm the opportunity of presenting to the U.S. culture world an example, even if limited, of the artistic and archaeological beauties of the ancient Stabiae site, by organizing the "*In Stabiano*" exhibition at the prestigious Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. We hope that this exhibition will arouse an interest in the project promoted by the RAS Foundation to continue and complete the archaeological research on the site in order to create the great Archaeological Park of Stabiae. We are confident that the implementation of such project will reveal many other wonderful treasures.

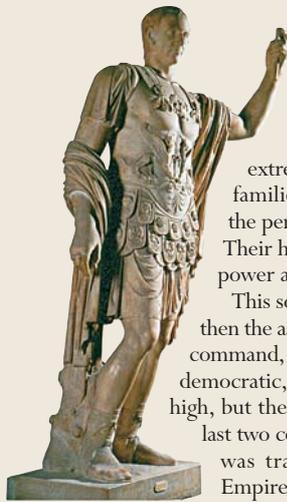
Front cover - Fresco fragment with a tragic mask from Villa Arianna (Stabiae Antiquarium).

## The Campanian Villas in the Power Culture of Rome

### Villas: The “Powerhouses” of Rome

*“For the most prominent citizens, those who should carry out their duties to the citizenry by holding honorific titles and magistracies, vestibules should be constructed that are lofty and lordly, the atria and peristyles at their most spacious, lush gardens and broad walkways refined as properly befits their dignity. In addition to these, there should be libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas, outfitted in a manner not dissimilar to the magnificence of public works, for in the homes of these people, often enough, both public deliberations and private judgments and arbitrations are carried out.”*

Marcus Vitruvius Pollio\*, Ten Books on Architecture, 6.5.5  
(Trans./eds. Rowland/Howe, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999)



The Roman Empire was created in large part by an extremely talented and intensely competitive ruling class: the families of the 300 to 600 men of the senatorial order and the perhaps ten thousand of the “equestrian”, or business, class. Their houses and villas were as much instruments of their social power as they were places of luxury and retreat.

This social elite rose to the apex of power - a seat in the Senate, then the ascending offices leading to those magistracies with military command, the “praetorship” and “consulship” - by means of largely democratic, and very unpredictable, elections. The risks were high, but the fortunes which could be made in the last two centuries B.C., when Roman conquest was transforming the Republic into an Empire, were enormous.

Those senators who chose to follow the very risky path to the upper magistracies had to make themselves continuously and personally available to a large public. They had to be talented - and effective - in persuasive public speaking, law, military command, financial administration, religious ritual and agriculture, and they had to be skilful and daring in political maneuver. Above all, because of the competitive electoral pressure, they had to have great talent for seeking out talent - in political allies, architects, producers of gladiatorial combats, military legates - because successful performance in these areas was key to attracting electoral success and huge fortunes.

In the city of Rome these men (and probably often their wives) did as much business in the atrium (main front room) of their houses as they did in the Forum or Curia (Senate House). In the early hours of the day their atria were always filled with a milling crowd of “clients,” that is, a network of political friends and dependents. When he stepped out in the morning for a court or Senate session, his throng of clients would follow the “great man” to the Forum. Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, the radical reformer of 133 B.C., supposedly was followed by a crowd of some three thousand “clients” when he strolled from his house to the Forum. In the later afternoon or evening a select few (or sometimes a



\*Vitruvius was a Roman architect, writing c. 30 B.C., about the time the Villa San Marco was built.



Landscape with seaside villa, a fresco from Stabiae (Stabiae Antiquarium).

select many) would be brought home to dine, and would be conducted by slaves to the more privileged dining rooms farther to the inside of the house. Cicero and Julius Caesar both had houses directly facing the Forum.

Cicero and Caesar also had a string of country villas. Cicero supposedly had eight, including three on the Bay of Naples (one at Cumae and one at Puteoli, both north of Naples, and one near Pompeii; he liked the one at Pompeii because it was so out of the way that no one bothered him there).

In the course of the first century B.C. this competitive and highly public Roman elite - and the local Campanian elite that quickly imitated them - discovered both the pleasures and the political uses of the Bay of Naples. They assembled their wealth and resources to invent an innovative type of “lofty and lordly” seaside villa with “libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas, outfitted in a manner not dissimilar to the magnificence of public works” and they continued to build more of them over the next two centuries, and build them ever more elaborately.

The art and architecture which they commissioned to surround themselves and their highly political house guests, with its numerous allusions to classical divinities and legends, was an assertion of their erudition, *dignitas* and sophistication as were their collections of art, their libraries, their skilled cooks, their entertainers, their resident philosophers and poets, their exotic fishponds, and their jewels and silverware.

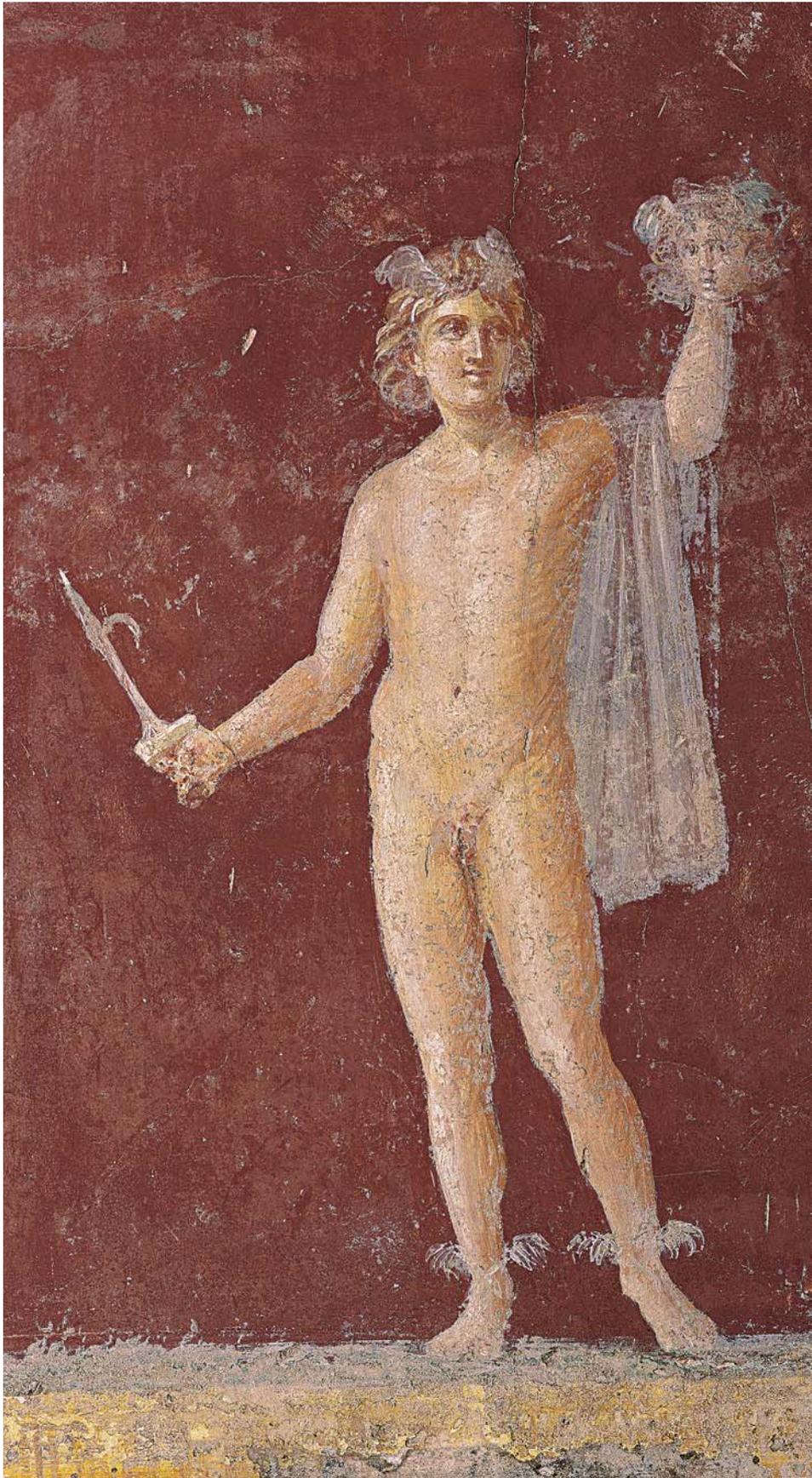
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Marble statue of Marcus Holconius Rufus (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

Equestrian statue of Marcus Nonius Balbus from Herculaneum (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

A symposium scene - Fresco from the *Casa dei Casti Amanti* in Pompeii.





## ***In Stabiano* (“In the territory of Stabiae”): A Brief History of the Villas**

*“In campano autem agro Stabiae oppidum fuere usque ad Cn. Pompeium et L. Catonem consules pridie Kalendas Maii quo die L. Sulla legatus bello sociali id delevit quod nunc in villas abiit”.*

*“The city of Stabiae existed in the Campanian plain until the consulship of Gnaeus Pompeius and Lucius Cato [89 B.C.], at which time the legate commander in the Social War, Lucius [Cornelius] Sulla, destroyed it on the 30th of April; since then it has been transformed into a place of villas”.*

Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, 3.9.70

Stabiae, which lies only about 5 km. from Pompeii, was buried in the same eruption of Vesuvius that destroyed Pompeii, Herculaneum and Oplontis. The site apparently had a long history as the secondary port town of the southern Campania plain (after Pompeii) from the seventh century B.C. through its destruction by Sulla during the Social Wars of 89 B.C., and a longer (but little understood) history as a medieval town after its revival following the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. But the main period of its fame as a villa resort is concentrated almost exclusively between 89 B.C. and A.D. 79.

After the old port town of Stabiae was destroyed by legate general Lucius Cornelius Sulla on April 30, 89 B.C., the area developed quickly into a zone of both luxury seaside villas (*villae maritimae*) and agricultural villas (*villae rusticae*): “that which was destroyed is now a place of villas”, as Pliny says. The town also appears to have grown up again, although it had only the status of a *pagus*, village, dependent upon the local Campanian city of *Nuceria* (modern Nocera). The remains to the east of Villa San Marco are almost surely this reborn town, although the date has not been as yet stratigraphically determined. The villas continued to prosper into the first century of the Empire. Based on comparisons with the dated four painting styles of Pompeii, most of the Stabiae wall painting is later Third Style or Fourth Style (c. A.D. 40-79), although some is early Second Style (c. 80 B.C., in Villa Arianna), and hence constitutes some of the first decorative work on the site.



*Facing page:* Perseus - Fresco in Villa San Marco, Stabiae.

Coastal landscape from Stabiae (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).



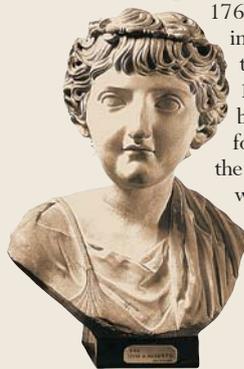
## Twice-Told Tales: The Story of the Excavations



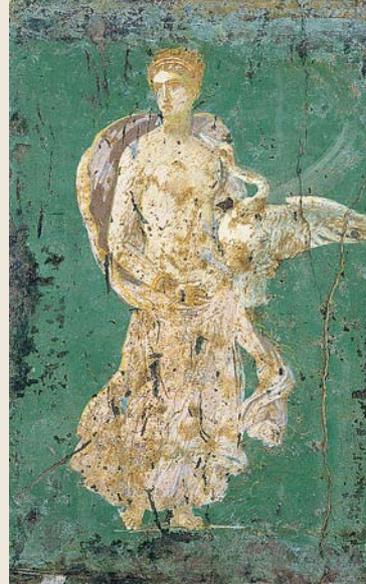
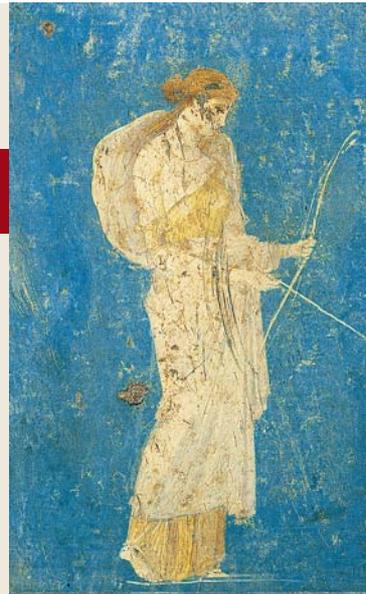
A section of the Tabula Peutingeriana, a Roman itinerary map of the third-fourth century A.D., showing Stabiae.  
Diana, Medea and Leda, frescoes from Stabiae (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

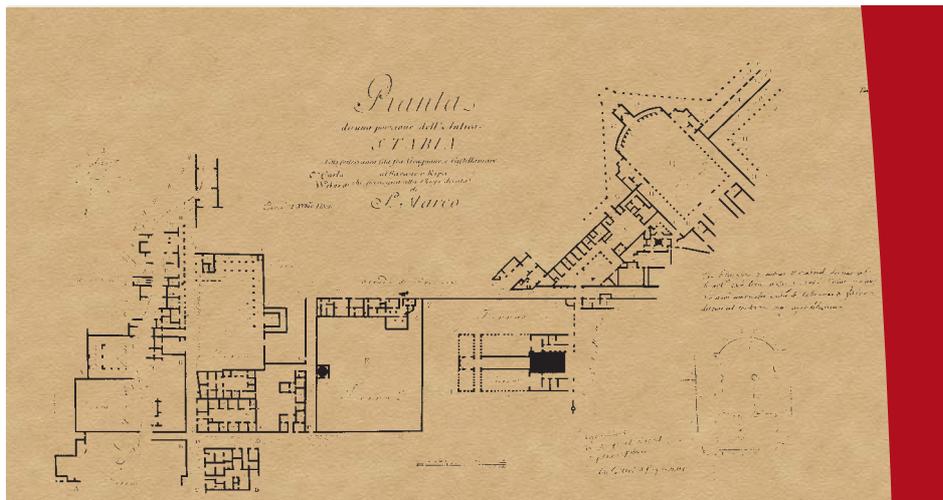
Already by the fourth century A.D. the accurate location of the ancient town of Stabiae was forgotten; the Tabula Peutingeriana, a Roman road atlas, places "Stabiae" north of the Sarno river and it continued to be confused with Pompeii into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The actual site of *Stabiae* was recovered only when excavations were begun in 1749 under the auspices of the King of Naples Charles of Bourbon, who had opened excavations at Herculaneum in 1738 and Pompeii in 1748. Excavations continued at Villa San Marco (so-called because of a neighboring chapel) and the villas later known as Villa del Pastore (of the Shepherd) and Villa Arianna (Ariadne) till 1762. After a thirteen year interruption excavations were taken up again from 1775 to 1782 under King Ferdinand IV, but then demands for workmen for Pompeii definitively closed the excavations of Stabiae. Trenches were filled, the fields put back into cultivation and the precise location of the villas forgotten.



Charles of Bourbon, King of Naples.  
Marble bust of Livia, from Stabiae (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).





Bourbon-era plan, drawn in 1759 by Karl Weber, with the explored buildings of Villa San Marco area in Stabiae.

The excavations were not published until 1881 when M. Ruggiero, then royal director of antiquities, proceeded to a compilation based on notes and drawings left behind. The eighteenth century excavations were conducted primarily by “hunters of antiquities” who removed sections of fresco and mosaic to enrich the royal collections of antiquities in Naples.

Nonetheless, the work, which was supervised by engineers, was well documented in 19 sheets of drawings of surprising accuracy. They located what appeared to be at least six villas on the hill of Varano and an urban settlement of some 45,000 sq. meters.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries signs of significant antiquities began to emerge through chance finds due to farming activity and the erosion of winter storms. Excavations were reopened on the site due to the passionate dedication of Libero D’Orsi, principal of the local classical high school, who began work at his own cost and with only a couple of workmen. The excavation continued in a more or less systematic way till 1962, and the site is now managed by the Superintendency of Archaeology of Pompeii.

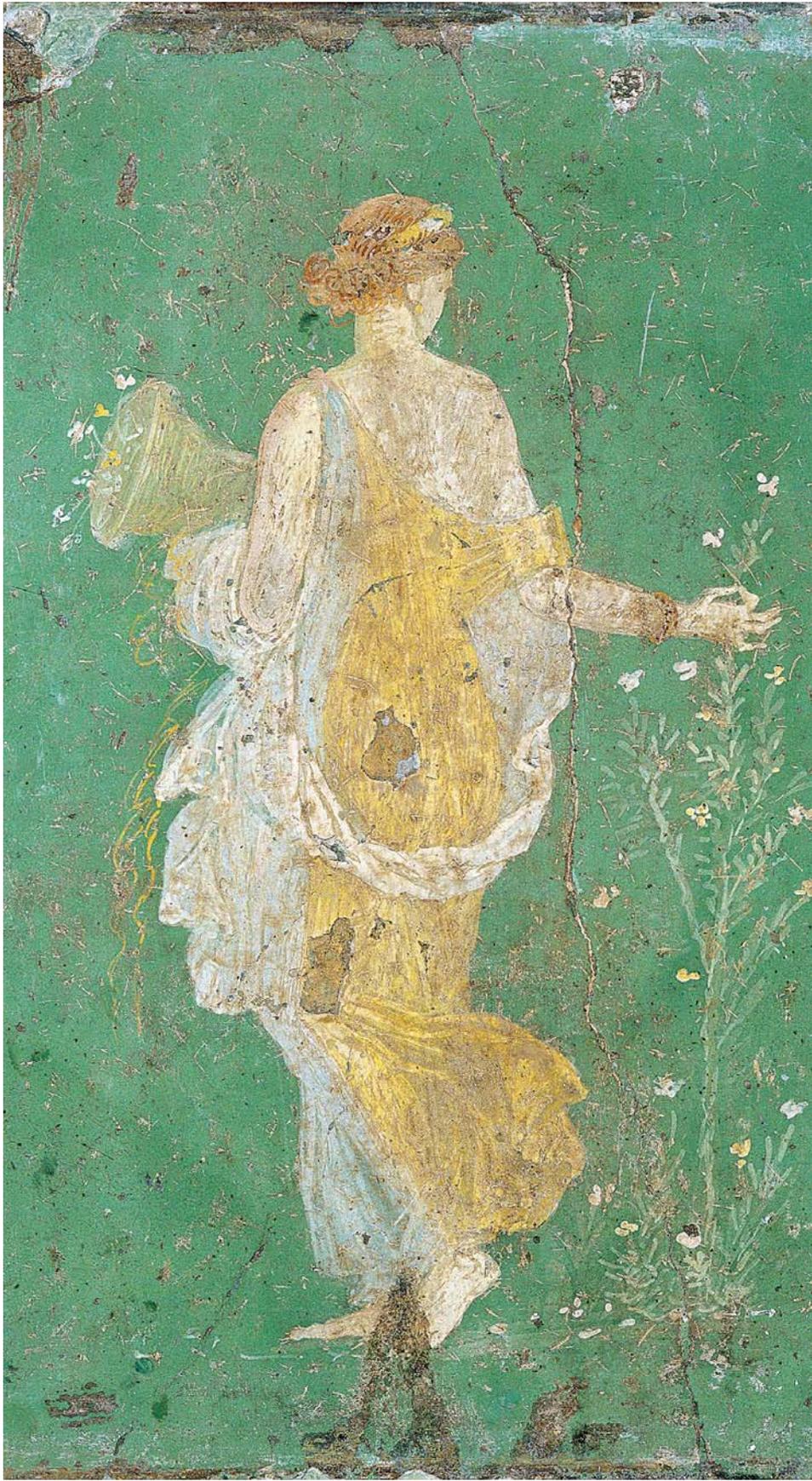
The more important finds from the site are now housed in the *Antiquarium Stabiano* in Castellammare di Stabia, which opened in 1957.

Villa San Marco: a Bourbon opening in the wall of the upper portico.

Mosaic niche from the swimming pool of Villa San Marco in Stabiae (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

1962 excavations at Villa Carmiano in Stabiae.





# Villa San Marco

## The *Villae Maritimae*

### Villa San Marco

The Villa San Marco, with a total surface area (including garden courtyards) of more than 11,000 sq. meters, is one of the largest of the seaside villas of ancient Campania. It stands at the east end of the cliff edge of Varano hill, with a splendid panoramic view of the Bay of Naples, and directly next to the town site. The original shoreline may have been quite close to the foot of the hill.

It consists of an original nucleus - an atrium and small entrance peristyle which leads off the street - a small but luxurious private bath complex, a large courtyard with pool, nymphaeum-fountain and sea-view *triclinia* (dining rooms), and an even larger sea-view colonnaded courtyard at a higher level. Several cubicles (multi-functioning private rooms) and a large kitchen lie right off the atrium.

Two completely enclosed internal gardens (*viridaria*) line the corridors from the atrium to the bath. The bath complex is entered through a miniature four column court, and has a *calidarium* (hot plunge bath), with floor and wall heating, a *tepidarium* with a similar heated floor, and an apsidal outdoor *frigidarium* (cold plunge bath).

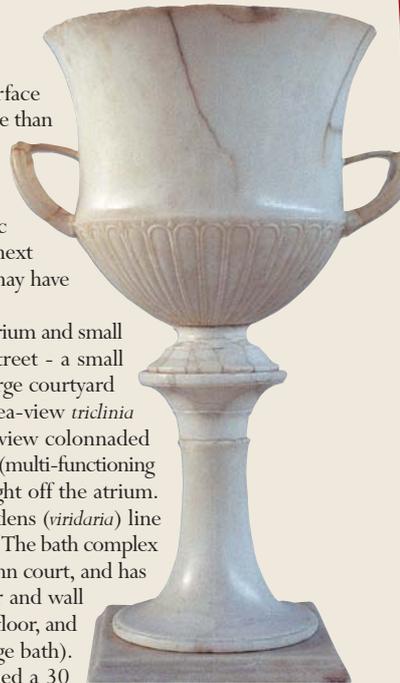
The first large peristyle court contained a 30 meter long garden shaded by plane trees whose roots are still visible as plaster casts. At one end of the court is one of the most complex set-pieces of any villa, an apsidal nymphaeum with illusionistic stuccos, frescoes, glass mosaic, fountains, and a cryptoporticus, a cool place for a summer walk. On either side were beautifully frescoed multi-functioning *diaetae* (day rooms), with differing views of mountains and garden. At the other end are the three main sea-view *triclinia*, two smaller ones flanking an enormous central space.

Alabastrine marble crater from the area of the swimming pool of Villa San Marco in Stabiae.

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Flora, a famous fresco from Villa Arianna in Stabiae (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

View of the peristyle and pool of Villa San Marco, with Mount Vesuvius in the background.



# Villa San Marco



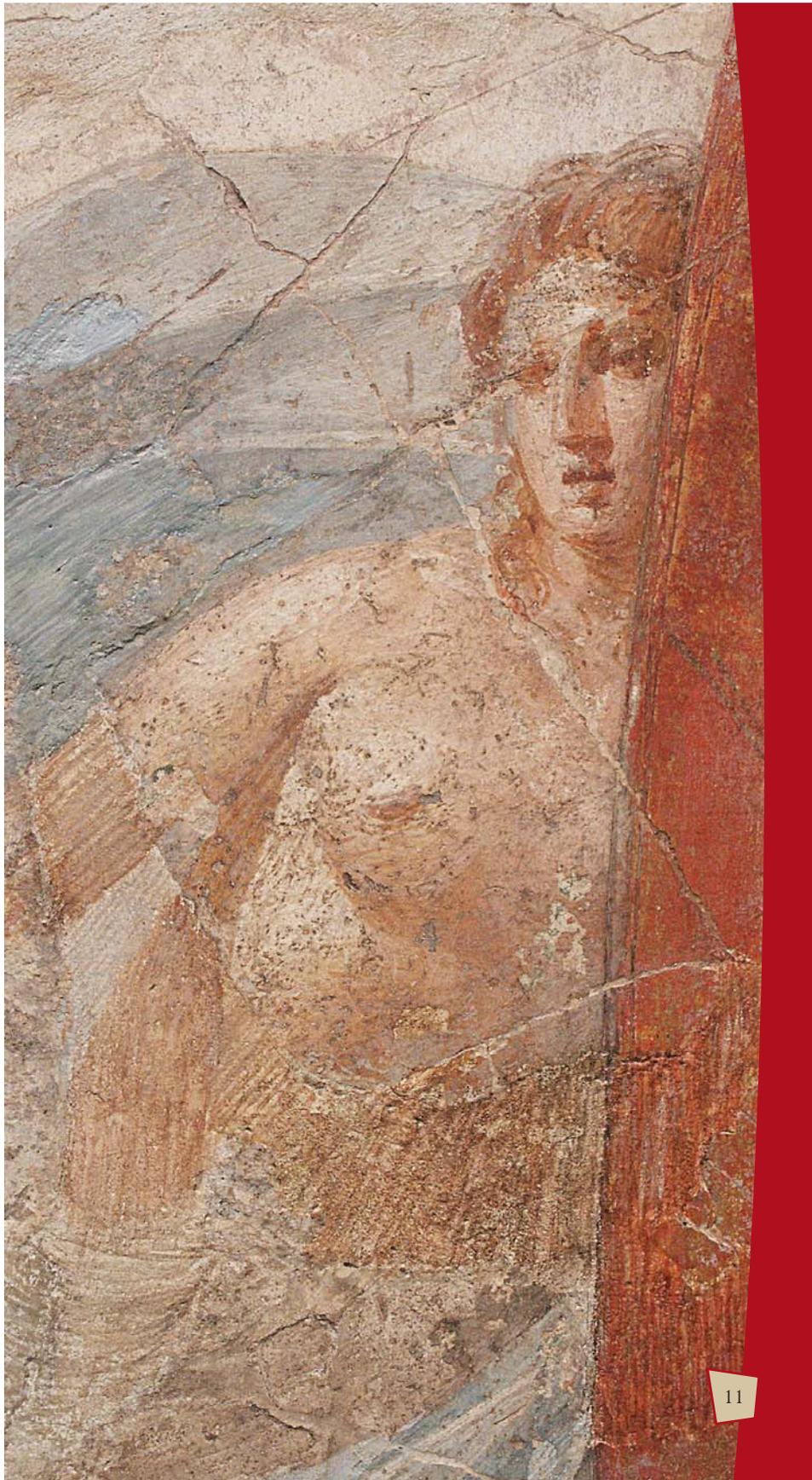
The peristyle with spiral-fluted columns of Villa San Marco during the excavations of 1951.

The upper peristyle was much longer, perhaps as much a 145 meters, as indicated by a 2002 geophysical survey. It was surrounded by unusual spiral-fluted columns and had elaborate ceiling frescoes suggesting the cycle of the seasons, fragments of three of which are included in the exhibit (the Planisphere, Hermes, and Minerva).

*Facing page:* The Spring, a detail of the Planisphere of Villa San Marco (Stabiae Antiquarium).

Planisphere of the Seasons, a fresco from the ceiling of portico 1 of Villa San Marco (Stabiae Antiquarium).





# Villa Arianna

## Villa Arianna

Named after the fresco of Dionysus and Ariadne from the large triclinium, the nucleus of the villa consists of an entrance peristyle and an atrium, and is the oldest of the known villas with Second Style frescoes which date it to the late Republic. Although almost the entire huge villa was excavated in 1757-62, only a small part is exposed today. The main core was expanded by the addition of



bathing, service and sea-view *triclinia* in the Neronian period (c. A.D. 54-68) and by the extensive peristyle garden in the time of the Flavian emperors (c. A.D. 69-79).

The grand triclinium featured Fourth Style frescoes which are still partly preserved on the walls and the ceiling. They are painted in a highly dramatic Hellenistic style which is openly redolent of the theater. The central panel portrays the abandonment of Ariadne by Theseus on the island of Naxos, the

Aerial view of the Varano hill in Castellammare di Stabia, with Villa Arianna in the foreground.

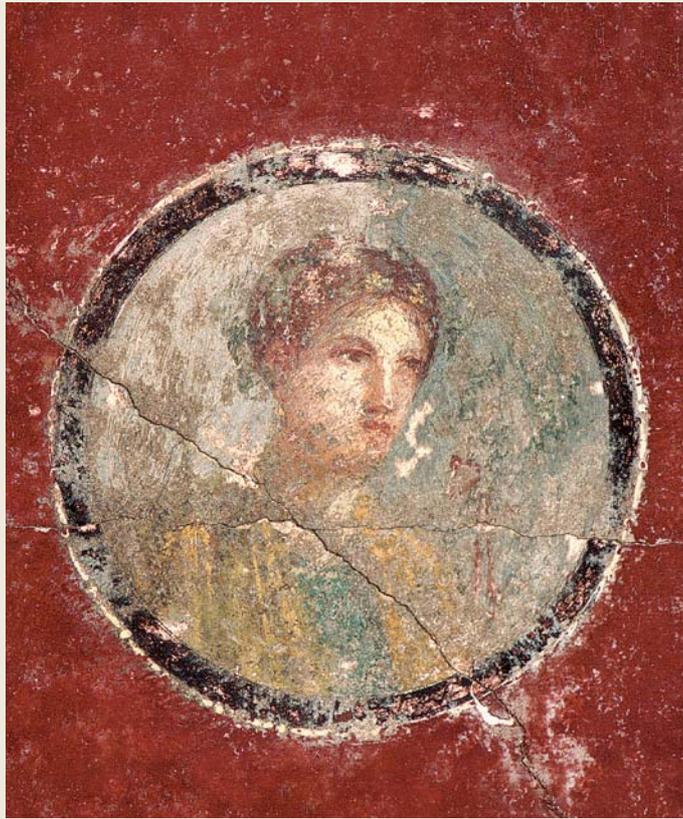
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Hippolitus, a fresco from Villa Arianna (Stabiae Antiquarium).

The Seller of Cupids, a fresco from Villa Arianna (National Archaeological Museum of Naples).







east wall portrayed Lycurgus and Ambrosia, that on the west Hippolytus and Phaedra.

One of the cubicles of the suite of Neronian rooms which faces the sea has a most singular decoration, which has nothing to do with the usual architectural formula but rather imitates a tapestry pattern.

The great peristyle has a length of c. 104 meters and a width of 81, which amounts to a total perimeter length of some 1200 feet, or about two *stadium*-lengths, the size recommended by Vitruvius for a public gymnasium.

This demonstrates that the model for the ostentatious architecture of the great seaside villas of the first century B.C. and A.D. was not "palaces" but public architecture.

Directly next to Villa Arianna lies another, only partly excavated large villa, the so-called Second complex, with a range of dining rooms on the cliff-edge, a *viridarium* (pleasure garden), a fish tank in a peristyle garden, and a small bath complex.

Roundel with a young woman, a fresco from site 7 of Villa Arianna.

Wall decoration with frescoed "tiles" from room 9 of Villa Arianna.



## Villa del Pastore

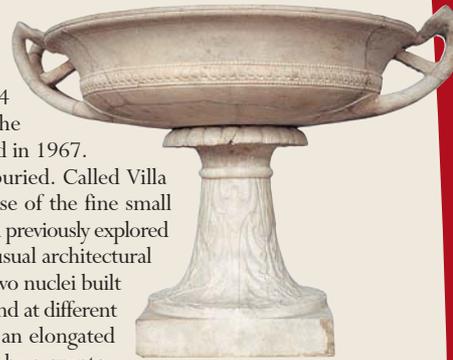
This second enormous villa (some 19,000 square meters (c. 204,514 square feet) including the area of the garden courts, was casually discovered in 1967.

After limited excavations it was reburied. Called Villa del Pastore (of the Shepherd) because of the fine small statue exhibited here, the villa had been previously explored in the eighteenth century. It is an unusual architectural

complex and consists of two nuclei built

on different axes and at different times: the first is an elongated courtyard framed by a cryptoporticus with windows looking out to the edge of the cliff, at the back of which was a long colonnaded portico and a garden with a wall topped by reversed (upside down) arches and a large hemicycle niche; at the west was another courtyard with many small rooms (slave and guest quarters) and another large bath complex. In the middle of the large garden court was a presumed *piscina* (swimming pool).

The nature of this “villa” is highly debated. It seems to have no conventional residential center (the atrium) as far as it is excavated now. It has even been suggested that it may not even have been a villa but a *valetudinarium* (a health spa) with nothing but bath quarters, guest rooms, and a garden, built to take advantage of the health-giving mineral springs of the area. The fine *labrum* shown above was found in the area of the large hemicycle of the main garden.



Marble basin (*labrum*) from the garden of Villa del Pastore (Stabiae Antiquarium).

Views of the 1967 excavations of Villa del Pastore.

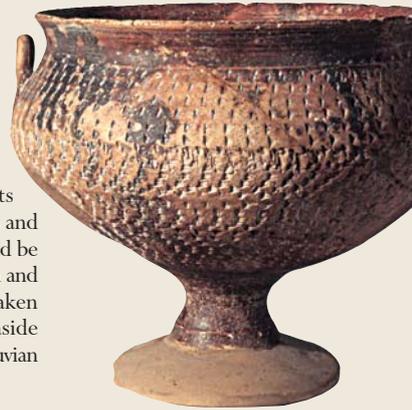


The Shepherd, a marble statue from the garden of Villa del Pastore (Stabiae Antiquarium).

## The Ager Stabianus and the Villae Rusticae

The *Ager Stabianus* (Stabiae countryside) mentioned by Pliny seems to have consisted of part of the plain of the Sarno river and the hilly region of the *Mons Lactarius* (modern Monti Lattari, literally “dairy products mountains”) providing rich crops of grapes and olives and where milk producing cattle could be raised. The major period of dense habitation and cultivation of the region seems to have taken place in the same period as the great seaside villas, that is after 89 B.C. and before the Vesuvian eruption.

Thin-walled ceramic cup from Villa Carmiano (Stabiae Antiquarium).



## Villa Carmiano

The *villa rustica* of Carmiano is located about 1 km to the east of the major villas in the hinterland and is now reburied for safety after excavation in 1962. All of the major rooms, both those of farm production and those which were decorated and used for entertainment, were placed around the same central court. The decoration of the main triclinium is inspired by Dionysiac imagery. The complex is datable to the last quarter of the first century B.C.

The pictorial decoration, much of which is displayed in the exhibit, is of Flavian age (c. A.D. 69-79).

Maenads, from the triclinium frescoes of Villa Carmiano.



Facing page: Neptune and Amymone, a detail from the wall decoration of the Villa Carmiano triclinium (Stabiae Antiquarium).



## Villa Petrarò

The *villa rustica* at Petrarò, discovered in 1957 in the Gargiulo farm, was another small villa of some 1000 sq. meters in total (including the open courtyard space) with all the rooms, habitational and farm-related, arranged around the same courtyard.

On one side there was a cryptoporticus, a somewhat luxurious feature to provide a cool space for escape from the summer heat. Several cubicles and apparent slave/workers quarters faced the same courtyard. Despite the mixed farm and residential character of the villa, on the east side of the courtyard was a fully equipped bath complex, with good stuccoes, many of which are displayed in the exhibit.

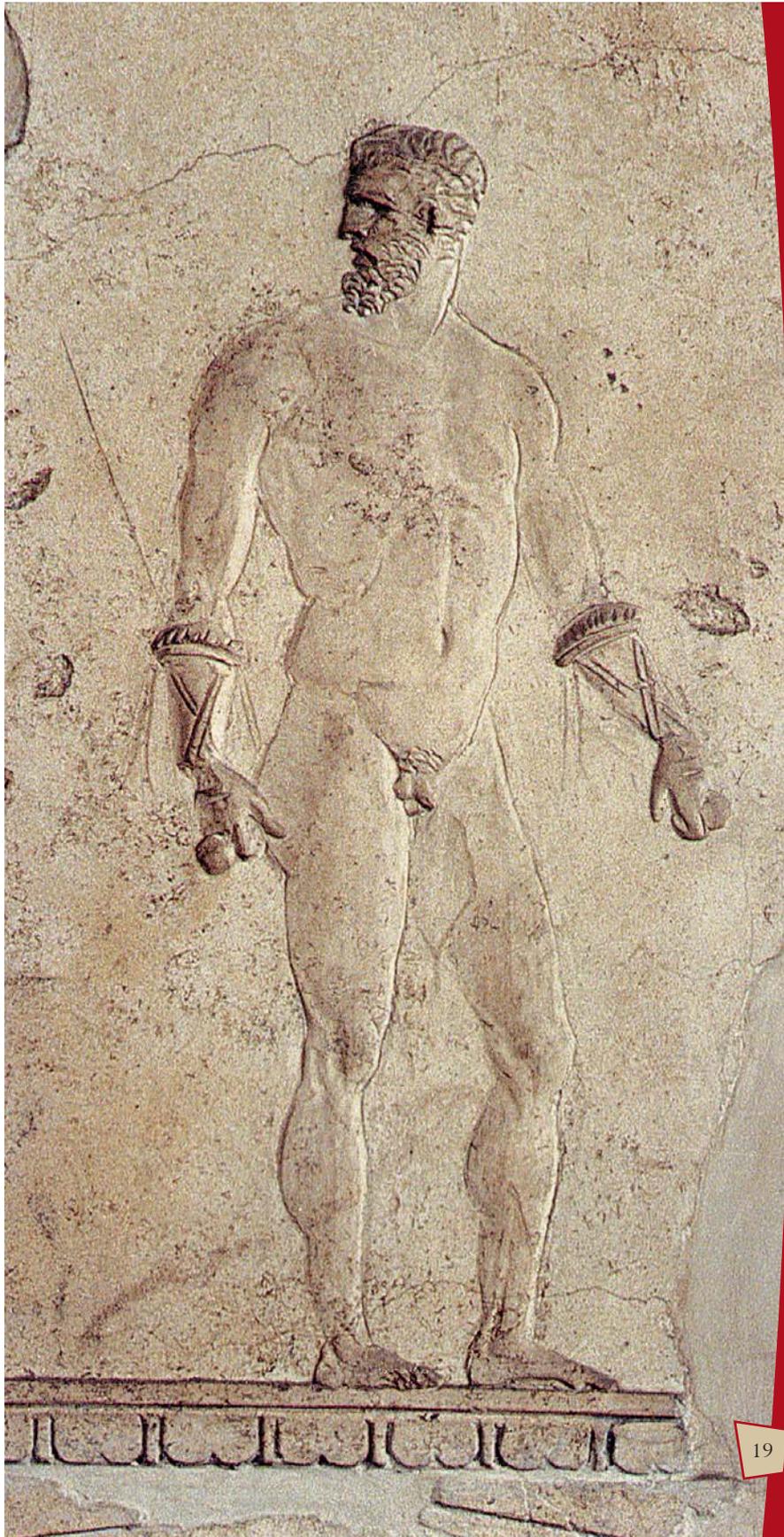
The first phase of construction seems to have taken place in the Augustan age (c. 30 B.C. - A.D. 14), and the second was in course of completion when the eruption of A.D. 79 struck. Several of the stuccoes show signs of incompleteness, as if the artisans were preparing to come back the next day.

Glass bottles from Villa Petrarò (Stabiae Antiquarium).

Narcissus, an illustrated stucco from the frigidarium of Villa Petrarò (Stabiae Antiquarium).



Facing page: Boxer, a stucco panel from Villa Petrarò (Stabiae Antiquarium).



## The Archaeological Park: Presenting the Power-Culture of the Roman Villas of the Bay of Naples

The three principal aspects of the Roman culture of the Bay of Naples are represented by three groups of remarkable archaeological sites: the urban culture of busy commercial towns such as Pompeii and Herculaneum; the “rustic” farming villas, like Boscoreale, Carmiano and Petrarò, which produced the famous wines and agricultural products of the region; and seaside villas like those at Stabiae. Only at Stabiae do we have well-preserved villas which also preserve the view of the sea and the cooling breezes for which they were built.

The villas were not just the luxury retreat of the Roman ruling classes; they were one of the principal places from which the “vacationing” senators and businessmen exercised their power. They met and worked with almost all levels of society there: they met with their “clients” every morning in the atrium, instructed professional artists, conversed with intellectuals, and settled major political and business matters over dinner parties. The house was administered through highly trained staff largely of slave status. It was with these intentions of building a house which projected “personal political clout” that the owners of these villas engaged their architects and artists to build ingenious and artful assemblages of architectural forms and painted decoration.

The Superintendency-RAS (see p. 24) Stabiae project proposes to be the major scientific and didactic center for the presentation of this Roman villa culture of the Bay of Naples. The full excavation of at least two of the villas, visitor centers, a major museum dedicated to the villa culture, are all parts of the foreseen project.

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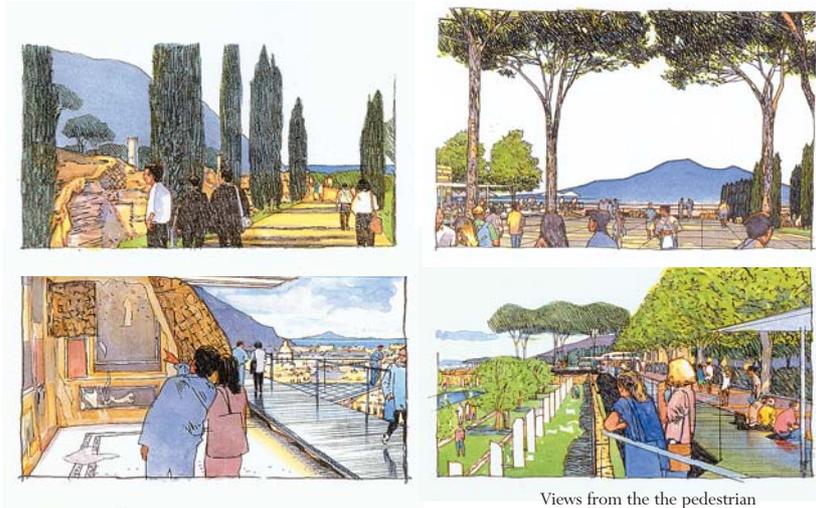
- Flavian dame, marble bust from the Farnese Collection
  - Bronze head of Lucius Caecilius Jucundus from Pompeii
  - The “Pseudo-Seneca” bronze head from Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum
- (all from the National Archaeological Museum of Naples).



## The Master Plan

The area of the park is seen as ringed by a line of pines which would make the site visible from Pompeii. A pedestrian path along the front of the hill will join the two principal villa sites and make the park function as an urban park, even when the villas are closed. In the evening the park can host summertime evening concerts and a cafe and restaurant.

The touristic visit to the site is seen as being very distinct from the average visit to the large urban site of Pompeii. With perhaps only 150,000-200,000 visitors a year (vs. c. 2,000,000), it would invite a slow thoughtful examination of the villa culture of the Roman social elite and enjoyment of the breathtaking environment of the Bay of Naples.

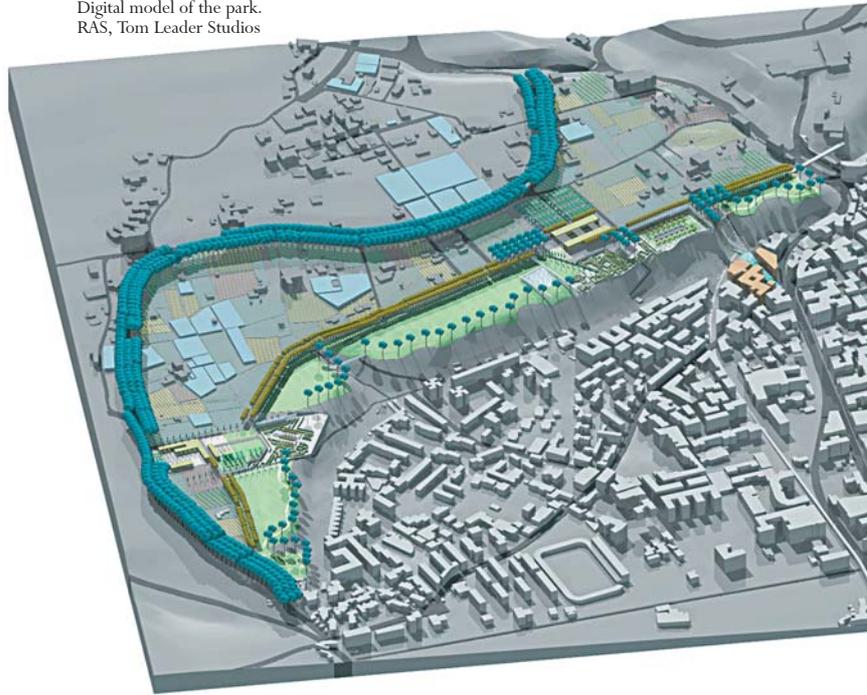


Views from the the pedestrian walkways at the edge of the terraces and overlooking the excavated ruins.  
(RAS: Chris Grubbs)

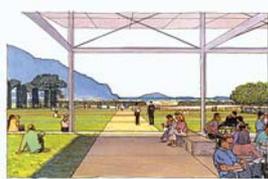
The Sarno River plain as seen from the highlands behind Castellammare di Stabia. The modern city extends on the left along the coastline. The Varano hilltop plateau is in the foreground at the picture center. Mount Vesuvius dominates the horizon: at this foot and to the right of its summit the urban sprawl of Boscotrecase-Boscotrecase can be noticed. Below, the darker, apparently featureless area is the site of ancient Pompeii.



Digital model of the park.  
RAS, Tom Leader Studios



## Visitors Centers and On-Site Museum of Villa Culture of the Bay of Naples



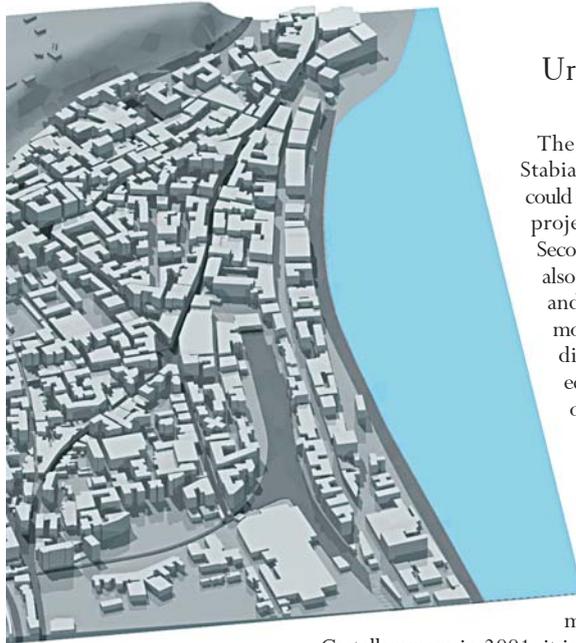
At the back of the open area of the park the RAS-Superintendency project envisions two groups of service structures. One at Villa San Marco, currently in an advanced state of planning with funds from the Region of Campania, provides cafe, administrative services and a didactic presentation area for school groups. The other, at the site of Villa Arianna, near the commuter rail station and the historic lower town, is proposed as the site for a major international on-site museum of the villa culture of the Roman Bay of Naples.

The structures are designed to have the minimum impact on the site and to allow the Roman remains to dominate the visitor experience.

## New Excavations

In the first century B.C. and A.D the entire cliff-edge of the plateau of Stabiae was overbuilt with villas lying directly next to one another. No complex has as yet been fully excavated. Some four were partly excavated in the eighteenth century, reburied, and three have been only in part re-exposed since 1950.

In 2002 a RAS geophysical team discovered a hitherto unsuspected extension of the great peristyle (c. 100 m. long) of Villa San Marco. The first excavations are planned to begin here within a year with funding from the Region of Campania. Their intent is to expose the original entrance to the villa and excavating the great nymphaeum of the main court.

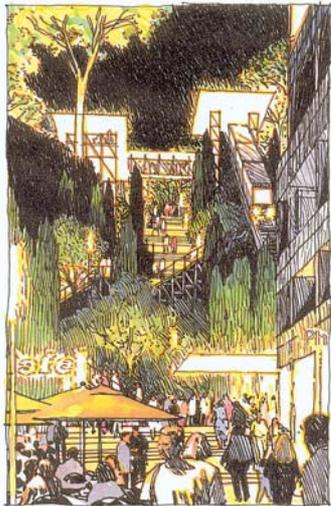


## Urban Connections

The archaeological park of Stabiae, when fully launched, could be the largest archaeological project in Europe since the Second World War, and it could also be the key to the cultural and economic revival of the modern city of Castellammare di Stabia, a beautiful but economically depressed area of southern Italy.

The park is seen as an integral part of the urban fabric. The most important connection between the park and the town is the so-called Piazza Libero D'Orsi. Commissioned by the City of

Castellammare in 2001, it is a proposed private development of the zone around the Circumvesuviana commuter railway station which would provide direct access to the archaeological site by means of a funicular. This and other projects are continuously in development by faculty and students of the School of Architecture of the University of Maryland.



"Piazza Libero D'Orsi" (RAS/Chris Grubbs) and the urban development (to the right) with funicular from commuter rail station to Villa Arianna site.



## Innovative Site Management, International Cooperation and Educational Exchange

The Restoring Ancient Stabiae (RAS) Project was created in 1998 through an invitation of the Superintendent of Archaeology of Pompeii, P. G. Guzzo, to the School of Architecture of the University of Maryland, with the idea of creating a new type of international organization which could augment the administrative flexibility of government agencies such as the Superintendency of Archaeology of Pompeii in executing ambitious projects like the archaeological park at Stabiae.



In February 2002 RAS became an independent non-profit foundation in Italy, the first created in correspondence with a new law (D.Lgs.368.98), with the intention of creating foundations which could seek and administer both public and private funds under the supervision of the Region of Campania and the Superintendency of Archaeology of Pompeii. As such, RAS is an innovative pilot project which, if successful, will serve as a model for the creation of joint private-public ventures which could in the near future share in the exploration, development and maintenance of major monuments of cultural heritage in Italy.



In 2004 the Fondazione RAS is opening a new phase of institutional and fundraising initiatives and is inviting interested persons of institutions in the U.S. to propose joint ventures under the Master Plan, including:

- a rare exhibition of original Roman frescoes in the U.S. starting with an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution (April 26-October 24, 2004) and a tour of several other American museums managed by International Art and Artists starting in 2005.
- exchange of cultural properties: under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the United States and Italy in February 2002, RAS is helping to coordinate the exhibition *In Stabiano*, first through the Smithsonian Institution in April-October 2004, and then through a multi-year tour to U.S. museums starting in fall 2005, organized by International Art and Artists.
- institutional partnerships: RAS is seeking and is open to American academic and museum institutions that may wish to participate in and execute various parts of the excavations, conservation, or site presentation activities.
- educational exchanges: RAS is seeking to coordinate educational exchanges between Italian and American institutions.
- fundraising structures: to supplement funds from European and Italian public institutions, which will provide some 70% of the projected 140 million dollar ten-year global budget, RAS is researching a fundraising structure in the US which will combine a private fundraising institutional structure with the non-profit status of the University of Maryland.

For more information, visit our web site at: [www.stabiae.org](http://www.stabiae.org)  
Contact in Italy: [info\\_ras@libero.it](mailto:info_ras@libero.it)  
Contact in USA: [leovarone\\_ras@verizon.net](mailto:leovarone_ras@verizon.net)