

## Exhibit at Little Rock museum offers look at Ancient Rome

By Rainer Sabin, Associated Press | March 30, 2005

LITTLE ROCK — Buried for centuries under ash after the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, remnants of ancient Roman villas that overlooked the Bay of Naples in southern Italy are on display at the Arkansas Arts Center.

From the efforts of curator Brian Young, the "In Stabiano" exhibit visits Little Rock as one of only seven cities to receive the three rooms of 72 unique items.

They come from four villas and range from ornate frescoes to ancient housewares found in the Arkansas Art Center's walls and in glass-enclosed cases. They are displayed subtly, and patrons walk through the exhibit at a leisurely pace, stopping and staring at the vestiges from a life of splendor enjoyed by Roman aristocrats. Standing outside a display of an elaborate triclinium fresco that once provided the background for a dining room, Young gushes about the exhibit.

"We thought it was a good fit," Young said. "Our first consideration was quality. We want an exhibition to be popular, but that can't be the driving force."

Since "In Stabiano" first opened, 31,911 people have filed through the halls of the [Arkansas Arts Center](#), which is the first museum to house the exhibit since it first opened last year at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

Capitalizing on the carry-over of visitors have come to see the Clinton Presidential Center after its opening in November, the Arkansas Arts Center has watched the number of people walking through its doors increase.

"You have to consider that, because they are showing attendance records like crazy," said Heather Haywood, a marketing director at the Arkansas Arts center. "Because they are a draw for tourism traffic, we have picked up attendance from that also."

But Young said that the unique opportunity to view a rare collection of art from Ancient Rome has also attracted crowds. He said the artifacts and murals have never been displayed in Italy, and when the Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation planned a traveling exhibit in the United States, Young jumped at the chance to be a stop on the tour.

"It is a big deal," he said. "It is the first time that I know of that we have had so many artifacts of this scale in one place in this state."

And Arkansans seemed to have responded. Young quickly walked over to the glass case that held what appeared to be a black frying pan coated with patina. He then pointed at it.

"That looks like one you can get at Williams-Sonoma," Haywood said.

Indeed, a lot of the items appeared as if they could still be useful today and were remarkably well-preserved, considering that serious efforts to uncover the remains of the lost city of Stabiae did not begin until the 1950s.

A marble statue of a shepherd carrying fruit and a young goat looks like it could have been sculpted yesterday. A fresco painting of the Greek god Hermes paired with the Roman deity Mercury provides some insight into the skill of the artists who painted the interior of the palaces that served as summer homes for Rome's elite.

Amanda Ware of North Little Rock stopped in to see the exhibit for the second time, saying she so impressed during her first visit that she felt compelled to bring her 7-year-old son Reese with her Tuesday.

"I was blown away," she said. "I think it is something neat that needs to be seen. I do appreciate it. I wish more Arkansans would take an interest in it."

The exhibit, which was scheduled to close April 3, will remain open until May 15. It will then go to Reno, San Diego, Calif., Madison, Wis., Atlanta and Jacksonville, Fla.

"I'm excited. It's a wonderful example of Roman art," Young said. "I am just thrilled that we can help show it to other people."

Source: [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2005-03-30-rome-exhibit\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2005-03-30-rome-exhibit_x.htm)