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ART EXHIBIT

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Diana

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Medea

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Lifestyles of the rich and famous, A.D. 79

Lush frescoes. Rooms open to the sea. Elaborate baths. A DMA exhibit from Italy tries to breathe life into a resort town buried by Vesuvius.

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The ancient Italian town of Stabiano on the Gulf of Naples was the East Hampton, N.Y., of its day. It was where fabulously wealthy and politically well-connected Romans spent their summers. When Rome sizzled in the summer heat, leaders would decamp to Stabiano for the cooling ocean breezes. There, the business of the government would continue.

While many people are familiar with Pompeii and Herculaneum, towns buried by Mount Vesuvius' eruption in A.D. 79, few have heard of Stabiano because there were few houses there. Excavations have been intermittent over the past 50 years, and only recently has an aggressive campaign been launched to uncover this former resort area and make its ruins available for tourist traffic. The few houses that are there are enormous, and they were decorated in the most lavish fashion of the time, with libraries, theaters, baths, swimming pools and countless rooms for entertaining.

"From the Ashes of Vesuvius, in Stabiano: Exploring the Ancient Seaside Villas of the Roman Elite," a traveling show that opens today at the Dallas Museum of Art, is a public-relations come-on sponsored by the Italian government to draw sightseers to Stabiano. They want tourists to go and spend the day ogling the 140,000-square-foot Villa Arianna or the more modest 65,000-square-foot Villa San Marco, places where days were spent enjoying the outdoors and early evenings were sybaritic occasions of outrageously expensive foods and wine. "The owners spared no financial expense to beautify their villas by cladding them with mar-



From the Ashes of Vesuvius, in Stabiano: Exploring the Ancient Seaside Villas of the Roman Elite

Through Oct. 7 at the Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 N. Harwood St., Dallas
\$5-\$10
214-922-1200 or www.dallas-museumofart.org

bles, statues, bas-reliefs, precious decorations issuing from Greece and the Orient," writes Domenico Camardo in the show's catalog. It was a lifestyle spent surpassing the Joneses at every opportunity.

The newly excavated Stabiae (its ancient name) consists of six luxury residences and 50 small supporting homes that were adjacent to farming plots. The area was so popular that an organized social life was re-established on the ashes within months of the great eruption, and by A.D. 92, the social set was partying like it was 1999.

The homes that were uncovered show great complexity and beauty. Most rooms in these villas weren't dedicated to any specific function; spaces were used as needed depending on the size of the family, the number of visitors and the changing seasons or weather. Bedrooms, servants' rooms and storage rooms seem almost interchangeable.

The dining rooms, however, were fixed-purpose rooms, and they were the most lavishly decorated, with elaborate frescoes on the walls and ceilings. Low couches were placed in a U shape, and guests would recline on them while the food was placed on small tables scattered about. Usually, dining rooms

More on STABIANO on 7D

Marble statue of Marcus Holconius Rufus

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