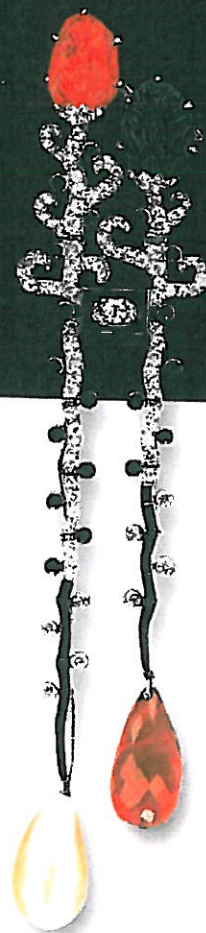




Marjorie Merriweather Post

Stefano, P. (2013). Icons of style.
In 20th century jewelry & the icons of style
(pp. 4-35). New York, NY: Thames + Hudson



The Hillwood Museum in Washington, DC, is the setting for one of the most magnificent collections of precious objects from Tsarist Russia and a splendid display of French decorative art. Its creator was Marjorie Merriweather Post, who left her house and its treasures for the benefit of future generations when she died in 1974. Wandering through the mansion and beautiful gardens of the 25-acre estate, one can still feel the allure of this grande dame of a bygone era.

Marjorie was born on 15 March 1887 in Springfield, Illinois, the only daughter of Charles William Post, owner of the Postum Cereal Company, and Ella Letitia Merriweather. At the age of 18 Marjorie married investment banker Edward Bennett Close, with whom she had two daughters, Adelaide and Eleanor. When her father died in 1914 she inherited a vast fortune and his company; she was just 27. Two years later her provincial lifestyle completely changed when the family moved to New York City. They lived in the Burden mansion on 5th Avenue, which Marjorie started to decorate with beautiful 18th-century French furniture, a style then in vogue with New York society. The connoisseur and art dealer Sir Joseph Duveen helped to educate her taste and she developed an interest in decorative art, including *objets de vertu*.

In 1919, Marjorie's marriage to Close ended and a year later she married the financier Edward Francis Hutton, who became chairman of the board of the Postum Cereal Company in 1923. It was probably that year in which she received a sapphire and diamond bracelet made by Cartier, set at the centre with a magnificent cushion-shaped 58.33 cts sapphire from the famous mines of Kashmir (p. 14). These stones are the most sought after and valuable sapphires in the world, thanks to their unrivalled velvety blue colour. It is very

rare to find a sapphire of this origin exceeding 20 cts, so Marjorie's stone is truly exceptional. A photograph of Marjorie from 1921 shows her wearing on her hat a long brooch of epaulette design, terminating with a pearl and a coloured stone, indicating her taste for the latest fashion; it is very similar to one created by Cartier in 1914 and elongated in the 1920s (p. 8).

Hutton was a skilled businessman and he developed the Postum Cereal Company by acquiring a number of other food brands, including Birdseye, and in 1929 the firm became the General Foods Corporation. The couple enjoyed the glamorous social scene of the 1920s and Marjorie hosted charity events in their many properties, including houses on the north shore of Long Island and at Palm Beach. In 1924, in a move that was common at the time, she decided to sell her New York mansion to the George F. Fuller construction company, which wanted to build an apartment block on the site. Marjorie agreed but only on condition that they build a triplex apartment with a separate ground-floor concierge, parking and entrance so that she could maintain her address on East 92nd Street while the other residents entered on Fifth Avenue. The apartment was the largest in New York with 54 rooms and 17 bathrooms; everything was created to the highest standards of the period. The panelled dining room could accommodate 125 people.

During this period Marjorie further refined her taste, not only for French porcelain and furniture but also for magnificent jewelry to suit her high-society lifestyle. Like every important lady of that time, she loved to wear long strings of pearls, as depicted in Frank O. Salisbury's 1931 portrait of her (p. 17), and throughout her life she often wore two strings of beautiful natural pearls graduating in size. Most of her jewelry from this era has been unmounted and

redesigned in more contemporary settings to suit changing fashions. Some, however, has survived, such as a diamond tiara created by Cartier in a geometric pattern typical of the time and set at the centre with a step-cut diamond of 13.38 cts (p. 14); a diamond and *calibré*-cut ruby strap bracelet (p. 16) – a very elegant example of this period – as well as important diamond and emerald single-stone rings.

One of the most spectacular jewels in Marjorie's collection dates from these years: an emerald and diamond *sautoir* by Cartier, London, created in 1928–29. The long necklace was later shortened (p. 12) to a line of 24 tumbled emerald drops, each one surmounted by an emerald bead and interspersed with a barrel-shaped motif pavé-set with diamonds. Originally, it had a pendant set with an engraved emerald of 47.20 cts in a lyre-shaped diamond motif, but that was reused later in the year by Cartier as a centrepiece in a diamond bandeau. To replace the pendant, a buckle-shaped motif that supports a cascade of pear-shaped emeralds was added (right). It was designed by the London branch of Cartier in 1923 and set at its centre is a large emerald carved with a 17th-century Mughal motif of a flower, bearing on the side a Persian inscription that translates as 'The Servant of Shah Abbas'. In 1929, at Marjorie's request, the buckle-shaped motif was altered by Cartier, New York, so that it could also be used as a brooch. Later that year, Giulio de Blass depicted it in this form on Marjorie's shoulder in his painting of her with her daughter Nedenia Tutton, who had been born in 1923. Marjorie wore the full version of the *sautoir* to great effect at the Everglades Ball in Palm Beach in 1929, when she was dressed as Juliette (p. 11).

As well as the most elegant creations of the 1920s, Marjorie's collection became rich with beautiful stones and historic pieces. In June 1929, she was presented at court in London. She wore a pair of pendent earrings with two pear-shaped diamonds, weighing 14.25 and 20.34 cts respectively. Cartier had acquired them in 1928 from the collection of the Russian Prince Felix Yusupov, who said that they had belonged to Marie Antoinette, Queen of France. Cartier then sold the pair to Marjorie, with each of the two historic stones now hanging from a triangular-shaped diamond. Marjorie's elegant gown was enhanced by the addition of a diamond *devant de corsage* from the early 20th century, which she used as her left shoulder strap (p. 15).



Page 8
Marjorie Merriweather Post photographed in 1921. On her hat is a brooch of opalite design similar to the one illustrated below, which was created by Cartier in 1914 and altered in 1920, set with diamonds, onyx, pearl, ruby and tourmaline.

Above
An emerald and diamond pendant by Cartier. In the photograph opposite, taken on the occasion of the Everglades Ball in 1929, Marjorie, dressed as Juliette, is wearing the pendant with an emerald and diamond *sautoir* (long necklace).





The year 1929 was a period of great achievement and happiness for Marjorie, but the euphoric roaring 1920s came to an end on Tuesday 29 October with the Wall Street Crash. Marjorie was not affected in the same way as others because General Foods continued to make a profit, but she was a sensitive and down-to-earth woman who realized that a glamorous lifestyle was not appropriate in a period of depression. Instead, she began to devote her time and energy to helping victims of the financial crisis. She put her jewelry collection in a safety-deposit box and with the money that she saved on the insurance she set up the Marjorie Post Hutton Canteen to help women and children in New York; her husband created the Edward F. Hutton Food Station for Men. Marjorie also established a delivery service for the elderly and the sick so that they did not have to make the trip downtown to pick up their food, and she dedicated time to organizing events to raise money for this and other charitable causes. Her good works extended to an anti-crime campaign, for which she was awarded the Cross of Honor from the United States Flag Association by the in-coming first lady Eleanor Roosevelt on 12 December 1932. In contrast, Marjorie's niece, the Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton, continued to indulge in an expensive lifestyle throughout these difficult times. This deeply upset her discreet and empathetic aunt.

After sixteen years, the marriage between Marjorie and Edward F. Hutton fell apart because of his philandering. In February 1935, when she was planning divorce proceedings, she met the man who was to become her third husband: Joseph E. Davies, a successful Washington attorney in corporate and international law. At the time of their first encounter, at a friend's dinner party in Palm Beach, they were both married – but this did not prevent them from falling in love. When their relationship took a serious turn, Joseph, like Marjorie, sought a divorce. Finally, on 15 December 1935, the couple married. Even though the press was not present, reports said that she was elegantly dressed in a beautiful pink gown, with the wedding cake and its flower decoration matching the hue of her dress. After the ceremony, the couple boarded Marjorie's

yacht, *Hussar V* – rechristened *Sea Cloud* to celebrate the marriage – for a honeymoon cruise in the West Indies. When it was launched in 1931, this vessel was listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as being the world's largest privately owned sailing yacht: from stern to bow it measured 96.92 metres, with 16,764 metres of sail and a complement of 72 crew. It was a real castle on the sea, with lavishly decorated interiors, including a bedroom with Louis XVI furniture and a pink marble bathroom, a cinema for entertainment on long journeys and even a fully equipped operating theatre with a team of doctors, in case of an emergency.

Once back from her trip, Marjorie became a member of the Board of Directors at General Foods; her appointment as the company's first ever female director was announced in April 1936. That August, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her husband American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, with the delicate task of fostering a good relationship between Russia and the United States at a time when the policies of Nazi Germany – the Rhineland had been occupied in March – had increased international tension. Marjorie was at first appalled at the prospect of going to Moscow, but she threw herself into organizing their move and knew she could help her husband charm the Russians.

She left most of her legendary jewels in a safe in the United States, but she did instruct Cartier, New York, to combine two existing diamond and sapphire bracelets to form a necklace. The final creation was quite spectacular, with the focus in the centre where a diamond and sapphire motif was created using a large cushion-shaped sapphire (p. 19). The motif can be detached and used as a brooch. In 1946, Salisbury painted Marjorie wearing the necklace (p. 18).

The couple arrived in Moscow on 19 January 1937. Living in the Soviet Union was not easy: Marjorie's phone calls were often intercepted and in this period of the purges Soviet officials would mysteriously disappear. Amid the turmoil, exquisite works of art from the Tsarist era came onto the market and this gave Marjorie a unique opportunity. Prior to her arrival, she owned only two Russian items: a box – her first Fabergé piece – from the Yusupov collection, which she had bought from Cartier in 1920, and the Catherine the Great Easter Egg, also by Fabergé, that Tsar Nicholas II had presented to his mother; the

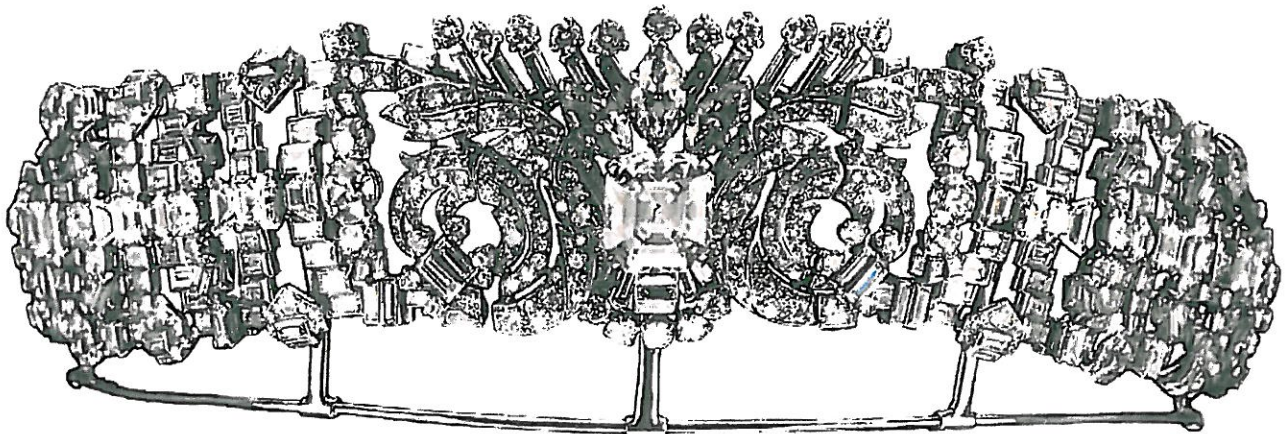
The emerald and diamond santon created in 1926–29 by Cartier, London, was later made into a shorter necklace, at Marjorie's request.

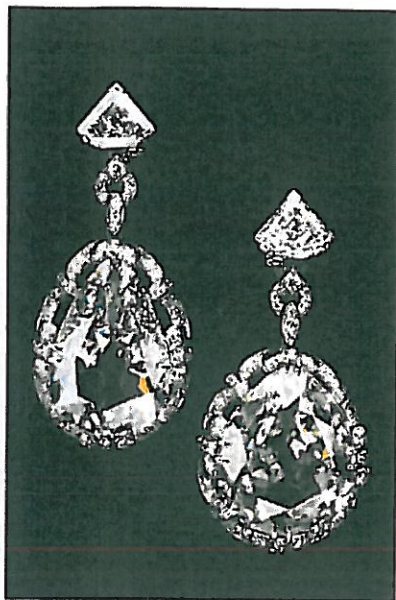
Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, for Easter in 1914. This was given to Marjorie by her daughter Eleanor in 1931. In Moscow, the Soviet government was selling art in order to raise money for its industrialization projects, and it paid little attention to the historical value of the items sold. Marjorie, with her collector's instinct and eye for beauty, took the chance to acquire a wide variety of items, from paintings and furniture to porcelain and icons. Fortunately, Joe Davies shared her passion for collecting. Objects were stacked in dust-covered piles in warehouses and she excitedly rummaged through them, buying as much as she could. The eighteen months that Marjorie spent in the Soviet Union sparked an interest in Russian art that was to continue for the rest of her life; many of the pieces of Tsarist art that came out of Russia after the Revolution eventually found their way into her collection from dealers worldwide. Ultimately she possessed the most comprehensive collection of Russian Imperial art outside of Russia.



A sapphire and diamond bracelet by Cartier, c. 1923. At the centre is a cushion shaped sapphire of 38.33 cts from Kashmir. The sapphire can be detached and Harry Winston later made a diamond mount so that it could be worn as a ring.

A diamond tiara made by Cartier for Marjorie in the early 1930s. At the centre it is set with a step-cut diamond weighing 13.38 cts.





Top
The Marie Antoinette diamond earrings. The two pear shaped diamonds weighing 14.25 and 20.34 cts respectively were mounted by Cartier in 1928. They came from the collection of Prince Felix Yusupov but reputedly had once belonged to Marie Antoinette, Queen of France. They are now in the Smithsonian.

Above
An emerald and diamond ring by the American jeweler Harry Winston, 1950s

Right
Marjorie dressed for her presentation at court in 1929, painted by G ulio de Blaas. She is wearing the Marie Antoinette diamond earrings.



In June 1938, the Davieses completed their mission in Russia and the government presented Marjorie with a pair of antique vases that she was allowed to choose for herself as a leaving gift. In July, Joe was appointed Ambassador to both Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The couple took up residence in Brussels in the Palais du Marquis d'Assche, at one time home to members of the royal family and birthplace of the reigning King Léopold III. The 19th-century house was still being renovated when they arrived and Marjorie made great efforts to decorate it appropriately. From her residence in New York she brought her François Boucher tapestries, French furniture and Russian porcelain. She was delighted to be in a country with a monarchy and Joe soon established good relations with the King. Marjorie was in her element amid the grandeur and rituals of the Belgian royal court.

While they were in Brussels, Marjorie, Joe and Nedenia listened with increasing alarm to Hitler's speeches on the radio: Europe was on the brink of war. At the time of the Munich crisis at the end of September, Joe was so worried that he sent Marjorie and Nedenia back to the safety of the United States. Marjorie returned in mid-November, since Hitler had been temporarily placated by the annexation of the Sudetenland. On 14 December 1938, she held her first diplomatic dinner in Brussels and proved herself to be the perfect hostess. The food was served on the Russian service for the Order of St George, to great effect.

The peace did not last, however. The Nazis' invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 led England and France to declare war on Germany. The Davieses were

on vacation in the United States at the time and the Department of State forbade the ambassador's family from going back to Europe – even to pick up its personal possessions. Nonetheless, the resourceful Marjorie sent several assistants to Brussels to collect her belongings and transport them back to the United States before the situation deteriorated further.

Davies resigned from his post in Belgium and, to Marjorie's relief, returned home. Back in Washington, he acted as an intermediary between the United States and Europe in his role as special assistant to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. The Davieses started to look for a permanent residence and, after some months, found a neo-Georgian house with 20 acres of land in northwest Washington that had once belonged to the wife of Alexander Graham Bell. With her design flair, Marjorie made extensive changes to the interior of the property to display her collections to advantage and brought everything from the triplex in New York, which she now gave up. Marjorie gave Joe ownership of the estate, to save his pride, and in 1942 when the family finally moved in it was renamed Tregaron after the Welsh village that his family came from.

On 7 December 1941, the United States was brought into the war by the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Marjorie, with her enormous generosity and sense of civic responsibility, leased the *Sea Cloud*, stripped of its fixtures and fittings, to the US Navy for the token amount of \$1 a year. It was used as a weather ship in the North Atlantic until 1944. Her characteristic kindness extended to the Grand Ducal family of Luxembourg – she gave them use of a house

A bracelet set with *calibré*-cut rubies and circular cut and baguette diamonds, c. 1930



Marjorie portrayed by Frank O. Salisbury in 1931. She is wearing pearl and ruby jewels and a ruby and diamond bracelet.



Marjorie, in a portrait by Frank O. Salisbury, 1946, wearing the sapphire and diamond necklace (opposite) created for her in 1936 by Cartier using two existing bracelets

Below
A sapphire and diamond ring set with an hexagonal step-cut sapphire weighing 70.19 cts



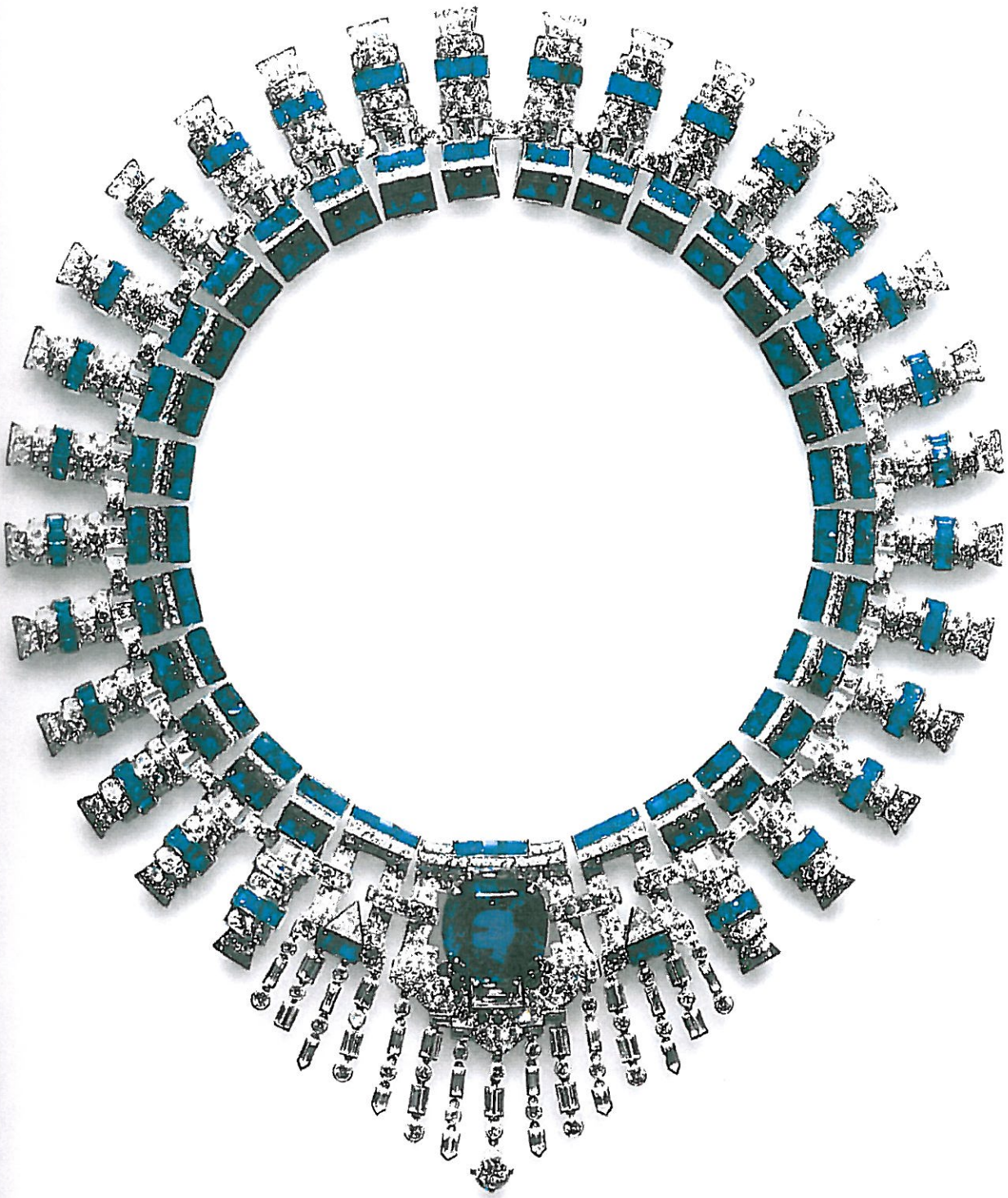
on her Long Island estate when they had to flee Europe in 1940. She devoted her time to helping the war effort through the American Red Cross and she and Joe continued to be involved in Soviet-American affairs; they hosted a meeting at Tregaron in 1942 to encourage better relations between officials of the two nations. One room in the house was decorated with major pieces from Marjorie's Russian collection. In May 1943, Joe, despite declining health, went on one last diplomatic mission to Moscow to meet with Stalin. In the same year, Warner Brothers released a film of his bestselling book *Mission to Moscow* (1941), starring Walter Huston and Ann Harding as Joe and Marjorie. The film's positive depiction of life in the Soviet Union under Stalin later drew criticism in the McCarthy era.

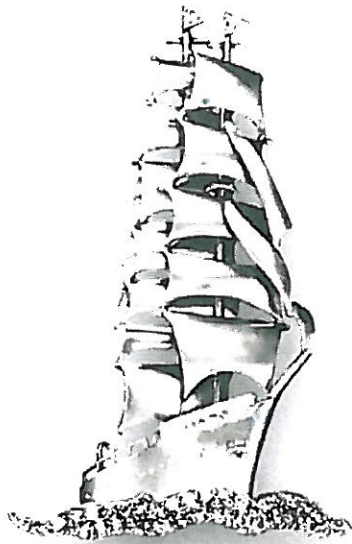
It was also at this time that Marjorie met Princess Julia Cantacuzène through the Sulgrave Club, an

exclusive women's club for the Washington elite, of which Marjorie had been a member since 1940. Inspired by the Russian relief programme to help refugees that the Princess had established after 1917, Marjorie displayed her magnificent Imperial Russian objects in an exhibition in Manhattan to assist Russian war relief. She loved to use her collection for the benefit of others.

After the Potsdam Conference in 1945, where he was special advisor to President Harry Truman and Secretary of State James E. Byrnes with the rank of ambassador, Davies's political influence waned. With the onset of the Cold War, his views on the importance of co-operation with the Soviet Union were no longer welcome. Ill and disillusioned, his relationship with Marjorie also started to crumble.

After its war service, the *Sea Cloud* was returned to Marjorie, together with \$175,000 for its renovation.





A platinum and diamond brooch in the form of Marjorie's yacht, the *Sea Cloud*.

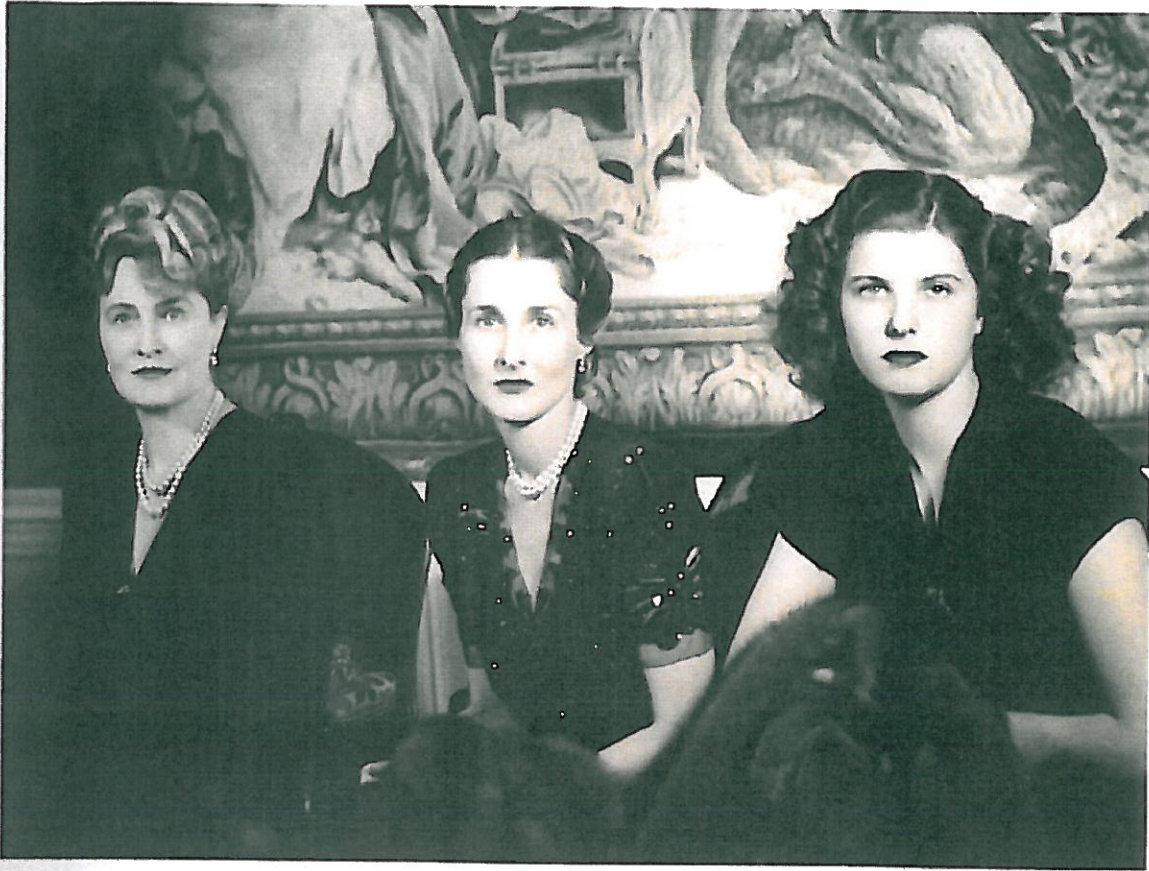
Marjorie with her husband, Joe Davics, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and friends on board the *Sea Cloud* in 1948.

Opposite
Marjorie with her daughter Eleanor and granddaughter Marwee.

She took great pride in restoring it to its former glory, which took nearly two years, and in April 1947 the family was finally able to set sail for the West Indies on a holiday. In the postwar years Joe was increasingly moody and possessive but Marjorie was determined to save the marriage and kept her unhappiness to herself. She concentrated on charity work and socializing, to take her mind off her personal troubles.

After Nedden's marriage to Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr., an heir to the Colgate fortune, in 1946, the family rarely visited Hillwood, the mock-Tudor house and 122-acre estate on Long Island's Gold Coast, and Marjorie decided it was time to sell it. As it happened, this was just when Long Island University was seeking to expand and Hillwood, with its swimming pool and fields that could be used for sports and new buildings, was perfect for a campus. In June 1947, the university signed a contract to buy the estate for \$200,000. But the local residents were afraid that hordes of middle- and working-class students and minorities would be attracted to the new college and destroy the area's character. The Oyster Bay zoning board decided that the matter should be publicly discussed and on 10 July over 1,000 people turned up to express their concerns





at an impassioned meeting that lasted several hours. Protestors found issues and loopholes that kept the argument raging for four years. Marjorie declined to comment on the situation to the press, but behind the scenes she made sure that her financial managers and attorneys fought hard, and successfully, for Long Island University. True to her generous character, she thought it more important to provide a good education to future generations than to pander to local snobbery.

In 1948, Marjorie helped the Good Samaritan Hospital in Palm Beach by acting as chairman of the Everglades Club's 'New Look Ball' at which a 'Chinese auction' raised \$176,000. The Duchess of Windsor was a member of the board and shortly after the event she and the Duke were invited for a cruise on the *Sea Cloud*. They sailed to Nassau and Havana, a journey that was enjoyed enormously by the Windsors and established a bond between the stylish Wallis and Marjorie. She celebrated this successful year with a stunning pair of

diamond ear clips set with a fringe of briolette diamonds, made by Van Cleef & Arpels (p. 29).

Marjorie brought together the most important members of society, present and upcoming, at her splendid receptions and dinners. She was renowned for these, and for her aristocratic allure; she was always elegantly dressed and sparkling with her fantastic jewels. The first impression of Lady Bird Johnson, the future first lady, when she was invited for dinner, was that everything around Marjorie had a regal aura – and this never faded. Her famous garden parties had to be perfect, from the flowers down to the tiniest detail. She found great joy in giving, and everyone invited was treated as a guest of honour, regardless of social standing. Despite her erect figure and stately presence, she was an extremely charming and open person with a great sense of humour. She loved to tango and at Mar-a-Lago, her mansion in Palm Beach, she provided instructors for her guests to learn the latest dances.



The large clasp of this necklace is set with brilliant cut and baguette diamonds mounted in platinum, and supports a long, graduated fringe of brilliant-cut diamonds. The clasp was created by Cartier in 1960 from an existing piece in Marjorie's collection. In the centre is a pair of diamond pendant ear clips by Van Cleef & Arpels, 1918, set with brilliant-cut, baguette and briolette diamonds.



Opposite
Marjorie inspecting the table settings prior to a formal dinner at Hillwood, Washington, DC, in October 1965. She is wearing her pearl and diamond Cartier necklace.





Opposite
An amethyst, turquoise and diamond necklace created for Marjorie by Cartier in 1950 and matching ear clips with suspended fringes of briolette amethysts.

Left
Lady Bird Johnson with Marjorie at Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach, in April 1968. Marjorie is wearing the Cartier amethyst, turquoise and diamond necklace

Marjorie became famous for her square dances, where everyone dressed in Western costume, although her own outfit was always enhanced by her striking jewels, such as the set created for her by Cartier in 1950 in amethyst, turquoise and diamonds (p. 24), a combination of stones and colours made famous years earlier by the Duchess of Windsor.

Marjorie was always interested in all forms of the arts. In Washington, she encouraged and supported organizations and events that enhanced the cultural life of the nation's capital. In 1950, she started to take an interest in the National Symphony Orchestra and held a garden party to raise money for it. There she made friends with one of the orchestra's board members, Gerson Nordlinger, a cultured bachelor whom she was to invite to her parties frequently from that point onwards. Two years later, Nordlinger, as treasurer, held a meeting to discuss the orchestra's \$90,000 deficit.

Marjorie took him aside and told him that she would pay off the whole debt. In 1954, when the orchestra had its first benefit ball, she acted as honorary chair. The following year, she donated \$100,000 to fund a programme that would enable thousands of high-school students to attend National Symphony Orchestra concerts for free, giving many of them their first experience of live orchestral music. This benefited the NSO, too: its season was lengthened by five weeks, providing its players with more work and attracting better musicians. By the end of its first year, 500,000 students had participated in 'Music for Young America', as the programme was called, and it was a source of great pride to Marjorie. She loved to receive appreciative letters and comments from the teenagers who had benefited from her generosity.

Meanwhile, at home, Joe's temper grew shorter and his jealousy became unbearable. Marjorie, clever

years younger than her husband, was not even permitted to dance with another man without being questioned aggressively afterwards. In 1950, Joe was diagnosed with intestinal cancer and Marjorie felt duty-bound to remain with him. Once he had recovered, however, there was nothing to bind her to him but a piece of paper. When a friend, finding some documents relating to Marjorie's properties in 1954, asked why Tregaron had been bought in Joe's name, Marjorie pretended that this was news to her: the property, she claimed, was hers. Now with 'proof' that she had been severely wronged by her husband, she had an excuse to file for divorce. Joe, in his fury, refused to relinquish his claim on Tregaron. Unfortunately for Marjorie, the law was on his side. Their Russian art collection was divided in half and Joe ended up with objects that Marjorie had bought for herself using her own funds (she repurchased many of them after his death); in retaliation, a bitter and irate Marjorie sent a removal van to Tregaron



The 'Blue Heart' diamond ring, set with a fancy deep blue diamond of 30.62 cts, was bought by Marjorie from Harry Winston in 1964.

Below
The Duke of Windsor with the French ballet dancer Zizi Jeanmarie at a ball in aid of

cancer research held in the orangerie at the Palace of Versailles, 16 June 1953. She wore the 'Blue Heart' mounted as a pendant with a blue and a pink diamond by Van Cleef & Arpels. This was the only time that the pendant was worn before being sold to Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza on 9 November 1953.





Above and below
A brilliant cut diamond necklace
by Harry Winston, c. 1965, and a
1950 diamond brooch by Cartier
set with an articulated cascade
of marquise shaped diamonds

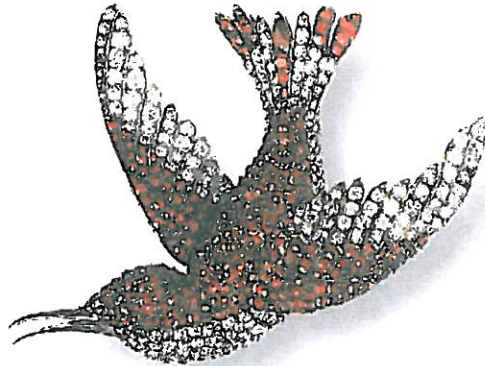
Centre left
A ring by Harry Winston set with
a cushion-shaped diamond of
31.20 cts. It is now known as the
'Merriweather Post' diamond.

Right

Marjorie attending the Red Cross Ball in Palm Beach in 1960 wearing the ruby and diamond necklace and pendant ear clips illustrated opposite. The necklace, of early 19th century manufacture, is set with oval-shaped rubies and old-cut diamonds mounted in silver and gold. The clips in the matching pendant earrings were a later addition.

Below

A late 19th-century brooch from Marjorie's collection, designed as a swooping hummingbird set with rubies and diamonds.



in the dead of night to retrieve everything, from her celebrated azaleas to the mansion's oriental rugs. After a marriage of nearly twenty years, the divorce was finalized on 8 March 1955.

With the loss of Tregaron, Marjorie started to look for another property in Washington. On the edge of Rock Creek Park she found a neo-Georgian house called Arbremont with 25 acres of grounds, which she bought and renamed Hillwood after her former residence on Long Island. For some time she had envisaged giving her collection to the nation and for the next two years, with the help of the New York art dealers French & Company, she had the interiors of her new mansion remodelled to showcase her priceless artefacts. Hillwood became a treasure house of Imperial Russian

art and 18th-century French furniture, as well as the setting for lectures given by the curator of her collection, Marvin Ross, who was hired in 1958.

Marjorie continued to acquire magnificent jewels, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s she made some important purchases through the jeweler Harry Winston. In 1960, she bought a 30.62 cts, heart-shaped fancy deep blue diamond. This stone had been mounted in the centre of a diamond corsage ornament by Cartier, Paris, in 1910, two years after it was discovered, and sold to Mrs Unzue, a wealthy Argentinian who owned it for forty-three years. In 1953, the three principal stones from this piece - the 'Blue Heart', a triangular blue diamond of 3.82 cts and a pear-shaped pink diamond of 2.05 cts - were set in clusters of diamonds







Opposite
A cultured baroque pearl, moonstone and diamond necklace and matching earrings by George Headley, 1966.

Left
Marjorie at Hillwood with her favourite schnauzer, Scampi, who is regally seated in an 18th-century miniature canopied bed that came from a royal collection.

Below
An invisible setting ruby and diamond brooch by Van Cleef & Arpels, 1967.



and hung from a diamond *rivière* necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels. It was worn in public only once – by the French ballet dancer Zizi Jeanmaire at a ball held on 16 June 1953 in the orangerie of the Palace of Versailles in aid of cancer research (p. 26) before the pendant was sold on 9 November to Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza. He purchased it for his future wife, Nina Dyer, as a token of his love (see Chapter 11). Bought back by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1960, the ‘Blue Heart’ was later acquired by Harry Winston in 1964. He sold it to Marjorie mounted as a ring in a cluster of 25 brilliant-cut colourless diamonds with a total weight of 1.63 cts. In the same year she donated the priceless diamond to the Smithsonian Institution.

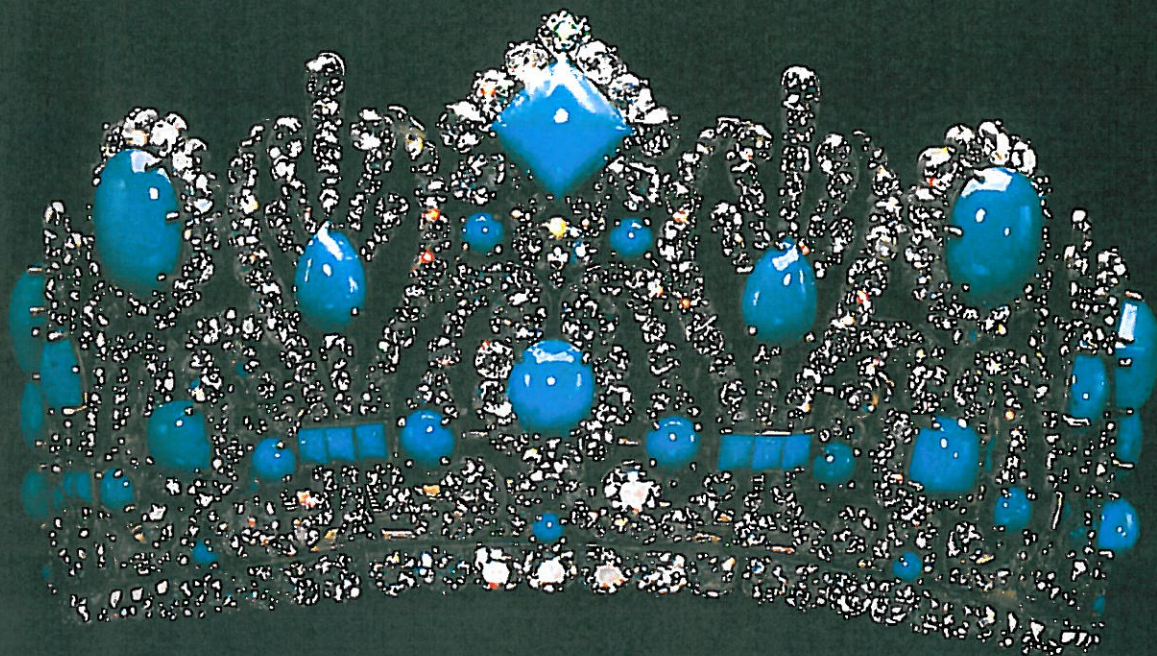
A few years earlier, Marjorie had bought another beautiful stone from Harry Winston: a cushion-shaped

diamond of 31.20 cts, of the highest grade D colour, from the Golconda mines in India. This diamond was from the collection of Mae Rovensky, the wife of banker John E. Rovensky. She had achieved fame in 1916 when her then husband Morton F. Plant exchanged their house on Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street with Cartier for two strings of pearls worth over \$1 million. Cartier, New York, is still located in that building. In January 1957, Winston had bought the stone at the sale of the late Mrs Rovensky’s jewels and recut it from its original 31.40 cts before selling it to Marjorie. Today, it is known as the ‘Merriweather Post’ diamond (p. 27).

In 1958, Marjorie was married for the fourth and last time, to Herbert A. May, a member of the board of directors of the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad, and of the New York, Chicago and St Louis Railroad,



Marjorie at the Red Cross Ball in Palm Beach in 1967. She is wearing the turquoise and diamond Marie-Louise Diadem (opposite) and the necklace, earrings, bracelet, brooch and ring created by Harry Winston in 1961 to match it. The diadem, originally set with emeralds, was part of a *parure* given by Napoleon I to the Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria on the occasion of their wedding. It was made in 1810 by Etienne Nitô et Fils in Paris and is set in silver and gold with 1,006 old cut diamonds weighing 700 cts. It was acquired by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1953 from a descendant of the Empress Marie Louise; the firm later removed the emeralds and substituted them with turquoises and sold the diadem to Marjorie. In 1962, the diadem was displayed at the Louvre in Paris together with the original necklace, earrings and comb in an exhibition about the Empress. Marjorie donated the diadem to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, in 1971.



and an executive with Westinghouse Air Brake company. Her engagement ring was a navette-shaped diamond mounted horizontally. The marriage did not last long, however, and after six years the couple divorced. Marjorie was known thereafter by her maiden name.

In the year that marriage came to an end, 1964, Marjorie bought several pieces by Fabergé and another twenty or so over the next five years. These included the celebrated Music Box created by Fabergé to celebrate the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Princess Zinaida Yusupov and her husband, Felix, in 1907.

Marjorie also continued to add historic pieces to her jewelry collection. In 1960, she bought the Napoleon Diamond Necklace from Harry Winston, donating it two years later to the Smithsonian Institution. It is primarily composed of forty-seven old-cut, pear-shaped and briolette diamonds and has an estimated total

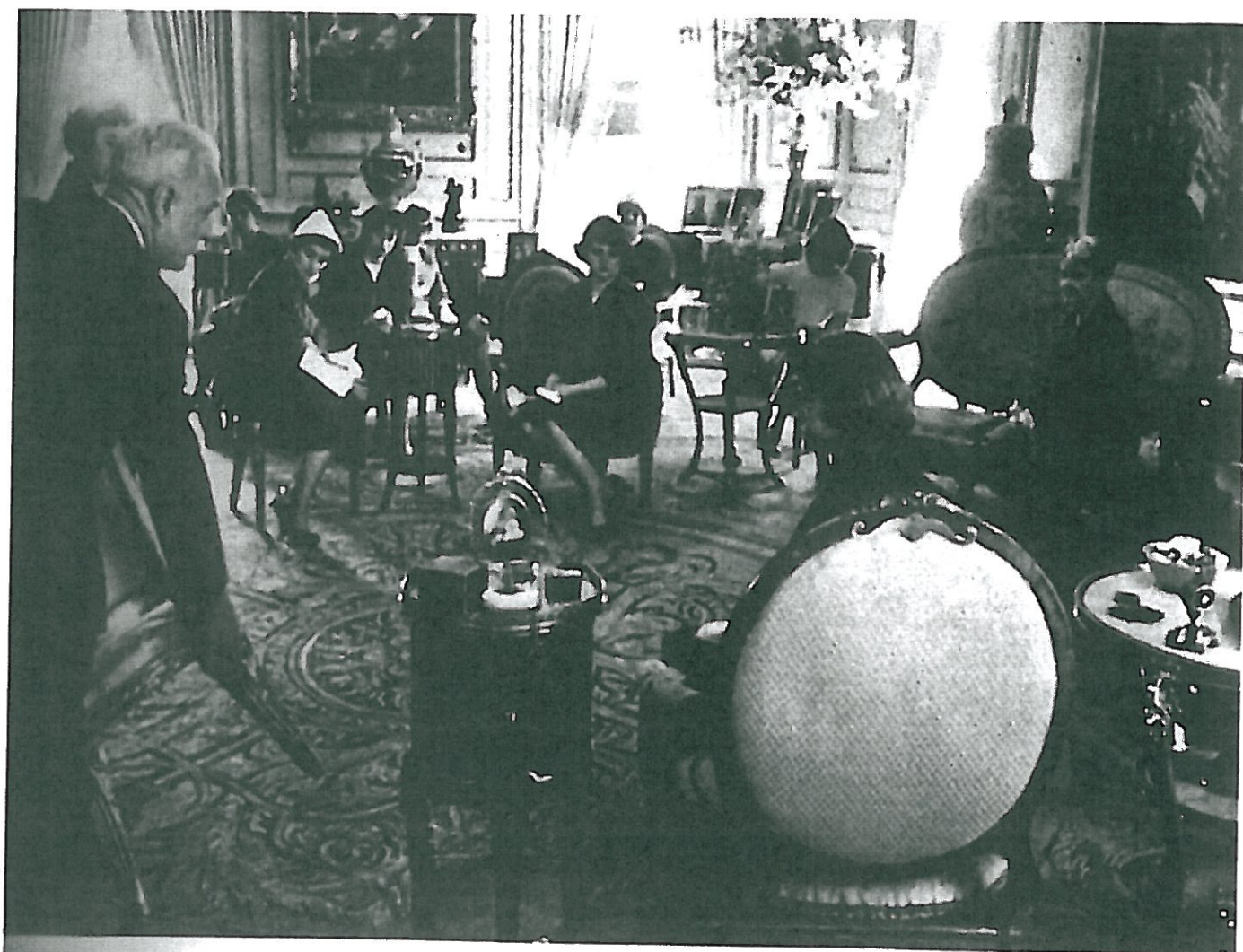
weight of 268 cts. Mounted in gold topped with silver, the necklace was created in 1811 by the court jeweler Etienne Nitôt et Fils of Paris for Napoleon to give to his second wife, Marie-Louise, Empress of France, to celebrate the birth of their son, Napoleon II, the King of Rome. After the fall of Napoleon, Marie-Louise took the necklace back to Vienna with her other personal jewels and it remained in the Habsburg family until 1918, when it was sold to the French dealer from whom Winston acquired it.

The necklace was not the only piece of Marie-Louise's jewelry that Marjorie possessed. She owned an imposing diadem, also made by Etienne Nitôt et Fils, that Napoleon had presented to Marie-Louise on the occasion of their marriage in 1810. It was originally part of a set that included a necklace, earrings and a comb, all mounted with emeralds and diamonds. On

The turquoise and diamond necklace created by Harry Winston for Marjorie and which she wore with the Marie-Louise Diadem



Opposite
Marjorie and guests in the French drawing room at Hillwood, Washington, DC, listening to a lecture on French furniture by the curator of her collection, Marvin Ross.



her death. Empress Marie-Louise bequeathed the set to her aunt, Archduchess Elise, whose descendant sold it in 1953 to Van Cleef & Arpels. The firm removed the emeralds from the diadem and sold them individually, mounted in pieces of jewelry. A newspaper advertisement for Van Cleef & Arpels in 1955 read, 'An emerald for you from the historic Napoleonic Tiara.' The diadem, now set with turquoises in place of the emeralds, was then sold to Marjorie (p. 33). Harry Winston created a turquoise and diamond necklace with matching pendent earrings, bracelet, brooch and ring that Marjorie wore with the Marie-Louise Diadem to the Red Cross Ball in Palm Beach in 1967. Oldric Royce designed a white and turquoise evening gown to complement the jewels (p. 32). In 1971, Marjorie gave the diadem to the Smithsonian.

Marjorie's jewelry collection also included modern pieces such as a stylish invisible setting ruby and diamond floral brooch made by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1967 and bought by her in 1969. Marjorie turned 80

that year and was making plans for the future of Hillwood and her collection. She proposed that on her death the entire house and collection would go to the Smithsonian Institution with an endowment to maintain it as a museum. This is what happened after Marjorie died of heart failure at Hillwood on 12 September 1973. However, the institution found it was too much of a financial burden, and the estate reverted to the Post Foundation in 1976. Finally, the property was opened to the public in 1977 as the Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens.

Marjorie's coat of arms had the Latin motto *Mea Spes Omnis*, meaning 'All my Hope is in Myself'. It encapsulated not only the self-sufficiency that she displayed through four not always happy marriages but also the philanthropy and capacity to improve the lives of others that was such a conspicuous part of her life of grandeur. That style of life has long gone but this elegant woman of unimaginable wealth left a legacy of refinement and education that lives on today. ❧