

# MARJORIE POST'S BEAUTY RITUALS AND PERSONAL CARE

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Marjorie Post was as meticulous about her personal appearance and presentation as she was about her gardens, the decoration in her homes, and the well-orchestrated events she hosted. This article explores some of these personal rituals of Marjorie Post related to her appearance, some more outwardly apparent, like the prominence of her meticulously lacquered manicure seen in portraits throughout the house, or the existence of a "massage room" on the second floor of her home—complete with a bonnet hair dryer. Others are covert—a jeweled Cartier vanity compact concealing red lipstick and a bit of powder, or the wafts of the Trefle home scent she used to perfume her rooms.



**Portrait of Marjorie Merriweather Post**, Frank O. Salisbury (British, 1874-1962), England, 1946, oil on canvas, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973 (51.143)* This portrait perfectly epitomizes the glamorous approach to beauty and personal care upheld by Post, from her signature curled up do to her bright red fingernail.

As a specialist in historic costume and jewelry, I have always considered other forms of ornamentation, like hairstyle, fragrance, and cosmetics as part of one's appearance and approach to dress, and my interest in these elements is rewarded through my research here at Hillwood.

## Scent:

Post loved the French perfume, *Carnet de Bal* (*Dance Card*), from furrier Revillon Frères. Renowned perfumer Maurice Shaller, who previously created the early perfumes for Poiret, was the creator behind the scent. This fragrance debuted in 1937 and was characterized by citrus and woody notes. Its round flacon evokes the design of a brandy glass.

Dina Merrill (1923-2017), the youngest of Post's daughters, had her own perfume and cosmetics line called *Amaranthe*. It was produced by Coty between 1969-1979. The line, named after a flower from mythology, included a fragrance, lipstick, liquid makeup, pressed powder, eye shadow, eyebrow pencil, moisturizer, night cream, and blush. The perfume is blonde in color and more reserved than provocative, perfectly reflecting Merrill's cinematic qualities.



**Carnet de Bal Perfume and Box**, Revillon Frères (French, 1732-1982), Paris, about 1940, glass, paperboard, *Museum Purchase, 2018 (2018.4-4a)*



**Dina Merrill's Amaranthe cologne spray and dusting powder**, Coty, Inc. (French, 1904-present), New York, about 1969, Glass, plastic, paper packaging, *Gift of Nedenia Rumbough and Jan Roosenburg, 2018 (2018.3.1,.2.1-3, .2a*

As certainly noticed by all our volunteers, Post traditionally scented her personal rooms with Trefle in the form of little puffs sprinkled with the scent and scattered around. "Trefle" was produced by the company EDCO, based in New York and established by Ed Devack during the 1920s. Other celebrity fans of Trefle included Frank Sinatra (1915-1998) and Happy Rockefeller (1926-2015). During the 1970s, the Ritz Carlton Corporation chose the scent for use throughout their properties---unsurprising since Post loved to spend time at the Ritz in Paris!

The recent February 2019 exhibition, *Perfume and Seduction*, highlighted Post's passion for historic beauty and personal tools she collected and displayed, and even featured a few special pieces she regularly used, like her 36-piece silver gilt dressing table set from the firm of Aucoc of Paris that was a wedding gift to Grand Duchess Ekaterina Mikhailovna (1827-94) in 1851. Post herself received the set from her husband Joseph Davies in 1938. Additional components from the Grand Duchess's set survive at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.



**Dressing table set**, Aucoc, Paris (1821–after 1960), Jean-Baptiste-Casimir Aucoc, silversmith (French, 1769–1865), Paris, about 1849, Silver gilt, glass, brush, silk, ciselé velvet, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973 (12.188.1–36)*

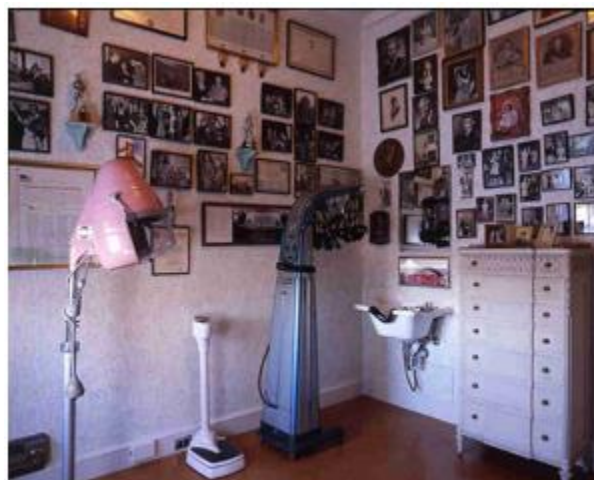
### Hair:

By the early twentieth century, Marjorie Post was effortlessly interpreting trends and adding her own, authentic touch. A 1934 *Vogue* column, aptly titled "Beauty Gossip," noted the trend for a "grey streak across the head" and pointed to actor Whitney Bourne (1914-1988) and socialite Frederica Vanderbilt Webb (1882-1949) as amongst those who wore streaks of grey in their hair in the form of "transformations" or custom-made clips. The writer goes on to say, "Mrs. E.F. Hutton has a grey streak too, but that is her own." Post's grey streak is prominent in several of her portraits and the condition is called poliosis and relates to a lack of melanin or color in the location of the streak. Folklore abounds about this unique physical trait and its association with strong, powerful women—unsurprising, then that Marjorie Post should chose to highlight hers amongst her cropped finger wave of the 1920s and 1930s and the signature, elegant up do she favored from the 1940s on.



**Portrait of Marjorie Merriweather Post**, Frank O. Salisbury (British, 1874-1962), England, 1934, Oil on canvas, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post* (51.140)

As a mid-century Washingtonian, Post had a fabulous working relationship with Joseph Steward Bankert (1916-1998) whose salon was located in Sykesville, MD. She routinely flew him to whichever residence she was staying at and was very effusive about the work he did—shampoos, cuts, and perms. Bankert cared for Post's coiffure at Hillwood in the massage room on the second floor of the mansion that was equipped with a sink flowing with heated and filtered rainwater for shampoos, a specialty perm wave machine, and state of the art bonnet hairdryers. Apart from these treatments, Post's hair maintenance was simple—she shampooed it once a month, but it apparently extended below her waist when she let it down (never!)



**View of Massage Room at Hillwood**



Discerning Post fans will notice occasionally visible black hairpins in Marjorie Post's signature mid-century up do. One very perceptive future volunteer docent, Helen Heller, even wrote in to Post in fall of 1968 suggesting she try some pins in silver to better camouflage with her hair color. Post was a great sport, responding "...with this mop of mine, I have to use four or five different types of pins to keep it in proper order and since I seem to be constantly running too fast, I have not taken the time to search out pins in the silver color."

### Cosmetics

While researching the forthcoming exhibition, [\*Roaring Twenties: The Life and Style of Marjorie Merriweather Post\*](#), I discovered that Post was very cautious of sun exposure during her winters spent in Palm Beach—choosing fully covered swimming ensembles and cover-ups, as well as a wide brimmed hat and an umbrella to shade her face while enjoying the sunshine.

For product, Post was also a steadfast client of Hungarian dermatologist Erno Laszlo (1887-1973), though she expressed a desire to be omitted from any promotions or advertisements in a 1967 correspondence with the firm.

Another correspondence finds Post singing the praises of Tangee lipstick in a note to the brand's owners, George W. Luft Co. in 1962. This is one of the few examples of Post's documented dedication to a makeup product. The "indelible" lip color appeared on the market for American consumers around 1923. Unlike traditional lipsticks, the Tangee product used a type of dye that reacts to the wearer's skin pigments to create a custom, natural color. Post wrote, "Tangee does not spill all over the face when you eat a morsel of any kind..." and identified herself as a loyal user since the 1920s.

Marjorie Post might have installed her favorite lip color into one of her precious Cartier New York vanity cases or personal beauty accessories. These include a rectangular enamel case (11.224) from the 1910s ornamented with diamonds and sapphires. The mirrored compartment includes a lipstick applicator and a tiny powder puff. An ivory toothpick—convenient for a post-dinner touch up—emerges from the top corner complete with a sapphire cabochon at the top. A second Cartier New York cosmetics accessory (11.248) from Post's collection is more compact and features one small gold enamel lipstick tube decorated with lapis lazuli and diamonds suspended from a gold-enamel linked chain. A longer version of the same chain attaches to a small circular powder and mirror compact. The chains attach to a gold thumb ring. This accessory dates to the 1920s and is the pinnacle of minimalist luxury for an evening out. Though applying make-up in public was still considered faux pas—should Post be observed in the act of employing one of these objects, she would be forgiven thanks to their excellence in artisanship and materials.



**(Left) Vanity Case**, Cartier (French, 1847-present), New York, about 1910, Gold, platinum, enamel, diamonds, sapphires, ivory, mirror, Gift of Eleanor Close Barzin, 1979 (11.224)

**(Right) Compact and lipstick case**, Cartier (French, 1847-present), New York City, about 1925, Gold, enamel, lapis lazuli, diamonds, Gift of Eleanor Close Barzin, 1996 (11.248)

Post also collected but did not use historic examples of portable personal accessories, specifically several étuis and patch boxes from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century. These examples act as pendants to the modern tradition of vanity and cosmetics cases---where a person might wish to freshen up her make-up in the twentieth century with lipstick and powder encased in a tiny luxurious object, they might have in the past held sewing tools, tooth picks, and perfume vials in a hand-painted porcelain case. Though the contents differ, the tradition remains the same.



Étui, about 1770, enamel on copper, gilt copper, *Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post (15.182)*