

AN IMPERIAL RUG WOVEN IN FRANCE BY BRAQUENIÉ

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The rug in the dining room is woven in the 18th century style in rose red and cream adorned with an intricate décor of flower bouquets as well as garlands and swags of roses, ribbons, clusters of musical instruments, parrots and other birds. Selected by Marjorie Merriweather Post in 1956, the rug matches the 18th century French inspired style of the room. The “extraordinary Aubusson palace rug,” as described by Post’s New York interior designer and dealer French & Company, measures 489 x 240 inches. Hillwood staff have folded and rolled the very large rug so visitors can enter the room without stepping on this historic piece.

When acquired, the rug was believed to have been part of the furnishing of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. An Austrian archduke crowned emperor of Mexico in 1864, Maximilian was executed during an uprising only three years later. During his short reign, Maximilian commissioned some furnishings from France, especially for the Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City, today the National Museum of History. After the fall of the empire, a selection of the palace’s holdings was sold and some acquired by American collectors such as Ida Hancock Ross (1843-1913), one of the richest women in California.¹ Post believed her rug was part of these sales. Post was familiar with Emperor Maximilian given she acquired in 1928 a 21.04-carat Colombian emerald, originally set in a ring worn by Emperor Maximilian, Post had Cartier set the stone in a new ring for her and today the ring, and stone, are at the Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. A: Hillwood’s Rug in the Dining Room (detail) (acc. no. 42.1)

Although the history of Hillwood’s rug can’t be traced directly to the emperor, the curatorial team have identified the manufacturer. An invoice in Hillwood’s archives describes the rug, “This is without doubt one of the finest large Aubusson rugs in existence, and was woven with particular interest and great care, for

¹ Part of the Hancock collection is today on view at the Hancock Memorial Museum, Los Angeles.

presentation to the unfortunate emperor.”² Aubusson is a small city in the Creuse region in central France where tapestry and rug weaving flourished since the 1300s. Many tapestry, rug, and carpet manufacturers established workshops in the city throughout centuries. The French manufacturer Braquenié, among others, had workshop in Aubusson since the 1800s. The firm, today part of Pierre Frey Paris, has produced tapestries, carpets, and rugs since 1824 and worked for an international clientele delivering French made textiles all over the world, including to the French Emperor, Russian grand dukes, international aristocracy, and American magnates. In June 2020, the gouache model, the painted sample produced by the manufacturer or designer, of Hillwood’s rug was identified in the Braquenié archives, making the attribution to the firm evident.



Fig. B: Gouache Model of Hillwood’s rug from the Braquenié Archives, Courtesy Pierre Frey

² Invoice from French & Co., Oct. 17, 1956, Object File 42.1, Curatorial Files, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections.