

A Model of a Three-Room Highlights Manson Tour Showcasing an Introduction, Transitions, Discussions in Rooms of Varying Lengths, and a Conclusion

Audience: intelligent, curious adults, most with little knowledge of the subjects of the tour

Objectives: After participating in this tour, visitors will be better able to:

- 1) Identify the function of these rooms and their connection to Marjorie Post;
- 2) Describe how the “theater of self-presentation” was employed by people in the past and Marjorie Post.

Tour Path: Tour D (the first 3 rooms: dining room, kitchen/pantry, & French porcelain room)

Theme: The “theater of self-presentation”

Advance Organizer (finding out what visitors already know):

- Welcome! My name is Lisa Leyh and I will be your docent this evening.
- **Who has been to Hillwood before? Does anyone have another tour or café reservations following our tour?**
- We will end in 60 minutes, in time to get you to your next appointment.
- We might have some folks join us along the way—that is ok.

Hook:

Show of hands...who here has heard the quote: “Plans are nothing, but planning is everything.”

Advance Organizer Continued (giving a brief overview and introducing theme):

- Our founder Marjorie Post was a meticulous planner and renowned hostess.
- Her home and the experiences she provided were crafted with every detail and consideration in mind.
- Post understood what we call the “art of self-presentation” as did the people behind the objects she collected.
- We will spend the next hour together exploring several rooms throughout the mansion and key objects from her collection to gain a better understanding of the theater of self-presentation.

Dining Room (6 minutes)

Estate:

We will begin here in the dining room. **What is your first impression of this space?** (grand, elegant, large, wood paneling, paintings)

- Your observations of grandeur and elegance are by design.
- You spotted all the elements that make the perfect backdrop for the lavish entertaining Marjorie Post was known for.
- These details — the oak paneling from 18th century France, the four large Dutch paintings depicting a hunt, and the grand table — all set the scene for a formal dinner.

Transition to Collection:

- As you might have guessed, not every evening included a 30-person dinner during Post’s time.
- She also hosted smaller gatherings and planned the perfect spot here in the breakfast room.

Collection Object #1: Breakfast Room

Style:

How does this space compare to the formal dining room? (intimate, cozy, airy design with the metalwork, lots of green)

- Great observations!
- With the lush plantings, historic Russian chandelier, and the view out onto the Lunar Lawn, this is one of the more popular rooms in the mansion today.
- The bronze metalwork you see here creating this conservatory effect is from Marjorie Post's former residence in New York City.

Function:

- Despite the name breakfast room, Post used this space for smaller, intimate lunches and dinners.

Transition to Object #2:

- The centerpiece of any dining area (large or small) is the table and the dining room table here is especially significant.
- Let us move towards the other side of the room to take a closer look at the leaf on display.

Collection Object #2: Table

Style:

What do you see? (colorful, inlaid stones, large, heavy, flowers, cornucopias with fruit). Good eye!

Function:

- This table was commissioned for Marjorie Post's winter estate, Mar-A-Lago, in Palm Beach, Florida.

Production:

- Naturally for a planner who has an eye for making a statement, Post commissioned the architect of Mar-A-Lago, Joseph Urban, to also design its dining room table.
- 17 artists created the table in Florence, Italy over the course of a year.
- The inlaid semiprecious stones were cut and polished then assembled to create a jigsaw puzzle, or "painting," in stones.
- We will see similar techniques used in wood later on our tour.
- Urban's background as a theater designer paired well with Marjorie Post's sumptuous interiors.
- Post stipulated the table be brought from Florida to Hillwood after her death.
- This table certainly held enough significance for her that she ensured it would be included in the museum.

Transition to Collector:

- The attention to detail did not just stop with the furniture; it was also extended to the event itself.

Collector:

- Staff would spend hours measuring to ensure the place settings were spaced perfectly apart.
- They would also review guest lists and menus.
- So if you had the good fortune to be a repeat dinner guest at Hillwood, the staff made sure you would not have the same meal twice!

- Marjorie Post personally selected the linens, silver and historic porcelain used for dinner.
- Today Hillwood regularly changes the table settings, including the floral arrangements.

Summary & Transition:

- We got a glimpse of Marjorie Post's flair for entertaining.
- It takes work to create the theater of self-presentation!
- Let us step behind the scenes now and check out where the action happened for the staff.

Pantry and Kitchen (5 minutes)

Estate:

- In the 1950s, Marjorie Post remodeled these spaces along with making major renovations to the rest of the mansion.
- Their look is in stark contrast to the many rooms at Hillwood that are inspired by historical European styles.
- Both the pantry and kitchen are equipped with the most up-to-date lighting, appliances, and color schemes of modern American design a la 1950s-- I love that avocado green!

Transition to Collection:

- **Where is the hub of activity in your home?**
- Conveniently connecting the dining room and kitchen, the pantry was the nerve center for the household staff.

Collection—Object #1: Pantry

(Gather near the door connecting the pantry and kitchen)

Function:

- Equipped with a clock, corkboard, calendar, chalkboard, and telephones, Post's staff was primed for efficient communication and planning to execute the perfect meal.
- This dumbwaiter is a small elevator that transported porcelain and glass from basement storage – saving many trips back and forth for her staff.
- A food-warming cabinet sits here helping avoid any cold entrees.
- These amenities were thoughtful additions by Marjorie Post, giving her staff the best tools to work with.

Transition to Object #2:

- Just through this doorway, we will see another "modern" convenience Marjorie Post provided for her staff.

Object #2: Sta-Kold Freezer

(Walk in to the kitchen)

Style:

- Notice behind you the "Sta-Kold" freezer.
- To the left are the eight stainless steel doors that open to the refrigerators. Most likely a little different from the ones we all have at home.

Function:

- Thanks to Marjorie Post's keen business sense, she helped bring frozen food to the masses when she acquired the Birdseye "frozen food" company, transforming her family's Postum Cereal Company into the General Foods Corporation.
- Certainly, a useful tool when prepping for dinners once a month, three 125-person luncheons, and garden teas over a weekend.

Transition to Collector:

- With entertaining on such a grand scale, Marjorie Post ensured her staff were supported to meet those high standards.

Collector:

- In addition to the cook who focused on Marjorie Post's meals, she also employed two cooks to focus on the staff meals.
- Maids had their own maids who focused on cleaning the staff rooms.
- Formal dinners required additional support - waiters were provided from a local catering company to assist.
- Marjorie Post never forgot to say thank you to her staff: at the end of the dinner party, she would stop by the kitchen, sometimes with the guest of honor, to thank the cooks.

Summary & Transition:

- As we saw, precision and attention to detail were essential for the staff here at Hillwood.
- And it's no surprise that Marjorie Post had high standards for her collection just as she did for her entertaining.
- Let us move the next room on the tour, which will allow us to get a closer look at her collection.

French Porcelain Room (6 minutes)

Estate:

- This is the French porcelain room and it displays Marjorie Post's collection of porcelain created at the renowned Sèvres porcelain factory outside of Paris, still in operation today.
- In addition to the renovation in the kitchen and pantry, Marjorie Post also had these built-in, lighted display cases installed here and in many first floor rooms.
- The cases have pullout drawers containing information about what was on display.
- These modifications reveal her intent to have her home be a museum.

Transition to Collection:

- By taking a closer look at the presentation Marjorie Post has curated for us, these cabinets will reveal how some celebrities of the 1700s influenced porcelain consumption from the Sèvres factory and aided the wealthy in their theater of self-presentation.

Collection Object #1: Pots-pourris Pompadour

Style:

- Take a look at the two containers near the top shelf in the center case.
- **Any volunteers...what do you see?** (turquoise color, gold gilding, hand-painted flowers in white area, urn shape with domed cover pierced with 6 holes)
- They are made by the Sèvres factory in 1757.
- What you just described is a pattern of decoration that became a hallmark of Sèvres porcelain--- which you can see repeated on other pieces in this room.

- Creating that signature style was a way to differentiate Sèvres style from other porcelain being manufactured in Europe at the time.

Function:

- **Any guesses as to how these containers were used. A hint: the holes are a clue, and they are not vases for flowers!**
- They are potpourris containers.
- The six holes that pierce the top allowed the fragrance of the flower petals and scented oils to fill the room.
- They were considered indispensable in a luxury home for fighting ever-present unpleasant smells.

Production:

- This particular type of potpourris containers was called *Pots-pourris Pompadour*.
- They are named for Madame de Pompadour, who bought several of these potspourris.
- She was the renowned mistress of France's King Louis the 15th and our first celebrity associated with Sèvres.
- Madame de Pompadour appreciated the French porcelain industry as a source of revenue and cultural prestige for France.
- She was an instrumental force in creating the Sèvres factory.
- Thanks to her efforts, the factory became a Royal Manufactory in 1750s.
- She was one of its greatest clients and promoters.
- She set an extraordinary example by spending huge sums on acquiring Sèvres wares, and wealthy nobles followed her example, with her cajoling.

Transition:

- Madame de Pompadour is not the only celebrity associate with Sèvres. Let's look at another piece of porcelain and see if we can find a familiar face.

Collection Object #2: Benjamin Franklin Cup & Saucer

Style: **Who is on this teacup?** (point to it) Benjamin Franklin

Function:

- Some of you may already know that Franklin had a French chapter in his life.
- When this cup was made in 1779, America was fighting its war for independence from England.
- Needing an ally...we sent Benjamin Franklin as an envoy to Versailles.
- He was instrumental in securing an alliance between France and America, which proved to be a very important one.
- This cup was made to commemorate that Franco-American alliance.
- Pretend you are a wealthy French person in 1779: **Why would you buy a teacup with Ben's face on it?** (to show worldliness; support a cause; conversation piece; connect to an important moment in time)
- In summary, you would buy one because you want to be connected to Ben Franklin.
- You were not alone... He was mobbed wherever he went in Paris—he was a true celebrity.
- He became a symbol of liberty.

Production:

- His likeness appeared on all kinds of memorabilia.

- The Sèvres manufactory also made porcelain medallions with Ben's face on them at the same time as this cup and saucer.

Transition to Collector:

- And as the original owners were making a statement with these porcelain pieces, so was Marjorie Post.

Collector:

- Sèvres was one of Marjorie Post's earliest collecting passions.
- She began collecting in the 1920s.
- You will remember we also saw in the dining room how the historic porcelain was even used as the actual plates for lavish dinners here at Hillwood.
- Post was purposeful with her self-presentation, creating a table setting that might spark conversation, show her worldliness, and impress her guests.

Evaluative Conclusion (summary):

- This brings us to the end of our tour.
- In our time together, we've looked at the function of the major rooms in the mansion, their connection to Marjorie Post, and through examining a few key objects from the collection, discovered how the "theater of self-presentation" was employed by people in the past and Marjorie Post.
- Thank you for visiting Hillwood!
- For those of you who wish to continue exploring, download our dynamic mobile tour app, continue exploring the remaining rooms in the mansion, visit the special exhibition in the dacha, or stroll through gorgeous gardens.

A Question Probing for Take-aways:

- **Before we depart, what is one idea will you take away from our discussion?**

Sources: Audio tour stops for dining room, kitchen & butler's pantry and French porcelain room, *A Taste for Splendor* p. 121 and 161-162, *Sèvres Porcelain at Hillwood* p. 57, 60-61, and 6-73.