

Interpreting the Garden-Mansion Connection on Tours **2024 Garden Docent Training** **Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**

This document reviews the interpretation that connects garden and mansion tours, the mansion rooms that connect to the outside, and, as a reference, an overview of the framework mansion docents use for developing mansion tours.

So where can mansion docents interpret the gardens on mansion tours?

French Drawing Room

Relationship to the French parterre in style and usage.

Dining Room

Floral arrangements here and throughout the mansion are cultivated in Hillwood's cutting garden and greenhouse (as well as some purchased from wholesalers) and are created by Horticulture staff. Documentary photographs of the various floral designs found in the rooms during Marjorie Post's residence are used as inspiration for designs created today.

Breakfast Room

Conservatory-like in design, this room is surrounded on three sides by garden views of the Lunar Lawn. Plantings in the room make it difficult to tell where the panoramic view of the garden ends and the room begins.

Pavilion

Sometimes on cloudy days, the pavilion curtains will be raised so visitors can glimpse the cozy patio that this room opens onto. Marjorie Post had lawn chairs and tables on this patio.

First and Second Floor Libraries

Visitors lounging in both these libraries had a grand view of the Lunar Lawn and beyond---out over the wooded valley of Rock Creek Park to the Washington Monument.

Marjorie Post's Bedroom Suite

From the bedroom window, visitors today look down on the same view that Post enjoyed during her mornings spend in this suite attending to business.

So where can garden docents interpret the mansion on garden tours?

Motor Court

Marjorie Post carefully orchestrated her guests' experiences at Hillwood, welcoming them in the motor court with the spring flowering shrubs and trees.

French Parterre

The French parterre extends the entertaining space and the style of the French drawing room located just beyond the two double doors framing the swan fountain.

Lunar Lawn

Guests of Marjorie Post would have accessed the Lunar Lawn from the breakfast room and library for outdoor lunches and garden parties.

Cutting Garden & Greenhouse

The flowers grown in the cutting garden and greenhouse are used in the floral arrangements you see throughout the mansion and in the visitor center. The greenhouse, open to the public, holds a collection of more than 2,000 orchids, representative of Marjorie Post's collection.

Hillwood and the American Country Place Era

Hillwood exemplifies a style of estate popular from 1890 to 1933--the American country place era estate--built for show and for pleasure, relaxation, sport and entertaining. The Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, built for George Washington Vanderbilt in the 1890s, represents the beginning of the era and its most significant work. The Biltmore Estate was designed by landscape architecture founding father, Frederick Law Olmsted.

The American country place estate tradition valued life in the country near nature, but was in direct connection to the city, which provided the wealth to support it. Because these estates were located with direct transportation to the city, cosmopolitan sophistication was brought to the countryside. Typical components included easy access to the outdoors through porches, verandas, and patios; formal and informal gardens; preserved natural acreage, and places for recreation such as a pool, golf course, riding trails, and tennis court.

While the gardens seen today at Hillwood were designed, built, and initially planted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Marjorie Post's earlier country houses and gardens date back to the country place era. The gardens at Hillwood are the culmination of all of Post's gardens (most notably, The Boulders, Greenwich, CT; Hillwood, Long Island, NY; and Tregaron, Washington, DC), and at the same time are a distillation of the features that she used and reused over the course of her life.

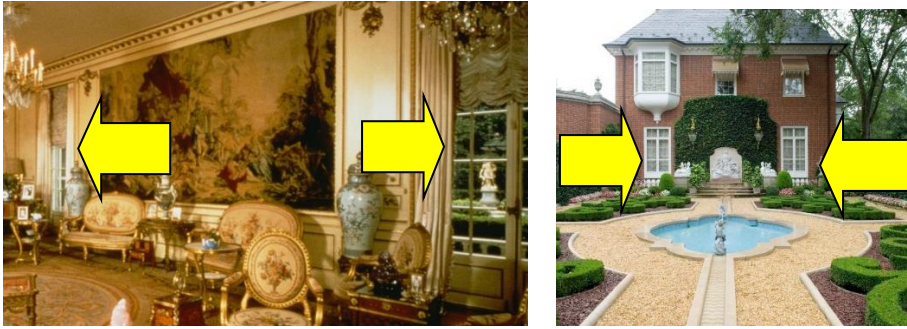
Hillwood's interior spaces function in tandem with their adjacent garden rooms. Post wanted visitors to experience her treasures within the intimate ambience--both in the mansion and gardens--she created to showcase them. Post strolled with her guests, hosted teas, and delighted in leading groups through Hillwood's beautiful indoor and outdoor rooms.

Mansion Rooms that Connect to the Outdoors

What follows are more in-depth highlights of rooms that afford opportunities to connect the mansion rooms to the adjacent garden rooms. Docent trainees can choose when to illuminate how Post designed the indoor and outdoor rooms to connect to each other.

French Drawing Room | Opens onto the French Parterre

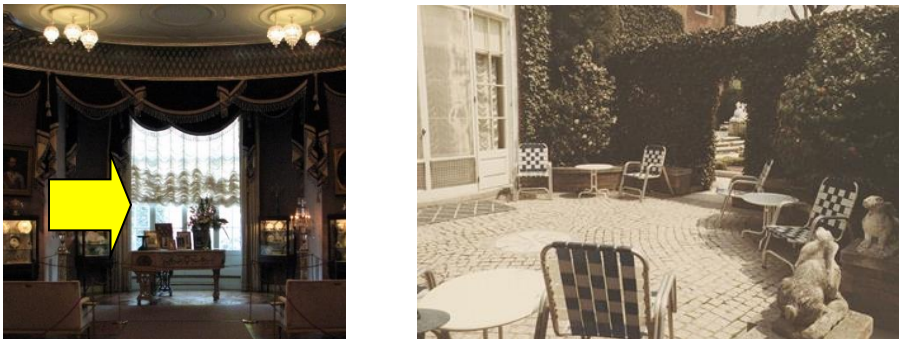
The French drawing room's two sets of curtained double doors open outside to the French parterre. This continuity of design welcomes guests into this outdoor entertaining space. Marjorie Post's bedroom above the French drawing room is the best location for viewing the French parterre from inside, because the curtains in the French drawing room generally stay drawn.



Left: The curtained doors, flanking the tapestry, lead onto the parterre. Right: Looking at the curtained doors that open onto the French drawing room

Pavilion | Opens onto a patio

Sometimes on cloudy days the curtains will be raised so you can glimpse the cozy pavilion patio, encircled by low walls and guarded by two rabbits. Marjorie Post had lawn chairs and tables on this patio.



Left: The pavilion doors leading to the patio Right: Archival photo of pavilion patio

First Floor Library | Opens onto to the South Portico and Lunar Lawn

The curtained door in the library opens onto the south portico and has a grand view of and access to the Lunar Lawn. This door is rarely opened, and the curtain is typically closed.



Left: Curtained door (flanked by windows) Right: Archival photo of guests on south portico

Breakfast Room | Looks out on the Lunar Lawn & has indoor floral displays

The breakfast room features a conservatory-like design, surrounded on three sides by garden areas. Look outside through the breakfast room windows to see:

- An American elm tree (a little to the right); the turf (Kentucky bluegrass)
- Seasonal displays along the edge of the Lunar Lawn: spring tulips; summer mix of annual flowers; fall chrysanthemums



Left: View today through windows in breakfast room, which looks onto Lunar Lawn

Right: View today looking from Lunar Lawn into the breakfast room



Left: the breakfast room and its floral displays today



Right: archival photo of the breakfast room, with floral displays in the background

A Note on Flowers: The flowers in the breakfast room window plantings are tended to by the Horticultural staff who change them according to the season. That staff also provides the flower arrangements on both the breakfast and dining room tables. The arrangements – inspired by historic photographs of floral designs during Marjorie Post’s residence – are created fresh every week by Horticulture staff and a team of volunteers.

Floral arrangements, orchids, and tropical plants are placed elsewhere throughout the mansion and estate, including the entry hall, visitor center, and café. Flowers from the cutting garden, greenhouses, and grounds (as well as some purchased from wholesalers) are used in cut flower arrangements here at Hillwood. Some of the types of flowers grown and used were traditional in formal arrangements of the 1950s and 60s, including snap dragons, zinnias, and gladiolas. Marjorie Post stipulated that, after her death, Hillwood would be opened as a museum to the public and that the tradition of fresh cut flowers would continue. Orchids from Marjorie’s collection also were used in many of the floral arrangements for special events that she hosted. Photographs taken in the 1960s suggest that flowers were chosen to complement the dinner service and the season. You’ll find that same level of attention given to them at Hillwood today.

Marjorie Post's Bedroom Suite | With views of the French Parterre

From the bedroom window, see the view that Marjorie Post enjoyed during her mornings spent in this suite attending to business. The French parterre, as well as the French drawing room on the first floor, complements her suite decorated in the French style. A parterre is a formal garden constructed on a level surface consisting of planting beds, edged in stone or tightly clipped hedging, and gravel paths arranged to form a pleasing, usually symmetrical pattern. Parterres need not have any flowers at all. French parterres originated in the 1400s.

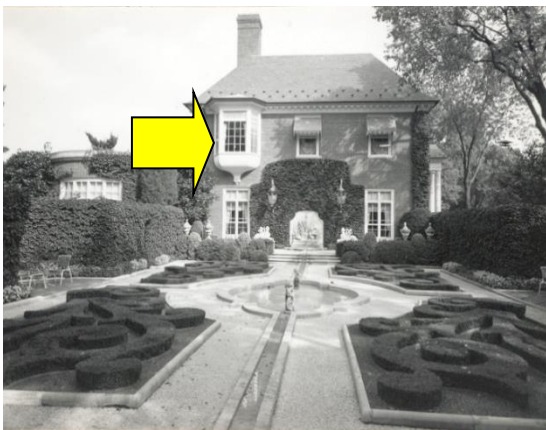
- English ivy forms the walls of the French parterre.
- The scroll pattern is a hedge of tightly clipped dwarf boxwood.
- Diana the Huntress was originally carved in marble by Antoine Coysevox (pronounced: kwa sa voe) in 1710. In 1956, Marjorie Post purchased this terra cotta copy that was created in the late 1800s.
- Japanese maples are located on either side of Diana, just beyond the ivy walls.

Take a moment to look a bit farther and glimpse the rose garden:

- Marjorie Post's obelisk (her ashes rest in the monument's base) is in the center of the rose garden (better viewed in winter).
- White wisteria was growing on the rose garden's pergola when Marjorie Post purchased the property. The wisteria blooms in April.



Current view from bedroom window, looking down at French parterre, Diana sculpture, and obelisk beyond



Archival photo showing Post's dressing room window overlooking the parterre (far left)

Adam Bedroom Closet Window | With views of the Lunar Lawn and Washington Monument

Note: Not on the Mansion Tour, But Can be Used During “On-Station” Days

On a clear day, gaze into the distant horizon, over the wooded valley of Rock Creek Park, and you may see the Washington Monument, less than five miles away. While Hillwood feels like an oasis in the middle of a forest, this landmark connects us to the fact that Hillwood is situated just a few miles from the center of Washington, DC. The monument can often be seen when standing on the Lunar Lawn.

From the Adam bedroom closet window, observe the half-moon shape of the Lunar Lawn and find Leo the lion directly below. This carved lion, crowned and seated on a rectangular base, is made of Portland limestone and was reportedly purchased in 1956 from Old Somerset House in England c. 1700. The expansive lawn was the site for garden parties with tables and tents set up to create dining spaces for Post’s guests. Today the lawn is used for large events, such as our June gala.



Left: Adam bedroom closet

Middle: View from the closet window down at Leo and Lunar Lawn

Right: View from closet window with Washington Monument in the distance

The “Style-Function-Production” Framework

Mansion Docent Training

Style-Function-Production Framework

This framework is designed to organize object-specific information. Each section of the framework answers certain questions.

Style

- What can you say about the color, line, shape, materials, and texture of the object?
- What does this object’s appearance reveal about the people who owned and used it?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

Function

- What purpose did it serve? Literally? Symbolically?
- How might you use this object?
- Who might have used this object?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

Production

- What can you tell about the people who made it just by looking at it?
- How was it made? (skills, materials, systems of production)
- What do you think the designer/maker was trying to say through this object?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

The “Design-Features-Marjorie Post” Framework Garden Docent Training

Design-Features-Marjorie Post

This framework is designed to organize “big picture” information for entire garden rooms. In general, this framework provides an introduction (design), body (features), and conclusion (Marjorie Post). This framework of intro-body-conclusion is one most of us instilled from our formal education.

Design

Marjorie Post and others who created country estates with formal gardens wanted their outdoor spaces to be used for entertaining, relaxation, and exercise. These estates functioned to present their owner in a certain light, and to support the lifestyle of the owner.

- Introduce visitors to the garden room through its design (its plan that shows its look and function).
- Integrate information about this garden’s role in the design of the entire estate.
- Think of the design section as: giving visitors time to transition from one garden room to the next; and as an introduction to the new room. In other words: time to settle-in and then focus.

Features

Select three or so features (i.e.: elements, both natural and manmade, used in the garden’s design), including plants, that best illustrate the garden room’s most important messages.

- Integrate information about the feature’s role in the design of the garden, its cultural context, and its horticultural information.
- Typical features include plants, stones, water, statuary, hardscaping (built environmental features like sidewalks, walls, and terraces), garden furniture, and vistas (a distant view).
- Here is where you employ your skills at conducting object lessons, as practiced during your Five-Minute Object Lesson.

Marjorie Post

Integrate information about Post as it relates to this garden room, especially her role in and use of this space and the features in it—especially those you just discussed. If you introduced some of this information in your design or features section, continue the story here. Information about Post could include narratives about her as an estate manager, hostess, business executive, philanthropist, or collector.

- The Post section serves as a nice transition from garden room to garden room.
- This section can also be a place to connect current museum activities to Marjorie Post.