

**Garden Object-based Learning Model:
Using Visual Evidence to “Read” a Garden Object, or Feature
Boxwood Example
2024 Garden Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**

Name of Feature* *plant, stones, water feature, statuary, hardscaping, furniture, vista, etc.	Dwarf Boxwood (<i>Buxus microphylla</i> var. <i>japonica</i> 'Morris Dwarf')
Location of Feature	French Parterre--in 4 quadrants/sections
Year or Time Period Created	planted in 2013, but recreating original design from 1950s

Look carefully at this feature, or garden object. Describe the physical aspects that you see.

Think about what you can detect with your senses: sight, sound, smell, and touch in particular. Think about what you can tell about its color, shape, stillness/movement, pattern, texture, line (curvy, straight, etc.), materials it is made from, and symmetry/asymmetry.

No flowers, small leaves, green, dense, low-growing/short, tufted, slightly rough to touch, planted in curvy lines—looks like feather plumes, in 4 quadrants/repeated pattern (4 times), asymmetrical, texture changes--when it has been trimmed it is sharp-edged

What emotions, moods, or ideas does this feature convey? How are those emotions, moods, or ideas conveyed by the feature?

- Controlled movement--planted in curving lines, trimmed/manicured, compact, tight, bounded by the curb
- Balanced—repeated pattern, 4 times
- People’s control over nature—need to trim and manicure so it doesn’t grow into any old shape, bounded by curbs and rocks
- It is a feature (in parterre) that Post enjoyed –first in Long Island, then in DC
- It is a primary feature in a “connector” space—connecting indoors and outdoors, dec art collection to garden, Post’s private (2nd floor rooms) to public (French drawing room) spaces
- It can be enjoyed from above (like a patterned carpet), and we can (and Post did!)

For plant features only: what do its physical aspects suggest to you about this plant?

Think about its desirability in this garden, its native habitat, or its biology.

- Grows slowly and can take pruning—good for parterres (which require sculpting)
- Dense with lots of small leaves—this compactness gives it shape

For plant features only: what function do the physical aspects of this plant serve? Think about functions such as protection, reproduction, nutrition gathering, or ornamentation.

- No flowers allow for the uniformity of the green color to define the pattern shape
- It has functioned as an ornamental plant in parterres for centuries in French and European garden design because it grows slowly and can take pruning

Why did the designer and/or Marjorie Post use this feature in the garden? Think about the influence of the designer/owner's intent and the social/cultural context of the garden feature or the garden's function, design, and meaning.

- Post enjoyed viewing a parterre from her bedroom---she did it before (Long Island) and does it here, and it connects her French bedroom/dressing room (above) and French garden below
- The parterre is part of a French garden: this connects thematically to the first-floor interior space (French drawing room); both focus on arts of 18th century France
- The French Parterre extends Post's interior entertaining space so it can spill out into garden space---the parterre is part of that entertaining space. It was probably of interest to guests and could have been a conversation starter for guests; the room itself has such specific boundaries that it probably helped keep guests contained (helpful if you were then going inside for dinner) for 8 p.m. arrival, 8:30 p.m. dinner.
- This is such a garden room (it has 4 literal walls) and the parterre is like a carpet design on the floor

What statement was Marjorie Post or is the museum making by maintaining or collecting this feature? Think about the choice of style, and its relationship to other gardens and the mansion. **Is this statement intentional?**

- The museum today reflects Post's original vision---she saw boxwood parterres so our visitors will too (intentional)
- Preserving gardens means that change/renovation/restoration is a constant---the parterres have had 2 major overhauls in last 20 years or so (1997-2000 and 2014) to keep them in great condition. (intentional)
- She liked well-crafted objects (think her 3 criteria for collecting dec. arts), and parterres have to be "well-crafted" (by horticulture staff) (unintentional)
- People controlling nature in gardens is still a statement that the garden makes (unintentional)

What personal meaning or contemporary relevance do you find in this feature?

- Post's focus on beauty---parterre is beautiful to walk by and gaze upon from above