

An Example of a Written Lesson Plan for a Ten-Minute Room Demonstration
2024 Garden Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

(Note: the four sections above the line are not spoken to visitors; they are only expressed in writing by the docent.)

Audience: Intelligent, curious adults with little to no knowledge of the lesson's subjects

The room & features highlighted: Rose garden, floribunda roses, underlayer perennials, rambler 'American Pillar', monument

Objectives: As a result of participating in this lesson, participants will be better able to: identify key aspects of this room's design, features, connection to Post, and importance to the museum's mission.

(Note: the sections below are spoken to visitors.)

Hook: **Who has renovated or redecorated a home, a room, a space?**

Advance Organizer: If you answered yes, you share an experience with our founder, Marjorie Merriweather Post. She purchased Hillwood in 1955 and spent two years renovating the gardens, as well as the mansion. At age 70, she knew what she liked, and these gardens are a culmination of a lifetime of garden experience. In this rose garden we will explore her design choices: how she kept some of the landscape features, and adapted or changed others. We will also explore several features that make this room special, and how the museum maintains it today.

Who has been to Hillwood before?

Design: The gardens at Hillwood are like outdoor rooms. **What shape would you say this garden room is?** a circle... She kept the overall circular shape as she found it when she purchased Hillwood. And it's always been a rose garden—for enjoyment, not for cutting.

Can you identify what elements make up the walls? boxwood hedges and pergola, or shaded walkway

First, the pergola—when Post moved here the rose garden existed with this pergola (and the stairs). She kept it.

Now, take a moment to imagine the garden without the American boxwood hedges. What happens if you take it away? More open, less encircled/enclosed. We can see what Post did by having hedges—it "finishes" the room. The boxwood wall is low enough that it allows our eye to continue looking past them. Interestingly, Post reused the boxwoods—they originally were planted on the Lunar Lawn when she purchased the estate.

Post enlisted help in the rose garden's renovations, which were really a refinement of what she found here, adapting it to her tastes. In 1956 she hired Perry Wheeler, a local landscape designer who later assisted in the design and planting of the White House Rose Garden. He picked up the brickwork in the pergola and incorporated that into the "floor" of this room. He made new paths and flower beds. Look at the unusual shape of these beds (point) ---in the shape of crowns---a fitting symbol to incorporate for a collector of decorative art often made for European royalty.

Transition: Let's take a closer look at the plant that is in these beds: the roses.

Feature 1: Floribunda Roses

All these beds have roses in them, which is how they are similar. **Any guesses on how each bed is different from its neighbor?** each is planted with a single variety of floribunda rose

Like its name implies floribunda roses are abundant with flowers—a bouquet on every branch almost! They were originally created by crossing a polyantha rose with a hybrid tea rose. Polyantha gets you the profusion of blooms, and hybrid teas gets you the size and colors range.

It used to be that the museum only planted floribunda rose cultivars that were available around Marjorie Post's lifetime (1950s-1970s). But because new roses are today being bred for disease resistance, since last year (2023) we are now planting modern floribunda rose cultivars.

Transition: The floribunda roses are not the only plants that are in each of the 12 beds in this garden.

Feature 2: Underlayer Perennials

We also plant perennials underneath and around the floribunda roses. Here you see moss phlox coming into bloom, along with columbine and species tulips. They make sense here because in fact because there is a historical precedent: Marjorie Post had tulips planted with the roses. But they also make sense for another reason. In 2018, Hillwood decided to shift away from spraying insecticides and fungicides, and to use more sustainable and environmentally friendly products. So these underplantings help keep the roses healthy (instead of using chemicals). They act as a literal barrier between soil diseases and rose leaves, living mulch and keep the roots cool in hot months, and attract beneficial insects to naturally control pests.

Transition: Now pull your eye up and behind me. Take a look at the pergola. We've got climbing and rambling roses on it.

Feature 3: Rambling Rose—'American Pillar'

Zero in on that end of the pergola. The pink spring-blooming 'American Pillar' roses take the color of this garden upward! That plant is original to Post's time.

Transition: Not all the elements of this garden date to Post's time at Hillwood.

Feature 4: Monument

Can anyone find an element of the garden that was installed after her passing in 1973? The pink granite monument in the center bed, originally there had been a fountain in its place

Marjorie Post:

Post chose this garden as her final resting place. Her ashes were placed in the base of the monument in 1974. It is topped with an urn made of porphyry—a very hard (durable) purple-colored stone. The base bears the Post family coat of arms and an inscription in Latin -- "All my hopes rest in me," a fitting motto for a generous and independent woman.

On the anniversary of her birth and death dates, horticulture staff place beautiful floral arrangements on the monument to remember and honor our founder.

Transition: There have always been horticulture staff at Hillwood.

Museum Today:

Today's horticulture staff numbers 14 full time staff and about 100 volunteers. During Marjorie Post's time about the same number (12-15) dedicated and capable gardeners maintained the gardens.

Conclusion: We explored this garden, to find out how Marjorie Post adapted this space to fit her wishes, the features that make this garden room special, and how Hillwood's maintains it today.

Conclusion question assessing visitors' take aways: **What did you enjoy learning about today?**

Resources consulted: Rose garden lecture & Q&A, rose garden section in: audio tour, Comprehensive Garden Notes, Plant Resource Guide