

**Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**  
**2026 Mansion Docent Training**  
**Object-Based Learning Model – Commode Example**

Object Name/Location \_\_\_\_\_ commode (chest of drawers) on left in entry hall (31.11) \_\_\_\_\_

Materials \_\_\_\_\_ wood (both carcass and marquetry), gilt bronze, marble \_\_\_\_\_

**Look carefully at this object and describe what you see.**

Lots of golden mounts, like lion feet, Hercules' head, scroll designs; wood; marble; geometric and floral images in wood; subtle signs of "mechanics" on outside, like knobs/pulls/keyhole/hinge/gap in wood around doors; transitional in style: both rococo – curvy, wavy lines, and neoclassical – straight lines, classical and pastoral imagery; you can't see inside it because doors are closed

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

- Luxury – elaborate, time-consuming craftsmanship in marquetry, expensive materials like gilt bronze/gold
- Dramatic, substantial, heavy, big, monumental, sturdy, delicate, imposing, busy, exquisitely detailed, feminine – floral and sculptures of women

**What does the object tell us about the people who owned it? What does it tell about the people who used it, and how it was used? [Think about the three time periods represented at Hillwood (when objects originally owned/used; Marjorie Post's time; today) and about change over time.] How is this information conveyed by the object?**

- For wealthy: expensive materials like gold and high quality, labor-intensive craftsmanship like marquetry...need a big space for it due to its size
- Chests of drawers were a new invention of 1700s...shows how current with trends you are if you have one in your home
- They used it to hold things...maybe mostly servants opened these drawers rather than owners (readings tell us they were first used in bedrooms for linens, then moved into presentation, public rooms)...its lockable – for safekeeping, perhaps
- You'd impresses visitors who would see it in your home – a show-off piece
- Could be just for display, like it is today
- Conveys your good taste
- Do the sculptural faces say anything about who owned it? Perhaps someone of strength or importance (because of Hercules)?

**What does the object tell us about the people who made it? How is this information conveyed by the object?**

- Made by skilled craftsman who spent a long time on this – you see that in the detailed marquetry, mechanisms
- Made by many different types of craftsman who collaborated together, and you see that through the different materials and types of skills
- Images in marquetry show what was in the minds of the people of the time when it was made – pastoral images show interest in an idealized country-life

## **How was the object made? (skills, materials, systems of production)**

- Materials include metal, wood, stone
- Skills include: designer, wood carver, stone carver, gilt bronze mount maker, sculptor
- Produced in a collaborative system – different craftsman working on different parts to create one final object
- Research/reading tells us the craftsmen were in guilds (can't see that by looking)
- Sometimes craftsmen repurposed their designs – if we noticed that another piece of furniture had the same designs in marquetry, we'd know they repurposed that design

## **What statement is the museum making by displaying this object? (Think about the choice of object, its relationship to the other objects on view, its placement in the museum.) Is this statement intentional?**

- First thing you see as you walk in – meant to be noticed
- It is next to another commode – meant to be compared/contrasted to tell a story about French furniture
- Sets the tone of the whole home – you will see beautiful things, exquisitely crafted, connected to historically significant people
- Contrasts to Russian objects in entry hall – meant to show Post's two main collecting passions (Russian and French decorative art)
- It is a grand, monumental piece – just like the museum and its founder

## **What does this object tell us about Marjorie Post?**

- She was wealthy to be able to afford this – conveys her social status
- She collected French decorative art
- She has three collecting criteria that we can see in this piece
- She knew she was going to live at Hillwood, and it would also be a museum – she was educating her visitors (in her lifetime and now) by putting it here, for instance by creating a moment to compare/contrast it to the other commode and the Russian objects surrounding it
- She purchased one commode in the 1920s and the other in the 1960s – shows her collecting moments related to French furniture – when she's setting up house in NYC and setting up a museum/house in DC
- Shows two of the people she sought assistance from to create her collection: Duveen and Ross
- Post lived in a home (Hillwood) that was both homey and formal/fancy, with museum-like displays all throughout it

## **What does this object tell us about ourselves?**

- Many visitors will still find the style of this commode beautiful and collection-worthy, even 250 years after it was made
- Best displayed in a museum or wealthy person's home, not an average person's home
- Many visitors have chests of drawers in their homes/offices – the commode's design has staying power!
- Our style of ornamentation on many of our furnishings can still be in the "French style of the 1700s," but we also have very modern and contemporary furniture (think Ikea, Crate and Barrel)