



# Ingenu TO Icon

70 YEARS OF FASHION FROM THE COLLECTION OF  
MARJORIE MERRIWEATHER POST

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**Opening at Hillwood June 6, 2015**

**Exhibition of Post's carefully selected gowns, dresses, outfits, and accessories presents the evolution of 20<sup>th</sup>-century fashion through the lens of one of America's most prominent women**

WASHINGTON—More than 70 gowns, dresses, and ensembles spanning the first seven decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are presented in the exhibition ***Ingenu to Icon: 70 Years of Fashion from the Collection of Marjorie Merriweather Post***, on view at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens from June 6 to December 31, 2015.

The first exhibition at Hillwood to present Marjorie Post's full range of style, ***Ingenu to Icon*** will examine how Post's lifelong passion for objects that were exceptionally beautiful and impeccably constructed extended to her taste for clothing. Even before she became a celebrated connoisseur and assembled a renowned decorative arts collection, Post developed a keen interest in clothing and a great appreciation for the richness of fabrics, expert tailoring, and elegant design. From a confection in tulle and taffeta made for her 16th birthday to the flapper silhouettes of the 1920s and sophisticated gowns of the 1950s, Post's changing styles are consistently characterized by fine craftsmanship, beautiful materials, and impeccable styles.

Post was born in 1887 and came of age during some of the most transformative times for American women in the 20th century. "Marjorie Post lived an extraordinary life, throughout which she played many roles," explained Hillwood executive director Kate Markert. "From a young Edwardian bride, to a high-profile business and society figure, to independent *grande dame*, she was always aware that how she presented herself, particularly through her dress, not only reflected her personality, but also projected her role to society." The seven decades of apparel represented in the exhibition and the accompanying archival materials and portraiture also offer insights into the progress of American society from the early 1900s to the 1970s and a new perspective on an emblematic woman whose life, sense of self, and wardrobe reflect the rapidly changing times.

### **Post's Apparel Collection at Hillwood**

With its renowned collection of Russian imperial art and French decorative art, Hillwood has long served as a testament to Post's influence as an art collector and connoisseur. With great insight, Post also left to Hillwood the most important examples of apparel and accessories she acquired over the years and today they serve as added perspective into her life of exceptional purpose, elegance, and style. "Throughout her life, Marjorie treated her clothing in much the same manner as her art collection," explained Hillwood's associate curator of textiles and curator of the exhibition, Howard Vincent Kurtz. "She knew that her clothing represented not just her own style, but a record of women's fashion. Thanks to that vision, today Hillwood has a singularly complete collection of costumes and accessories that is a resource for the study of American style and the changing role of women in the 20th century." *Ingenue to Icon* draws from Hillwood's collection of more than 175 dresses and over 300 accessories, including shoes, hats, gloves, and purses.

### **Exhibition Highlights: June through September**

The presentation of designer and couture outfits, cocktail dresses, and gowns in *Ingenue to Icon* will be presented in two segments. The first, from June through September, will feature Post's summer and spring attire. The second, running through December, will display looks from fall and winter.

The exhibition opens with the fashionable young Post embracing the new feminine ideal of the "Gibson Girl." With her upswept hairstyle and high fashion gowns coupled with confidence, worldliness, education, and independence, Post epitomized this late 19th and early 20th-century trend. As an adolescent, she had an insatiable appetite for stylish clothes. An example of her extravagant taste is the Edwardian two-piece evening dress created for the occasion of her 16th birthday by the Baker sisters, who had a small dress shop in northwest Washington, D.C., where Post was attending finishing school at the Mt. Vernon Seminary.

Post's entry into East Coast society that accompanied her marriage to Edward Bennett Close in 1905 provided a new outlet for her passion. To fulfill her new role hosting and attending formal dinners, parties, and fundraising and cultural events, Post acquired a full wardrobe from Parisian couturiers, fine department stores, and New York custom fashion houses. A high-waisted evening dress of 1907-08 from the Parisian house Callot Soeurs (shown right), whom Post first encountered as a young teenager visiting the grand 1900 Paris Exposition, is an example of the elegance of the time and place.



The progress, prosperity, and liberation that characterized the 1920s had a significant effect on the fashion of what came to be known as the "Roaring Twenties." Voluptuous Edwardian curves gave way to a new silhouette that hung away from the body and allowed more movement and ease. Hemlines became shorter than any other time in the history of women's fashion. With her second husband, E.F. Hutton, Post embodied the spirit of the era. An evening ensemble she commissioned from Thurn, a American dressmaker, with its flapper-style silhouette, bold geometric patterns and bright, saturated colors, captures the Art Deco flair that characterized many dresses of the 1920s.

As Post began a new lifestyle with her third husband and ambassador-to-be, Joseph E. Davies, she incorporated the glamorous style of 1930s Hollywood that was the trend with women in high society. Clothing was designed to drape more closely to the body than in the 1920s, skimming women's figures in sensuous fabrics. In 1934, Post sat for a portrait painted by renowned English society portraitist Frank Salisbury wearing a striking white, bias-cut, satin, sleeveless dress with a low-cut V-back fastened with a ruby and diamond brooch. Accented by a velvet and fur drape and long two-strand pearl necklace, the dress exudes the allure of Hollywood. The dress opens the exhibition alongside the glamorous Salisbury portrait.

Post's role as an ambassador's wife also prompted a turning point in her approach to fashion. After their return stateside and throughout the 1940s, the Davies continued to entertain in grand style, and the hostess to diplomats, Supreme Court justices, senators, and high society required a wardrobe that portrayed elegance and confidence. Post, along with other prominent Americans, was influenced by Christian Dior's "New Look," and a gray, ankle-length dinner dress with a cinched waist, full skirt, and broad, padded shoulders, exemplified the look and was well-suited to her corseted figure, narrow waist, and slim hips. For a sitting with another notable English portrait painter, Douglas Chandor, Post wore a beautiful gray silk faille evening gown attributed to

African American designer Ann Lowe, who was known for the swirl-like motifs as seen on this dress. A year after this dress was immortalized in the Chandor portrait, Jacqueline Bouvier popularized Lowe's fashions when she chose a wedding gown by the designer.

Post was divorced from Davies in 1955 and her full life culminated in a style that displayed confidence and independence. With a deep knowledge of who she was and what she liked, her fashions from this point on reflected a taste in the classic and a continued commitment to exquisite design and expert tailoring. By the late 1940s, she had grown fond of the Czechoslovakian designer Oldric Royce, who by then was working in New York. Feeling that he translated her mature, elegant style into dresses and gowns that suited her to perfection, Post commissioned dresses from him for the rest of her life. Sometimes, if she especially liked a certain style, she would order the same design in different colors with slight variations. One such example is a day dress made between 1957 and 1960. This short dress of bright yellow and green is nearly identical in form and material to the wedding dress Post had made by Royce for her marriage to Herbert May, her fourth husband, in 1958. It is typical of the mature and elegant designs she wore during her time at Hillwood, hosting garden parties, lavish dinners, and some of Washington's most memorable affairs among the objects of beauty that were her life's passion.

With over 30 dresses on view for each rotation, the selection of spring and summer dresses will be replaced for styles made for fall and winter on October 1, to provide a broad look at Post's evolution while protecting the valuable garments from long-term exposure to light.

## **Programs and Events**

*Ingenue to Icon* will be the inspiration for an array of programs and events throughout the presentation of the exhibition.

An opening celebration will be held on Tuesday, June 2. Inspired by Post's grand affairs at Hillwood, the evening will include cocktails and a glamorous dinner on the Lunar Lawn in honor of Post's singular style and in support of Hillwood's mission to share her cultural treasure with the public.

The three-part lecture series, *20th-Century Transformations of Women and Fashion*, will be presented in October, including speakers Howard Vincent Kurtz, exhibition curator and associate curator of costumes and textiles at Hillwood; Valerie Steele, director and chief curator of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology; and Robin Givhan, Pulitzer Prize-winning style and culture critic.

## **Sponsors**

The exhibition is supported by: The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Dina Merrill Hartley, Joan & Dan Mulcahy, Janice & Ralph Shrader, and an anonymous

donor. All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission on the Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program.

### **Hillwood Background**

When art collector, businesswoman, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of Russian Imperial art outside of Russia, an exquisite 18<sup>th</sup>-century French decorative art collection, and 25 acres of serene landscaped [gardens](#) and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include the Japanese-style Garden, Rose Garden, French Parterre, and a greenhouse full of orchids.

### **General Information**

- Location:** 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC  
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)
- Information/Tickets:** (202) 686-5807 for information or [www.HillwoodMuseum.org](http://www.HillwoodMuseum.org)  
[Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum](https://Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum)
- Hours:** **Editors Please note change in hours: Hillwood is now open every Sunday (previously only select Sundays)**  
Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in January.
- Café:** The HILLWOOD Café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Afternoon Tea is served on Sundays only from 11a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Express Dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 4 p.m.  
Call (202) 686-5807 for café reservations.
- Suggested Donation:** \$15, \$12 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18.  
No donation is suggested for children under 6.