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Hi res images available upon request

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Setting Sail: The Story of Sea Cloud
On view February 15 through June 15, 2025

Travel the seas through one of history's most famous yachts.

Washington, D.C.—Step aboard one of history's most magnificent ships and experience its incredible journey in the special exhibition *Setting Sail: The Story of Sea Cloud*, on view at [Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens](#) from February 15 through June 15, 2025.

Sea Cloud, the windjammer that was once the world's largest sailing yacht, has lived many lives since its creation. Built by Marjorie Merriweather Post and her husband, E.F. Hutton, in the early 20th century, the vessel went on to serve as a weather ship for the U.S. Coast Guard, and today survives as a luxury cruise liner. This special exhibition will trace the extraordinary story of this seafarer from the 1930s to today. Set sail on the high seas through documents, photographs, models, decorative arts, paintings, and more.



"The original Sea Cloud embodies all that was so remarkable about Marjorie Merriweather Post," said Kate Markert, Hillwood's executive director. "It reveals not only her love of finely crafted objects, like her renowned art collection, as Sea Cloud allowed Post to sail the world in luxury, but also her dedication to philanthropy and public service, as she patriotically donated the ship to be drafted into military service. We look forward to sharing the rich history of this incredible vessel."

Hussar V to Sea Cloud

The first half of the twentieth century was the golden age of ocean travel as most overseas journeys were accomplished by ship. In 1926, Marjorie Merriweather Post and her husband, E.F. Hutton, commissioned the building of a four-masted yacht, constructed in Kiel, Germany, which they christened Hussar V. Post took great care with outfitting the ship, much as she did with her homes, creating luxury cabins decorated with French antiques and splendid furnishings. Post sailed extensively from 1932 onwards, using the Hussar V for personal travel, social and diplomatic entertainment, and the hosting of notable guests.

In 1942, Marjorie Post and her third husband, Joseph Davies, lent the yacht, now named Sea Cloud, to the United States Coast Guard, in which it served as a weather ship during World War II. Post said, "Since I have no son to give to the war, I will offer the Sea Cloud." It was the first ship with a racially integrated crew, including African American officers and boatmen such as artist Jacob Lawrence. Paintings created during his capacity as Coast Guard Artist will be on view.

After the ship's retirement from military service and its restoration to its former glory, Marjorie Post sold the ship in 1955 as her interest transitioned to air travel. After passing through numerous hands, Sea Cloud today survives as a luxury cruise liner, traveling throughout the world.

Exhibition Organization and Highlights

Setting Sail: The Story of Sea Cloud will present an array of photographs, documents, such as blueprints and letters, paintings, decorative arts, glassware, porcelain, and more, from the ship's conception in 1926 to the present. Organized into seven sections, the exhibition will move through the life of Sea Cloud, from its building and furnishing to life on board to the ship at war and then its story after Marjorie Post.



Marjorie Post commissioned Sea Cloud during the height of maritime travel, and the exhibition will open with a brief look at this time, before delving into the actual building of the ship. Blueprints, designs, along with a design award, and photographs, will demonstrate the details and attention that went into crafting this impressive ocean liner.

Post took great care when furnishing Sea Cloud, just as she did with her illustrious homes, spending almost two years outfitting it. French and English antiques, specialty linens, custom porcelain services painted with the ship's monogram, and more ensured Post and her family lived in ultimate comfort and style when on board. A selection of these items, along with numerous photographs, will highlight the elegance and beauty of this floating palace.

Life on board was divided primarily into two—entertaining and recreational family time. Post maintained impressive social circles, hosting guests including royalty and heads of state, such as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and Gustav V of Sweden, on Sea Cloud. On private trips, Post and her family, including husband E.F. Hutton and youngest daughter Dina Merrill, sailed to the Galapagos, Caribbean, and more, with Post keeping meticulous scrapbooks of their travels. These scrapbooks, photographs, and home videos will set the stage of what life was like on these ventures.



Lavish accommodations in state rooms in period styles served as the perfect home away from home for Post's family and visitors alike.

The next section will highlight the Sea Cloud crew, the sailors and captains necessary to operate such a vessel. An impressive model of Sea Cloud, traditionally on view in Hillwood's first

floor library, will be newly conserved for the exhibition. Application letters for onboard positions and artifacts from the daily life of the crew will also be displayed.

Sea Cloud at War will explore the chapter during which the yacht was used by the Coast Guard as a weather ship during World War II. Marjorie Post's luxurious trappings were removed as Sea Cloud was outfitted for war. Photographs, cartoons, and artifacts will appear alongside paintings by Jacob Lawrence. These, including *Captain Skinner* and *Disembarkation*, are rare surviving examples of his numerous wartime paintings.

The exhibition will conclude with episodes from Sea Cloud's journey after Marjorie Merriweather Post, along with a look at Post's transition to air travel in the 1950s with the acquisition and refurbishment of an airplane, which she named Merriweather. After numerous owners, Sea Cloud became the star of Sea Cloud Cruises, available for luxury sea travel as an ocean liner, continuing its remarkable journey.

Curator

Thomas Wu is Hillwood's Assistant Curator of European Decorative Arts. Prior to joining Hillwood in 2023, he was Assistant Curator of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/Legion of Honor. Thomas received an MA in history of art from the Courtauld Institute of Art, as well as a BA in history of art and architecture from Boston University.

Events and Programs

Setting Sail: The Story of Sea Cloud will inspire an array of programs and events throughout the presentation of the exhibition. A special event timed to Valentine's Day, on Thursday, February 13, 2025, will celebrate the opening of the exhibition. A spring lecture series will feature a rich array of speakers exploring a variety of topics related to the exhibition.

Exhibition Sponsors

Setting Sail: The Story of Sea Cloud is supported by The Richard C. von Hess Foundation, The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Ms. Nedenia Rumbough and Mr. Jan Roosenburg, and Janice H. Brambilla. All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs Program. This project was supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

About Hillwood

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 18th-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 & 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 a [Japanese-style garden](#), [rose garden](#), [French parterre](#), and an orchid-filled [greenhouse](#).

General Information

- Location: 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: Van Ness/UDC, Red Line (20-minute walk)
- Information/Tickets: 202-686-5807 for information or www.HillwoodMuseum.org
[Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum)
- Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in January.
- Café: Merriweather Café is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Merriweather To Go, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Ticketing: \$18, \$15 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18. No donation is suggested for children under 6. Adults and seniors receive \$3 off the suggested donation for weekday visits and \$1 off for weekend visits when reservations are made online. Members receive free admission to visit the estate during regular operating hours. To join visit <http://www.hillwoodmuseum.org/membership> For more information visit <http://www.hillwoodmuseum.org/hours-and-tickets>

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