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Wedding Belles: Bridal Fashions from the Marjorie Merriweather Post Family, 1874-1958
June 18, 2011 to January 1, 2012

Exquisite gowns and other wedding apparel reveal how three generations of Post family women celebrated weddings with their legendary elegance and style

WASHINGTON – Just in time for the height of the traditional American wedding season, Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens presents [Wedding Belles: Bridal Fashions from the Marjorie Merriweather Post Family, 1874-1958](#), from June 18, 2011 to January 1, 2012. From turn-of-the-century Edwardian bride to Upper East Side doyenne to Washington *grande dame*, Hillwood founder Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887-1973) asserted her status, taste, and sophistication in the styles she wore down the aisle. Now, *Wedding Belles* brings together her four wedding gowns, along with those of her mother and daughters, to explore her exquisite bridal fashions and examine the evolution of early 20th-century wedding style through the lens of one of America's most notable and fashionable families. Drawn mainly from the extensive costume collection left by Post to Hillwood, the exhibition also includes her daughters' flower girl and bridesmaid dresses, mother of the bride dresses worn by Post and her mother, a historic veil on loan to the exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution, and a show-stopping jewel-encrusted Cartier bag. Archival photography, correspondence, and ephemera further illustrate the tradition, romance, and elegance that informed the renowned family's nuptials.



Post's daughter, Dina Merrill, with father E.F. Hutton

American weddings have traditionally been emblematic of social status, wealth, and personality. For Marjorie Merriweather Post, they also reflected her progression from young bride to fully-emancipated American businesswoman. "Marjorie Merriweather Post was the daughter of a self-made man, a

businesswoman, collector, philanthropist, and every bit an embodiment of the American dream. And what dream doesn't include a great love story or two?" said Kate Markert, executive director of Hillwood. "The passion she brought to decorative art collecting and every other facet of her life was equally evident in the elegant and stylish dresses Mrs. Post chose for her weddings and those of her daughters. We're thrilled that for only the second time, an exhibition at Hillwood pulls from the extraordinary collection of apparel that Post left to the museum, to examine the intersection of connoisseurship, style, high society, benevolence, and the great American story that marks Post's legacy at Hillwood."

The 2009 exhibition, *An Invitation to the Ball*, a display of Post's intricately-designed fancy dress gowns created for her legendary costumed balls of the 1920's, was the first special exhibition at Hillwood to focus on Post's extraordinary collection of apparel. **Wedding Belles** will offer visitors not only a new perspective on the lives of the gowns' wearers, but will also offer a view of the changing silhouettes of American bridal fashions in the first half of the 20th century.

Beginning with the 1874 wedding dress of Post's mother, Ella Merriweather Post, this look at Post family gowns and dresses worn over the next 80 years reveals the fashion trends and burgeoning wedding traditions, including the time-honored white dress, that informed theirs and the American bride of the 20th-century. "From Ella Merriweather's practical yet elegant gray satin dress to Mrs. Post's classic 1958 lace afternoon dress, the bridal fashions of the Post women always followed the style of the day," explained Howard Vincent Kurtz, assistant curator of costumes and textiles at Hillwood and curator of the exhibition. "While changing fashions may affect the silhouette, the wedding dress and veil have remained subtly timeless since the introduction of the white wedding gown by Queen Victoria over 150 years ago."

Exhibition Highlights

Post's flourishing independence, very much like that of American women in the early 20th century, is reflected in the range of wedding gown gowns on view in the exhibition. Post's wedding dress selections begin with a 1905 Edwardian gown, incorporating the traditional use of orange blossoms made popular by Queen Victoria, for the young bride's marriage to Edward Bennett Close. The 1920 Lucile-designed dress for her marriage to E. F. Hutton, with its romantic tea-length hemline, reflected the high fashion of early 1920's New York society. When she entered her third marriage, to American lawyer and diplomat, Joseph E. Davies, in 1935, the event exhibited the typical grace and elegance that suited an heiress and social, business, and philanthropic leader of the day, with the intimate affair at her stately New York apartment lent a touch of glamour by her Hollywood-inspired velvet dress from Bergdorf Goodman. Finally, the classic ballerina-length dress for her 1958 wedding to Herbert May befitted her status as Washington socialite and matriarch.

A new acquisition given to Hillwood by the actress Dina Merrill, Post's youngest daughter, joins two dresses



Dina Merrill and Mrs. Post, 1946

already in the collection to complete Merrill's evolution from flower girl, to bridesmaid, to bride. This vignette includes the flower girl dress worn by Merrill, when she was just three years old, for her older sister Adelaide's 1927 wedding; the bridesmaid dress for her mother's wedding to Joseph Davies; and her own wedding gown for her 1946 marriage to Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr.

Other exhibition highlights include the sophisticated and finely-detailed flapper-style dress worn by Post's oldest daughter Adelaide for her 1927 wedding; her second daughter, Eleanor's glamorous Callot Soeurs-designed gown for her 1933 wedding; two of Post's mother-of-the-bride dresses; and other wedding accessories, including hats, veils, and Merrill's Cartier wedding purse. Archival

imagery, invitations, and ephemera will further personalize this look at American brides and wedding customs from 1874 to the mid 20th-century as told through Post-family weddings. "Weddings of notable families like the Posts received wide press coverage with very detailed reporting. As mother-of-the-bride, Post's hostess skills, as well as the grace and traditions of the extended family, are evident in these celebrations," explained Estella Chung, historian and curator of American material culture at Hillwood and collaborating curator of the exhibition. "This exhibition allows visitors to be first-hand witnesses to the beauty and textures presented in these joyful gatherings."

The Twentieth-Century Costume Collection at Hillwood

Wedding attire reflects one facet of Marjorie Merriweather Post's lifelong love of fashion. Throughout her life, she acquired and preserved many dresses, ensembles, gowns, and accessories. Today, the collection at Hillwood houses over 175 dresses and over 300 accessories, including shoes, hats, jewelry, gloves, and purses, and one of the most significant collections of 20th-century apparel in Washington, D.C.

Hillwood Background

When Post cereal heiress, art collector, 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, a notable 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 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 exquisite

jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include the Japanese-style Garden, Rose Garden, French Parterre, and a greenhouse full of orchids.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What: *Wedding Belles: Bridal Fashions from the Marjorie Merriweather Post Family, 1874-1958*

When: June 18, 2011 – January 1, 2012

Where: 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)

Information: 202.686.5807 for information and reservations or www.HillwoodMuseum.org
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Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm. Closed Mondays and most national holidays. Open on Select Sundays throughout the year.

Café: The Café is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.
Express Dining from 10 am to 4 pm
Lunch seatings from 11:15 am to 2:15 pm
Afternoon tea seatings from 2:30 to 3:30 pm.
On select Sundays the Café is open from 1:00 to 4:00 pm.

Suggested Donation: \$15; \$12 for seniors (65 and older); \$10 for college students;
\$5 for visitors age 6 to 18. Donation waived for visitors under age 6.

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