Of Socialite Spaces:
Identity, Autobiography, and Performativity in Brooke Astor's Interiors

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ABSTRACT

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Georges-Étienne Carrière

The publishing and display of celebrity homes and their lifestyles have been objects of fascination for many readers and viewers alike since the late nineteenth century. Often suggesting a narrative rather than a documentary approach, these displays tend to represent a dual depiction of self-expression as a form of material autobiography and an ideal stage set to perform private lives commensurate with their public persona. By featuring her interiors primarily created in collaboration with the legendary interior decorators Sister Parish and Albert Hadley through the pages of *Architectural Digest, House & Garden, Vogue*, and other magazines as backgrounds to her hectic public life, the legendary philanthropist, socialite, and author Brooke Astor used this media tradition to reflect her identity, taste, and biography but also her public activities as director of the Vincent Astor Foundation, a charity built on her late husband's immense fortune with the prospect of alleviating human misery in New York City. As the foundation's director, she centered its activities around causes close to her heart and the city's wellbeing on cultural, social, educational, economic, and environmental grounds, rendering her interiors, private self, and public self as deeply interlinked entities.

Following a social and gender performativity, biography and literary criticism, and design and cultural history informed framework, this research argues that her interiors were a form of public relation that importantly linked her personal interests and life story to her public activities as a philanthropist, and represented spaces for the creation, control, and staging of her public persona and narratives as material autobiographies. By focusing on the case study of this singular woman commissioner and celebrity, this thesis grapples with issues of agency, domesticity, performativity, biography, gender, and authorship within interior design and their complex interplays in celebrities' homes.

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I would like to conclude by honoring my father, Roger Carrière, who passed away during the course of this research. May you rest in peace.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late nineteenth century, celebrity houses and lifestyles, as shown through mass media, have become desirable objects of fascination for the mass public. Publications like *Architectural Digest,* social media, and television series like *MTV*'s *Cribs* typically showcase the domains of celebrities down to their most private rooms, often belying the idea of private retreats they purport to represent. Instead, most tend to seemingly have been designed with little wish to be outside of the limelight, becoming akin to spaces for entertaining rather than privacy.[1] Elizabeth Emery suggests, in regards to the French magazine *La Revue Illustrée*'s 1890s series "Une Heure chez," that aside from documentary intent, these displays suggest a narrative approach where private interiors form performance stages for private lives corresponding to the grandeur of contemporary celebrities' public persona.[2] In the mid to late-twentieth century, the celebrated New York socialite and philanthropist Brooke Astor (1902-2007)(Fig. 1) applied this idea to great lengths within her interiors, casting them as forms of public relations rather than private retreats. Backdrops to interviews and articles dedicated to her, but likewise expansively displayed in magazines such as *Architectural Digest*, *Vogue*, and *House & Garden*, the so-called first lady

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[1] Daniel Harris, "Celebrity Houses, Celebrity Politics," *The Antioch Review* vol. 68, no. 1, *Celebrity Houses* (Winter 2010): 8-9.

[2] The "Une Heure chez" series was published for roughly a decade starting from 1891 and proposed expensively illustrated virtual visits of contemporary personalities' dwellings to the readers of important French illustrated cultural magazine *La Revue Illustré*e. The series capitalized on the popularity of a series of standalone celebrity interiors photographs, known as *Nos Contemporains chez eux,* sold in photography stores and engraved for licensed publications starting from 1889. The late nineteenth century's growing views of collecting and interior decorating as forms of self-expression pushed *La Revue Illustrée* to push the concept to full photo spreads of these interiors recording the tangible spatial self-expression of their inhabitants, framing them as reflections of their identity, and situating them in time, space, and socio-culturally. This series was groundbreaking and foregrounded media's interest in and display of celebrities' lifestyles. Elizabeth Emery, "Staging Domesticity in *La Revue Illustrée*'s Photo-Interviews: *Belle Époque* Celebrity Homes in the Periodical Press" in *Designing the French Interior: Modern Home and Mass Media,* eds. Anca I. Lasc, Georgina Downey, and Mark Taylor (2015; paperback repr., New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 157-159.

of philanthropy's interiors were part of a long lineage of celebrities materially displaying their achievements and identity to the public. Her luxurious livings coupled curious amalgamations of eighteenth-century antiques, eccentric chinoiseries and Buddhist collections, artworks by great masters, an extensive collection of dog memorabilia, a particularly celebrated modernist library, and business and entertainment spaces flux between the private and the public, and the formal and the informal. Designed primarily by decorators Sister Parish (1910-1994) and Albert Hadley (1920-2012) between the 1960s and 1980s, the interiors of her Park Avenue, NYC apartments and her private retreats Cove End in Northeast Harbor, Maine and Holly Hill in Briarcliff Manor, NY were material autobiographies reflecting her interests, taste, and role in the public sphere.

Astor was an important public figure and celebrity who used her interiors as extensions and stages for her independently constructed and atypical public identity, while having subscribed to non-traditional gender expectations to reach her status. By the turn of the twentieth century, interior decoration became a significant vehicle for many whose social roles were predominantly limited to marriage and domesticity, to both construct and express their identity spatially. Members of the upper and upper-middle class, in particular, were expected to use their interiors not only as sites to portray ideal womanhood but also as barometers for their family's success and legacy.[3] An unconventional client, Astor hired decorators to create domestic spaces conversely used as stages sets for her social life. By hybridizing traditional and unusual domestic and public activities as a widow, celebrity, and philanthropist within these interiors, she subverted typical expectations of feminine domesticity and nullified the traditional binary between the private and the public.[4] Albert Hadley even once characterized her Park Avenue

[3] Nancy H. Blossom and John C. Turpin, "Risk as a Window to Agency: A Case Study of Three Decorators," *Journal of Interior Design* vol. 34, no. 1 (September 2008): 2-3.
[4] Based on similar case studies in Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press),11-12.

apartment as New York's stateliest residence; one built for entertaining and doing business rather than a private domain.[5] The objects within her interiors were likewise dedicated to serve as personal mementos, to carry on the Astors' legacy, and used symbolically for public relations bilaterally. Thus, her estate reflected the contrast between her particular preconditions and the traditional expectations of her gender.

Her public presence arose mainly after the 1959 death of her third husband, William Vincent Astor (1891-1959), businessman, real estate mogul, philanthropist, and last descendant of one of the United States' wealthiest families. According to urban legends, Brooke Astor was famously left as his sole heir with the mission to spend every single inherited penny until her death.[6] Taking the reign of her late husband's namesake philanthropic foundation, she injected more than USD 194 million (313 million adjusted to inflation in 2020) back into New York City by 1997. As the site where the family's fortune originated, she made it her mission to support causes close to her heart and the city's wellbeing on cultural, social, educational, and

[5] Wendy Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room," *New York Magazine*, April 13, 2008, http://nymag.com/realestate/vu/2008/04/45966/.

[6] Vincent Astor's estate was estimated at approximately USD (1959) 134 million (1.192 billion to inflation as of 2020) at the time of his death. About a million was divided between his first wife Helen Hull, his niece Emily Harding, his will's executors, and a few charitable bequests. Brooke Astor was left with 2 million outright and most of his properties and goods. The rest was divided into two parts, with an estimated 67 million going directly to his foundation and an almost equal amount used to create a trust fund with net interests paid to her during her lifetime and the principal left in her power to be willed after her death. She chose to have parts diverted directly into the Foundation's coffers long before, and his remaining real estate and ventures sold off. His will did not appoint a direct successor at the foundation's presidency, having made known he wanted her to take his place but not legally making the pronouncements. Despite fierce competition from some of its board members, she assumed presidency in 1960 and changed its vague mission given by Vincent into concrete terms. The foundation was to be active within New York City only (although there were exceptions) as the site where the fortune originated, its goal was to enhance the urban living of all citizens with particular attention to the less fortunate, and unlike its predecessor, its president was to now take an immensely active role in its running. Frances Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor: A New York Story* (2007; paperback repr., New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 136-139, 147-150.

environmental grounds.[7] As an author and collector, Astor was greatly responsible for saving the New York Public Library from bankruptcy, was a prominent figure in developing the East Asian Art collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and helping disadvantaged neighborhoods per the Foundation's mission of alleviating human misery.[8] Her most infamous quote was a variation of the adage: "Money is like manure; it's not worth a thing unless it's spread around."[9] Never one to hide behind bank checks, she visited nearly every project she donated to, including ones in the city's rougher parts. Her public appearances were particularly famous for the way she dressed up to fulfill public expectations of her as "Mrs. Astor," the incredibly wealthy but unpretentious socialite with a heart of gold.[10] As an Astor widow working within the public sphere, she was responsible for gaining and spreading her marital lineage's reputation as "great benefactors" within NYC's landscape. However, this image was solely her construction as the Astors were rather known as privileged land sharks, gatekeepers of the city's high society, and

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[7] The amount given refers to the total of grants from 1960 to 1997 (USD 194,745,013) given by the foundation published in its final report. Interestingly, it does not list most of its activities prior to Brooke Astor's incumbent presidency. She was a trustee since 1953. The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997* (New York: Vincent Astor Foundation, 1998), 162.

[8] She remains one of the most central figures in the New York Public Library's history and survival in the twentieth century due to her public promotion and immense financial support of the struggling landmark institution. As for the MET, she was most notably responsible for The Astor Court, a reproduction Ming Dynasty Chinese-garden courtyard within the museum that became one of the first permanent cultural exchanges between the US and the People's Republic of China. Although she came up with the idea, and partly arranged its conception and funding, mentions of her implication have been diminished by present day. The New York Public Library, "Brooke Russell Astor (1902-2007)," press release, August 1, 2007, https://www.nypl.org/press/press-release/2007/08/01/brooke-russell-astor-1902-2007?iamaselector=/node/29647. Audrey Topping, "A Chinese Garden Grows at the MET," *New York Times*, June 7, 1981. Brooke Astor, foreword to *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, by The Vincent Astor Foundation (New York: Vincent Astor Foundation, 1998), 8. https://folio.iupui.edu/handle/10244/395.

[9] Marilyn Berger, "Brooke Astor, 105, First Lady of Philanthropy, Dies," *New York Times,* August 13, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/13/obituaries/13cnd-astor.html.

[10] Marilyn Berger, "Being Brooke Astor," *New York Times*, May 20, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/20/magazine/being-brooke-astor.html?.

her late husband's philanthropic bent was far more meager in comparison.[11] Moreover, her public presence was itself a self-made act because, since the 1920s, she had successfully built a name for herself through magazine publishing, interior decoration, and philanthropy, which significantly contributed to her public persona later in life. Likewise, she fully constructed her public image on her terms by controlling media displays and discourses using her autobiographies *Patchwork Child* (1961, reedited in 1993) and *Footprints* (1980), the articles she penned, and through how she chose to portray herself in interviews and public appearances. Harnessing control over her social impression allowed her to maintain a positive image and relevancy in the public's eye, while her interiors simultaneously represented another step in the construction of her public persona.

Surprisingly, the attention dedicated to her career—let alone her décors—has mostly been the subject of tabloid and superficial magazine reports; something only made worst by her tragic end as a victim of elder abuse and grand larceny in 2007. While the legacy of her philanthropic endeavors survives through their social, cultural, and physical impact in the city's landscape, this image of a fallen socialite left to die in squalor with no access to proper medical care for her Alzheimer's disease and waning health she gained in her later years rapidly overshadowed her lifetime achievements in the public imaginary.[12] Likewise, dedicated literature remains almost solely centered on her life story by being only composed of three biographies by Frances Kiernan, Meryl Gordon, Alice Macycove Perdue, and her two memoirs.[13] Considering that her

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[11] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 107, 113-115, 147.
[12] Robert D. McFadden, "Anthony D. Marshall, Astor Son Who Was Convicted in Swindle, Dies at 90," *New York Times*, December 1, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/nyregion/anthony-d-marshall-son-of-brooke-astor-convicted-in-swindle-dies-at-90.html.
[13] Brooke Astor, *Footprints: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1980). Brooke Astor, *Patchwork Child: Early Memories* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; New York: Random House, 1993). Alice Macycove Perdue and James W. Seymore, *In Brooke Astor's Court: An Insider's Story* (North Charleston, SC, USA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing

autobiographical writings were often inevitably highly selective and interpretative recounts meant to portray her in a positive light and represent the fiction, fantasy, and motivation of her life, one often has to rely on secondary biographies to grasp a more objective view of the figure.[14] Nevertheless, biographies dedicated to Astor provide in return their respective author's own interpretative accounts of the character or cast their respective politics on her, rendering them just as subjective. Barbara Katz Rothman suggests that for biographical writers, a fundamental shift in methodological thinking has often traded an ethic of objectivity for one of involvement.[15] As some of these authors were implicated in Astor's life, their apparent credentials to recount her life remained highly partial as a result. In the specific case of Macycove Perdue, Astor's former office manager and a witness of her decline in her late years, she seemingly sought to shine lights on and reveal essential details about her elder abuse victim case. Similarly, Gordon's monograph carries much of the same parameters in its particular uses of Astor's nurses' diaries to chronicle the treatment she received in her later years, rendering both sources limited to this particular image. Contrastingly, Kiernan's biography provides a broader and more critical outlook on Astor's character, which proves useful for any discussion around her due to the sheer number of collaborators and interviewees part of Astor's life (well over a hundred) contributing their views and testimonies.[16] However, the author's contribution sometimes comes across as voyeuristic if not prying in its discussions of her morals and sensationalist dishing of the rich and famous' shenanigans.

Platform, 2014). Frances Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor: A New York Story* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007). Meryl Gordon, *Mrs. Astor Regrets: The Hidden Betrayals of a Family Beyond Reproach* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books-Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

[14] Gayle Letherby, "Feminist Auto/Biography," in *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds. Mary Evans et al. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), 53-4.

[15] *Ibid*, 51.

[16] Kiernan, The Last Mrs. Astor, 303-307.

Consequently, due to this overwhelmingly biographical focus of the literature on her, Astor's public role and impact still remain under-addressed on academic terms, and in the same vein, studies of her spatial production of self through her interiors' roles within her social life have mostly been left out of or under-addressed within existing literature despite their perpetual mediatization and iconic status attached to her identity. In fact, *The New York Times* deemed her Hadley-designed oxblood red library (Fig. 2) as "one of the most admired interiors of the 20th century," yet, no studies of it exist to date.[17] When coming across pictures of Astor's New York apartment during a previous research on Diana Vreeland's similar use of domestic interiors as performance spaces, I found myself seeking to learn more about Astor's character, living spaces, and her fashioning of them as my knowledge of her was still limited to her elder abuse victim image. It soon became apparent under a critical feminist perspective how political and gender structures have played a role within this limited view by the belittling ways in which her contributions to society have been discussed and epistemically marginalized in the press if not left unaddressed.[18] This research seeks to ask why, how, and what a woman privileged by wealth and status do to reshape her identity, her world, and the world around her in relation to her domestic interiors. Despite having no need to, Astor used her wealth to create eclectic and dramatic environments for herself and for others that at times significantly directed, enhanced, and rubbed against public opinions of her influential life.[19]

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[17] Christopher Mason, "The Cherished Remainders of a Luxe Life," *New York Times*, August 16, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/garden/sothebys-auctions-brooke-astors-treasures.html.
[18] Letherby, "Feminist Auto/Biography," 48.
[19] These two sentences were paraphrased from this thesis' examiner's Dr. Cynthia Imogen Hammond's feedback, and whom must be credited accordingly.

Being deeply intertwined with her biography and identity, insights into Astor interiors, public presence, and philanthropic endeavors require, to a considerable extent, a biographical leaning as she herself framed all her discussions of them around her life story. Interrelatedly, the importance of its author's voice in the direction and interpretation of the present research, and this representation of Astor is essential to acknowledge here. As Katherine Frank suggests, the ethnographic process of 'translating the reality of others' often helps actively create or invent that very same reality in the act of writing rather than merely representing it.[20] Accordingly, Gayle Letherby suggests the importance of maintaining theorized subjectivity in feminist biographical writing by acknowledging and exploiting this awareness of the relationship between research processes and their products and how epistemology becomes translated into practice. As most feminist writers undertake research for and not simply about women, our work often remains inherently political and subjective. As Letherby argues, accounting for the significance of these issues adds to, rather than detracts from, the accountability and authority of our research product by making methodological approaches transparent and our products clear and open to critical scrutiny.[21] As such, this thesis' agenda is not to represent an authoritative and definitive portray of Brooke Astor and her interiors but seeks to highlight, question, recover and most importantly interpret Astor as an overlooked—if not systematically erased—case studies of a woman creating, commissioning, and using interiors as spaces of identity-(per)forming.

Design history, cultural, and gender studies have increasingly looked at interior decoration as a productive site for the interplay of issues of gender, class, agency, and subjectivity with its long-overlooked figure of the lady decorator becoming its main actress. To name but a few contributions to the field, Nancy Blossom & John Turpin (2008), Penny Sparke

[20] *Ibid*, 52-53.
[21] *Ibid*, 50-51.

(throughout the 2000s), Anne Massey (1990), and Cheryl Buckley (1986) have all accomplished critical recovery processes in retracing the historiography of the interior decoration/design profession and its critical female figures.[22] The fact that women were central to its professionalization, yet, that these histories needed recovery (and still do!) speaks volumes about the inherent lacunae in interior design and architecture's historiography.[23] The misogynist views of these fields have, for the longest time, ostracized the domestic interiors and decoration interrelatedly as being feminine and, therefore, incompatible with the supposedly superior and rational male opposites they purport to represent, despite their intrinsic links. As a result, the lady decorator is often wholly erased from their exclusively male canons, particularly so with modernism's rise, due to profound social anxieties about gender and sexuality.[24] Unsurprisingly, attention dedicated to women as commissioners of interiors, architecture, and art, also remains relatively marginal if not limited, despite often being implicated if not fully part of the creative process. Diane Sachko Macleod (2008) and Alice T. Friedman (2007) have respectively conducted studies on women as collectors and as commissioners of architectural spaces, but, while these studies remain substantial and groundbreaking works, much remains to be done on case studies falling outside of their parameters, like Astor for instance.[25] Often of the elite and

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[22] Nancy H. Blossom and John C. Turpin, "Risk as a Window to Agency: A Case Study of Three Decorators," *Journal of Interior Design* vol. 34, no. 1 (September 2008). Anne Massey, *Interior design of the 20th century* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990). Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," Design Issues vol. 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1986).

[23] Grace Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History," in "Professionalizing Interior Design, 1870-1970," *Journal of Design History* vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2-3, 10.

[24] *Ibid,* 3-4.

[25] Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1998). Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2008).

upper social classes, these women experienced interiority, domesticity, gender expectations, and agency within space and the public sphere in profoundly different ways accounting for hybrid, unusual, and unique spaces.

This design studies thesis focuses on the estates and interiors of this particular famous woman who constructed her atypical public identity through mastering impression management, gender performativity, using her gendered attributes and interests typically deemed as feminine, and controlling her own life narratives to advance herself within society. The three properties she owned, 778 Park Avenue, Cove End, and Holly Hill, were central to her public identity by serving as material autobiographies and stage sets to form, perform within, and circulate the narratives she constructed about herself, the image and identity she wanted to project to the public, her causes, taste and interests, and her authenticity as a civil philanthropist, socialite, and celebrity by their widespread featuring in the press. A methodological approach anchored in material culture, gender, and performance studies supplement this present exploration of the visual and material landscape of her interiors and seeks to analyze the objects and spaces within her homes and the meanings they held and conveyed on both personal and social terms. To accurately survey the role of her interiors as stage sets, one must first question how did Astor, as a woman, appropriate both the public and private spheres to stage her self-made persona within them? The first section of this research traces the development of her social performativity through her biography, focusing on her advance into the workforce and public sphere, using the theories of sociologist Erving Goffman (1956) and Judith Butler (1990) as its anchor points.[26] Similarly, as an essential aspect of the performance and development of her public self as a self-

[26] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959). Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999).

authored ideal interpretation of her identity, her two autobiographies additionally deserve consideration.[27] By being part of her performance of self, how should these be interpreted and used to analyze her life story and interiors? Her memoirs meant to control public perceptions on her terms by creating envy and admiration for her glamorous life full of achievements, and sympathy for her hardest passages. Through these displays, they served to explain and share the particularities of her decorating style as her collections reflected her own life story and accomplishments accordingly. However, how did her interiors reflect and stage this public persona as sites of identity-making and expression? Building on design history's theorizations of the notions of identity, subjectivity, interiority, and agency, the second part of this text explores the spaces she created with her decorators in her three estates. The interiors in question will be formally laid out and analyzed through linking their broader thematics and particular objects, such as the abundant use of chinoiseries and eighteenth-century antiques, representations of animals and dogs more specifically, artworks, and vast collection of literature for instance, with her biography and public functions. As a philanthropist, magazine editor, and writer, her occupations centered on causes that were correspondingly reflective of her convictions and interests, resulting in the need for her interiors to adequately reproduce these links. Additionally of note is the question of authorship, which remains a vital factor to consider here. Indeed, how much of her interiors reflect her identity if they were not solely her work and done with interior decorators? Because Astor was also a collector who acquired most of the objects they contained and dealt with the field herself, this research posits that their creation was a collaborative process and intermingling of different voices that nevertheless centered around the owner's way of life

[27] Vesna Goldsworthy, "The Private Self: Interior and the Presenting of Memory," in *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior,* eds. Anne Massey and Penny Sparke (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishings, 2013), 175-176.

due to the decorators' work ethics. This present research seeks to add to the field's extant scholarship on women and interior decoration by focusing on the agency, socio-cultural context, and role in the design process of an unusual commissioner. As a case study, Brooke Astor represents a particularly enriching analysis of the importance of overarching issues of domesticity, performativity, biography, gender, and authorship within design studies.

PART ONE: Forming the Performance

By her own accord, Roberta Brooke Russell's life was anything but ordinary due to her particular predispositions. Born in 1902 in Portsmouth, NH, she was the only child of Major General and Marine Corps Commandant John Henry Russell Jr. (1872-1947), and social butterfly Mabel Cecile Hornby Howard (1878-1967). Her father's role and advantageous exchange rates allowed them to take residence throughout three continents, live above their means within fully staffed houses, plenty of leisure time, and much to see in foreign lands.[28] Nevertheless, she always believed her strict upbringing was her foundation and the key to her success in the public sphere:

> I was taught that life can be a good game if played well and with certain rules. […] By what they said and what they did, my parents provided me with a survival kit. If I land on my feet like a bird with a strong sense of equilibrium, it is because I was taught to fly long before I left the nest.[29]

Expected to abide by her parents' morals and virtues infallibly, she developed her goodwill, hardworking nature, honor, discipline, intellect, compassion, and literary affections from early on. Moreover, her parents were deeply responsible for her incomparable ease at socializing and impression management, later proving essential to her social rise. Her success depended on her singular dexterity at creating, controlling, and promoting her identity within the public sphere by using her image, gender, and gendered interests in her favor.[30] As such, she forged her presence

[28] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 33-42.
[29] Brooke Astor, *Footprints: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 5.
[30] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 28.

by subversively taking on work in women periodicals, homemaking, and philanthropy up to her taking on of the title of "Mrs. Astor." Her life prior was also categorized by the development of her interiority and first forays into decoration, proving substantial to the later creation of her famous interiors. Equally significant to her identity-making, Astor penned two memoirs which served to control her image, identity, and narratives disseminated of her within the public sphere.

The Early Years: Impression Management

For one, having parents with a substantial social presence forced the young girl into the public sphere from quite early on. According to her memoir *Footprints* (1980), she consequently felt that she was a repository of their aspirations and needed to conform to the well behaved, cultured, and proper ideal they desired to present to their social circles. In particular, her education relied extensively on the idea that her social performance and image were the keys to social mobility, protection, and power.[31] Her father's insistence on the notion of honor greatly contributed to this sentiment: "One of the most important things in life is to have the respect of the people who know you. Everyone may not like you, but you should conduct yourself in such a way that all will respect you."[32] Recalling his words in *Footprints*, she confessed that she increasingly realized their importance as she grew up: not getting respected was to forfeit one's social standing and success.[33] This emphasis on managing others' perceptions of her drew close resemblance to the idea of a theatrical performance, as most famously allegorized by sociologist Erving Goffman in his groundbreaking *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). According to him, ordinary social intercourse parallels theater scenes in their similar exchanges of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. By creating specific

[31] Astor, *Footprints*, 5-6.
[32] Astor, *Footprints*, 10-11.
[33] *Ibid*.

settings, saying particular words, and controlling their appearance as performing actors would (the front), individuals typically attempt to guide how others perceive them through verbal and non-verbal communication (the impression given and the one they give off). In return, audiences seek the necessary information to respond to the individual's anticipations and relate what they expect of him, notably their character, attitude towards them, socio-economic status, and conception of self.[34] However, social fronts often belie the reality they purport to embody through the favorable and beneficial nature they are given to create social advancement and envy in audiences.[35] Accustomed to playing an ideal to satisfy those around her as social protection, Brooke Russell became prematurely aware of this concept and its beneficial nature significantly through observing her mother's social behavior.[36] Mabel Russell continuously made stories out of

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[34] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 1-10, 72. James Loxley, *Performativity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 151.

[35] It should be noted that Goffman's theories have had their fair share of criticism regarding the discrepancies between the reality of the stage and that of social life itself. Notably, Harold Garfinkel criticized the viability of his model polemically in his 1976 *Studies in Ethnomethodology* by analyzing the difficulty and intensity that sustaining a false impression represents in reality and the choices it requires adversely to Goffman's idea that it depicts our normal and inevitable course of action in social life. Not to mention, the problematic homogenizing factor of his assumptions that we all have the same standardized requirements placed on us. However, Stanley Raffel posits that Goffman gave us a way of interpreting a phenomenon recognizable to most of us: public appearance and sustaining impressions make us feel that what we are not revealing our true selves. He suggests that Goffman's critics have identified the limitations and blind spots that caused him to misinterpret this phenomenon in a much grander superficial version disruptive of the key prerequisites of normal life. Nevertheless, very few critics or theorist have linked the idea of celebrity life with this theatrical perspective. Celebrities represent the most intense embodiments of Goffman's theories, as they spend most of their life in the public's eyes under constant scrutiny having to maintain the exact idea of social impression he developed. Stanley Raffel, "The everyday life of the self: Reworking early Goffman," *Journal of Classical Sociology* vol. 23, no. 1 (February 2013): 163-4, 168-9.

[36] Brooke Russell's social skills came also partly from dealing with her parents. She often played a diplomatic role between the two due to the constant quarreling resulting from their dissimilar personalities: her father was stern, steadfast, disciplined but compassionate man, while her mother was mercurial, an intellectual, a flirt who often made him jealous, a snob brought up to valorize wealth and status, and a social butterfly. As her biographer Frances Kiernan argues, her only child status made her feel secure in the love she received from them as the sole target of their attention but also heightened her sense of her own importance within the family unit.

everything she had experienced (or not) to show off to her family and the intellectual, literary, and society circles she gravitated around. In her young mind, or through what she wrote decades later, Brooke Russell was surprisingly conscious of how deceptive the idealized images adults surrounding her wanted to portray were, but how useful they were to gain social acceptance and mobility.[37] As children's learning of sociability significantly takes form primarily in modeling themselves after whom they emotionally relate to, and as the closest example of the power of one's social image she experienced, this rapidly became how she molded her own social self.[38] Thus, her social front became a central part of her identity-construction, in that enhancing her image was fundamental to her molding, preservation, and advancement of the public self, later repeating her mother's behavior by heavily editing her life into a spectacle in her memoirs.

Accessing the Public Sphere: Gender, Philanthropy, and Magazine Editing

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Preserving the status quo within her household became a means of protection, as any disturbance often felt twice as threatening for the child who felt responsible for any obstacle coming her way and already having to deal with the impermanence of the family's nomadic lifestyle. Astor, *Footprints,* 6-10. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 28.

[37] This observation was made especially evident within a passage of *Patchwork Child* were she relates notes Beijing's legation quarters' social life and adults' tendencies to show off: "At times [their] talk was quite silly, and I knew that if I had said the things they did, I would have been told that I was stupid. They acted as though children had no ears and no sense." Brooke Astor, *Patchwork Child: Early Memories* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; New York: Random House, 1993), 64. Page number refers to the 1993 edition. She later related the same idea about her mother more specifically, listing some of the people and events she allegedly met or seen: "Mother made a story out of everything. […] She may have shown off a bit for us, but she aroused in me an interest in people which I have never lost. Because I was brought up to express myself, I feel that, given the chance, I can talk to, and get on with, almost anyone." This last section is especially important as it indicates that her sense of impression management was key to her success in coaxing opinions and establish relationships. Astor, *Footprints*, 12-13.

[38] As based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Two World of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (1970) quoted through Mariane Hedegaard, "Children's Creative Modeling of Conflict Resolutions in Everyday Life: Family Life as a Site of Learning and Development," in *Children, Childhood, and Everyday Life: Children's Perspectives,* eds. Mariane Hedegaard et al. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2018), 24-25.

Despite auspicious predestinations to the public sphere, Astor's gender rapidly proved to be an obstacle. By the time she was fifteen and inherited her mother's literary affections and intellectualism, she envisaged becoming a scholar and was receiving an advanced classical curriculum at the private institution The Madeira School in Washington, DC between 1916 and 1917. However, fearing her daughter would become a bluestocking and wishing for her to marry wealthy, as she had been herself brought up to do, her mother quickly downgraded her to a lesser establishment focusing on the domestic arts and gender-appropriate activities in line with the period's view of women's marital roles.[39] Penny Sparke elucidates that by the second half of the nineteenth and well into the next century, the enormous societal transformations of modernity lead to increasing separation of genders along spatial binaries. Although they were not wholly separate or always distinct from each other in reality, the "rational" public sphere of labor, economics, and politics was gendered as male, while women were limited to the domestic sphere and its emotionally-charged environment dominated by morality, social aspirations, and the exercise of taste and display.[40] As the period increasingly focused on the notion of social efficiency, educational curriculums centered on preparing students for their specific societal roles along this spatial separation, with women's education resultantly depreciating towards domestic art and science subjects.[41] Resigned, Astor fulfilled her social role and her mother's wish in 1919 by securing a wealthy marriage to John Dryden Kuser (1897-1964), son of a millionaire. However, she soon found herself stuck with an abusive, alcoholic, and cheating husband living off his father's fortune. Despite failing to become the Kusers' hopes of a stabilizing influence for

[39] Astor, *Footprints*, 8-9. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 45-47.
[40] Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London and San Francisco: Pandora/HarperCollins, 1995; Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2010), xxi. Page numbers refer to the 2010 reprint edition.
[41] Karen Graves, *Girls' schooling during the Progressive Era: from female scholar to domesticated citizen* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 189-191.

him, this bleak union brought her her only son, a first home, and access to the public sphere through her gender, philanthropy, and magazine editing.[42]

After a few years, she concluded that the best escape from her bleak situation was to find solace in the society of Bernardsville, NJ, where she resided throughout her marriage. She quickly gained locals' sympathies by performing the role of a young and desperate but devoted wife.[43] Astor developed a particular attachment to not only impression management but also to the performance of her gender through taking on interests seen as feminine and subscribing to her marital role. *Footprints* contains one of her most telling remarks on the subject:

> […] to have a perfect relationship in every way with a man who loves you deeply—a man whom you, in your turn, love and respect—is truly a beautiful and satisfying thing. It makes a woman blossom and grow. […] it is the fine and filtered essence of being feminine, without in any way denying that many thousands of women are stronger and happier today because of women's liberation. I must admit that never in my whole life have I ever thought for a moment that being a woman was frustrating or would keep me from doing what I wanted. […] I will shock all feminists by saying that one of the things that I have enjoyed most in my long life has been to be an *éminence grise*—a power behind the throne. In my case, of course, the power behind a man.[44]

Her performance of the devoted wife, proficient homemaker, hostess, and good mother role was, in part, due to the social expectations of her time and particularly those of her class. Judith Butler's seminal *Gender Trouble* (1990) argues that gender is not a natural attribute inherent within individuals, but the repeated performance of particular gendered acts and norms to create the appearance of identity substance and the perceived essence of a stable gender definition. The social and cultural imposition of the rigid regulatory frame and heterosexual matrix in which the individual lives transform gender into a stable, predetermined, and inescapable construct in which

[42] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 49-50, 58. *Astor, Footprints*, 41.
[43] Astor, *Footprints*, 59. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 61-2.
[44] Astor, *Footprints*, 142-3.

biological sex determines its imposition on the individual.[45] Astor's use of the term "blossom and grow" is especially important here. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, one indeed "becomes" a woman under the cultural compulsion to become its socially acceptable definition, alluding to the taking on, performance, or appropriation of its gendered characteristics.[46] Astor's quote elucidates this attachment to gender performativity precisely as her key to gain subversive access to the public sphere and social advancement. Goffman argues that upward mobility depends on the maintenance of the individual's social front and is expressed in terms of sacrifices made for its upholding according to the values of the society within which it takes place.[47] While Astor was able to advance herself within the work sphere by performing this ideal publicly and using her "feminine attributes and interests" of homemaking and taste, like many women in similar positions and in the upper spheres of society she never quite embodied nor subscribed to the stereotype of the domesticated housewife. Amanda Vickery suggests in her study of women's history literature's separation of spheres that in reality, the infinite singularity of different households' matrimonial power relations results in an unpredictable variety of private experience, in any given period or cultural context, often accounting for a complete collapse of this stereotype.[48] As further pointed out, some women's performance of this subservient ideal was in possibility only lip-service to ensure suitability within their societal and cultural context, being eminently capable of professing one ideal and performing a completely different thing instead.[49]

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[45] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 1990, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11-12, 32-33.
[46] Based on Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) through Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 11-12, 17.
[47] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 36.
[48] Amanda Vickery, "Historiographical Review: Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* vol. 36, no. 2 (1993): 390-91
[49] *Ibid*, 391.

In the case of Astor, she expressively acknowledged that by subscribing to the gendered expectations of the supportive wife, that is, by morally supporting her husbands in their public activities yet also serving as an advisor, assistant, and even their backup, that she was able to gain power and agency within her relations and access to the public sphere in parallel. Notably, when her first husband forayed into politics, she quickly realized she enjoyed the public outreach of campaigning far more than he did and reached out to the field that allowed her the most similar experience: philanthropy.[50]

Largely barred from involvement within political and economic activities at the turn of the century, philanthropy became one of the few socially acceptable ways for women to parallel men's power and social roles, while further deconstructing the cult of female passivity and domesticity. By contributing their time, energy, and funds to charity, they impacted the political landscape through their roles in institutions, non-profit organizations, and in campaigning for policy-making.[51] Their leading causes often revolved around women's conditions by a sense of sisterhood and discourses frequently absent within the political sphere: gaining access to education for lower classes, suffrage, reproductive rights, health, sanitation, housing, and assisting working-class women.[52] As someone who believed life settings were central to one's development, Astor's first forays dealt with housing and childcare. On the Virginia Day Nursery and the Maternity Center Association of New York City's boards, she toured the cramped and

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[50] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 64.
[51] Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere" in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 1, 4-5.
[52] Joan Marie Johnson, *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870-1967* (Chapel Hill, NC, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1-2, 79. Anne Firor Scott, "Women's Voluntary Associations: From Charity to Reform" in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 46-47.

run-down housing of poverty-stricken households with trained nurses to provide healthier living conditions.[53] Some married women's limited access to financial independence often limited their benevolent activities to face-to-face work intended to ease the suffering of others. However, these activities were importantly developmental by exposing her first hand to these social conditions and foregrounding her own active involvement within the Vincent Astor Foundation's activities.[54] As its president, she targeted grander scientific causes to bring about social change and challenge causes of suffering on a broader scale, but also similarly filled urgent needs through similar social work and smaller-scale activities, most notably the creation of community spaces.[55] When she wrote in *Footprints* that her gender never restrained her, it was because she was able to impart political and social contributions parallel to those of men through subversively using gendered activities and attributes to gain a social presence.

Simultaneously, Astor also gained financial independence by penning articles for women's magazines. Her social connections in Bernardsville put her into contact with *Vogue* editor Caroline King Duer who appointed her as the magazine's first book reviewer in 1924. She also wrote for the periodical *Pictorial Review,* where her first article further revealed her understanding of performing gender and impression management. Titled "Do Women Dress for Men or Women?," it explained that fashion was a means to make other women envious. In her case, it allowed her to fit in with the stylish circles she brushed with in her profession, and elevate her social register.[56] Her earnings allowed her to sustain herself independently after her

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[53] Astor, *Footprints*, 61.
[54] Johnson, *Funding Feminism,* 4. Astor, *Footprints*, 61-62.
[55] The Foundation targeted grander causes such as literacy, culture, and education but also contributed smaller donations and support to better, maintain, and help smaller institutions and communities. For instance, they sometimes contributed to the Fresh Air Fund, a non-profit providing free summer vacations to New York's low-income households' children. The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, 8, 31.
[56] Astor, *Footprints*, 65-66, 73. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 63.

1929 divorce and help her household income throughout her next marriage to Charles H. Marshall's (m. 1932-1952) after his assets took a downturn following World War II. She undertook her most famous venture as features editor at the homemaking magazine *House & Garden* from 1946 to 1954. Hired by its new editor Albert Kornfeld, Astor's task was to revive the prosaic publication and transform it into one catered to the upper-middle to upper-class homemakers finding themselves increasingly pressured into portraying a prescriptive ideal of domesticity and femininity in the post-war era and its need for social stability.[57] Left with an extended list of tasks and no access to the house staff they once relied on, women's place was further re-emphasized as belonging to the domestic sphere. An intensive popularization of consumer magazines, particularly so homemaking publications, became instrumental in shaping the concept of professionalism within the home and promulgating such gendered identities.[58] Women's magazines provided a model of frilly femininity idealizing them as the household's nurturer, beautifier, hostess, and consumer, with Astor taking a significant part in its circulation by featuring her own interiors as these very ideals within *House & Garden*.[59] One of her most common features was instructional articles on staging informal receptions for which she laid out settings, tables, and decors decked out with the precious and attractive china of the magazine's advertisers, rented plants, and antiques, within her own home.[60] Design historian Francesca Berry points out that women's magazines and the domestic interiors represent mutually constitutive

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[57] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 92-93.
[58] Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 119-120. Grace Lees-Maffei, "Dressing the part(y): 1950s domestic advice books and the studied performance of informal domesticity in the UK and the US," in *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, eds. Fiona Fisher, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, Trevor Keeble and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 185. Fiona Fisher, "Introduction: 1940-1970," in *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, eds. Fiona Fisher, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, Trevor Keeble, and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 140.
[59] Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 122.
[60] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 93. Astor, *Footprints,* 222.

sites for the staging of feminine subjectivities, in that through serialization, the former offers readers a range of ideals and ideologically determined models that are potentially transformational or ambiguous forums for its construction and negotiation.[61] The use of photographs often present interiors, and the persona alluded to within them, as authoritative models of fashionable taste (and by extension achievements) already constructed for readers to follow.[62] Astor transformed her interiors into spaces where she could circulate and showcase her taste and identity as an apotheosis of ideal femininity and domesticity, despite being herself far from embodying these gendered expectations due to her demanding job. Goffman's views regarding the literature of social mobility offer helpful insights into how these displays become tools of social conditioning: by scripting ideal and fashionable performances to be acted within the home, domestic advice writers articulated the unspoken textual codes of social interaction and dictated the social fronts to be put on within them (décors, appearances, manners, gesture, ways of talking, and more).[63] Astor legitimized her front of ideal domesticity and femininity by using her own interiors as scripts for her readers to follow. Yet, despite reinforcing these gendered ideals of the housewife as hostess and decorator, she was subversively using her gender to gain financial independence, escape the domestic sphere, and mold her public identity in parallel.

The Home as Self: Interiority and Interior Decoration

Footprints suggests that what led her to gain her public presence was decorating her first home: it became her first escape from her unhappy marriage, a means of identity construction, and a healthier base for interiority. After a nomadic childhood and living with her in-laws until then, in

[61] Francesca Berry, "Designing the Reader's Interior: Subjectivity and the Woman's Magazine in Early Twentieth-Century France," *Journal of Design History* vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 63.
[62] Berry, "Designing the Reader's Interior," 63-64.
[63] Lees-Maffei, "Dressing the part(y)," 186-87.

around 1923, Astor was given her first home with a decorating budget by the Kusers, in addition to insurance funds received after a heist at their mansion.[64] Haphazardly designed and outdated, the residence compelled her to put all her energy into making it a nest of her own with fresh paint, lively chintz, flowers, and books (Fig. 3).[65] Modernity, as most famously posited in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, emphasized the role of private interiors as privileged sites for subjective identity construction in being both a symptom of the individual's retreat from the outside world and a mode of self-definition within it.[66] Having to deal with reality in the work sphere, the individual needs their private dwellings (their etui) as complements where they can sustain their illusions and seek asylum from commercial and social considerations.[67] Astor's home served instead as a marital retreat, decorating provided her a gender-appropriate distracting outlet. Modernity's gendering of the domestic interior cast the private dwelling as a reflection of men's wealth and labor, but reversely as a space ruled by women.[68] The cults of female domesticity increasingly enforced the belief that decorating was her natural task and taste an innate quality leading the interiors to be increasingly seen as extensions of their natural

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[64] The exact year she received the home remains unclear due to most sources presenting different dates. *Footprints* and Kiernan's *The Last Mrs. Astor* indicate it as taking place around the time she announced her pregnancy in late 1923 or early 1924, and a year after the Kusers were victims of a theft in November 1921, presuming it to be around fall 1923. New York Times, "Adroit Thief Drugs Then Robs Kusers - Takes $20,000 in Jewels From Home of Son-in-Law of Late Senator Dryden," *New York Times*, November 2, 1921, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1921/11/02/98764961.html. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 58-60.

[65] Astor, *Footprints,* 52-53. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 61-62.

[66] Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007),9-13. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Beate Söntgen, eds., "Introduction," in *Interiors and Interiority* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 4.

[67] Cornelia Klinger, "Interior Spaces as Playground of Inwardness," in *Private Utopia: Cultural Setting of the Interior in the 19th and 20th Century*, eds. August Sarnitz and Inge Scholz-Strasser (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 90-92.

[68] Brenda Martin, general introduction to *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, ed. Fiona Fisher, Trevor Keeble, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 3.

identities.[69] Often, decorating became a means of expression and control over their environment, although profoundly shaped around traditional expectations of femininity, fashionable taste, socially regulated behaviors, and displays of wealth and consumption.[70] Astor's first practices were meant to create a healthier environment for herself and her child but were also symptomatic of the particular attachment to houses she developed. *Footprints* elucidates:

> Sometimes I have thought of my life as a house—the foundation was what I inherited, the roof was the faith that sheltered me, and the rooms of the house were the different phases of my life. Leaving the door open in some rooms, closing the door on others. […] I am a nest-builder. Whether my taste is good or bad, I must make the nest my own. [71]

More than an extension of identity, she saw the home as a literal embodiment of self and interiority by being a transposition of her personal history and memories in material and physical terms. This is not without recalling Benjamin's famous assertion that the dwelling is a shell, lined with soft, impressionable surfaces where the traces left of its occupants' life express their identities within them.[72] These traces are not only signs of living but also the objects that compose interiors, associating this concept with the collector's habits specifically, as their true resident. Infamous collectors brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt reflected this idea prominently; their deeply aesthetic collections meant to soothe the senses from nervous exposure symptomatic of public life and serve as catalysts of stimulation and cultivation of sensual responses to private aesthetic experience.[73] *Footprints* transposed this idea of "soothing" when

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[69] Bridget May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Design History* vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 63.
[70] Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, xxi, 5-8, 51-52. Anne Massey, *Interior design of the 20th century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 124.
[71] Astor, *Footprints*, 56.
[72] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, USA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19-20.
[73] Klinger, "Interior Spaces and Other Playground of Inwardness," 93-94. Freyja Hartzell, "The Velvet Touch: Fashion, Furniture, and the Fabric of the Interior," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* vol. 13, no. 1(March 2009): 55.

Astor alludes to her use of her insurance funds within the overhaul of the home. By the most ironic outcome possible, they compensated her stolen wedding jewelry, and funded a redesign of the house's porch into an inviting terrace with climbing roses and a balcony to her bedroom that she considered as "a marvelous investment, far better than sapphires!" Precisely so, it was a metaphorical trade for the difficulties of her marriage.[74] In *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects,* Dianne Sachko Macleod illustrates this analogy from a psychoanalytical viewpoint. She notes that during maturation, we tend to turn to objects to resolve issues during the struggle between dependency and autonomy, becoming substitutes for social relations. This psychological attachment, in return, turns them unto emancipatory and transitional objects crucial to the formation of distinct identity, which is retained throughout life and especially so within art and collecting.[75] Decorating her first home afforded a metaphorical transition and emancipation from her marriage that allowed her to form her identity through its creative act, later developing a particular attachment to objects, and turning this passion for homemaking into employment. According to her, her first home was the base from which she jumped into the world.[76]

The Public Persona: Autobiography and the Creation of the Public Self

Her second husband's death in 1952 led to her controversial securing of a third marriage to the immensely wealthy but difficult, foul-tempered, solitary, and sickly William Vincent Astor (1891-1959) less than a year later in October 1953.[77] In the process of divorcing and childless,

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[74] Astor, *Footprints*, 56-58.
[75] As based on Macleod's argument using the writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe and D.W. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (1971). Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008), 12-15.
[76] Astor, *Footprints*, 58.
[77] According to Astor, Vincent's previous wife, Mary Benedict "Minnie" Cushing, was at the time seeking divorce but needed a replacement and for him to be well settled to guaranty herself a

Vincent desired someone to assist him in his few years left to live , but more importantly provided her with generous assets that led to the penultimate creation of her public persona: social advancement, the prospect of becoming his sole heir, and more importantly, the possibility to expand her philanthropic endeavors through his namesake foundation. Unlike his lineage, Vincent was a humanist who traded the Astors' slum holdings for less problematic venues and redevelopment into public housing, leading to the creation of his foundation in 1948.[78] Brooke Astor joined its board in 1953, assumed its presidency in 1960, and made its activities blossom until its shuttering in 1997.[79] Her newfound role and being now left in control of the Foundation, the Astors' legacy, and her own persona required her to take control and withhold her social standing and performance as a public figure. She confessed in a 1984 interview given to the *New York Times*' Marilyn Berger: "After Vincent died, […] I recreated myself. Now I feel I've become a public monument."[80] Transforming herself into "Mrs. Astor" required her to recreate and reshape her public image through the media, with its success relying on three significant acts: charity work, public appearances, and, more importantly for the present research, her writing of

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generous settlement. By accepting Vincent's proposal, not only was she gaining status and greater prospects, but also was given a favor to Cushing who wished to escape this wedding and married her second husband the self-avowed homosexual painter and art historian James Whitney Fosburgh, likely to pursue her art collections, simultaneously. The two unions were essentially financial and social transactions. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 104-105.

[78] The Astor's fortune, one of the greatest in the United States, was primarily based in New York real estate and originated through John Jacob Astor (1763-1848). The family consolidated their fortune through primogeniture, detained holdings in luxury hotels (notably the Waldorf-Astoria and St-Regis) housing and slums, and sustained their status through taking reigns of New York's high society. Vincent's grandmother Caroline Webster Schermerhorn Astor ruled over, codified, and gate kept its upper echelons (known as the Four Hundred) in the second part of the nineteenth century. Axel Madsen, *John Jacob Astor: America's First Multimillionaire* (New York and Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 2001). Eric Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002). Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 118-127.

[79] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 147-151.

[80] Marilyn Berger, "Being Brooke Astor," *New York Times,* May 20, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/20/magazine/being-brooke-astor.html

self. As the Foundation's president, she also became its representative figure, and feeling the need to fulfill public expectations regarding her image and status, staged her appearances accordingly. She regularly inspected where the Foundation's funds were applied, including in the most dilapidated neighborhoods of the city, dressed in Chanel suits and covered in diamonds (Fig. 4). She explained this curious fashioning to Berger: "If I go up to Harlem or down to Sixth Street, and I'm not dressed up or I'm not wearing my jewelry, then the people feel I'm talking down to them. People expect to see Mrs. Astor, not some dowdy old lady, and I don't intend to disappoint."[81] Her appearance played a seminal role within the construction of her social performance, in that her use of attire as masks and her acting as front served to consciously construct and frame her public personas for the audiences she addressed.[82] Astor's relentless self-awareness of her front (or public mask) was not just limited to appearances but extended to her identity and biography as a whole, as evidenced in her life-writing. Her memoirs *Patchwork Child* (1962) and *Footprints* (1980) were central to the construction and performance of her public identity. They were tools to influence public perceptions by reshaping her history and image according to what she agreed to disseminate about herself, shared her own accredited versions of events, and transformed her background into an enviable narrative for her audience.

The releases of both memoirs were decisively timely enterprises. When *Patchwork Child* was published in 1962 (later reedited in 1993), Astor was only just starting to establish herself in high society, as the Foundation's president, and as a novelist. The volume provided a highly detailed narrative, if not suspicious by its crystal clear recollections half a century later, of her

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[81] *Ibid*.

[82] Marilyn Cohen, "Breakfast at Tiffany's: performing identity in public and private," in *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, eds. Fiona Fisher, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, Trevor Keeble and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 159-161.

history up to her first marriage.[83] Powered by her imagination sometimes running wild as a child, the events described at great lengths sometimes took on identical characteristics to her mother's amplified storytelling habits to appeal to and impress her readers alike. Its most extreme example takes form in the section dedicated to her time in China (1910-1913), the book's lengthiest due to the influence it had on her character, and specifically the Dowager Empress Cixi's funeral procession she allegedly attended.[84] She describes the procession as grandiose and transcending all she had ever seen, but overtly exoticized and inflated her account to impress her readers. She mentions that the funeral took place six months (around May 1911) after they had arrived in Peking (November 1910) with the Empress having died a year prior, yet, her mother had somehow met her:

> A week or two before the Empress's death, Mother had been taken by Mrs. Calhoun (the wife of the American minister to China) to be presented at an informal audience. […] Beside her on a table lay an enormous scepter of jade—a symbol of her power. As she sat there, acknowledging introductions with a nod of her head, the sun came through the screen behind her and lit up the beautiful translucent green of the scepter. Its reflection turned the Empress's haggard face a strange, unearthly green. Mother said it sent shiver down her spine to look at her. It was "like someone returning from the dead."[85]

This lyrical account poses significant issues regarding factuality: aside from her mother somehow meeting her before even being in the country, in reality, the Empress died in 1908 with her funerals happening in 1909. The otherworldliness of this account is due in great part to Astor almost wholly constructing it. What she attended was the funeral procession in 1913 of her successor Longyu, which despite being one of the last vestiges of Imperial China was a far cry from what she wanted her readers to believe she experienced. Socialite Louis Auchincloss relates a discussion he once had with Astor about this issue: her memoirs never featured accurate -if any-

[83] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 31-32.
[84] Astor, *Patchwork Child*, 45. *Footprints*, 35.
[85] Astor, *Patchwork Child*, 51-52.

dates, letting on that she must have been much older than she was if she had actually witnessed the event. Astor dismissed his criticism arguing she must have seen it as an infant in her father's arm, somehow forgetting she was eleven years old then.[86] Her memoirs' blurred chronologies were due in part to the non-linear nature of memories, but her amplifications, inventions, and censorings of events were more often deliberate. Subjectively reshaping her history gave her an enviable background and helped flatter her image publicly.

Likewise, its follow up *Footprints* (1980) further served the similar purpose of constructing and shaping her public identity by laying down her own version of events regarding her ascension to fame. Covering her three marriages, and work at her foundation up until that point, *Footprints* most notably served to answer pervasive rumors regarding her third marriage as being of convenience. Marrying a difficult but wealthy man only six months after being widowed and him divorced was unsurprisingly seen as controversial, but *Footprints* prominently defended their union as being convenient for him because it allowed him to accept his wife's divorce request.[87] Vincent's pursuit of her is given prominence by Astor sharing his love letters and how they made her cave in. She then alludes to the issue directly: "When a woman marries a very rich man it is usual to say that she married for money. I know that these letters meant far more to me [...]."[88] As she explains, she was at a particular moment in her life where she felt the need to be loved and wanted to love back in return by trying to make him a better man, enlightening the public on her apparent motivation for marriage.[89]

Both Footprints and Patchwork Child similarly served to offer ideal sites where Astor, being extremely careful about how she presented herself to the world like many public figures,

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[86] *The Last Mrs. Astor,* 31-32, 39.
[87] Astor, *Footprints*, 266.
[88] *Ibid,* 271.
[89] *Ibid*, 270-271.

could subjectively reshape her identity, history, and image into her own ideal reality. Autobiographies are a performative act, as retrospective prose narratives focusing on the individual's life and the development of their character, in that the self is not materialized in self-narrating, nor is it a whole, seamless, and proper form of interiority, but is constructed through the act of writing itself.[90] As author and protagonist are one, this implies a performance of intimacy with the reader that makes this form of narrative appear as honest confessions, whereas memoirs are representations and subjective interpretations of one's life story rather than a mimicry of reality.[91] This was precisely what Katherine Winton Evans noted in her 1980 review of *Footprints* for *Daily News* when she argued that its chatty, rambling, and unpretentious lyrical style was akin to a light reminiscence intended for one's closest entourage.[92] Mikhail Bakhtin further suggests that every subsequent retellings, recollections, and performances of memories become as much part of them and their spectrum through an active process of signification. Interrelatedly, author Vesna Goldsworthy contends that once written down, these memories become frozen and cut off from further accretions, substituting mimetic depictions for edited and symbolic versions of them. It is the process of revealing the signs that compose them that becomes in itself their performance.[93] As such, when zooming in on specific details and events,

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[90] As based on Philippe Lejeune's definition of the genre in his essay "The Autobiographical Contract"(1982) through Goldsworthy, "The Private Self," 175-6. Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader,* eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, WI, USA: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 108-115, originally published in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* vol. 10, no. 1 (1995): 108-109.

[91] Silke Schmidt, *(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim: Mediating Orientalism in Contemporary Arab American Life Writing* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 49. Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," 109.

[92] The review was published in different newspaper, but this specific citation refers to Katherine Winton Evans, "Meet Brooke 'Make-Someone-Happy' Astor," review of *Footprints*, by Brooke Astor, *Daily News*, August 25, 1980.

[93] Goldsworthy, "The Private Self," 176.

as did Astor, or taking liberties in or even sometimes going to the length of eschewing their retelling, the author is allowed to construct, give notability to, and legitimize the subjective narratives they construct or modify about themselves.[94] Astor acknowledges the issue of subjectivity herself when she mentions: "I remember things as they appeared to me, not necessarily accurately but like huge vague shadows in my mind or like splendid sparkling episodes."[95] Her memoirs were deeply performative, as they sought to construct her public image on her own terms. Their occasional textual, factual, and temporal inconsistencies were symptomatic of their interpretative process as she shaped them to be deciphered in specific ways by her readers rather than being simply plain-spoken and unembellished accounts. Literary criticism of the autobiography genre has typically relied on historical records to analyze the factuality of the narratives and evaluate the true quality of life of authors without giving much consideration to the question of subjectivity and the psychological, literary, and historical implications inherent in the process. In revenge, more recent views have asserted the need to base these interpretations on the individual's psychological dimensions, and by extension motivations, instead.[96] Astor's conscious acts of reinterpretation allowed her to shape her narratives of self according to what she wanted to portray socially.

Social identity, the external process of identity-making and presentation, is constructed through the narratives promulgated about and by the self, making memoirs its most suitable site of process.[97] Michel de Certeau asserts that in the historical context, these narratives represent

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[94] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.
[95] Astor, *Patchwork Child*, 20-22.
[96] Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 4-5.
[97] As based on Tony J. Watson's "*Managing identity: identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances*" (2008), "*Narrative, life story and manager identity: a case study in autobiographical identity work*" (2009), and Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges's "Autobiographical acts and organizational identities" in *Understanding Management* (1996) cited through Isla

hegemonic strategies and culturally credible means to make audiences believe in genuine and culturally normative selves. Their physical transposition and incarnation in written form accredit these narratives and portrayed identities for their readers as candid, making them believe that they speak in the name of and are dictated by reality itself.[98] When reading through *Footprints,* one rapidly ends up portraying Astor as an ideal of womanhood of her time. Despite being honest about her mobility within public life contrasting the housewife stereotypes of the early and mid-century, Astor nevertheless sought to portray herself along normative gender roles (motherly, domestic, and marital). As Ruth McElroy argues, the significance of autobiographies is as much their subjective speech and construct than their narratives. Their materialization of identity through words is a process of accommodation and conflict for the political and physical subject that when seeking to answer their origins not only operates as a requirement to manage belonging, but forcefully hinges narratives of self, politics of identity, and the contradictions of our relationships to our home. "Home" here does not refer to a dwelling, but instead to selfhood and our attachments by encompassing a complex matrix of different identarian, national, political, and professional homes that intersect, infringe on, and complement one another.[99] Astor's literary portrayal of her attachment to gender roles in her early life was political, serving to give her role of leadership as a woman at the Vincent Astor Foundation eligibility. As political scientist Eileen McDonagh contends, all societies infer personality traits and a wide range of attributes on the basis of biological sex. Despite their exaggerations and homogenization, these

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Kapasi, Katherine J.C. Sang and Rafal Sitko, "Gender, authentic leadership and identity: analysis of women leaders' autobiographies," *Gender in Management* vol. 21, no. 5/6 (2016): 342.

[98] As based on Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life,* trad. Steven F. Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), through Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," 109.

[99] Ruth McElroy, "Bringing it home: Autobiography and contradiction," in *Feminism & Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 255.

stereotypes tend to be held by a majority of a country's population, prescribe appropriate behavior according to gender and sexuality, and direct individuals towards making choices and taking roles consistent with them due to their influence on how they are perceived.[100] Leadership is typically associated socially and culturally as gendered male by the agentic behaviors of aggressivity, drive, and ambition needed, whereas women are conversely seen as community-oriented, supportive, empathetic, kind, and seen as having relational personality traits.[101] Philanthropy offered an ideal site for Astor to turn these stereotypes in advantages. Leading women penning memoirs, as Isla Kapasi, Katherine J.C. Sang, and Rafal Sitko contend, typically construct and maintain their leadership along normative models of personal, domestic, and familial values conforming to gender roles.[102] By shaping her narratives of self along these traits, Brooke Astor alluded to the eligibility of her public and directorial role due to her "feminine" communal leadership traits, empathy, causes, and values inherent to her philanthropic activities.

Her autobiographies were central to her social performance as she was able to effectively control her public impression and performance of gender through them. Feminist historian Carolyn Steedman accurately points out the power given to women writers by placing themselves into such narratives: "What a successful analyst might do is to give the analysand possession of her own story, and that possession would be a final act of appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of one's own history."[103] Media coverage acted in the same manner, often using her memoirs as their sole references, and further cemented her full possession of her story. In one

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[100] Eileen McDonagh, "It Takes a State: A Policy Feedback Model of Women's Political Representation," *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 8, no. 1 (2010) : 71.
[101] Kapasi, Sang and Sitko, "Gender, authentic leadership and identity," 344-350. McDonagh, "It Takes a State," 71. Kapasi, Sang and Sitko, "Gender, authentic leadership and identity," 344-350.
[102] Kapasi, Sang and Sitko, "Gender, authentic leadership and identity," 344-350.
[103] Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) quoted in Penny Sparke and Anne Massey (eds.), introduction to *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishings, 2013), 2.

extreme case, a September 1993 *Vogue* features on her even used a near word-for-word transcript of *Patchwork Child* to describe her childhood in China.[104] Her public self as high society's empress of philanthropy was successful because she was in full control of her public image, responded to public expectations of her, and reappropriated her history through life-writing.

PART TWO: The Public Residence: 778 Park Avenue, NYC

The transitional period where she became the Vincent Astor Foundation's president, was the start of a new chapter intrinsically linked with her real estate venture. While she inherited her late husband's properties in parallel to his foundation, they rapidly gave way to the very first home she could truly call her own, 778 Park Avenue, NYC (Fig. 5).[105] The terraced duplex apartment she acquired in the early 1960s was the first home solely and specifically made for her as a reflection of her life story, aesthetic aspirations, taste, and new lifestyle. Victoria Rosner notes that "It was interior design […] that articulated a visual and spatial vocabulary for describing the changing nature of private life." This new dwelling was the very embodiment of this idea as it reflected the new developments in Astor's life on both private and public scales as reflections of her aspirations, achievements, aesthetic tastes, life story, the causes of her foundation, her place

[104] The transcript was composed of condensed excerpts taken from pages 35-141 of Patchwork Child's 1993 edition. Astor, Brooke. "Astor's Place: Peking Pageantry." *Vogue*, September 1993.
[105] Astor, *Footprints*, 324. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 137.

within the Astors' legacy and her role as a trendsetter. By the same token, their display within the press and their roles in her social meant to convey these meanings to the public.[106] The two secondary residences she subsequently transformed, Holly Hill in Briarcliff Manor, NY, and Cove End in Northeast Harbor, Maine, further emphasized these developments through their similar autobiographical nature and as reflections of both her private and public identity. If her memoirs were sites for constructing her public persona and its background, her properties were further means of forming, staging, and controlling them through their objects and their attached meanings. Sparke points out that the modern interior represents a far more complex site than what cultural historians have theorized and imposed on the private/public binary. It is instead the result of a bidirectional movement between both spheres where individual and group identities are formed, contested, and re-formed on personal, cultural, and societal levels according to gender, class, race, sexuality, nationality, and other cultural factors.[107] Historian Leora Auslander further asserts in her seminal *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (1996) that objects are both constitutive and representative in that they are signifiers of their owner's conscious identities and unconscious desire and fears. They become a means of identity-making by holding multiple potential personal connotations for them, as they become part of the individual's life, and reflect and influence others' views of the person in return. As sites where identity is created, formed, performed, and transposed, interiors offer more than just surface-relation to their inhabitants and visitors; they are constitutive and representative of the self.[108] The following

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[106] Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 9.
[107] Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 16-17.
[108] This argument refers to historian Leora Auslander's introduction for her book *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 18-19. As discussed and quoted within Sparke and Anne Massey (eds.), introduction to *Biography, Identity and the Modern*, 3.

chapters use media displays of the spaces in interviews and articles, the literature on their decorators, and the 2012 Sotheby's auction catalog of her properties to analyze their meanings for Astor and her audience in constructing her public persona.

Before looking into them, it is seminal to address the fact that all three of her homes were mainly the work of famous decorators Sister Parish, born Dorothy May Kinnicutt (1910-1994), and Albert Hadley (1920-2012). Parish was a socialite who delved into decorating as a result of the publicity and notoriety the decors she created for her marital home gained. Word-to-mouth amongst her class led to a stream of people seeking her advice and solicitations for projects, despite Parish not having any formal training, knowledge, or even having read anything on decorating prior. Using almost no formal planning and shuffling things around until she felt they were right, her intuition and "good taste" grounded her decorating process. Her firm, established in 1933 as a means of self-preservation following the Great Wall Street Crash of 1929, was reserved to a select clientele of patrician pedigree with an appreciation of traditional values, fine things, and the funds to afford her services.[109] She was most well known for her redecoration of the White House under the Kennedy administration, until French decorator Stéphane Boudin usurped her role, and her creation of what came to be known as the American Country Style. Her style was a unique departure from more traditional and formal historicizing tendencies in interior decoration by using classic aesthetics and forms but approaching them with an unmistakably modern consideration of comfort, and sometimes radical ideas of surface treatments and colors that nevertheless still adhered to the ideals of the class Parish was both a member of and targeted. Her interiors used the English cottage aesthetic as the basis of their informal atmosphere, with an abundance of English and French furniture often painted, handicrafts such as basketry, quilts, and

[109] Blossom and Turpin, "Risk as a Window to Agency," 9-11. Martin Wood, *Sister Parish: American Style* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2011), 18, 23-27, 30.

wicker furniture, painted floors, botanical chintz, and asymmetry to produce unstudied, unself-conscious, and unstrained cozy décors.[110] Albert Hadley (1920-2012) joined Parish and became her associate in 1962, with the firm subsequently becoming Parish-Hadley Associates, Inc. Unlike Parish, Hadley was formally trained and studied under Van Day Truex at the Parsons School of Design, worked for design firm McMillen, Inc., and taught prior. Well known as a modernist decorator unique in his affection of glamour and nostalgia, historical influences and styles were deliberately mixed in within his interiors even if usually seen as incongruous.[111]

Astor's most famous residence was her New York City apartment, acquired in the early 1960s, as the center of her public life. Built in 1931, the 778 Park Avenue building was the work of celebrated luxury residential architect Rosario Candela.[112] Her terraced duplex was accessed on the 16th floor through a private landing and comprised eighteen rooms, including service areas, and six bathrooms (Fig. 5). The living spaces began with an extensive gallery opening onto a formal dining room, a large salon, and a corner library. Meanwhile, a lengthy L-shaped passage provided access to the private rooms: a sitting room, a guest bedroom, a bathroom, Astor's master suite with its dressing room and bathroom, and a spiraling staircase leading to the floor below. Initially inhabited by her elderly mother until 1967, the later contained a drawing room, bedroom, and sitting room.[113] The interiors were decorated throughout the decade of their

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[110] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 30. Steven M. L. Aronson, "Sister Parish: The Doyenne's Unerring Eye for Warmth and Grace," *Architectural Digest*, January 2000.
[111] Adam Lewis, *Albert Hadley: The Story of America's Preeminent Interior Designer* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2004).
[112] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 165.
[113] This listing of rooms is based on the plans provided with the sale of the apartment in 2008. Although the original listings do not exist anymore as of 2019, plans and pictures have survived through a few gossip magazines and journals articles and blog posts concerning its sale. Mark David, "Brooke Astor's Posh Park Avenue Aerie," *Variety*, May 5, 2008, https://variety.com/2008/dirt/real-estalker/brooke-astors-posh-park-avenue-aerie-1201227985.

acquisition mainly by Parish, with some later updates and schemes by Hadley. The apartment was only featured once in a lengthy photo spread for an interior design magazine, Alan Pryce-Jones' "The Triumph of Tradition" in the October 1985 issue of *House & Garden*, which curiously never named her despite her links with the publication but gave enough clues regarding her public role to hint at her identity.[114] However, this lone uncredited feature was supplemented by the interiors' common featuring as backgrounds to interviews and articles on her enforcing specific readings embedded within particular rooms and objects.

The apartment's public spaces started with a grand gallery with a low barrel-vaulted ceiling treated as an architectural space by Parish. Left uncluttered, only its cream walls received special treatment by the use of visible brushstrokes to recall the peculiar texture of shantung silk.[115] Antagonistically, attention focused on two arresting sets of doors made with lacquered panels from Chinese folding screens opening onto the dining room and the living room setting the tone to their chinoiserie decorative scheme. A richly ornamented pagoda-inspired chandelier, glazed biscuit lions, elephants, and Buddhist figurines, delicately painted Chinese porcelains, and Japanese lacquer completed the scheme decoratively.[116] Meanwhile, German and Italian Rococo

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Max Abelson, "No Name-Dropping in $46 M. Brooke Astor Apartment Listing, But Floorplan's Gargantuan!," *The Observer*, May 5, 2008, https://observer.com/2008/05/no-namedropping-in-46-m-brooke-astor-apartment-listing-but-floorplans-gargantuan/.

[114] Alan Pryce-Jones, "The Triumph of Tradition," *House & Garden,* October 1985.

[115] This observation of the wall's treatment is based on photographs of objects in-situ taken for the 2012 Sotheby's auction of Astor's properties. Most of the lots respected the original positions of objects within their respective rooms and reproduced to the best extent what the rooms would have looked like during Astor's life aside of objects that went missing. The objects within the gallery and the apartment's entrance (and possibly some miscellaneous pieces) represent lot #1 to 26. All rooms have sequential listings as well. "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor: 24 September 2012 – 25 September 2012 | 10:00 AM EDT | New York," auction listings, Sotheby's, accessed April 30, 2020, http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2012/property-from-the-estate-of-brooke-astor-n08890.html. Wood, *Sister Parish*, 155.

[116] As based on Sotheby's auction lots #2, 5, 8, 11-18, 23-25. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."

consoles and mirrors, French pieces in the three Louis styles, a particularly fantasist bird-flanked English girandole mirror, and finally, a large red, cream, and black-toned early 1900s Karabagh gallery stood as the larger pieces.[117]

At one extremity of the gallery, the dining room, the residence's most formal space, was girdled by a pair of large late eighteenth-century Japanese gilt and lacquer vases preparing viewers to face the dramatic décor Hadley devised inside (Fig. 6-7).[118] The room's staggering peacock green walls framed Astor's cherished panels of pastoral chinoiserie scenes by Jean-Baptiste Pillement. Originally meant to reprise their sanguine pink shade per her wish, Hadley convinced her to use their contrasting secondary color instead to create an effect of high relief. The room's purely fantasist motif offset its formal eighteenth-century ballroom setting. Further contributing to the titillating décor were her collections of French furniture, decorative arts, and the elaborate peacock blue and muted pink draperies she specifically requested to be styled like belle-époque ball gowns.[119] A large Louis XVI and smaller mahogany tables surrounded by eighteenth-century seating and additional furniture stained in frosty grays, light blues, and mints with color-coordinated upholstery accommodated guests.[120] An elaborate Chippendale mirror crowned by a fantasist pagoda hung above the mantelpiece, an Italian carved gilt-wood clock with Chinese figures under, and a large six-paneled folding screen color-coordinated to the

[117] Sotheby's lots #4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 26. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[118] Sotheby's lots #19 and 21. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[119] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 159.
[120] Most of the furniture were antique Louis XV and XVI pieces, with some reproduction pieces. Interestingly, some tables even if antiques were put on wheels to accommodate different reception settings. Sotheby's lots #151, 152, 153, 155, 160, 161 and 162 and 163. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."

Pillement panels further Orientalized the space.[121] During functions, the tables were dressed fancifully with fine china and centerpieces as whimsical as palm trees and camels.[122] Despite the almost pastiche appearance of the room, a highly avant-gardist ceiling box hid lights directed at the murals to complement the atmospheric shimmering of candlelight during receptions.[123] The atmosphere recalled the escapist eighteenth-century chinoiserie pavilions and cabinets of European aristocracy instead of typical mid-century interiors which championed modernism, but also the Francophile décors of interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe. Her heavy use of eighteenth-century French styles created an alternative modern femininity that she exemplified herself at the turn of the century. De Wolfe consciously crafted her public identity by subversively converting her feminine taste, homemaking role, and the disadvantages of her gender into accesses to the business world and using them as positive attributes that enhanced her potential for success, as did Astor herself in the field of philanthropy and homemaking magazine publishing.[124] The Enlightenment period's decorative vocabulary paralleled de Wolfe's perspective on women's societal roles and especially so regarding women ascending to social levels near equal to men. Her interiors harkened back to the salons where figures like Madame du Barry indulged in their

[121] The folding screen was a commissioned modern piece in the Louis XV style with applied panels in polychrome meant to match the Pillement panels or part of the same series. Sotheby's lots #154, 156, 157. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[122] Silverware, porcelain services, other tablewares, and even servant uniforms extend roughly from Sotheby's lots #164 to 217. Some pieces were inherited from her late husband. Stylistically and period-wise, her eclectic collection included anything from precious eighteenth-century Meissen chinoiseries pieces and sèvres china, Victorian and Edwardian era porcelain, precious American silverware by Tiffany & Co. and others, Directoire, Georges III-V, Rococo, other ornate to more streamlined antique styles and modern pieces. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor." Mentioned centerpieces are not found within the listings but are seen in a photograph of the room by Feliciano originally used in Alan Pryce-Jones, "The Triumph of Tradition" and later published in Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 156-7 and Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 76.
[123] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 155.
[124] Blossom and Turpin, "Risk as a Window to Agency," 4.

intellectual aspirations with leading scholars and philosophers alike instead of reflecting the American cult of female domesticity she affranchised herself from by turning her feminine attributes into a full-blown profession, as did Astor herself.[125] In fact, Astor's interiors as a whole contrasted greatly with more typical contemporaneous American interiors, particularly the male fantasy of the cosmopolitan and modern gadget-laden bachelor pad and the modern family home too often considered as cohering around women's identities, perceived domesticity, consumption, and family raising, to signal her own subversive departure from typical gender roles by that point.[126] As later shown, they instead provided her spaces in which to live her alternative lifestyle by reconfiguring domesticity in spatial and stylistic terms.

Contrastingly to the dining room's *rocaille* exoticism, the living room next door (Fig. 9) featured a calmer scheme delineated by buttermilk-colored paneled walls but nevertheless centered on a colossal oriental early or mid-nineteenth-century Axminster carpet dominated by a vibrant coral red.[127] Originally conceived by Parish, the décor appeared in the March 1966 edition of *Fortune* addressed as an eighteenth-century room. Parish's version had an Aubusson rug, and modern plain seating and upholstery, but Hadley refreshed and tidied up the space to its most well-known version as described here.[128] Hadley's draperies and upholstery used Cowtan and Tout's "Bouquet Anglais" chintz with larger pieces using Quadrille's Shalimar silk moiré in

[125] *Ibid*, 5. Penny Sparke, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Interior Decoration* (New York: Acanthus Press LLC, 2005), 19-20.
[126] Bill Osgerby, "The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men's Magazines, 1930-65," *Journal of Design History* vol. 18, no. 1 (2005): 100.
[127]The rug is Sotheby's lot #105. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor." Wood, *Sister Parish*, 159.
[128] Fortune, "Those Manhattan Designers of Good Living," *Fortune*, March 1966.

beige tones.[129] Seating pieces were shuffled around periodically but often regrouped to allow intimate conversations using additional coromandel screens. Two stationary groups centered around large couches set on the left wall and the back wall.[130] The use of late Qing and Korean lacquer with gilt and mother-of-pearl fillings tables reprised the orientalist theme of her interiors.[131] A copy of Antonio Canova's Venus Victrix welcomed visitors, while a circular table with Louis XV gray-painted fauteuils further summoned them into the space.[132] The vast majority of decorative objects found within the room were of Chinese and Buddhist themes, including an ensemble composed of Famille-Verte glazed biscuit figures and lobed baluster vases encircling the bodhisattva Guanyin associated with the virtue of compassion on the mantelpiece. A collection of porcelain vases and animal figurines, and a tall and intricate Chinese pieced-bone pagoda model further completed the décor thematically.[133] A variety of eighteenth and nineteenth-century old masters drawings and paintings, including van Loo, Lancret, Géricault, Boucher, Tiepolo, Watteau, and Canaletto, overflowed from the walls unto bookstands.[134] One of the most interesting decorative arrangements was the placement over the mantelpiece of a Louis XV gilt-wood mirror taken from the library of the Astor's country retreat Astor Courts (Fig. 9),

[129] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 159. Only a few seating pieces were listed for the auction of her estate. Sotheby's lots # 106, 118, 119, 122. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[130] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 174.
[131] Some of these pieces were listed as Sotheby's lots # 104, 109-111, 116, 120, 145, 147. No information subsists on other pieces and particularly those that were found in Parish's version of the room. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[132] Sotheby's lots # 90 and 122. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[133] Sotheby's lots # 98, 100, 102, 103,107, 108 117, 144, 146, 148-150. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[134] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 174. Sotheby's lots #94-97, 123-143. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."

the ensemble circling the bodhisattva Guanyin right under it (Fig. 10), and the direct facing of an 1878 Astor family portrait by Lucius Rossi on the opposite wall (Fig. 11).[135]

The living and dining rooms were the primary public spaces of her private residence, used to entertain the often illustrious but highly eclectic guests of her public life. While invitations to her parties were keenly sought after, a 1984 *New York Times* profile of Astor explained her curious blends of invitees: "The guests tend to be people who work to make New York what it is - not the idle rich."[136] Astor invited people regardless of class, wealth, and status, as long as they had a role or impact in the city's cultural, social, and political spheres or were linked to the institutions and causes she supported. For instance, Comedian Frank Langella recalled attending a soirée in her apartment in 1998 alongside MET director Philippe de Montebello, *Sesame Street* creator Joan Ganz Cooney, David Rockefeller, and UN secretary-general Kofi Annan.[137] Langella's account makes important allusions to the performative function of her receptions. Once everyone gathered in the foyer taking their metaphorical theater seats as a supporting cast, Astor made her entrance by sashaying down the hall attired in an elegant designer gown with her hair immaculately coiffed and refined jewelry covering her small figure. At every act of the mise-en-scène, she brought her guests through a new room, transforming the night into a house tour: welcoming invitees in the gallery, serving hors d'oeuvres and aperitifs in the living room, spiritedly conversing over exquisite cuisine in the dining room, and concluding the night in her library.[138] The house tour meant to perform her public persona to her invitees by the autobiographical and public meanings of the spaces and

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[135] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 159. Sotheby's lots # 101, 102, 103. Sotheby's, "Auction Results-Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[136] Berger, "Being Brooke Astor."
[137] Frank Langella, *Dropped Names: Famous Men and Women as I Knew Them* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 272.
[138] *Ibid*, 272-273.

objects they contained, but also sought to cast herself as being just as crucial to New York's cultural, political, and social life as they were, and in return also allowed her attendees to display themselves as being on a similar level as her. Meanwhile, for those who did not have such access and the public at large, published photographs played the trick. The objects and décors served to materially embody and display her public identity by displaying evidence of her life story, alluding to her status as a widow carrying her husband's legacy and lineage, and more importantly, displaying her accomplishments, causes, and implication within New York City's landscape as a philanthropist to her audiences.

At the outset, the prominent inclusion and location of Lucius Rossi's 1878 Astor family portrait (Fig. 11) within her salon were particularly significant as it communicated her place within the Astor lineage. More precisely, the painting alluded to her taking on the weighty "Mrs. Astor" title within New York's high society, and conversely distancing her from the previous titleholder. Being a widow, its inclusion signaled Astor's marital affiliation, but was rather odd considering she was only an Astor by marriage, nor born into society, and that the painting was not exactly seen as charming. According to historian Eric Homberger, it was strictly a display of wealth and status: there are no loving familial sentiments found between its members who frigidly pose dwarfed by their opulent surroundings to call attention to their social rank and their prosperity.[139] Meanwhile, Brooke Astor's interiors provided a stark contrast to this frigid formality and its setting by the warm and unpretentious appeal of Parish-Hadley's style. While the interiors used brand names, rare antiques, and precious objets d'art, they also mixed high and low and were never about the money put behind them but about comfort, warmth, and the identity of its inhabitant instead. This relative humility equally found itself within her public personality as

[139] Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 92.

"Mrs. Astor."[140] Seated on the right-hand side of the painting surrounded by her children was the family's most well-known member and the original titleholder, Vincent's Grandmother Caroline Webster Schermerhorn Astor (1830-1908). Ruling over New York's high society during the later part of the nineteenth century with social arbiter Ward McAllister, Caroline sanctioned its entry, codified its etiquette, and ranked its echelons into the "Four Hundred" to maintain old money aristocracy's sovereignty, traditions, and its hierarchy threatened by a flux of nouveaux riches disrupting the established social order.[141] By her public presence, Brooke Astor took on her title yet wildly differed from Caroline because she linked the appellation with her charitable nature and a down-to-earth broader worldview. Her entourage was not formed according to fortune or social status, but rather because of the individuals' impact on the city's cultural, social, economic, and political wellbeing.[142] The painting's position further reflected this dissociation: on the mantelpiece directly opposing it and right under its reflection in the Astor Courts mirror, the placement of the porcelain bodhisattva Guanyin (Fig. 10) associated with compassion was a figurative allusion to her public role in philanthropy and her opposition to the Astor's reputation. Similarly, a widely circulated 1956 Cecil Beaton photograph of her (Fig. 12) further enhances this opposition. Leaning against a marble chimney over which the painting thrones, Astor poses and smiles in an emerald green Pierre Balmain ball gown mirroring the central figure of Helen (1855–1893), the second daughter of Caroline, who married into the equally prestigious and political Roosevelt family.[143] The particularity of this candid depiction was its context; it

[140] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 153-4
[141] Ester Crain, *The Gilded Age in New York, 1870-1910* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2016), 135-136.
[142] Berger, "Being Brooke Astor."
[143] The photograph was notoriously featured in a section dedicated to notable society people (but spread throughout the magazine) in the March 1957 edition of *Vogue*. "Mrs. Vincent Astor," *Vogue*, March 1957. Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York,* 268.

commemorated a ball held for her marital union to Vincent. The juxtaposition of its context and the visual links drawn between Caroline Astor's progenitor and Brooke herself served to allude to her continuation of the lineage and political subtexts.[144] Her marriage was not political *per se*, but her role at the helm of the Vincent Astor Foundation offered her as much power as possible and a place of leadership rare amongst women by the mid-century. While the Vincent Astor Foundation was a surprisingly small organization, its impact on the city and the sheer amount of its donations gained her an influence akin to the First Lady of the United States on a local level. This allowed her to surround herself with power brokers of politics such as the Reagans, Rockefellers, Henry Kissinger, diplomats, and multiple secretaries-general of the United Nations to name but a few.[145] By establishing iconographic and visual links between herself and the painting, Brooke declared that she was the new Mrs. Astor: a woman not born into riches who benefitted those less fortunate than herself, had immense social power, and ruled over New York society from a broader worldview.

The omnipresence of artworks within the living similarly alluded to her public role, but as a contributor to NYC's cultural landscape. Her foundation donated near USD (1997) 30 million to over 36 museums, with the Metropolitan Museum of Art being the principal recipient.[146] Astor was a member of its acquisition committee and executive board as a trustee from 1963 to 1982, in addition to her frequent donations of artworks and artifacts both from her own pockets and through the Foundation, unsurprisingly majorly to its Asian Art collections.[147] Adversely, her

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[144] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 125-6.
[145] Brooke Astor, "Brooke Astor," interview by Mike Wallace, *60 Minutes*, CBS News, May 10, 1987, video and script, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brooke-astor-die-with-your-boots-on/. Also seen through various photographs of her with other public figures.
[146] The Vincent Astor Foundation in its 1997 last report established their donations to museums as totaling USD 29,441,294 divided between 36 organizations. The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, 162.
[147] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 177-178.

contributions remain overlooked because she did not have formal art history training, nor was she ever deemed a great connoisseur. In fact, a 2015 article in the Museum's bulletin on the department's history specifically addressed her as not being a collector and limited mentions of her contributions to her greatest gift, the Astor Chinese Garden Court, as solely inspired by her childhood in China.[148] The article was correct in its allusion to biographic meanings but almost completely omitted her dedication to the MET. Notably, she was instrumental in enlisting some key personnel for the institution whom significantly changed its history, including director Thomas Hoving (in office 1967-1977). She was never perceived as an archetypical collector because she collected objects according to their personal resonances, whether harbingers of aesthetic pleasure or sentimental associations that interweaved freely within her identity and history, rather than as pinnacles of institutional taste and monetary value when she was not advised by the museum's board. Accordingly, her donations reflected her peculiar collections of genres and categories usually considered hierarchically inferior: decorative arts due to her passion for chinoiseries and interior decoration, Asian and Buddhist antiquities because of her upbringing, passion for history, and her faith, master artworks of low value she saw as aesthetic, animal portraits because she simply loved animals, and custom garments by important designers she had once worn.[149] Sociologist David Hall makes a crucial and insightful point explaining the dismissal of her status as a collector and as a contributor to the MET: while inseparable from political, aesthetic, socio-cultural, economic, and religious contexts, historically, the material context in which art and culture have been displayed and consumed was the private home.[150] It

[148] Maxwell K. Hearn, "ASIAN ART at the Metropolitan Museum," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* vol. 73, no.1 (2015): 32.
[149] Brooke Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting," *Architectural Digest*, March 1982. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 177-178.
[150] David Hall, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 2-3.

has long been assumed that the art market's driving forces were their use as status symbol (distinguishing the self over uncultured others), cultural capital (as a source of power in reproducing class structures), and ideological dominance (popular culture as a standardized commodity and ideological tool dominating the masses versus high arts). On the contrary, these meanings have been instated by art's institutionalization, limiting if not wholly erasing understandings of their actual meanings and values for their real audiences, which Hall suggests as emerging or crystallizing in highly different ways depending on their settings of consumption.[151] Astor authored an article for *Architectural Digest* in 1982 that eloquently described her vision of collecting. She believed that the institutional point of view was to show as much as possible in order to illustrate the evolution of what it deemed to be the perfect example, and to satisfy objectively as many as possible, whether scholars or regular folks. On the contrary, collecting was for her a personal matter and an act of passion. She believed the private collector could run entirely amok with his collection, juxtaposing anything completely incongruous because being one was not a question of taste, but of desire to possess.[152] Additionally, Astor originally bequeathed some of the artworks found within her apartment to the Museum, including her most precious asset, a Childe Hassam painting later discussed.[153] The display of her art collection, therefore, had dual functions to her visitors as reflecting her tastes, histories, and memories, imbuing the objects with meanings unlimited to traditional hierarchization of art and culture, and alluded to her role in the cultural landscape of the city and its institutions.

Themed Décors: The Question of Chinoiserie

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[151] *Ibid*, 5-11.
[152] Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting."
[153] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Statement by The Metropolitan Museum of Art On Settlement of the Brooke Astor Estate," press release, March 28, 2012, https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2012/statement.

If her collections had deep personal resonance, the omnipresence of two themes in particular often completely defined her individual décor choices: animal memorabilia and the extreme use of chinoiserie. Although not as obvious within the previously studied spaces, her passion for collecting anything decorative representing animals had a rather straightforward explanation: she was an inveterate animal lover.[154] Wildlife conservancy and animal care programs were central causes in her philanthropy, totaling near USD (1997) 18 million by the time she closed the Foundation.[155] Astor's love of wildlife even extended to her funerals, as her statement of faith mentioned: "I want the creatures, the animals, and the birds to be a little less afraid of human beings because I have blessed them and loved them, and far from doing them any harm, I have done them good."[156] In fact, her most extensively collected memorabilia type were depictions of her favorite animal: dogs. She addressed this habit in her March 1982 *AD* article on collecting:

> Dogs have always been a part of my life; I don't believe I could survive without them. Inspired by their ever-loyal friendship, I started to adorn my walls with pictures of them. I chose works from the 19th century, mostly English, with a few Spanish and French, and have stuck to that.[157]

To put it simply, her collection of dog representations celebrated her love for them, and ended up starting a trend for collecting dog portraits amongst socialites.

The second theme was the arguably problematic omnipresence of chinoiseries. Astor collected everything remotely aesthetically "Asian," whether Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or even European: lacquer, mother-of-pearl, precious china, Buddhist statues, biscuit figures, coromandel

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[154] Throughout her life, she constantly had a plethora of critters surrounding her. While dogs were always her favorite companions, she managed to possess a good dozen species throughout her upbringing even including a pony and a donkey while in China according to *Patchwork Child.*
[155] The donations of the foundation towards animal care totaled USD (1997) 1,572,500, botanical gardens received USD 1,510,434, parks USD 2,591,020, and zoos USD 11,659,977 by its 1997 final report. The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, 162.
[156] Astor quoted in Mitchell Owens, "Brooke Astor's Collection of Animal Art at Auction," *Architectural Digest,* August 31, 2012.
[157] Brooke Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting."

screens, Chippendale furniture, girandole mirrors, and even had a full-blown Chinese pavilion constructed on her Maine compound.[158] The term Chinoiseries refers to a branch of Orientalism encompassing western appropriations, interpretations, and imitations of Chinese (or perceived as being) and East Asian aesthetics either regrouped without distinctions if not wholly misrepresented. It is most typically associated with the Rococo period by a similar use of asymmetry, fantastical schemes, overbearing ornamentation, a focus on materiality, and highly stylized depictions of nature, leisure, and pleasure themes. The style was, in essence, an exoticized and othering vision of the Far East that relied extensively on the artist, craftsman, or collector's imagination rather than offering accurate cultural representations.[159] While studies on the subject are often more closely associated with Edward Said's views of western colonial domination, restructuration, and authority over the eastern world they purport to represent, the use of orientalist styles and themes can be symptomatic of entirely different agendas, especially so in the case of interiors.[160] John Potvin argues that they can represent hybridized alternative spaces betwixt and between polarities associated with East and West, or rather liminal entities per Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space, where hybrid identities are always in the process of taking form through constant and ongoing tensions, negotiations, flows, bursts, presences, and absences. They become through the same means intrinsically linked to identity-formation by allowing other differences to be articulated within them, whether "dissident" sexualities or gender, issues of class and race, or cultural belongings, and are in turn informed by the other.[161]

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[158] Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies," 40.
[159] John R. Haddad, "Imagined Journeys to Distant Cathay: Constructing China with Ceramics, 1780–1920" *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 41, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 53-80.
[160] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014).
[161] John Potvin, "Inside Orientalism: Hybrid Spaces, Imaginary Landscapes and Modern Interior Design," in *Oriental Interiors: Design, Identity, Space*, ed. John Potvin (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 2-6.

Accordingly, Astor's fantasist vision of China offered a much more complex agenda then a strictly colonial one as an articulation and negotiation of her singular childhood. Her collections allowed her to grapple with and recall her own history as a military child living in constant flux by fashioning an object-based anthropology and historiography of the self based on the period she saw as the most crucial to the development of her character.[162] Astor lived in Beijing as a front-row spectator of the torturous transition from Empire to Republic at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), making her deeply passionate about its history and culture in turn. Her autobiographies allude to her experience there as being responsible for central aspects of her personality, namely her compassion, attachment to nature, and faith.[163] The imperial city and the excursions she took outside the legation quarters' walls were her first encounters with social disparities after living most of her early childhood comfortably sheltered. She often brushed along its lower classes when taking walks with her caretaker and parents, being highly inquisitive about the inequalities and social disparities they suffered. These early encounters developed her sense of compassion and her interest in others that directed her towards the field she became an icon of, philanthropy.[164] Likewise, the relations she developed with locals and particularly Buddhist priests, were influential in the development of two important values for her: her faith and love of nature, as later explained. To treat servants and people of lesser status than her with respect and on equal ground, that everyone was worthy of attention, to observe the world around

[162] Anne Anderson, "Coming Out of the China Closet?: Performance, Identity and Sexuality in the House Beautiful," in *Oriental Interiors: Design, Identity, Space*, ed. John Potvin (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 128.
[163] Astor, *Footprints*, 16-17, 19-20. Astor, *Patchwork Child*, xiv.
[164] Considering the importance her parents put on taking interest in other, the young Brooke Russell was highly observant of her surroundings. Her memoir provided lengthy descriptions of the contrasts between rich and poor so obvious that they were ghastly to her even as a child, noting however that the exoticism of her surroundings was so novel to her that her curiosity often outweighed her compassion. Astor, *Patchwork Child*, 37-38, 48, 91-92.

her as a site of interest, teaching, and entertainment, and to respect and appreciate different cultures, traditions and religions all became valuable lessons for her later philanthropic activities she also absorbed during this period.[165] On cultural grounds, she donated and acquired hundreds of artifacts for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Asian art and objects collections, but the way she used these objects in her own interiors was wildly different from her institutional outlook. Their fantastical approach served to instead offer sites where she could revisit and submerge herself within her memories of China because they alluded to her deeply exoticized infantile imaginary of it, her memories, and the constructs she developed in her memoirs. Through the same means, the overabundance of chinoiseries fantasies within her interiors served to convey the subjective narratives of China and their impact on her upbringing as displayed within *Patchwork Child* and *Footprints* materially to her audiences.

Blurring Sphere Divides: Backstage Spaces as Sites of Performance

Nonetheless, if one would assume this public section of her apartment and its attached meanings were split from the rest along a traditional private and public threshold to provide her intimacy, reality was far from expectations because Astor's lifestyle was anything but conventional. Alice T. Friedman asserts in *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (2007) that women with unorthodox marital situations, sexualities, living arrangements, and lifestyles who commissioned homes often resulted in unique house plans that completely blurred such divisions and redefined domestic conventions due in significant part to their particular role within the public field and independence. Their fluctuation suggests new levels of formality, importance, and customs regarding their atypical activities outside of expected feminine domesticity. By choosing to have

[165] Astor, *Footprints*, 5-20. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 40.

homes built for themselves, atypical for their gender, they highlighted the importance of the home as a site of self-representation, memories, styles, occupations, status, and personal histories.[166] To parallel this view, *New York Magazine*'s Wendy Goodman 2008 conversation with Hadley on the apartment's sale accurately made this connection when it pointed out that Astor's abode was "one of New York City's stateliest residences—a home built for entertaining and doing business, where presidents and kings took tea with Mrs. Astor."[167] Displayed through mass media and used to entertain guests pertaining to her foundation, her homes only further exemplified the bidirectional movement between both spheres within the modern home where identities are formed, contested, re-formed, and performed.[168] As such, this cemented much of what the apartment was: a backdrop for her public activities (even if the Foundation's offices were elsewhere) and a material performance of both identities. Her living room and her dining room, for instance, had scales and settings suggestive of the monumental character of public spaces: the former explicitly drew comparison with an eighteenth-century salon while the dining was in effect a shrunken down ballroom alluding to her activities' levels of formality and importance, and reinforcing them through decorative drama.[169]

Arguably, the rooms beyond this point, accessible through a smaller corridor, represented the threshold to her privacy. Friedman posits that similar cases of women's "public" homes used devices such as contrasts in scales, partitions, screening, and framing to establish this boundary.[170] However, this divide of spheres did not align spatially since one drawing room designed to entertain guests had the particularity of being the innermost site of the residence,

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[166] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House,* 11-12, 17.
[167] Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room."
[168] Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, 16-17.
[169] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 12-15. Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 155.
[170] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 18.

requiring a complete house tour to reach it. Guests had to pass through this corridor, peeking into its private rooms, to descend a spiraling staircase directly across from her bedroom.[171] Some rooms were inevitably inaccessible to visitors, but Astor's choices of having some published in the media hints otherwise. She was one of the sporadic cases in the literature dedicated to Parish-Hadley, usually only featuring clients' more public spaces, who allowed photographs of the sacred site of intimacy that was the master bedroom.[172] In effect, the only rooms that really kept this divide were service areas, dressing rooms, and bathrooms. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who notably worked with Goffman, points out that communication through commodities is often subtle and unspoken but reveals that every aspect of our lives have become sites of status display, even extending to traditionally backstage spaces.[173] Hence, her virtual visitors having access to almost her whole residence reinforces the argument that she specifically constructed her decors to convey her alignments and identity in relation to her social self.

In reality, the most instrumental rooms for the performance of her public persona were actually those found beyond the public spaces of her apartment: the aforementioned drawing room at the innermost of her residence and a small sitting room on the lower floor, and the library designed by Hadley. Parish-Hadley redecorated the lower floor of the apartment around 1968. As Hadley recalled, Astor invited them over and brought them down a brand-new curving staircase designed by architect Page Cross. When Parish asked Astor what she was planning to do with the large drawing room containing eighteenth-century furniture, she quickly answered: "Oh Sister,

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[171] As based on the house's plan available during its 2008 listing on the market and surviving through David, "Brooke Astor's Posh Park Avenue Aerie."
[172] Lewis*, Albert Hadley*, 164.
[173] As based on Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979) through Lees-Maffei, "Dressing the part(y)," 188.

this is where I plan to give away Vincent's money!"[174] They were left with only a month to overhaul the whole floor, including this space known as "The Money Room" (Fig. 13), a guest bedroom, and a miniature sitting room. The room was the primary space in which she received guests related to the Foundation's activities until Hadley's oxblood red library replaced it. The modernized drawing room had its wooden floors stained into an alternating herringbone pattern of different bandwidths while the paneled walls used the Italian marbling technique in tints of ivory, parchment, muted golds, and tobacco. By this play of light, shadow, and texture, the decorators conceived a highly modern and luxurious but warm and welcoming atmosphere. Likewise, the furniture pieces were upholstered with raw neutral silks, cotton, and linens, contributing to the informal ambiance. A pair of lightwood and mother-of-pearl inlaid Indian consoles were added by Parish to serve as a backdrop for a large grand piano on the left end wall. A Louis XV rouge royal marble mantle centered on one wall with pairs of doors flanking it on both sides, tall bookshelves set into the paneling on the right end wall, and simple linen draperies in a creosote tree of life pattern screen printed from an antique fragment of crewelwork by the decorators complimented the setting.[175] An extensive collection of books and a wide array of decorative objects were added to the décor to offset any hints of stateliness and give warmth.[176]

Much like the house tour-cum-reception recalled by Langella in his memoir, the house tour required to reach the room was also performative, in that it exposed visitors to her material autobiography. The apartment was a museum of and for herself: a narrative of her life constructed through its mementos and objects, and their personal and cultural allusions. Souvenirs of travels and photographic displays of her life recalled her memories and

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[174] The downstairs section of her residence was missing from the 2012 Sotheby's auction. Descriptions of the making process and objects based on Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 152-155.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Astor, *Footprints*, 219-223.

achievements, while gifts received from friends, notably artworks by Cecil Beaton, alluded to her social register. Some objects alluded to her public activities, while others drew direct connections to her upbringing as recounted in her memoirs. For example, the lower floor guest bedroom had a copy of a painted canopy twin bed she owned as a young girl representing a set piece for *Patchwork Child*.[177] As a matter of fact, she saw objects as verbatim embodiments of her memories, as after all, one's biography is intimately bound up with the objects that populate it.[178] One of her first purchases as a salaried worker was a small Chippendale table affectionately addressed in *Footprints*:

> It is part of my lares and penates that I have dragged around with me through my life. I sometimes feel that like Marley's ghost in *A Christmas Carol* I am shackled to my belongings. A great many of them are absolute junk, but they have been with me through good times and bad. I feel that I cannot desert them. […] I feel that even inanimate objects have a life, and that I must be good to them because they trust me. Whenever I take a trip I always bring something home to show that although I was away I was thinking of my house.[179]

In another instance, she considered a Bvlgari emerald necklace and earrings set (Fig. 14) as one of her most sentimental possessions as a postmortem sign of encouragement from Vincent. A few months before his death, Vincent had commissioned the set as a gift using gems they chose together. Having forgotten its existence due to his death in February 1959 and the public role she started taking on, to great surprise, she ended up receiving the colored transparency two years later from Bulgari himself with a note written by Vincent urging him to finish it before her March 1959 birthday. Initially feeling it inopportune to acquire something this lavish, she quickly realized that it was Vincent's last personal gift and concluded the transaction.[180] Her possessions were material outposts of her life story, witnesses of her development, and memory banks.

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[177] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 157.
[178] Sarah Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 27.
[179] Astor, *Footprints*, 73-4.
[180] *Ibid*, 318, 330.

Collectors often have a rather peculiar attachment to objects. Shax Riegler's study of Mario Praz's 1958 autobiography-cum-house tour *The House of Life* provides meaningful parallels to Astor's interiors. Praz presented his roman residence as a museum of memories where objects dually held historical significance and attested to his personal experiences, ideals, tastes, associations, and aspirations. The collector's interiority holds particular power as the intimate, sensory perceptions of objects can unlock these simultaneous meanings.[181] Similarly, Susan Stewart argues that private interiors are the ideal setting for collectors to capture and weave links with commodities through the scenes of acquisition that become attached to them. The collection is an ahistorical entity; a narrative of the self built into and through its organization and acquisition replaces its timely allusions instead. This narrative is constructed by a subjective retrospective of this identity-making process, rather than by objects, with the serial act of acquiring becoming the biography itself.[182] Astor's sentimental and animist attachment to objects draws direct links with Praz's: in their "living" interior worlds, objects are both passive, as they become imprinted with their owner's life, and active, by possessing the power to recall memories (personal or historical). They created a linear autobiography by the scenes attached to them.[183] In her 1982 *AD* article on collecting, Astor further emphasized these issues when denoting that when her possessions would find their way to the auction room someday, she categorically wished they would be as cherished and bring as much happiness to their new owners because nothing for her could be unresponsive.[184] Her collections served as sites of affective experience,

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[181] Shax Riegler, "Mario Praz: Autobiography and the Object(s) of Memory," in *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior*, eds. Anne Massey and Penny Sparke (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishings, 2013), 129.
[182] As based on Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1984) through Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 13.
[183]Riegler, "Mario Praz," 141.
[184] Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting."

for which Sarah Ahmed's concept of the "happy object" offers helpful insights. In *The cultural politics of emotions,* she argues that these entities draw our bodies and lust towards them because we aim for the emotional response we assume they will deliver. Our orientation towards objects relies on how they affect us: being affected "in a good way" orients us towards their positive values, while we distance ourselves from other objects because of their negativity, as sources of pain, or else.[185] Objects are "sticky," alluding to the connections between objects, values, and ideas (i.e., taste) that make us "stick" to them because they gain these emotional attributes through circulation.[186] In the context of the home, Jan Smitheram, Akari Nakai Kidd, and Sharon Lam argue in "Celebrified homes: architecture and spacing celebrities," that by serializing the "happiness" embedded within objects' symbolism throughout decors, we perform the hopefulness that they will deliver the same effect to its inhabitants.[187] Walter Benjamin himself drew parallels when asserting that the act of collecting is a process of interiorization where we represent things as they step into our life, rather than displacing ourselves in their space.[188] Accordingly, the material artifacts of her interiors stepped and linked themselves into her identity through the meanings they gained as narrative entities, becoming autobiographical when recounted by her retrospectively.[189] As allusions to her good memories, important parts of her life, or her aesthetic tastes, the objects she collected were important sources of affect inspiring or signifying the happiness that she wished to reproduce again and obtain for herself by populating her homes with them.

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[185] Sarah Ahmed, "Emotions and their Objects," afterword to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 219-221. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness,* 24 .
[186] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 35.
[187] Jan Smitheram, Akari Nakai Kidd, and Sharon Lam, "Celebrified homes: architecture and spacing celebrities," *Celebrity Studies* vol. 9, no. 3 (July 2018): 377-378.
[188] Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 14.
[189] Sparke and Massey, introduction to *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior*, 4.

To go back to the performativity of her interiors as biographical, her celebrity status only further amplified its effects. The use of interior decorating as a form of self-expression by celebrities often suggests a much less documentary intent but rather an affinity for many to turn their domestic interiors into theatrical stages to create illusions of private lives proportional to their public persona, rendering them as liminal between both spheres. This is accomplished predominantly by linking the extravagance of stylistic choices to their enhanced aesthetic sensitivity as artists, showcasing themselves as prime tastemakers, or describing interiors as direct reflections of their professional body of work.[190] Through its display in the press, the smallest room of her residence (listed as a walk-in closet when it hit the market in 2008), the "Dog Sitting Room" (Fig. 15) in the downstairs suite made especially palpable this flux between private and public.[191] The deep high-gloss red room's exuberant namesake theme was the result of Parish-Hadley's decision to put a nineteenth-century mannerist painting of a black whippet dog they had freshly found in the bare space left over the sofa as their deadline came to a conclusion. Their choice paid off as the painting immediately caught Astor's attention and represented the starting point for her collection of dog portraits. Within just a few days, she was already starting to fill the microscopic room and, most famously, the spiraling staircase of her Holly Hill estate with more. The space was otherwise left relatively barren, only using natural-colored straw matting for carpeting, wooden furniture, subtler patterns and textured upholstery in pale tones of beiges and reds, and a central snuff-colored linen damask sofa.[192] In June 1968, she chose the room as the setting of her first interview (with Judy Lee Klemesrud of the *New York Times*) as president of the Foundation, photographed with her two dachshunds on its sofa (Fig.

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[190] Emery, "Staging Domesticity in *La Revue Illustrée*'s Photo-Interviews, " 158.
[191] As based on surviving real estate plans of the apartment in David, "Brooke Astor's Posh Park Avenue Aerie."
[192] Lewis, *Albert Hadley,* 157.

16). The article quoted Astor as such: "I think I have to overcome quite a lot, being Mrs. Astor, a lot of social workers are against you. They think you're a silly Lady Bountiful, who doesn't know a thing. When that happens I try to be as attractive as possible and win them over. I'm not here to show off."[193] The article sought precisely to win the public over through impression management. The use of one of her more luxurious rooms as setting to the interview would have seemed to show off her privilege, whereas, the small sitting room was honest about her situation through its eccentric theme but depicted an approachable and attractive figure to the public through its intimacy. Smitheran et al. suggest that some media displays of celebrities in their private domain seek to narrow the gap between them and their public through the illusion of authenticity they produce but typically attempt to separate them by defining their spatiality symbolically in terms of good taste. Through their achievements, cultural capital, material wealth, power, fortune, and political impact, celebrities are seen as an unattainable ideal, as are their interiors, which reinforce and regulate middle-class values of taste and situate working-class taste as abject and other.[194] Astor attempted precisely to circumvent falling prey to cast herself as being boastful by finding a middle ground. The room was a façade of authenticity elemental in proving her genuineness as the caring and implicated philanthropist rather than a "Lady Bountiful," its eccentricity made it honest about her status and wealth while avoiding being overbearing. The photographs of her within space served this purpose through juxtaposition: a snapshot of her sitting in her canine room as the fun down-to-earth celebrity paralleled another featuring her reviewing grant applications as the serious philanthropist in her office.[195] In parallel, the article textually portrayed her as glamorous but never taking herself too seriously, humorous, and kitsch

[193] Judy Klemesrud, "The Goal of Brooke Astor: Easing Misery of Others," *New York Times,* June 16, 1968.
[194] Smitheran, Kidd and Lam, "Celebrified homes," 387.
[195] Klemesrud, "The Goal of Brooke Astor."

loving while also drawing attention to the causes she was promoting at the time.[196] In her study of late nineteenth-century *La Revue Illustrée*'s displays of celebrity interiors, Elizabeth Emery emphasizes that these types of interviews are typically staged by significantly reducing them to interesting hooks directly correlating to the star's public identity. For instance, playwright Victorien Sardou's museum-like Marly castle represents a direct reflection of his work by linking his passion for theatrical décors, the dedication of his life and income to chronicling France's history, and his nationalistic patrimony. Meanwhile, these interviews never showed private rooms contrasting with the ideals they constructed. Marly became the theater stage for him to play his public role and emphasize his cultural capital, in Bourdieu's term, within turn of the century society.[197] Astor's interview was staged similarly by beginning with a description of a trinket found right outside her residence's door. Her "begging monkey," a white porcelain primate sitting like a Buddhist priest with a coin in his mouth, was comical in its kitsch appeal pointing to the colloquial and amusing figure in private, yet, was also a metaphor for the city by alluding to her civil philanthropy in its symbolism.[198] As such, the article set off to link her private and public personas by exposing her interiors as direct reflections of her professional body of work, making them read as a mirror of "authenticity" behind them.

"One of the Most Admired Interiors of the Twentieth Century": The Oxblood Red Library

[196] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 166-170.
[197] Emery, "Staging Domesticity in *La Revue Illustré*'s Photo-Interviews," 159-160.
[198] Klemesrud, "The Goal of Brooke Astor."

As famous as some of these interiors were, none quite reached the seminal status of Hadley's oxblood red library (Fig. 2, 17). Until his intervention in the 1980s, the room was left with its original 1930s pastiche Louis XV paneling and Parish's furnishings from the early 1960s (Fig. 18). Hadley recalled its conception: tired of its décor, Astor initially considered antiquarian Geoffrey Bennison for the project but feared Parish's reaction. She met Hadley over tea to discuss her concerns and show him his plans, only to have him criticize the profusion of draperies taking over the room's essence and proposing to alternatively entirely gut it out into a literal translation of its function.[199] The original scheme was for him "the only thing fake in her life," replacing it with highly modern rich oxblood red lacquer paneling, slick brass trimmings, and receded floor-to-ceiling shelving.[200] One of his most demanding projects, the particular wall treatment required over ten layers of glaze to obtain the desired results.[201] Meanwhile, Parish's more traditional furnishings were mostly untouched with Chinese lacquer tables, Gray-painted or gilded Louis XV and XVI bergères, banquettes, and tabourets upholstered in neutral tones or a red floral velvet, larger seating covered in a striped brown and crimson floral chintz, and a nineteenth-century Bessarabian carpet covering a mellow parquet de Versailles populating the room.[202] Decorative objects personalized the space, including bovine and pork bronzes by

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[199] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 170. Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room."
[200] Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room."
[201] The process of its making is shared within Petkanas, Parish and Hadley: "Since precision was crucial the wooden wall panels were built directly in the apartment, then sent to the foundry for their metalwork. "Everything had to fit like jewelry," says Mr. Hadley. Reassembled in the library, they were treated to numerous coats of lacquerlike enamel, each rubbed with a fine pumice stone, followed by the application of a mottled glaze. Lastly the walls were given a gloss varnish, then polished three times." Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley,* 92. Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 176.
[202] Objects from the library were listed in the Sotheby's auction of her estate roughly from lots #27 to 88. Lacquer tables were lots #34, 57-59. Seating pieces were all eighteenth-century pieces and were lots #27, 31-33, 36-38. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor." Barbaralee Diamonstein, "Home Design: A Private Library," *New York Times*, November 16, 1986.

Herbert Haseltine, Famille-Rose vases mounted as lamps, lacquer wares, and an extensive collection of antique Tibetan, Chinese, and Indian Buddhist and animal bronzes figures extending to sixth-century Northern Wei/Tang dynasty. Precious timepieces by the likes of Cartier, and Tiffany & Co, some Astor heirlooms, Chinese and Indian glazed biscuit figures, and a wide array of precious and semi-precious stone animals completed the décor with lion and dog effigies prominently presented.[203]

The setting was originally a display of her late husband's literary collection, but its modernism referred directly to Astor's contemporaneity, in Hadley's words: "a point of view that is at once classical and well-grounded, but with a cutting edge of the moment."[204] Her interiors differed significantly from typical expectations of modernity by their heavy ornamentation, cluttering, and historical allusions because women typically lived wholly separate modernities from the canon. Sparke posits that early twentieth-century feminine decorating literature, advice books in particular, made clear that style specificity was insignificant in the display of "being modern," it was instead the ability of decorative schemes as markers of feminine identity and expression to project their personalities and "spirit of the age" that made them so.[205] Hadley's proposition was symptomatic of modernist architects, designers, and their unusual women clients' beliefs that the spatial essence of modernity was the complete alteration of the home from

[203] The Herbert Haseltine pieces include Sotheby's lots #60-64. The Northern Wei/Tang dynasty piece was a small gilt-bronze seated lion, lot #71. Other decorative objects and random pieces include lots #28-30, 38-56, 65-88. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."
[204] Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room."
[205] Penny Sparke, introduction to "Part Two: The Early Twentieth-century Interior (1900-1940," in *Designing the Modern Interior: From The Victorians to Today*, eds. Penny Sparke, Anne Massey, Trevor Keeble and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), 71.

construction, to interiors and their divisions of private and public spaces, as suggested by Friedman. A spatial redefinition of domesticity was often seen as key to modern lifestyles.[206] Astor's library went farther than that by playing with a more traditional form of interiors typically deemed as feminine, an almost Victorian drawing-room complete with tasseled draperies, but encasing it within a highly stately and modern setting more typical of a CEO's business office. Its unique mixture of modern and traditional was the primary space where she received guests related to the Foundation's activities. Her domestic interiors not only correlated with her identity and individuality as an independent woman who arose publicly through using her gender, but playfully redefined traditional domestic spaces for her public activities.

Furthermore, the room also served to showcase her political and societal power as a woman. She received numerous presidents, diplomats, and heads of state within the room, juxtaposing her public role and its influence within the city to these men.[207] The 1985 *House & Garden* spread dedicated to her apartment makes this precise point by comparing her with the very famous eighteenth-century woman writer most well known for her letters on the Ottoman Empire and Muslim Orient as the wife of the British ambassador to Turkey:

> You can compare her to a practical eighteenth-century bluestocking like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who combined a sensible domesticity […] with literary talent and an ambassadorial flair. She is one of those women who can hold their own in any company without assuming a false masculinity. Some men might find her slightly frightening, but that could be because she is cleverer than they.[208]

The article then goes on to note that despite this power, her kindness towards others guides her. On both societal and political terms, this allusion is made particularly potent within the room's décor itself by its significance as a showcase of two of her main causes.. A November 1986 *New*

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[206] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 16.
[207] Lewis*, Albert Hadley*, 176.
[208] Alan Pryce-Jones, "The Triumph of Tradition," *House & Garden,* October 1985.

York Times article by Barbaralee Diamonstein dedicated to the library noted it as being one of the most public rooms in Astor's apartment, but also its most personal through objects that revealed her past and tangible expressions of her interests: animal welfare through the countless animal trinkets within it, and literature, literacy, and education interrelatedly through its function.[209] Keeping in mind she was herself a bookworm and author, the Vincent Astor Foundation's donations towards libraries totaled near USD (1997) 29 million with a majority designated to the New York Public Library's main branch.[210]

The room served as a manifesto of her support of the NYPL and, by extension, the city itself. Established in 1895 as one of New York's most prestigious cultural centers and one of the most important public libraries on the continent, the NYPL was in severe decline by the second part of the twentieth century. Severe financial hemorrhages caused the disrepair of its landmark 42nd street main branch designed by John Mervin Carrère and Thomas S. Hastings, the extreme cutting of its opening hours, and the swift decay of its cataloging and conservation practices.[211] In addition to her frequent financial and public support, by 1983, Astor left all cultural institutions' boards she was on to dedicate herself fully to the NYPL, and with its director Vartan Gregorian, was able to restore the institution's cultural status, financial stability, and circumvent its imminent collapse.[212] As a trustee and honorary chairman for nearly five decades, the institution

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[209] Barbaralee Diamonstein, "A Private Library."
[210] The Foundation established their donations to libraries as totaling USD (1997) 28,793,479. Grants related to education totaled USD 35,890,426 and those to vocational education USD 1,256,435. The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, 162.
[211] Scott Sherman, *Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library* (New York and London: Melville House, 2015), chap. 2, Google Play.
[212] Its board chairman Andrew Heiskell spoke in his 1998 memoir *Outsider, Insider: An unlikely Success Story* about the state of the library when he first signed on its board in 1978: by then the library system had no reputation left to protect as it had no political clout and no constituency aside of scholars, children and ordinary citizens who enjoyed reading. If it had not been for Astor's mammoth USD 5 million donation a few years earlier the library would have been done for. Sherman, *Patience and Fortitude,* chap. 2.

declared her its most pivotal promoter and supporter in modern history in its mourning of her passing in 2007. As she believed, "all New Yorkers, regardless of circumstance, should have access to the Library and experience the enlightenment and pleasure to be found in reading."[213] If she advocated universal literacy and access to knowledge as a personal cause, on the other hand, the library was a way to carry on the Astor legacy. One exception to their reputation was the central role of John Jacob Astor (1763-1848; the Astor dynasty founder) in birthing the city's first public library through a codicil in his will assigning part of his estate "To contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge and the general good of society."[214] The Astor Library later merged with the Lenox Library, and with generous donations from Samuel J. Tilden and Andrew Carnegie formed the NYPL in 1895. Parts of the red room's extensive collection of rare books compiled by Vincent, and her own collections (approximately 1,800 volumes) were willed to the NYPL, in addition to the Foundation's records, three paintings (including the Lucius Rossi), and her archives, cementing their interrelatedness.[215] Likewise, the omnipresence of lion figurines within the room was just as symbolic of this interweaving, as they alluded to Patience and Fortitude, the two marble lion landmarks of the institution.

Furthermore, the room was also home to one of Astor's most cherished possessions, a painting crowning its mantelpiece that most eloquently reflected her dedication to the city as a

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[213] The New York Public Library, "Brooke Russell Astor (1902-2007)."
[214] From The Astor Library, *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Astor Library of the City of New York: Made to the Legislature, January 29, 1850* (Albany: The Astor Library, 1850), 10-12, through Mario D'Avanzo, "Melville's "Bartleby" and John Jacob Astor" *The New England Quarterly* vol. 41, no. 2 (June 1968): 259-260.
[215] Associated Press, "Brooke Astor collection heads to research room at library," *Business Insider*, June 22, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-brooke-astor-collection-heads-to-research-room-at-library-2018-6. Laura Italiano, "New library room to honor Brooke Astor," *New York Post*, June 20, 2018, https://nypost.com/2018/06/20/new-library-room-to-honor-brooke-astor/.

philanthropist.[216] American impressionist Childe Hassam's 1917 *Up the Avenue from Thirty-Fourth Street* (Fig. 19), acquired by Astor in 1970*,* was part of a series of patriotic WWI parades depictions taking place on the city's Avenue of the Allies (now Fifth Avenue) from a viewpoint close to the NYPL itself.[217] Undoubtedly, its patriotism was self-referential, Astor was a military child and most of the important men in her life had been navy officers.[218] Her friend Brendan Gill visited her apartment in 1997 to pen a *New York Times* article for the celebration of her 95th birthday, foreseeably including a virtual tour of the room itself with substantial attention put on the Hassam. He accurately pointed out that the picture was exhilarating and full of high hopes in its patriotism, but in reality, more so because it alluded to her own support and hopes for the city.[219] Nineteenth-century art historian Jakob van Falke importantly argued that interiors and interrelatedly fashion are ideological signifiers of the moral substance and zeitgeist of individuals and cultures alike.[220] In his views, interiors need to fit their inhabitants like "more ample garments" expressing their changing personal tastes and identities, as well as national identity and by extension cosmopolitanism and cultural identities, of their "wearer" through reflecting contemporary culture and changing trends.[221] Astor's nationalism, cultural attachments, and sense of the spirit of the age were dominant within the room through allusions to her dedication to the

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[216] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 178.
[217] Barbaralee Diamonstein, "A Private Library."
[218] Brooke Astor kept a few Astor heirlooms but few alluded to the family at large aside of her husband, those useful to her public figure (notably initialed dinnerware probably used for receptions), and aesthetically pleasing pieces. However, she kept military medals awarded to Vincent and other Astors. Sotheby's lot #430. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor." Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 90. Wood, *Sister Parish*, 160.
[219] Brendan Gill, "A Party for Brooke: At ninety-five, Brooke Astor is kicking up her heels—and moving on," *The New Yorker*, April 21, 1997.
[220] Eric Anderson, "From historic dress to modern interiors: the design theory of Jakob von Falke," in *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, eds Fiona Fisher, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, Trevor Keeble and Brenda Martin (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 19.
[221] Anderson, "From historic dress to modern interiors," 23-24, 26-28.

city, patriotic depictions, material allegories of her political power, and finally, the modernity of the décor itself reflecting her contemporaneity.

PART THREE: The "Private" Retreats

Holly Hill and Cove End provided private retreats for the summer and weekends, where Astor could withdraw from the public's prying eyes amongst their sprawling grounds, enjoy nature, exercise, and attend to her occupations and hobbies. Although this may suggest that she divided the public and the private between her urban and country life, their similar use as autobiographies for the staging of her public self further complicate this idea. Her retreats were subject to as much media coverage than her primary urban residence was, although limited to only a few rooms, particularly enjoying a presence in interior design periodicals that the former only once did. Notably, her articles "Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies" from May 1981 and "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting" from March 1982, a May 1986 profile picturing her candidly in her homes, and a July 1996 coverage of Cove End's overhaul made both homes accessible to *Architectural Digest*'s readership. A June 1982 article in *Vogue* with romantic views of Cove End's gardens and its living room.[222] As such, their status was compromised by what she let the public see of her most private estates, extending even to a folly known as August Moon nearby Cove End reserved only for her most intimate guests, romances, and where she allegedly even swam naked.[223] Likewise to her most famous residence, although much less formal, these three retreats served the similar purpose of allowing her public persona a site in

[222] Brooke Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting," *Architectural Digest*, March 1982. Brooke Astor, "Guest Speaker: Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies," *Architectural Digest,* May 1981. Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor,*" Architectural Digest*, May 1986. Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summers on Mount Desert Island in Maine," *Architectural Digest*, July 1996. Julia Reed, "Astor's Place," *Vogue*, September 1993.
[223] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 156.

which to expose self-constructed narratives regarding her identity and life story, and depicting her as a tastemaker.

Holly Hill, Briarcliff Manor, New York

During weekends, Astor retired to her idyllic stone cottage Holly Hill (Fig. 20) in Briarcliff Manor, New York. The 64.6 acres property she acquired in 1964 overlooked the Hudson River from the top of a hill, with a roughly 10,000 square feet house designed by notable architect William Delano of Delano & Aldrich in 1927.[224] The property featured complete staff quarters and a chauffeur apartment, a large carriage house, sunrooms on each extremity, an indoor and an outdoor swimming pool, a greenhouse, orchard, extensive gardens and lawns, a pet cemetery, and a never pictured site listed as the "Love Temple" (presumably a garden folly) in the property's 2008 listing.[225] Holly Hill was where she could live a double life. In private, she relished nature, received close friends informally, swam, exercised, and enjoyed writing far from her hectic social life. That is if she was not busy receiving guests in the mansion's staggering thirteen bedrooms, or continuously stuck on the phone.[226] Both lives were not mutually exclusive and often interlinked themselves through her celebrity and socialite status, most prominently within publications. The decors by Parish and Hadley were much less high style, less glamorous, and less cluttered than her bustling New York residence was. Overall, lighter wall treatments, less studied decorative schemes, fewer wall hangings, and airy well-lit rooms furnished with cozy seating grouped tightly for intimate conversations brought a more informal atmosphere.[227]

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[224] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor,* 151.
[225] Mark David, "Behold! Holly Hill Hits the Market," *Variety*, November 12, 2008, https://variety.com/2008/dirt/real-estalker/behold-holly-hill-hits-the-market-1201228666/.
[226] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 154, 247-248.
[227] Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor,*" Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Astor's taste was reflected by the reprised overarching themes of dog memorabilia, chinoiserie, and the use of French antique furniture.[228] The May 1986 issue of A*rchitectural Digest* possessed a profile of Astor by Arthur Schlesinger with photographs by John Dominis of her in the estate described as an antidote to her hectic urban lifestyle. [229] Due to its function, the interiors were mostly kept private, with only limited views available to the press. Dominis captured only five pictures of the property within the article, with two of its gardens showing the happy and relaxed celebrity playing with her dogs near immaculate and lush blooming bushes (Fig. 21) as a mean to portrait the function of Holly Hill.

When visitors entered her home, a continuation of her dog sitting room greeted them. A corridor leading to a spiral staircase infamously covered in dog paintings (Fig. 1) was the most iconic room of the estate and the one most associated with her as a tastemaker. Relatively untouched by the decorators, bare white walls with simple monochromatic octagons and dots floor tiling served as backgrounds to a Louis XV provincial carved fruitwood buffet crowned by a Regency gilt-wood mirror, a small George III tea table, several overflowing bookcases and low tables, and two eighteenth-century chairs. The room's main characteristic was the extreme sprawling of Astor's collection of dog goods within it. Two porcelain poodles guarded one door while various themed trinkets covered the furniture, but the most striking part was the display of over 74 (by Spring 1982, and extending to connected halls) paintings and needlepoint portraits of dogs, including some of her own canine friends, well-known artists like Jean-Léon Gérome, Edwin Landseer, Edwin Cooper, and George L. Harrison, as well as obscure figures.[230] Unlike the property itself, the room remains the most photographed in her visual landscape and a

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[228] Wood, *Sister Parish*,165.
[229] Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor.*"*
[230] Sotheby lots #375 to approximately lot #417 represent the items found in the room. Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor."

definitive performative act: it was responsible for starting a trend amongst the elite for collecting dog portraits that cemented her status as a woman of taste.[231] As the American *Vogue* reporter in Paris Bettina Ballard stated in the 1930s, but which still holds true to this day: "Women of fashion were dictators, in the sense of a luxurious and capricious way of life. [Their social standing depended] on their power to make others emulate the way they dressed or entertained or talked and on their ability to make fashionable the people and the places they preferred."[232] Although pictures of her infamous staircase date to about a half-century later, this idea has not evolved much. Celebrities still depend on their power to sell a luxurious lifestyle in the media and to appeal to their followers who wish to emulate them to acquire an elevated social and cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that such displays of taste are the practical affirmation of differentiation in that aesthetic disposition represents part of a distancing and objective assurance opposing the self to the world and others on social, cultural, and class-based terms. As he posits: "Taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others."[233] In turn, taste and cultural capital represent reproduction strategies for the assurance, maintenance, and improvement of assets and position within class structures.[234] However, Astor's constant display of this room was not a question of class desperation as she did not have anything left to prove regarding her place within society or her fame to the public, but rather as a mean to showcase her love for dogs, taste making status, and cultural capital within socialite American society and the field of design. Christopher Petkanas and Parish-Hadley featured the space in *Parish-Hadley: Sixty Years of American Design* (1995)

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[231] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 44.
[232] Eleanor Dwight, *Diana Vreeland* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 40-41.
[233] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 1979, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 56-7.
[234] Bourdieu*, Distinction,* 125.

but rather surprisingly gave her no credit despite its iconic status. However, they referred explicitly to the space as that of a style-setter comparable to Queen Victoria, who started a trend for dog portraits herself a century prior.[235] This connection was liberally made by Astor herself in her 1982 *AD* article on collecting to cement her cultural capital: "Queen Victoria, who was as sentimentally addicted to dogs as I am, had every one of her pets painted and her courtiers quickly followed her example."[236] The spiraling dog staircase became one of the most iconic rooms of her estate, second only to her Hadley-designed library, in that it was a direct display of identity as a dog lover and the enormous pleasure she took within her status as a collector. More importantly, the room served as a continuation of what she enterprised as a homemaking magazine editor in the decades prior in that it similarly displayed her personal taste as a model of fashionable taste and cultural relevance.[237]

Two other rooms were featured in the Schlesinger article and further hinted at her interiors' performative and autobiographical nature. On one end of the mansion, one of two peaceful sunrooms with views of thick woods and gardens known as "The Philosopher's Room" (Fig. 22) showcases Mrs. Astor reading, further emphasizing the function of the home as a retreat. The room had a heavily blue-themed color scheme with upholstered chairs in a geometric pattern by Quadrille and some blue lacquer pieces, most notably a tall overflowing bookshelf. A surprisingly modern glass table sat at the center of the room and offered an additional surface to expose her extensive book collection and even some Buddhist icons. Its twin room was recognizable by its cream floral chintz and its dominance of green tones.[238] Much like her oxblood red lacquer library, it linked her public persona to her interiors by Schlesinger describing

[235] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley*, Parish-Hadley*, 44.
[236] Astor, "Brooke Astor on the Pleasures of Collecting." Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 57.
[237] Berry, "Designing the Reader's Interior," 63-64.
[238] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 116-118.

the room as a site in which as an author and avid reader she made full use of its restorative powers, becoming a stage for this role specifically in opposition to her demanding role as a civil philanthropist. The later was juxtaposed photographically (Fig. 4) through the rest of the article by depicting her active implication in New York City's landscape at the Foundation.[239]

However, the last room depicted in the article hinted at this performativity and autobiographical nature most explicitly, as the aptly named "Memory Room" (Fig. 23) was quite literally a museum of self. The sitting room, only displayed through limited views, had navy walls with white panel molding baseboards, and aviary patterned Brunschwig & Fils upholstered sofa. What truly characterized it was its complete cluttering of surfaces. In Astor's words, the room was a photographic display of her roots and growing that attested to the notable events of her life and her late husband, covering the totality of walls and furniture, including even couches.[240] The room draws close parallels to Billy Baldwin's infamous "Red Garden In Hell" sitting room (Fig. 24) for *Vogue* editor-in-chief Diana Vreeland. Characterized by an extreme and indiscriminative use of Vreeland's favorite color on everything and its intensely busy floral wallpaper that gave it its name, the room was equally notorious for its similar over-cluttering of all imaginable surfaces with personal mementos. As a matter of fact, Vreeland and Baldwin explicitly chose surfaces for this purpose, with the latter describing the space as the most definitive personal statement that he had seen in all his years because the objects verbatim wrote her life into it as a material narrative.[241] In summary, the "Red Garden in Hell" was an autobiographical attestation to her life experience through displays of social connections in gifts

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[239] Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor."
[240] *Ibid*.
[241] Valentine Lawford, "Former Vogue Editor Diana Vreeland's New York Apartment," *Architectural Digest,* September-October 1975. Amanda Mackenzie Stuart, *Empress of Fashion: A Life of Diana Vreeland* (New York : HarperCollins Publishers Perennial, 2013), 153-155.

and photographs of friends, her professional accomplishments, numerous thank you notes, depictions of herself, souvenirs, inspirations, aspirations, and aesthetic tastes. As Valentine Lawford noted in her *Architectural Digest* September/October 1975 article on the apartment, Vreeland's guidance through it was the only way to fully understand its personal significance as it revealed the lifestyle she wanted to project through being narrated.[242] Astor's own memory room had the same condition, although not as widely circulated as Vreeland's sitting room, as hinted in a 1987 segment of CBS's *60 Minutes* where correspondent Mike Wallace interviewed her. As she tours the room, pictorial depictions emphasized her impressive social register: "Many of Brooke's friends are among the mighty and the powerful, and she keeps track of them in a special place […] she calls the "Memory Room." Among them are presidents [notably the Reagans] and cardinals, ambassadors, and more presidents."[243] Much like Vreeland's floral cacophony, the room was a showcase of her social register and her civic and political achievements to viewers. Astor's memory room assumed the similar role of transcribing her life story into the space materially, and also shaped and controlled her self-made persona's authenticity. As previously argued concerning De Certeau's view on autobiography, the physical practice of laying narratives (hereby in material terms) accredits them and makes readers believe that they speak in the name of the real as if the act declares: "This text has been dictated for you by Reality itself."[244] If one needed Astor to narrate the room, and by extension all her interiors,

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[242] Lawford, "Former Vogue Editor Diana Vreeland's New York Apartment." Dwight, *Diana Vreeland*, 97.
[243] Brooke Astor, "Brooke Astor," interview by Mike Wallace, *60 Minutes*, CBS News, May 10, 1987, video and script, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brooke-astor-die-with-your-boots-on/.
[244] Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Xviii-xx, 148. Through Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," 109

meant that the reality dictated by it was the one she authored, revealing the room's use within the construction of her "authentic" public identity.

Cove End, Northeast Harbor, Maine

Cove End (Fig. 25), her summer home in Northeast Harbor, Mount Desert Island, Maine, only further complicated the private/public binary of her interiors and further showcased this material performativity. The property was the only one she preserved from her marriage, her late husband having acquired it in 1953 as a summer getaway for them because she had a long attachment to coastal Maine, and was the closest experience of a quiet private life she possessed even if Holly Hill became her favorite home.[245] Meant to be the couple's most informal residence, Cove End was a comfortable white-shingled New England colonial house with green shutters and roofing, and views over the Atlantic waters.[246] Modest in size compared to proximate properties and closer to town than usually fashionable for people of their status, the house was the work of architects Roger Griswold and Millard Gulick of Little & Russell for the inventor William Barton Eddison in the early 1930s.[247] Three sections composed the two-storied house, with a central pavilion containing living spaces and bedrooms, a smaller wing for the living room, and the other wing containing services areas. The couple only frequented it for only one or two months a year, but after Vincent's death, Brooke Astor made it her summer retreat where she stayed from Memorial Day until the early fall and accordingly redecorated it to signal her appropriation of the space. Over the years, Astor became quite attached to the local community and expected to be

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[245] Kiernan*, The Last Mrs. Astor,* 129.
[246] *Ibid*. Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summers on Mount Desert Island in Maine," *Architectural Digest*, July 1996.
[247]Little & Russell, "Cottage for W. Barton Eddison Esq.," 1930, Item 2527, ID 325, GHC Box 9, Great Harbor Collection, Northeast Harbor Library, Northeast Harbor, ME, USA. Wood, *Sister Parish*, 165.

treated just as a local resident would when she wandered into local stores, walked around town, attended Sunday service, or even took part in the city's Memorial Day parade.[248] Cove End was, much like Holly Hill, where she was free to please her aestheticism, recharge from her ecstatic public role, enjoy nature, exercise, and dedicate her time to reading and writing. [249] Yet, as frequent visitor Rosamond Bernier and one of Astor's editor Betty Prashker of Doubleday recall, Astor rarely had time for long periods of concentration because guests constantly filled the house, and as early as 10:00 am she was stuck on the phone.[250] Parish decorated its interiors around 1963, and the property was one of Hadley's first projects with her. The compound was the most complete translation of Parish's classic American country style in Astor's estate, interestingly predating the public debut of her nearby Maine home in *House & Garden* that popularized the aesthetic in 1967.[251] However, her version of Cove End was seldom publicly displayed within the press, with the sole exception of the living room, until it was overhauled in the 1980s by Astor's close friend and neighbor Nancy Pierrepont and interior designer Mark Hampton.[252]

Multiple themes found consistently throughout Astor's decors were repeated at Cove End and were meant to convey personal narratives to her audiences as hinted in some of the few published pictures of Parish's version. A series of articles dedicated to her life accomplishments within the June 1982 edition of *Vogue* following her 90th birthday featured a few pictures of her interiors, including the living room (Fig. 26), and further reemphasized this function through a quotation. When explaining the various elements found throughout a "Brooke Astor room," she explained: "This room isn't *decorated*, it puts together all the parts of my life."[253] Schlesinger's

[248] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 155.
[249] Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor."
[250] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 204-205.
[251] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 60 .
[252] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 65.
[253] Vogue, "The incredible Mrs. Astor," *Vogue*, June 1982.

1986 profile of Astor for *AD* contained views of the living room, the library, its terrace, exteriors, and a particular site known as August Moon later addressed. As pictured, the living room featured a blue and green color scheme picked from the bold floral chintz used on smaller seating, blue linen curtains color-matched to the chintz, cheery yellow walls, and a wide array of Canton blue-and-white china displayed in receded shelvings and on multiple tables.[254] The sofas and their provenance were, however, given the most attention. Reupholstered by Parish in a deep cream chintz with a large mauve diamond pattern, the photography captions prominently indicated them as being architect Stanford White's original designs for the Astor family's historical property Ferncliff's sports pavilion he completed between 1902 and 1904.[255] However, she never quite enjoyed her time there, as Kiernan suggests through Pierrepont's account of visiting it: Ferncliff was too much of a reminder of Vincent's previous marriages and still frequented by people of his past including his former wives.[256] Shortly after his death and probably even longer than she intended because finding prospective buyers for the mammoth property proved difficult, she replaced it with Holly Hill..[257] As such, the Stanford White couch served a similar purpose to the Astor family portrait in 778 Park Avenue as it juxtaposed and demarked her from the Astor lineage by having it reupholstered and put into a new context. Most of the objects present within the interiors were embodiments of her memories transposed into linear narratives of her life story. Most explicitly, a small table near the receded shelving in the living room (Fig. 27) showcased a metaphorical timeline of her history through a photograph of her maternal family and finishing with a portrait of Vincent, while the blue-and-white porcelain surrounding it alluded rather directly to her childhood in China as Schlesinger listed them as

[254] Wood, *Sister Parish,* 168.
[255] Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor." Wood, *Sister Parish*, 168.
[256] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 131 .
[257] *Ibid*, 145-46.

being from the Qing dynasty, the very same dynasty she assisted to its fall.[258] Interestingly, even after Pierrepont and Hampton's refurbishments, most of Cove End's interiors conserved Parish's original touch and stylistics (only changing some color stories) and leaving the autobiographical decorative displays by Astor barely touched. For instance, the library (Fig. 28) originally done by Parish-Hadley was seen as "being already so pretty" by Pierrepont that she kept the same feeling and went as far as having the original floral chintz used on couches and draperies reproduced by Scalamandré more than 20 years later.[259] In the same token, the master bedroom (Fig. 29) was redone by her but apparently kept much of its past incarnation. She described the objects present within it as going far back in Astor's past, containing mementos she always had around her and even an Arthur Rackham drawing she received as a child.[260] Pierrepont's work ethics were that she personally felt a responsibility to her clients to compliment the decors they already had and keep their essence, choosing restorations and repairs rather than changes, keeping Cove End's autobiographic essence untouched.[261]

However, much like her two other residences but even more so in this particular case, Cove End further complicates the public/private divide by its publication in the press. Her most private retreat, one where she apparently wanted to be treated as just another local resident, was not only featured within Schlesinger's article but on two other occasions within *Architectural Digest.* Cove End served not just as hard and fast evidence of her particular nature, but as an utterance of her voice and tool for the creation of her public identity despite its privacy.[262] A July

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[258] Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor."
[259] Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End."
[260] Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End."
[261] Susan Mary Alsop, "Nancy Pierrepont: An English Envelope for Fine Art in New York," *Architectural Digest,* September 1996.
[262] Inga Fraser, "Body, Room, Photograph: Negotiating Identity in the Self-Portraits of Lady Ottoline Morrell," in *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior*, eds. Anne Massey and Penny Sparke (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishings, 2013), 70.

1996 article in *Architectural Digest* entitled "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summers on Mount Desert Island in Maine" chronicled the home's refurbishments by Pierrepont and Hampton. The feature began with a description of her private time there: exhausted from her public life and not wanting to face a single soul, she retires to her quiet summer property with nothing to do but watch sailboats. There, she is finally free to seek the peace she longs for by going swimming in a private pool hidden within a secret garden (Fig. 30). When she goes through its gate, she struck a gong to advert a bronze Buddha surveilling her sacred personal space that she has arrived. Her years in China again become a predominant theme when the article further links this space and its gardens to the summer temple retreat her family held in the Western Hills right outside of Peking.[263] The privacy of this little enclave is adversely destroyed by its very picturing and description within the magazine. Ilya Parkins and Lara Haworth argue that the impossibility of maintaining this public/private split for celebrities is often due to a mediatization of the private self as a commercial enterprise: it sells the image of an authentic, accessible self to audiences that legitimize their public activities.[264] Celebrities tend to divide their dual personas along a temporal and spatial divide where their retreats are escapes from the pressures of their modern urban life and the multiple gazes attacking the public self.[265] Inversely, showcasing them within the press to the same prying eyes they meant to escape makes evident that the idea of privacy often only remains a façade; it is as meditated, or as public, as the social figure.[266] For Astor, this was meant to reemphasize her authenticity and accessibility as a civil philanthropist and celebrity.

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[263] Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End."
[264] Ilya Parkins and Lara Haworth, "The Public Time of Private Space in *Dior by Dior,*" *Biography* vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 684-5.
[265] Parkins and Haworth, "The Public Time of Private Space in *Dior by Dior*," 669-70.
[266] *Ibid*, 676.

The Private Folly: August Moon

The issues at play within her interiors, perhaps took their most extreme form in the last site of her estate: her private folly August Moon (Fig. 31). Not long after the completion of Parish's version of Cove End, she found a nearby twenty-five acres property on the waterfront looking across a bay to a small mountain shaped like Fujiyama named Blue Hill on which she had two pavilions constructed and would later further expand its grounds. Her little camp on the ocean was remote enough from her property that it created a sense of complete retreat but was just within a short car ride away. In 1981, she penned an article for *Architectural Digest* entitled "Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies" that documented her vision of and presented her own:

> A folly is really not a folly at all, but an outlet—an extension of oneself. All my life I have lived in houses that were built and planned for other people, so when it finally came time for me to build, what did I do? I built a folly. In fact, having finished one [presumedly meaning Cove End itself]—exhilarated by the pleasure it brought me—I built a second one, close to the first.[267]

Originally planning to only construct a bathhouse, she enlisted architect Bob Patterson who convinced her to do more with the picturesque setting leading to her declaring: "I don't think I want a bath house at all. I want a real house that has a roof shaped like Blue Hill itself and with a feeling of China."[268] The first building was an octagonal Chinese pavilion made out of red cedar and overlooking the waterfront complete with a cone-shaped roof mirroring the mountain, a latticework ceiling, red-lacquer trimmings, crowned by a gilded lotus bud and sitting over a heated pool encircling half of it. The building was essentially a chalet with a living room, a small kitchen unit, a bedroom and a bathroom, and a large stone fireplace, multiple bookcases, and folding doors. The second structure, known as "A House for Intimate Conversation" but seemingly never photographed, was a small square glass "Japanese teahouse" but with a curving

[267] Astor, "Guest Speaker: Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies."
[268] *Ibid*.

Chinese roof connected to the right side of the ocean-front façade of the former and overlooking the surrounding forest as well. The rest of the property also contained a romantic garden landscaped according to its thematic with imported ancient Japanese rocks, a stone bridge, and fierce-looking Buddhist statuaries meant to protect the site from evil. A waterfall, stream, and saltwater moat to swim in were built to complete her fantasy.[269] Astor's article and Schlesinger's 1986 profile of her both depict the folly, but most pictures never actually showed the buildings. Instead, they focused on architectural details and the landscaping to give the place an almost mystical feel, yet, her descriptions gave enough clues for readers to picture them. This full-blown Chinese fantasy was a private getaway for meditating, reading, and swimming, a love temple for tête-à-têtes and romantic moments with friends and affairs, and most interestingly, a sanctuary.[270]

The site meant to recall her own summer vacations in China as a child, highlighting its role as an extension of self. Her family usually rented a few courtyards in a Buddhist temple in the Western Hills, a few miles away from Beijing, to respite from their busy urban social life.[271] Both *Patchwork Child* and *Footprints* stress the impact of China on the development of her character as a westerner living there during the most impressionable years of her life, with particular attention put on the Buddhist temple as the site where she found two personally important values her parents had neglected to teach her: the love of nature and the comfort of religion.[272] As a lonely and curious child, she spent most of her time there assisting to the temple's ceremonies and fraternizing with priests who thought her a great deal about their spiritual relationship with nature:

> These gentle priests also pointed out to me the beauty and excitement of nature. To watch a pomegranate ripen through the summer, to see a flower grow, to listen to the singing wind

[269] *Ibid*. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 156.
[270] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 156.
[271] Astor, *Patchwork Child*, 136.
[272] Astor, *Footprints*, 16-17.

> and the rippling of a stream—these were to them an important part of their lives. Everything had a life of its own, they told me, every plant and tree, and it should be loved and cared for, as one would care for a person.[273]

She developed an attachment and affinity with nature she described as a "mystical bond" central to her faith.[274] While her parents were not religious themselves, she eagerly absorbed these Buddhist teachings, and by the time she was twelve and received a traditional Christian education, her religion became a mixture of both:

> The love of one's fellow man was a cardinal point in both religions. And as God created the universe, why should one not revere all his creations? […] to find God in nature has been very helpful to me. How can I ever be lonely when the cloud that passes overhead, or the pigeon on my windowsill is as one with me?[275]

As she hints in her *AD* piece, this folly was the very site in which she could feel this connection for herself, in that despite being useless functionally as a dwelling, it gave her this spiritual sense of peace, exhilaration, and of being one with nature.[276] The overwhelming presence of Buddhist statues throughout her decors similarly spoke of her faith.

Nevertheless, if August Moon meant to be a sanctuary for her spiritual belief and even her love life, its publishing and availability to the public not only further breaks down the public/private divide but also further posits that this search of privacy was not exactly possible. Having none of the shots within articles it featured in display the compound itself allowed her to retain some of its intimacy. However, the luxurious depictions of surrounding landscapes and textual revelations of its function and personal meaning made readers gain a highly intimate glimpse into one of the most private aspects of her personality. Emery elucidates: published celebrity spaces and their photo spreads typically stage them for the viewers by situating them

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[273] *Ibid*, 19-20.
[274] Astor, *Footprints,* 17.
[275] Astor, *Footprints*, 20.
[276] Astor, "Guest Speaker: Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies."

with markers of time and space (in this case it being her summer retreat along the Maine Coast) and by reproducing the banter between interviewers and the celebrities (in one case she was even both) through their texts, prompting them to believe they are actually and immediately accessing these spaces. Therefore, text and image work hand in hand: the former offers social cues to interpret photographs, while the latter confirms the authenticity of the narrative.[277] Interrelatedly, essential to highlight here is that this immediate access was also one to her identity. Astor's notion that "a folly is really not a folly at all, but an outlet—an extension of oneself" within her article is telling, not just for August Moon but her estates as a whole.[278] Inga Fraser notes in her study of the self-portraits of society hostess and patron of the arts Lady Ottoline Morrell that her choice of being photographed within the different rooms of her homes lends to the interiors a biographical significance due to their synergetic relationship with the self as displays of taste, personal histories, inspirations, memories, and identity.[279] While Astor herself was not always present within photographs of her properties, their press display worked in similar if not identical ways through textual, symbolical, narrative, and biographical evidences further supported by her memoirs and the articles she penned. John Potvin highlights the role of the domestic interior and fashion as sites for both formation and expression of modern identity within photography: their surfaces are sites of play and meaning used to "narrativize the individual's corporeal and spatial identity," which the photographs help to further chronicle and circulate.[280] Thus, the interiors and exteriors of Cove End, Holly Hill, and August Moon, in being "extensions of oneself," were

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[277] Emery, "Staging Domesticity in *La Revue Illustrée*'s Photo-Interviews," 159.
[278] Astor, "Guest Speaker: Brooke Astor on the Wisdom of Follies."
[279] Fraser, "Body, Room, Photograph," 73, 76-77.
[280] John Potvin, "The velvet masquerade: fashion, interior design and the furnished body," in *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity,* eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (London: Ashgate, 2010), 6,15, through Fraser, "Body, Room, Photograph," 81.

meant to construct and depict her narrativized public and private identities materiality, and to chronicle and circulate them within the public sphere through photography and press coverage.

PART FOUR: The Decorated Interiors and the Question of Authorship

Despite their symbolism and meanings directly linked to both her public and private personas, Astor's interiors posit a significant issue regarding the question of authorship as they were mainly the works of decorators. Considering their autobiographical roles, the extent to which these spaces were Astor's creation and her implication in the design process remains essential but difficult concerns to address as monographs on the designers and press coverage of them have, in some cases, entirely censored her name as both commissioner and implicated decorator-cum-collector.[281] Contrastingly, the little information available on their making suggest that her interiors represent a complex collaborative process between decorators and herself that

[281] To exemplify this issue, Petkanas, Parish and Hadley's *Parish-Hadley: Sixty Years of American Design* (1995) featured a few of her rooms under titles mentioning the inspirations or atmospheres used, but only addressed her simply as the client, owner, or other vague titles rather than by name. The sole exception is her Hadley-designed library, more than likely because it was too famous to not credit it. Even her infamous dog staircase is only listed as "A style-setter's Hudson river stair hall." This choice is surprising considering many of the other projects featured are credited to their respective clients while Astor's interiors were amongst the duo's most published projects in the decade prior to the book's publishing. Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 44, 76, 92, 116-118, 174-179.

intermingled their different voices due to a few particular factors. As traced until now, being a collector and experienced in decorating herself, Astor acquired most of the objects they contained and shaped them into material embodiments of her life story, causes, and affiliations. Nevertheless, the importance of the decorators' work ethics, their vision of interiors as reflections of their owners' way of life, and the influence of their backgrounds and aesthetics on her interiors, significantly shaped them as well.

For one, a primary issue in discussing the question of authorship and the decorators' work in Astor's estates, particularly Sister Parish, is simply a lack of data. Most of the literature on the decorators, including texts they have penned, dedicate the period surrounding their creation almost solely to Parish's work for the Kennedy's White House, leaving only pictorial evidence and short descriptions from Hadley and no perspective of Parish available. Despite this lacuna, the literature provides relevant information about the decorators' approaches to address these concerns. In his monograph on Parish, Wood argues that her ethos was to make sure that decors would be timeless, and above all, highly persona. She firmly believed that they should never look pretentious or "decorated," nor follow a "look" or trends, but rather be lively, warm, and imaginative to reflect the owner's personality, way of life, and own architecture, style, and period.[282] Astor herself denoted in a biography of Parish that unlike many decorators she had met, she was unique for the genuine interest she had in her clients beyond their professional relations.[283] In fact, Parish's clientele was highly selective as she only chose to work with people she developed a mutual understanding and trust with, rendering a large part of them her own friends and social circles, Astor being a childhood acquaintance in her case. Parish was even a

[282] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 153.
[283] Apple Parish-Bartlett and Susan Bartlett-Crater, *Sister: The Life of Legendary American Interior Decorator Mrs. Henry Parish II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 202.

regular guest at Holly Hill, as she lived in close by Bar Harbor.[284] The Parish-Hadley firm was even notorious for the mutually nourishing ongoing relationships it established with its clients, extending beyond completions by restoring and freshening up some spaces over time, amplifying its highly personal and even friendly client-decorator relationship philosophy.[285]

While Parish believed that the interiors she created needed to reflect their owners explicitly, Astor's spaces often exceeded this ideal. When credited, magazines and literature typically addressed her interiors as the works of "Brooke and Parish-Hadley" rather than mere commissions. Parish's first project for Astor, Astor Courts with help from Van Day Truex and Billy Baldwin in 1953, makes especially explicit their collaborative process. In Wood's descriptions, some ideas are directly credited to Astor, as were the glass doors and walls surrounding the infamous indoor swimming pool (the first within a private property in the United States) she then furnished with Parish. Her implication within the design and making processes of the spaces made her gain credits directly alongside the decorators rather than just as a client.[286] However, Astor Courts being a property she never cared for, where Parish's ethos and Astor's implication is better exemplified is Cove End through Hadley's memories. One of his first projects under Parish and not quite accustomed to what he would later call her "baroque, freewheeling style of working" yet, Hadley had spent meticulous attention and time preparing detailed floor plans and arrangements down to minute details only to find his plans completely ignored by Sister who begun sending furniture flying around to arrange them intuitively where they are the most comfortable and will look best.[287] Despite Parish's intuitive approach, Astor's approval and lengthy discussions with her were required for every single detail and aspect of the

[284] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 34-35, 54.
[285] Petkanas, Parish and Hadley, *Parish-Hadley*, 134.
[286] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 35.
[287] *Ibid*, 97.

job, from color schemes down to even wall finishes.[288] Considering Astor's background in interior decorating, even including a short stunt at Dorothy Draper, it would be highly unlikely her input was limited to that of the typical client. Parish's granddaughter notably recalls that Holly Hill was often the scene of verbal skirmishes between the two women due to their highly competitive nature.[289] Undeniably, the decorators' mission was to please their client, but as Hadley notes in Adam Lewis' monograph of his work, Astor had a charmingly effective enthusiasm for every detail pertaining to the decorating of her rooms, and a keen wit that was unequaled amongst their clients and acquaintances.[290] Wood further suggests that Astor's interiors represented an interesting collection all decorated not for but shaped around one person as settings for her life, and by extension, as containers for her "living" collections and identity.[291] Astor's agency within the design process, coupled with the decorator's philosophy, allowed her private domains to become deeply personal and interlinked with her private and public identities because she was not just a mere client, but fully part of their creative, material, and even technical creation.

In revenge, the decors Parish-Hadley created with and for Astor also became imprinted with their signatures by the physical manifestations of their aesthetics and inspirations. Parish's American Country Style, made especially potent at Cove End, is perhaps the most graphic display of this issue. Parish's creative process and the basis of her aesthetic were profoundly ingrained within her biography. As she argued in her unpublished memoir: "A decorator's taste, a decorator's eye, the personality that any decorator expresses in his or her work comes from deep within, some of it inherited, some of it experienced, some of it acquired. I have no doubt that

[288] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 102.
[289] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 168.
[290] Lewis, *Albert Hadley*, 159-160.
[291] Wood, *Sister Parish,* 168.

much of what I do today as a decorator comes, in some way, from my parents."[292] She credited her mother's vision of homemaking, her father, and her childhood homes as shaping much of what came to characterize her work as a decorator. In the case of the former, she inherited her mother's instinctual approach to decorating, her perfectionism, and innate good taste, as much like her, she developed an ease at envisioning how she should pair, place, and how objects and furniture would look like to provide the most comfort, warmth, personality, and liveliness to rooms.[293] While the revival of quilts is typically attributed to Parish, as she argues, the credits truthfully went to her mother, who "knew instinctively that the most important things in decorating are the little things that add to the warmth and love and well-being of the family [or owners]."[294] On the other hand, she attributed her technical and scholarly knowledge of furnishings and antiques, which she deemed essential to decorating, to her father being a great connoisseur and authority on English and American decorative arts.[295] Merging both parents' influences, her childhood homes later became highly influential for her. In particular, their sitting room in Morristown, N.J., which vividly impacted her to the point that she was traumatized by a later redecoration, provided her the inspiration behind and foreshadowed her own American Country Style by her constant reprising of its stylistics. The room's matting flooring, worn needlework rug, mattress ticking and English floral chintz upholstery, overabundant fresh cut flowers in vases, white painted wicker and English furniture, quilts, strewn of handy and folk crafts, lace covers, and its romantic pastoral atmosphere became constant elements throughout

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[292] Parish-Bartlett and Bartlett-Crater, *Sister,* 10-12.
[293] Although she gave her credit for her inherited sense of style and taste, she notes that her mother's obsession for neatness was the one thing she did not quite absorb to the same extent. Parish usually preferred offbeat objects, off-center placements, and imperfections over the idea of perfection, likely to give more personality and liveliness to rooms rather than rendering them as static ideals. Parish-Bartlett and Bartlett-Crater, *Sister*, 10-12.
[294] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 25-28.
[295] Parish-Bartlett and Bartlett-Crater, *Sister*, 10.

her interiors. Most notably, her infamous and groundbreaking Bar Harbor home that shocked the decorating world and popularized the style in its January 1967 *House & Garden* spread was her most complete and closest attempt at recreating the very essence of the room.[296] Meanwhile, Astor's interiors reflected these aesthetic affections through some of the furnishings brought on by the decorators and some overall schemes that reprised these inspirations such as her Cove End living room, yet, the vast majority of objects being her own contributions significantly blurred that visibility. For their part, Hadley's touches and affections within her interiors were subtler, with his oxblood-red library being the sole exception. The extreme modernism of its setting was entirely unique within all her décors and was more reflective of Hadley's contemporaneity and his attachment to modernist values than her more traditional way of life embodied in the original furnishings.

Mrs. Astor's interiors were undeniably shaped and centered around her identity but were more intricate in nature than just strictly commissioned decorated interiors. By her implication within their creation on all levels, her interiors were far from ideal display models created for just any other client, but highly collaborative in their reflection of her voice and those of her decorators. Despite the lack of credits given within some literature pointing to the contrary, Astor was just as much an author as Parish and Hadley were, rendering her interiors as personal but assisted personal statements. Collaborating with the decorators did not limit her vision but allowed her to put into material form what she sought to create due to their particular concern for making the spaces they created intimate reflections of their owners. While Parish and Hadley's touches and even identities were incontestably intrinsically linked within them as well, these interiors nevertheless remained shaped around one person as settings for her life and identity.[297]

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[296] Wood, *Sister Parish*, 27, 111-112.
[297] Wood, *Sister Parish,* 168.

CONCLUSION

In 1996, after more than thirty-five years at the Vincent Astor Foundation's helm and as one of New York City's prime philanthropists, the ninety-four-year-old Brooke Astor was named one of the city's most important living monuments by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Incidentally, this achievement also marked the conclusion of her career. Her role and image were increasingly challenging to live up to at her advanced age, leading her to shut down the Foundation by 1997.[298] Astor liquidated some 24 million left between her leading causes, namely the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, institutions related to animal care programs, education, literacy, historic conservancy, women's housing and empowerment to

[298] Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 233.

name but a few.[299] Her decision was twofold: for one, stepping away from the platform that gave her public presence, identity, fame, power, and greatest pleasures avoided turning in a performance she feared was not as adequate anymore. On the other side, she also ensured her legacy would remain untouched as no one would ever be able to derail her original vision and direction for the Foundation.[300] Still active throughout the next few years as a public figure, Astor slowly retired from the public sphere by the turn of the millennium due to her waning health and fight with Alzheimer's disease. In 2006, her near-complete disappearance from the public's eye came to an end when she had a major media resurgence following a much-publicized and infamous lawsuit against her caretaker, her son Anthony, over her welfare on accounts of grand larceny, failure to provide her adequate living conditions, and elder abuse.[301] As attached to her identity as they were, her sumptuous residences, beloved possessions, and extent collections reflected these unfoldings by their gradual disappearance, confiscation, and dismantling. Most famously, her Childe Hassam painting bequeathed to the MET was instead sold away in 2002.[302] Despite a great number of missing pieces, her beloved possessions finally found their ways to the auction room in 2012 to finance her favorite charities post-humously as she had initially wished.

Despite the image of elder abuse victim she gained and her loss of control in her later years, Brooke Astor built for herself a more than successful trajectory spanning over a centenary and public prominence that far outshined her regretful ending. Her public persona as Mrs. Astor, her life story, incredible achievements, success, and power were not only atypical for a woman,

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[299] The Vincent Astor Foundation, *The Vincent Astor Foundation: 1948-1997*, 155-160. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor,* 241

[300] *Ibid*, 239.

[301] Helen Peterson, "Battle of N.Y. Blue Bloods!," *Daily News*, July 26, 2006.

[302] The Hassam was reportedly sold to a private buyer for USD 10 million in 2002 by her son, who had convinced her she was nearing destitution and taking a sizeable commission for himself. Its whereabouts remain unknown. Kiernan, *The Last Mrs. Astor*, 273-277.

but also the result of her incomparable agency in the public sphere. Gaining access to labor, prominence, fame, and success by seizing the limitations of her gender, she turned typically "feminine" interests of homemaking, taste, women's magazine publishing, and philanthropy into opportunities for success. As such, her success depended on her singular dexterity at creating, controlling, and promoting her identity using impression management, her life-writing, controlling media discourses, and performing her public image. While part of her fame as a philanthrope and socialite came through her marital status, Astor independently arose to her place in society and transformed her late husband's foundation into her very own.

In return, by being displays of these achievements and her development, the interiors of 778 Park Avenue, NYC, Holly Hill in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., and Cove End in Northeast Harbor, Maine became means to transpose her narratives of self, identity, and literary autobiographies in material form. On the personal level, the objects she possessed were imbued with deep emotional meanings because they were animist, material, sensory, and psychological outposts of her memories and witnesses of her development she felt she was nothing less than shackled to as parts of herself.[303] Astor's attachment to objects was made even more potent by the fact she was a collector, as her possessions became imprinted with her experiences, aspirations, and associations. Her collections were not only historical entities but "living" material embodiments of her identity with the power to recall and convey these personal narratives to herself and others.[304] Visiting her interiors whether physically or through the media, exposed one to the life she had achieved and constructed for herself through an object-based anthropology of self: chinoiseries fantasies fancifully recreated her childhood souvenirs of China, Buddhists icons signaled her faith, photographs of her entourage and the important people in her social life

[303] Astor, *Footprints*, 73-4.
[304] Riegler, "Mario Praz," 141.

showed off her vast register and rising to her status, and dog effigies called attention to her favorite animal and love for her own, to name but a few of their main themes.

Sister Parish and Albert Hadley created backdrops for her to stage her life within where she was not only a client but had full agency in their making as personal statements. When explaining what made a room a "Brooke Astor room" for *Vogue* in 1982, Astor shared that it was how they were made personal by putting together all the parts of her life rather than being "decorated."[305] Despite having been overlooked until now, Brooke Astor's interiors represent more than just tangible expressions of a private self but a unique case study of a woman creating, commissioning, and using her private domestic spaces as spaces of identity-(per)forming for a public audience. To reprise Penny Sparke, the modern interior is the privileged site of a complex bidirectional movement between public and private spheres where individual and group identities are formed, contested, and re-formed on personal, cultural, and societal levels..[306] As a celebrity and businesswoman, the role of Astor's private homes as stages for her social life and as displayed in mass media bridged and undid typical expectations of domesticity and sphere divides. They were simultaneously used to form, perform, and circulate a domesticity corresponding to her public persona's grandeur on multiple levels.[307]

Foremost, her image as the philanthropist figure was cemented in the use of 778 Park Avenue to convey her achievements, causes, power, and public role through the symbolism imbued within its objects, its role as backdrops to activities and press coverage of her foundation, and through media display of its interiors for the public at large. The *New York Times*' report of the 2012 Sotheby's auction of her estate reemphasized these links: her fanciful circus of animal

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[305] Amy Gross, "The incredible Mrs. Astor: A very happy woman-and why not?," *Vogue,* June 1982.
[306] Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, 16-17.
[307] Emery, "Staging Domesticity in *La Revue Illustrée*'s Photo-Interviews," 157.

memorabilia directly asserted her love for animals and support of animal welfare, while her red-lacquered library pointed to her starring role in reviving the New York Public Library and literacy as one of her leading causes.[308] Likewise, her expansive collections of Chinese, Buddhist and East Asian antiques, decorative arts, and paintings symbolized her cultural legacy in supporting the MET and her beloved Childe Hassam's *Up the Avenue from Thirty-fourth Street* signaled the patriotic nature of her support for the city. Using her domestic spaces to entertain politicians, celebrities, guests of the Foundation, artistic, and scholarly figures alike, Mrs. Astor argued for the legitimacy of her social standing, her political and cultural power, and her equal status and importance in relation to those public figures. In the meantime, framing her sometimes eccentric interiors within the press to showcase a down-to-earth, unpretentious, and even kitsch-loving but glamorous celebrity image to the public at large gave accessibility, authenticity, and proved her genuineness as the caring and implicated civil figure. As Hadley once characterized her Park Avenue apartment, the residence's hem was stately; it meant to entertain and conduct business in rather than serve as a private retreat.[309]

In the same vein, her interiors' performativity was not limited to her public residence but extended beyond the threshold to her privacy to include traditionally backstage spaces and her private retreats to further shape and convey her social identity. Cove End and Holly Hill became as public through their publishing as her urban home and further accredited her public roles, biography, marriage, gender, and taste to the masses. Her possessions were imbued with deeply personal meanings, but also reprised the narratives she created about herself in her autobiographies and public image as physical embodiments of them. In its most extreme form, this theme served as the literal function of her "Memory Room" as a photographic and spatial

[308] Mason, "The Cherished Remainders of a Luxe Life."
[309] Goodman, "Selling Off the Money Room."

display of the development of her private and public identities. In parallel, her décors also highlighted the importance of marriage within her growth. In particular, multiple allusions to her marital lineage, her place within and in opposition to it, and her carrying on of their legacy highlighted her subversive attachment to her marital role as a widow, and the central role of her third marriage in the creation of her public persona. Likewise, gender itself was both an implicit and explicit theme within her interiors. A woman commissioning interiors built around her unusual lifestyle and domestic arrangements was not only atypical but also greatly influenced their planning and layouts to provide new levels of formality, importance, and customs shaped around her public occupations and bridging of both public and private spheres.[310] Her décors were more feminine in architectural and design terms as gentile, ornate, lush, romantic, cluttered, and even dramatic domestic interiors, standing in stark contrast to their male counterpart the sleek, functional, corporate, and cosmopolitan modernist interior, but on the contrary, served like the latter as business, public relations, and entertaining spaces. Perhaps a more explicit embodiment of the question of gender, her taste as a woman and socialite manifested itself in the tastemaking status conferred to her dog portrait collections at Holly Hill and was made just as central as a theme within the public role of her interiors. As such, a threshold between private and public was almost non-existent within her estates due to her public presence, as they all served, backstage spaces included, to convey these meanings attached to her identity, provide public accessibility, and authenticity to her private self for the public at large.

[310] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 11-12, 17.

FIGURES

Fig. 1- Portrait of Brooke Astor for *Architectural Digest,* 1986. Photographed by John Dominis. In Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor,*" Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Fig. 2- Albert Hadley's library for Brooke Astor. Photographed by William P. Steele. In Christopher Petkanas, Sister Parish and Albert Hadley, *Parish-Hadley: Sixty Years of American Design (*New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 94-95.

Fig. 3- Brooke Astor and her son Anthony in their first home, late 1920's.
In Brooke Astor, *Footprints: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY, USA: Doubleday, 1980).

Fig. 4- Brooke Astor conducting a preliminary site visit for a Vincent Astor Foundation grant, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor," *Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

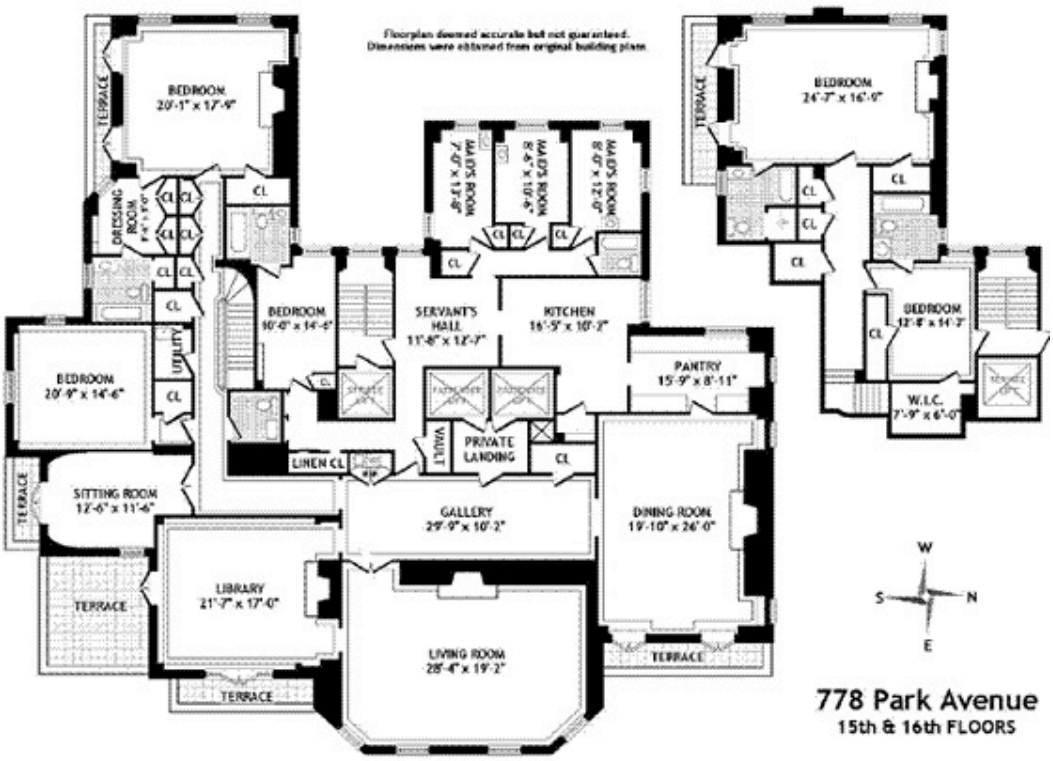

Fig. 5- Real estate floor plan of the 2008 sale of 778 Park Avenue.
In Mark David, "Brooke Astor's Posh Park Avenue Aerie," *Variety*, May 5, 2008, https://variety.com/2008/dirt/real-estalker/brooke-astors-posh-park-avenue-aerie-1201227985.

Fig. 6- Entrance of 778 Park Avenue's dining room. Photographed by Billy Cunningham. In Martin Wood, *Sister Parish: American Style* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2011), 156.

Fig. 7- 778 Park Avenue's dining room for *House & Garden*, 1985. Photographed by William P. Steele.
In Alan Pryce-Jones, "The Triumph of Tradition," *House & Garden,* October 1985.

Fig. 8- 778 Park Avenue's living room. Photographed by Billy Cunningham
In Martin Wood, *Sister Parish: American Style* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2011), 159.

Fig. 9- “An Early Louis XV Carved Giltwood Mirror,” originally situated in the library of Astor Courts, c. 1725.
Sotheby’s lot #101, “Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor: 24 September 2012 – 25 September 2012 | 10:00 AM EDT | New York.” Auction listings. http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2012/property-from-the-estate-of-brooke-astor-n08890.html.

Fig. 10- “A Chinese Famille-Verte Glazed Biscuit Figure of Guanyin and Pedestal,” 19th century. Sotheby’s lot #103, “Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor: 24 September 2012 – 25 September 2012 | 10:00 AM EDT | New York.” Auction listings. http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2012/property-from-the-estate-of-brooke-astor-n08890.html.

Fig. 11- Rossi, Lucius. *Astor Family Portrait*, 1878. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. The New York Public Library, New York.

Fig. 12- Beaton, Cecil. Photograph of Mrs. Vincent Astor, 1956. Photograph. Cecil Beaton Studio Archives, Sotheby's. Published in black and white in Vogue, "Mrs. Vincent Astor," *Vogue*, March 1957.

Fig. 13- 778 Park Avenue's "Money Room." Photographed by William P. Steele.
In Adam Lewis, *Albert Hadley: The Story of America's Preeminent Interior Designer* (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 153.

Fig. 14- “A Platinum, 18 Karat Gold, Emerald and Diamond Necklace, Bulgari,” 1959. Whereabouts of the earrings unknown.
Sotheby’s lot #900, “Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor: 24 September 2012 – 25 September 2012 | 10:00 AM EDT | New York.” Auction listings. http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2012/property-from-the-estate-of-brooke-astor-n08890.html.

Fig. 15- 778 Park Avenue's Dog Sitting Room. Photographed by William P. Steele.
In Adam Lewis, *Albert Hadley: The Story of America's Preeminent Interior Designer* (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 155.

Mrs. Vincent Astor, the philanthropist, sits in her bright red "Dog Room," decorated with 40 paintings of dogs. Her dachschunds, Benny and Judy Montague, are from England.

Fig. 16- Photograph of Brooke Astor in her Dog Sitting Room at 778 Park Avenue, 1968 Photographed by Arthur Brown. In Judy Klemesrud, "The Goal of Brooke Astor: Easing Misery of Others," *New York Times,* June 16, 1968.

Fig. 17- Albert Hadley's oxblood red library. Photographed by Billy Cunningham.
The Childe Hassam painting originally crowning the mantelpiece was sold to a private collection.
In Martin Wood, *Sister Parish: American Style* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2011), 160-161.

Fig. 18- The library as it appeared before Hadley's redecoration.
In Katherine Tweed (ed.), *The Finest Rooms by America's Great Decorators* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

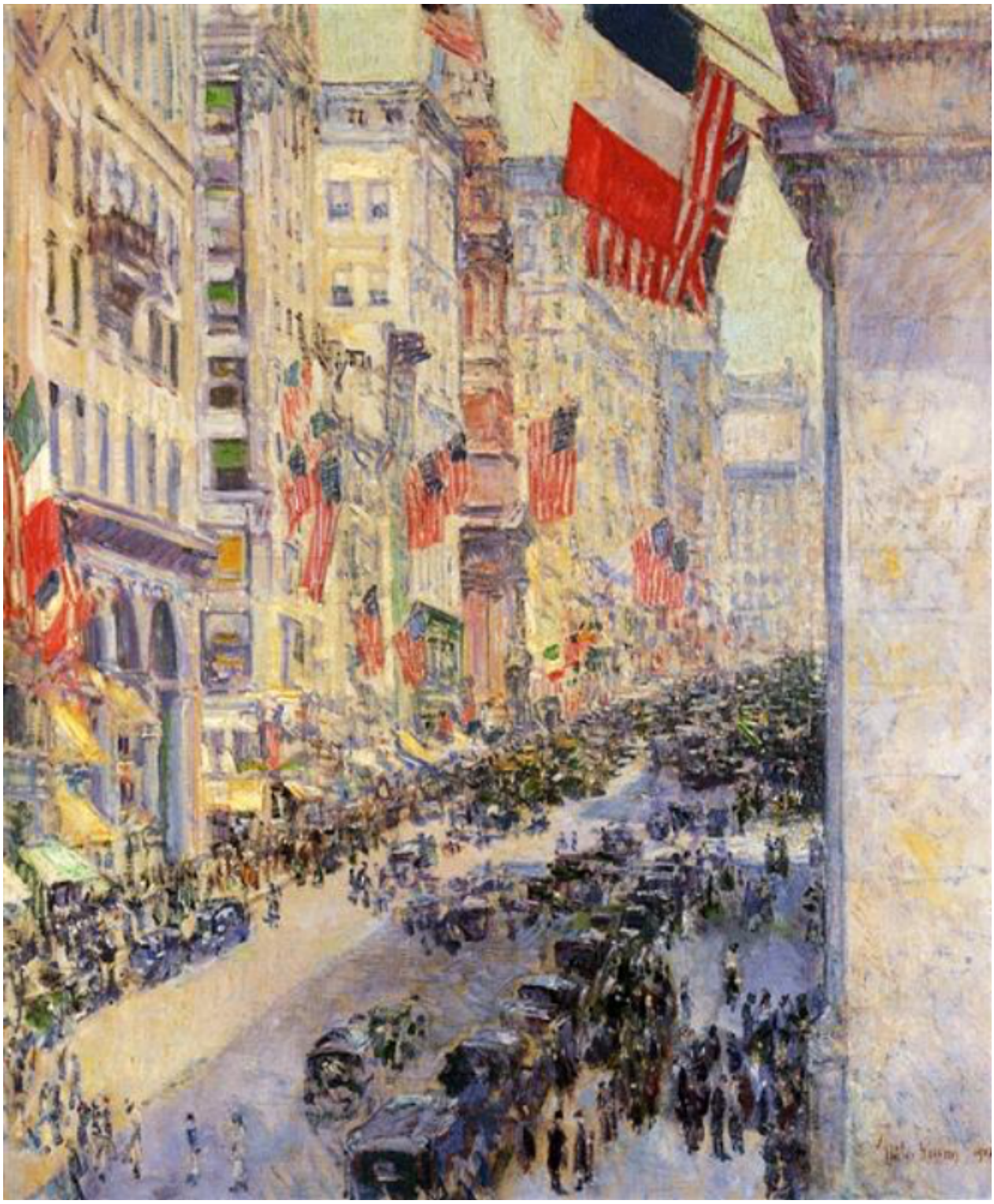

Fig. 19- Hassam, Childe. *Up the Avenue from Thirty-Fourth Street*, 1917.
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

Fig. 20- Unknown. Photograph of Brooke Astor's Holly Hill estate.
Sotheby's, "Auction Results- Property from the Estate of Brooke Astor: 24 September 2012 – 25 September 2012 | 10:00 AM EDT | New York." Auction listings and catalog. http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2012/property-from-the-estate-of-brooke-astor-n08890.html.

Fig. 21- Brooke Astor accompanied by her dogs Henry O.K. Astor, Freddy the daschund and Maizie the schnauzer at Holly Hill, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor,*" Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Fig. 22- Brooke Astor reading in “The Philosopher’s Room” at Holly Hill, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, “Profiles: Brooke Astor,*” Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

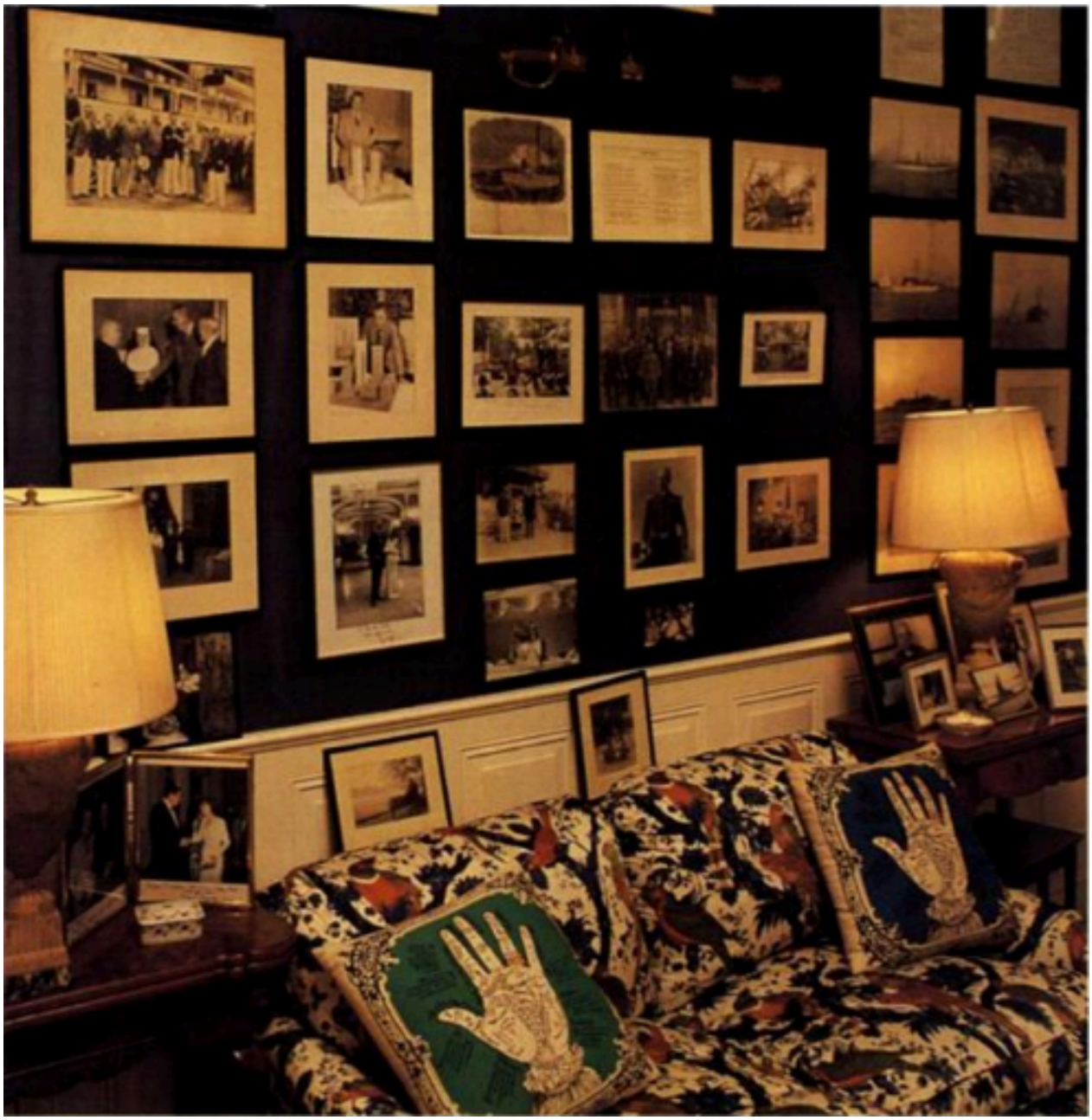

Fig. 23- “A photographic display of my roots and my growing” is Brooke Astor’s description of “The Memory Room” at Holly Hill, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, “Profiles: Brooke Astor,*” Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Fig. 24.- Billy Baldwin's "Red Garden in Hell" sitting room for Diana Vreeland and its displays of mementos, 1975. Photographed by Champion Pictures.
In Valentine Lawford, "Architectural Digest Visits Diana Vreeland," *Architectural Digest*, September/October 1975.

Fig. 25- Back façade of Cove End, 1996. Photographed by Brian Vanden Brink.
In Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summer on Mount Desert Island in Maine," *Architectural Digest*, July 1996.

Fig. 26- The living room of Cove End as decorated by Sister Parish, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor," *Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Fig. 27- Displays of mementos and Brooke Astor's collection and blue and white Qing porcelain, 1986. Photographed by John Dominis.
In Arthur Schlesinger, "Profiles: Brooke Astor," *Architectural Digest*, May 1986.

Fig. 28- The library of Cove End as redecorated by Nancy Pierrepont and Mark Hampton, 1996.
Photographed by Brian Vanden Brink.
In Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summer on Mount Desert Island in Maine,"
Architectural Digest, July 1996.

Fig. 29- The master bedroom of Cove End as redecorated by Nancy Pierrepont and Mark Hampton, 1996. Photographed by Brian Vanden Brink.
In Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summer on Mount Desert Island in Maine," *Architectural Digest*, July 1996.

Fig. 30- The secret swimming Pool at Cove End, 1996.
The Buddha surveilling the site is seen on the right. Photographed by Brian Vanden Brink.
In Susan Mary Alsop, "Brooke Astor's Cove End: Summer on Mount Desert Island in Maine,"
Architectural Digest, July 1996.

Fig. 31- Patterson, Robert. August Moon for Brooke Astor. Northeast Harbor, Maine. Repainted in red, restoration, and additions by SPAN Architecture, NY. Span Architecture, accessed June 15, 2020, http://span-ny.com/work/august-moon

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