

Royals

Remembering HSH Princess Marianne of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn, a doyenne of German and Austrian nobility known for her legendary parties and high society photographs

The celebrated noblewoman – famously glamorous and a dedicated patron of the arts – died in early May at her home in Munich, aged 105

By Clara Strunk

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Princess Marianne of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn has died in Munich aged 105 Franziska Krug/Getty Images

Much-loved royal, renowned photographer and a storied socialite: Princess Marianne of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn, who passed away earlier this month at the age of 105, leaves behind a remarkable legacy. The Princess – who catalogued her extraordinary life through a lens, amassing an archive of 300,000 photographs – died on 4 May at her home in [Munich](#), to the sadness of [royals](#) across Europe.

Born Baroness Maria Anna Mayr von Melnhof in Salzburg, [Austria](#) in 1919, 'Marianne' as she was known was the eldest of Baron Froedrich Mayr von Melnhof and Countess Maria Anna von Meran's nine children. A descendant of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria through her mother, Marianne enjoyed a privileged childhood, growing up between the family's main home of Schloss Glanegg near Salzburg, palaces in Graz and [Vienna](#), as well as several other country residences across Austria, including the castles of Kogl, Neu-Pfannberg and Jagdschloss Hochalm.

While a student at the Blocherer [Art](#) School in Munich, Marianne met her future husband, His Serene Highness Hereditary Prince Ludwig Stanislaw Heinrich of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn. The couple married at the bride's family home, Schloss Glanegg, on 12 March, 1942 and, less than a decade later, Ludwig succeeded his father, Gustav Alexander, as the 6th Prince of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn.



The Princess, photographed in Austria by Slim Aarons in 1986, was famous for her society parties, which blended creatives with aristocracy Slim Aarons/Getty Images

It seemed that the Prince and Princess were on a high, as they welcomed five children over the following few years: Princess Yvonne, Prince Alexander, Princess Elisabeth, Princess Teresa and Prince Peter. But in the early Sixties, Ludwig was caught in a tragic accident, killed by a drunk driver right outside his family home of Schloss Sayn. The widowed Princess Marianne was left to take over the

management of the family's estates, including Sayn and a hunting lodge in Fuschl near Salzburg, inherited from her father.

Far from daunted by the undertaking, however, Princess Marianne rose to the challenge, beginning an annual arts festival at Fuschl, which evolved into a social hub for nobility, artists and international celebrities. She even published a book on the event: *Mannifeste*, a pun on her nickname of 'Manni'. From the 1970s to 2009, during and around the annual Salzburg Festival, Princess Marianne gave several of her famous 'rural lunches' for 100 guests each at Fuschl, to which she welcomed countless celebrities (including many artists performing at the festival) as well as scores of diplomats, politicians and royals.



Princess Marianne, pictured in 2019 at an exhibition of her photographs at the Kronsbein Gallery in Munich picture alliance/Getty Images

The Princess also took up photography to bolster her in this next era of her life and, over the years, took over 300,000 photographs of celebrities and royals, including Andy Warhol, Audrey Hepburn, the Aga Khan and King Charles. Indeed, so prolific was she with her camera, that she caused Princess Caroline of [Monaco](#) to say: 'You're not a paparazzo, you're a mamarazza.' In contrast to the paparazzi of the day, Princess Marianne never used pictures that she deemed indiscreet or degrading, maintaining that she 'always photographed her friends as friends'.

Towards the end of her life, the Princess lived at her apartment in Munich, but maintained the fabulous standards she had always set for herself. When she celebrated her 105th birthday last year, her youngest son, Peter, told a reporter: 'My mother was always vain and placed great importance on her appearance. My mother would never wear a tracksuit or even a nightgown during the day when guests came.' Survived by four of her five children (her second daughter, Princess Elisabeth, died in 1997) Princess Marianne will always be remembered as an exceptional example of artistic innovation and hardship overcome, as well as a hostess of legendary parties and one of the wisest chroniclers of high society.