

As seen in issue 25
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Femininity

the way you see it!

Look back 100 years and you would have seen women in dresses, and dresses only.

WOMEN'S ATTIRE HAS EVOLVED greatly since then, and when you think of those transformations, they do tend to reflect how women themselves have changed. Society's view of women; their rights both politically and personally, equality in the work place, careers and sporting activities have all contributed to how we view and how we utilize a dress in our wardrobe.

The introduction of women wearing trousers in the 1930's was made more acceptable by actresses like Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn, who were often photographed wearing them. During World War II, women working in factories or doing other forms of 'mens work' on war service wore trousers. In the post-war era trousers became acceptable casual wear. But not until the 1970's did trousers and trouser suits really be a staple in a women's wardrobe - and over time influenced the fashion for most of us to co-ordinate our outfits with matched separates, rather than wear a dress.

Until now! The dress is back! Of which I am so pleased. When you look back, the dress has always been the picture of femininity, and as women, we can gladly wear them as a badge of honour.

Famous dresses

Dresses do have something special to say, and they can be remembered for what they represented at that time. For example, who would not remember Marilyn Monroe's famous white dress, which sold at auction in 2011 for 4.6 million dollars. Conjure up the image of the sexy red evening dress with plunging neckline worn by Julia Roberts in *Pretty Women*; representing the transformation of the pauper into the princess. And we cannot forget Princess Diana's fairytale wedding dress.

Audrey Hepburn's little black dress and pearls were iconic, and stayed with us as a picture of elegance. It made its debut in the late 1920's and has become a stock wardrobe item for us ever since. This gave birth to the LBD, which in 1926 was featured in *Vogue* by Coco Chanel. It was a simple elegant sheath dress in black crêpe



de chine, with long sleeves worn with a string of white pearls. It was publicised as the 'essential' that would take you practically anywhere, which has still got that connotation today.

Hemlines making headlines

During the turn of the century dresses and skirts were long and modest. However, the 'Roaring Twenties' offered a shocking new look as hemlines rose to knee length in only a handful of years. Being original in this new design signified a whole new era for women; not only were women using their rights to vote, they were freeing their legs of cumbersome fabric.

This knee length was to be until the 1960's when the miniskirt came into the limelight, causing quite a stir when hemlines rose to unheard of heights.

Since then hemlines have had their ups and downs. During the 1990's the trend was to wear dresses and skirts to the ankle; and we exited from the 20th century ironically cyclical in nature. We

entered the twentieth century with ankle-long dresses and skirts and we exited with the same length hemline in fashion.

As for trends today we have such variety of looks and lengths that anything goes, and they do seem to coexist pretty peacefully together.

The perfect length

The perfect length for most people will be determined by their overall height and proportion, and shape of leg, however there are lengths that suit most people. For example, wearing simple and



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classical styles on the knee and just below the knee, where the leg dips in, is the most flattering.

More flowing designs which require more fabric in construction need the 'midi' length, which is just below the widest part of the calf muscle; whereas any longer for the not-so-tall stature can be considered frumpy. Basically the longer the length, the higher the shoe needs to be, which you can see in evening dresses and similar.

The exception is the maxi dress for summer, which does team well with flat sandals, creating a bohemian or beach wear look. Perfect for those who wish to be casual and comfortably stylish at the same time.

Let the dress do the dressing this season!

Open any magazine or pass a frock shop this season and you will see in the window all manner of styles, colour, patterns and dress designs. The dress is a favourite garment of mine as it has the ability to instantly slim you, creating an elegant look. With this uninterrupted style line through the body it is the ultimate illusionary dressing tool.

When you put on a dress all you need to do is add the accessories. You do not have to think about coordinating top and bottom garment, dressing is made easy with the dress. Fabric and length will determine whether it looks casual, dressy or formally glamorous. The simpler, the more classic it becomes, floral and fluid fabric show more feminine tastes, bright colours, texture and pattern will show creative spirits, and if you prefer comfort and practicality you will opt for crisp cotton or knit fabric.

With Cup and Show Week approaching, and the season for special occasion wear like balls and Christmas parties on the horizon I see people scouring everywhere for that special dress. To be different, feminine, sexy, glamorous, feel beautiful, free, elegant, and special this summer, look no further than the dress! ■

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