

10 tricks for dressing with confidence

Anna Murphy reveals how some clever clothing choices can make you feel like the best possible you...



Every cloud has a silver lining. Or maybe some silver brogues. Or perhaps some sparkly earrings. It's understandable why we women sometimes feel cross about the effort we have to make with clothes. Men have it easy in comparison. But theirs is such a uniform that the only option they have is to conform. So men have it boring, too. For us women, it's anything but. With a few tricks up our sleeve we can deliver instant confidence. We can dress our way to looking and feeling like the best possible version of ourselves. What power! What fun!

Forget about trends. Or rather, keep an eye on them – they might provide you with a refresh here and there – but don't get hung up on them. Instead work out what you love, and what loves you. The most important thing to ascertain is what

enhances your figure. If you aren't sure, it can be worth investing in a session with a personal shopper. (I rate Anna Berkeley, who offers a "body map" for £200; annaberkeley.com.)

Buy the best you can afford. We all need less that's better. We need to think and shop like our grandmothers did: knowing what's right for us, and investing in the best quality we can. Yet we should also relish our freedom, a freedom of which our grandmothers could only dream. We can dance all night in our metallic flats. We are never too old for jeans, as long as they are cut right (see overleaf). And the fun flourishes at our fingertips – from fabulous jewellery to killer lippy – are the stuff of which their fantasies were made. Dressing with confidence means we can – and should – enjoy the best of their world and the best of ours. Here's how...

style confidence

1 The one-stop dress

I remember talking to an American fashion editor who had moved to London a few years ago. "Why on earth don't you Brits wear dresses?" she asked me, baffled. "They're so much easier to get right than separates." She has a point, and now we do. One look-at-me frock – perhaps a print, perhaps a bright colour, perhaps both – is a wardrobe and mood game changer. It also does all the work for you: no worrying about what goes with what. And it smooths your lines beautifully. Layer over a polo neck or long-sleeved tee if it's chilly. I love this M&S Collection style, available from the beginning of February (£45, marksandspencer.com). If you have a wedding or other big event coming up this year and are game for splashing some cash, I rate Goat for chic plains with a whiff of the Jackie O about them (from £440, goatfashion.com), and Beautiful Soul for power-florals (from £330, beautiful-soul.co.uk).



TIP
If it's chilly, layer over a fine-knit polo neck or long-sleeved T-shirt, and add boots

2 It's all in the detail

A bright lipstick, some statement earrings, or – a favourite tactic among the older members of the fashion pack – a just-mad-enough pair of sunglasses (think oversized and/or colourful). A small flourish can a big confidence boost give, and also take years off. I rely on Anthropologie for unusual ear bling (£38, anthropologie.com). For top-notch hot-hued lippy that works with any complexion, try the small but perfectly formed Rodin range (£28, net-a-porter.com).



"A small flourish can give a big boost"

3 The youth-endowing jumpsuit

Either your toes are curling at the very idea of a jumpsuit right now, or you are already a fan. If you are in the former camp, might I suggest you switch to the latter pronto? Like my friend, a chic sixty-something devotee to the genre who has discovered there's no easier way to add a just-cool-enough edge to otherwise classic style. Kitri Studio is my go-to brand. This Roland Black Tuxedo Jumpsuit is £125 (kitri-studio.com).



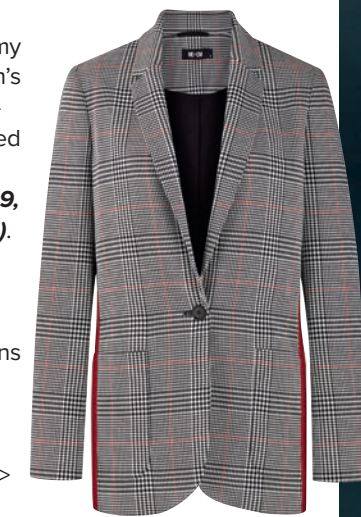
4 The shearling gilet

Yep, this is going to cost you up front. But in terms of price per wear (thinking like our grandmothers), it will end up as pennies. Us Brits have to deal with nippiness all year round, so what better investment than something you can sling on over a big knit this month, or a floaty dress come summer? There's more. A gilet will render you fabulous, whether you're wearing it at home on the sofa or out and about. Whistles has the best range, and delivers good faux options, too, from £149. This cream beauty, also available in grey, is £450 (whistles.com).



5 The power jacket

Because a sharply tailored something-or-other doth an air of competence endow. Men have been getting by courtesy of the cut of their lapels for generations. But, as discussed, we can have much more fun with it, and play with colour and pattern. Buy cleverly and you will end up with something that works just as well with jeans at the weekend as in the office. Zara's hard to beat, but I currently have my eye on Me & Em's just-enough-of-an-edge checked jacket with red side stripe (£299, meandem.com). Me & Em is a solution-driven British brand that also happens to be one of the best in the business at comfort luxe. >>



style confidence

6 The high-days-and-holidays flats

Thankfully, there are countless versions of flats out there that are just as showstopping as any heel and – newsflash – facilitate the small matter of being able to put one foot in front of the other. One very special pair of shoes can transform an otherwise plain ensemble (just ask Theresa May). I rate boutique brand Penelope Chilvers for its ever-after quality, like the silver Camber (£229, penelopechilvers.com). Twinkle toes indeed.



7 It's in the bag

To look – and feel – like the superwoman you indubitably are, can I suggest a bag that is a) crossbody and b) multi-hued? The former leaves you hands-free, thus allowing you to get on with all those things you need to do. The latter makes you look sure of yourself, pulled together, anything but dull. I rate this example from boutique British brand Demellier, which delivers on both quality and affordability (£345, demellierlondon.com).

8 The all-day heel

Even the most dedicated runner for the bus sometimes needs the instant confidence boost that heels can give. This Fay style from recently launched brand Aeyde has become a favourite of mine (£210, aeyde.com). Why? Because here is a shoe that really will remain your ally from morning to night, and because its conical heel, pointy toe and V-neck decolleté (yep, a shoe can have one of those, too) is very, very now.

“Shoes that will remain your ally”



9 The ultimate jeans

There's nothing to put a spring in one's step more than some great denim – but there's nothing harder to track down. To skinny or not to skinny? We keep being told not to wear them, but we can't seem to give them up. Why? Because they make us feel and look, well, skinny. But to my mind, a more grown-up – and not to mention flattering – approach is somewhere between a skinny and a straight-leg. Gap calls them the Slim Straight. I call them too good to be true. (From £59.95, gap.co.uk).



10 Putting your best ankle forward

According to the celebrity stylist Rebecca Corbin-Murray, the most flattering way to dress is with a flash of the ankle. “The narrowest point of your leg is between your ankle and your mid-calf. If you have a skirt or dress that cuts you off there, and that also pulls you in at the waist, it is slimming and elongating.” The same applies for cropped trousers, whatever your height. I rate Jigsaw and Toast's cropped trews. But when it comes to skirts and dresses, LK Bennett is the most reliable brand. This brocade number is knock-out (£250, lkbennett.com). Top tip number two from Corbin-Murray: “It's about rediscovering your waist. Bringing everything in at the waist flatters most people.” Box also neatly ticked by this skirt. w&h



TIP

The narrowest point of your leg is between your ankle and mid-calf, so seek a skirt that cuts you off there