

fashion

From A-lines to V-necks — how to dress for your shape

Whether you're a triangle or an hourglass, these new rules will change the way you shop. By **Anna Murphy**



Triangle
Vertical stripes flatter a larger section

Midiskirt with slit, £195, rixo.co.uk

I am about to urge you to spend £200 on something, not an exhortation I have made before, nor, I'll wager, one that I will make again. (Far be it from me to dictate how you spend your precious spondulix.) This is not about the perfect summer dress, or the best kitten heels. This is not about anything you will wear. It's about everything you will wear, for ever more.

Because £200 will buy you a so-called bodymapping session with the personal shopper and stylist Anna Berkeley. And I hereby pledge that this will be the most transformative fashion-related investment you make. It will change the way you shop for clothes. It will change your relationship with the clothes already in your wardrobe, and it will probably — for all the right reasons — end your relationship with some of them altogether.

Big promises, but a bodymapping session is that good. Mine proved to be two of the most fascinating and useful fashion-related hours I have spent.

First off, the London-based Berkeley, formerly a fashion buyer at Selfridges, is her own best advertisement when it comes to clothes, a perfect storm of practicality and jeu d'esprit. Real-world chic is her speciality and she arrives at my door looking effortlessly on point in a plum trouser suit (Paul Smith), slogan tee (Kenzo), and neon orange kitten heels (LK Bennett).

The personal-shopping world is full of very stylish women, of course. It's what might best be described as

Berkeley's plan of campaign that makes her stand out. Because the 45-year-old plots your body — and with it your fashion happy place — with the rigour of an army general.

At the heart of her approach is the bodymapping process, which will acquaint you with your body — your real body, not your idea of it — like never before. For this she Blu Tacks a vast piece of brown paper to your wall. You stand against it. She draws around you. You go off and make you both a cup of tea while she starts measuring and muttering like Hermione Granger in an arithmancy class. You come back. Then the eye-opening begins.

I thought I had big hips. Turns out I have medium hips (rare apparently) and my shoulders are broader, so need rebalancing. I thought I had short legs, but they are actually marginally longer than my torso, so this too needs to be balanced by what I wear. It's all — all — about proportionality. This was just one of the surprising things I learnt. We all know the bodily dimensions we are supposed to covet — long legs being one — but in fact the most flattering way to dress is to make everything look in balance, by way of a style trompe l'oeil or two if necessary. (Berkeley has dozens up her perfectly proportioned sleeve.)

I now know precisely where my smallest point is — which determines how and where dresses and jackets should be cut — my frame size and shape (more on this anon), what length earrings suit my neck, what type of shoes flatter my “heavy” (sigh) legs and big feet. (Shoes to

flatter your feet! I had never even thought about that one.) I won't bore you with the rest — of which there is a lot — but you get the idea.

Then comes the next phase, in which Berkeley pepper-sprays the sheet of paper with 20 or so bespoke pre-printed Post-its telling you exactly what will and won't work for you, factoring in pretty much everything imaginable: necklines; skirt and trouser lengths; dress shapes; patterns; fabric types; detailing; jewellery; even haircuts. You end up with an incredible dossier of information with which to go through your wardrobe and/or hit the shops.

Do it. I am serious. And in the meantime here's Berkeley's starter for five.

1. What is your default style?

Do you naturally tend to look cool or smart? Do you overdress or underdress? If you walked into a party full of strangers, what is the one word you would like people to think of you before you



Curvy
Try Modern Rarity



Anna Berkeley speak? (I said “interesting”. Most women tell Berkeley it's “effortless”.) Keep all this in your head when you shop. Make sure what you buy ticks all these boxes.

Anna Berkeley

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ZAC FRACKELTON FOR THE TIMES

**Hourglass or triangle**

Emphasise your waist;
skim your lower half if
you're a triangle

Above left: top, £75; culottes, £120; coatigan, £100, johnlewis.com. Above: £320, cefinn.com from July

2. Find your true body shape(s)

Forget about apples and pears. There are seven main shapes: the neat hourglass, the full hourglass, the triangle, the inverted triangle, the column, the rectangle and the rounded.

The neat hourglass has a defined waist, a defined bust and a neat bottom and hips. The full hourglass has a defined waist, a full bust and a full bottom and hips.

The triangle is akin to the so-called pear, with full hips and thighs, a defined waist, narrow or sloping shoulders and a top half that appears smaller than the lower. The inverted triangle has straight, square shoulders, little definition between waist and hips, flat hips and bottom, and a lower half that seems smaller than the upper.

The column has narrow shoulders, a flat chest or small bust and undefined waist, plus narrow hips and a flat bottom. The rectangle is also straight up and down but, as the nomenclature suggests, wider, with square shoulders. The rounded shape has a rounded shoulder line, fullness around the middle and a flattish bottom.

The five non-hourglass shapes can exist in pairs. I, for example, am both a triangle and an inverted triangle.

3. Operation hourglass

Those of us who aren't lucky enough

to be an hourglass should be dressing to give the appearance of being one. Which means, as and where relevant, making big bits look smaller, small bits look bigger.

Some general rules: pattern, colour and detailing draw attention to an area, making it look larger. Skim large hips or boobs and keep everything in that area as dialled back as possible. Add in some fussy stuff — buttons, ruffles, embellishment, lateral stripes, pattern, bright colour — if you want to bring emphasis, and the illusion of centimetres, to an area. Any of the above will increase a small bust or add curves to a linear figure.

To elongate, try vertical stripes. To disguise lumps and bumps diagonals can be the stuff of arithmancy. V-necks and flat-fronted trousers are universally flattering.

If you don't have a waist — a particular problem for columns, rectangles and rounded — forget about belts, but don't think that unwaisted styles are the answer. (The shift dress is not, in fact, your friend.) If you are a column, you can fake a waist with ramped-up

**All shapes**

V-necks work for everyone

Above: trousers, £79.95, and shirt, £64.95, massimodutti.com

**Small frame**

Petite print, trim cut

Above: £185, Primrose Park at shopatanna.com. Left: £175, lkbennett.com

**All shapes**

Flat-fronted trousers are
universally flattering

Blazer, £370, and
trousers, £210,
cefinn.com

shoulders and a fuller skirt. If you are rectangle or rounded, a dress or top that is fitted to below the bust, then flares to a subtle — subtle! Not swamping! — A-line will be your best bet.

4. What's your frame?

You need to work out if your frame size is small, medium or large since this will determine what kind of accessories will suit you, and what scale of pattern. Berkeley uses wrist measurements — easily searchable online — but the simplest rule of thumb (literally) is to wrap your thumb and forefinger round your wrist. If they overlap you are small-framed, if they touch you are medium-framed, if they barely touch, or they don't touch, you are large-framed.

Shop for shoes, bags and patterns that chime with your size. Small frames need dainty shoes and bags that are A5 or smaller, while large frames need shoe chunkiness plus a bag that is A4 or above. If you are in the middle, stay there, with medium heels (like a slim block or wedge), plus a bag that is A5 or a bit bigger.

Also important is frame shape. You determine this by eye. Do you look curvy, angular or somewhere in between? (What Berkeley calls "interjacent".) Go for fabrics and patterns that match your frame shape. If you are curvy, that means drapey cuts and fabrics

(with little or no texture), plus fluid patterns — rounded florals, watery patterns. If you are angular it's sharp lines, stiffer fabrics (again, untextured) and rigid patterns — stripes, checks, angular abstracts. If you are interjacent it's somewhere in between: fabrics with flexible fibres that fall in straight lines (textures work well) and patterns that are neither too angular nor too curvilinear (blended checks, soft abstracts, animal print, nature-inspired florals).

5. Shop smart

Shop in store, ideally a multibrand operation. Easier to try on and reject. Make sure always to check that whatever you are trying is as flattering from the side and back as from the front. If you are buying a single piece, always consider what else it will go

with in your wardrobe. Shopping within a single brand for separates is a great way to ensure that the overall aesthetic works; it's a label's business model to make it easy to mix and match items. And find the brands that consistently work well for your body shape. Often a brand that in origin serves a country where lots of women share your proportions is a good starting point. So if you are petite, Berkeley rates the French brands Maje and Sandro, Spanish brands such as Zara and our own French Connection. If you are tall, think Scandi (Cos, Arket and Ganni) or American (Gap and J Crew). If you are curvy, try our homegrown Modern Rarity, Cefinn and Phase Eight. **Times readers can book a bodymapping session for £200 (normally £250) until the end of July, quoting this article; annaberkeley.com**