



“A side stripe detail can elongate your legs

£169, available from late August, meandem.com



£49, warehouse.co.uk



£29.99, zara.com

at everywhere from Paris couture shows to Mayfair dinners (£149, meandem.com).

Personal shoppers have peerless pavement-pounding expertise when it comes to what works for women of all shapes and sizes. Annabel Hodin (annabelhodin.com) rates LK Bennett, Whistles and Reiss on the high street, Joseph, Theory, Piazza Sempione and Sofie d'Hooe in the mid-range. For Anna Berkeley (annaberkeley.com) it's Jigsaw, Cos and Whistles (again) that score best in the former camp, Margaret Howell (good for bigger thighs), Sportmax and Pleats Please Issey Miyake in the latter.

When pressed, my front-row high-spenders gave the high-street thumbs up to Finery and Cos. Thumbs were definitively down for Zara and J Crew for all but the super-skinny. Zara wins the ultimate booby prize as the Brand Most Likely to Give Camel Toe, due to an absence of fabric in the crotch area.

### Body sculpting

Think of your trousers as part of an outfit, because that is — to state the obvious — what they are. “You need to make your wider bit look narrower,” says Hodin, whether you are petite or curvy. “If you try to circumvent a part of your body you don't like, you make it look worse.” That's why she's a fan of emphasising the waist, and recommends a top or jacket that crops on or above the hip for almost all of us. “Covering your hips up doesn't work.” If you insist on wearing an unwaisted top, it's strictly slim-cut trousers only. (Like Piazza Sempione's

Audrey style, £185, was £231, farfetch.com.) Don't underestimate other trompe-l'oeil tricks. A high-waisted cut makes the leg look longer and a side stripe detail can also elongate.

### The power of the crop

The world is full of crop-trouser naysayers. However, they tend to be women who haven't actually tried them. Give a pair a whirl and you will soon become a yaysayer. As Hornby recounts: “I ran a styling session with eight friends and six of them ended up buying a straight-leg crop, even though they had all started out totally against the idea.” Whatever one thinks of the rest of one's legs, it's the ankles that are their slimmest point. “Most women have great ankle bones and this style shows that bit of the leg off.” And, despite misconceptions to the contrary, the cropped trouser works well if you are petite. I like LK Bennett's black Nia style (£97, lkbenett.com).

### The 20-minute test

When embarking on solo forays Hodin's personal shopping clients have a strict series of instructions to follow. First, they have to scrunch up the fabric to see if it creases. Then they have to wear their putative purchase for 20 minutes and spend that time walking around and sitting down. “Have the trousers developed camel toe or gone saggy at the bum or waist,” asks Hodin. “Is the leg length the same as it initially appeared?”



£169, meandem.com

### Material matters

Rare is the woman who doesn't benefit from a bit of a stretch and — praise be to the god(dess) of trousers — there have been huge advances with fabrics that look tailored, yet feel anything but. Seek out jerseys, silks and anything with give. Berkeley rates Jigsaw for its stretch fabrics, and for cuts that suit curvier shapes. The navy fluid wool parallel trousers, with a side-split hem, are super-versatile (£140).

### Make friends with a tailor

Buy for your biggest bits and have the rest tailored to fit. Most of us are between two sizes. Don't make the mistake of buying the smaller one. Buy large and get the waist altered. It will

cost you £20 and make your trousers look twice as expensive. If you are skinny you may need to get what Hodin calls “the wings” taken in from the outside hip, and/or tweak the inner thigh or crotch area: “You don't want to look droopy or waif-like.”

### The geeky stuff

Front pleats, the front and back rise, camel toe, the thigh gap. We may not know some of the nomenclature, we may be all too familiar with the rest.

Front pleats first. Unless you are Katharine Hepburn the only ones that are acceptable are sewn down at least halfway, and do not balloon out if viewed from the side. “A full deep pleat makes you look bigger all over,” says Berkeley. “It's better to go for a flat front that's cut right.” Proceed with caution when it comes to pockets, and embrace the side zip.

The front and back rises are the seams that go from the top of the leg to the waist. If the rise is too short for your body length, the trousers will be tight around the crotch.

Happily for ME+EM customers, Hornby is fixated with this stuff. “We do a tuck at the back of the trouser so that the gap between your legs goes all the way to the top creating a perfect ‘V.’” That must be why I finally have the appearance of a thigh gap. Told you this stuff gets easier. Sort of.