



**STRETCHED
AT
THE
SEAMS**

Learning the fascinating history of the beautiful bodysuit enables us to have a greater understanding of how to style this garment, along with the help of fashion designers, film stars and celebrities...

Writer LARA BRENT

The bodysuit has quickly become a much-needed wardrobe staple over the past few years and according to SS18 RTW catwalk shows it doesn't appear to be going away anytime soon. With the likes of Isabel Marant, Balmain and Tom Ford all challenging the ways in which to wear a bodysuit, the outfit possibilities are now endless.

The transformation from evening wear to day wear over the past 2 centuries shows us just how versatile this piece is and how vital it is to have a small (or large!) collection of them in your wardrobe. Films such as *Flashdance*, *Fame* and *Dirty Dancing* all showed the increased popularity of the bodysuit in the '80s. These iconic films showed us how bodysuits allow a freedom of movement and how easy it is to incorporate them into every outfit, given you have the right accessories.

During the early '40s Claire McCardell transformed a gymnast's leotard into something much more modern. Her further developments with synthetic fibres also helped to transform the leotard even more. McCardell's introduction of materials such as Acrilan, Barlon and Orlon further revolutionised sportswear, so therefore we really have her to thank for the development of the bodysuit. If it wasn't for her experimental attitude and her creation of 'basics' for the wardrobe, we may not have the clothes we have today.

However, let us not forget Giorgio di Sant'Angelo who doubled up bodysuits as bathing suits, evening

tops and tubes in the 1990s. His collaboration with the company Dupont, in which he experimented with new fabrics, helped him further develop bodysuit designs and constructions. Within this collaboration he was able to: find replacements for wool and acrylic knits; design silks that could stretch in any direction and create new fabrics that could be painted, tie-dyed and embroidered with ease.

This development of different fabric use can still be seen in the SS18 collections as we see Filles A Papa using denim, Jayne Pearson using leather and Cynthia Rowley creating interesting silhouettes with mesh fabrics. The use of mesh fabrics in Rowley's designs makes the bodysuit appear more like swimwear and the use of nudes and blacks gives off a nautical vibe. Therefore, we can see how bodysuits are made flexible with the incorporation of more translucent fabrics and asymmetric lines.

Beyonce and Iggy Azalea helped make bodysuits more daring back in 2014 with the help of designer, Emilio Pucci. The psychedelic colours and swirling patterns that are Pucci's trademarks are continued in these 2014 designs while being further developed with embellishment and metallic elements. This vibrancy shows how the '80s had a major influence on the bodysuit as those patterns have continued through, although they are no longer part of daywear.

With the recent passing of 1980's designer Azzedine Alaïa, it seems that bodysuits from this time are

getting light shone on them once again. However, in comparison to Pucci's designs, Alaïa's designs are much more simplistic, with no embellishments and the use of neutral colours. The only detailing on his garments is created through stitching and the revealing of seams. Therefore, we can see just how influential the '80s were as two designers at this time went very differently with their creations, creating very opposing looks that were both equally as popular.

Whether you wear the bodysuit on its own like the Alberta Ferretti models, or layer it over a t-shirt à la Tomas Maier, there are multiple ways in which to pull off this simplistic garment in new and original ways. And now for the first time, outside of a sports environment, men are also being encouraged to wear bodysuits by brands such as BodyAware which fits in with the gender issues our society currently faces. By beginning to degender clothing items, such as the bodysuit, we are able to see how societal norms are beginning to break down and how it is easier to express ourselves in whichever way we see fit.

So, despite the '80s being highly influential on the way in which the bodysuit was worn, the 21st century is also having a dramatic influence in the way the bodysuit can be styled. Therefore, we can no longer be afraid to experiment with articles of clothing, as freedom of expression is becoming more and more on trend. ■

