



# Hannah Betts

## The wear necessities

Get the staples of your wardrobe right, and your life will be transformed

As you may recall from my inaugural column, I feel the essence of a person's style should be explicable in just three words. For example, I have a friend whose triple epithet would be: "Blue, torn, erect" (the third being a predicate of his hair, I hasten to add). His shoes are beaten down at the backs, everything he owns is ripped à la Bros (or Renaissance buck), and his pullovers have been described as "never knowingly without horse snot". Yet lately, this comrade has undergone a metamorphosis. He has thought; he has shopped; he has flooded his wardrobe with socks, pants, shirts and six (count 'em) new suits. The psychological benefit has been profound.

"Bets," he recently confessed, "I never got this stuff before, but when your clothes are sorted, your life falls into place. I feel put together, primed to spring into action. Improving my sock drawer has significantly improved my life."

The likes of Diane von Furstenberg and Donna Karan have been on to this for a while. DI is all about packing wrap dresses into overnight bags before hobnobbing with *le tout* fashionable Europe; DK about an equally uncreasable micro-wardrobe comprising a paltry seven stalwart pieces.

We fashion fetishists will demand more than a suitcase or a coordinating jersey septet. However, the principle remains the same. Develop a core of staunch basics – a school uniform, as one might Britishly refer to it – and an enhanced existence will follow. Expressed more Californianly: fix your staples and you fix yourself.

The basis for every woman's essentials will be broadly the same: pants, bra, some sort of hosiery. My own life – and that of every female I have discussed the matter with – has been augmented by Marks & Spencer's No-VPL knickers (from £4, [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)). Oh, the dizzy liberation of no longer having to fret about all that visible panty line guff – and to think some of us used to subject ourselves to the indignity of the thong. If you've never succumbed to these wonders of modern technology, then get on the case pronto.

Hose-wise, I favour M&S's

Autograph 60 Denier Velvet Touch Hold-ups (in a large size for length: £9.50), deeming tights too claustrophobically sausage-skin like. The point is to ascertain your own chosen mode, then stock up on more – many more – than you imagine you will require. The website MyTights.com comes strenuously recommended; it makes stocking-amassing positively pleasurable. For jazzier staples, its Pamela Mann 3D 50 denier opaques (£4.95) in 46 rainbow shades are divine.

Last year was, for me, the Year of the Sock. Never previously having been a trouser wearer, I had no use for the things. Yet now my mauve Purdey shooting socks are the light of my life (from £40, [www.purdey.com](http://www.purdey.com)). Purdey, Brora and the White Company all do heavenly cashmere numbers. Gap's knee-socks can, when worn with a skirt, be pleasingly Britney-esque, although, again, consult MyTights for the full *Hit Me Baby One More Time* effect.

Regarding bras, the rescuer of my own not so much heaving as exploding bosom was Michael Rabinowitz, founder and CEO of Le Mystère. It was Michael who discovered that I had been sporting the same, rather too resplendently incorrect size for a quarter of a century: a 34B rather than an E. Cue the inquiry: "What made you think that 'medical wench' was a good look?"

No less a luminary than Oprah Winfrey recently took on the role of unofficial Le Mystère ambassador. When she first started sporting her Le M, a rumour went around that she'd had weight-loss surgery, such is the brand's trompe l'œil waist-slimming effect. Evangelist that she is, Opes flashed her



### The fab four: everyday essentials

Pamela Mann 3D 50 denier opaques £4.95 ([www.mytights.com/gb/top-ten/pamela-mann-50-denier-tights.html](http://www.mytights.com/gb/top-ten/pamela-mann-50-denier-tights.html))



Cashmere V-necked sweater from Uniqlo's winter collection, some styles still on sale from £19.99 ([www.uniqlo.com](http://www.uniqlo.com))



BoBelle eelskin Melissa bag in midnight blue £115 ([www.bobelle.co.uk](http://www.bobelle.co.uk))



Le Mystère Francesca bra £55 ([www.theingerieboutique.co.uk](http://www.theingerieboutique.co.uk))

newly encased wares for the camera, and secured a bra for every woman in her audience.

The brand's hi-tech genius resides in an elaborate mélange of microfibres, memory contour cups, concealed supportive mesh, and collaborations with eminent surgeons. My favourite is the Francesca (£55, [theingerieboutique.com](http://theingerieboutique.com)). As a school uniform bra, Le M cannot be bettered.

When your foundations are as firm as this, the world is your lobster. The definition of staple is deeply subjective. For some it will be jeans and crisp white shirts, for others (me) wool skirts and Uniqlo cashmere. I would argue that city shorts (that is, not hot pants) and a cape count as contemporary essentials, where some women will find this fighting talk.

Sanity-wise, it pays to be a one-bag woman. Not all of us achieve this, but it is a bore to be forever

transferring – or failing to transfer – one's kit from receptacle to receptacle. BoBelle's cel-leather designs are rather fascinating. Eelskin is strong and sheeny, known by the ancient Koreans as the "silk of the ocean". There is an eco-aspect, as it is a by-product of the fishing industry, and the skin becomes supple with age. BoBelle's Melissa is its breakout pop hit – versatile enough to work as a shoulder, cross-body, or clutch bag. Lay down the gleaming, off-black midnight blue for now, the pale grey for spring (£115, [www.bobelle.co.uk](http://www.bobelle.co.uk)).

February is the perfect month for a wardrobe audit. Vino in hand, chuck out any inadequate or unworn staples – bobbly heels or baggy knickers – and take note of what you are obliged, yes, obliged to invest in for a functioning life. Call me superficial, but the joy of not having to hunt for an unsullied pair of stockings of a morning is nothing short of sublime.

### Online

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