

## What clothes are worth investing in?



Anna Berkeley

### Ask a stylist

**A**s a new autumn season approaches, what are the clothes worth investing more money in? And where I can save?

Tailoring is the area where I recommend spending the most you can afford because good cut, design and fabric are essential for it to last.

Fabric needs to be properly fitted, seams strengthened and lined. A good suit requires quality fabric that doesn't bag at the seat (aka bum) or knees instantly – it has to have some spring and a suppleness to it.

A case in point is Paul Smith suiting. I have a purple suit I've worn multiple times for styling (which is a little like an Olympic sport – lots of reaching, carrying, bending, stretching, kneeling and running around) and it genuinely does not crease.

I'd recommend Paul Smith's wool hopsack – a brilliant weave that is light, breathable and anti-wrinkle. The label's punchy pink suit with slim trouser (£235, paulsmith.com) can be worn separately and works well with burgundy, navy, charcoal or white (blazer is £440, paulsmith.com). There is a wide-leg trouser suit in lilac if you're curvier.

If your budget allows, then go bespoke – The Deck on Savile Row is amazing (prices from £2,550). For off the peg, I recommend Joseph, Theory, Stella McCartney, Victoria Beckham, Cefinn and, on the high street, Arket.

I own a couple of Arket suits – the jackets are fairly well cut but I don't wear the trousers without the jackets; the fit simply isn't good enough. Again, the hopsack suit is a great choice (£149, arket.com).

Next, coats. Coats matter, as they are often the first thing people see. Save up for a good-quality or designer-level brand, or use Depop, Vestiaire Collective or HEWI for a preloved gem.

If you choose classic shapes such as a wrap, a Crombie or a long military style, you can rely on them to work year in, year out. Key to this are high-calibre fabric and craftsmanship. Wools and wool blends provide warmth and are hard-wearing.

If you want a solid investment, then the king of coats really is Max Mara. My picks this season would be the water-repellent cotton cape (£785, gb.maxmara.com), the classic cashmere (£2,050, gb.maxmara.com) or visit your local Max Mara off-price outlet for some great deals) or the brand's cuddly teddy-bear shape (right). The rich burgundy-wine style (£870, gb.maxmara.com) looks amazing with navy, blues, black and cream. Wear with trainers or loafers in autumn and a boot in winter.

Textural coats can easily double up as evening coats, adding interest and fun. I own a Stand Studio style in fake shearling. It feels light but it still kept me toasty in New York in December – no mean feat (£624, shopbop.com).

I truly believe it's worth buying jeans from the jean specialists – the designer denim brands. Yes, they are expensive but they spend all their time honing their fits, pocket shapes, fabrications and so on. I rate Mother, Citizens of Humanity, Agolde and SlvrLake. This straight-leg model from SlvrLake (right) is a year-round shape.

Knits are also worth putting money into – unless you live with naughty cats! Don't buy cheap, high-street knits made from polyester and acrylics, as they are guaranteed to make you sweat profusely at an inopportune moment and they always look cheap. British wools are hardy, long-lasting and extremely warm. We will all be wearing them round the house this winter, while the heating is out of bounds. Buy from the solid British labels &Daughter, Charl knits or Navy Grey. Navy Grey's new "The Oversize" is reminiscent of Phoebe Philo-era Celine, with a reassuring weight and density.

Cashmere is worth the money (but always freeze new additions – whether they are from a store or second-hand – for a couple of days in a plastic bag to kill off any moths). The softer knits are the most expensive, as you get only a small amount of the silkiest hair under the chin per goat and it tends to be



Clockwise: Max Mara coat, £2,135, gb.maxmara.com; Nanushka coat, £650, brownsfashion.com; Navy Grey jumper, £260, navygrey.co; SlvrLake + Net Sustain jeans, £305, net-a-porter.com

separated by hand. Look at Aethel, Alabaste, Lisa Yang and Le Kasha. I rarely buy cashmere full price but it's worth it for Margaret Howell – I have owned some pieces of hers for more than 10 years.

What not to splash out on? Don't waste cash on white T-shirts or shirts, just go to Cos, Uniqlo, Colourful Standard, Arket or Jigsaw for white tops and shirts. The issue, and apologies if this is unsavoury, is that a white top doesn't wear well. Until someone works out how not to ruin the underarms, seriously, don't bother.

I love a sock and a sandal but I have had little longevity from expensive socks. They feel nicer, they look good but they always go at the heel and the toe.

Let's end with shoes. Controversially, it seems to me that although designer shoes are undoubtedly more beautiful, they are not necessarily more wearable than a cheaper option. But if you do want to splash out, a good way to test the soundness of your investment is to wear new shoes on the carpet for at least two hours once home to see if they really are comfortable.

Anna Berkeley is a London-based personal stylist and style columnist for FT Weekend. Have a question for Anna? Email her at [anna.berkeley@ft.com](mailto:anna.berkeley@ft.com)

## The art of dress

Costume Performance artists have long used garments to transform their bodies into protagonists. By Helen Barrett



Carolee Schneemann in 1962  
Photograph Leo Choplin/Carolee Schneemann Foundation/DACS

Carolee Schneemann was a deeply uninhibited performance artist. Often, she did not bother to wear clothes at all. But the costumes she did design, make and wear allowed her to explore serious ideas about sexual liberation and consent with ingenuity and joy. Schneemann, who died in 2019 at the age of 79, is the focus of one of two new exhibitions exploring the work of leading female performance artists of the 20th century. Together, they show how some of the genre's most radical practitioners used costumes to turn their bodies into protagonists.

Carolee Schneemann: *Body Politics* at the Barbican in London (until January 8 2023) spans Schneemann's career over six decades – from her origins as a frustrated painter to her strange, radical costumes for her performances of the 1960s and 1970s. "Schneemann was working with her body as a political act, and a form of sexual liberation," says Lotte Johnson, the exhibition's curator. "In art, women are often objectified and cast as muses. She's reclaiming that role, bringing her own body alive. She's challenging the prescribed ideas and asking the question: 'Can I be both image and image maker?'"

Take "Meat Joy" (1964), an epic performance in which she and a group of dancers roll around on the floor, the women wearing fur bikinis, with chicken and fish carcasses being thrown at them. Meanwhile a costume for "Noise Bodies" (1965) transformed her into a human sound system, with a structure she made from metal debris including bike wheels, saucepans and costume jewellery. She made another for her partner, James Tenney. No footage of their performance survives, but at the Barbican the costume is shown alongside an original audio recording and photographs. "As they moved across the stage, they created a cacophonous soundscape. It's about the erogenous. They are playing each other's bodies, a sexual exchange," adds Johnson.

Performance art flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, driven largely by a generation of women who, like Schneemann, felt pushed out of established genres such as painting. Schneemann trained as a fine artist, turning to film performance in the early 1960s, when she wrote that painting was "dead" for her, after her instructors told her she was unteachable.

A different exhibition at the Muzeum Susch in Switzerland focuses on Schneemann's near-contemporary, the avant-garde Swiss artist Heidi Bucher. *Heidi Bucher: Metamorphoses II* (until December 4) suggests Bucher's approach to

costume was less playful and overtly sexual than Schneemann's. But she was just as concerned with emancipation.

In the 1970s, Bucher began clothing herself in "architectural body skimmings" – costumes made from the negative latex impressions of buildings with significance: her parents' home, a Swiss psychiatric hospital. She covered walls with gauze and liquid latex, let it dry, then peeled it off and turned it into costumes that could be worn like wings and shed as skin. In part, she intended to confront what she saw as the patriarchal structures embedded in those buildings.

The latex-peeling process demanded enormous effort, as film footage of the artist at work shows. "It's a very strong and highly physically driven process," says Jana Baumann, the exhibition's curator. "This peeling is a gesture of liberation. It reflected how women were treated in society, and she's focused on absence and presence." Bucher's "Body Shells", made in 1972, are even more ambitious: oversized, wearable abstract sculptures with glittering surfaces. In the accompanying video, they dance, sway and turn on Venice Beach.

Bucher's archive is fragile – some costumes have decayed beyond repair. "I'm not sure if this exhibition could happen again in 40 years," says Baumann.

Performance art lives on – most obviously in Lady Gaga's public appearances. The singer's 16-minute choreographed entrance to the 2019 Met Gala, involving three costume changes down



Heidi Bucher and her sons with "Body Shells", 1972 – The Estate of Heidi Bucher

to a sparkling bikini, for example, owed something to Schneemann. Schneemann and Bucher's legacy is also evident among today's female artists, for example in American sculptor Hannah Levy's work with latex, and in costumed performances by Mariechen Danz, the German-Irish multidisciplinary artist.

Danz, who was born in 1980, often makes work dealing with bodily distortions. She has designed, sewn and hand-dyed many of her own costumes – recently surreal, foamy, oversized suits. Costumes, she says, "allow me to take a position, to communicate and carry me... I'm not performing as me."

Schneemann, Bucher and a previous generation of performance artists, she believes, would have been similarly liberated by costumes. Both artists were "vital, vital engagements" to Danz's practice. "They were dealing so inherently with the body."

Some argue that the point of performance art is that it happened in a moment without documentation, but the costumes both Schneemann and Bucher left behind are tangible evidence that the events happened. They remind us that performance art could not only be deadly serious, but also transgressive and full of joy.

