



BEYOND THE

**SHOPPING FOR JEANS JUST GOT A LOT EASIER. THAT UNFORGIVING,
LEG-HUGGING STYLE HAS MADE WAY FOR A LOOSER LOOK. AS SHOPS
ARE STOCKED WITH EVERY POSSIBLE SHAPE, WASH AND PRICE POINT, THE
ONLY RULE NOW IS THAT YOU MAKE JEANS YOUR OWN.
BIBBY SOWRAY NAVIGATES DENIM'S RELAXED NEW MOOD**

I have vivid memories of my mum wearing classic Levi's 50ls – stonewashed, high-waisted with a button-fly and loose tapered legs in signature thick denim – throughout my childhood to do the gardening or take the dog on a muddy walk.

As I hit adolescence, when replicating Kate Moss and Sienna Miller in their super-skinny Sass & Bide 'Misfits' (remember those?) became my ultimate goal, I would tease her about how 'dated' her pale Levi's were. 'They'll come back around one day,' she'd say, like all mums do.

She was right: they have. Now her single pair of life-worn Levi's make me look like the dated one. I own 24 pairs of jeans – and every single one of them is skinny.

After years of riding high, this style is now the bedridden former rock star of denim, clinging on for dear life as it watches its younger, peppier counterparts steal the limelight. Sure, Kate Moss is still wearing them, but she's Kate Moss and I, sadly, am not.

What used to be my fail-safe outfit, the staple that formed the basis of every single look I wore, now makes me feel lumpy and overexposed. No matter what I pair them with, the proportions somehow feel all wrong.

I'm not the only one who feels this way, either. 'As I get older, it's not about showing off skinny legs, or figure-hugging clothing – feeling comfortable in my clothes and in myself is more important,' says fashion editor and *The Frugality* blogger Alexandra Stedman, 33. 'Plus, the denim styles at the moment are moving away from slick silhouettes to more relaxed and voluminous – and I love that.'

Parisian writer and creative consultant Camille Charrière, 28, agrees. 'It was very hard to get out of skinnies, especially being French, but now I find it hard to get back into them. I think it comes with being a certain age – you look more rock'n'roll in skinny jeans, but more elegant in boyfriend jeans,' she says, adding that she finds the best jeans courtesy of Levi's, Monki and H&M.

But where did it all go wrong for skinny jeans? 'Jeggings ruined them,' says Donna Wallace, ELLE's Accessories Editor, who currently favours a pair of Lee straight-leg men's jeans that she's cut off at the hems. 'As soon as they started bastardising the denim and putting in too much stretch, it became trashy.'

THREE NEW BRANDS TO KNOW

Bliss And Mischief

Designer Hillary Justin takes the growing trend for customised denim and makes it beautiful. Vintage Levi's are embroidered with delicate wild flowers or dappled with laser-cut eyelets for true statement jeans.

blissandmischief.com

KÉJI

Former fashion buyer Katie Green launched KÉJI in 2015, inspired by denim's origins as a workwear fabric. It takes the everyday and elevates it – think tailoring that just happens to be denim.

kejidenim.com

AMO

Denim industry veterans Kelly Urban and Misty Zollars honed their skills at brands including True Religion before setting out to create the perfect jeans themselves. AMO fuses vintage-inspired washes with modern cuts to create the best of both worlds.

amodenim.com

HIGH-STREET HEROES

ASOS

You'll find more than 200 different jean styles at asos.com, from wide-leg to deconstructed, as well as tall and petite options for all key styles. A one-stop denim shop.

asos.com

Warehouse

Thanks to new Design Director Emma Cook, Warehouse has some incredible denim due to hit stores in September.

The popped super-flares will be a sell-out.

warehouse.co.uk

Monki

The sister brand of H&M has seriously upped its jeans offering of late.

Its thick, cotton-rich denim doesn't lose its shape – buy the 'Kimono' style in bulk.

monki.com

Our perception of what looks cool has shifted, and though I'm a little miffed to realise that the skinny jean isn't, as I had previously thought, my denim life partner, it's a sign of a greater shift in fashion, and that is always exciting.

Brands such as Vêtements, the Parisian underground collective turned game-changing fashion powerhouse, and London-based Marques'Almeida, have heralded the return of true denim. They've reminded us of a pre-skinny golden age when it was thick, stretch-free and more of a statement than just an off-duty staple. Think Farrah Fawcett on that skateboard, Thelma and Louise mid-road trip, Jane Birkin in her spliced and re-stitched flares.

The way we shop has changed, too. 'It used to be that a customer might find one style or fit they preferred and stick to that,' says Topshop Buying Director Emma Fox, 'but now they are building up their jeans wardrobe with different shapes, cuts, washes and finishes according to what they want to wear that day.'

Proof? From high street to high end, we're buying more jeans than ever before, with price points across the board. Net-a-Porter has reported a 25% increase in sales on last year and can't keep Vêtements' now-iconic style in stock, despite its eye-watering £790 price tag. Meanwhile, ASOS saw sales up 47% in the three months from March versus the same period last year, and has to date sold an incredible 12,000 pairs of its washed blue 'Farleigh' Mom jean, priced at just £35.

'The influence of street style on this is undeniable and the result is that we are seeing trends emerging upwards from the street to influence designers, rather than the other way around,' says Lisa Aiken, Net-a-Porter's Fashion Director.

The street-style phenomenon, made possible by the growth of digital and social media over the past decade, means that we now have endless inspiration at our fingertips. We can see how real people make clothes and how trends work for them in real life, rather than solely through the creative filter of a major fashion house. This has undeniably made us more adventurous, more confident and far more attuned to our own personal style. In turn, we're now more diverse in our denim choices, and far less likely to head sheep-like into a mass trend. >

THE STORY

THE NEW JEANS TO BUY NOW



MOM JEANS Characterised by its high waist, tapered leg, ankle crop and thick denim, the Mom jean borrows from the trends of the Eighties and Nineties. ‘I always have a pair of men’s Levi’s 50ls on the go, in high-waisted indigo selvedge,’ says Harriet Walker, Deputy Fashion Editor at *The Times*. ‘I’ve been wearing them with a black Petit Bateau long-sleeved bodysuit in homage to the Nineties supermodels.’



CROPPED KICK-FLARE This new denim style takes the snugness of skinny jeans in the upper leg but has a Nineties boot-cut flare or a Seventies bell-bottom, cropped to an ankle-hovering length. *The Frugality* blogger Alexandra Stedman is currently in love with M.i.h’s ‘Lou’ style (‘They’re a real mid-blue, so really Seventies’), while Caroline Issa, Fashion Director of *TANK Magazine* is favouring J Brand’s ‘Selena’ cut in white (‘I pair them with a white T-shirt or a simple blouse’).



CUSTOMISED ‘The ultimate in statement denim is the return to customisation,’ says Lisa Aiken, Net-a-Porter’s Fashion Director. ‘It plays into the maximalist mood that is dominating right now.’ Gucci has led the charge with colourful fauna-themed embroidery all over its various jean styles, while Levi’s now offers personalisation options where you can add pins, studs, patches, monogramming, embroidery or custom distressing. Similarly, Topshop has made a pop-up customisation service with Hand & Lock a permanent concession in its Oxford Circus flagship store, due to its unprecedented popularity.



BOYFRIEND Typified by a true straight leg, loose fit and often turn-ups, the boyfriend jean is the antithesis of the skinny jean. ‘About 18 months ago I noticed I was actually wearing my boyfriend jeans more than my skinnies,’ says Harriet. ‘I wanted a pair that were smarter, less worn-in and cropped, and got really into M.i.h’s “Phoebe” style.’ Donna Ida Thornton, Founder of denim boutique Donna Ida, sees them as a year-round classic. ‘Current/Elliott makes the best boyfriend jeans with mid-weight denim, which is designed to wash and wear for years to come,’ she says.



DECONSTRUCTED VINTAGE The new wave of denim has seen something quite remarkable – the creation of a ‘cult’ jean. When Vêtements decided to take two pairs of vintage Levi’s, deconstruct them and sew them back together to form unique quirks like double-back pockets and uneven hems, it produced a phenomenon. Parisian street-style muse Camille Charrière was wooed by their charms and bought a pair when they first hit stores. ‘Vêtements brought back a classic shape – that old-school Mom style – but with a real edge, which makes it feel so current. Jeans can feel off-duty, but when I wear these I feel like I’m still high-fashion.’ Though she experienced some initial buyer’s remorse, the cost-per-wear has made them worth it. ‘There is something to be said about the shape – they give an arc to your legs that you’d never find with a pair of basic jeans.’ LA-based Re/Done has a similar approach, taking vintage Levi’s apart at the seams and repurposing the fabric to create one-of-a-kind jeans that are made all the better by the worn denim. Meanwhile, FRAME has created its very own sell-out version of the trend, the Le Mix style. If you want a gentler introduction, seek out Mother’s Insider Crop Step Fray, a great middle ground between a skinny and a deconstructed style. ■



How to STYLE IT

Mom jean

Embrace the Eighties feel and wear a polo neck body or a crisp white shirt (but keep it tucked in) to show off the high waist of the jeans.

Deconstructed vintage

The jeans make the statement, so don’t over-think the rest of your look. Keep the top half of your outfit fairly relaxed. A tee or hoodie works.

Cropped kick-flare

The emphasis here is on the ankle, so style this jean with a high-heeled patent boot or a trophy shoe. Keep it neat up top with a short jacket.

Boyfriend

Stay casual and opt for a classic T-shirt or mannish grey cashmere jumper. For evening, pair with a tuxedo jacket and shiny loafers or heels.

Customised

Like the deconstructed style, the jeans are doing all the hard work here. So make the rest of the outfit simple: a crisp men’s button down and trainers.