

RISE OF THE SEASONLESS WARDROBE

Something that's so now, and yet so summer, too. *Bibby Sowray* finds we're coveting a closet that multitasks all year round



Main, from left Kitri; Rixo; a showgoer at Paris Fashion Week autumn/winter 2017 wears a summer dress and open toes with a jacket in March; Ganni





© 2017



Did you pack away your summer clothes and reinstate your winter warmers come the end of September? Nope, me neither. In fact, save for sandals, some swimwear and one particularly hefty, duvet-like coat, my wardrobe looks the same in June as it does in December. My knitwear and boots enjoy more outings in the winter months, sure, but they don't lie dormant the rest of the year. Nor do my linen shirts and floral dresses only see daylight when the temperature hits 18C. 'I never change over my wardrobe,' agrees celebrity stylist Angie Smith. 'I have a big bag of beach clothes, but the rest I pretty much wear all year around.'

The great seasonal wardrobe changeover, it seems, is dead. Instead, we're cultivating intelligent, multipurpose clothing edits that will see us through 365 days, whatever the weather. Pan-seasonal, if you will.

It's a mentality that's now mirrored in the fashion system at large. Look at next spring's collections, on the runway last September, and you'll notice that Céline, Balenciaga, Gucci and co offered anything but a wholly hot summer wardrobe. Instead, the overarching message was to layer up, from socks and sandals to cardigans over silk dresses – all delivered in as many autumnal hues as the typical ice-cream tones.

Other labels – like Burberry, which presents its 'February' and 'September' collections for customers to buy straight off the catwalk – have shunned the concept of seasons, designing pieces to meet the public's needs no matter what climate we live in. Anyone left thinking, 'But what do I wear in

» SHOP SEASONLESSLY »



Wool jumper, £160, Hades (hades-shop.co.uk)



Tailored jacket, £145, Kitri (kitristudio.com)



Leather slipper, £495, Gucci (gucci.com)



Denim jacket, £295, Raey (matchesfashion.com)



Crêpe skirt, £140, Ganni (ganni.com)



Merino turtleneck, £24.90, Uniqlo (uniqlo.com)



Oversized cotton shirt, £175, M.i.h Jeans (mih-jeans.com)



Cotton trousers, £29.99, Mango (mango.com)

next summer's heatwave?' need only step into an air-conditioned office to appreciate that temperatures these days are flexible.

The shift is very much in response to our changing shopping habits – a rare example of fashion catching up with us, and not the other way round. A seasonal wardrobe is no longer desired, required or, often, feasible.

'For me, it's a case of space,' says Katherine Ormerod, a London-based brand consultant and influencer, of her year-round wardrobe. 'While I would love the luxury of a walk-in wardrobe that could house four seasons of clothes, the reality is that my storage options are limited. Small spaces definitely make you considerate of your shopping choices; if something is only going to work for six weeks a year, it's going to be wardrobe-blocking for 46 weeks.'

Her strict approach extends to special-occasion pieces: 'I'm wary of occasion wear that can't be styled for everyday use. If you can't layer a dress with a chunky knit or turtleneck, it's not worth its price.'

Thankfully, high-street brands are wising up to the demand, too, and a new wave of labels are emerging to serve an audience that is saying no to polarising trends, and yes to functional, timeless pieces.

'It's important that our customers buy pieces not to just wear for one season or one occasion, but to have in their wardrobe for years to come, and to love more and more each time they wear,' says Orlagh McCluskey, co-founder of Rixo, a brand that eschews trends in favour of perennial designs. 'It really adds value to the purchase knowing that you've got an item that you can rely on, no matter the season.'

Take its silk Camellia dress, available in an array of non-trend-led prints. With blouson sleeves and a midi length, it's light enough for a summer wedding, yet provides enough coverage for a winter one. Swap heels for trainers and you've got a day dress to layer over a polo neck in winter, then wear with sandals and a denim jacket in the summer.

Fellow new British brand Kitri has a similar approach, which comes from founder Haeni Kim's instinct for what women want. 'Of course we are all prone to coveting very season-specific trend pieces, but, overall,

If something is only going to work for six weeks a year, it's going to be wardrobe-blocking for 46 weeks'

I think we are spending money differently. We want something that can last longer than just a season, something that doesn't make us look like we're mindlessly following trends,' she explains.

'Our designs have to be able to withstand constantly changing trends and have a classic element as well,' says Haeni, who cites the brand's shirting styles as the most popular year-round. 'At the same time, it's important to us that our customers can imagine wearing our styles during the day and at night. No one has time to go home to get changed for the evening any more.'

So what is the ideal seasonless wardrobe? Well, it's not prescriptive. It's about finding pieces, colours, cuts and fabrics that work for you. It is about learning to look at pieces in a different way and building a wardrobe in which each piece has multiple uses.

'I recently styled Holly Willoughby in a Warehouse dress layered over a turtleneck – she had such a great response, with a lot of women saying they wouldn't have thought to do that but now they would,' says Angie Smith, whose outfits for Willoughby often rack up more than 100,000 likes on Instagram. 'It means all those dresses that would have been previously reserved for late spring or early summer appearances are now being worn throughout the winter.'

The humble dress has the biggest potential to be a wear-all. 'Contemporary brand Ganni and emerging brands A.W.A.K.E. and Magda Butrym offer a great selection of mid-length dresses that can be worn any time of year,' recommends Lisa Aiken, retail fashion director at Net-a-Porter. 'Whether they're layered over jeans in winter or with sandals for summer.'

But don't forget to look at what's already in your wardrobe. 'I do wear new clothes, but I also have an awful lot of old ones – things I've had for five-plus years. For me, that's authentic style,' says Katherine Ormerod. 'The brand-new shiny thing is all very well, but I would never swap my 18-month-old patent Topshop mid-heels, my favourite Isabel Marant dress or my ancient Maje biker boots, because I don't know how I would dress without them! For me, those are the pieces that define my style.' ♦