

## Classics revisited The Breton top

There are few designs that transcend time and trends quite like the Breton top. Fewer still that merit the 'classic' label quite so definitively.

Born out of functionality, the traditional cream-with-navy-stripe marinière was made the official uniform of all French navy seamen in Brittany following the 1858 Act of France. Its boat neck allowed sailors to dress quickly; its horizontal stripes (21 – one for each of Napoleon's victories) to easily spot an overboard shipmate; and its woven cotton to withstand the elements while maintaining a level of comfort.

It was Coco Chanel who triggered its ascent to sartorial sainthood. Spotting it on sailors while holidaying on the French Riviera, she popularised it

among the yachting set – for both sexes, remarkably – and used it as inspiration for her 1917 nautical collection.

It has permeated every decade since, astutely straddling social strata and finding a fit with men, women and children, defying age brackets and ephemeral fashions. It has, of course, been abetted by its equally iconic wearers – from Brigitte Bardot to Picasso, Jean Seberg to James Dean, Kate Moss to Kurt Cobain.

Today it is found in its most faithful form at Petit Bateau, spiritedly reworked at Comme des Garçons Play and in every which colourway at Armor-Lux. But wherever you find it, high street or high end, a Breton top is a purchase you will never regret. **Bibby Sowray**



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Coco Chanel and her dog Gigot in 1930

### How to wear it now, by Victoria Bain

#### French style

Think Inès de La Fressange and mix a chic jacket with jeans



Marinière, £58, Petit Bateau (petit-bateau.co.uk); gold spear necklace, £155, Maria Black (maria-black.com); straight jeans, £205, Frame Denim (frame-denim.com); leather bucket bag, £409, Claudie Pierlot (claudiepierlot.com); shirt jacket, £180, J Crew (net-a-porter.com); leather open-toe shoes, £715, Chanel (020-7493 5040)

#### Rock legend

Team a suede biker jacket with flared jeans



Breton top, £25, Boden (boden.co.uk); flared jeans, £39.50, Per Una by M&S (marksandspencer.com); leather tassel bag, £65, & Other Stories (stories.com); suede biker jacket, £529, Maje (uk.maje.com); silver Tribal Spike earrings, £160, Pamela Love (net-a-porter.com); leather loafers, £265, Church's (church-footwear.com)

#### Working woman

A striped top makes a smart, office-ready look a bit less uptight



Breton top, £139, APC (apc.fr); silk duster coat, £79.99, Mango (mango.com); pearl earring, £145, Erickson Beamon (net-a-porter.com); leather A-line skirt, £130, and snakeskin-effect heels, £42, both Topshop (topshop.com); leather shoulder bag, £3,425, Chanel (020-7493 5040)