

SIMPLE STYLE

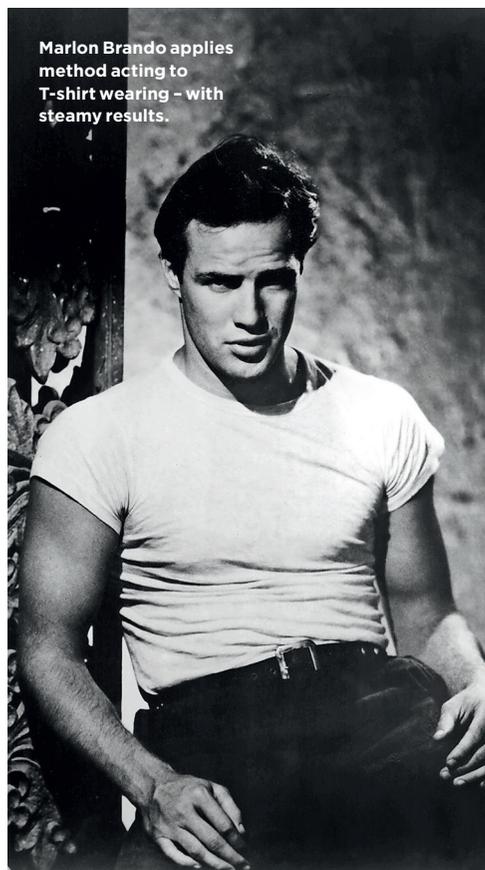
THE WHITE T-SHIRT

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

Don't be fooled by its uncomplicated looks – the white T-shirt declares angst and rebellion like no other item of clothing. Since being liberated from underwear status by American sailors, who revealed it when removing their shirts in hot climates, it has become the wardrobe staple for the disaffected.

Costume designer Lucinda Ballard recognised its potential for disquiet when she clothed Marlon Brando in one in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). His character, Stanley Kowalski (pictured), returns from a bowling match and peels it from his sweaty torso in front of Vivien Leigh, saying that he's removing it "to make myself more comfortable".

Many similar moments of cinematic glory followed as the white tee was sported by a series of tousled bad boys: James Dean boosted sales after he famously wore one under a red jacket and troubled eyebrows in *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955). Paul Newman, the king of rumpled cool, made wearing a white tee and jeans into a fashion statement, and Martin Sheen irresistibly teamed one with jeans, a quiff and a cigarette dangling from his lower lip as outsider



Kit in *Badlands* (1973). On a man, then, the white T-shirt is at its most pleasing worn fitted, over a sculpted torso, and a little grubby – besmirched with the impression of grease from a motorcycle engine, perhaps.

For women, it should be crisp and chic (unless you're on a Club 18-30 holiday and about to enter a wet T-shirt competition*,

“The white T-shirt is at its most pleasing worn fitted, over a sculpted torso”

when, of course, it should be damp and clingy). Jane Birkin got it right in her Serge Gainsbourg days as she padded around Paris wearing one with jeans and a gap-toothed grin. Lauren Hutton, ditto (sans Serge).

Its combination of insouciance and comfort maintains its style status, but finding the perfect one can challenge even the most fashion-savvy. **S**

* *The first wet T-shirt competition* was inspired by Jacqueline Bisset's emergence from the ocean in *The Deep*, wearing a sea-soaked white tee

PHOTOGRAPH © REX FEATURES

A CLASSIC & THE TWIST

White T-Shirts

THE CLASSIC

CC CREW | £25

A true wardrobe staple. Probably best worn under a fitted jacket with jeans and loafers for a soignée, Rive-Gauche kinda vibe. www.houseofraser.co.uk

TWO GREAT TAKES

MANGO | £17.99

Made from linen with cascading sleeves, this is a pretty take on the classic. www.johnlewis.com

J CREW | £30

A flattering V-neck, especially when teamed with tanned collarbones and a pair of boyfriend jeans. www.net-a-porter.com