

SIMPLE STYLE

THE SHIRT DRESS

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There are times in everyone's life when the need to look smart arrives. Smart but not contrived. Not female-politician-in-boxy-jacket-constricting-skirt-and-court-shoes smart, but effortlessly so. Which is where the shirt dress steps up. If ever there was an item of clothing that said 'smart casual', the shirt dress is it. You could trot along to a meeting feeling utterly in control and managerial wearing one, then swish out again, undo a couple of buttons and meet friends in a hotel bar for a glass of something chilled, the epitome of chic sexiness.

With its combination of masculine tailoring (it is basically a long, man's shirt) and feminine detailing (waisted shape, cinched belt), the shirt dress is demure but not frumpy. A good option for summer workwear, it can be worn with flat shoes, sandals or wedges, its buttons and cuffs unfastened and rolled up as the temperature fluctuates. It also looks the part when worn with cropped trousers unbuttoned from the waist down – always a useful warm weather wardrobe option for anyone unhappy about displaying their not-quite-ready-for-summer calves.

The shirt dress's understated cool has made it a firm favourite with fashion icons



Demure but not frumpy: the smart summer dress option

"Its understated cool has made it a firm favourite with fashion icons"

past and present. Audrey Hepburn favoured a tightly belted, full-skirted version, worn with ballet pumps or loafers. Grace Kelly famously said that "Your dress should be tight enough to show you're a woman and loose enough to show you're a lady", so it's not surprising that she was often seen in a fitted, but not-too fitted, shirt dress. A favourite style was sleeveless and buttoned up, accessorised with high mules, pearls and a golden tan: cool, crisp and effortless. She even wore a shirt dress as evening wear, albeit a full-skirted version in sumptuous silk with lashings of underskirt. Both these styles live on in the wardrobes of today's film stars: Keira Knightley and Kirsten Dunst being the most frequent shirt dress wearers. Alexa Chung was also born to wear this boyish-yet-feminine garment, and is often seen in a short, buttoned-up denim version.

It is testament to the wearability of the shirt dress that it survives the vicissitudes of fashion, appearing in stores from Boden to Burberry every year. Which means that there is one to suit anyone looking for that elusive but useful option: 'smart casual'. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOPFOTO

THE UPDATE



Denim shirt dress | £139

Roomy enough to wear over trousers. And a deeply satisfying indigo blue. toa.st

THE CLASSIC



Geometric print shirt dress | £35

A snazzy pattern to bring a splash of razzmatazz to summer. marksandspencer.com

TWO GREAT TWISTS



Stripe shirt dress by Boutique | £75

Plenty going on here: it's over-sized, midi length and it's got whopping sleeves. topshop.com