

SIMPLE STYLE

THE BRA

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

It's not really surprising that most of us are wearing the wrong size bra*. Not only is the choice of bra endless – from push-up to balconette to plunge and, most recently, the bralette – but as our body shape changes, we neglect to change our bra size accordingly. The first teenage bra purchase, often hurried and approximated, can result in a mental bra size that endures far beyond the reality. It's a dispiriting truth that as we age, our once neat and/or bouncy breasts grow softer and more pendulous. Squeezing them into an ill-fitting bra can lead to a 'double boob' or unappealing armpit bulge.

Fortunately we live in an age when with a bit of application and a proper fitting, every woman can find her ideal bra. It wasn't always so. Until the 1920s, women were constrained by corsets, their breasts heaving over the top, uncomfortable and unsupported. The first bra was patented in 1899 by German Christine Hardt, but it was a free-thinking American, Mary Phelps Jacob, who designed a lightweight garment that most resembles today's versions. She patented her design and set up the Fashion Form Brasserie



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Company in 1922, but marriage took her away from the business.

As bras became more widely available, they became more complex, with some comprising up to 48 separate parts, and cup sizes – ranging from A to D – introduced in 1932.

Like any other garment, the bra has been subject to the whims of fashion. During the 20s, flattened breasts were the thing, but in the 40s and 50s, the bullet bra protruded conically from many a sweater. Playtex's Cross Your Heart bra which promised to 'lift and separate' grew in popularity during the 80s; and the sexy, push-up Wonderbra ('Hello boys!') came to, erm, prominence in the 90s.

Some brands have, however, remained constant throughout: Marks & Spencer has always been most people's default lingerie shop, and Rigby & Peller (founded in 1932 by two female corsetières Bertha Rigby and Gita Pellar) is consistently the go-to place for an expert fitting. The number of options available today can be overwhelming but does mean that we have run out of excuses for inappropriate bulges or pinching. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

THE UPDATE



THE CLASSIC

White Full Cup bra, Classic Micro Support | £29

A good foundation for many outfits. playtex.co.uk



TWO GREAT TWISTS

CK Black Audacious Push-up Plunge bra | £60

With a racer-style back for racier occasions. figleaves.com



Nude Mesh Triangle bra | £10

Simple and soft. Almost like you've got nothing on. prettylittlething.com