

SIMPLE STYLE

THE VEST

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

There was a time – during what some would describe as fashion’s lost years, the 1980s – when vests were worn outside clothes. Popstrels like Madonna, Bananarama and Cyndi Lauper layered the sleeveless undergarment over T-shirts, and then piled cheap accessories on top. Which was to miss the point of the vest entirely. The point of the vest is that it keeps you warm, and it does this by creating a layer of warm air next to your skin when you wear it beneath not over your clothes.

But fashion has never fully understood the vest, especially when worn by women. For centuries, while men were able to slip a vest (or undershirt if wealthy) over chilly torsos and tuck into generous, long pants, women were cinched or winched into corsets and stays, causing cramped internal organs and general discomfort.

The arrival of the liberty bodice at the end of the 19th century – which had no boning and was made of soft, warm wool – was a welcome relief. Its simple shape – like a waistcoat but with a rounded neck and suspenders – and fleecy fabric, was pioneered by the Victorian dress reform movement, which aimed to free women from restrictive clothing. It was the forerunner of today’s thermal vest and



“At the risk of sounding like your mother, you need to wear a vest”

continued to be worn by many older women into the 1970s.

Should you think there is no place for a vest in these days of centrally heated homes, air-conditioned cars and draught-free offices, you obviously don’t get outdoors much. At the risk of sounding like your mother, you need to wear a vest when the temperature drops and the winter wind whips. Not a skimpy ‘camisole’ as worn around town in summer. No, you need a vest made of wool or a technical thermal fabric. Wool has amazing insulating properties, even when wet, and will wick away sweat from your skin. And it needn’t be bulky or scratchy: merino is soft and fine and can be woven into thin base layers that are as snuggly and neat as you like. Technical thermal fabric has similar properties, and vests made from it are skinny enough not to cause unsightly folds and bumps. Ensure the vest is long enough to tuck into your waistband; your core will be insulated and warm, and your blood flow will remain constant to your extremities, keeping them toasty, too. Something that even Cyndi and Madonna might now appreciate. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

THE UPDATE



Pali vest | £30

Made entirely from natural fibres (50% merino) so is as soft and snug as can be. finisterre.com



Lurex rib vest | £35

Nice and long so will keep the small of your back warm and toasty. Plus it sparkles. hush-uk.com



Athleisure Elodie cross-over vest | £28.50

100% linen and adaptable for use in the gym or a yoga class. fatface.com