

SIMPLE STYLE

MULES

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

The biggest thing in favour of mules is that you can slip them on, then kick them off with barely a thought.

With no straps, buckles or laces to trouble you, these backless shoes are the easiest of footwear to manage. They are just the thing for baking summer days when all you want to do after traipsing about town is to liberate your hot feet in an instant and pad around the house barefoot.

This ease of wear is also responsible for their rather racy reputation. Intended originally for the bedroom, they were the *chaussure de choix* in the 18th-century French court, for example, and worn by Madame de Pompadour (official mistress of Louis XV), peeping out beneath layers of flouncy crinolines. Manolo Blahnik, luxury shoe designer, is quoted as saying: “They are very sexy. Madame de Pompadour in her mules walking around Versailles, click, click, click. Can you think of anything more exquisite?”

Mules also feature in art as an erotic symbol: a single mule flies from the delicate foot of the lady in ‘The Swing’, by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 1767, and Edouard Manet’s ‘Olympia’, 1863, lies naked in bed, apart from her mules. Hollywood glamour pusses also saw their potential to add a



Hedy Lamarr, presumably on the phone to the department for misplaced wardrobes

little sex-kitten allure to their image. Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell both trotted about in high-heel mules trimmed with marabou in their films and in real life, often worn with some sort of satin negligée confection.

But we’re not just concerned with the backless shoe’s sauciness. We are concerned with ease in hot weather. Mules are not just easy to slip on and off but, by virtue of their backlessness, they ventilate your feet as you walk about, keeping them airy and fresh. They aren’t, however, the best shoes to run in – being unsecured they have a tendency to fly off bringing the wearer to an undignified, hopping, halt.

Nevertheless, mules are having a moment in a variety of shapes, from flat, backless loafers to elegant heeled party shoes. Some take their cue from the traditional flat slippers of Turkey and Egypt, or the fancy embroidered versions worn by Venetian grandees in the 15th century. Others have a wearable, small heel and a simple toe-revealing band and are a good shoe for smartly clip-clopping to work in on warm days. And, more importantly, for kicking off when you get back home. **S**

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THE UPDATE



THE CLASSIC

Flat leather mules | £125

Perfect for slippety-slopping around the house or shuffling to the shops. arket.com



TWO GREAT TWISTS

Leather kitten heel mules | £125

A dressier mule with a dainty heel to take out for dinner and show off. cosstores.com



Crochet-heeled mules | £98

Stretchy uppers and room for toes to wiggle: shoes to spend the summer in. jigsaw-online.com