

SIMPLE STYLE

THE WRAP DRESS

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

You don't want to be faffing about with buttons, zips or tailoring when the days are warm and the nights are sultry. The free'n'easy feeling that suffuses late summer requires clothes that offer freedom of movement and no fuss. Step up the wrap dress, a garment that is fastened simply with a ribbon tie and envelops you softly and flatteringly with its V-shaped neckline and generous skirt. This is a dress that can be slipped on and off with ease and looks good almost anywhere, from a picnic in the park, to work, to the beach tied over a swimsuit.

These twin qualities of versatility and removability were what made the wrap dress such a success in the 1970s for designer Diane von Furstenberg. By combining two of her previous designs – a ballerina-style top and a cotton jersey shirt dress – she came up with a million-selling item of clothing that became synonymous with her brand. Claiming to invent it, she emphasised the sexiness of this figure-hugging garment: “It makes every woman look like a feline.” It was also, she said, easy to take off when going home with a lover after post-work cocktails. Heady days. When she relaunched it in the



That's a wrap!
singer Natalie Cole looks unforgettable in this classic

1990s, however, it was more how it looked on than it its readiness to come off that made it an enduring fashion staple.

Despite this, DVF can't claim all the credit for bringing us this most wearable of dresses. Its far more humdrum origins go back to the Great Depression when dresses called Hooverettes were worn by American women to do the housework in. Tied on either side, their wrap-over panels could be switched enabling the grubby side to be exchanged with the cleaner one. Italian designer Elsa Schiaparelli created a much more glamorous version in 1930 that tied at the waist, while influential designer Charles James' dress fastened with a spiralling zip and was called the Taxi dress – a moniker that derived from the fact that its wearer could easily 'slip in or out of it in the back of a taxi'.

This summer, most high-street brands have produced versions of the wrap dress in various lengths and fabrics. Wear one with trainers or flat sandals for pottering about in or put on a pair of heels for the pleasure of feeling a bit more dressed up. Whichever you chose, its carefree, unfussy nature will boost your enjoyment of the last days of summer. **S**

“It can be slipped on and off with ease and looks good almost anywhere”

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

THREE DONE WELL



Asymmetric wrap midi dress | £75
Floral and floaty, the stuff of romantic summer evenings. stories.com



Melanie wrap dress | £75
An organic cotton canvas for dressing up or dressing down. peopletree.co.uk



Pleated wrap dress | £49.99
Bring a bit of extra wildlife to your back garden with timeless animal print. hm.com