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With every mood shift
and proportion change
of each collection, the
little black dress
morphs into a new
character, season
after season.
Always.

- Marc Jacobs

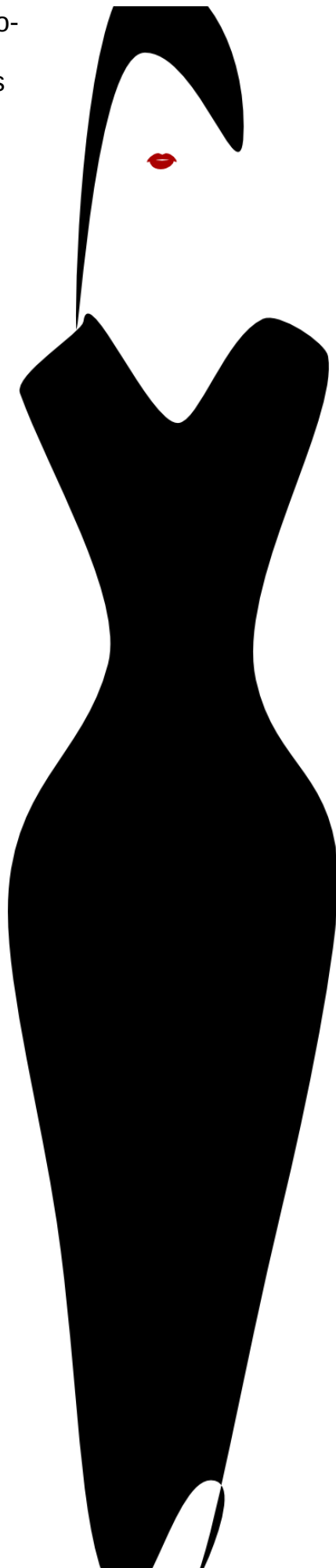
Can it get more classic than the go-to wardrobe staple of every woman — The Little Black Dress aka LBD?

After all, this timeless piece is known for its effortless elegance. Even though its silhouette has changed dramatically ever since Coco Chanel introduced it in the 1920s and it continues to evolve even now, it has managed to always occupy a spot in every woman's heart and wardrobe. Apart from being worn by the most influential figures throughout history (I mean, we all remember Lady Diana's 'Revenge Dress' by Christina Stambolian), also, its simplicity means that any woman can afford it and look chic in it. For me personally, it's the ultimate have-it-in-your-closet-at-all-times dress because it can be worn on any occasion, literally.

Versatile, comfortable, simple, chic and sexy are terms that best describe the LBD, and this probably is one of the main reasons why women tend to be instantly drawn to it. It's a failsafe option because it's appropriate for every occasion, always accepted and always in style as it adapts fashion trends and has managed to remain a classic.

So if you're wondering whether you should wear an LBD for a super formal dinner or an absolutely caj coffee date with your main girls, the answer is YESSS!

One thing that the entire fashion world can agree on (which rarely ever happens) is that the LBD is the ultimate wardrobe classic which has weathered all the changing fashion trends and managed to stay on top.



Even before Vogue and Chanel made it famous, the black dress has always been a part of women's wardrobes.

As Didier Ludot, has rightly said, "the story of the little black dress is the story of our society and of our changing politics, and so it can be seen more as a statement rather than just an outfit". In my opinion, you shouldn't underestimate the power of this piece of garment which has adorned women's wardrobe since the 1800s.

When you think about that one item which is a wardrobe staple for women across different classes, and of different shapes and sizes — the answer is simple; it's the little black dress. You ask why? 8 out of 10 women claim to feel incomplete without it. It's fabulous, it's confident, it's chic, it's simple, it's elegant: it's a paradox.

Nevertheless, I love it, you love it, we all love it and we all own one (at the very least). Now the question is, how did the LBD go from a frock to a timeless, cult-status wardrobe essential which has always been able to take advantage of the zeitgeist?

The colour black itself is so intriguing and vital. Black is the only shade you can't go wrong in. It symbolises luxury and poverty, humility and power, evil and penance, demure and raven as well as posh and discreet.

Black has always been a colour rich in symbolism; romance and artistry became synonymous with black outfits from the early 18th century.

During Medieval times, wealthy people wore black velvet clothes to display their opulence as black dyes were expensive. Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good wore black robes so that he stood out among his courtiers who wore all the shades in the rainbow. This led to black being viewed as a colour of sophistication.

With the rise in popularity of the humanist philosophies, the colour black was used to emphasise the individual rather than using ornate garments to denote rank and connection. This trend didn't last long, and black garments reverted to being associated with mourning or religious attire. The romantics were the ones who made black stylish again. But it was only post the WWI that black came back into trend for Europeans and Americans, it not only was symbolic

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Interestingly enough, the Little Black Dress finds its roots not in the wardrobes of upper-class women, but among the poor.

of the pain, sadness and destruction caused by the war, but it was practical colour to wear as it didn't get dirty quickly especially for women who started working outside of their homes in the new industrial world. And it was during this period that the length of women's dresses shrank simply cause of financial restrictions. Owning a little black dress meant that it didn't take a lot of money to look classy and chic.

In the Victorian and Edwardian era, a plain black outfit was worn either by mourners or maids/servants. The thought of it becoming haute couture was unimaginable cause even being seen in public in a simple black garment was viewed as non-traditional. It was during this period that black from a

colour of art became a colour that signified grief and mourning — widows were expected to wear black for at least four years. In a nutshell, the black clothing for women signified mourning.

However, when fashionable women did wear black, it was to make a statement. One of the most controversial examples of this was John Singer Sargent's 1884 portrait of "Madame X," Virginie Gautreau, dressed in a form-fitting black evening gown.

Interestingly enough, the Little Black Dress finds its roots not in the wardrobes of upper-class women, but among the poor. Back in the day, the domestic servants wore hand-me-downs of their employers. Sometimes, the help wearing castoffs led to mix-ups between the mistress and maid of the house. So they were required to wear a standard uniform which was a white mobcap, an apron, and a simple black dress.



1920s



Image 2

1930s



Image 3

1940s



Image 4

Now



Image 11

2000s



Image 10

1990s

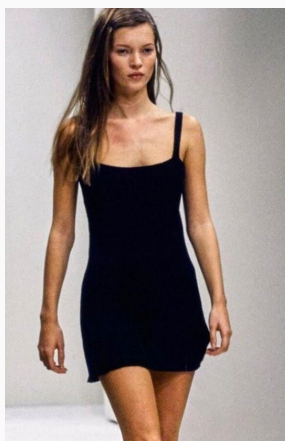


Image 9

1980s



Image 8

1970s



Image 7

1950s

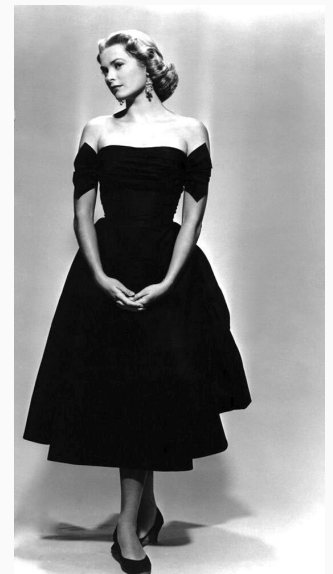


Image 5

1960s

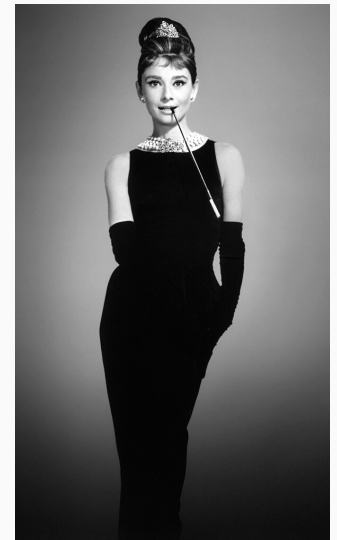


Image 6

The changing silhouette of the little black dress!

It's the 'roaring twenties' and the year is 1926. It was in this year that Vogue featured on its cover the very first 'Little Black Dress' designed by Coco Chanel which was inspired by the tailored black uniforms of maids and shopgirls. The magazine's cover showed a woman posing in a long-sleeved black dress which was accessorised with a pearl necklace and a low-waisted belt. The woman also wore pumps and a cloche hat. This stunning outfit was described by Vogue as 'The Chanel Ford' as the dress's mass appeal was extremely similar to Ford's most popular Model T. So it's safe to say that in an era where dresses leaned towards being colourful and 'extra', the Little Black Dress by Chanel was a breath of fresh air. Even though Chanel didn't invent the LBD, there's no denying that it was she who turned it into a fashion statement and a ready-to-wear outfit for almost any occasion.

During the 1930s and through the Great Depression, the popularity of the Little Black Dress didn't fluctuate. It was during the 30s that Elsa Schiaparelli's wrap dress came to fore. The viral cartoon character 'Betty Boop' was seen wearing extremely short and tight dresses which added to the popularity of the dress. Hollywood played an important role in maintaining the dress's status with Marilyn Monroe, Sophia Lauren to Madonna and even Kim Kardashian (in the 21st century) wearing it in their own way. During WWII the little black dress became extremely vital as the concept of recycling and reuse, and even rationing was prevalent during that time due to the lack of fabrics which were being used to make uniforms rather than haute couture pieces. The LBD could be accessorised with heels, jewellery or scarves for evening wear and could be toned-down during the day. During this period, the black dress became the must-have versatile piece of garment. Fewer fabrics were used to make the dress, and so it became shorter (till the knee), and simple patterns were made on it.

The post-war era (the 1950s) saw the rise of Dior's 'The New Look' and this brought back the idea of the LBD being associated with the dangerous woman. The collection was the embodiment of the shape in the fifties, featuring full and flirty skirts with nipped-in waists.



“One is never over-dressed or underdressed with a Little Black Dress.”

- Karl Lagerfeld

The mood of the 50s gave the dress a super sexy makeover. The Femme Fatales of Tinseltown such as Grace Kelly were always seen in a Little Black Dress, whether on or off-screen.

During the 'swinging sixties' the little black dress was seen as a cult-status dress which was available in two different styles. The more mature women preferred the classic, longer version just like the one worn by Holly Golightly played by Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This was designed by Hubert de Givenchy and sold at auction for almost one million dollars in 2006. Young girls opted for thigh-high slits and shorter lengths. It was during this period that the term 'mini dress' was coined by Mary Quant, the most inventive designer of the time.



The 70s was all about punk rock and wearing the LBD with fishnet stockings or adding safety pins to it (hint, hint: the black Versace dress worn by Elisabeth Hurley which was held together by oversized golden safety pins) came into Vogue.

The 80s saw peplum styled black dresses with broader shoulders and deeper necklines which gave a new twist to our favourite wardrobe staple. All of these dramatically altered the silhouette of the little black dress.

Over the decades the little black dress never really went out of style, but during the 90s there was a considerable hike in its popularity. The dress during this time was an intriguing amalgamation of grunge meets back-to-basics style. All of sudden you could see celebrities, supermodels and even everyday women (like you and me) strutting around in a figure-hugging short black dress which was usually paired with leather boots or sandals. We all remember Kate Moss with

her I-just-threw-this-on LBD look, don't we? This shift towards comfortable and casual fashion was a massive contrast with the extravagant designs of the 80s. And this gave birth to the laid-back black dress, which gained a lot of popularity. The start of the millennium showcased the LBD as a symbol of professionalism and poise. Forget diamonds, the little black dress is the best friend of a millennial girl. An outfit she can rock at any time of the day or night and add a little twist to it which is unique to her.

“The little black dress is the true friend. You remember when you met her...what happened the first time you wore her...she travels with you...is patient and constant...you go to her when you don't know where else to go and she is ALWAYS reliable and timeless.”

- Diane Von Furstenberg

This sartorial emblem of sensuality has been worn by baby boomers to gen Z. Be it in the form of a stunning haute couture piece or a simple plain black mini dress, it reminds us of the most amazing women be it Gabrielle Chanel, Lady Diana, Audrey Hepburn or the girl next door. The best part about this dress is that it not only interestingly adapts to the current trend, but it never overshadows the woman who's wearing it. It's like a blank canvas which only reflects what the woman wearing it wants to highlight.

While trends have changed over the decades the Little Black Dress (whether long or short) has remained a staple in most women's closets. You can wear it to work, to funerals, while running errands or on a night out – the dress invokes a sense of confidence in the wearer and will undoubtedly continue to do so till fashion lives on. In its own way, it has withstood the test of time. This oh-so-important-can't-live-without outfit has evolved over the decades into different styles and silhouettes. From it being a uniform for the maids to a cocktail dress to being featured on almost every Hollywood movie the Little Black Dress has proven time and again that it has always taken advantage of the zeitgeist.

Over the years this wardrobe staple has maintained its status as the go-to dress for any woman be it a celebrity, supermodel or everyday girls like you and me. Despite everything, it has managed to create a space for itself with every fashion trend; it has beautifully evolved to suit each era.

The fashion industry, especially in recent times, has been under the radar for not coming up with sustainable products. We all know that sustainable fashion is the 'new black' of the fashion world. So what could be more sustainable than the timeless LBD! Isn't one of the main points of sustainable fashion is to replace fast-changing trends for timeless pieces?