

3 MIDI CULOTTES

This season, accept a little gift from our continental cousins: culottes, which now swing about shins from Valentino to Max Mara. Yes, they're the rarer fashion contender – personally last worn as a pre-teen in a paisley pattern and paired with Palladium boots – but they were the comeback kid this summer in shorter styles. For pre-autumn they parade in a grown-up guise – neither knee-length nor ankle-grazing – exposing a flicker of flesh. Whereas the Nineties greeted culottes with grit and grunge, the new silhouette is polished, pleat-fronted and pressed.

“The shape of culottes is really universal. They flit from playful to classic to experimental,” says British designer Alexander Lewis, who presents a navy jacquard culotte suit. “There is also something masculine about the shape [“culottes” first referred to knee-breeches worn by the European upper classes], almost

like plus fours or knickerbockers that have been loosened from around the knee, and I like that idea of women appropriating menswear for their own.”

The pre-autumn palette presents shades of caramel and nude, while Proenza Schouler suggests monochrome and partnering with a tunic. At Max Mara, slightly flared toffee-toned culottes extend the fluid lines of a curved cream coat, and at Alexander Wang, tailored boxy culottes come in schoolgirl grey; exposed ankles evened out by a royal-blue poloneck knit and metallic ankle boots. (Culottes look best when the upper half is completely covered, way up to the neck.)

“Culottes work with flats or heels, depending on how dressy you want to be,” says Lewis, “and something as easy-going as a crew-neck jumper or as dressy as a slinky silk blouse.” The only requirement? A delicately turned ankle.

Ellen Burney



MAX MARA



PROENZA SCHOULER



ALEXANDER LEWIS



ALEXANDER WANG