

STYLE

Best In Fashion History: Swimsuit Edition

The swimsuit edition we've all been waiting for (the one for the ladies). We've rounded up the best swimwear moments in fashion history for a delightful trip through the marine style scene.

By Julie Drake Jul 22nd 2023 ⌚ 4 min read

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With the sun blazing and the self-tanner flowing like pina coladas, we're ready to hit up every pool east of the Mississippi. But what to wear? When seeking to make a stylistic splash, this is the seminal question – and one that has been answered resoundingly by tastemakers of the past.

One of the most polarizing articles of clothing in history, the swimsuit has been used throughout time for everything from an act of teenage rebellion to a major boardwalk fashion statement, and, occasionally (*gasp*), actual swimming. An indicator of dominant ideology, one need not look further than what the girls on the beach are wearing to assess a society's tendency toward hypermodest Victorianism, unrestrained liberalism, or somewhere in between (which the neighborhood busybodies have much to say about as they watch from their barely parted drapes).

But what gets lost in all the gossip is the most important, and most interesting, aspect of the swimsuit itself: *the fashion!* When it comes to swimwear, there are as many different shapes and cuts as there are body types (and, as a side note, it's our personal belief that there is a flattering suit for every body type out there). And while current trends may not always speak for a society's credal views as a whole, one thing the swimsuit *will* always tell us about is the fashion *du jour*.

Considering their cultural impact and reflection on contemporary trends, we've

rounded up the most memorable, iconic swimwear moments in fashion history. And while you may be surprised by the variety of shapes and silhouettes, one thing's for certain: the female body is a work of art, and these swimsuits are a celebration of that fact. (*Don't you just love being a girl?*)

Elizabeth Taylor's White Cutout Maillot

Elizabeth Taylor's white cutout maillot in 1959's *Suddenly Last Summer* was something the world could never forget. The style, considered modest by today's standards, was so racy for its time the film was almost banned from theaters. Luckily for us, it wasn't, and we now have this iconic scene by which to remember a legend. And a template for "classy bombshell" while at the beach.

Pamela Anderson's Red Hot One Piece

No such list would be complete without *the* swimsuit moment of swimsuit moments: every single time Pam Anderson put on the unforgettable rouge one piece for *Baywatch*. Super high cut and siren red, it's an image burned into all of our memories, whether you actually watched the show or not. The woman we thought was a real life Barbie as children, Pammy sure knew how to secure Hollywood icon status, and secure it she did.

Sarah Jessica Parker's Colorblocked Wonder

We're not necessarily picking a #1 here, but if we were, this might just be it. Perhaps the least well-known on the list, this look was worn by Sarah Jessica Parker's character SanDeE* (yes, that is actually how it was spelled) in 1991's *L.A. Story*. Color blocked neon bikini top with black and white biker shorts might be the most delightful thing we've ever seen on the beach, as is SJP's free-spirited frolic. One things for sure: if we could bottle up this energy and sell it over the counter, we'd never need to work again.

Angelina's Black Belt in Bikini

Just Angelina Jolie being unforgettable as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*. The OG femme Nikita, there wasn't a teenage boy who didn't dream of her by night, nor a teenage girl who didn't secretly wish to be her by day. Looking absolutely fatal in this flattering black bikini, the vibe is sleek, peak and ultra chic.

Elle Woods, Esq.'s Total Sparklefest

A must on this list? Every one of Reese Witherspoon's super sparkly bikinis in the

greatest movie of all time, *Legally Blonde*. Though it may not be provable in a court of law, any fashion lover – Harvard educated or not – would cede us this point; and if not, we'd certainly appeal. Plus, Elle is like the best friend every girl wishes she had: gives excellent advice (i.e. a certain iconic scene with Jennifer Coolidge in the beauty parlor), and can sue your deadbeat ex for every last cent.

The Blue Crush Girls

In our wildest dreams, when we aren't cosplaying Lara Croft, we're pretend surfing with Eden and Lena (Kate Bosworth's besties in the second greatest movie of all time). The *Blue Crush* girls may be the greatest female trio ever to grace the silver screen, and their sporty-sexy bikinis giving "hot tomboy" is everything the world (still) needs. And, PSA for all the swimwear makers out there, when it comes to what a girl really wants, it involves less thong, and more boy shorts. Just ask Kate. (P.S. if you're looking for a *Blue Crush*-inspired suit this summer, look no further than Kate Bosworth's super fun [collaboration with Roxy](#).)

Halle Berry's Burnt Orange Bodaciousness

Men and women can agree on one thing: when it comes to making swimwear a *moment*, Halle Berry is the GOAT. Gorgeous, talented, and rocks a "threat level orange" -kini like nobody's business. Except she made it all of our business when she wore it in 007's *Die Another Day*, and changed the world as we knew it forever.

Cameron Diaz & Demi Moore's Dichromatic Duel

We love a competitive friendship between two [powerful female figures](#), especially when it involves yin and yang bikinis. "Anything you can do I can do better" energy, this iconic scene from *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* makes you want to grab your bestie and take it to the surf. *May the best secret agent win*.

Rachel McAdams's Retro Revolution

Many a teen girl went looking for her bird-adjacent lover after [Rachel McAdams](#) declared it "true (avian) love" with Ryan Gosling in 2004's *The Notebook*. "If you're a bird, I'm a bird" became the most-commonly-used phrase in wedding vows the following year (not an actual fact, just a young fangirl's conjecture). McAdams' red retro patchwork bikini? She's channeling cardinal, and selling us on reincarnation.

Daniel Craig's 007 Thirst Trap

Leave it to the Bond movies to give us two swimsuit scenes we'll never forget.

Noticeably male-er than the last, Daniel Craig is the Michelangelic David of our day in tiny blue shorts and a completely shredded physique (what's the opposite of dad bod?). Anyway. What were we saying?

Kiera Knightley's Alabaster Slay

Kiera Knightley needs to atone for the obliteration of all other previously attractive swimsuit options. After killing us with chicness via this perfect white swim dress and matching cap for *Atonement* in 2007, we are still down for the count with no vital signs. And by the way, how is it possible for anyone to look this gorgeous in a swim cap? We're calling black (white?) magic.

Beyoncé's Sports Illustrated Sovereignty

In an aesthetic we hope to revitalize for 2023, Beyoncé paid homage to our favorite summer treats in pink lemonade and orange creamsicle bikinis for Sports Illustrated in 2007. A very memorable moment, and editorial reminder that it's always been Queen Bey's world, and we're just living in it.

Pop Quiz

Lessons from swimwear history: if you're going for peak classy, make it a white one piece. If bombshell's the goal, order up an orange-kini, on the rocks. And if your sight's set on Harvard, the required swim attire must be so shiny it reflects all the sun's rays, and blinds admissions officers from any so-called "inadequacies" on your otherwise perfect application.



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