



FLATS

ACCESSORIES

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SOLE SURVIVOR

NOW IS THE TIME FOR WAFER-THIN SANDALS AND SWEET, SLENDER-SOLE FLATS. ARMED WITH SHOPPING STRATEGIES—AND THE ODD SCULPTA SHOT—THE HOPELESSLY HEEL-ADDICTED NEEDN'T GO HIGH AND DRY

One gray, blustery morning in the depths of last winter, Ann Watson, the vice president and fashion director of Henri Bendel, glanced wistfully at one of her Bottega Veneta boot-clad feet (eyeing, in particular, its substantial

stacked heel), and declared, determinedly: "This is it. This is the year I learn to wear flats."

Politesse required me to respond with a few vaguely encouraging, sympathetic clucks—I may have even mentioned Bottega's latest charmer: a nude woven sandal with a tiny pouch affixed to the toe—but I was really thinking, Oh boy. Does she have any idea what she's getting herself into?

Anyone planning on wearing the season's bum-skimming baby dolls, microminis, mod A-lines, and abbreviated tents (and who could resist?), should take Watson's lead: Flats are the new footwear imperative. Sure, on a runway, thigh flashing looks chic and futuristic

when performed in studded, hefty-sole platforms or Gehry-esque superheels. But in real life—during daylight hours, at least—the mini/heel/bare-leg combo gets a whole lot trickier. How to keep the new silhouette at its youthful, flirty best? Think of Twiggy, who looked fresh and gamine enough in her Mary Quant minis to epitomize the "Youthquake" of 1963; or of "the Shrimp," who still looks utterly up to date 40 years after she posed for this photo (at left): Choose flats.

Still, numerous readers no doubt flipped past this page the moment they spotted Shrimpton's timeless T-strap, "Flats?" they thought. "Pas moi!" For some, taking the low road requires, as Watson put it, a bit of reeducation—and a few carefully chosen cosmetic solutions.

GRACING IT

It all starts with basic physiology. More than any other item in the wardrobe, our shoes control how (or whether) we stand and walk. They make us taller and leaner or shorter and, well, less lean, and, as every woman knows, they dictate our comfort level at any given moment of the day. Heel habitués are accustomed to being pitched forward, arching their lower backs and thrusting out their busts and backsides; such contortions instantly sexualize not just a woman's stance but, chances are, her mind-set. Spring's delicious profusion of wafer-thin gladiators, thongs, and ballet slippers, on the other hand, "are grounded, motivated, zippy. They're go-getter shoes," says fashion writer and shoe savant Meghan Cleary. Yes, an impish girl-on-the-verge sounds far more alluring—not to mention more modern—than a supine vamp, but "to a high-heel girl, flats can feel dumpy, inelegant. Like you're not going to get noticed. It's a difficult adjustment."

HOW TO WEAR FLATS
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