

The Rules: White

Looking for an instant dose of Zen-like calm? Soft, pale shades in everything from sculptural linen to romantic lace will leave you feeling fresh and pretty. By Kirsty Munro.

Illustration Wai

Texture

In the absence of colour, what you notice is texture – delicate embroidery, lace or the contrast in fabrics such as silk, muslin and linen. Plain white cotton can look like a hospital gown so go for details, whether pretty and delicate or strong and sculptural. Broderie anglaise, that traditional French eyelet lace, is everywhere this season. Nicola Finetti's white bubble dress, \$459, would look chic with elegant black ballet flats. White linen is also popular. Search for soft, well-washed linen or launder your pieces before you wear them. Stiff linen stands out from your body and creates a larger silhouette. Sussan stores have a soft white short-sleeved linen shirt with white floral embroidery and delicate buttons for \$70.

Vintage

Off-white and cream blouses with pintucking and lace trim, dirty-white linen jackets, canvas trousers the colour of lime wash – these evoke a simpler, more innocent time. To indulge your *Picnic At Hanging Rock* fantasies, look to designer Lee Mathews, who hand-makes and embroiders her clothes in pale natural fibres. While they might not feel right in the boardroom, these layers will put you in the mood for collecting shells and baking cupcakes. Lover specialises in white blouses with a Victorian feel; pair its Theodora peasant bodice shirt, \$363 (available in late April), with jeans and sneakers for modern chic. When choosing real vintage, check for stains and rust marks. Hand-wash pieces in a gentle detergent at 40 degrees or less. To remove yellow marks, dab with white vinegar or a paste of baking soda and water; try a little salt dissolved in lemon juice on rust stains.

Romantic

Heroines such as Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott were painted like angels in white. Fleur Wood has a romantic slip in white, \$260, that recalls that era. For a beach picnic, an Esprit cotton sundress with

lace trim (\$129 at Esprit stores and David Jones) looks fresh and pretty, not prim.

Sporty

A short-sleeved shirt (Scanlan & Theodore has a cuffed cream silk shirt, \$220), worn with shorts or an A-line skirt and pure-white Dunlop sneakers (available at Kmart), evokes lawn tennis and Scarlett Johansson looking devastating in *Match Point*. Stella McCartney's sporty range from Adidas is stylish enough to wear for coffee after the game. Josh Goot's leggings, singlets and soft jackets in white, grey and silver will impart instant calm.

Proportion

Never forget that white optically enlarges objects, such as your hips. Add a dark belt to a loose white dress and remind people that you have a waist. Painters use white as a highlighter – you can, too. If you have a problem area, whether it's a generous bottom or bosom, wear darker colours to disguise those areas and white to call attention to the bits you like. A long, dark top over slim white pedal pushers (try Marcs) is a streamlined holiday outfit.

In the boudoir

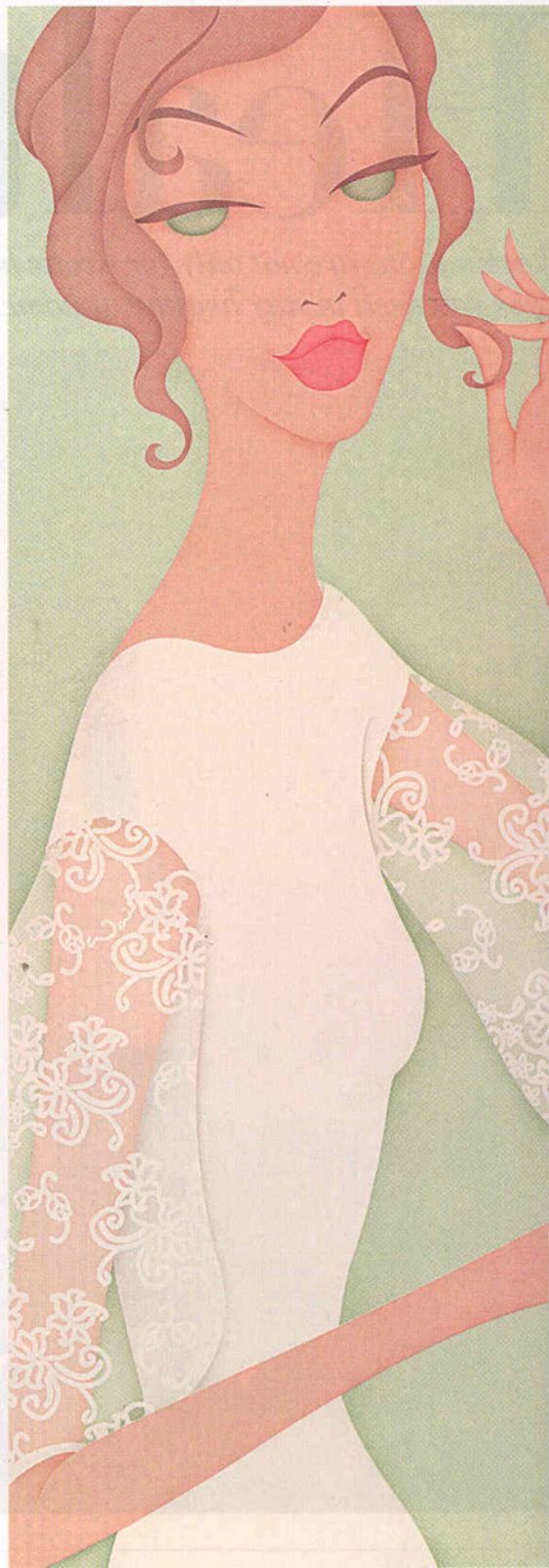
Wear flesh-coloured underwear that's close to your natural skin tone: white undergarments can show through. The Berlei Barely There Contour Bra is smooth and cut low so it disappears under most garments. For lolling about seductively, try Kayser's Victoria camisole, \$30.

Must-haves

Wear a lacy white dress anytime but add brown leather accessories for day or gold for evening.

Must avoid

Top-to-toe white looks too bridal. Avoid white pants in thin fabric that shows the pockets and/or your underwear. White denim is safest.



Little Joe by Gail Elliott knit, \$385, (02) 9328 0799. Fleur Wood slip, \$260, (02) 9282 9511.

Mimco belt, \$139, and choker necklace, \$199, (02) 9223 1055, (03) 9529 2000. Nicola Finetti dress, \$459, (02) 9362 1685, (03) 9663 7886.

Little Joe by Gail Elliott dress, \$509. Jac + Jack top, \$260, (02) 9380 6630. Youth World top, \$235, 0410 554 518.