



GIGI HADID
WEARS AN ESP
ROBE COAT IN
NEW YORK.

Bed, Bath, and Beyond

In an always-on world, Olivia Stren revels in the power of the ultimate off-duty look.

Growing up, I used to visit my grandmother at her condo in Palm Beach, where my favorite activity was grocery shopping at the local Publix—the kind of supermarket that had valet parking and Alhambra-like archways swathed in bougainvillea. There, suntanned tycoons with skin more leathery than their Vuitton valises shuffled through the aisles shopping for crab salad, wearing monogrammed-silk dressing gowns. Nothing seemed a more blatant display of leisure than sporting your peignoir in Publix. Wearing a robe in the glare of day has long been the habit of the egregiously wealthy, the unhinged, or, um, the freelance writer.

Pajama dressing, of course, has been a recurring trend for 100 years: Coco Chanel debuted her “beach pajamas” back in the late 1910s. But the robe, and all its louche, silken sisters—the dressing gown, the kimono, the caftan, the peignoir—are drifting into the mainstream, out of bedrooms and down runways, red carpets, and city streets. Even into the Louvre: For a scene in Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s “Apeshit” video, Queen Bey perches on a settee, clad in a Versace Barocco-print bathrobe that’s slipped down into a shimmering puddle at her stilettoed feet. Meghan

FRONT ROW

Markle, meanwhile, has made the dressing-gown coat her trademark since sporting a wedding-white number (from Canada's Line the Label) for her public engagement announcement to Prince Harry.

According to Valerie Steele, director and chief curator of the Museum at FIT, this look is a shot across the bow at propriety, undoing the seams between day and night. "The robe is casual, it's comfy, and it's also modest—but it has little frissons of eroticism, because it reminds you of the bedroom," Steele says.

Milanese design duo Giorgia Tordini and Gilda Ambrosia of Attico founded their brand around this blur between the public and private (attico means "penthouse" in Italian), building their fall 2018 collection on the robe's sensuous silhouette. "Our intention was to give the robe new life and bring it outside the bedroom," Tordini explains. "But we like to maintain that bit of mystery and sexiness that the robe represents, the way it wraps around the body, the slit and the plunging neck that gently unveil some skin." For resort, Louis Vuitton and Gucci both went full tilt on heavily embellished versions, while Chloé's Natacha Ramsay-Levi showed nightgown-like variations.

For all its glamour, robe dressing can, of course, have a slovenly aspect. Pair one with jelly sandals and you have *The Big Lebowski's* infamous look. When I was a college student living in Montreal, I spotted Nick Nolte riding a bicycle in his bathrobe, his terry-cloth tie and hair flapping in the wind. What strikes me now about this vignette is how unsurprising it was—the robe has long been the uniform of those privileged enough to not have to bother with the business of getting dressed. Its lascivious underbelly is tethered to a predatory and patriarchal masculinity. Harvey Weinstein often wore nothing but. Hugh Hefner surely would not have had the same libidinous image had he worn, say, a fleece around his mansion. If the robe is associated with morals as loose and slippery as Hef's silks, maybe robe dressing for women is about reclaiming a look that powerful men have long been getting away with. (Steele dismisses this female-empowerment theory: "I think designers have a commercial interest in saying that the robe is a feminist statement.")

In a political climate that is chronically tempting us to take to our beds, designers seem to be divining the next best thing. If the world feels like a hostile place, the robe—belonging to that liminal state between the safety of sleep and the vulgarity of waking—serves as a soft protest and armor (albeit one that telegraphs a certain elitism). When there is nothing less relaxing than reality, the robe speaks to our collective need for coziness.

All of this brings to mind a recent meeting I had with Toronto-based artist and designer Maryam Keyhani. She was sporting a linen robe, a style she wears everywhere. She explained that it takes her a long time to get out of bed in the morning—real life is too unwelcoming. The robe provides a sort of buffer, helping her soften the transition into the sharpness of the day ahead. This, it seems to me, may be the allure for all of us. Reality has never been my element. Sometimes there is nothing so chic, and luxurious, as denial.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GUCCI CRUISE; ZENDAYA IN FATIMA DANIELSSON; LOUIS VUITTON CRUISE; SIENNA MILLER; ANGELINA JOLIE IN A JENNY PACKHAM GOWN.