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**B**EFORE I moved to Paris, I was the sort of woman who only bought a new bra when the washing machine ripped my old one to shreds. To me, a bra was a basic necessity: functional and nothing more.

But in France, I discovered that underwear isn't just underwear, it's 'lingerie' and it reflects an art of living — a philosophy dedicated to an enhanced well-being.

I first discovered the power of 'lingerie' in the minuscule dressing room of a tiny boutique.

The shop's owner had selected an ivory satin bra with small pleats that was trimmed in lace and, after deftly adjusting the back hooks and tightening the straps, running her fingers over the bra like she was tuning a violin, she handed me a matching pair of knickers. When I turned to face the mirror, I couldn't believe what I saw.

I'm 5ft 7in — but had I suddenly grown taller? My back was straighter. My breasts were lifted and fuller-looking. And what was that on my face? A smile. Shopping for underwear had never made me smile before.

And so began my inauguration into the French attitude to lingerie. Over the years, I learnt that French women don't need a special occasion for nice underwear, they wear nice underwear every day. And forget painful straps and itchy lace, for the French good lingerie is always comfortable — so comfortable that you wouldn't think of wearing anything else.

Perhaps crucially, I discovered that the French have a really rather wonderful trick for finding the perfect lingerie to fit their shape.

Rather than trying to classify their bodies as apples or pears, triangles or inverted triangles, columns or hourglasses, the French prefer letters. They believe that every woman's shape can be summed up by one of the following letters: A, V, H, X and O.

Once you know which letter you are, you can pick the perfect style of lingerie for you, the lingerie that will make you look taller, slimmer, more youthful and — crucially — happier.

To identify your letter, simply stand in front of a full-length mirror wearing a bra and knickers, and take a discerning look at yourself...

**A** DEFINED by wider hips than shoulders, the A silhouette is reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower in all its elegance, majesty — and allure.

**BRAS:** Balance body proportions by drawing attention to the upper body. Wear bra styles with padding and straps attached to the side of the cups to increase the bustline.

Balconette, moulded, half-cup and bandeau styles can all be flattering choices. Look for horizontal patterns and lines and sparkling materials to accentuate the shoulders and create overall harmony.

Vary your tops and dresses to include wider necklines, such as the bateau, which follows the collarbone from shoulder to shoulder; the Sabrina, named after the Audrey Hepburn movie, which is also a wide and shallow neckline but with slightly more curve; and the empire neckline, which lengthens the waist and emphasises the bust.

**KNICKERS:** Wear high-cut styles in ultra-light fabrics with Spandex and in understated colours to slim hips and elongate legs. Detailing and embellishments in the front or back enhance natural curves without increasing volume.

Light colours capture grace and movement, and lace or mesh side panels can distract attention. Try a size up for a smoother silhouette and overall slimming effect.

**V** DEFINED by shoulders larger than the hips, V silhouettes have an elegant and statuesque shape, with a generous bustline and a less pronounced derriere.

**BRAS:** Balance body proportions by drawing attention to the lower body. Moulded bras create a smooth and natural bustline.

Avoid horizontal stripes and styles that exaggerate what you already

have naturally. Select straps with delicate details to soften the lines of this silhouette.

Halter and plunging front and back necklines will dramatically highlight the symmetry of a V silhouette's shoulders, which will require bras with convertible straps to position accordingly.

**KNICKERS:** Low-cut boxer styles and knickers with scalloped edges will add detail and texture. Choose bold colours and patterns for balance and interest.

**H** SHOULDERS and hips are aligned, to create a balanced, elongated silhouette, with a less-defined waist. Accentuating the bust and hips will help create contours.

**BRAS:** Padded, push-up and frilly bras help shape the H silhouette. Cropped camisoles can add softness and gentle curves around the bust and hips.

**KNICKERS:** French knickers with



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# How to look as good as the French in lingerie

## The secret's a whole new way of thinking about your body shape

details on the side can create volume. Ruffled or ruched briefs add shape visually, while high-cut designs suggest gentle roundness.

**X** CHARACTERISED by aligned shoulders and hips, the X silhouette has a well-defined waist, with proportionate and balanced curves.

**BRAS:** Select well-constructed bras for support and gentle shaping. Pick daring V-necklines and fabrics to follow your curves. For greater definition, corsets, bustiers, pin-up and retro styles look sensational on this silhouette.

**KNICKERS:** Fashionable retro-styled, high-waisted knickers flatter and flatten if necessary, while a thong or scalloped-edge boy shorts and briefs showcase your contours.

Avoid ill-fitting clothing that's too loose, as it will tend to hide this symmetrical silhouette and make it seem shapeless.

**O** THE O silhouette has a voluptuous bustline, with rounded shoulders and curves that include a tummy and hips. Draw attention to the upper part of the body with revealing neck-

lines. Slender legs often accompany this body shape, so create intrigue with textured or coloured hosiery or leggings.

**BRAS:** Full-cup bras provide maximum shape and support, while half-cup and balconette styles will sculpt a divine bustline. Be careful with minimisers that tend to flatten and spread out breasts, instead of shaping them.

**KNICKERS:** High-waisted briefs in ultra-soft fabrics slim the hips, while those with a front panel provide support and help define the waist.

■ *PARIS Undressed: The Secrets Of French Lingerie*, by Kathryn Kemp-Griffin, is published by Allen & Unwin at £9.99. To order a copy for £7.49 (25 per cent off), visit [mailbookshop.co.uk](http://mailbookshop.co.uk) or call 0844 571 0640, p&p is free on orders over £15. Offer valid until February 6, 2017.

## HIDE THE BITS YOU HATE — BY FLAUNTING THOSE YOU LOVE

*THE game of Hide and Peek shows how to 'hide' a feature you're not too fond of — by revealing a 'peek' of another part that's more alluring...*

**HIDE:** Large hips.

**PEEK:** A narrow waist.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Often, curves create the perception of a narrow waist. Try a waspie (waist cincher) or bustier to enhance a small waist with finesse. A bias-cut chemise in darker shades also accentuates the waist and flows gently over the hips.

**HIDE:** Narrow hips.

**PEEK:** Legs.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Full or half vintage slip with slit with lace. Lace adds an element of texture and shading to create intrigue.

**HIDE:** Generous breasts.

**PEEK:** Sensual cleavage.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Bras with seams for the best shaping and to smooth out any bulges. Look for a combination of lace and fabric to vary texture and light patterns.

**HIDE:** Small breasts.

**PEEK:** A graceful neck and shoulders.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Triangle bras, bustiers and camisoles reveal the curve and beauty of the shoulders. Strapless and halter-style bras

work well for backless fashions. Look for delicate design details in bra straps.

**HIDE:** Large derriere.

**PEEK:** Small of the back.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Slips and chemises cut on the bias with a tapered back will flow beautifully, while light plays in the undulating fabric. Briefs with details and cutouts in the back create shadow and light, while stretch lace creates interesting textured outlines.

**HIDE:** Flat derriere.

**PEEK:** Legs.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Thongs elongate and extend your leg. If you like stockings, try a garter

belt or ruffled brief with a built-in garter belt to draw attention to your legs.

**HIDE:** Too much tummy.

**PEEK:** Arch of the back.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Look for high-waisted, retro-style knickers, so the elastic doesn't cut into the part you want to hide. Briefs with a centre supporting panel and sheer side panels and back mask your tummy and create intrigue through textured shadows, guiding attention to your lower back.

■ *EXTRACTED* by Claire Coleman from *Paris Undressed: The Secrets Of French Lingerie* (see book offer, above).