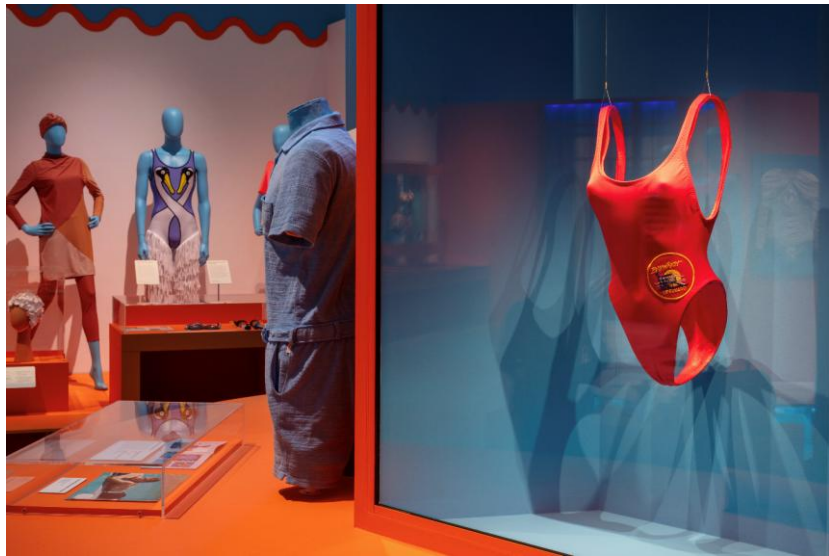


# Pamela Anderson's sensational Baywatch swimsuit now on display in exhibition on swimming's century

**Splash! A Century of Swimming and Style**

28 March – 17 August 2025

the Design Museum



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*Associate Sponsor: Orlebar Brown*

Pamela Anderson's sensational red bathing suit from *Baywatch*, the first Olympic solo swimming gold medal won by a British woman, and a pair of Tom Daley's Speedos worn while competing at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, are all now on show as star items in the Design Museum's major new exhibition on swimming.

**Splash! A Century of Swimming and Style** — which opens to the public at the Design Museum on Friday — examines our enduring love of water over the past 100 years: from Britain's lido boom during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the viral Mermaidcore trend of the 2020s.

Other remarkable objects on show in the exhibition include the banned 'technical doping' LZR Racer swimsuit, one of the earliest surviving examples of a bikini, and a detailed architectural model of the Zaha Hadid-designed London 2012 Aquatics Centre.

In total over 200 objects — from around 50 lenders across Europe — feature in **Splash!**, collectively exploring swimming's evolution in its social, cultural, technological and environmental contexts.

Across three in-depth sections that reflect the three locations in which we swim — the pool, the lido and nature — the exhibition dives into design's role in shaping our relationship with swimming, both in the water and beside it. Visitors will discover the full spectrum of the design of swimming — from sports performance and fashion, to architecture.

The exhibition's story begins in the 1920s, when swimwear began to be marketed for swimming rather than the Victorian's preference for bathing, and when beach holidays exploded in popularity. It explores right up to the present day, and swimming's role in modern life such as how it influences and subverts our ideas of body autonomy and agency, as well as its link to environmental issues.

**Splash!** is guest-curated by Amber Butchart, a dress and design historian and broadcaster known for her history segments on BBC One's *The Great British Sewing Bee*. From the Design Museum, the exhibition is curated by Tiya Dahyabhai.

### **Splash! exhibition highlight objects**

With US TV series *Baywatch* drawing an estimated 1.1 billion weekly viewers at its peak in the 1990s, the red swimsuit worn by actor Pamela Anderson (as iconic character CJ Parker) can claim to be the most famous piece of swimwear in the world.

Visitors to **Splash!** will get up-close to a surviving edition of the suit worn by Anderson during her tenure on the show from 1992-97. It comes on loan to the Design Museum in London from the BikiniARTmuseum in Germany — the first international museum of swimwear and bathing culture — who acquired the piece from the collection of Anderson's co-star David Hasselhoff and All-American Television in 2023.

Baywatch's swim costumes were based on swimsuits worn by real lifeguards in Southern California. Each of the actors were given costumes specially adapted for their specific proportions. The popularity of Baywatch put the one-piece back in the spotlight, and it became synonymous with Pamela Anderson and the show. Its status was further elevated by often featuring in Anderson's slow-motion running scenes, which became a signature visual of the series.

Also on loan from the BikiniARTmuseum — in the German town of Bad Rappenau — is one of the earliest bikinis. Two-piece swimwear was first called a bikini in July 1946, when French designer Louis Réard debuted his navel-exposing design at the Molitor pool in Paris. It was named after Bikini Atoll, site of American nuclear test explosions. Réard's first bikini design featured newsprint, and one of the earliest surviving examples of this — from 1951 — is on show.

The evolution of swimwear for men is also a significant feature of **Splash!**. One of the oldest on display is a striped woollen swimsuit from 1933, produced under the Bukta label and it is shown on loan from the Westminster Menswear Archive at the University of Westminster.

The most eye-catching men's items however are the display of 10 Speedo briefs — now simply known as 'Speedos' — ranging from the 1980s to the present day. Peter Travis was the designer who first reshaped the Speedo brief in the 1960s, with his designs radically celebrating the male form. For many visitors, the Speedos on display will collectively offer a reminder of changing fashions over the decades, and how Speedos became known for utilising bright, bold and sometimes garish colours.

One of the oldest objects in the exhibition is the Olympic gold medal awarded to swimmer Lucy Morton. Morton took the 200m breaststroke title in the 1924 Paris games, becoming the first British woman to win a solo Olympic title in swimming. The gold medal is on loan from Blackpool's Showtown museum after it was acquired by the local council from Morton's family in 2019.

The story of swimwear for sporting performance is also explored through a number of other items in the exhibition. Advances in textile technology are examined, and visitors will see innovations such as a 1930s woollen Jantzen Swimsuit with a Y-shaped back that was designed for speed improvements, and a 1960s swimsuit which was made of Bri-Nylon and designed with Olympic champion swimmer Judy Grinham (who was only the second woman to win solo gold for Britain in the pool in the Olympics).

Also on display is an example of the hugely controversial LZR Racer swimsuit. The LZR Racer is a high-performance swimsuit developed by Speedo in collaboration with NASA and the Australian Institute of Sport. Introduced in 2008, it revolutionized competitive swimming by offering swimmers significant advantages in speed, buoyancy, and drag reduction. But when 79 of 108 world records were broken by swimmers wearing the suit in its first year — as well as wearers winning 94% of the golds on offer in the pool at the 2008 Beijing Olympics — it was banned in all competitions

by world governing body FINA in 2010 as the advantages the suit offered were deemed 'technical doping.'

The architecture of swimming is also spotlighted. The exhibition highlights the Jubilee Pool, opened in Penzance in 1935, and known for its unusual triangular shape. Visitors will see a film and supporting material showing how it has been regenerated by a local community, including its transformation to include the UK's first geothermal powered seawater pool, heated all year round. Another famous pool highlighted is the London Aquatics Centre designed by Zaha Hadid and which was an architectural landmark of the 2012 Olympics. Notable examples of saunas, beach huts and public baths are also in the show.

The role of nature and folklore in swimming's story is examined. While merfolk, sea people, water spirits and nymphs exist in centuries-old tales around the globe, the past 100 years have seen these stories told through mass-media for the first time. Visitors will see a range of examples, from stills of the British actor Glynis Johns as an enchanting mermaid in the 1948 film *Miranda*, to Halle Bailey on the cover of *The Face* magazine to promote her role as Ariel in the 2023 live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid*.

A final feature of the exhibition is its examination of who swimwear is designed by and for, and how it determines which bodies are welcomed in public spaces. There is a focus on contemporary swimwear designers whose work enhances bodily autonomy and agency, and challenges previous ideas around access to pools and beaches.

**Amber Butchart, guest-curator of Splash!**, said: "It's incredible to be showing Pamela Anderson's iconic *Baywatch* swimsuit in the exhibition, especially at this pivotal point when she has reclaimed her own image, and has designed and modelled her own swimwear."

“I live in Margate and I grew up in a seaside town, and as a fashion historian, understanding our relationship with water through design and clothing has always been at the heart of my work. So it's a delight to bring this exhibition to the Design Museum. The history of swimwear and swimming is fascinating as it mirrors wider changes in society over the past century, whether that's around issues of bodily autonomy and agency, or how we spend our leisure time.”

**Tim Marlow, Director and CEO of the Design Museum**, said: “The story of swimming is more than just a story of sport, as our new exhibition makes abundantly clear. By examining the culture of swimming through the lens of design, we explore a range of evolving ideas about the way we have lived from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, from materials and making to leisure, travel, performance, wellbeing and the environment. It's another innovative exhibition that shows visitors to the Design Museum the profound impact of design in almost every aspect of our lives.”

**Trevor Hardy, Chief Marketing Officer at Orlebar Brown**, said  
“Swimming, style and London are part of the fabric at Orlebar Brown, so we are enthusiastically supporting the Design Museum's Splash! exhibition that will inspire visitors to dress with more character and colour for their poolside and seaside escapes.”

**Splash! A Century of Swimming and Style** runs at the Design Museum in London from Friday 28 March until 17 August 2025.

**-Ends-**

### **Notes to Editors**

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**About Amber Butchart:**

Amber Butchart is a curator, writer and broadcaster who specialises in the cultural and political history of textiles, dress and design. She researches and presents documentaries for television and radio, including the six-part series A Stitch in Time for BBC Four that fused biography, art and the history of fashion to explore the lives of historical figures through the clothes they wore, and she is the history consultant and regular on-screen historian for BBC One's Great British Sewing Bee. She is a regular public lecturer across the UK's leading arts institutions, and is an external adviser for the National Crime Agency as a Forensic Garment Analyst, working on cases that require investigation of clothing and textiles. Her books include The Fashion of Film, Nautical Chic, and a history of British fashion illustration for the British Library. She is currently a CHASE-funded PhD researcher in curating political textiles, and her latest exhibition, 'The Fabric of Democracy: Propaganda Textiles from the French Revolution to Brexit' ran at the Fashion & Textile Museum in London.

**About the Design Museum:**

The Design Museum is a multifaceted museum, an ever-changing space for the public, industry and education to come together and explore new ideas. A registered charity, the museum's innovative exhibitions, partnerships, research and learning programmes evidence how design can enable this planet and its inhabitants to thrive. Our landmark building in Kensington is the centre of our national network and a global hub for the transformative potential of design.



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