

# Buttonhole Banter

BY NANCY BEDNAR

Webster defines the buttonhole as “the hole or loop through which a button is fastened”. This simple and functional description underplays the creative and structurally enhancing buttonhole enhancements made possible by BERNINA® sewing machines. Specially engineered buttonholes add strength to counteract stretch in knits and allow extra “wobble room” in heavy coatings. All take on a new perspective when sewn in unexpected threads, over filler cord with fringy tails, or framed with any of the many decorative stitches housed in our BERNINA®’s. Let’s explore some practical and creative possibilities.

## The Corded Buttonhole – Demystified

Tailoring classes have long touted sewing over a cord as the preferred way of stitching a buttonhole: unstable fabrics, such as Chanel-like boucles, are stabilized, while gaping “frog lips” closures are eliminated from stretchy fabric. Although cording sounds like a tricky technique to master, built-in aids found on your BERNINA® buttonhole foot make this technique simple and easy to learn.

### Corded Buttonholes with Standard Buttonhole Foot #3/3C

The short, center toe on this foot is designed for the express purpose of holding a cord in position when stitching the left and right hand sides of your buttonhole.

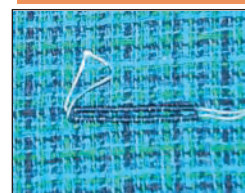
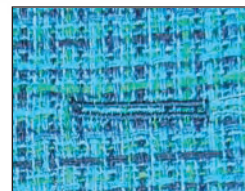
- Cut a generous length of filler cord, 4-5 times the length of the finished buttonhole.
- Fold the cord in half, with the loop facing you and the tails towards the back of the machine.
- Take the first stitch of your buttonhole, stopping with the needle down in the fabric.
- Raise the buttonhole foot and drape the folded part of the cord over the center toe of the foot. Guide the left and right tails of the cord towards the back of the foot. They will automatically fall into the grooves in the sole of the foot, the same place where the beads (sides of the buttonhole) will be guided.
- Lower the buttonhole foot and sew the buttonhole. A small loop of filler cord will appear at the end of the buttonhole. When the buttonhole is complete, gently pull on one of the cord tails to draw the loop snug against the buttonhole bead satin stitches.
- Using a hand-sewing needle with a large eye, bring the tails to the underside, then knot and clip the tails.

### Corded Buttonholes with Automatic Buttonhole Foot #3A/3C

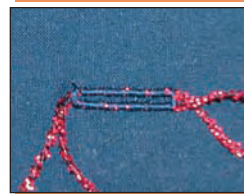
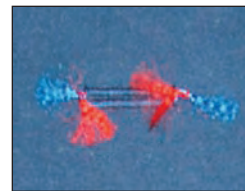
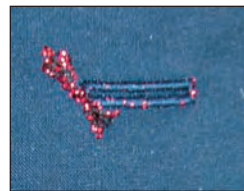
The center toe which holds the filler cord is located at the back of this foot, while a rubber “plug” at the

front secures the ends of the cord while the buttonhole is stitched.

- Sew the first stitch of the buttonhole, stopping with the needle down in the fabric. Raise the foot and drape the cord from the back to the front. Secure the ends between the two guide notches at the center front of this foot.



- Lower the presser foot and stitch the buttonhole. The loop will be created at the far end of this buttonhole. Again, when the buttonhole is complete, tug on one of the filler cord tails to snug it up against the stitches.
- Use heavy metallic serger threads as filler cord to add a subtle sparkle.
- Consider knotting your thread tails on top of your project and fraying the ends for textural interest!



## Filler Cord Options

Classically, a strand of topstitch weight thread, color-matched to the buttonhole thread, is the filler of choice. Other stable fillers include gimp, pearl crown rayon, and crochet cotton.

Take a time-honored tip from tailors and use your fashion fabric thread to create your own filler cord.

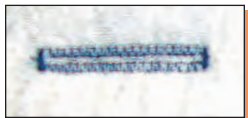
- Cut 5-6 strands of the fashion fabric thread. Bundle them together in your hand.
- Set your machine for a short zig zag (SW – 1 to 1½, SL – ½).
- Center the bundled threads under the presser foot and zigzag them together. Custom cord! *Note: The small, round opening found in the crossbar of Embroidery Foot #6 makes it ideal for holding the multiple strands while zigzagging.*

## Special Buttonholes for Special Fabrics

### Stretch Buttonholes

Just as seaming knit fabrics together requires stitches that stretch, buttonholes in knits work best when their stitches have some “give”. Some BERNINA® sewing machines have a specially designed stretch buttonhole that will stretch with the garment, but spring back when released, retaining its original shape. The secret to this buttonhole is that the sides are composed of a series of tiny overlock stitches, not the traditional satin stitch bead. When sewing stretch buttonholes, place a single layer of lightweight tear-away stabilizer underneath the garment to neutralize the stretch of fabric against the feed dogs. Sew the buttonhole through all layers, removing the stabilizer when the buttonhole is complete.

*Note: Place a layer of water soluble stabilizer on top of high loft or sweater fabrics to help feed on the top side of the fabric, too!*



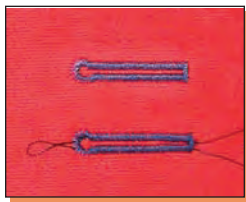
Consider sewing stretch buttonholes in an unexpected thread, such as variegated cotton or rayon.



### Keyhole Buttonholes

These specialty buttonholes have the appearance of skeleton key doorplates, hence the name “keyhole”.

They are designed in this manner to provide extra “wiggle room” in the buttonhole slot opening for extra wide, chunky or shank style buttons. As these heavier buttons are most often used on outerwear, these buttonholes are formed by closely spaced zigzag rows, with a rounded or pointed end. These buttonholes are always stitched horizontally with the shaped end (round or pointed) of the buttonhole facing center front.



**“Yes, you can cord a keyhole buttonhole!”**

### “NEW” Buttonholes on the Block

Heirloom – A delicate version of the traditional buttonhole, with narrower side beads.



Heirloom garments, sewn from fine linens and batistes require a finer, more lightweight buttonhole with a narrower width. Sizing and stitching this type of preprogrammed buttonhole is identical to creating standard buttonhole, but the resulting buttonhole is

much lighter in appearance. *Note: Owners of older BERNINA® models may replicate this look by decreasing the preset stitch width on their buttonhole beads before stitching, and/or by engaging the Double Needle function.*

### Handlook Buttonhole

Browse through racks of vintage garments in your favorite antique shop and you will find many examples of this buttonhole style. Our BERNINA® machines can now duplicate the buttonhole craftsmanship of hand-stitched



buttonholes from years gone by. Most appropriate on firmly woven fabrics, this lovely buttonhole style has a more open appearance than other machine-stitched version. The stitches that form the right and left bead are created with a blanket stitch (also called a buttonhole stitch), and has only one bar tack and a rounded end. This new buttonhole style is destined to soon become a favorite with garment and craft sewers alike!



### Not Just for Buttons Anymore

When is a buttonhole not just a buttonhole? Step outside the traditional buttonhole “box” and consider the opening a buttonhole creates – a clean finished slot. Take your creativity one step further and consider other possibilities for this opening other than accommodating buttons:

- Ribbon/fabric strip/cord weaving
- Pocket “slits” using the manual buttonhole foot for infinitely sized openings

- Create designer “slashed” fabric for a funky boutique look.

- Use buttonhole eyelets as perfectly shaped, round doll and teddy bear eyes.

### Must have Notions for Perfect Buttonholes

- Seam Sealant – Lightly coat the inner opening of your finished buttonhole with seam sealant. Allow to dry completely, then cut the buttonhole open. The sealant will secure the fibers and your open buttonhole will be professionally and cleanly finished. *TIP: Avoid over-cutting the buttonhole length by placing a pin in each bar tack before cutting.*

- Buttonhole Cutter & Block Set – Indispensable for making clean cuts in your newly sewn buttonhole. After the seam sealant is totally dry, place the wooden block underneath the buttonhole to be opened. Hold the cutter blade edge perpendicular to the fabric. Press the blade into the fabric with one smooth motion – a perfect cut every time! *TIP: To cut very small buttonholes, place the fabric on the block so that one bartack hangs over the edge. Fold the excess fabric over the edge of the block, then cut the buttonhole.*

