

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

This is the complete 2 part tutorial I originally posted on sew VeraVenus in 2012. Though it concentrates on vintage style French Knickers many of the techniques I cover can be applied to other types of lingerie... modern styles as well as vintage.

Part 1- covers cutting out, hand sewing on lace motifs, sewing french seams and how to attach a continuous side seam placket with either a hand or machine finish.

Part 2- covers adding a waistband with either a fabric or elastic (ha, didn't expect that did you!), machine appliquéd lace hems and motifs, machine pin-hemming, hand-made button-holes and other closing options.



ՏԵՎ ՄԵՐԱՎԵՆՈՍ®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

JUST A COUPLE OF NOTES BEFORE BEGINNING:

My making methods are not the be-all-and-end-all of sewing techniques; I prefer fairly “old-school” sewing methods and intend that this sew-along to pull together a handful of techniques that are useful in making both vintage-style lingerie in general and knickers in particular whether you have drafted your own pattern or maybe have an original one that no longer has any instructions. All the sewing photos should open large size in another window when clicked if you’d like to see them closer up.

And finally- for the purposes of the sew-along I made three more pairs of knickers as couldn’t squeeze all techniques into just one pair.... I hope suggesting different ways of doing things all in the one sew-along is not too confusing to follow, but I think it’s good to have choices.

Lets get started!

CUTTING OUT: If you are using a thin and slippery fabric cutting with tissue paper underneath is just brilliant. It makes cutting out slippy fabrics so much easier. I buy myself large packs of A2 size tissue sheets from a shop supply company just for this purpose.



To do this tape a couple of sheets together so they won’t separate then tape the corners onto the table. You can lay out your fabric as a single or double layer but as the tissue is so stabilising you’ll probably find double works fine. Fold fabric in half and lay it on the tissue with the selvages lined up parallel to one edge of the paper and use the right angled edge to align the cut/torn edges of the fabric. It’s a little fiddly to get slippery fabrics lined up but persevere. When it is then anchor the fabric edges to the tissue with pins.

About cutting vs. tearing: The debate rages. I do what works on a per-fabric basis. Silk, some synthetics and many cottons tear well without pull lines damaging the fabric, or if they do it will be only an inch or so in. Tearing may cause wavy edges, but after tearing I steam and press edges flat again and try not to place any pattern pieces too close if some waviness remains. This way I definitely know I have straight edges. If it looks like tearing will damage my fabric I just squint hard or maybe pull a couple of threads to find the weave to cut along for a true straight edge. Printed designs are too often a little off grain and I have learned the hard way not to trust that they are straight, but if the pattern is

woven you can generally follow the design repeat for getting a true straight edge.

Soap-box moment: Prep is all! Consider time spent on ironing fabric smooth before cutting, getting grains straight and cutting out accurately.... tedious as it is... completely worth it because when something is cut out off-grain or otherwise sloppily no amount of careful sewing makes up for it. When things are precisely cut-out sewing seems to go so much smoother.

No more finger-wagging after this, I promise.

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

So lay the pattern pieces on top of the fabric and pin through into the tissue. If you aren't using tissue underneath then cut out as you normally would.

TIP: If your pattern is on paper that doesn't take pins easily you can trace it onto other sheets of tissue and without cutting them out lay those complete sheets on top of the fabric with other sheets of tissue underneath creating a complete “sandwich”. (When you trace the pattern pieces draw them so the straight grains of pattern pieces line up with the tissue edges so when it's all laid together you'll know it's all on grain. This cutting method works really well especially with small pattern pieces when using too many pins and a stiff paper pattern pieces would start to distort the fabric. You can also do it without a tissue layer underneath your fabric.

When it's all laid up cut it out. All the seam allowances on my pattern are 1cm/3-8” everywhere so I don't consider it necessary to notch or otherwise mark them. A tiny 2mm snick at the side seams for the placket notch on the left (and the same on the right to use as a balance notch and the single and double centre front & centre back notches are all I think needed.

For placket and waistband pieces I generally tear a 4cm wide strip on the straight grain and cut to the needed lengths. Sewing is much easier when those pieces are as straight on their edges as you can get them. If you do prefer cutting over tearing the tissue sandwich will make cutting the strips more accurate. Another benefit of the tissue underneath is that if you take the tape off the corners you can safely turn the whole thing around as if on a turn-table to cut areas you would otherwise find awkward to reach.

HAND APPLIQUÉ: I started making a pale green silk mousseline pair of knickers with black lace motifs first to show about hand done appliqué. I only had an 8” piece of this lace but it had two repeats of the design so was perfect although too fine for sewing by machine. So don't over-look even small pieces of lace you find at flea markets etc! I like to do this kind of appliqué before other sewing gets done as it takes some time and I don't want to over-handle and wrinkle more fabric than I have to.



The motifs were cut out of the lace with very sharp embroidery scissors and placement was decided simply by holding up the front piece to myself in a mirror and seeing where it looked nice. Pin and baste your motifs in place with big-ish stitches being careful not to pull the thread too tight (img-lower left). I don't knot my basting threads, just a small back-stitch at the beginning and one at the end to hold. Keep your basting away from the edges as it's harder to pick it out if it's caught in the appliqué stitches. From the right side of the material start to sew over the edges of the lace with tiny stitches. Not as close as a satin stitch but fairly close. I have always called this sort of stitching “whip stitching”. It does take some time... each of the main motifs took about 1&1/2 hours to do -not speed-sewing, but at least you can watch tv or have a chat while sewing and it looks more properly Vintage. After whip-stitching if you want to cut the backing fabric away you can. Leaving 1/8” (2mm) edge is enough. Make sure the lace is strong enough though for this. The motifs I used here were just too small and the lace too delicate for cutting the green fabric away so this time I didn't. Lowest image on the right shows it all done from the wrong side.

SEW VERA VENUS®
 “A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com



If you are cutting fabric away this example from a 1930's negligee shows the small fabric edge left after trimming.

FRENCH SEAMS: Knowing the foot spacing of your sewing machine or having accurate lines on the throat plate helps a lot when doing french seams and I don't think they need to be as nerve wracking as many sewers seem to find.

I know if my fabric is right against the edge of the foot that I am sewing an accurate .6cm. leaving me 4cm. for the second run. The throat plate of my machine is marked in imperial measurements which is really annoying as I sew with metric measurements (although I frequently draft patterns using imperial measurements which drives younger all metric-based



seamstress I work with nuts! ... many pattern-drafters my sort of age are caught in the middle of metric/imperial measurements) Anyway place a tape measure under the foot of your machine to check how things line up. If you want different markings than what you have you can simply stick on a strip of masking tape on as a new guide.



Image 1 shows the french seam width I aim for in lingerie and img.2 shows the first line trimmed and pressed with a finished seam underneath. French seams smaller than these look very pretty in chiffons and other see-through fabrics, but don't make yourself crazy trying to do them super small as they can pull apart if made overly tiny.

The left side seam which gets the placket is sewn first. Place fabric wrong sides together and sew from the hem up to the placket notch (img 3 black arrow) and do a few back-stitches to secure the end. Clip into the seam allowance to the last stitch at the notch. Trim the seam allowance down to half its width and carefully press it to one side. I've read on various sewing blogs how some sewers don't like to press each stage while they sew. My ironing board is set up very close to my sewing machine so I don't have to walk miles back and forth. In general I think pressing at various stages of sewing is important but with french seams you should consider it essential.

Pin the seam right sides together now so the first stitching line is on the fold and sew the second line of stitching taking just one stitch beyond the first line. Press it but not to either side and clip a fraction below where the last stitch is (img 4)

PLACKETS:

1-hand finished on the inside, 2-all machine stitched.

1- On this green pair I did a placket machine stitched to the outside side of the knickers and hand finished on the inside:

Mark the half-way point of the placket piece with a tiny notch if it isn't already. With fabrics right sides together match the notch to one side of the french seam line and place a pin at that precise point. This bottom pin marks right where the stitching line should start (img-1). Depending on your fabric you will have varying amounts of ease on the hip of your knickers. There was a lot of give in this green fabric and hardly any on the peach colour broadcloth I made another pair with. Anyway, ease what ever amount there is evenly along the 1/2 placket and pin.

Tip: If there is noticeable ease you may find it easier to sew with the placket side on top to help any ease to sew in smoothly. The straightness of the placket helps force the ease to lie smoother- if you were to sew with the eased side up you might find that the fabric is more likely to bunch somewhere or make a little tuck in front of a pin. Don't catch the french-seam in the placket – it should stay free.

Pin the other half of the placket to the knicker side seam and again sew from the half point up towards the waist. Img 2 is what this should look like. Press the seam allowances towards the placket piece. The green fabric was so fine I didn't trim the seam-allowances down at all.

Next, turn the seam allowance under along its free edge and fold the placket in half to the inside of the knickers. Slip stitch in place (img- 3) just catching the first stitching line. Press the placket nice and flat and now press the french seam towards the front (img-4)The front half of the placket folds behind the front of the knickers, the back half remains extended (img- 5). With tiny whip-stitches catch the top of the french seam to the bottom fold of the placket (img-bottom centre). Hand or machine baste the turned back front at the

waist line.



2-ALL MACHINE SEWN PLACKET:

Attaching a placket that you would like to machine finish rather than hand finish is done in reverse to the hand finished one: with the right side of the placket against the wrong side of the knickers sew the first sewing lines from the french seam up to the waist, sewing

SEW VERAVENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

first one side of the placket and then the other. (plackets can be sewn with a continuous stitching line but it's harder to 1- not catch the french seam and 2- to hit that exact spot where the last french seam stitch is so there can be a little gap at the bottom there.)

Here are the all-machine steps shown on my peach silk-broadcloth pair: In the second image down you can see that I've trimmed the seam allowance on one side- this is the front half of the placket and I did it because this fabric was thicker which could make the front side of the placket feel bulky once it is folded back. Trimming even the one seam allowance layer off helps that. Leaving three layers is good for sewing snaps on or making buttonholes so best not to trim all seam allowances away... judge by feeling your fabric. You may have noticed that I top-stitched the turned back front of the placket in place. You could do that now if you like but it can also be done later when the waistband is sewn on...it depends on how your knickers will ultimately be closed.



CLOSING THE LEGS:

With french seams, remembering they always start with right side of fabric facing out, sew the other side seam and the short inseams so each leg is complete. Press the side seam towards the front and the inseams to the back. Place one knicker leg inside the other wrong sides together, sew the first line of stitching, trim, press and sew the second line. When pressing a crutch seam I press the straight bit flat to one side but leave the bottom curves standing up because if you try to press the curves flat you will probably end up creasing it...heaven forbid!

End of Part 1.

SEW VERAVENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

TO TOP-STITCH OR NOT TO TOPSTITCH

The edge of the green placket has been hand stitched with a tiny running stitch after the waistband and poppers went on. The reason for doing it later is so the poppers (snaps) can be sewn on without having to worry about catching the front of the knickers in the sewing. Plackets don't have to be sewn down at all if you don't like the look of it... however you may find that the opening pulls a little when you wear the knickers so if that bothers you then catching the front placket down either by hand or machine will help.

The peach knicker placket on the right was machine sewn on its edge (you can just see in the photo that the stitching is about 2mm in from the shadowy placket edge) I usually sew a top stitch like this from the outside of the knicker opening to keep my stitching as parallel to the edge as possible feeling with my fingers as I sew where the edge underneath is -though you could do a quick thread-baste line as a guide if that seems better to you. If I sew my topstitching from the inside I find myself concentrating more on the inner edge of the placket- and if that happens to be a bit wonky the stitching will then look wonky from the right side too. Ideally of course it should look lovely on both sides, but doesn't always go like quite that. In the end I think the outside view is the more important of the two.

I already knew I was going to buttonhole the placket on the peach pair so did do the topstitch at this point. The hand stitching on my green pair was done after the poppers were sewn on.



WAIST OPTIONS X 3

- 1-Fabric waistband
- 2-Folded elastic waistband
- 3-Gathered elastic waistband (for bloomers or pj's)

1-FABRIC WAISTBAND

The sewing on of the fabric waistband is essentially the same as sewing on the placket:

- do a machine stay-stitch on the waist line a fraction away from the sewing line where it will be covered by the waistband
- match right side of waistband strip to wrong side of knicker waist, pin in place smoothing any ease and sew.
- The seam allowance of the knicker waist really does need

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com



to be clipped into so it will lie flat inside the waistband strip. For all but the thinnest fabrics it is probably a good idea to also trim the seam allowance of the waistband down small as shown in the photo. Don't trim the knicker waist down though as it could start to pull out of the waistband after a few wearings.... so simply clip into it like in the top photo.

- press the seam allowances towards the waistband, press the free edge turning over and also press the seam allowances on either end in too. Pin in place and sew down by edge-stitching all the way around the waistband, the ends and top most edge too. It looks like photo below when all done (I had just marked the top for the buttonhole)

Between the seven pairs of french knickers made for myself and a few pairs for friends I've used this finish on almost every single pair... so I'd say it's my preferred one.

If you would rather do a hand finish on the inside edge and no top-stitching at all, then sew as for the hand stitched placket- i.e.. start with the right side of the waistband strip against the right side of the knicker waist and machine it on. Do all the same clipping of the waist as pictured above and on the wrong side just hand sew the inner turn and the ends in place with tiny slip-stitches.



2- FOLDED ELASTIC WAISTBAND

Just to try something different I used a (new-to-me) folded lingerie elastic specially made to fold in half over a raw edge giving a nice clean finish.

As a general rule I cut waist elastic 2"-3"/5cm-7.5cm smaller than my waist measurement as the zig-zagging always seems to make it stretch it out and it still fits over my hips easily.

- Stay-stitch the waistline and pin the elastic to the inside of the waist. It will be folded over to the front for the second line of sewing.

- Holding it stretched as far as your fabric allows sew on with a zig-zag stitch. On my machine it is 3-4 width stitch and about a 2 length but machines vary. The point is not too small or too close together or it forces the elastic to spread out too much.
- Trim off a little waist seam-allowance but not too much and fold the elastic in half over to the outside of the knicker waist and zig-zag again. I left the ends a little longer than the waist line, trimmed them back after the waist all was sewn and

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com



hand whipped them to finish flush with the placket edges as the elastic can't be turned under itself like a waistband would and trying to zig-zag finish the small end just started to chew them up.

So using this elastic even though the pattern waist only has 2cm ease more than my actual waist measurement still gives the waistline just that little bit of stretch which feels comfortable to wear but is still very flat .



3-FULLY GATHERED ELASTIC WAIST

I'll quickly go through how I apply a narrow elastic to a very gathered waist...incase you used your pattern to cut wide pyjama bottoms as I describe how to do in the [drafting](#) instructions.

- For this gathered waist I cut my elastic a full 7.5cm/3" smaller than my waist (because when so much fabric is gathered onto it it often seems to finish a little loose otherwise) and overlapped and zig-zag stitched the elastic ends closed.

- Then, having pressed the 1cm waistline allowance down and having folded the elastic and marked out its quarter points with pins I match those to the front, back and sides of the knicker waist.

- Next I stretch each quarter section and put a few more pins in the

distribute the fabric evenly onto the elastic band.

- On my machine I stretch sections flat and zig-zag in place. It is usually a wrestling match and takes some patience to stretch and keep the edges lined up at the same time.... but it gets there in the end. You can see again that my stitches are not too small when sewing the elastic on.
- A small bow added at the front tells me the front from the back as it's not so easy with bloomers

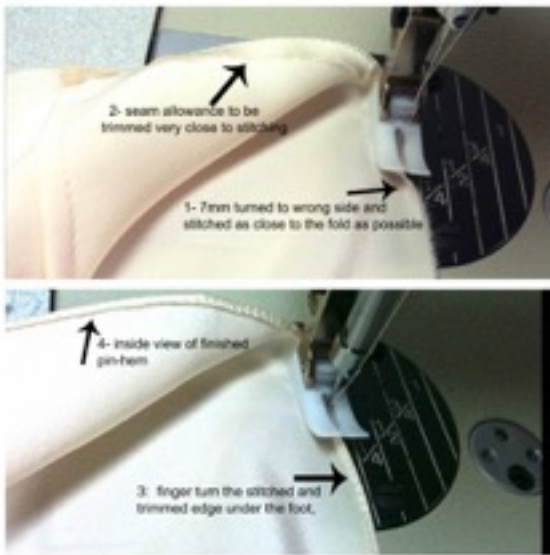
SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

HEMS AND LACE APPLIQUÉ- BUT BY MACHINE THIS TIME

I love-love-love tiny pin-hems! Next to bound necklines and armholes they are my favourite finish for thin and sheer fabrics. It takes a little more practice to do on curves or bias edges but for the knickers at least not so hard to do.

It is all sewn working from the wrong side:

- If your hem allowance is 1cm turn about 7mm of that to the inside for the first stitching line. If you have more allowance than that it is better to trim it down to 3/8"/1cm for manageability.
- with small sharp scissors trim the seam allowance very close to the stitches. Slowly! It is easy here to cut something you don't want to cut.
- Position the start of the second turning under your machine foot and wheel the needle down so you can pull the fabric gently for a bit of tension. Do that, carefully rolling the little stitched and trimmed edge to the wrong side and sewing almost on top of the first line of stitching.
- when done it should be about 2mm wide. **TIP:** If you are aiming to make a pair of knickers with as little machine sewing visible as possible then sew the second line by hand with small slip-stitches and you'll have a lovely hand-rolled edge.



This pin-hem is nice on its own and also gives a fine but strong edge to attach a straight edge lace trim to as I did on my bloomers:



Sew the lace on top of the right side of the fabric so the rolled hem is hidden behind the edge of the lace.

- With a length of lace a few centimetres longer than the hem measurement I start sewing at the inseam and sew it all the way around until it meets at the inseam again. To join the lace ends I usually simply overlap them at the beginning/end point in-line with the inseam and either hand-whip closed or do a tiny machine zig-zag stitch and trim off any over hang of lace close to the join. By not cutting and joining the lace to an exact leg measurement before sewing it on allows for any bit of hem stretching which may happen and means I won't get all the way around only to find my joined lace is a centimetre too small.

MORE APPLIQUÉ



If you would like a lace hem but with a shaped edge the photo shows visualising the possibilities.

Pin or baste your lace over the raw hem and decide where it looks nicest from shapes suggested by the lace. The dotted black lines in the photo show where I zig-zagged my lace on for each hem.

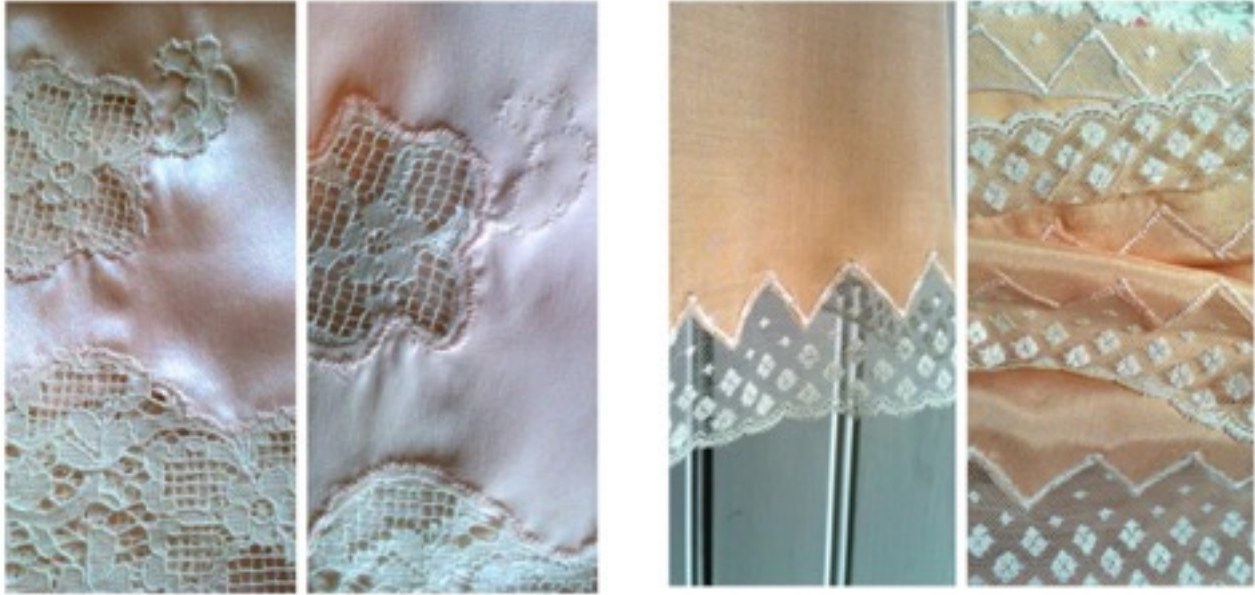


For machine appliqué I do use a fairly narrow and close together zig-zag. Not as close as for a buttonhole but almost. Then it is all down to you and how much control you have doing curves while zig-zagging and how many times you are happy to lift the presser foot to pivot! Remember to leave the machine needle down every time you pivot or turn as it can be easy to pull the material out of line otherwise and then the stitching might have gaps.

This photo to the right shows in detail the stitching on the pointy appliqué.

The top shows outside and inside before the lace and fabric were trimmed away and below that after trimming. I didn't have an exact thread match for the peach so used a close-enough pink in my bobbin. Matching the bobbin colour to at least something close to your fabric looks nicer and more carefully thought-out than if it's the same colour used for the lace.

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com



The img- left side shows the floral lace appliqué from the outside and the img-right shows it from the inside. Also there you can see a side by side contrast between machine and hand stitching where I sewed the little leaf on by hand next to the machined flower motif. It was too small a shape to get the ins and outs done nicely by machine. My original post describing how to do the appliquéd lace in the shape of bows can be found [here](#).



SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

CLOSINGS



Poppers, hooks and loops, buttons...lots of choice. My advice is whatever you choose flat and small is best. My own knickers have 5 poppers aka snaps most of the time, 4 poppers with a button hole at the top sometimes and 4 buttonholes just this time.

Occasionally I use a small hook and bar at the top or a button with a thread loop but find poppers work the best over-all... though if the waist is even a little too tight a hook or button is more secure than a popper! Now that I am finally over my “they will take too long” issues I will do hand-worked buttonholes more often. I posted photos of my button-hole making below but while sewing them I made a discovery- I do my buttonhole backwards to how all 6 books I consulted show how they should be done... I work from left to right and all books I’ve seen say work the stitch from right to left. So other than showing photos of my steps and final results I won’t be saying much more on the subject as some confusion will surely follow. Best just study the stitch illustration, cut some practice buttonholes on a fabric scrap and give it a go... and working right to left not left to right like I do.

On thread for buttonholes: They just don’t work well with regular sewing thread... single is just too fine and when doubled it doesn’t lie flat and looks messy over all. A ‘top-stitch’ or ‘strong’ weight thread can be used with reasonable success-that’s what I used on mine- but really using purpose made silk buttonhole twist thread gives the hands-down nicest result. I didn’t think I had any but found some after, here is the difference: top is ‘strong’ thread and below is silk twist. It noticeably makes for a much finer buttonhole.

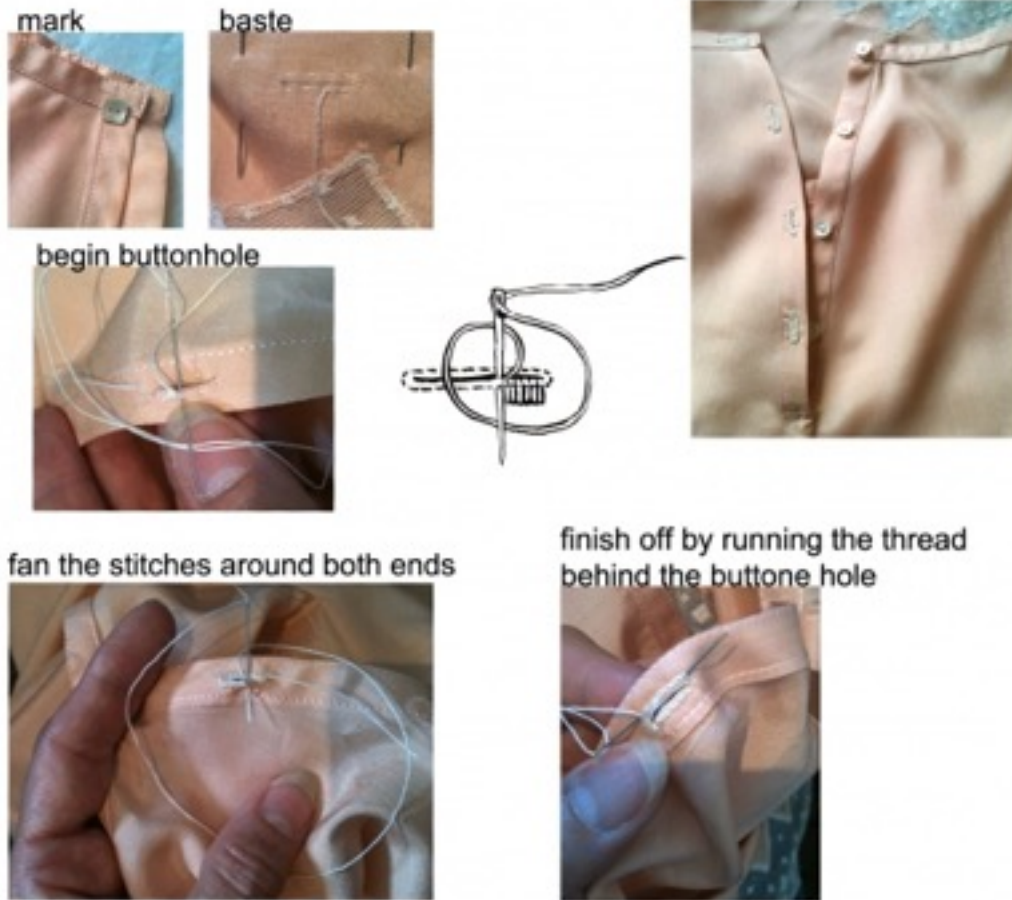


I do have a few tips that may help regardless of sewing direction:

- Waxing the thread definitely helps keep it from knotting.
- On such thin fabric I didn’t over-cast the cut edges first- I did a sample and the result was lumpy.
- Beware the use of Fray-check. It often marks light coloured fabric. I stay away from the stuff in general.

ՏԵՎ ՄԵՐԱՄԵՄՆՍ®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

I sewed a ‘fan’ of stitches at both ends of the holes (my fans still need improving so the stitches don’t bunch up on each other on the hole edge) since it isn’t a tailored buttonhole but a small so-called ‘worked’ buttonhole- so to do the bar at one end like many instructions show just looked like over-kill to me. The beautifully made vintage lingerie photo next page is done with fanning of the



stitches at both ends too. This photo shows my steps... the line illustration is the direction most books show it should be done... but I’m working in the opposite direction. Go figure! I may do a special buttonhole post at a later date when I finally figure out if it makes much difference which direct it gets done in. Best way , as I said, was to just practice. I was going quite quickly by the last one and have at least overcome over my fear that hand made buttonholes are just too much trouble. They do have their moments!

SEW VERA VENUS®
“A modern make on vintage style”
VeraVenus.com

This is an example of hand buttonhole and thread loops from a 1930's pair of lounging pyjama bottoms. Everything on them is done by hand... french seams lace appliqué and all.

Loops like these are simply a double thread loop with buttonhole stitches worked tightly over it from one end to the other. Sometimes I do one at the top of a knicker waistband so that will button and then sew poppers down the placket. Quite small flat ones can be made for hooks to hook into if you don't want to use the metal bar. I've sort of raced through the various closings having realised they practically need a tutorial to themselves...

And that brings this tutorial to the end. I hope you find it useful.

You can drop me a [line](#) any time with comments or questions on this tutorial.

HAPPY KNICKER MAKING

-Jeanne



By the way at the link [here](#) to the VV free page you'll find a free knicker pattern in two sizes as well as a pdf drafting tutorial for how to draft a pattern to your own measurements.