

# Jabots and Bertha Collars Add Era Flair to Modern Dresses

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When looking at women's afternoon and evening wear of the Model A era, you'll notice all sorts of drapes, flounces, ruffles, ties and streamers that you generally don't see in modern clothing. This can be a bit perplexing when trying to recreate an era look. How do you achieve this without the work of sewing an entire garment? Try adding a jabot or bertha collar to your modern dress.

## Jabots

As defined by the MAFCA Fashion Guidelines, "Jabot (*zha-boe*): A pleated frill of lace or cloth attached down the front of a woman's blouse or dress." Historically, men have worn jabots for a few hundred years before being adopted by women in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jabots were popular during the Model A era and well beyond, for spiffing up an afternoon or evening blouse or dress.



A rule of thumb is the jabot is at least as nice as the fabric in the main garment. It is an embellishing flourish.

Some jabots were sewn to the neckline or collar of a dress, while others were separate pieces pinned to the neckline, usually, but not always at the center. Jabots could be made of the same fabric as the garment, and could be printed or solid material. Whether they were streamlined or heavily ruffled, jabots were usually angular, often coming to a point at the bottom.

The July '28 *Delineator* describes this Butterick dress pattern as having a diagonal slot to insert a fashionable scarf to act as a jabot.



This Butterick pattern, also featured in the July '28 *Delineator* states, "The ripple of the jabot across the front and down the left side gives this simple frock the formality required of afternoon clothes."

Below left is a dress from the Montgomery Ward Catalog Fall/Winter 1929 – 30, with a very fancy lace collar and matching jabot.

In the photograph below right are a couple of my estate sale finds. The fancy lace jabot looks similar to the one on the red dress, but is probably earlier than the Model A years of 1928 – 1931. It is completely hand made and unlikely to have been made for mass purchase.



The jabot with the cameo pin is also hand made, but is more modern looking. Many jabots look like fancy handkerchiefs folded and pinned to the bodice front. Before you pin, remember that pins leave holes that often cannot be repaired.

In the photo at near right is a modern dress with a triangular bertha collar. The small amount of vertical gathers I put in the collar near the neckline created a slight jabot-shaped drape that added a hint of “vintage.” Pinning on the jabot, far right, really cranked up the vintage look.



### Bertha Collars

Bertha collars, also known as “cape collars,” are cape like overlays that attach at a dress’s neckline and extend over the shoulders. Often of voile, organdie, lightweight silk or very sheer cotton, bertha collars add a flutter of movement to an afternoon or evening frock. Sleeveless dresses often had bertha collars that gave them, “the satisfactory feeling of sleeves without any of their discomfort for warm days,” according to *Modern Pricilla*, July 1929. In other words, the wearer gets to hide some skin in comfort and add a bit of graceful movement.



Here are some dresses with bertha or cape collars from the MAFCA Fashion Guidelines with a variety of hem treatments:



Bertha collars weren't limited to sleeveless dresses as shown in the dress below right, from Montgomery Ward Catalog, F/W 1929-30. Nor were the necklines of bertha collars always symmetrical as in below left, from Modern Pricilla, 1929.



Following is my bertha collar addition. Photo below left is my modern dress with the plain short sleeves removed and armholes finished with hem tape. At right is the “collar” made with Simplicity pattern #3921 MISSES’ BOLEROS AND CAPELETS WITH TRIM VARIATIONS, 2011. Notice the loops fastened to both sides of the neckline that hook onto a small button sewn to the center front of the dress neckline. This way the collar stays in place and looks more authentic.



At left is the completed dress with the sheer bertha collar in place and added ribbon belt.

Perhaps you’re asking yourself, “where did the bertha collar fabric come from?” When I bought the used modern dress on a large online auction site, I found a **second** dress which supplied ample fabric. Another option was to buy solid black sheer fabric that matched the texture and weight of the dress. In that case I would’ve inserted a solid black tier between the two printed tiers at the hem to unify the design.

The next time you want to amp up your modern dress for a Model A banquet or afternoon tea, try adding a fancy jabot or bertha collar and get ready to receive compliments.

Reference Material:

- ❖ MAFCA Fashion Guidelines, 2015 ed.
- ❖ Simplicity Pattern Co. 2011
- ❖ Delineator, July 1928, The Butterick Publishing Co.
- ❖ Modern Priscilla, July 1929, the Priscilla Co.
- ❖ Modern Priscilla, November, 1929
- ❖ Montgomery Ward & Co, Fall & Winter, 1929-30
- ❖ Art Needlework, Fall & Winter, 1930-31, Frederick Herrschner Co.
- ❖ M.W. Savage Co. Spring & Summer 1931

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