

# A perfect day for mother-of-pearl buttons

Endearing documentary-cum-comedy straddles the line between friendship and street-smart philosophy

By Julio Nakamurakare  
Herald staff

## FILM REVIEW

Even before it begins to unfold, there's two or three things about the film *Cracks de nácar* that strike viewers as mesmerizingly beautiful if somewhat odd. The epigram that follows the title, though not without a modicum of charming wit, does not help clarify matters: "Some buttons, since the moment of inception, are destined to end up as button clothes. Only a few are born to shine on a soccer pitch."



Mother-of-pearl-buttons, decades ago seen on everyday clothing items from shirts to dresses and overcoats, are a rarity these days, replaced by plastic, more affordable replicas. Original mother-of-pearl buttons may be found on true vintage garments, and when missing or broken they are replaced with similar plastic buttons, but the real thing is almost never found in the market.

Haberdashers, the *barrio* type, are by far the easiest solution when it comes to replacing a missing button, but snapping up a "twin" button

is as infrequent as striking oil in your backyard.

The new film *Cracks de nácar*, which premieres today at handful of theatres in Argentina after a few screenings at the BAFICI festival in 2011, is the kind of mother-of-pearl button your grandma or auntie may have been trying for years to find a replacement for before settling for a cheap, plastic substitute. The "cracks" in the title are neither crevices nor a reference to illegal substances: it's an allusion to soccer champs. Are soccer champs made of mother of pearl? It's a hardly contestable assertion which may prove right, but the material normally associated with outstanding players is gold — guffaws would have been inevitable if organizers had come up with the idea of awarding mother-of-pearl balloons to outstanding soccer players.

Associations with soccer are not out of place when discussing *Cracks de nácar*, because the movie deals with a scarcely-known hobby-addiction: table football (sort of) played with buttons standing for players.

The table, of course, stands for the soccer field, and two cardboard contraptions stand for the goals at each end. The button-players, need we say this, are not autonomous, however great the footballers they are named after. The button players are manipulated by table football practitioners, one or two a-side.

Now that things are, hopefully, a bit much clearer vocabulary-wise, it's time to delve into the real substance of *Cracks de nácar*, an endearing movie about the game but, above all, about friendship and bonding between two players-collectors who are equally passionate about a good read, good writing (they're both journalists), and, to while away a game's idle moments or to cap off a perfect evening, a shot or two of good whisky.

The two leads in *Cracks de nácar* are rather unlikely and could have never come out of a casting call: film critic Rómulo Berrutti and journalist Alfredo Serra, two revered veterans in their own fields. Now in their 70s but still typing away news reports and reviews, both kick off the ball in *Cracks de nácar*, which plays out like a soccer game from the moment the whistle blows.

Written and directed by Daniel Casabé and Edgardo Dieleke, *Cracks de nácar* is both a game and a biopic, an endearing portrait of two colleagues and friends bound by the same passion, and an analytical piece on what it is that really draws humans closer together.

Thoughtful, humorous and enlightening in its own charming way, *Cracks de nácar* is beautifully constructed as a picture of the present and sweet remembrance of a near past -- not so distant really -- when things were much simpler and you met your friends over a cup of coffee or a

game of billiards or, unknown to many, for a “button football” game, away from computers and cyberspace, where there’s no room for buttons -- only for uncondusive Internet links.

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

*Cracks de nácar*. Argentina, 2011. Written and directed by: Daniel Casabé and Edgardo Dieleke. With: Rómulo Berruti and Alfredo Serra. Cinematography: Alejandro Petrecco. Editing: Andrés P. Estrada and Daniel Casabé. Distributed by: Ají Molido Films. NR. Running time: 80 minutes.

### **WHERE & WHEN**

— From February 7: Cine Gaumont, Rivadavia 1635 (at 12.20 noon and 8.45pm). Arte Cinema, Salta 1620 (at 3.35pm and 7.50pm).

— From February 14: Malba, Ave. Figueroa Alcorta 3415 (every Thursday at 8pm).