



THOMAS MASON®

FOUNDED 1795

BELTON LANCASHIRE ENGLAND

ASCOT CHANG

A GENTLEMAN'S SHIRTMAKER



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For the 3rd volume in our series focusing on key Thomas Mason customers, we moved this time from England over to Hong Kong; the home of one of Thomas Mason's oldest customers. Named as "The Best of the Best" by the Robb Report; the highly acclaimed bespoke shirtmaker: Ascot Chang.

In the words of Johnny Chang "East meets West" has never been more true than in 2013. However the great collaboration between Ascot Chang and Thomas Mason dates back to the time that Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the British throne in the mid-20th Century.

Perhaps to mark this 60 year "Diamond Jubilee" (Ascot Chang was founded in 1953) my cousin Silvio was delighted to speak with three generations of the Ascot Chang family, for an insightful past, present, and future perspective into a world of craftsmanship and elegance.

Hope you will be inspired!

FABIO ALBINI
CREATIVE DIRECTOR




AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

The Chang Family:

Johnny, Tony, Lincoln and Justin

Management family of the Hong Kong brand Ascot Chang.

Dr Silvio Albini,

President and in the 5th family generation of leadership

of the Albini Group.



SIXTY YEARS OF VERY STYLISH HISTORY SINCE 1953

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

DR SILVIO ALBINI So already sixty years of very stylish history since 1953 when a young bespoke tailor from Shanghai, with the equivalent of just 10 US dollars in his pocket, followed his dream to found the eponymous “Ascot Chang” brand in Hong Kong. Today managing the successful International firm are Ascot’s brother Johnny, his son Tony, joined by nephew Lincoln and grandson Justin from the 3rd family generation. At Albini Group we are also very proud to be a family company, with again four of us, from the 5th generation, leading the firm, with Silvio, Fabio, Andrea and Stefano. It’s good to see that in 2013 our companies are still run by the family?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Absolutely. We feel that in our business, the family offers the continuity needed to uphold our values in quality. Also, as we are in the fashion business, the younger generations give us new ideas and bring new energy to the company. I am sure that it is the same with Albini?

DR SILVIO ALBINI Yes it certainly is. Tony, anything you wish to add?

MR TONY CHANG The Albini family and the Ascot Chang family share the same fundamental family values. While individual members bring different expertise to the business, our family heritage brings us together in pursuit of a common goal. Most important is that all members share the same passion for the business in following the footsteps of my father, Ascot Chang. Each member must do their utmost to bring value to the business and to grow the brand. We are extremely happy to be working with the Albini family. We often think on the same wavelength; decisions can be made swiftly to the benefit of both companies and our business and personal relationships grow stronger as a result.



THE ALBINI FAMILY (FROM LEFT: ANDREA, FABIO, SILVIO AND STEFANO)

DR SILVIO ALBINI Albini Group has family members in different areas of the company and everyone is specialised and very passionate about his own particular field of interest.
Is it the same also for Ascot Chang?



THE CHANG FAMILY (FROM LEFT: LINCOLN, JOHNNY, TONY AND JUSTIN)

MR JOHNNY CHANG Yes it is very much the same. When I first joined the company, my brother Ascot dedicated himself completely to shirt making. He spent many sleepless nights solving fitting and cutting problems for our customers and his shirts were loved by customers all over the world. With the guidance and trust from my brother, I dedicated my energy and interest to sales and marketing. I was also in charge of sourcing top quality fabrics from Europe.



OUR FIRST OVERSEAS ASCOT CHANG STORE - IN NEW YORK

MR JOHNNY CHANG My nephew Tony joined the company in 1977 and he has further strengthened our brand through international expansion. Tony opened our first overseas Ascot Chang store in New York, and then later in Beverly Hills and Manila. In 2006, he introduced an updated store design that provides a luxurious and elegant atmosphere for our clients. This design is now the blueprint for all of our Ascot Chang stores worldwide. Recently, his focus is more on our China expansion; he brought us back to our roots by opening in Shanghai, and later in Beijing, Hangzhou and Suzhou. Tony is also in charge of our product development and has expanded our ready-to-wear selection. We now carry a full range of suits, jackets, trousers, shirts, sweaters and polos in our stores.



A CURRENT HONG KONG STORE
IN THE ELEMENTS SHOPPING MALL



THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE
OF ASCOT CHANG:
“MY CUSTOMERS SELECT THEIR OWN STYLE.
I GIVE THE STYLE SUBSTANCE.”



THE PATTERN ROOM - A MONUMENT TO THE INDIVIDUAL - THE HEART OF OUR COMPANY



“TO BE FOCUSED ON BRINGING A YOUNGER CUSTOMER INTO ASCOT CHANG”



STILL GOING STRONG AND ALSO NOW OFFERING A TOTAL LOOK

DR SILVIO ALBINI At Albini, my own generation was delighted in 1992 to acquire two historic English brands: Thomas Mason (1796) and David & John Anderson (1822) who for decades had already been suppliers of fine cotton shirtings to Ascot Chang. Which particular new aspects have the younger generation at Ascot Chang brought to the company? We know, for example, that Justin is very focused on digital topics and I have noticed with pleasure that our two brands are often linked in the mind of the customer when you Google them!

MR JOHNNY CHANG I am glad that both Lincoln and Justin love what they are doing. They have focused on bringing a younger customer into Ascot Chang. This is an important job because the young people today are very style and fashion conscious. As a bespoke house, we have to make sure that we can satisfy their demands. New customers are the lifeblood of our business and we have to continuously evolve to make sure that we are keeping up with the market.

Communication is a big part of this and nowadays, with the wide range of social media and internet platforms available... I leave that to Lincoln and Justin!



MR ASCOT CHANG - FOUNDER

ASCOT CHANG FOLLOWS HIS DREAM

DR SILVIO ALBINI Can you tell our readers something of the history of Ascot Chang?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Yes of course. In 1937, while only 14 years old, Ascot began his apprenticeship in China under a master shirtmaker. At the time Shanghai was the pinnacle of continental style and culture, and Ascot was influenced by some of the world's best tailors, from Italy to Russia to Savile Row. Following the dream of creating his own company, Ascot came to Hong Kong in 1949 with, as you mentioned, just 10 US dollars in his pocket, but rich in his own unique expertise. He later established the first Ascot Chang shop in 1953 at 34 Kimberley Road.

Over the years he became renowned for his exacting attention to workmanship, detail and fit.

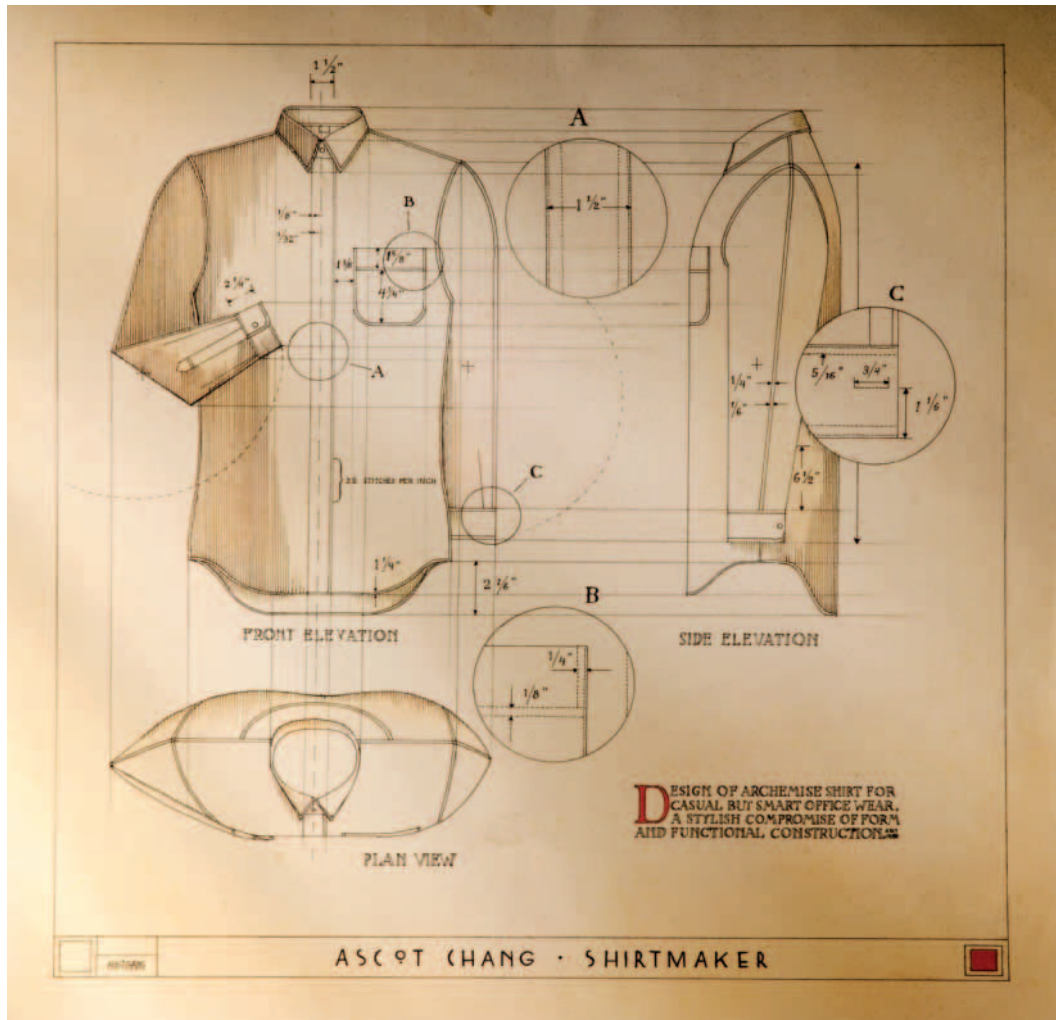
Ascot lived through the heydays of Shanghai and witnessed the transformation of Hong Kong from an industrial city to a world financial centre. You could say that our company has lived through the time of East meeting West.



“AT THE TIME SHANGHAI WAS THE PINNACLE OF CONTINENTAL STYLE AND CULTURE.”



“YOU COULD SAY THAT OUR COMPANY HAS LIVED THROUGH THE TIME OF EAST MEETS WEST.”



THE “BLUEPRINT” OF ASCOT CHANG PHILOSOPHY - WORKMANSHIP, DETAIL AND FIT

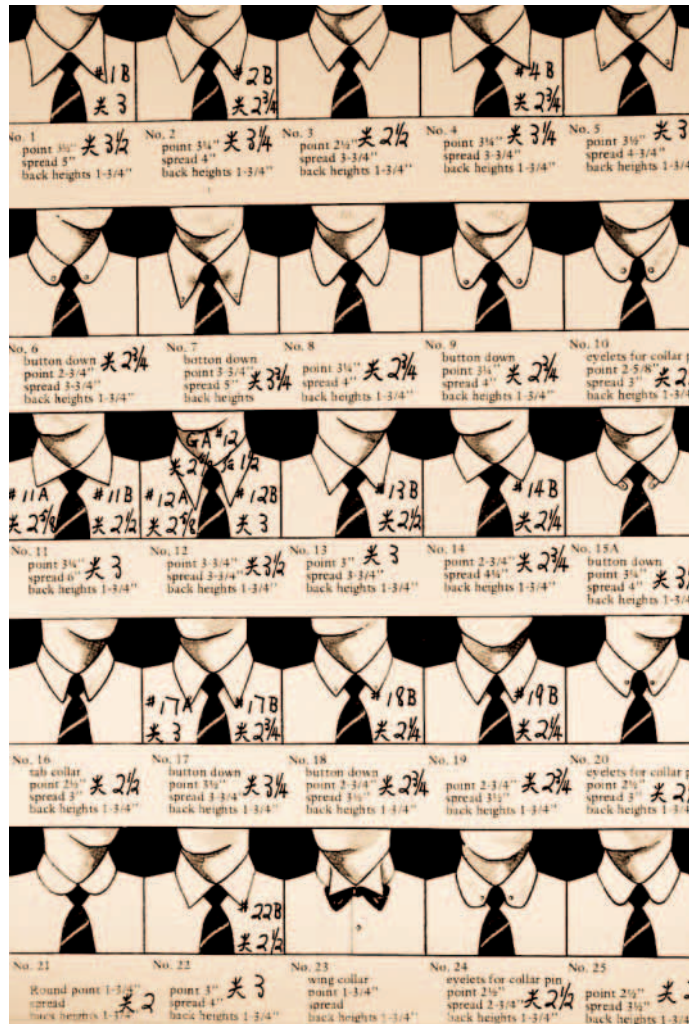
DR SILVIO ALBINI Considering this period, what were the biggest changes about the style in the shirt world?

MR JOHNNY CHANG We have found that shirt styles tend to follow a cycle that usually lasts around 10 - 15 years. I remember in the late 1950s when we first started, collars were small and the body fit was relatively loose. In the late 1960s, early 1970s, collars became larger and the fit became slim. We even made collars that had 5” (12.7 cms) collar points in colourful prints! Later the shirt fit became loose again and so forth. Over the last 5 years, shirt collars have gotten smaller again, and our younger customers want shirts that fit tightly around the body.

Fabrics also follow similar trends and the demand for very bold stripes, checks and prints was at its strongest during the 1960s and 1970s. Naturally, we embraced these designs and this colourful style has remained our signature ever since. Of course, there is always an unlimited demand for the classic colours and patterns, especially in more austere periods of history.

DR SILVIO ALBINI What would you consider to be the best fabric for a Gentleman of Hong Kong?

MR JOHNNY CHANG We carry a great variety of fabrics to satisfy our customers’ tastes: from Thomas Mason’s fancy and flamboyant stripes, checks and tartans, to DJA’s classic cotton poplins, and so much more. Since Hong Kong has a tropical climate, lightweight poplins in 2/100’s to 2/140’s, Zephyr and Voile have always been popular.



ASCOT CHANG'S EARLIEST COLLAR STYLES -
SOME ARE STILL IN USE TODAY

DR SILVIO ALBINI Coming back to shirts; does a style of Hong Kong and a Chinese style exist? What is the difference?
Does Hong Kong feel the effects of English colonial influences in terms of style?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Hong Kong is a melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures and we've been fortunate enough to see all different kinds of shirts: English shirts with stiff spread collars and long shirt-tails; Italian shirts with soft spread collars, high armholes and tapered bodies; U.S. shirts with soft button-down collars and loose bodies. We've even made Chinese-style shirts with a mandarin collar or high band collar.

The shirts that we make for customers now tend to take different elements from these traditional shirt styles and mix them together. For example, we just made a shirt for a customer with an extra high mandarin collar, a tuxedo front and a stud buttonhole at the collar. He wanted to wear it under a black Nehru collar suit. It was an Asian inspired black tie and the whole look turned out very well!

DR SILVIO ALBINI So what could be the differences between Hong Kong style and English style?

MR JOHNNY CHANG It is hard to differentiate since most of our Hong Kong Chinese customers are westernised. One point of differentiation is that the English are bolder with their choices and can accept colourful stripes or checks. Naturally, the Thomas Mason Silverline range is one of their first choices due to the variety of colour and design.



DR SILVIO ALBINI An important part of your business is linked also to bespoke shirts: what are the key features of an Ascot Chang bespoke shirt?

MR TONY CHANG We have always insisted on maintaining our traditional manufacturing techniques: 20-22 stitches per inch, depending on the fabric, single-needle French seams, and pattern matching at the shirt front, shoulders, collar and even sleeve placket. These features ensure that our shirts have straight and clean seams with minimal puckering for a smooth, structured look.

For customers who demand more, we also have a handstitched option where seams are finished by hand, buttonholes are made by hand and buttons are hand sewn. These shirts have over 2500 stitches that are done by hand, resulting in a “one of a kind” shirt. We especially recommend hand-stitching for high yarn count fabrics. Due to the high thread density of certain ultra-luxe fabrics such as the DJA Cullinan or Millennium Star, hand-finished seams allow us to have a greater degree of control when sewing, resulting in smoother seams at the sleeves, waist and hem.

Above all, the defining factor of our bespoke shirts is the fit. This is our expertise and we can do just about anything the customer requests. As long as the customer has the requirement or idea, we will do our best to make it happen. The founding principle of Ascot Chang was “My customers select their own style. I give the style substance”.



DR SILVIO ALBINI What is the most unusual request you have ever received about a bespoke shirt?

MR JOHNNY CHANG We made a shirt for a famous musician once and we had to make a button hole at the back of his shirt, around waist height, so that he could thread his microphone wire through his shirt. We've also done "hidden" mobile phone pockets underneath the armhole on the side of the shirt. When the customer had his arms down, you couldn't see the phone. We made a shirt for a customer once using four Hermes silk scarves. We even managed to match the pattern of the print across the front of the shirt!



60 YEARS ON - A “DIAMOND” COLLABORATION

DR SILVIO ALBINI How did the collaboration between Ascot Chang and Thomas Mason start? What is the most important aspect in choosing our fabrics?

MR JOHNNY CHANG We started buying fabric from Thomas Mason in the 1950s when we started our business. Thomas Mason already had a wonderful reputation for quality and so naturally, we worked with them extensively. At the time, the “Silver” quality 2/100’s poplin was one of our best sellers, and that remains true today.

MR TONY CHANG When Albini took over Thomas Mason in 1991 to 1992, we were immediately impressed that Albini took great care in preserving the history and heritage of Thomas Mason. Albini was able to reproduce the different qualities that we were used to buying from both Thomas Mason and DJA, which meant a great deal to us and our customers. The transition was seamless. Moreover, Albini was able to improve on the quality consistency while delivering goods on-time. We were extremely happy about that!

DR SILVIO ALBINI And what about the fabric choice for a bespoke shirt? Do your customers ask for a “generic fabric” or maybe they ask for a Thomas Mason/DJA fabric?

MR TONY CHANG Actually we’ve been carrying the Thomas Mason and DJA books since their inception, Silverline and DJA since at least the 1970s and 1980s - long before the Albini ownership, and Thomas Mason Goldline since 1996; so our customers already know these books by heart. The synergy between our brands brings the best of both worlds to our customers. We’ve also had some interesting requests for fabrics. We had a customer once who loved Thomas Mason’s plaids (tartans) so much that he once picked out 20 plaids, and had 10 to 20 shirts made in each one! We had to specially order piece cuts from you, just for his order. Over the years this customer has ordered more than 800 of Thomas Mason’s plaid shirts.





“... ALBINI TOOK GREAT CARE IN PRESERVING THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF THOMAS MASON”

DR SILVIO ALBINI Thank you Tony, for us it is extremely important to preserve the heritage of such important brands as Thomas Mason and DJA. Talking about this theme, we are carrying on a great project together for next season; developing some fabrics exclusively for Ascot Chang starting from the original designs of the 70's and 80's realised by Thomas Mason in Lancashire and jealously maintained in our archive. I think this is a wonderful idea!

MR TONY CHANG Yes, we had this lovely idea together with your creative team and I think it is very important to remember the historical designs, giving them a new life.

In particular we decided to focus on 2/140's fabrics, which are my favorites, perfect also for the Hong Kong climate, as explained Johnny before.

In terms of style, the fabrics are vintage Ascot Chang with a twist: they are colourful classics while remaining elegant at the same time. This project is possible thanks to the Thomas Mason archive, which is always a source of inspiration for you and for customers like us. In this case, we started the project from a selection of fabrics that we had ordered in the 1970s, and then further developed additional colourways and accents to suit the modern wardrobe. We couldn't have done it without your Thomas Mason archive! I was in awe when I first saw the archive during my last visit to your headquarters in Albino... 700 books dating back to the XIX century, incredible! We consider them so important that we also asked to display one of them at our brand exhibition in the Landmark shopping mall, in 2011. I remember you brought it directly in your hand luggage from Italy, to be 100% sure that no one could steal or damage it.

DR SILVIO ALBINI Yes, nice company during the 12 hours flight!



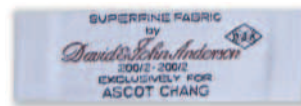
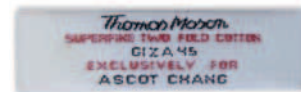
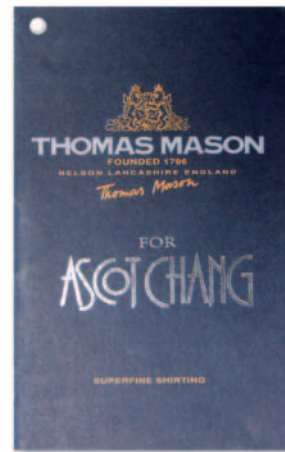
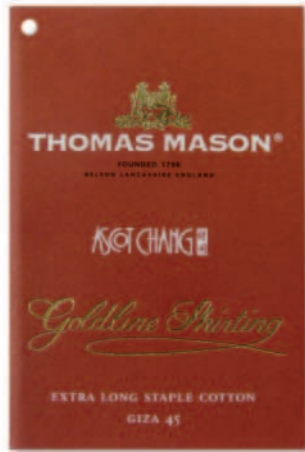
DR SILVIO ALBINI The event in Landmark in 2011 you just quoted was very important for our companies. Ascot Chang highlighted also the importance of the quality and creativity of our fabrics. On that occasion, besides Ascot Chang shirts, the best raw materials in the world and 19th Century archive book of Thomas Mason were exhibited. Albin Group realises its fabrics thanks to quality and heritage, combined with innovation. Is it important for you and your customer to know it?

MR TONY CHANG A high quality shirt must consist of two things: high quality craftsmanship, and top quality fabric. When working with your fabrics, we know that we can focus our concentration on the cutting and making...because the fabric quality is already taken care of!

However, we realise that our customers, especially new customers, may not know this without trying a shirt for themselves. We feel that we must share with each one of them your brand history and fabric making process. Behind each step in the process, lies an amazing amount of research, testing and planning. Especially with fabrics such as the 3/300's Millennium Star and 2/300's Cullinan, these are technological innovations that need to be highlighted to everyone!



2011 LANDMARK EVENT - HONG KONG



DR SILVIO ALBINI Selling your products you often use a co-branding both on the fabric presentation (e.g. Goldline bunches) and on shirts (e.g. personalised Ascot Chang + TM/DJA label or hangtag)... Can we consider it a win-win relationship?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Absolutely. The shirt is a garment that customers wear next to their body. When worn day-in day-out, even the slightest change to the fabric construction can be felt...not just in terms of yarn count, but also the composition of the fabric. That is why our customers, who have tried Thomas Mason or DJA fabrics, will always come back and ask for them by name. Once they find something they like, it is hard for them to switch to something else. Every day, we have customers who come in and ask for your fabrics by name and they even un-tuck their shirts to show us the Thomas Mason or DJA labels at the tail!

DR SILVIO ALBINI We know you created also some ties with Thomas Mason fabrics. It's very interesting to know our fabrics are sometimes used in different ways. Who had this idea inside your company?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Actually, this was something that our customers often used to do in the 1960s and 1970s. They would order shirts, and then order matching ties in the same fabrics. This practice fell out of popularity in the 1990s, but when our designer, Mr. Michael Macko, heard of this, he decided to give it a try for the collection. Maybe we will re-introduce this trend today! We also offer matching bow ties and handkerchiefs. We often make pyjamas, boxer shorts and robes as well with shirting fabrics.





“I ASKED SILVIO A TECHNICAL QUESTION ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EGYPTIAN GIZA COTTON AND SEA ISLAND COTTON. HE EXPLAINED WITH SUCH DETAIL...”

DR SILVIO ALBINI Can you tell us some anecdotes/curious insights about the relationship between our companies?

MR TONY CHANG One time at dinner, I asked you Silvio a technical question about the differences between Egyptian Giza cotton and Sea Island cotton. I remember that you explained with such detail, it was as if we were attending a lecture in University! Lincoln and Justin were impressed and learnt not just the technical details, but also were able to see why you have been so successful in your field.



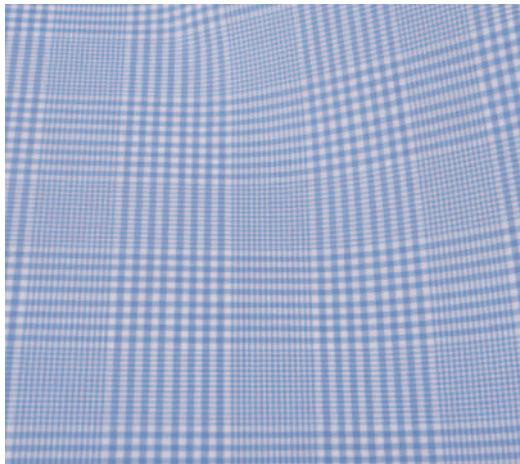
ALBINI GROUP COTTON FIELDS



CULLINAN



BUCKINGHAM



ROYAL TWILL



REGENT CHECK

OTHER CURIOSITIES

DR SILVIO ALBINI I always think that rather like different individuals that each fabric possesses its own characteristic personality. If you each should choose a fabric for a shirt, which one would it be?

MR JOHNNY CHANG For me, the 2/300's Cullinan. Silvio, I remember when you kindly gave me a cut of this fabric when you were still trialing it and thinking "This is incredible!" It feels so light, has a very silky hand feel and yet, retains a good body. I don't have many in my closet but I always look forward to the days where I wear those shirts.

MR TONY CHANG The 2/140's Buckingham. I love the soft touch, and yet like the finest poplins, it still has crispness and body. The best part is that it still feels like new, even after many washes. That is why so many of our customers come back and ask for this quality.

MR LINCOLN CHANG My choice is the Silverline Royal Twill. You can't wear it out! It gets more comfortable with every wash, and it doesn't lose its shape.

MR JUSTIN CHANG Lately I've been wearing my Regent Check shirt more and more. It takes a while to break in because the yarns are so compact, but once you do, it just gets better. Great colours and design as well.



PETER SELLERS



MARLON BRANDO



RICHARD NIXON



KIRK DOUGLAS



ALEXANDER HAIG

A GENTLEMAN'S SHIRTMAKER

DR SILVIO ALBINI We know Ascot Chang products attracted a distinguished clientele including George Bush, Nicolas Sarkozy, Paul Anka. Do other famous people want to realise their bespoke shirts with your company?

MR JOHNNY CHANG Yes, we have had the good fortune of serving quite a number of famous customers. Performers and artists such as Sammy Davis Jr., Marlon Brando, Steve McQueen, Peter Sellers, Andy Williams, Sir Douglas Fairbanks, Kirk Douglas, John Woo and Andy Lau to name a few. We are also proud to have served a number of world leaders such as President George Bush Sr., President Nicolas Sarkozy, Prime Minister Taro Aso, Timothy Geithner and Alexander Haig. Last but not least, you probably know Silvio Albini, one of our most important customers. Every time he visits us in Hong Kong he orders some shirts... of course with Thomas Mason or David & John Anderson fabrics!

DR SILVIO ALBINI What I can say, however, is that at Ascot Chang "you always go the extra mile" for your bespoke Customers. And though you are a great distance away from us, the road is never long that leads to a friend's house.



GEORGE BUSH

DR SILVIO ALBINI Can you tell us any inside story about your famous clients?
Are we too indiscreet?



MR JOHNNY CHANG When President George H. Bush was still Vice-President, he had a 24 hour visit to Hong Kong. His secretary called in advance to make an appointment with us, and we went up to his Presidential suite to measure him for the first time. He was extremely friendly and wore our shirt in his first Presidential election. He remains our customer today!



“IF YOU MEET A MAN THAT WEARS AN ASCOT CHANG SHIRT, MARRY HIM!”

DR SILVIO ALBINI Once a NY Zagat reviewer exclaimed: “If you meet a man that wears an Ascot Chang shirt, marry him!”

What kind of appeal has a man with an AC shirt?

MR TONY CHANG We’re very appreciative of the customer who said that about us, because that phrase has gotten us quite a lot of attention! It’s also true!

MR JOHNNY CHANG The one trait that I have found in all my customers is that they are all self-confident individuals. Our customers know exactly what they want and come to us because they want something made to their specifications.

We work with some very discerning customers, but as my brother Ascot always used to say:

“Demanding customers are the best customers, because once you can satisfy them, they will always come back!”

Graphic Design GRITTI MORLACCHI & SCHIRMER *Milano*

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