

arbiter

ELEGANTIARUM



Silvio Albini
QUALITY
absolute value

*Milano Unica
lands in Shanghai,
queen of the Far East*

*The best fabrics are
exclusively made in Italy*

*Arbiter, since 1934
the cultivation of taste*



WE ARE THE HISTORY

The magazine of man's lifestyle was launched in 1934. It collected tailors' opinions and was the keeper of bespoke values. It had to surrender in front of the war and prêt-à-porter, but every time it came back, stronger than ever. Till the present, when Arbiter Elegantiarum reaches China, celebrating Italian know-how

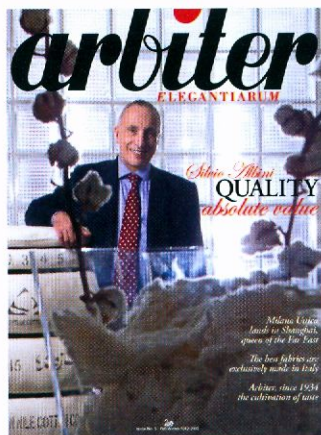
by **Valentina Ceriani**

When neither internet nor television existed, and magazines had difficulties in being published, man had anyway the exigency of being informed, knowing, grasping what was happening around him. Of exploring that world, able at the beginning of 1930s to give him certainties and immediately after take them away. A certainty was the suit, protagonist of man's wardrobe, unrivalled garment of everyday life: a garment getting the value of ceremony suit on Sundays, and living during the week the reality of not needing the right occasion to be worn. Hence it was one of those good habits asking not to be forgotten. It was the fashion of that time, where the pure difference was made by the suit making, not by the new collection of the it-designer. When tailoring was the link of all, detail was really important, the element turning a suit into the top of elegance just for the lucky few, or a garment for all. *Arbiter Elegantiarum*, the "magazine of man's life", defined the boundaries between the two, explaining the reasons of a choice and revealing secrets. It was 1934, Società Anonima L'Editrice, located in Milan, commissioned the restyling of the magazine *Lui* to Gino Magnani and Mario Soresina, launching a new magazine with a Latin name.

Arbiter of fashion was defined Petronius at Nero's court, described by Tacitus in his *Annals* as a cultivated and refined man, master of style and refined behaviours. The

rest is history, and the story of a man with taste, an aesthete naturally loving the beautiful. He has an inborn elegance, hence he wears with confidence and self-assurance, without showing off even the most extravagant of details. Such a man has a reference magazine: *Arbiter*. Being launched in the period when Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party enjoyed the apex of its success, the magazine was stopped in 1942 (world war 2) to come back in 1948, once again keeper of man's vanity, once again witness of the made-to-measure world, once again tool of the élite turning the excellence of wearing into their own ideal. Fashion plates, sketches, texts became the voice of tailors, and in fact *Arbiter* organized Sanremo Festival of Man's Wear with editor Michelangelo Testa and the support of some entrepreneurs of Biella. It was 1952. The couple wool mill-tailoring was the winner, before the manufacturers had the upper hand. It was a guide to elegance, the introduction of the best fabrics, a support to enterprises. Then

it was the time of designers – Giorgio Armani, Valentino, Gianfranco Ferré. Prêt-à-porter, industrial marketing: the limelight went on for the fashion system. And *Arbiter* began to lose its grasp, then its tailors and many readers. Being bought by Rusconi publisher wasn't enough: the magazine was closed in 1983, and in the same time *Piacere* was launched. We must reach 2011 to listen again to the tailors' voice, that is the voice of those making the real made in Italy, to study again the virtues of bespoke tailoring, to



GENERATIONS TO COMPARE

Above, the cover of Arbiter Elegantiarum new issue is consecrated to Silvio Albini, made-in-Italy ambassador in Shanghai for the second edition of Milano Unica in China. Right, a cover of the Thirties: elegance and balance of the images are noteworthy, with the man perfect in his tuxedo and the lady in a long dress with pleated insets. It could be a cover of today.

Business leader



**THE CHAIRMAN
OF VALUES**

*Silvio Albini is
Albini Group chairman,
counting eight
plants in the world, with
1,300 employees
and sales for 121 millions
recorded in 2011.*



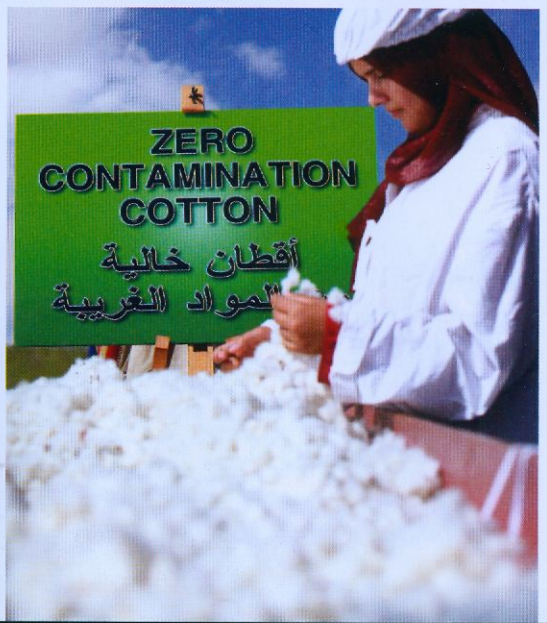
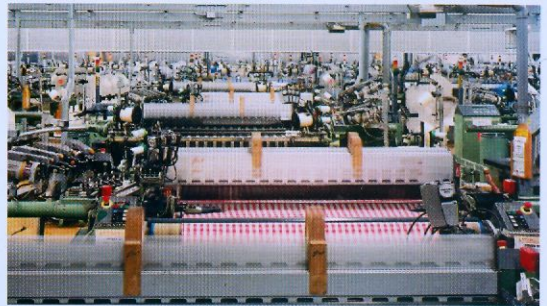
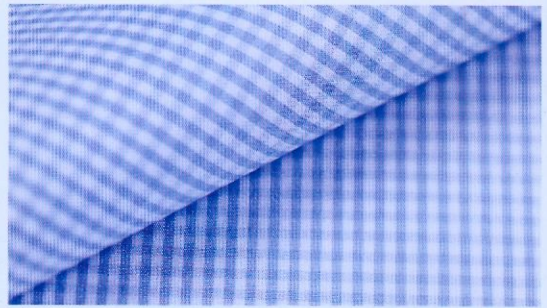
by **Gianluca Tenti**

DRESSING A COTTON DREAM

*Silvio Albini leads the fifth generation
of a family turning shirt fabrics
into their mission of quality. And now
he starts again from spinning*

Passion is here. The noise of machines reveals more than any other language. In Albino, the main town in Val Seriana, Albini Group has been a sound presence since 1876. That is: 136 years of fabrics, the fifth generation of the family represented by Silvio, Fabio, Andrea and Stefano, Albini of course. They control eight plants (five in Italy) with 1,300 employees, and are the main European producers of fabrics for shirts. Five brands (Cotonificio Albini, Thomas Mason, Albiato 1830, David & John Anderson and Albini, donna), 20,000

versions, the absolute excellence as a mission: 70% control of Sea Island (the cotton kind boasting the longest fibre in the world), produced in Barbados and Jamaica, Giza 45 (Egyptian extra-long staple), Giza 87 (Albini exclusivity). "Behind all this there is a family of 13 shareholders, and it's something fundamental for the company. As a matter of fact, many are the families supporting the textile industry in Italy. The secret? Passion and far-sightedness." The group chairman Silvio Albini speaks about this beautiful business experience with pride.



An experience now fulfilling its vertical merging by setting up the direct production of yarns in Nuova Manifattura di Breno, in Ceto (Brescia), with exclusive production lines in partnership with Niggeler & Küpfer group. Silvio Albini speaks in a sober and meaningful way. He reveals data, defines strategies, draws the future. “We stayed in Albino, in Bergamo area, and we do our best to plan here the future of our productions”, he explains among cotton bales: “This area boasted a great textile tradition already in the second half of the 19th century, thanks to the labour force, the devotion of workers and the quality of the product.” This little town just 50 km from Milan has 18,000 inhabitants, and 700 of them work for Albini. Direct heirs of that silk and cotton business before the Industrial Revolution, then opening to cotton. The first in noticing a potential industrial development destined to internationalization in this area were Swiss people coming from St. Gallen and Graubünden. The fruit of this development is still perceivable today. But it wasn't all roses. “In 2008 we felt the crisis”, Silvio Albini says sincerely, “but we reacted, by defending ourselves, by investing. Taking difficult choices which helped in strengthening the family DNA.” A creditable story needs numbers. Hence: from 169 millions of sales in 2007 to 102 in 2009, then improving and rising again, focusing even more on quality: 121 million in 2011, with the export growing during this year (shifted from 67% to 73%). Healthy, encouraging signs, above all if linked with an entrepreneurial culture.

“Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrook* ethics is fundamental, because figures must always balance”, he explains realistically. “Our engagement is focused on work. Also and above all for the future generations. Italian market represents 27% of our sales, but it's important for the expressed quality, even though our



ABSOLUTE QUALITY, PURE ITALIAN HAND

customers – Zegna, Brioni, Loro Piana, Armani and Etro – export most of their finished work. That's why an international scope is fundamental to us. In the last 30 years the world has changed with an incredible rhythm. I started travelling on business because I wanted to help our family company in the marketing area, since I was the only without an engineering degree. It was mid Eighties, and at that time markets were Europe and North America.” Europe, and the main capital: London. “It's so in our business. They wear with a perfect, iconic style. The first great satisfaction for a man loving to

FROM NATURE TO THE SKIN

Above, fabrics classified in Albino seat. Opposite, clockwise from top, cotton harvested in Egypt, dyed Millennium Star fabric in 330/3 thread, the spinning room, the selection of pure material and a step of the fabric ennobling.



WE USE ONLY THE BEST RAW MATERIALS

watch Savile Row windows was purchasing Thomas Mason and David & John Anderson in 1991. We sold to America, but experts kept looking at England. And from there we launched our attack to Hong Kong and Singapore.” And Germany? The core business of textile/wear? “We exported there Italian style, our good taste.” Which is the secret of your success? “We have always looked at quality, at the value of a factory producing beautiful things, at the richness of the native land. That’s the reason why I decided we should be more competitive also in cotton. We looked for the best raw materials. About 15 years

ago the production quality decreased, thus we decided to go back to the origins, to the country producing cotton – Egypt.” And... “And you know? We thought of knowing many things, but we learnt there many more.” Innovating fabrics like Giza 45, the mono thread and the twisted thread that didn’t exist. Innovation is saving us. Research, the attitude of granting the company the proper condition to improve production constantly. Then always going on searching for the best. Even to California, producing Supima, the less polluted cotton at the origin. In that country they work on the seed, studying it. You know? Genetic engineering... And then there’s the linen, covering 5-6% of our sales. Here we buy only the best, the Terre de Lin from Normandy.” Why did you opt for spinning in Italy? “To improve the production chain and for a matter of coherence. We had to do something. Someone thinks we are mad, but in this way we brought back spinning to Italy, thanks to Val Camonica plant. Otherwise, it would have gone away, we would have lost it for ever.” President, let’s talk about ethics. Your story testify your choice of creating a 100% Italian production chain. The direct production of yarns is a precise sign, much more so since it arrives while you are Milano Unica chairman...

“The right way isn’t delocalization. Delocalising you lose the know-how, you turn into traders and no more producers. As for the spinning, we have our production lines in agreement with Niggeler & K upfer, we have chosen the best technicians in Legnano and employed redundant workers from other companies. The aim is to be stronger in Italy: innovating the product, exasperating the quality research, improving our customer service, with exclusive products and quick response.” Which is the cotton preferred by Silvio Albini? “A nice poplin. I like the crispness, and the smooth fabric with a good body. 100/2, 120/2 are okay, even though we produce 300/2 Cullinan and 330/3 Millennium Star.”

GRANTING IDENTITY

Above, the best shirts in the world are manufactured with Albini Group cotton, having exclusive productions in Egypt, Barbados, Jamaica and United States. The top of British style, from Thomas Mason to Anderson, is controlled from the seat in Albino (www.albinigroup.com).