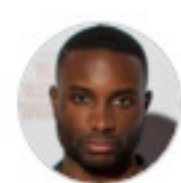


Lifestyle

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Inside The Italian Entity behind the Dress Shirts of Prada, Tom Ford, Saint Laurent and .Zara



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Based in Milan. Soft spot for Made in Italy and emerging markets. [FULL BIO](#) ✓

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“When I just started working, I got to know Gianni Versace. He loved delving into the fabric archives and once said in an interview, that Italian fashion starts in the archives of those who produce silk in Como,” says Silvio Albini, CEO of Italy’s Albini Group. Silvio is part of the Albini family’s fifth generation currently managing the family business, since its 1876 inception. Albini Group is the parent company which oversees five different brands specialized in supplying high quality – predominantly cotton – dress shirt fabrics, to world’s most recognized luxury brands. You’re favorite Ralph Lauren Purple Label cotton dress shirt? Albini Group. That Prada button-up made of Egyptian Giza cotton? Albini Group. That Ermenegildo Zegna cotton wardrobe staple? You guessed it. Add to that list practically every other major player in the world of luxury (menswear) attire, and chances are, the Bergamo-based fabric producer acts as their enabler. The family-owned firm made revenues of €148,5 million over 2015, and celebrated its 140th anniversary this year.



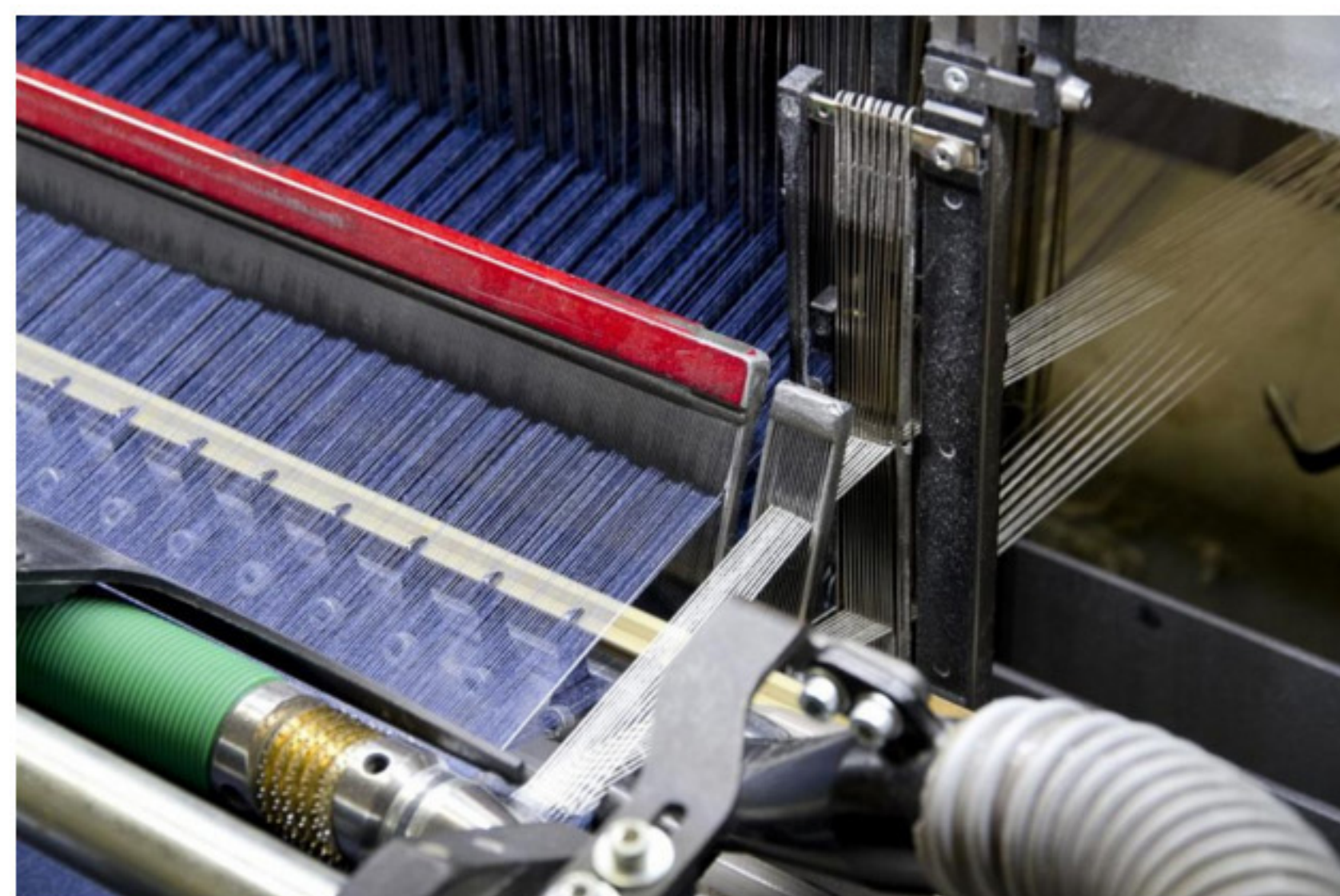
The Albini family’s fifth generation, inside the Albini Group headquarters. From left to right: Stefano, Andrea, Silvio and Fabio Albini. (Photo: Massimo Sestini)

“Many come here (Italy) to study fashion from a design, marketing, or economic perspective. They’re fascinated by it all but don’t always realize that Italian fashion for a big part relies on its fabric industry; it’s the foundation of the technology and design behind a clothing piece,” says Albini Group’s CEO when we sit around a conference table inside the company’s Bergamo headquarters.

Following almost one and a half century in business, Albini Group has a portfolio of clients spread across eighty different countries. 60% Of its business is generated by export. At present, the company’s biggest market is Italy and remaining parts of Europe, in addition to the US. The parent company’s principal brand is Cotonificio Albini, which dedicates itself exclusively to the production of high quality cotton fabrics. And when it comes to sourcing raw materials, the company is known for having a penchant for the extra-long, ultra rare, Egyptian Giza cotton. A cotton type one will find around Egypt’s Nile area, which represents solely 3% of the world’s total cotton resources. In addition to that, the Albini Group owns 100% of the sea cotton production in Barbados.

Besides a client portfolio which includes names such as Dolce & Gabbana, Kiton, Giorgio Armani and Brioni – the company doesn’t snob the world of fast-fashion either. Zara, as well as fellow Inditex brand Massimo Dutti, are loyal takers of Albini cottons. “Fast-fashion has caused a revolution in the world of apparel. They’ve been clever, and I have great respect for groups such as Inditex. It cannot cover the entire world of apparel, but it’s an important part of fashion nonetheless. It has strongly influenced many of the big luxury brands, when it comes to the concept of testing the market to see if something sells or not. This also means that we as a supplier must be able to respond quickly.”

The aforementioned quick response is a current priority inside the company, which over the years has invested heavily in state-of-the-art machinery to meet growing demands. “Quick response has become more important, and so has flexibility. Think of the production for a limited edition item for example. In some cases we need to deliver an order within a one-month time frame. We have about 5000 classic fabrics ready as part of our archives. Then, some of our bigger clients request that we produce them an exclusive fabric, so they can differentiate themselves from their competitors.”



Albini Group’s “tinto in filo” process, in which each yarn is dyed separately, prior to forming a colored fabric. (Photo: Albini Group)

Amongst those big-name clients requesting exclusive Albini fabrics, is Ermenegildo Zegna. The brand which initially started as a supplier of suit fabrics, has successfully evolved into a full-on ready-to-wear clothing brand. A similar model of verticalization has been applied by popular Quarona-based cashmere supplier Loro Piana, currently owned by LVMH. Following the Albini Group’s 1992 acquisition of British fabric brand Thomas Mason, the company is already experimenting with verticalization in the form of ties, swim shorts, pocket squares and scarves. “We decided to verticalize our business through Thomas Mason, since it is a brand quite well-known in the world of bespoke shirts – so there’s a synergy.” Doing the same for Cotonificio Albini, isn’t a top priority at present according to its CEO. “Trough Thomas Mason we offer a small line of accessories which we showcase at the Pitti trade fair in Florence. For Cotonificio Albini, entering the world of ready-to-wear apparel could be interesting, but it’s a very time-consuming task which requires a different type of skillset. It’s on our mind however.”

Nevertheless, a current priority for the 140-year-old company is speaking directly to its final consumer. It is here, where e-commerce comes in. “Right now we’re investing in a new website which will make it possible for clients to purchase our Thomas Mason line of accessories. It will also enable customers to buy our fabrics online, in case their local tailor doesn’t carry them. Everything should be finished by 2017. It is the world of digital in which we see our present, as well as our future.”