

TIMELESSNESS, NOT TRENDINESS

The Finest Fabrics Are Made in Bergamo, Italy

By Arian Jabbary

It was the last day of **Pitti Uomo**, and tradeshow fatigue had set in. Desensitized by three days of menswear pandemonium, I sauntered to my last meeting. At 4:30 p.m. I was slated to meet with Albini Group, the venerable Italian fabric company; I anticipated that the discussion would be no different than the usual brochure regurgitation.

At the booth, a conversation was in progress. Seated on the right was a gentleman clothed in a **modest navy suit**. His fingers were woven softly upon the table before him. Like many style ambassadors from Italy, his appeal was not his suit, but his temperament.

The two men personified the extent to which today's menswear industry is at odds with itself: timeless vs. temporary.

On the left sat a younger twentysomething, also in navy suiting. Below his face rested a plastic yellow lapel flower. His gingham skinny tie was knotted so large that it began encroaching sideways into the collar. A tie bar in the shape of a fishing hook dangled forward as he leaned, indicating it had never been attached to the shirt placket at all. In clear

juxtaposition, the two men personified the internal conflict of today's menswear industry: timeless vs. temporary.

The conversation concluded, and I approached. “Silvio,” the gentleman said, extending a hand. “*Piacere*,” I returned, hoping to make the appropriate salutation to meet his sincerity with a showing of deference. This was Mr. Silvio Albini — fifth generation of the Albini Family and current CEO of the business. We spent the next ten minutes exchanging pleasantries, gracing every possible topic except the [Albini Group](#).

In the way he carried conversation, Mr. Albini showed me something about his family’s business that neither a well-designed brochure nor a product exposition could convey. He revealed the importance of the family DNA in the company’s decision-making process. Passion for the company was synonymous with passion for his family. He emphasized how Albini Group focuses on long-term growth, and he disclosed that the company has complete control of the full production cycle of their fabrics. From the cultivation of the cotton to the finishing touches and quality inspection, when Albini fabric leaves their facilities, it has only been graced by Albini employees’ hands. Under this model, Albini Group has full discretion in optimizing their processes in-house, and they consistently experiment with new technologies and methodologies.

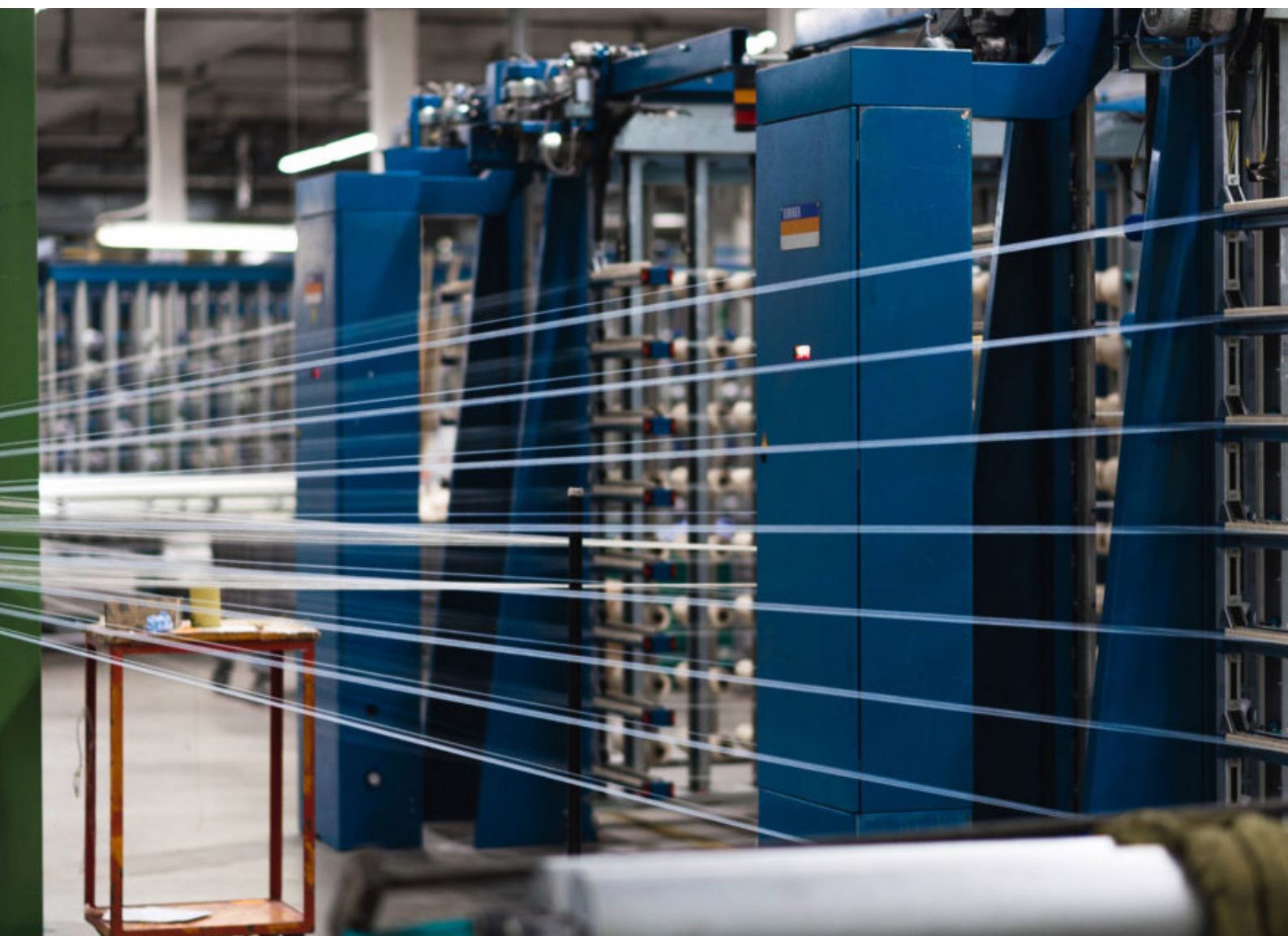
“Feel this, please,” Mr. Albini insisted, untucking his tie. The fabric was not simply the byproduct of a chain of manufacturing. Mr. Albini intoned, with a delightful pride, that the fabric represented more than fabric — it encapsulated his family’s lineage. “You see,” he said, “you can really feel it.”

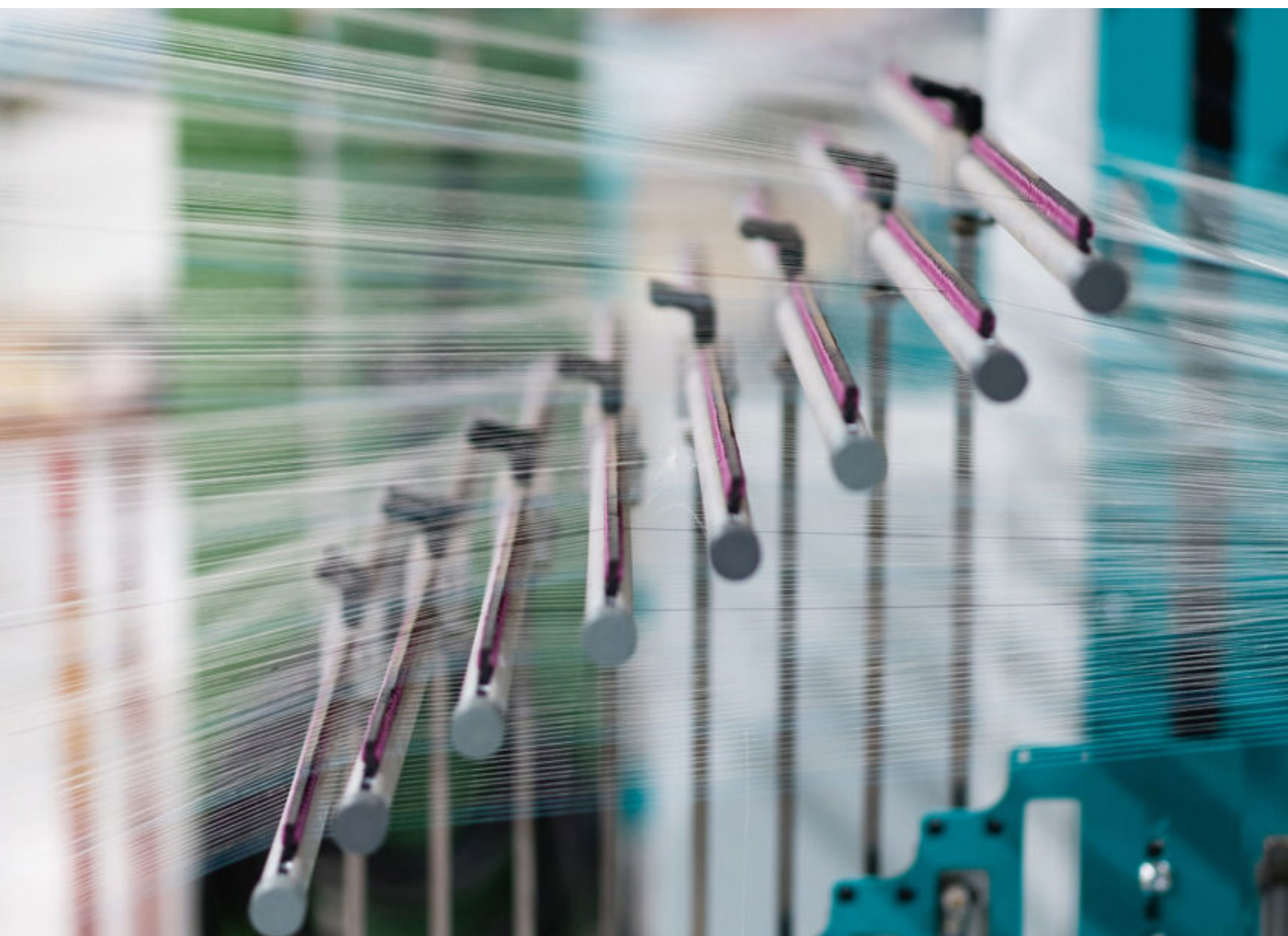
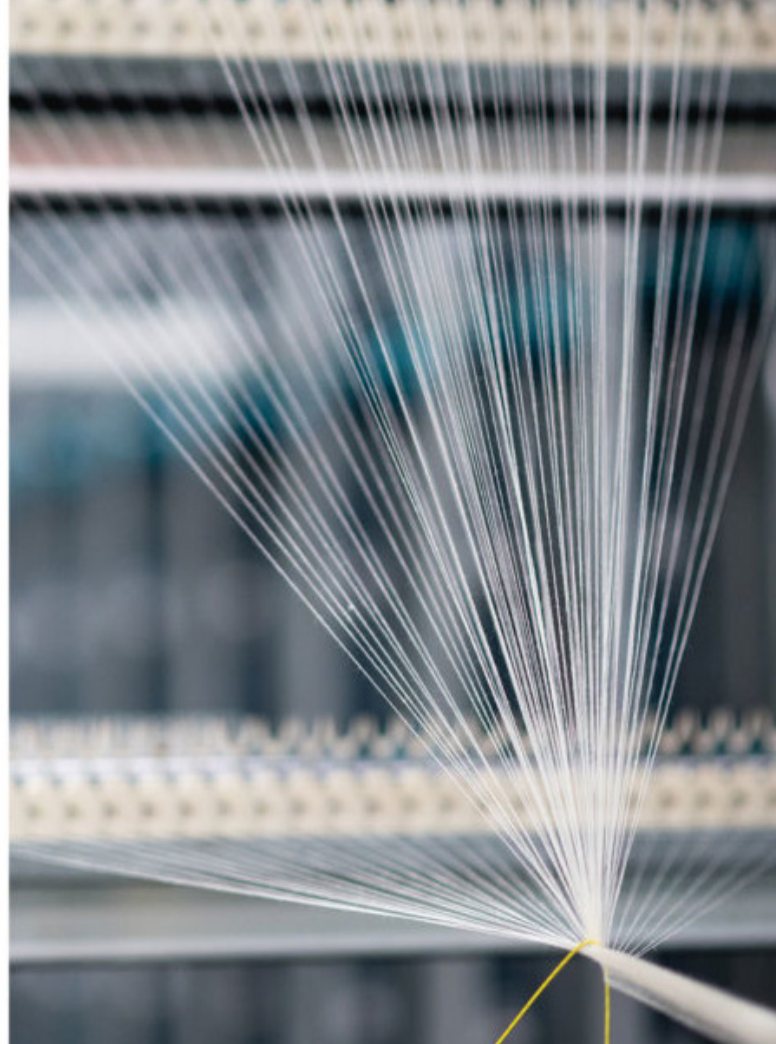
Story Continues After the Photos















From a bird's-eye view, Albini Group is a fabric company dedicated to the creation of the world's finest shirting textiles. Established in 1876 in the city of Bergamo, just northeast of Milan, the company has remained in family control ever since. In 1884, the business was awarded a bronze medal at the Industrial Exhibition of Turin, foreshadowing the superior quality of their product to come. Throughout the following century, Albini Group has systematically grown as it has passed from generation to generation.

Thanks to the innovative leadership of Silvio Albini, in unison with the work of Fabio (Silvio's cousin) and brothers Andrea and Stefano, Albini Group has grown exponentially since their entrance in the mid-1980s. The company has acquired two historic British textile brands, [Thomas Mason](#) and [David & John Anderson](#), which have contributed to the Albini's success today. Following the 2008 world financial crisis — in which many of its industry peers were pressured into deciding to bequeathe shares of ownership to outside investors — Albini proceeded in the opposite direction. From 2009 to 2012, the company expanded existing facilities and built a satellite Egyptian location for the cultivation of two prime cotton species, Giza 87 and Giza 45.

Today, Albini Group represents four brands — [Cotonificio Albini](#), Thomas Mason, David & John Anderson and [Albiato 1830](#) — and provides shirting fabric to hundreds of well-known accounts, such as Ralph Lauren Purple Label, Prada, Ermenegildo Zegna, J.Crew, Proper Cloth and more.

I thanked Mr. Albini for his hospitality. He shook my hand with both of his. With humble affection, he communicated that his business is not concerned with appealing to the mass market. He favors timelessness over trendiness. After a few shakes, Mr. Albini still held my hand in his; a thought was clearly lingering. "You smile," he said. "I like very much people who smile."