
FROM NEW YORK TO TEXAS

STYLE PROFILE: SHOWROOM VISIT WITH SILVIO ALBINI OF ALBINI GROUP



Since 1876 Albini Group's commitment and ambition has been to create the most beautiful fabrics for shirts in the world. A few core values that **The Group** stands by are, innovation, service that creates value, product excellence, ethical responsibility, brand identity, and family and territory.

Founded in 1876 in Bergamo, Italy Northeast of Milano. The Group is the leading manufacturer of fabrics for high-end shirts. Today The Group supplies the highest kinds of cotton and linens to fashion houses that include Brooks Brothers, Brunello Cuccinelli, Dior, Gucci, Hugo Boss, Prada, Purple Lable Ralph Lauren, Theory, and Zenga.

The Group also designs collections for its various brands including Albini 1876, Albini, donna, **Thomas Mason**, David and John Anderson, and Alibate 1830. I had a chance to sit down and speak with President of Albini Group Silvio Albini. Since he has become President, Silvio has helped grow The Group into one of the largest shirting fabric manufacturers with innovation, new colors, yarns, qualities, prints and patterns that will inspire specialized shirt makers, tailors, and designers.

Interview:

In the interview, Silvio and I spoke about Thomas Mason, fashion in Houston, Albini's history, designing fabrics and his top 5 staple men's wear items.

1. David – Houston is a very hot city (weather wise). What are your thoughts on heavier fabrics for hotter climate cities?

Mr. Albini – Houston is a very interesting city. Can you believe when I went to visit Houston for a **J.Hilburn** presentation, in July I was very cold? As Italians, we are not used to using colder air conditioners. But I believe heavy fabrics or shirt fabrics can be sold in Texas even in the summer. So yes! I believe customers purchase heavy Oxford's, Royal Oxford's even in summer.



2. David – In my opinion and maybe I sweat a lot. But it's harder for me to wear a suit, sports coat or certain shirt fabrics in hotter climates similar to Houston. With your background, knowledge, and experience what types of fabrics would you recommend guys to look into for hotter climates?

Mr. Albini – Our recommendations for lite weight fabric will be all linens we sell, especially in the United States. Not only in Houston and in the South, but across the United States. Linen-cotton blends and linen are very popular for men's and women also. We also have poplin in cotton which isn't highly constructed, that are lite, breathable, and use finer counts of yarns. Royal Oxford's and Oxford cloth are very different. An Oxford cloth is much heavier, rougher, and more a durable fabric. A Royal Oxford is well-known for its softness, elaborate weave and feels cushy and nice, which is also made of finer counts of yarn.



3. David – **With being the fifth generation President of the Albini Group, can you tell me a little bit of the Albini history.**

Mr. Albini – Yes! I am the oldest of the fifth generation. Albini Group was started by the uncle of my great, great grandfather. Back in the 19th Century of the Industrial revolution in Northern Italy. He wanted to be a textile entrepreneur. In Northern, Italy they were two important things water, well good water, and passionate people. Having good water is very important to move the machines, clean the machines and process the fabrics. When electricity came in the end of the 19th Century, beginning of the 20th Century, the machines were not moved by water anymore but by electricity. The presence of good water and a lot of water was extremely important to dye the yarn, fabric and to process the fabrics. The Albini Group facility is in Bergamo 50 kilometers from Milano which equals to about 32 miles is at the feet of some mountains, on some hills. Having our factory there was a great idea.

The second was having passionate people who wanted to work. Bergamo natives are famous for being great hard workers and we're very fortunate for that. Since the beginning, we have produced high-quality fabrics and shirts. My grandfather started studying and experimenting with chemistry. He would dye fabrics, especially yarn. So we added value inside the company. Passion is a strong core value for our family, our company, for good quality, manufacturing and innovating. The innovation for Albini Group was to have the most modern machinery, product, and facility.

In the last 30-35 years, my generation has pushed a lot of innovation for the product. The designing departments have become more and more important, and my cousin is one of the best designers for shirts, colors, and fabrics in the world. He also has the passion, capability, and vision for fashion and fabrics. We keep on innovating in machinery and we continue to keep our factory modernized.



4. David – You mentioned your cousin that is apart of the design team. What is the process for designing fabrics for different parts of the world?

Mr. Albini – Every 6 months my cousin and his design team go to the most important fashion capitals in the world (New York, Paris, London, Milano, Tokyo). They spot colors, trends, and fashion trends for shirts. They visit shops to have an idea or ideas for what fashion capitals are presenting. Then the commercial marketing team gives the design team a briefing for what we would like for the upcoming season/collection. When the briefing is set the design department starts putting ideas together for the next 2-3 weeks from the commercial marketing ideas, all the information the design team has gathered around the world, and also the sale side. After 15-20 days the design team proposes a catalog or lookbook of the newest collection. Both commercial marketing and the design team then have a very deep creative discussion on the catalog presented. If both parties approve they start to create the collection. This process is done in only 3 months – 3 1/2 months. A collection comes out at least every 6 months. The preparation, travel, coming up with ideas all takes about 1 1/2 months to prepare what we will show at upcoming exhibitions. In total that is 6 months, we have from one collection to the next. For every fabric collection, we make three thousand new items and fabrics. So every 6 months, Albini produces more than three thousand new fabrics, one different from the other, to make shirts and other items.



5. David – Honestly, I didn't know shirts have trends. I just assumed shirts were either business or casual shirts. Can you please explain what shirt trends are.

Mr. Albini – Believe it or not, shirts have trends. Which are common all over the world. What we sell in the United States isn't what we sell in Italy, Germany, or in New Zealand. There are some trends after a few seasons that are common around the world. In some parts, trends are due because of weather. Some countries prefer heavier fabrics compared to South of Italy. There are fashion trends in shirts like stripes or more checks, which colors, textures, and weight. There are periods where people like heavier or lighter weights. Men's shirts definitely have trends, a lot of trends. Trends, as you know, are constantly changing. There are times where certain patterns and textures don't do so well.

Even our clients have trends within their shirt fabrics. Some of the fabric designs that Armani chooses won't be the same as for Zegna, Hugo Boss, or Ralph Lauren. We have to manufacture special fabrics designs for the big fashion companies. In addition to the three thousand designs every collection, we have to create an additional 1,500 – 2,000 fabrics, that are manufactured exclusively for certain brands. All of our clients have their own trends and we're not allowed to share those fabrics with other brands.



6. David – When did Thomas Mason join the Albini Group?

Mr. Albini – Founded in 1796, we purchased Thomas Mason in 1991. Thomas Mason also produces their own line of fabrics through the Albini Group. So we represent great heritage brands. Albini last year celebrated our 140th anniversary and Thomas Mason also celebrated their 220th anniversary. Last year we decided to go beyond fabrics and introduce a small line of men's accessories for the final consumer with the Thomas Mason label, mainly using Albini and Thomas Mason fabrics. Some ties are made from linen and cashmere, this allows us to build a business to the final consumer that is well made in Italy and grow the business little by little. We are very happy and invested for the long-term. But we can not forget our core business which is fabrics-shirt fabrics. Our goal is to remain the first European producers of shirt and fabrics. As a family our vision is a long-term vision, to have good economic and financial results. Our focus is the wealth and health of the company for the long-term. That is the difference between a family-owned business and a business in the stock exchange.



7. David – You are definitely a walking encyclopedia. Thank you very much for your time and this opportunity. If I can ask, what are your top 5 staple pieces in men's wear?

Mr. Albini – First you need 6 kinds of shirts, a few white shirts, one for summer and winter, and other designs. Also wearing a denim shirt formally is very elegant. You always need a great blazer, two suits (gray and blue), I would recommend versatile ties that aren't loud or clash with your wardrobe. I believe it's better to have one garment less but of great quality. The fabrics in shirts, suits, and ties make a big difference in the quality of the garment.



For more information on Thomas Mason click [here](#) and for Albini Group click [here](#).