


THE JOURNAL

MY SPACE: MR MASSIMO ALBA

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Having spent more than a decade as creative director of a leading Italian cashmere brand, Mr Massimo Alba knows something about comfort. He went on to work with one of Europe's best-regarded knitwear companies, before launching his own, eponymous, label six years ago. His collections take everything that Mr Alba learnt while working with cashmere, and deploys that knowledge across an entire range of clothes, from T-shirts to double-breasted jackets. The results are soft, comfortable, rumpled, chic and relaxed. Mr Alba, with his tongue only half in his cheek, describes his creations as the clothes celebrities wear when they're on holiday, away from the cameras.

His designs hit a sweet spot where contemporary forms and beautiful fabrics meet Italian manufacturing. There are long-sleeve polos in linen, crew-neck sweaters in ultra-soft cashmere and tactile jacquard blazers with a beguiling little car print on the lining. All are as comfortable to wear as pyjamas, while being smart enough to wear to lunch in a decent restaurant. We visited Mr Alba in his showroom and studio space in Milan's Navigli district, to understand what inspires him, and to see where he works.

His studio space, which is simultaneously a library, office, living room and art gallery, is filled with such a busy blend of eclectic elements that it's initially overwhelming. However, as the eye adjusts, individual pieces begin to stand out; the most eye-catching is a pair of beaded African chairs, while the mid-century Scandinavian desk and table are more sophisticated, but just as beautiful, and there's also an elegant French chaise longue. The various bits of furniture and works of art come together to produce a coherent and relaxed room, in a way that's reminiscent of how Mr Alba's clothes feel like a series of individual items, rather than a uniform.



THE WORK



PHOTOGRAPHS AND BIRD STATUE

"The photographs of the woods are by Gianni Pezzani, while the bird comes from my collection of old German ceramics, and was made at the end of the 18th century."



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Q. **What effect does this space have on you?**

A. When I stay here I feel really protected, it's a place to dream, where I can be anywhere [in my mind], from the countryside to the seaside. You are inside my heart in this room.

Q. **Where did you get the beaded chairs?**

A. I bought them at a flea market in New York. At 5am they came out from a truck and I was immediately fascinated. What was very difficult was to manage the delivery to Milan.

Q. **What inspires your designs?**

A. Men from the past who had a cool attitude, which means that they always seem contemporary. But we started designing for us, and everything we design is part of our wardrobes.

Q. **What is it that appeals to you about the way men dressed in the past?**

A. People had fewer clothes, so the clothes became part of their life and their personality - style has a lot to do with repetition. Everything absorbed the soul, the body shape, the scent and the gesture [of the wearer].

Q. **How can men make themselves more stylish?**

A. I dream of a day when men decide to dress in their own way, taking ideas from the culture of the present. I think people are looking for something small, and something different, something that lets them feel special.

Q. **Does your art collection influence your designs?**

A. Art is very important, because the most important thing today is being able to mix everything, to create your own blend and define your own taste.

Q. Which men do you consider to be well dressed?

A. That's a difficult question. You can describe the attitude but it's difficult to give a name. The attitude is one of curiosity, being part of your culture, looking at art, gardens and places. It's not about being dressed in a certain way, it's about being in touch with these values.

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Sweater
By Massimo Alba

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