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by LUKE LEITCH

Around a decade ago, not long after he started his own label, Massimo Alba made a great mistake. A batch of shirts and t-shirts he was working on that had already been garment dyed one color were mistakenly exposed to another. Speaking at his showroom presentation this weekend, Alba said: “it’s very interesting to me that so many good things start out as mistakes like this.” That accident was to Alba what the mold-infected petri dish was to Alexander Fleming: a stumbled-upon eureka that led to a career-defining course of investigation.

This collection featured a series of softly tailored jackets, corduroy pants and shorts, plus light cashmere sweaters that were

hand-overdyed two, and sometimes three colors. It’s a process that led to variations in tone that included acid-trip floods of purple on purple to a subtle bleeding of magenta across mustard yellow. Like most of Alba’s garments, these dyed-pieces appeared at first glance conventionally prosaic. The more attention you gave them, however, the more their exceptional qualities became evident. Take a pale blue jacket, for instance, which at that first glance seemed passingly related to a surgeon’s scrubs. To the hand it was light and almost textureless in its softness: the fabric was a cotton mousseline developed for Alba by Albini. Long-sleeved, in a delicately mottled finish of washed-out sky blue, it made for an ideal mid-summer shacket; in pink, sleeveless, it was an impactful shirting second skin.

Other interesting developments this season included a cotton pant named the Myles with a cutely kinking stitched gather at knee level on both legs and another handsome pant, baggy in white poplin, with patch pockets. A blue tropical weight jacket named the Lenny, after Bernstein, was Alba’s interpretation of a bohemian creative’s ideal piece of workwear. Collarless shirts in ripstop linen and button up short-sleeves in terry were further finely effective *coups de théâtre*. Alba is a self-deprecating yet dangerous designer: try just one carefully chosen piece and that’s it, you’re spoiled for good—because nobody else quite compares.