Ermenegildo Zegna opens Milan Men's Fashion Week with smart style for smart working

By Godfrey Deeny - January 16, 2021

Remake, remodel, and (Re)Set at Ermenegildo Zegna, which Friday afternoon opened the Milan menswear fashion week for the winter 2021 season with the most significant reinterpretation seen so far anywhere in a contemporary man's wardrobe, in the wake of the pandemic.
To date, no other designer in menswear has juggled as much with construction and concept as Alessandro Sartori, Zegna’s artistic director, who harnessed the experiences of the global lockdown – from homework and Zoom to culture and cocktails – into the commanding new co-ed collection.

Sartori called the collection (Re)Set. Going so far as to introduce the first womenswear looks into Zegna, an Italian powerhouse, and the most vertically integrated brand in European menswear – from spinning yarn and weaving fabric to manufacturing haute gamme apparel and retailing it in its global chain of stores.

Zegna kicked off the five-day Milan season, where barely three houses will stage actual runway shows, with a dramatic video, shot amid the high-tech modern buildings of Assago in south Milan, before passing through Zegna’s headquarters and ending up in a hallucinatory multi-level set.

The multi-ethnic cast even had their own Re-Set newspaper, which they collectively read at the final, and, it being Italy, some even enjoyed a bowl of pasta with tomatoes.

The collection’s key element was the knitwear, paired with hyper deconstructed tailoring in soft forgiving silhouettes. Modular mode, where certain sweaters were made in varying gauges from 200 to 800 grams, the fabric naturally providing an elastic feel to garment.
The softer yet somber hues ideally contrasted to the blue glass buildings, modernist fountains and concrete concourses in the film, whose soundtrack featured Superpoze’s metronomic funk.

Jackets – devoid of padding, fusing, canvas or lining – were wrapped like cardigans, or cut glove-like around the torso, and paired with funnel neck pullovers with patch pockets. Sartori even experimented with tweed, lightweight for shirts, heavier for perfectly cut two-button hacking jackets or splendid curvy pleated pants.

“We live in a world where indoors and outdoors; business and casual; Zoom and WhatsApp are all colliding into a new and different aesthetic,” stressed Sartori in a pre-show Zoom preview.

Smart style and styling for smart workers, where men dress to glide easily from private Zooms, hotel business meetings, early evening vernissage and, eventually, elegant dinners. In a year of shows within books, Sartori mailed senior editors a 22-page draft of a script for his fashion film, dated December 15, one month before its premiere. Last July, Sartori staged a phygital show, with live models parading through Zegna’s headquarters and gardens in the Piedmontese countryside.

“Unlike July, we did not want to start with the mindset of a physical show. But to layer and scale a digital show differently. I mean a fashion movie, with location, script, story board and narrative like a film. Added to which we can then bring in a one-to-one Zoom with our customers,” explained Sartori.

Capturing the new spirit, roomy patchwork cardigans with raised hems; or wrapped dressing-gown style coats in a grey and pacific blue zig-zag motif, made in recycled cashmere. Almost one third of the collection featured elements of recycled materials.
Pajama suits for the gals; wrap coats and cotton fishermen funnel neck sweaters. Zegna will now offer these clothes in key flagships, not as a separate women's collection -- more as looks a gal can borrow from her guy's closet. Petite in size but in a man's cut.

The collection was also a timely reminder that few brands in men’s or women’s fashion are such inventive fabric innovators as Zegna. Which this season boasted a marvelous cashmere beaver - a woven twill that is brushed and then pressed, to create a subtly matted feel.

While Sartori’s tailoring detailing continues to surprise – like new pockets where the flap starts half inch in; or outdoor dressing gowns, slits so you can reach right into the trouser pocket; or intriguing seamless shoulders.

A more resilient wardrobe – from the jacquard wool dressing-gown coat to the precise jackets composed of a Donegal tweed from cashmere yarn, spun in Zegna's factory in Biella.

“Conversations between the same outfits on men and women; outdoor and indoor and on older and younger guy,” said Sartori of the collection, which first arrives in stores in July but can, in part, be pre-ordered via Zoom with clients at home speaking to boutique staff in Italy.