West Elm’s newest line is upholstered in your recycled jeans

A new line of pillowcases and a lounge chair at West Elm may look new, but they actually have a long history. That’s because they originally started life as Eileen Fisher clothing. The two companies are working together on a circular economy project to help both reduce their environmental impact.
In a take-back program for garments, the clothing brand resells and repairs some old clothing that is sent back by customers. An internal innovation team called Waste No More also works to find new ways to use the material. “We have hundreds and thousands of damaged garments that can’t be resold, that can’t be repaired,” says Abigail George-Erickson, a project manager at Waste No More. “Our team has been tasked with coming up with solutions of how we can recycle these garments, so they don’t end up in landfills.”

In some cases, that means shredding old garments to create new yarn. But designers at the company discovered that it was also possible to make a felted material from deconstructed, hand-layered denim, and used the technique to make the new pillowcases now sold by West Elm. While the clothing brand had started selling circular home goods on its own, the new partnership is “really kind of proving the scalability of this business model,” she says.

It’s the type of program that Eileen Fisher hopes that other clothing companies will copy as others also try to find ways to become circular businesses. “We can’t repair the fashion industry by ourselves, so the hope and the dream is that other companies are inspired by this,” says George-Erickson. “Buyback programs have gotten way more popular, which is really exciting. I think everyone is kind of in this position of like, ‘Okay, we have all this material, what do we do with it?’”