EILEEN FISHER SAYS ‘THERE ARE TOO MANY CLOTHES IN THE WORLD’

Vintage is one of the only growth areas in retail—and that is good, according to founder of eponymous clothing brand

Unlike most clothing designers, Eileen Fisher counsels restraint when it comes to stock your closet.

“People are really starting to understand that there are too many clothes in the world and too much consumption,” said the founder, chairwoman and co-chief executive of the eponymous clothing brand at The Wall Street Journal’s Future of Everything Festival on Tuesday. “Stop and breathe before shopping, that’s my advice.”

As consumers become more environmentally conscious, fashion brands are moving to minimize their use of plastics or to make clothes out of recycled materials.
Eileen Fisher, the founder of the eponymous clothing brand, talks at the WSJ’s Future of Everything Festival about how she resells her customers’ old clothes.

Ms. Fisher has a slightly different approach. The company pays customers $5 for each Eileen Fisher item they return, then cleans and resells the used garments. At its Tiny Factory in Irvington, N.Y., the company turns clothes that can’t be resold—some have stains or holes—into other clothes or, using a felt loom, into pillows and art works. Ms. Fisher said that people have told her it would be possible to double her business without making new clothes.

“One of the only growing areas of retail today is the vintage market, which is a good thing, because it means people are reusing things,” she said.

Ms. Fisher said her antiwaste ethos goes back to childhood, when her mother would keep “every single scrap of fabric.” She started her company 35 years ago with a focus on natural fibers, lasting designs and items that could be worn together. The company also works with cotton farmers to help them transition to organic crops.

“We think of it from the seed all the way through to the life of the garment, and we talked about the second and third lives of the garment too,” said Ms. Fisher, who began the panel with a moment of silence and a chime, as she does at company meetings.