Ten Years of Take-Back With Eileen Fisher

Eileen Fisher marks the 10-year milestone of her take-back program “ Renew” by convening a panel in her Brooklyn store.

Eileen Fisher is a denizen of sustainability, and for good reason. Celebrating the 10-year milestone of her take-back program Renew by convening a sustainability panel in her Brooklyn store, the founder and designer reflected on her company’s vision.

Panelists include Carmen Gama of the company’s Waste No More design initiative and production manager at Eileen Fisher; Brittany Dickinson, director of design and sustainability at N.Y.-based uniform-style clothing label Alex Mill, and Whitney McGuire, cofounder of Sustainable Brooklyn, an organization which creates access and insight to sustainability from the lens of the African diaspora.

One aspect of sustainability is designing garments that last, and the other is bringing those same garments back into the fold with resale initiatives. “When I see a piece come back in wearable condition, I feel good about the clothes we’ve been making since 1984,” Eileen Fisher told WWD.

In the past 10 years, Eileen Fisher has taken back more than 1.3 million garments. “It is an incredible feat,” she added. The resale program began in 2009 and was the first step in Eileen Fisher’s Waste No More Initiative.
“It sewed the seeds for the rest to become possible, including Yerdle,” said Fisher. The resale partner to Eileen Fisher, Patagonia, and others, Yerdle joined in 2016 and has since handled all of the reverse logistics for the resale operations to exist at scale. This includes managing an e-commerce presence for the Renew program and implementing the in-store buildout.

It’s not just operating a take-back program that separates the company, Eileen Fisher is also a B Corp. The B Corp status, along with being a founder-led business and offering stock-ownership opportunities, has attracted thousands of people to work for the company over the years, as the designer shared.

Fisher found that the journey to becoming a B Corp changed her entire business approach, adding: “It has made us think differently about how we run our business from governance to employee policies and everything in-between.” The addition of an external member board also helped to “shape the company.”

When WWD asked one misnomer about being a B Corp., Fisher said, “that as a company you have to sacrifice profits for your environmental goals, but that is far from the truth.” Although requiring time, resources and bandwidth to formalize her company’s B Corp status, the decision adds “value to the customer as well as a value to your employees.”

In line with her Vision 2020 goals, Fisher said the spring collection “will be our most eco to date,” with 80 percent of the garments being made with eco-preferred materials, 100 percent organic linen and 98 percent organic cotton.

As for what collaborations are brewing behind-the-scenes, Fisher isn’t ready to share just yet, but believes partnership “is the key to gaining any kind of change in the industry,” and to make more space at the table for women.