

Sustainable Fashion GOAT: Eileen Fisher

Description



Eileen Fishe for New York Times

Eileen Fisher and her eponymous namesake brand have never been trend followers. From fashion mission to environmental mission, Fisher has long been a trailblazer of what are now prolific buzzwords â?? minimalism, capsule wardrobe, sustainable and ethical fashion.

Founding her namesake brand in 1984 for just $350, Eileen Fisher stepped away from stints as a graphic designer and fashion showroom salesperson after an inspiring trip to Japan. Armed with a keen eye for design stemming from her degree in architecture, her initial focus was to create simple, comfortable, and timeless clothes for women.



Eileen Fisher, center, shows her collection at the International Fashion Boutique

Clothing as a language

The Eileen Fisher mission is â??â?¦to inspire simplicity, creativity, and delight through connection and great design.â?• With the enduring style and sophistication of the Japanese Kimono as the spark, Fisherâ??s designs embody â??â?¦ [what is] timeless and universal and what transcends the ageâ?¦to stand the test of time.â?•

Fisher and her designers have coined their process as â??undesigningâ?• â?? finding the simplest version of a garment that lies under all the trends. Her pieces make up a â??line system,â?• with all items working together to mix and match a capsule wardrobe that can bridge occasion and season.



A textile made from upcycled Eileen Fisher garments.

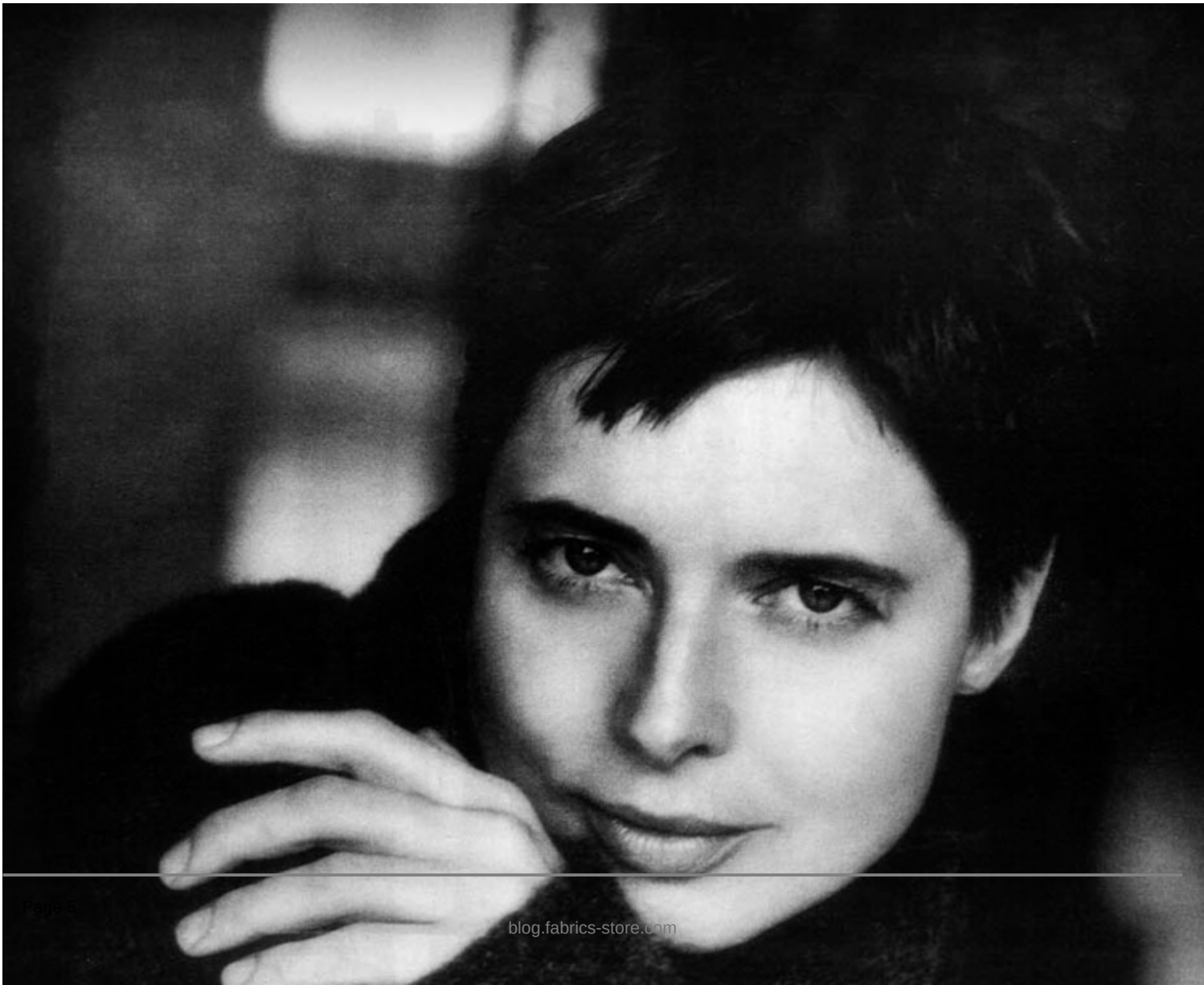


Piles of felted materials lay on a workstation.

Sustainable before it was cool

From the beginning, Fisherâ??s work was characterized by a forward-looking emphasis on sustainability, ethical practices, and timeless design. A burgeoning idea of business social consciousness from Fisher and some of her contemporaries like Yvon Chouinard of Patagonia and Susie and Doug Tompkins of Esprit set them apart from the prevailing trends and practices of the fashion industry in the 1980s. She hired a head of social consciousness 30 years ago, decades before corporate activism became fashionable.

Fisher has consistently championed environmentally responsible practices like organic materials, fair labor practices, and recycling programs. Her commitment to sustainability has become a hallmark of her brand.



Campaign image from 1998 starring Isabella Rosselini. Courtesy of Eileen Fish

A timeline of environmental and social leadership

The Eileen Fisher brandâ??s success is attributed to her innovative approach to fashion and ethical and environmentally conscious practices, which continue to resonate with a growing body of consumers. Although â??ecoâ?• and â??greenâ?• sound like tired marketing tropes today, 30 years ago they were revolutionary â?? and Fisher led the charge.

1996 â?? Fisher releases the first â??ecoâ?• collection of undyed wool.

1997 â?? Fisher launches their Human Rights program and joins Social Accountability International to advance human rights in the workplace. The brand adopted SA8000 as the standard for its supply chain.

1999 â?? Fisher signed the Living Wage Proclamation issued by United for a Fair Economy.

2004 â?? Fisher releases their first organic cotton garment.

2006 â?? Fisher eschews taking the company public and instead deploys an employee stock ownership program (ESOP).

2007 â?? Fisher joins the fair-trade movement with supply from the Textile Exchange and a membership with the Clinton Global Initiative.

2008 â?? The company updates its NYC facility to carbon neutral, earning an AIA award.

2009 â?? â??Green Eileenâ?• becomes the companyâ??s first take-back program.

2013 â?? Fisher launches â??The LABâ?• â?? a wholly recycled clothing retail store utilizing materials from their take-back program. The brand switches to responsibly dyed silk.

2014 â?? Working with Canopy, the brand commits to tree-based fibers from non-endangered or ancient forests and joins the Sustainable Apparel Coalition to promote industry transparency and standards for environmental and social impacts.

2015 â?? Fisher announces VISION202, intending to switch to 100% sustainable materials in five years. The company is awarded B-Corp status.

2016 â?? Fisher launches Tiny Factory, a state-side center for making new designs from the take-back program clothing.

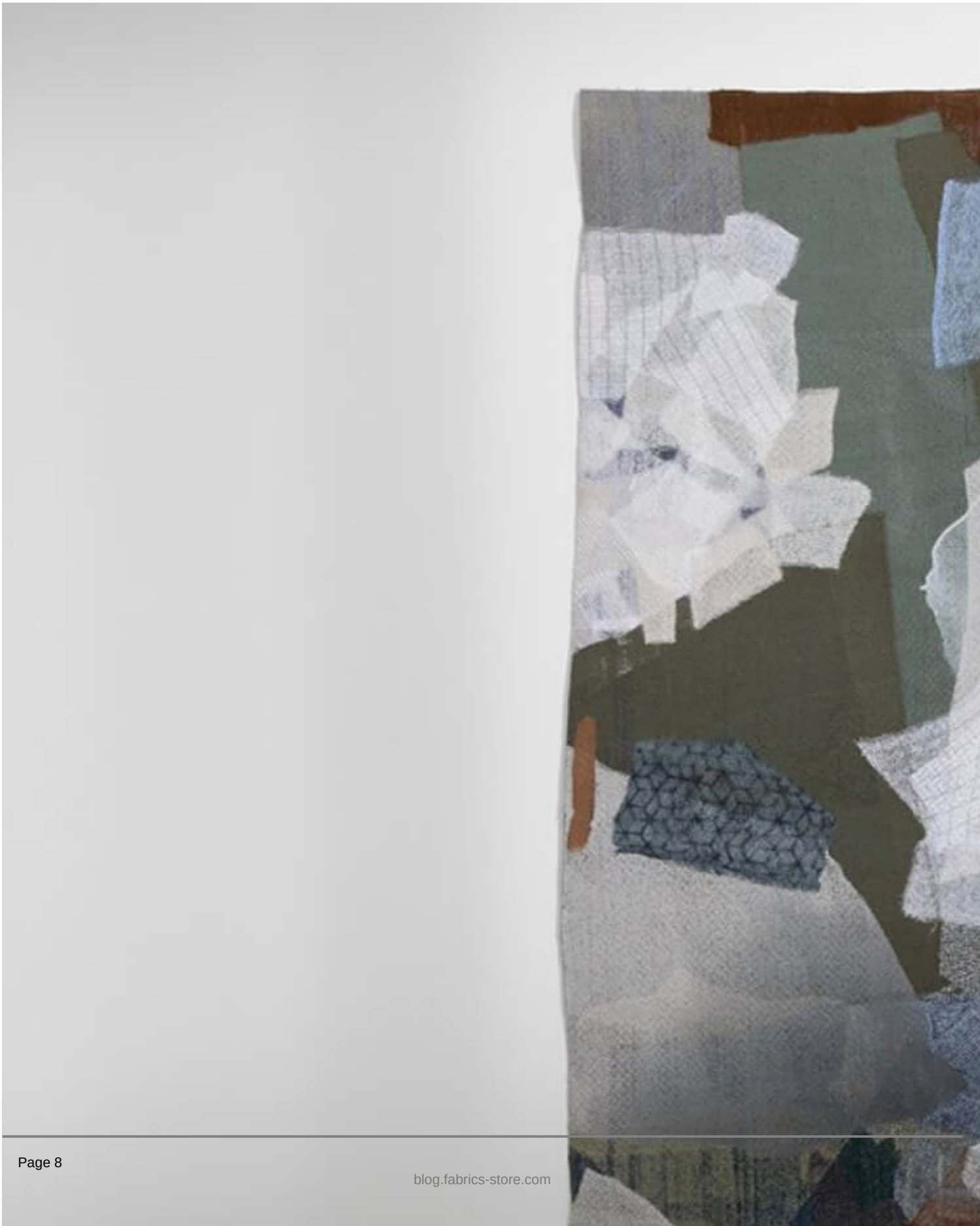
2017 â?? Take-back is reborn as Renew, and the First Life, Second Life, Third Life circular model is established.

2018 â?? The brand joins the Harvard SHINE Worker Well-being program, completes a more energy-efficient renovation of its creative center, and commits to the new Responsible Wool Standard.

2020 â?? Fisher updates her VISION2020 plan to Horizon 2030, incorporating broader impact standards through circular design and regenerative agriculture practices.



Wallworks is a project running alongside Eileen Fisher clothing brand comprisin
wall hangings felted from reclaimed Eileen Fisher clothing



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Future Forward

Eileen Fisher continues to lead the industry in environmental and social innovation. When asked about her long-standing success in a fickle industry, she attributes it to â??â?¦ doing things the right way â?? making clothes that really function in peopleâ??s lives, that work together and simplify our customersâ?? closets, being responsible and transparent about our successes and our struggles, and learning how to do more with less.â?•

The brandâ??s influence has contributed to the industryâ??s shift toward more sustainable practices â?? leading the way for growth in business models that can inspire positive change and take environmental and social responsibility. Doing well by doing good has never looked so cool.

CATEGORY

1. SUSTAINABILITY

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