

THE INTERVIEW: HÉLÈNE DARET, DIRECTOR OF THE BRANDS CENTER AT REFASHION

THEY'VE DONE IT. RISEN TO THE CHALLENGE – AND NOT AN EASY ONE AT THAT - OF ESTABLISHING THEMSELVES AS BRANDS RENOWNED FOR THEIR ECO-DESIGN. "THEY'VE DONE IT" IS ALSO THE NAME OF THE SECTION OF ECODSIGN (THE REFASHION DIGITAL PLATFORM) THAT SHINES A LIGHT ON THOSE TEXTILE MAISONS THAT ARE MINDFUL OF THEIR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ARE DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT. SINCE ITS BEGINNING, LA MAISON DE LA MAILLE HAS BEEN EAGER TO ALWAYS TEND TOWARDS AN ETHICAL MANUFACTURING PROCESS, AND IT IS NOW RECOGNIZED FOR THIS. HÉLÈNE DARET, DIRECTOR OF THE BRANDS CENTER AT REFASHION, TALKS TO US ABOUT IT.



REFASHION: WHAT IS IT AND WHO IS IT?

REFASHION IS A STATE-APPROVED ECO-ORGANIZATION THAT DEALS WITH THE MANAGEMENT OF WASTE FROM THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY. WE COVER THE WHOLE CLOTHING TEXTILE INDUSTRY, INCLUDING FOOTWEAR AND HOUSEHOLD LINEN. WE DEPEND ON THE EPR (EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY), WHICH STATES THAT THE BRANDS COMING ONTO THE MARKET MUST BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THEIR OWN WASTE MANAGEMENT OR CALL ON AN ORGANIZATION THAT CAN DO IT FOR THEM. REFASHION PROVIDES TOOLS, SERVICES AND INFORMATION THAT FACILITATES AND ACCELERATES TRANSFORMATION AND PARTICIPATES IN FUNDING THE TRANSITION TOWARDS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

AND ECO-DESIGN?

THIS IS THE DIGITAL PLATFORM CREATED BY REFASHION TO PROVIDE THE BEST ADVICE TO TEXTILE BRANDS AND HELP THEM TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF ECO-DESIGN. WE PLAY AN IMPORTANT SUPPORT AND EDUCATION ROLE ON THE SUBJECT BECAUSE THERE ARE STILL MANY COMPANIES TODAY THAT ARE KEEN AND LOOKING FOR INFORMATION, BUT ARE STILL NOT VERY WELL ACQUAINTED WITH WHAT THAT INVOLVES. THAT'S WHAT WE ARE THERE FOR, AND WE BELIEVE THAT NO EFFORT IS TOO SMALL. ON THIS ECODESIGN PLATFORM, WE HAVE OPENED A SECTION CALLED "THEY'VE DONE IT", FOCUSING ON BRANDS THAT WE THINK ALREADY CHECK A LOT OF THE BOXES IN ECO-DESIGN, SUCH AS LA MAISON DE LA MAILLE. OUR ROLE IS TO EDUCATE THE BRANDS BUT ALSO TO PROMOTE THOSE THAT ARE ALREADY ON THE RIGHT COURSE.

AND WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

THE SITUATION IS NOT DRAMATIC AT ALL AND WE ARE IN A RATHER ENCOURAGING INDUSTRY. HOWEVER, IF ONE DAY WE WANT TO HAVE ZERO, OR ALMOST ZERO, WASTE TO MANAGE, WE NEED TO EMBARK ON A TOTAL CIRCULAR ECONOMY. OUR GOAL IS TO SUPPORT THE BRANDS IN TERMS OF ECO-DESIGN SO THAT THIS PROCESS CAN BE IMPLEMENTED. THE IDEA IS TO GO THE WHOLE NINE YARDS WITH RECYCLING. THE MOST RECENT FIGURES, FROM 2019, TALK OF 648,000 TONS OF PRODUCTS PLACED ON THE MARKET AND 248,000 TONS COLLECTED. 57% OF THE COLLECTED PRODUCTS ARE REUSED IN THEIR ENTIRETY (SENT TO AFRICA MAINLY) AND 24% ARE RECYCLED. WHAT IS A SHAME NOWADAYS IS TO SEE CLOTHES WITH A VERY SHORT LIFETIME AND (VERY) MANY PRODUCTS GATHERING DUST AT THE BOTTOM OF CLOSETS WHEN THEY COULD BE DONATED AND CLASSIFIED.

ARE ALL TEXTILE PRODUCTS RECYCLABLE?

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PRODUCTS ARE RECYCLABLE, BUT WITH DIFFERING DEGREES OF COMPLEXITY. APART FROM RECYCLABILITY, HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PRODUCT, AND ABOVE ALL ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, THAT HAS TO BE EVALUATED. IN THAT RESPECT EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT: THE RAW MATERIAL, THE TRANSPORT, ITS SECOND LIFE, CONSUMER USE, ITS END OF LIFE, AND SO ON.

WHY LA MAISON DE LA MAILLE?

BECAUSE LA MAISON DE LA MAILLE MEETS THE CRITERIA I HAVE JUST MENTIONED. I FIND THE IDEA OF THE “PLAID MERVEILLEUX” (MARVELOUS THROW) VERY INTERESTING. A NATURAL RAW MATERIAL, THE ABILITY TO TRACE ITS ORIGINS, PROPOSE A LOCAL, ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRODUCT, THE IDEA OF PRODUCING ZERO WASTE, PLACING EMPHASIS ON KNOW-HOW AND SUCCEEDING IN CREATING A SUPERB END PRODUCT; IT’S A REALLY GREAT IDEA AND WE HAD NO DOUBTS ABOUT PROMOTING IT. AND ADDED TO ALL THESE FACTORS IS THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AN ITEM LIKE THE THROW, WHICH STANDS THE TEST OF TIME AND IS NOT AFFECTED BY THE WHIMS OF FASHION.

ARE THINGS MOVING?

YES, FORTUNATELY. WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BUT WE HAVE REALLY TURNED THE CORNER RECENTLY. WE HAVE NOTICED A REAL WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE BRANDS, IN GENERAL, TO MAKE THINGS BETTER. CONSUMERS ALSO WANT TO SEE BIG CHANGES, AND THE BRANDS HAVE INCREASINGLY TAKEN THIS ON BOARD. TO HELP THEM, WE ARE GOING TO LAUNCH AN ECO-DESIGN MATURITY SCALE SO THAT THEY CAN SEE THEIR “LEVEL” AND WHAT THEY CAN DO TO IMPROVE. WE HAVE SET UP SUPPORT WORKSHOPS TO HELP THEM WITH THIS PROCESS. WHEN A BRAND WANTS TO START OUT IN ECO-DESIGN, IT’S LIKE TRYING TO CLIMB EVEREST IN FLIP-FLOPS; WE ARE THERE TO HELP THEM GET HOLD OF THE RIGHT FOOTWEAR, GOOD EQUIPMENT AND TO SUPPORT THEM IN THEIR CLIMB.

ANY TIPS FOR THE PUBLIC/CONSUMERS?

PLEASE, DON’T THROW YOUR TEXTILES INTO THE HOUSEHOLD TRASH!
TAKE THEM TO A BRANCH OF AN ASSOCIATION, TO A STORE WITH THE NECESSARY FACILITIES, OR PUT THEM IN A CONTAINER PROVIDED FOR THE PURPOSE BECAUSE THEY WILL BE RE-USED, CLASSIFIED AND DONATED. TODAY’S TEXTILE WASTE IS TOMORROW’S RESOURCES. LET’S GET INTO A 100% CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND TAKE CARE OF OUR PLANET.

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SUBSCRIBE TO LA MAISON DE LA MAILLE:
THE VERY COSY LETTER