

BRAND PROFILE: FINISTERRE

Cold-water surf brand Finisterre is committed to responsible manufacturing. It also encourages its customers to think more about the products they buy.

Finisterre questions everything

When Tom Kay founded Finisterre in 2002 in a flat above a surf shop in Cornwall, in south west England, he aimed to fill what he saw as a gap in the apparel market. At the time, there were no brands manufacturing clothing for cold-water surfers, something which illustrated what he has since called a “complete lack of innovation” in the apparel industry. He wanted to create warm garments for surfers to wear before and after they go in the sea.

The company’s modus operandi is creating high-quality technical clothing with as little impact on the environment as possible. The small team at its headquarters in St. Agnes maintains a commitment to manufacturing in a responsible manner. Debbie Luffman, product director at Finisterre, says the company believes it is possible to balance success and sustainability. She explains that a willingness to “question

everything” has contributed to achieving this. Finisterre also believes it has a duty to educate its customers about the apparel industry.

Seeking alternatives

Ms Luffman says material selection is “absolutely fundamental to the beginning of the design process”. Finisterre carefully considers the purpose of the garment and the qualities it needs to have; it questions what it is making and why. She explains that, in this sense, designing for an outdoor brand is easier than designing for the mainstream fashion industry as there is a “fundamental design brief”; cold-water surfers need garments that are warm, waterproof and windproof.

Good performance is not enough for Finisterre when selecting materials; it goes a step further and seeks out more sustainable alternatives. This includes materials that are organic, recycled or

The needs of cold-water surfers provided a market for Finisterre.

 James Bowden/David Gray

produced closer to the source of the raw material. Ms Luffman insists that, in her experience, using these alternatives is often not more expensive; many companies just aren't asking the right questions of the right people.

When it launched a range of swimwear, it aspired to do more than just print a pattern on a high-performance fabric; it needed to have "more meaning". Its search for a more sustainable material took it to the door of yarn-maker Aquafil, an Italian company that developed Econyl, a recycled nylon fibre made using waste collected from the world's oceans. At its chemical plant in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Aquafil recycles the marine waste to create a nylon filament, which can be spun, woven or knitted into a usable fabric. Aquafil describes the relationship as "a perfect match" because the companies share a desire to look after the planet.

Jacket insulation is another area in which it has

sought a sustainable alternative. Instead of down, which Ms Luffman says Finisterre refuses to use, many of the brand's jackets contain synthetic insulation from US performance insulation specialists Primaloft. Its Silver Eco insulation contains 70% post-consumer recycled content. She says the material also "ticks the boxes from a performance point of view", meaning it sees no need to use down.

Impossible is nothing

When Finisterre decided to place wool "at the centre of its fabric development" in 2005, it set about finding a way to establish a UK supply chain so that it could use fully traceable material. In the neighbouring county of Devon, it struck up a partnership with Lesley Prior, a breeder of Bowmont sheep, which are known for producing superfine merino wool. Ms Prior had 30 animals when Finisterre first came on board in 2007, but



The company's relationship with a nearby breeder of Bowmont sheep for its merino wool has been beneficial to both parties.

David Gray

now has a herd of more than 250 producing around 700 kilos of wool per year. Ms Luffman says the company refused to believe suggestions that establishing such an operation in the UK was impossible, highlighting it as an example of the success it has had by questioning everything it does. She says wool is a "fantastic fibre" and is perfect for cold-water surfing due to it being warm, soft and antimicrobial. Merino wool is a good material to use in baselayers and thermal underwear as it traps warm air and moves moisture away from the body, helping wearers to regulate their temperature.

Animal welfare is a very important consideration for Finisterre when it is sourcing wool. All its wool is muels-free and it maintains "as close a relationship as possible" with farmers it sources from, including those in New Zealand and Australia, to ensure the sheep are treated properly. The company sees dialogue with suppliers as an important factor in a sustainable business; it works with suppliers that share its vision of how things should be done and visits them regularly to better understand the supply chain. It is also willing to take on board their suggestions on matters with which they have more experience. These relationships are mutually beneficial as Finisterre is available to share its own ideas; it has in the past given a supplier tips on how to improve energy efficiency.

Beyond materials

Finisterre's search for ways to make its products more sustainable is not confined to material sourcing. It has committed to eliminating the use of polyfluorinated organic

compounds (PFCs) in its waterproof and water-repellent products by the end of 2017. Ms Luffman explains that this has been on the company's agenda for many years and it is continuing its work with suppliers to find a viable alternative. The challenge it faces is moving away from PFCs without compromising the performance of its products in wet conditions.

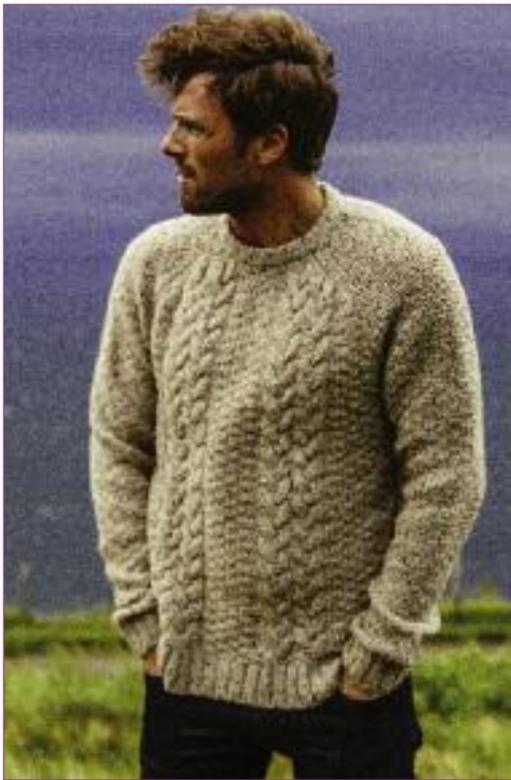
It used the ecorepel fluorocarbon-free finishing technology from performance textile company Schoeller Technologies in its Anatis range of waterproof jeans. This innovation, unveiled by the Swiss producer in 2012, is based on the natural water repellency of ducks, which allows water to roll off their backs. It consists of a thin film which wraps around individual textile fibres in a spiral. This reduces surface tension so water droplets (as well as dirt particles) with higher surface tension run off. The long paraffin chains are biodegradable and have met the Oeko-Tex Standard 100 as well as being bluesign certified.

It took the decision to eliminate the use of PFCs on its own; customers are not calling



Finisterre turned to a recycled nylon fabric, Econyl, from Italian company Aquafil when it launched its range of swimwear.

Abbi Hughes



Finisterre uses wool from New Zealand and Australia, as well as from its partner in the UK.

James Bowden/David Gray

(such as zips and buttons) that can be easily replaced or repaired. Rather than see a garment sent to landfill and replaced with a new purchase, it prefers to repair an old one. Customers can send damaged or worn items back to the company's headquarters in Cornwall where an in-house repair team does what it can to restore them. It has also hosted workshops at its store in London to teach customers how to carry out the repairs themselves.

Finisterre tweaks the design of a product when it notices a common repair is needed. For example, one of its men's jackets repeatedly needed repairs due to the tendency men have of hanging their hands off their pockets. It consulted with its suppliers on how best to combat this and the result was a jacket with reinforced pocket areas. Customer feedback is crucial to product development; Ms Luffman says customers "inspire us to make a better product next time". It sees the evolution of its products as a constant process. It doesn't target specific seasons or trends with its garments as it wants customers to continue wearing them year after year. It believes the garments that consumers form some sort of emotional attachment to last longer as the owner is reluctant to throw them away.

for it, nor is legislation demanding it at present. "We felt that it was our job to tell them this was happening," Ms Luffman says. The company believes engaging more with its customers can have a positive influence on their behaviour and help create a more sustainable apparel industry.

Educating customers

A key tool in the company's quest to educate its customers about the items they purchase is the i-SPY traceability programme, an online tool designed to provide information about how its products are made. Finisterre is adamant that this initiative is not a self-promotional tool; it purely serves to make the information available to anyone who is interested. It contains details about the lifecycle of products, from design through to purchase, including the materials used, from where they are sourced, how and where they are processed, and how they are transported. Ms Luffman says the clothing industry has "become too detached" from its consumers due to the increasing speed of the race towards the next revolutionary garment; her company is trying to breach the divide.

Durability ranks highly in Finisterre's list of the qualities its products must have. It sees the creation of products built to last as crucial to promoting sustainability in the apparel industry. "We want our clothes to last because that is the ultimate in sustainability," says Ms Luffman. One way in which it does this is to use components

Whether it be through the materials used, where they are sourced, or the design itself, Finisterre continues to search for ways to make its products more sustainable. If it can change how customers view the apparel industry and inspire progress on a larger scale, so much the better.

The company refuses to use down in its insulated jackets; it instead uses recycled synthetic insulation from PrimaLoft.

Finisterre

