**It’s Always Sunny in Targetland**

**By ARIEL KAMINER – NY Times**

On the second story of [East River Plaza](http://www.eastriverplaza.com/html/abouterp/eastriverplaza.html), at 116th Street, wide sliding doors open onto an evenly lighted, color-coordinated, climate-controlled space and then slide shut again, cutting off the waft of 95-degree air plaguing the sidewalks of East Harlem.

Suddenly all is calm: Street sounds are gone. Heat wave is gone. Sidewalk vendors are gone. Everything else — every household need that could ever be anticipated, every consumer object you might not yet know you want — is present. Row after cheerful, brightly colored row; aisle after generously proportioned aisle; 147,000 square feet of merchandise. You are not in a rush. You are not in a city. You are in a Target.

Specifically, you are in Manhattan’s first Target, which [made its debut last Sunday](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/26/nyregion/26pleasant.html) after much fanfare.

East Harlem is not an obvious location for retail prestige, so Target’s investment in the area has taken on the air of civic virtue, a contribution not just to shoppers who might patronize it but to the city as a whole. “We feel that Harlem embodies our values of community, diversity and being a good neighbor,” a company spokeswoman said.

Celebrities showed up to lend their support. Politicians applauded. And Target — which had plastered whole trains on the No. 6 line with advertisements — announced a number of initiatives, including local hiring programs, partnerships with nearby cultural institutions and neighborhood-specific merchandise.

That means an array of “Hispanic” products in the grocery section. It means dish towels by [Marcus Samuelsson](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/marcus_samuelsson/index.html?inline=nyt-per). And it means Ebony Inspirations greeting cards, with pictures of [Halle Berry](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/halle_berry/index.html?inline=nyt-per) and inscriptions about beauty.

All these items are indeed specific to their neighborhood. But that neighborhood is Targetland, located anywhere, or perhaps everywhere, in America.

Roz Safdari, a tattooed hairstylist with an angular blond cut, said the store reminded her of a Target in Atlanta. Kathy Cocca-Bates, who was shopping the day after moving to New York, thought of the Target she had left behind in New Haven. “My expectations were it would be like any Target anywhere,” said Deirdre O’Brien, a lawyer who had made the trip from Midtown.

In Targetland the forecast is sunny with only a mild chance of panic attack. A day after the opening-Sunday crush, everything was in its place, fully stocked and neatly stacked — a far cry from Target’s earlier experiment at the Atlantic Terminal in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn.

Retail consultants from the Doneger Group were taking it all in, excitedly calling attention to the lighting, which in turn called attention to the floor-to-ceiling displays, which called attention to the “end-capped” aisles, which called attention to the name of the featured product and the price. Look, there’s a video of Allstar Weekend, in which the members of that chirpy boy band chirpily discuss ... their favorite departments of Target. In Targetland all the signposts point inward.

It is a sharp contrast to hopping from store to store for kitchen tools here, socks there, electronics in yet another place, and I wonder if there’s a hardware store somewhere nearby. That dominant New York shopping model has its charms, but really, remind me what they are. I like local merchants as much as the next New York nostalgist, but on a torpid summer day there is much to be said for the suburban efficiency of one-stop shopping. And for air-conditioning. Plus Bob’s Discount Furniture, just up the escalator from the new Target, has free candy and ice cream and cookies. Free! Is this what we’ve been missing out on all along?

It all seems so convenient (and cheap) that you start to think you should just buy everything then and there, to have on hand when you need it.

But what did I need? A Five Star college-ruled Advance notebook ($5.24)? A 40-pound bag of Pedigree Small Crunchy Bites dog food ($17.09)? A $149.99 Kelty Getaway four-person all-weather tent? A Gabriel Iglesias “I’m Not Fat ... I’m Fluffy” DVD ($9.99)? Four Riedel wine glasses ($39.99)? (When the same brand is available at Target and Tiffany, it’s time to re-evaluate the distinction between mass and class.) And how would I ever get it all home?

After several hours, I found myself wandering through the aisles with my shopping cart, glassy-eyed from the sheer glut of choices, idly reaching for things that I felt no special connection to. It was time to go.

At most of Target’s 1,743 American stores, I would make the long walk through the parking lot, trying to pick my car out from the thousands like it. But East River Plaza is an anomaly, a shopping mall in a subway city. It does have a parking lot, but the lot doesn’t seem very busy, so attendants instead ask shoppers if they need a taxi.

I walked back through the clamorous outdoor market known as East 116th Street, past a dozen vendors whose displays were neither end-capped nor color-coordinated.

On the subway home, I opened my bags to see what, in my shopping-induced fugue state, I had actually purchased. Luckily not the macho-looking Brinkman four-burner stainless steel grill that was going for $329.99. Instead I found a red Stephen Burrows dress, six dark gray hand towels, some conditioner, sunglasses and underwear. Somehow I’d spent more than $100.

Out on the street a whippet-thin woman was carrying the same red-and-white bags I was. She had made the pilgrimage to buy products by Boots, the English beauty line. I asked her which of those items she scored, but she shook her head: none. “I kept putting things in my cart and taking them out,” she said. “I get overwhelmed by choice.”