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Creative Spaces: Designing the Brand

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When you walk into a Target store, the first thing you might notice are the hot dog and pretzel stands or clerks in red shirts. It's a convenient place to stock up on candles, light bulbs, towels, sheets, sporting supplies, kids birthday gifts and other household essentials. This giant cost-cutting retailer is just like a Wal-Mart or K-mart, right?

Not at all. At first glance these stores might all seem similar, but on thorough examination they couldn't be more different. Target is one of the first big box retailers to set itself apart from the competition through its advertising and branding campaigns and even more-so, through its partnership agreements. Target's innovations in design have dramatically raised its profile, setting it above its rivals.

Target first launched its now-legendary design initiative more than 13 years ago, in 1999, with the architect and prolific designer [Michael Graves](#), who created everything from unique toilet brushes to brooms and dustpans for the store. More than 2,000 uniquely designed products later, this relationship has recently come to an end. Such lessons were not lost on H&M, which is now doing very much the same thing for fashion that Target did for housewares, offering inexpensive collections to its customers by high-profile designers such as Stella McCartney, Marni and Versace.

Target just announced "[The Shops at Target](#)" concept, in which a number of boutiques will open up exclusive shops inside stores for a limited time. This newest installment of Creative Spaces celebrates the imagination and originality that goes into such branding and partnership efforts.

Slideshow production by [Steven Pedigo](#).

Michael Graves



Target sold its Graves-designed tea kettles for less than \$30, offering its customers high-end cachet at distinctly low-end prices. If you want to buy a Graves tea kettle now, you have to go to Alessi and pay \$180 or more.

Photo credit: dwell.com

The Candy Store, San Francisco



San Francisco's premier candy boutique sells a dazzling array of sweets, sours, gummies, gumballs, licorice, and chocolates. "We really consider ourselves candy curators," its owners say. "When people walk into Target and see our collection, they're going to feel like they've walked into our little store in San Francisco."

Photo credit: flickr user elviraswinburn

Cos Bar, Aspen



The Cos Bar opened its first store in Aspen 25 years ago, and quickly became the place where privileged vacationers went to buy high-end skin products to undo whatever damage the sun and cold air had done on the ski slopes. Now Cos Bar has curated a selection of reasonably-priced skin products for Target shoppers, allowing them to “enjoy the fantasy that they’re in Aspen,” as its founder Lily Garfield puts it.

Photo credit: beautyedge.com

Polka Dog Bakery, Boston



Polka Dog Baker is a Boston neighborhood institution: a functioning bakery whose product is artisanal dog treats. “Lawyers and doctors and artists and plumbers; they’re all here because they love their dogs and they like the community and its interactions,” its co-owner observes. For a few weeks this spring and summer, Target customers all over the country (or rather their dogs) can sample some of this quirkiness for themselves.

Photo credit: savvysassymoms.com

Privet House, Warren, Connecticut



Privet House sells a mix of vintage and new home accessories, including tableware and linens, curiosities like “the occasional taxidermy,” and imported, high-end personal care products. A shopper at Privet House’s Warren or Greenwich, Connecticut location might pay \$15 or more for a goblet. A Target customer will be able to buy one for less than \$4.00.

Photo credit: 2.bp.blogspot.com

The Webster, Miami



High fashion Miamians shop at the Webster for designer casuals. This spring, Target customers can pick up “a piece of Miami sunshine” too, as the Webster’s co-founder Laure Heriard Dubreuil puts it—but for a lot less money than they’d pay in Miami.

Photo credit: itsallstyleto.me

Jason Wu



Jason Wu was an unknown 20-something designer when Michelle Obama put him on the map by wearing one of his creations to the inaugural ball in 2009. Since then he has been busy dressing the likes of Ivana Trump, January Jones and Amber Valenta. Now Target shoppers can try on one of his dresses too—but for a lot less money than they’d pay in his Soho atelier.

Photo credit: Flickr user shanghaiense dumpling

Missoni



The Italian fashion house Missoni has diversified from its signature knitwear in recent years, offering shoes, intimate apparel, housewares, bicycles, and even iPhone covers. Last fall, the Missoni for Target brand featured some 400 items for a limited time, an event that made Target a destination store for every shopper with an eye for sophisticated design.

Photo credit: flickr user gold & turquoise

Zac Posen



In the Spring of 2010, Target introduced a limited edition Zac Posen collection that was available just 30 days. It included a full-length gown, a tuxedo suit, a red suede jacket and bold metallic swimwear. Prices were under \$200.

Photo credit: flickr user ashley marie Quinn

Alexander McQueen



Available for just one month in Target stores in the spring of 2009, Alexander McQueen's McQ line was inspired by rock-and-roll, specifically by the Duke Spirits lead singer Liela Moss, who was the muse for the collection's punk vibe.

Photo credit: flickr user temerityjewelry