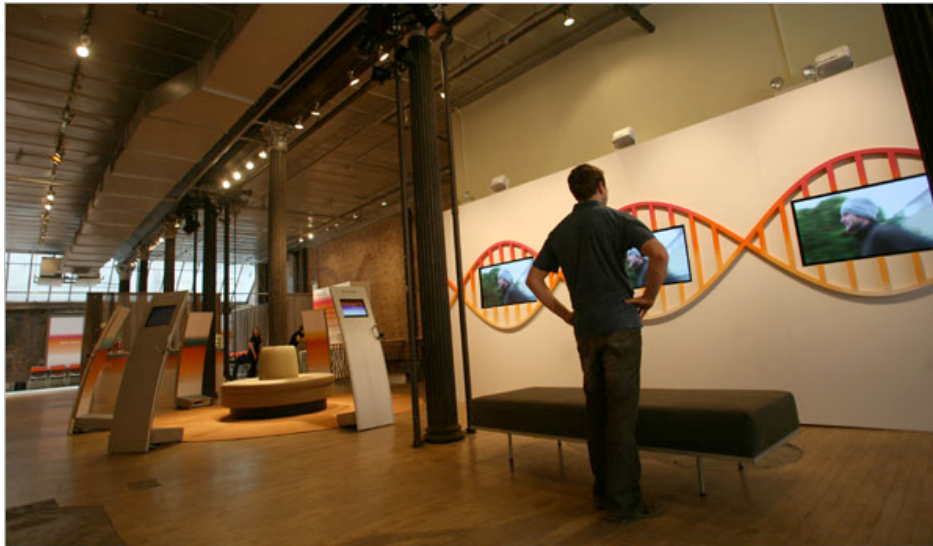


The New York Times

On the Retail Frontier, Another Shop in SoHo for the Person Who Has Everything



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

A temporary shop in SoHo offers DNA analysis for \$2,500, plus \$250 a year for updates.

By [PATRICK McGEEHAN](#)
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Michael Hall said he was in SoHo on Saturday to do what people do in SoHo: meet friends, have a meal, browse the galleries and boutiques. But along the way, he stumbled upon something completely different — a storefront offering to analyze his genes.

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Mr. Hall, a visitor from Switzerland, was immediately intrigued when he walked into the showroom set up on Greene Street by Navigenics, a California company that recently started selling genetic scans. He said he was curious about his risk of getting the type of [cancer](#) that killed his grandparents, but he was not in a hurry to pay the going rate for the information.

For a fee of \$2,500, Navigenics will use a saliva sample to analyze a person's DNA and gauge the risk of contracting one of 18 conditions, including [breast cancer](#), a [heart attack](#) and [Alzheimer's disease](#), company officials said. After that, the company will charge \$250 a year to provide updates based on the latest findings about those and other illnesses.

Navigenics is the latest entrant into the new field of genetic testing for consumers. A handful of other companies already offer to take samples of customers' DNA and extract information about their ancestry and their susceptibility to certain diseases.

But the juxtaposition of the storefront where the concept was being marketed, across a cobblestone street from the boutique Kiki de Montparnasse, whose mannequins were outfitted in hot-pink

lingerie, was a bit of a surprise to some passers-by.

“What I’m sort of hearing from the people walking by is, ‘I’d rather not,’ ” said Dr. Perry Starer, who lives in Greenwich Village.

Despite his training in geriatric medicine, Dr. Starer, 53, said he had little interest in his own genetic makeup and was skeptical about the benefits of knowing more. “I know what my father died of, and I know how my mother’s behaving,” Dr. Starer said. Beyond that, he said, he did not see how learning that he might have a higher-than-average risk of contracting Alzheimer’s disease, for example, would affect his lifestyle.

“I would say, live your life as if you might get any one of these diseases,” he said. “The choice you’re going to make is [healthy living](#).”

Some medical experts have warned that DNA testing may provide consumers with more detailed information than they can wisely use. And some critics have noted the advice that Navigenics or any other genetic analyst might provide to try to ward off certain diseases would in most cases involve the obvious: a proper [diet](#) and regular exercise.

But Raju Kucherlapati, a professor of [genetics](#) at Harvard Medical School, said he believed that knowing what might lie ahead could transform American health care by motivating patients and doctors to shift resources from treating illnesses to preventing them.

“This is just the beginning of a wave of information that is going to be made available to patients,” Dr. Kucherlapati said.

After paying the initial fee, a customer receives a kit that includes a vial to be filled with saliva and shipped overnight to a laboratory. Within a few weeks, the customer can log on to the Navigenics Web site and read a secure report that rates the likelihood of contracting any of 18 conditions for which there is a medically accepted strategy for prevention, said Amy DuRoss, the company’s head of policy and business affairs.

The company has been authorized to sell the service to residents of every state except New York, Ms. DuRoss said. New York residents must join a waiting list until state health officials license the company’s designated lab to provide services to New Yorkers.

Even if that regulatory hurdle had been cleared, Ms. DuRoss said she doubted that the company would have invited customers to provide saliva samples on the spot. “It’s a little awkward to ask people to spit in public,” Ms. DuRoss said. “It’s a very private thing.”

Prospective customers can sign up for the service at the SoHo storefront or on the company’s Web site. The store, which is intended to increase public awareness of the testing, is open until Friday.

Privacy is a key concern, as is the fear of how insurance companies might use the information if they got it, said Melissa Floren, the head of business development for Navigenics. The company provides copies of the reports that customers can share with their doctors, but advises that they should be kept out of medical files.

New as the idea is, genetic testing clearly appeals to some people, especially those who are young.

Robinson Muir, 20, a [St. John’s University](#) student who is from Seattle, wandered into the Navigenics storefront with a skateboard in one hand. He said his interest was piqued by firsthand evidence that a healthy lifestyle does not guarantee long life.

“Members of my family do yoga and surf every day,” and still have a history of dying young from heart problems, Mr. Muir said.

His curiosity began to wane when he heard that Navigenics was charging \$2,500. “Whew, that’s a steep price,” he said.

“It would be nice to know, I guess,” Mr. Muir said. Then again, he wondered, “Is it going to turn us all into hypochondriacs?”