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design

Magazine
Spring 2010

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The home Tru Love and Stephen Stuart purchased in 2005 had “good bones, in a nice neighborhood” — right on the edge of Crescent Park in Palo Alto.

But they soon discovered it was uninsurable due to sub-standard wiring and plumbing. Most of the windows were painted shut, and half the counterweights were missing.

“Then we started thinking: ‘If we have to rip out the walls...’” Love says, and the rest is history.

The couple’s first goal — after safety — was making the home more kid-friendly for their soon-to-be family of five.

Ultimately they knocked out a couple of walls to expand their kitchen and squared off the back of the house.

“We wanted to save the integrity of the house,” Love says, but when the contractor opened the walls, “Oh, my God, dry rot, termites, water damage. You could take a hand and put it through the walls.”

Today, Love says, “We have more steel in this house than Superman.”

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Creating a livable, kid-friendly space — in four years

BY CAROL BLITZER

PHOTOS BY DASJA DOLAN

Even after construction began, the couple ran into problems with the city. They ultimately compromised on how much of their carport at the rear of the property could be covered, and even whether or not posts would be allowed in front of the house.

Today one enters through a wooden door with a Gaelic saying for 100,000 welcomes. Next to the front door is a 1/10 replica — a fairy door to offer the house protection and good luck, Love says. Other fairy doors appear throughout the house, and a bough doorknock-

•.....•
A stained-glass demi-wall, top, blocks the stairs facing the front door; the library features a fireplace and large picture window, creating a cozy space to curl up with a book; the kitchen was expanded, with a long island and built-in semi-circular nook; potted plants fill the visual space where the family originally wanted columns.

The basement, below, became an imaginative space for children, with pint-sized doors and built-in bunk beds for sleepovers. A tiny fairy door near the front door, right, offers protection and good luck.



er acquired in Dublin, hark back to Love's Irish roots.

To the left is a library, with plenty of bookcases and a large picture window, perfect for a Christmas tree.

Not all design was completed up front. When Love's mother came to visit, after the rooms were framed, she noticed that there weren't enough closets in the library. She quickly found space for them, as well as a broom closet near the kitchen.

Most projects grow in budget as they gain in scope, but Love found ways to cut corners: Instead of paying \$100,000 for built-in bookcases, she had the framers use mostly particle board, with bead-board backing and real wood trim — costing closer to \$5,000.

"It looks good and it's very useful," she says.

The new kitchen is now part of a great room, with the original fireplace, now faced with tile that resembles river rock. The expansion allowed a semi-circular nook, as well as a long island, with a five-burner Wolf cooktop, a small sink and a white Corian countertop.

Along one wall are two Bosch dishwashers for the family that thrives on large gatherings. Across the room is a GE Monogram side-by-side refrigerator and freezer, as well as Viking double refrigerator drawers, mainly for easy access to drinks. More refrigerator drawers fit into the dining room's built-in cabinets.

Completing the first floor is an activity room, where the couple's three children are home-schooled, as well as a full bathroom and a mudroom.

Behind a large stained-glass window the stairwell leads upstairs, with a laundry room at the top — handy to the four bedrooms. The master bedroom is off a large balcony — with that fireplace — overlooking the backyard.

The basement — 1,700 square feet — is mainly a kids' playroom, with a bathroom with soaking tub, a bedroom for guests and sleepovers (with two twin beds and a loft bunk bed). A tiny door leading from playroom to guest room sports a doorbell. There's also

continued on next page

continued from previous page

a second laundry room, with an extra refrigerator (“big enough for a sheet cake”) and a mechanical room that houses a whole-house water filtration system. Radiant heating in the floor keeps the basement toasty.

Like the planning process, the building process did not go smoothly — or quickly. About halfway through, the couple dropped their contractor and hired De Mattei. Their only regret is not finding the company sooner, they said.

And despite the various glitches, the house passed final inspection in one round, Love says.

But just when they were ready to move in, a plumbing mistake caused \$150,000 in water damage. They had to rip out hardwood floors, replace Sheetrock and ultimately learn to live with the new swirled pattern on the basement concrete.

In the end, the couple got what they wanted — a kid-friendly, spacious home with plenty of room for guests.

“I obsessed about this house for four years,” Love says. “I would walk through it in my dreams.” **h+g**

Resources:

Architect: Patrick J. Flanders, Flanders Bay Company, Inc., Los Gatos, 408-354-0949, www.flandersbayco.com

Building contractor: De Mattei Construction, Inc., San Jose, 408-350-4200, www.demattei.com

Basement/concrete: Bill Brown Construction, San Jose,

408-297-3738, www.bbrowconstruction.com

Framing/carpentry: LJR Construction Co., Inc., Soquel, 831-462-5454

Structural engineer: Hohbach-Lewin Inc., Palo Alto, 650-617-5930, www.hohbach-lewin.com

Landscape designer: Irving Tamura, Tamura Designs, San Jose, 408-279-0236, www.tamuradesigns.com

Kitchen: Helen Choi, Kitchens by Meyer, Mountain View, 650-968-7866, www.kitchensbymeyer.com

Goal of project:

Expand space, make kid-friendly and incorporate feng shui

Unexpected problems:

Termites, dry rot, need to replace wiring and pipes, city challenges during individual review process

Year house built:

1929

Size of home, lot:

4 BR, 2 BA (3,000 sq ft) became 7 BR, 5.5 BA (3,300 sq ft plus 1,700-sq-ft basement)

Time to complete:

2 years and 3 months to get permits, another 2 years to build



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KUDOS to this award-winning KITCHEN



BLENDING A GRACEFUL CURVE OF CABINETS WITH A CRAFTSMAN HOUSE

BY KATE DALY / PHOTOS BY DAVE EDWARDS

“It all started with a peeling floor,” says Mary Ann, describing how she and her husband, Ken, ended up with an award-winning brand-new bright kitchen in their Craftsman-style home in Old Mountain View.

When Ken first bought the house in 1995, it was just shy of 1,100 square feet, and dated back to the 1920s. Then Mary Ann came on the scene, and they decided to add 771 square feet onto the back, a garage and a courtyard with a Koi pond. They matched existing materials on the house, and from the exterior, the additions with their taupe-colored, triple-drop wooden siding and off-white trim look like they’ve been there for years.

Light streams in through the corner wall of windows, offering a new view of the back yard, above a curving wall of cabinets. The couple chose earthy orange colors for the backsplash, with large terra-cotta-colored tiles on the floor.

The problem was, so did the kitchen. It was too dark, none of the cabinets matched, and the linoleum floor was peeling.

The couple called in designer Barbara Reyes to help out again, and she came up with an innovative way to bring in more light: Add a corner wall of windows and create a curve of cabinetry below, giving the room a whole new focal point and a new view of the back yard.

Working with contractor John Hammerschmidt of Hammerschmidt Construction in Los Altos, they worked hard to figure out how to get the job done.

Mary Ann is a financial planner, and had allocated more than \$200,000 for the project. “The budget was what we expected up front. He does a good job of estimating,” she says.

The couple bought the maple cabinets directly from Quesco in San Carlos, and also purchased the appliances.

“The biggest challenge is that we were installing mod-
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The pass-through to the dining room was opened up, and Mission-style shelving and a built-in buffet added, above. At right, maple cabinets and a Desert Limestone CaesarStone quartz countertop fit right in with the Craftsman house.

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ular cabinets on a curve, so we had to make sure the sizes and the designer's designs met so it really looked like a curve. And they wanted a very specific look ... soft colors, very subtle, old-fashioned," in keeping with the rest of the house, Lynn Hammerschmidt says.

Construction started in October 2007, with the kitchen stripped to the studs. Windows were removed along the wall facing the neighbors' roof, and replaced with floor-to-ceiling cabinets and drawers. The unit includes a built-in fridge that's camouflaged with panels and hinged so that it lies flush.

The pass-through that used to lead into the adjoining dining room was opened up, so the kitchen now flows into the eating space. New Mission-style shelving and a built-in buffet extend along the same wall that now features a new larger window.

That area showcases Mary Ann's mother's collection of Lalique glass figurines, and provides lots of wine storage below. The buffet is accented with tiles that are repeated above the white stove, and in the backsplash above the double sinks in the curved part of the kitchen.

The six- and four-inch-square Arizona hand-crafted tiles come from Mexico, and tie in with the "Southwestern colors" the couple selected. Lynn Hammerschmidt says it took two "runs" to get the mix-

ture of earthy orange tones right.

Another short delay occurred when the counter top the couple wanted wasn't available in time. That led to substituting with CaesarStone, a manmade quartz that's quite resilient.

Large terra-cotta-colored tiles on the floor, and a skylight on the ceiling, round out the project, as well as an enlarged opening leading into the family room. New hardwood floors tie the room into the rest of the common areas.

The couple is very pleased with the end result. "We're cooking more than we used to and we have people over more than we used to," Mary Ann says.

The contractor recently submitted the project to a remodeling competition sponsored by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry of Silicon Valley, and received a silver award.

Ken and Mary Ann feel like they also won an award. They pulled the money out of other investments to pay for the remodel right before the economy went sour. With that timing, she says, "We got such a deal!" **h+g**



Resources:

Contractor: John & Lynn Hammerschmidt, Hammerschmidt Construction, Los Altos, 650-948-4200; www.hammerschmidtinc.com
Designer: Barbara Reyes, 650-851-3760

Goal of project:

Remodel kitchen and improve flow into adjoining rooms

Unexpected problems/hidden costs:

First choice on countertop material wasn't available, so substitution made

Year house built:

Original part 1924, addition built in 1998

Size of home, lot:

1,867-sq-ft home on 50- by 150-ft lot

Time to complete:

Seven+ months

Budget:

More than \$200,000

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A VIEW WITH A HOME

GLASS-AND-METAL HOUSE IS SITED FOR 'SIGHT'

BY CAROL BLITZER / PHOTOS BY DASJA DOLAN



From the back, above, a wall of glass offers a panoramic view from virtually every room of the house. The living room segues into the kitchen, with an onyx ceiling and

glass counter top; the marble over the fireplace — which functions as a piece of art — appears to flow into the trees outside; marble is inlaid into the glass kitchen island.

Less can be so much more.

Hen and Dora Truong bought a 2,000-square-foot tear down in Portola Valley's Westridge neighborhood four years ago. Their thought was to retain the heart of the ranch-style home with the panoramic view.

"Ninety-nine percent of people would tear down the house," Hen Truong says, but they loved the size.

"It seems the house sits in the environment perfectly," he says.

So they started by trying to preserve what they had, beginning with the view. Since the house was a wreck, they took it down to the slab, with just one wall of the garage left standing. The footprint remains essentially the same.

Truong not only designed the new structure, but he and one helper built it in two and a half years. Much of the time was spent searching for just the right materials.

Instead of a banal rancher, the home today is a glass-and-metal wonder, with no moldings to disguise badly fitting joints. Everything was done to precision, and with energy-efficiency in mind, from the recycled blue-jeans insulation and radiant heating to capturing rainwater from the permeable driveway.

Custom-built, 400-pound, metal-framed windows open out on pivot hinges. The windows are a dominant feature in nearly every room, with views from living room, kitchen, guest and master bedrooms. No window coverings mar that view, which stretches over the nearly 4 acres beyond to Silicon Valley.

And very little art adorns the walls.

Over the living-room fireplace, Truong found five slabs of marble that both seem like a tree branch — an extension of the exterior view — and a piece of art. The corner was matched so closely, it appears as one fat slab.

Other materials that stand out are the Crema Marfil marble floors, "teak" marble from Afghanistan in the guest bathroom and recycled-glass sinks.

A minimalist look was achieved by floating the beds (which are supported by steel beams in the walls) and eliminating vanities. In the guest bathroom, for example,

a Porcelanosa glass sink from Spain appears to float against the wall. One showers under a rain showerhead, looking out at the

continued on next page



No window coverings

obscure the view, even from the master bathroom, top, or the guest bedroom with its "floating" bed. Marine-grade teak paneling is coupled with teak marble in the adjoining bathroom.



continued from previous page

view or the fireplace.

The great room is subtly broken up into various spaces — living room, kitchen, eating area and private TV room — with flooring made of 5-foot by 10-foot slabs of honed marble.

The kitchen island is made from recycled glass with marble inlay near the cooktop, all under an onyx ceiling that hides the fluorescent lighting. In another bathroom, no shower curtain or glass enclosure defines the shower space, with its onyx-covered walls. Another rain shower offers intermittent spurts of water. The bowl sink is made of chocolate Crema Marfil marble, contrasting with the lighter marble floor.

Truong designed his home to organically flow from inside to outside. In the bedroom, “walls seem to come from outside in,” he says.

The master bedroom features a steel fireplace and another floating bed — “good feng shui,” Truong adds.

No curtain mars the view in the master bathroom, with its textured white ceramic wall, ceramic floor that looks like steel and onyx ceiling. Another

Morning coffee can be enjoyed overlooking the view, next to the stone fireplace, which was carved to fit in the corner.



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Porcelana glass sink floats against the wall.

Because one can see every inch of the landscape from almost every room, no exterior detail was left to chance. An abstract path, which can be seen from the bathroom, leads to the midnight blue, pebble-finish pool. Downspouts are made of rusted chain links, which coordinate with the steel fireplace.

Truong, who had worked on smaller-scale projects in the past, points with pride to subtle details: the Swiss-made faucet with a built-in light, the robotic Kohler faucet in the kitchen island, track lighting buried in a beam, hidden hinges, a nearly invisible door to a wine cellar.

“We spent time taking out what we don’t need,” he says, alluding to the lack of molding and the scarcity of light fixtures.

Large boulders were imported from Los Angeles and placed in front and back, some incorporated into the siding. A small amount of wood siding is made of variegated redwood, which resembles exotic woods, with a natural stain.

Nearly everything was built on site by Truong or his co-worker, including an arbor made without nails and a wrought-iron railing.

Truong and his wife are thinking of moving to a smaller place, where he can get around a bit easier (he lost his leg at age 16 in Vietnam), and he’s not averse

to building it himself — again.

“If you have the will, anyone can do it,” Truong says. **h+g**

Resources:

Building contractor: self

On the cover: Hen Truong turned a banal ranch-style home in Portola Valley into a precision-built, glass-and-metal home with breathtaking views. Photo by Dasja Dolan.

Goal of project:

Rebuild a house on same footprint, with all new materials

Year house built:

Original 1952; remodel 2009

Size of home, lot:

2,000 sf, added 500 sf, on 3.9 acres

Time to complete:

2.5 years

Budget:

On market for \$4.8 million

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A TOUCH OF

Italy
 IN PALO ALTO

Dream home
 incorporates
 Mediterranean
 touches

by Kathy Schrenk / photos by Dasja Dolan

Maria Gabriel visited Italy for the first time only four years ago, but the house she's shared with her husband since 1969 looks like the dream home of a native Italian transported to Palo Alto.

Gabriel, an interior designer, visited Italy with her daughter and fell in love — you could even say that she became obsessed. Her travels on that and a subsequent trip two years later took her to almost every corner of the country, including Rome, Venice, Florence and into the Tuscan countryside to see medieval towns such as San Gimignano. She was smitten with the colors and materials of the landscapes and the buildings.

So she tried to keep a European feel in her plans for the house as much as possible. Tile underfoot and stucco walls provide a cooling effect, just as in the Mediterranean parts of Europe that inspire the design. Gabriel uses wardrobes and other alternatives to closets in the bedrooms, as is cus-



Italian touches abound, above, from the hand-painted frescoes above the kitchen entry to the detailing above the built-in ovens; a custom lighting fixture draws the eye upwards in the living room; addition of a carved column top was inspired by a trip to Italy.

tomary in many European countries.

The house has the light, open feel of an Italian villa with a seriously eclectic bent to the accessories. Gabriel made the stained-glass windows in the kitchen that feature tropical birds. She is in the process of hand-painting frescoes around the house, including one in the master bathroom that's designed around a single tile Gabriel bought in Italy.

Before the remodel, the house only had two bedrooms and one bathroom. Now there are three bedrooms and three bathrooms, including a guest suite with a kitchenette and a separate entrance. Gabriel and her husband

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Bathrooms feature granite countertops, with tiny square tiles in the backsplash, and limestone floors.

continued from page 16

have four adult children and five grandchildren scattered throughout the country, and they wanted to establish a spacious and comfortable retreat for all of them to gather. (A new 75-gallon water heater adds to the comfort level.)

Its exterior had the look of an Eichler, Gabriel says. But when guests walked in the front door, the first thing they saw was a bathroom. The family room off the kitchen was little more than a covered porch. That room now is not only an actual room, but it has a striking fireplace that looks just like a clay oven.

After five years of thinking and planning and fighting with her husband over the details, Gabriel had everything torn down but the kitchen and the laundry room. (The kitchen had been remodeled in 1985, and the couple didn't want to add the cost of a new kitchen to the already hefty price tag of rebuilding the rest of the house. It has the same feel of the rest of the house, though, with a tile backsplash evoking an Italian or old Spanish feel.)

They lived in an apartment in Mountain View for a little more than a year while construction continued under Gabriel's watchful eye. "They called me the Change-

continued on page 20

Goal of project:

Expand house while incorporating a European feel; make home comfy for visiting kids and grandkids

Unexpected problems/hidden costs:

Changes in some details due to owner changing her mind

Year house built:

1950, remodeled 2009

Size of home, lot:

was 2 bd, 1 ba, 1,900 sq ft; now 3 bd, 3 ba, 3,456 sq ft on 7,500-sq-ft lot

Time to complete:

13 months



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Order Queen,” she says of the contractors, who were patient and accommodating of the changes, she adds.

“We finally got to do our dream.”

As with any remodel, the details can be the changes that really bring the residents day-to-day joy. In this case, it’s the heated floors in the bathrooms (“My husband said we should have put them in the rest of the first floor.”) Gabriel also enjoys the granite countertops and limestone floors in the bathrooms and the African Mahogany closet doors.

And then there are the custom lighting fixtures, particularly the one in the living room. But the little luxuries don’t always cost a lot: the built-in shelves, drawers and dividers in the master walk-in closet are all from IKEA, along with many of the others throughout the house. **h+g**

Resources:

Building contractor: RJ Smith Associates, Palo Alto, 650-321-1775

Interior designer: Maria Gabriel, Palo Alto, 650-856-6596

Tile: MGM Tile, San Jose, 408-577-0230

Countertops: Da Vinci Marble, San Carlos, 650-595-2500

Lighting design: Delight Lighting, Palo Alto, 650-323-7779



by Judy Maier

An amazing world of succulents

Beautiful, exotic plants are a water-wise choice

An underwater scene or life from another planet? Indeed our own planet Earth is home to this amazing group of plants. Long gone are the days since the well-loved ‘Hens and Chicks’ (a *Sempervivum*) were my only idea of succulents.

The world of succulents is vast, beautiful, exotic, sculptural and fascinating and can add a whole new dimension to your landscape.

Even with the plentiful show of rainfall we’ve had this year, the focus is still strongly turned towards water conservation and drought-tolerant solutions. Creating a succulent garden, succulent corner, mixed-planting bed including succulents or succulent containers is not only an interesting addition to a landscape, but a water-wise choice. Though the particular microclimate must be considered (many succulents enjoy the marine layer and don’t like hot blazing inland sun), in Palo Alto, the Peninsula and the entire Bay Area, succulents can flourish given the right planting environment.



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Judy Meier

This colorful ruffled Echeveria (*Echeveria gibbiflora*), which looks like something one might find under the ocean, is best planted in part shade.

Knowing where plants originate from helps to understand their microclimate needs. Succulents are plants that have adapted to mostly harsh environments where water was not always available, sometimes going for long periods of time without water.

According to Robin Stockwell, owner of Succulent Gardens Nursery in Castroville and an expert on succulents, “There are three environments that caused this adaptation: the desert (hot and dry), the alpine regions (cold and frozen) and the tropics (wet and salty).” Partially

due to these challenging origins, Stockwell calls succulents “the conservationists of the plant world.” They have learned to conserve their need for and use of water.

Virtually all succulents have a thick skin or protective coating that actually seals in moisture and minimizes evaporation — thus their name. The coating may be white and powdery or waxy and blue-green. Spines can also provide some sun protection. They need a porous, well-draining soil to thrive, and once established, let them fully dry out between waterings. They do not like “wet feet,” a term used to denote plant roots sitting in water.

Many succulents prefer and do better with some shade or protection from intense direct sun, doing well with as little as two to three hours of direct sun each day. There are also those succulents that thrive in hot sun.

Cacti by definition are succulents belonging to the Cactaceae family. They like more light and sun and prefer less water than many other succulents. Southwest-style or desert-themed gardens are perfect for these, but they can be carefully worked into some other garden styles.

When planning and planting your garden, keep in mind that all plants tend to grow and reach towards the sun. Being that succulents like to dry out between waterings, planting on berms is one way to assist natural drainage to occur. Though not essential to plant this way, it does take advantage of gravity and the natural flow of water — thus drainage. Plant succulents on the tops and

continued on next page

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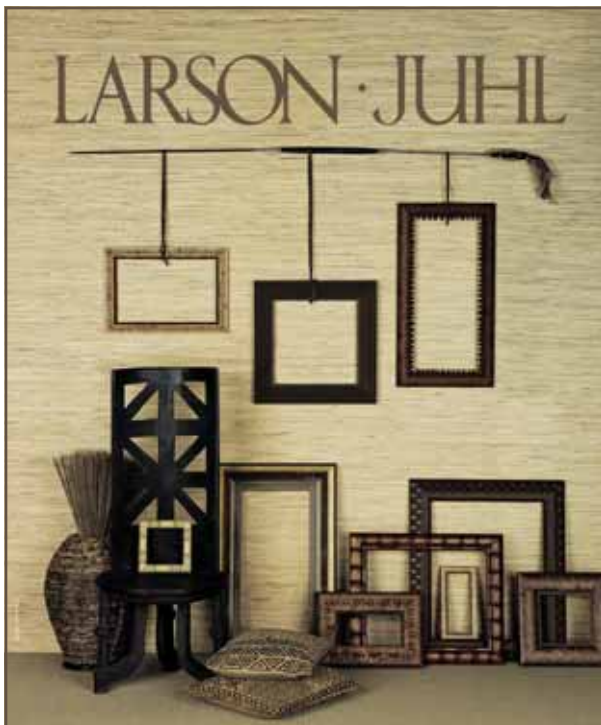
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Judy Maier

Mixed planting of succulents and sedums can be done as a slight mound in a container or on a berm in the landscape.

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sides of the berm, rather than at the base, which naturally tends to catch more of the water. Save this area for plants or groundcover that need that extra water.

In terms of design, the variety of forms available with succulents range from very low-growing groundcovers to very large forms, to even tree-like forms in size and shape. They go from soft to spiky in texture and from bright, playful colors to soft muted pastels. Often they have sculptural forms that set them apart and allow them to easily be used as focal points. Mixing them with other drought-tolerant plants allows for even more expansion of the palette and textures.

Living green walls are becoming very popular in designed landscapes and these too can be created with succulents as well as other plants.

Whatever opportunity you might have in your landscape for adding succulents, be it a complete new design, to a little vignette or corner, the unique features of succulents enable seemingly endless creative opportunity for beauty and interest. **h+g**

Judy Maier, APLD, is a landscape designer and garden coach serving Palo Alto and the Bay Area. You can find Judy's Garden and Design on Facebook or visit her blog at www.gardendancing.blogspot.com and her website at www.judysgardens.com. She can also be reached at 408-398-3161.



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