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architecture & design
تصميم و هندسة معمارية

SITUATION SPECIFIC

Experiences: The conversion of the Masrah Al Qasba Theatre in Sharjah

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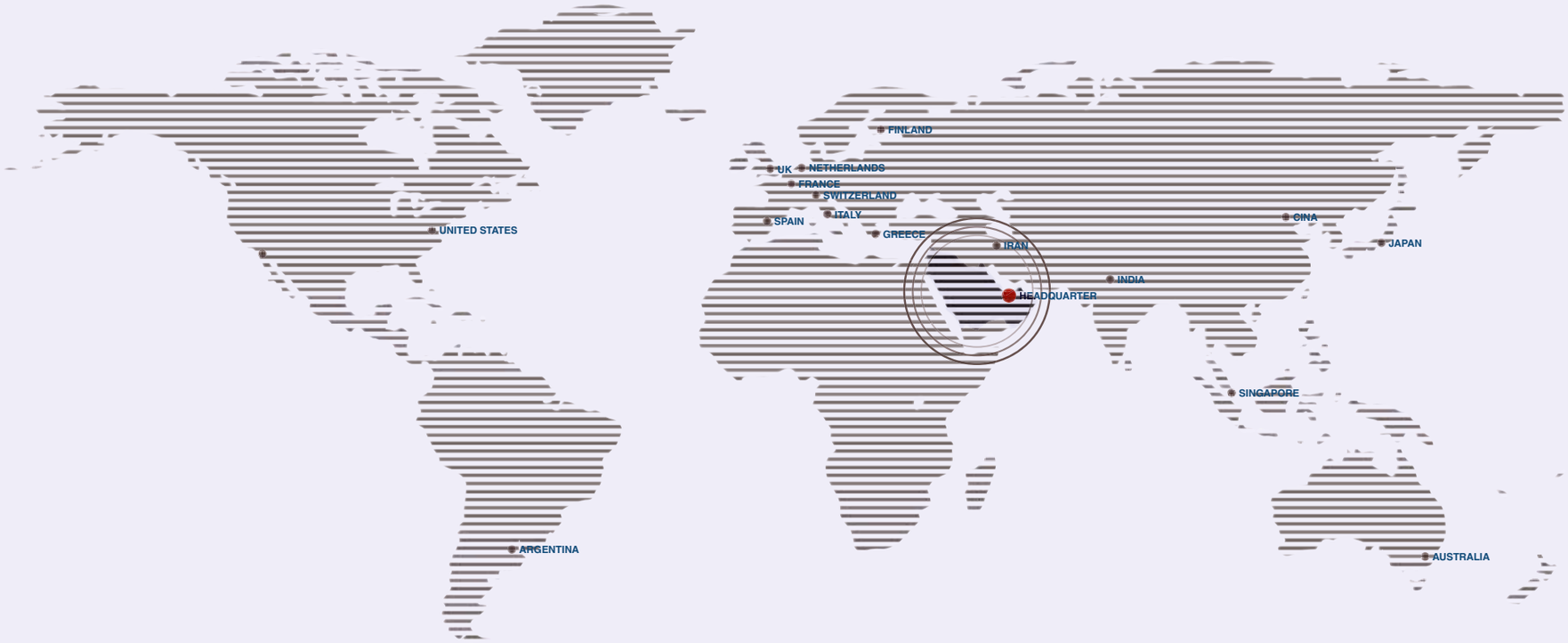

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The Ecstasy of Particles: a Café in the Temple

Kengo Kuma & associates

Project Name
Starbucks Coffee at Dazaifu Tenmangu Omotesando

Year
2011.1 - 2 011.8

Location
3-1196-11 Zaifu, Dazaifu, Fukuoka Prefecture

Client
Manten Corporation

Size and Total Area
Site Area 436.71 mq
Built Area 212.98 mq
Total Floor Area 210.03 mq
Maximum Height: 5.06m

Structure
Jun Sato Structural Engineering

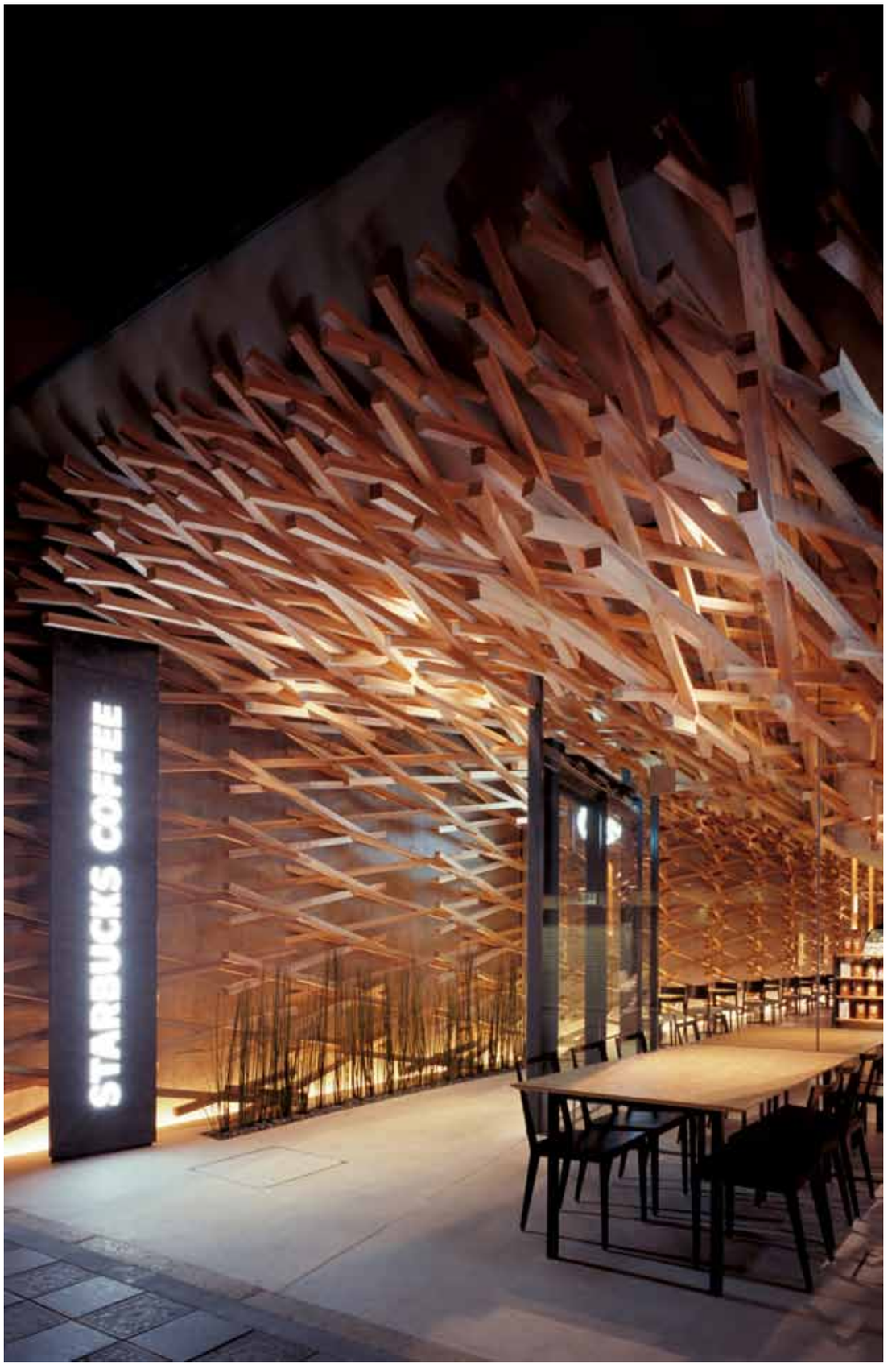
Facility Design
Tosai Corporation, Kyu-den Ko Corporation

Construction
Matsumoto-gumi Corporation

Lighting
Isumi Okayasu Lighting Design

Image credits
Courtesy of Hiroyuki Oki

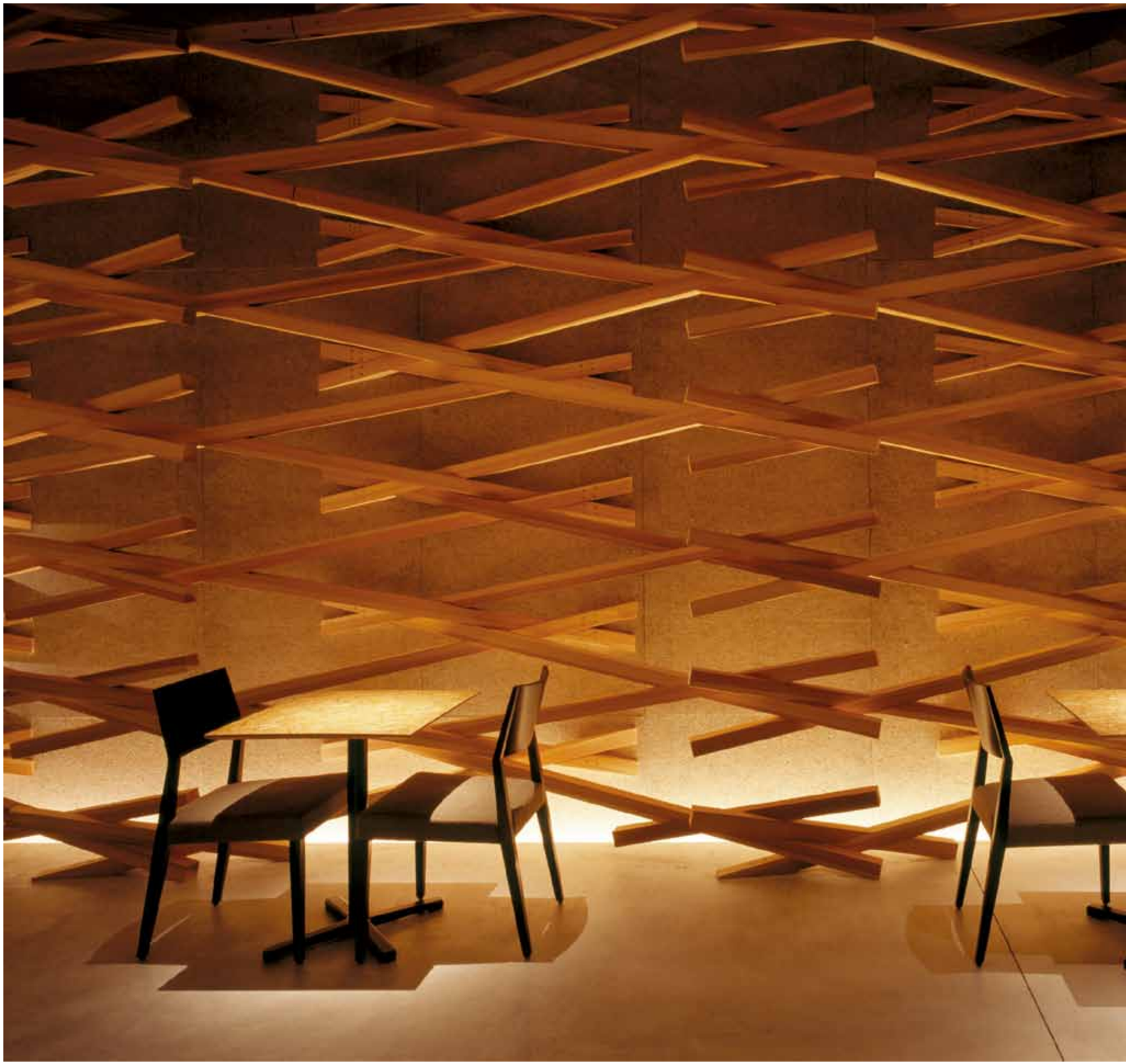
The multinational brands of our gloabalised world appear to have recently adopted the notion of 'mass customisation'. The outlets of Seattle-based Starbucks, which serves 8 million cups of coffee a day in over 20,000 stores around the globe, are difficult to distinguish from one another, as one would expect from such a brand that, together with McDonalds and others, embodies the sprit of a global society. The new shop in Dazaifu, Japan is instead another story.
Designed by Kengo Kuma, the store is located in a particular area, along the road to Dazaifu Tenmangu, one of Japan's most important temples, not far from Fukuoka, the capital of the island of Kyushu. Constructed in 919 AD, the temple venerated as the home of the "god of tests" is visited each year by approximately 2 million people who come to pray for success at school or a promotion at work. The processional path leading to the temple is flanked by a series of traditional buildings, for the most part one or two-storeys in height.
A delicate example of Kengo Kuma's organic research, his Starbucks seeks a fluid connection between interior space and this town in southern Japan.
Kuma's choice was anything but casual.
As an architect he is extremely capable of reading context and offering a contemporary reinterpretation of tradition. >


STARBUCKS COFFEE

The style of this project adapts to the sacred nature of the site, reconciling the needs of a commercial activity with the respect due to context and the ‘genius loci’. Kuma’s recent strategy, aimed at the realisation of an organic architecture, is resolved here in what this Japanese architect refers to as “particalization”: a molecular architecture of particles. This is not be confused with a type of biological expressionism that mimics natural forms, but instead is to be considered the active formation of simple elements that create an organic whole. Frank Lloyd Wright, who made an enormous contribution to organic architecture, wrote: “no house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill”. Similarly, Kuma has often stated that his objective is to “cancel architecture”. In the Starbucks in Dazaifu, a complex geometry of wooden sticks decomposes architecture into fragments that are then fused with their context.
The 160 square meter store can seat up to 45 people. The surfaces of this small building are modulated by a highly aesthetic and sensual a geometry. The walls are a diagonal weave of wooden elements that harmonise the relationship between interior and exterior. This system is composed of approximately 2,000 wooden sticks, varying in length from 1.3 to 4 meters, with a section of 6 cm. Set end to end, the sticks would stretch for 4.5 km. The resulting weave is vaguely reminiscent of the Chinese game of Mikado. >

TANZANIA

Building with interlocking joints is a Japanese tradition, previously tested by Kuma in his Chidori project and in the GC Prostho Museum Research Centre. Yet, while in these two projects the weaving of wooden elements moved along orthogonal lines to produce an atmosphere of stability and rarefaction, in the Starbucks project the interlocking system is composed of diagonals, producing action and dynamism. In both Chidori and the GC Prostho Museum Research Centre, the interlocks were resolved by overlapping three points. Here, to create the diagonal weave, the points of overlap became four: anything but a banal detail as it greatly increases the complexity of the joint. This made it necessary to identify a fulcrum capable of balancing the overlap of the four elements, which led to the division of the system into two groups. The details were resolved in analyses by the structural engineer Jun Sato, a regular contributor to many of Kuma's latest projects.

While the construction itself was resolved though a parametric adjustment to context, based on a bottom-up approach, in reality it belongs to both Japanese and Chinese building traditions in which small elements are overlapped, jointed and elevated in an ordered stack/construction set atop the earth. The spatial layering created by elements wrapping space has traditionally been used in Japan to bring depth and a sense of openness to otherwise narrow spaces. The wrapping form of Kuma's Starbucks welcomes passers-by, almost inviting them into a garden. The three-dimensional pattern created by the overlapping wooden modules defines an directional space that draws attention towards the interior of the shop. Once inside, visitors have the concrete experience of what Kuma has often theorised: the necessity of inverting the direction of vision and looking at architecture from its interior. The poetic of this Japanese architect often contains references to the transcendent aspect of architecture, so distant from the formalism that dominates our contemporary society of images. As Kuma himself recently wrote: "only after obtaining the continuity of space can we see architecture disappear, leaving only its experience". The style of the new Starbucks evokes the spirit and atmosphere of calm that reigns over the nearby sanctuary. Inside architecture disappears: what remains is the sensation of being safe in a nest, in harmony with nature.

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