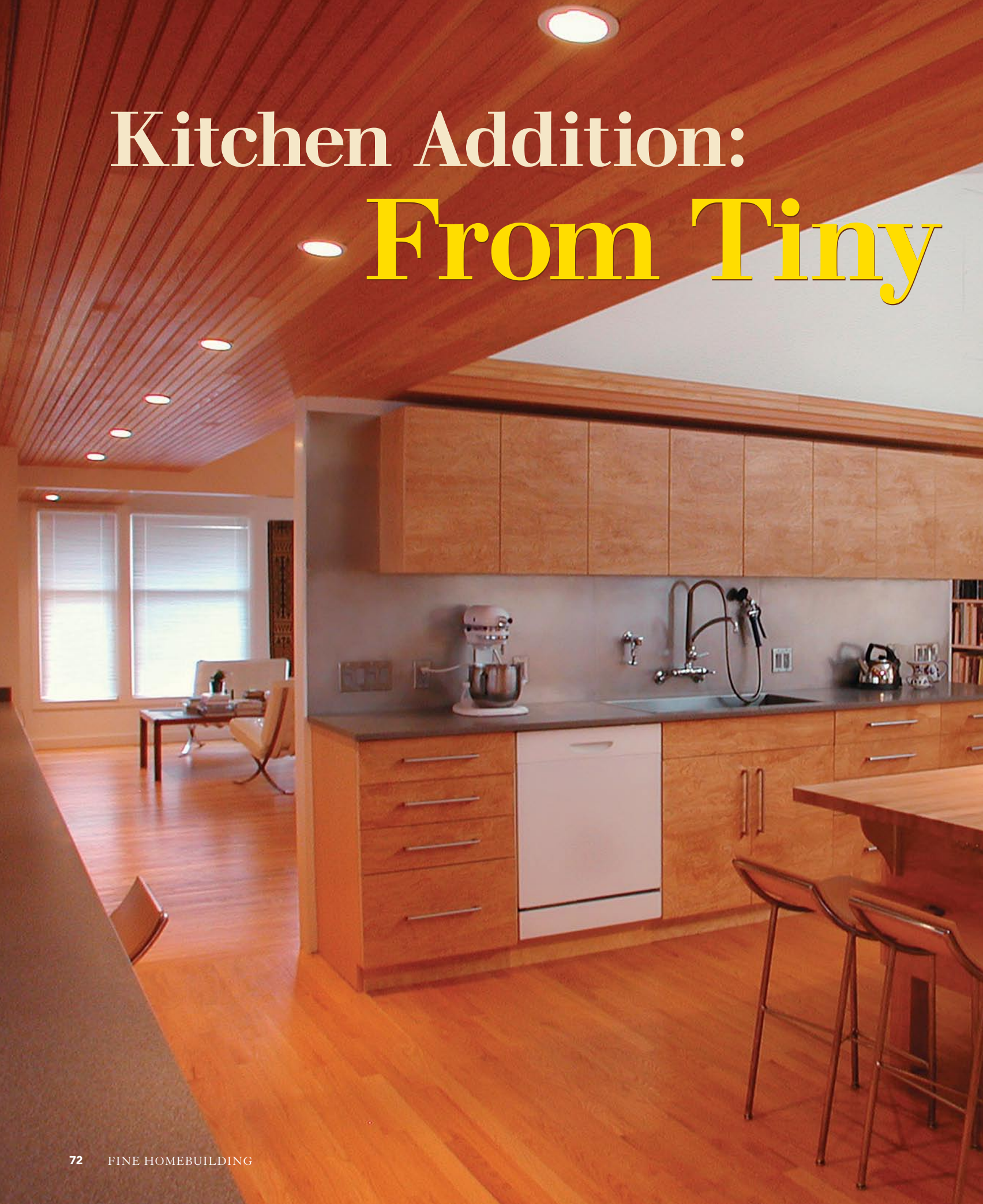


Kitchen Addition: From Tiny



to Terrific

An architect's kitchen sketches inspire the transformation of her 1970s ranch

BY MELISSA HARRIS



Vince, my husband, does virtually all the cooking at our house, and I do the baking and cleaning. Unfortunately, the frustration of two people trying to work in our original kitchen fueled contentious outbursts. Opening the refrigerator blocked passage to the dining room, and the dishwasher couldn't be opened while I kneaded bread dough. Either we baked or we cleaned, but never both at once. The bottom line: We had a one-person kitchen and a two-cook family.

When we finally went ahead with a kitchen addition after several years in tight quarters, my husband and I took stock of what was important to us. Cooking and baking, shared meals with friends, and a comfortable place to read, draw, and display our work topped our list.

Kitchens need morning light

The addition had to be on the west side of the house because of two limiting factors: We wanted to preserve sunlight to the east-facing walk-out basement; also, we needed to keep down costs, which was possible by building the addition so that it would abut the existing kitchen plumbing.

I think it's important to have morning sunlight in a kitchen, so the shape of the addition was dictated by my desire to bring light inside. Although a gable or hip roof would have blended into the house (and cost less), the kitchen would have been dark at breakfast time. Instead, I chose a shed roof. By incorporating clerestory windows, I was able to catch the sun rising over the house and bring direct light into the kitchen as early as 8 a.m.

The shape of the shed roof has the added advantage of a large, flexible interior space



Boldly modern. After working out the details on paper (drawing left), the author arrived at a new kitchen that incorporates her taste for sleek, contemporary design. The 385-sq.-ft. addition creates a kitchen large enough for two to work simultaneously and unencumbered. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

free of supports and walls. This uninterrupted volume let us create two distinct work areas. Early in the design process, we attached our names to different sides of the new kitchen. Vince's side has plenty of preparation space, a sink, and easy access to the refrigerator, stove, and pots and pans. My side accommodates a baking center (a deep flour drawer, vertical slots for baking sheets, and drawers for baking accessories and mixer attachments) as well as a large, deep sink and the dishwasher, with easy access to dishes and silverware.

Corridor provides the backbone

I imagined design solutions by sketching dozens of variations of the addition (sidebar, facing page). While drawing different appliance and workstation configurations on tracing paper, I happened to stack the sheets together and noticed that the north wall was always an organizing principle. This long corridor, which I call "the line," became the primary organizing principle of the space and functions as the main path through the house. It runs from the screened-porch entrance through the mudroom, the kitchen, and the dining space, ending in the living room. I defined the line with a 7-ft.-high dropped ceiling. The height feels comfortable when you walk along the corridor and creates a sense of arrival as you step into the taller kitchen, dining, and living spaces.

I used the same 7-ft. ceiling height and Douglas-fir beadboard to create a sheltered feeling in the breakfast nook on the opposite side of the kitchen. Although the nook is connected to the kitchen and feels close to the action, its seating is safely on the sidelines with a press-box-like view of the arena.

An island anchors the kitchen

The island is a workhorse. It was the last thing I sketched, well after most of the kitchen was complete, with the hope of achieving a more tailored fit.

Inspired by my great-grandmother's kitchen table, I wanted a large, communal work-surface. Our island does it all, serving as the baking hub, an eating counter with seats, a prep counter, and a serving buffet. There's also ample storage for pans. At 34 in. high, the island is perfect for kneading dough yet provides comfortable seating for guests. At the end of the island opposite the seats, the microwave fits into a niche below the countertop. Because we usually don't "nuke" food, we don't mind the lower location, and it elimi-



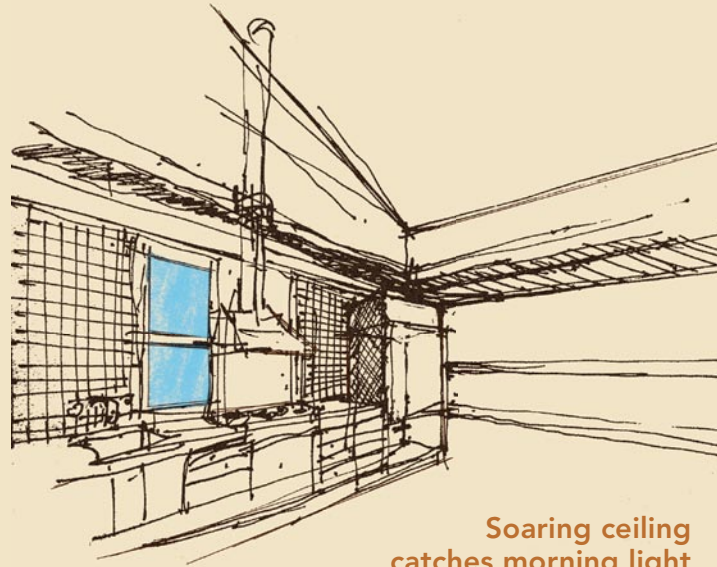
Don't judge an addition by its wrapping

The shed-style addition doesn't blend in with the house, but it creates an open, airy space for a modern, functional kitchen.

Someday the ramp may provide wheelchair access to the one-level house, but for now, it's the perfect launching pad for the author to cross-country ski from her door. Photo taken at C on floor plan.



"IF YOU CAN'T SKETCH IT, YOU CAN'T BUILD IT"



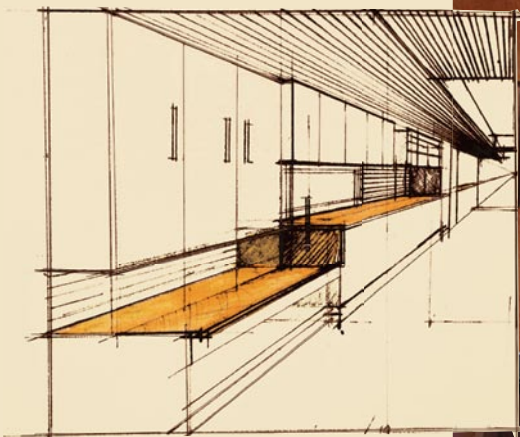
Soaring ceiling catches morning light

Stretching the roofline upward to accommodate clerestory windows floods the west-facing addition with morning light by reaching above the shadow cast by the main house. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

I filled sketchbooks with ideas and details for everything in this project, from the shape of the addition to the components of the island and the configuration of cabinets. As the project advanced, I moved from sketching on paper to making full-scale drawings right on the walls to see how cabinets, counters, and appliances would fit. This process of visualization and reinterpretation was crucial to arriving at the final product.

What appeared on paper to be simply a graphic urge to extend lines proved to have functional and visual benefits as construction proceeded. The floor plan allowed for better breezes, views all the way through the house, easier circulation, and ultimately more room for the activities slated for each area.

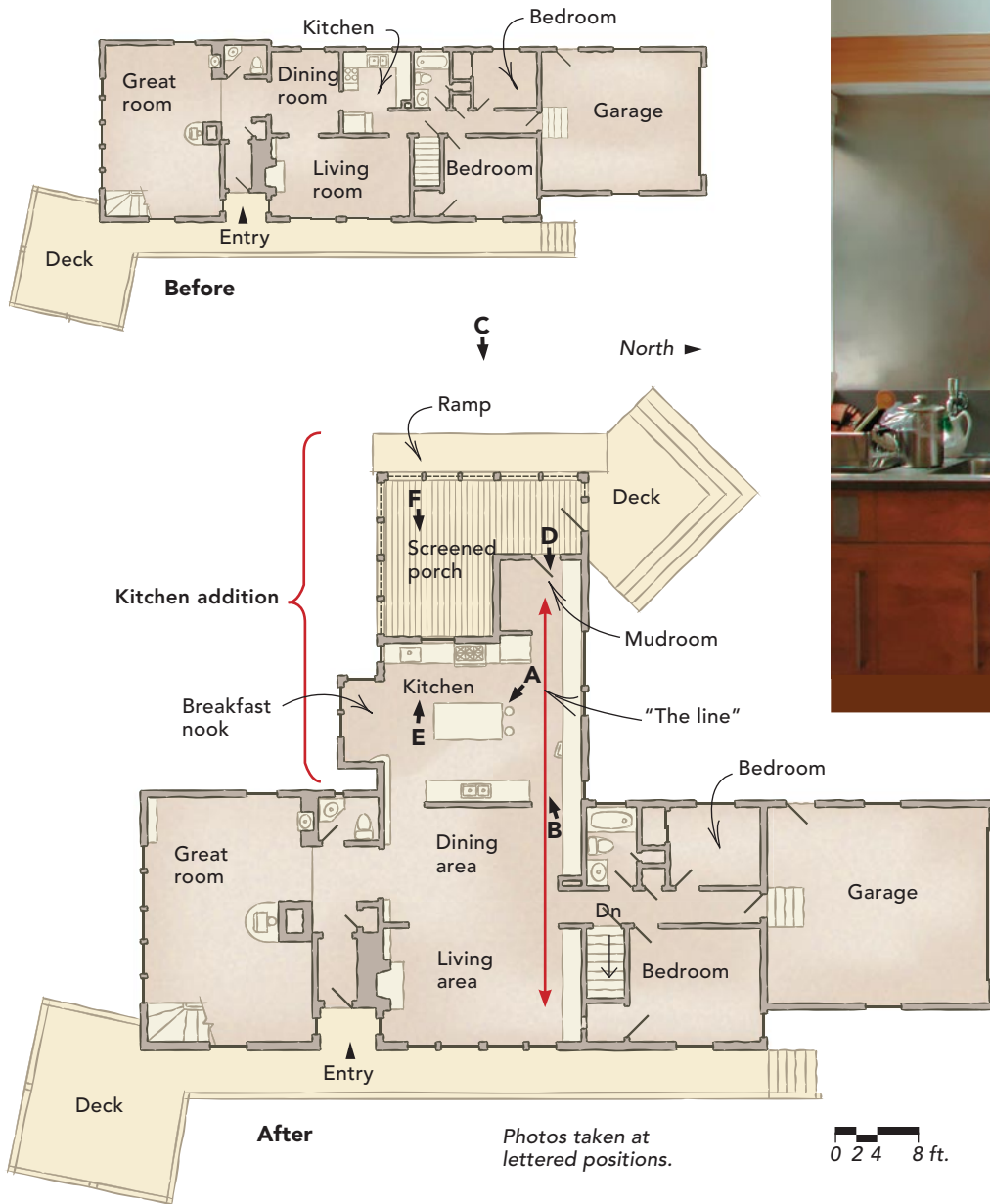
I also discovered that a detail that looks flat or unresolved on paper won't correct itself when it's built. One detail I wasn't able to draw to my satisfaction was the intersection of the refrigerator, the dropped ceiling, and the shed roof. In our completed kitchen, the stainless-steel wall meets the beadboard at the margins of the refrigerator nook in such a way as to leave the space a hybrid of both the kitchen and the corridor.



Walk the line

A long, built-in desk creates a drawer- and cabinet-lined corridor, dubbed "the line" by the author. The dropped beadboard ceiling defines the axis as the major circulation path through the house and adds a sheltered feeling to the work counter. Photo taken at D on floor plan.





ONE WINDOW, TWO VIEWS

The window above the prep area provides views of the yard and the woods while the homeowners are working at the stove. During the summer, the window opens to connect the kitchen and screened porch so that guests can converse with the cook and enjoy temperate breezes away from the heat of the kitchen. Also, the window serves as a pass-through for food and plates. Photo above taken at E on floor plan. Photo facing page taken at F.

A simple line organizes the space

The long hallway, known as “the line” to the author and her husband, emerged as a common theme among the working drawings for the new addition. By reorganizing circulation through the house, the new kitchen not only added a beautiful cooking space but also improved the living and dining areas.

nated the challenge of blending the appliance into the sleek expanse of wall cabinets.

Storage galore

Many of the counter and cabinet heights are lower than standard because my husband and I are both on the shorter side of average. At 32 in. high, the long bank of drawers from the mudroom through the dining area splits the difference between a desk and a counter. Because there isn’t a sink on this wall, we were able to convince the building inspector that this “desk” was a long piece of furniture

rather than a kitchen counter. As a result, we were relieved of the obligation to have electrical outlets every 2 ft. as required for kitchen counters. The long bank of drawers provides plenty of storage space. Drawers with full-extension slides offer one-motion access to items; that’s the most efficient type of storage. In fact, the only undercounter cabinets in the kitchen are beneath the sinks.

Reshaping the floor plan

Although technically speaking we added only a kitchen and a screened porch, the ren-



ovations to the interior enabled us to clarify activity areas so that rooms in the existing house had a better relationship with each other (floor plans, facing page).

Entering the house had always been troublesome: The hard-to-find front door lacked a vestibule for shedding coats and boots (critical rituals during a Michigan winter). Instead of using the front door, visitors generally arrived at the sliding doors in the living room. The small room felt tiny when it was arranged for and used primarily as a pass-through, so we replaced the sliding doors

with double-hung windows and removed the wall between the living and dining rooms. This open plan allows us to use the addition wall between the new kitchen and the dining area as a gallery wall for showing Vince's large paintings.

A mudroom in the kitchen addition has eased the entry process by providing a place to put down bags and remove winter layers after entering through the new screened porch. We had always wanted a screened porch because the flies and mosquitoes in our wooded location make it nearly impos-

sible to sit outside during the summer. Even our dog, Isaac, could use his outdoor pen only in the winter because those same flies would eat him alive. Now we all spend the warmer months eating, reading, and relaxing on the screened porch. Its solid walls are clad with the same beadboard that was used in the kitchen, giving the porch the feel of an interior room. □

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