Cultural landscapes of a tourism destination: South Australia’s Barossa Valley

Understanding Cultural Landscapes symposium, Flinders University, July 11-16, 2005

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Tourism constructs places as destinations which then compete for customers globally and locally. Cultural landscapes are the raw material from which destinations are constructed, and within which visitor experiences and memories are created. Tourism marketers aim to identify points of difference for each destination. The ways in which they do this vary partly with the nature of the place they are selling, and partly with the markets they want to reach. Being able to identify key elements of cultural landscapes should be able to help tourism marketers differentiate their product more effectively, and improve decision making in tourism planning. It should also help the communities who live in destinations to manage tourism in such a way that local identities are acknowledged and respected, so that it is culturally and socially, as well as economically sustainable.

Some cultural tourism operators build their tour around interpreting mostly historical cultural landscapes¹ and some concentrate on Australian Indigenous art². But mostly, the term ‘cultural landscapes’ appears in tourism promotional materials in conjunction with ‘unique’ or ‘authentic’. These two words are used so widely as to have lost any real meaning, as in ‘You will find the area is unique in Australia’ (BWTA 1999) and ‘Whether you are looking for quiet indulgence, or a happy family holiday, the Barossa can offer an authentic experience’ (Fineline Printing 1989³). They certainly don’t help would-be travellers make choices about likely destinations, or about what they will see and do when they are there.

Why do cultural landscapes matter in tourism? Is a cultural landscape the same for people who live in a tourism destination as it is for those who

¹ For instance, Australians Studying Abroad tour titles since 1990 have included Cultural Landscapes of Tuscany and Umbria and Cultural Landscapes of France. Tours focus on aspects of culture such as history, art and architecture.
² Ku Arts and Wayward Bus have recently announced a cultural tour to the Anangu/Pitjantjatjarra/Yankatjatjarra lands in Central Australia, in which the tour base is visits to the Arts Centres in the APY communities.
³ The Barossa Regional visitor guides have usually been produced for the regional tourist association, but in 1989, Fineline Printing was awarded a contract to produce and distribute the guide for the Barossa Tourist Association.
visit it? How do visitors develop their expectations about the places they visit and what is the place of cultural landscapes in this? This paper discusses some of these questions, using South Australia’s Barossa Valley as an example.

Every cultural landscape has layers of meaning, which vary depending on the perspective taken (eg architecture or agriculture) and the ways in which each individual is likely to be aware of and then interpret those layers (cf Meinig 1978, Schein 1997, Suvantola 2002). We see landscape through our existing mindsets, influenced in part by what we already know or expect, in part by the things which interest us most – history, vegetation, food and wine, visual arts, spirituality, architecture. The way we see a cultural landscape is also influenced by whether it is a landscape that is intrinsic to our identity or one that is constructed and viewed by outsiders; whether we live in it or are visiting it for a day, a month or a year.

Tourism is one of the main ways in which we experience cultural landscapes as outsiders. The extent to which we are able to interpret cultural landscape layers and understand the everyday culture in places we visit depends on what we already know about a place before we leave home. Tourists usually select one destination over another on the basis of place images which are selected by the tourism industry, and it has been argued that globally, tourism is ‘the most profound modern force involved in place production’ (Young 1999). Cultural landscapes become destinations through the meanings ascribed to them by marketing and promotion. Typically, these images have been conveyed through promotional brochures of different sorts (Squire 1994, Young 1999) although the use of the internet for travel destination research is increasing. Destination image is usually discussed in such a way that it implies both visual imagery and words, although these do not always consistently convey the same message.

This paper discusses these ideas in the context of the Barossa Valley in South Australia. My perspective is that of both insider and outsider. Although I was not born there, I lived in Angaston with my family from 1985 to 2004 and my mother has lived in Bethany and Tanunda for over thirty years.
My English name conceals the German part of my identity – the Neuenkirchen line. Living in this community was the first time I felt that the German part of me was not only acceptable, but a doorway to acceptance. My first employment in the tourism industry was with what became the Barossa Wine and Tourism Association, and in the Barossa I began to learn about the structure and operations of the tourism industry. I also observed the ambivalent way in which the communities felt about tourism, and felt this myself. As tourism marketer I promoted the region. As community member I worked on committees planning and presenting major events such as the Barossa Vintage Festival and Barossa Music Festival. As president of the Residents’ Association I fought against schemes for tourism developments that would have transformed the rural communities and taken more water than was available for irrigated golf courses.

I love knowing that the village of Bethany was drawn up in medieval strips as a waldhufendorf and that Eugene von Guerard sketched the tiny falls in Bethany Creek, raising them almost to romantic torrents. I understand some of the complex linkages that keep the Barossa communities working cooperatively, and those that keep old differences alive. Some Barossa tourism literature talks about the great community spirit in the Valley, usually in relation to organising the great regional
events like the Vintage Festival. Beyond this is another level of responsibility and care exemplified most recently for me by the activities coordinator at the Tanunda Lutheran Home arranging for my mother to take weekly piano lessons. Her teacher is a Year 11 student from Faith Lutheran School – Faith students come to the Home most weeks to help with the activities program for residents. This closeness can only be available to people within a community and should be beyond the reach of the tourist gaze.

The Barossa is one of the top three tourism destinations in South Australia (SATC 2003a). The Barossa Regional Profile (SATC 2003b) describes it as offering ‘stunning vineyard and rural land-scapes [sic] alongside heritage towns and traditions that owe much to early English settlers and Lutheran pioneers. The Barossa’s core theme is of course wine’.I

This has not always been the case. In the first half of the twentieth century the Barossa Valley was promoted mostly for its scenery and its fruit industry. The German heritage with which the region is now widely associated only emerged as an element in tourism promotional materials in the 1960s. The English heritage mentioned in the Regional Profile generally refers to the wealthy pastoralists in the hills, and particularly the Angas family who played a prominent role in the ‘planned free settlement’4 of South Australia and the region. Heritage and wine underpin most writing about the Barossa as a tourism destination, with community spirit, events, food and music moving on and off stage depending on the publication and the market.

The regional tourist guides from the late 1980s to 2005 have attempted to convey some of the complexity of the Barossa - its cultural landscape – with varying degrees of success. But to present a cultural landscape as tourism product is a major challenge. To reveal and understand the many layers of what can be seen on the surface requires weaving in elements of landform, land use, survey and settlement patterns, building materials and styles. These tell us some things about the forms of what we see before us. To unravel their relationships to each other, and to the people who have shaped and modified the land and those who still do, the threads of history, ethnicity, custom and tradition, economics, religion and other values need to be identified. And taking its shape from all of these things and more is the everyday lifestyle of the region’s people.

The Barossa’s colonial heritage is dominated by its early settlement by German-speaking dissident Lutherans from Silesia, Brandenburg and

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4 Barossa Australia was commissioned by the Barossa winemakers for a regional promotion in London.
Posen. The tourism myth has it that these were the first settlers in the Barossa. Regional visitor guides do not mention the Peramangk and Ngadjuri people who preceded the European settlers. The more substantial regional guides produced by the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia (Barker 1991, Barker, Heathcote and Ward 2003) do have sections on the Indigenous people of the Barossa. For mention of the English settlers who preceded the Germans in the southern Barossa, one has to turn to the more specialised regional histories, such as *The Barossa, A Vision Realised* (Muncenheg et al 1992). The first Germans who took up land in 1842 at Bethanien, Neu Schlesien (Bethany) are the source of the tourism myth. The continuing nineteenth and twentieth century chain immigrations of people from many different parts of Germany into the Barossa have shaped the present community significantly, but they are not represented in the ‘regional heritage’ presented to tourists.

The English and German settlers lived side by side in connected but separate communities for some time, gradually evolving through a highly distinctive regional culture which draws from both sets of cultural traditions. Angela Heuzenroeder’s current research on cross-cultural exchange in the women’s realm of food - ingredients, recipes, cooking methods and the language associated with them - gives a fascinating insight into one aspect of the local culture.\(^5\)

Today the Barossa is an Australian community, which maintains a lively awareness of its German and English connections, and the Lutheran churches remain a social and political force that is quite unusual in today’s secular Australia. The German influence is most evident in devotion to foods such as mettwurst, dill cucumbers and honey biscuits, music, in many vernacular buildings of the nineteenth century, the many German place names such as Siegersdorf and Kaiser Stuhl\(^6\) and in the dominance of the Lutheran churches. Every town in the Barossa has a well-attended Lutheran primary school, and the Faith Lutheran secondary school near Tanunda is a coeducational Christian Secondary School where the ‘philosophy of education is based upon the Holy Scriptures and acknowledges the Christian home to be the primary and fundamental agency of Christian education’. The skittles game of Kegel is enjoyed by a small but dedicated band of players in Tanunda.

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\(^5\) Angela Heuzenroeder has been kind enough to let me read in draft form the relevant chapter of her PhD thesis in History at the University of Adelaide.

\(^6\) German place names in the Barossa, as in other parts of South Australia, were replaced with English names during World War I. A few were reinstated in 1936, as part of South Australia’s centenary celebration, but the majority were only restored in the 1970s.
Much less visible are the meanings of the street plantings of carob trees and the rows of pink Easter lilies planted outside the fence lines of the older cottages.

For these one needs to tap into the store of associations that the settlers from Eastern Europe brought with them. The carob trees (also known as locust trees) have a spiritual meaning, They are said to be the tree of St John the Baptist, providing him with food when he went into the wilderness. One huge carob tree behind a rural church was introduced to me some years ago as the Johannesbaum, and that is how I see them – as well as through the landowner’s eye of as good fodder trees, very hardy and the source of carob as a chocolate substitute. The pink lilies baffled me for years. Why were they planted on the outside of fences, and not in gardens?

An answer came one day when I was talking to a woman who had grown up in Bethany, a very close knit community with a strong Lutheran congregation. She said ‘You know my mother used to say (though I don’t believe it) but she used to say that those pink lilies you know, they keep away the evil spirits’. It is fascinating that along with their strong commitment to Lutheranism, some of the German-speaking settlers brought with them a world inhabited by spirits that could be
harnessed by rituals of various sorts. In his *Barossa Journeys*, Noris Ioannou summarises some of the stories he heard in the course of his researches. They include tales of the Sixth and Seventh books of Moses ‘believed to exist in Wendish folklore as a source of knowledge on magic and witchcraft’ (1997:61), hexes and white magic. The lilies connect to this earlier world of folklore and superstition.

The valley itself is framed on the east by the Barossa Range and on the west by the Greenock Hills. The view across the valley from the hills is described in *Discover the Barossa* as ‘a valley of vineyards crossed by roads and rivers, with houses and settlements and native woodland’ (Barker et al 2003:2).

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View of the Barossa Valley from Trial Hill.

The fertile valley lands have supported flourishing wheat and fruit crops as well as vines until the last decade or so, when the success of Australian wines on the international markets has increasing led to vineyards taking over from other agricultural and horticultural uses.

As wine tourism has developed, wine has come to dominate the Barossa’s tourism marketing. The food culture of the Barossa is also well represented, as is the region’s German heritage.

In the late 1980s the Barossa became unfashionable amongst wine writers, who labelled it as a hot climate for grapes, producing heavy wines with the fire of high alcohol but inferior fruit. Cool climate wines such as those from Mornington and the Coonawarra were written about much more favourably. Determined to re-establish the Barossa’s name as a producer of top quality wines, the committees of the wine and tourism associations embarked on a joint promotional strategy which included replacing all the existing photographs in the marketing library with new ones commissioned from photographers who knew the region well. The brief stressed the need to have images which were green and implied coolness. Autumn vineyards were acceptable. The resulting photographic library showed the Barossa winter, spring and autumn, but not summer. The window of opportunity to achieve green vineyards and green hills was very tight. It really had to be October, when the vines were coming into full leaf and before the hills had begun to brown as the rain dwindled at the end of spring.

Control over the content and design of regional visitor guides has been a topic of discussion between regional tourism associations and the state
government tourism agency for at least twenty years. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the guides were written and assembled by the regional tourism association, with advice from the tourism agency. The 1989 theme. Locally generated, was *The Barossa, A Land For All Seasons* (Fineline Printing 1989)

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The committee’s concern to include the people of the Barossa as part of what set the region apart from others shows in the selection of the images for the front cover of the regional guide that year. These photographs show vineyards being picked by hand; white grapes in the trailer and red grapes in the foreground. The inset images show food and wine being served outdoors; a family at a hot air balloon event (drinks on the table), and three of the grape pickers at work. At this time, mechanised picking was being introduced rapidly, and a deliberate decision was made in choosing these harvest images to reflect the traditional craft of hand-picking.

The 1991 guide, *The Barossa....Unforgettable* (Barossa Tourist Association 1991), featured one of the newly commissioned photographs. Taken from the hill behind Gnadenfrei winery looking across to the Barossa Range, the picture foregrounds St Michael’s Lutheran church framed by gums. The colours of the landscape come from the small farms and vineyards typical of the valley floor at that time.

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1991 guide front cover 1991 back cover autumn vineyard

In 1996/97, the cover image is autumn vineyard. Here, as in the earlier cover images, the vines are hand-pruned and therefore hand-picked (BWTA 1996).

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On this cover also is the marketing image of the South Australian Tourism Commission (bunch of grapes) and the state marketing slogan of the time – ‘Come to your senses. Come to South Australia’. (This slogan was short-lived, as its intended associations with sensual delights were misinterpreted in some other countries, where the translation ran more along the lines of ‘Don’t be stupid’).

The covers of the regional tourism guides from 1999 to 2005 have all been designed as part of a family of guides designed and shaped by the South Australian Tourism Commission, still with input from the region.
The 2000 guide is the last one to show any awareness of other elements of the Barossa than vineyards (BWTA 2000).

This typical small Barossa Lutheran church surrounded by vineyard and framed by gum trees is Gnadenberg (Hill of Grace). The vineyard is owned by the Henschke family, who produce a famous red wine called Hill of Grace. Gnadenberg is in the hills east of Angaston, between Keyneton and Moculta. Most of the country out here is used for grazing or growing grain, its lower rainfall evident in the eucalypts’ mallee forms. This is the only summer photograph I have seen on a regional guide cover, and is the only one of a place that although locally immediately recognisable, is outside the valley geographically. The local government boundaries of the Barossa extend well beyond the tourist core of the Barossa, and so does the sense of association between communities. Gnadenberg was settled in 1856 by people from Bethany, who were seeking new land and the Gnadenberg church shares a pastor with the Strait Gate Lutheran Church in Light Pass.

In 2001-2002, the image is back in the tourist heart of the Barossa, with a posed group picnicking on the grass, wine glasses in hand, in a treed park in front of Richmond Grove chateau style winery.

The most recent guide has no people and no landscape. The cover is three and a half beautifully lit tasting glasses of what should be shiraz (but doesn’t look like it), sitting on an oak cask (Barossa Marketing 2004).
We know that this is the Barossa, because the engraving on the wine glasses tells us so. But where is the distinctiveness in this? There is no sense at all of the Barossa or its people here. The wine marketing strategy has taken over for the time being. But as the wine tourism marketers are searching now for images that will quintessentially define each of the South Australian wine regions, we can hope that the wine glasses will appear for one edition only.

Part of what has happened in the selection of cover images for the Barossa guides is the search for a widely recognisable image, one that indicates the primary strength of the region as a tourism destination.

Inside each guide there are brief descriptions of what you can see and do in the Barossa. Most of the images include vineyards and wineries, there are always a few of the Lutheran churches, and many images of food, wine and festivals. All of these representations of the Barossa are authentic, in the sense that the scenes exist, the wine and food grown in the region are enjoyed with familiar pleasure by local people, and that the year is punctuated with events centred on wine, food and music. Yet it is a much narrower base of cultural landscape representation than that featured in a major community art work, *The Barossa Valley Wall Hanging*, which was designed and made by a group of thirty nine women, members of the Vine Patch Quilters.
The creators of the hanging chose what to include in their representation of the Barossa, based on discussions of places, memories and aspects of daily life important to them. They designed it to give realistic portrayals, so that the places and activities in it are recognisable, so they used photographs or real life examples (as with the sausages in the foreground and the Barossa Pearl bottle). Each image was sized to fit the overall design of the hanging, and was made into a kit to be worked as a square. Every interpreter was given instructions on making the pieces as close to real life as possible. It portrays key elements of the Barossa’s history, heritage, people and places that are important to these women. Some of the images can frequently be found in tourism guides. The Seppeltsfield winery, the old Tanunda post office building/Tanunda museum and the Whispering Wall at Williamston are examples of this double significance.

The hanging includes many of the historic landmarks of the Barossa: wineries, churches, settler’s cottages, barns, flour mills, bake-ovens and German wagons. Bethany’s medieval farm strips are there, as are the historic cottages around Goat Square. Community celebrations such as the Barossa Vintage Festival are represented, along with the music and food which are such an important part of Barossa life. The places and activities represented in the hanging were chosen because they were well
known, had an identifiable shape, historical significance or were important to present Barossa communities (Leader-Elliott et al 2004 p 12). Aspects of everyday life are there, such as sports and recreation and a local pub (specifically requested by the husband of one of the interpreters, as he wanted there to be a place where he could have a beer). As well as wineries, other local industries such as fruit growing and drying, grain growing, cattle and sheep, horse breeding, and mining (the Angaston cement works) are represented. So too are the cooper at work in the centre of the hanging, shaping the casks with flame and massive forearms.

The women who designed and made the wall hanging have a strong feeling for the Barossa as a place. They have drawn from their history and traditions, choosing and expressing elements which continue to have meaning in their contemporary lives. ‘The group was careful to include places from all parts of the Barossa, so that all the towns and several of the villages were represented in the hanging. They also wanted to make connections between the past and the present’. (Leader-Elliott et al 2004 p 13). The Indigenous people of the area is not part of the cultural landscape of the women who made the hanging. The Barossa before European settlement is represented by kangaroos and grass trees (in the upper right section of the hanging).

This piece of cultural landscape interpretation grew up from and out of a community group’s sense of itself, of the things that mattered to them. It is not unlike some outreach projects undertaken by heritage agencies (English Heritage 2000) in which different communities have been engaged in activities to connect them with aspects of their cultural heritage.

This view of the Barossa’s cultural landscape is full of the sort of local cultural detail that can enrich the globally recognisable image of the vineyards and the wine glass. It celebrates the vernacular and the everyday, the past and the present. Every image in it has multiple stories behind it, drawn from the collective myth and history of the region, as well as the stories of why each artist chose the images she did. Built heritage is strongly represented, along with many aspects of the region’s intangible heritage.

*The Barossa Valley* hanging is just one example of the ways in which communities can convey layers of meanings from their own cultural landscapes. The book *Creating the Barossa in Fabric* (Leader-Elliott et al 2004) complements the art work and deepens visitor experience of the Barossa by linking the stories from the hanging with the stories of the places represented in it. Engaging communities in projects to express alternative views of their own cultural landscapes can strengthen a
community’s sense of identity. The ideas and images they develop could be linked to tourism marketing and interpretation programs to give potential visitors a deeper understanding of what they might expect to find at a place, and to derive more satisfaction from the experience they have when they are actually there.

When people travel, they carry their own constructions of the cultural landscapes they visit. These can be shaped by a wide range of influences, including literature, film, television, paintings and cookery books. They will also be shaped by representations of regions and sites created by tourism marketers (Rojek 1997:53, Urry,1990:11). Expectations of travel are often built on idealised images, in which the attraction or sight/site is separated from the everyday aspects of the lifestyle and landscape/environment around it. It is the contrast between our own everyday patterns of behaviour and cultural beliefs and the practices of different cultures that attracts us (Rojek 1997:71). And as ‘the historic environment is part of everyday culture’ for the people who live with it, (English Heritage 2000:25), it is also part of the attraction of a different place for tourists.

The fundamental product in tourism is the destination experience (Ritchie and Crouch 2000:1), and tourism therefore constructs places as destinations within which certain sorts of experiences will be available (Suvantola 2002) – either by just being in a place, or through purchasing aspects of it, such as accommodation, food, or visits to sites and attractions (Pearce and Moscardo 1984). For wine regions, the challenge is to ‘develop images in the minds of travellers that position their destinations as truly extraordinary wine tourism experiences (Williams 2001:52). Peter Williams’ analysis of the imagery used by wine regions in eleven countries concluded that ‘those destination images that differentiate one region or product from the next must be based on a strong appreciation of distinct natural and cultural elements, which cannot be replicated elsewhere’ (2001:54)

As tourism is such a powerful economic generator, it is not surprising that there is fierce competition amongst destinations and attractions. Tourism marketing agencies and various elements of the tourism industry are players in the competition. Each organisation aims to represent a place in what it perceives to be the most advantageous in market terms and select place-promotion images on the basis of what they think will sell best. Competition, therefore, centres on the destination. (Ritchie and Crouch 2000 p1, Selby and Morgan 1996). Tourism agencies at all levels take their role as destination marketers very seriously and commit significantly to enhance their ‘touristic image and attractiveness’.(Ritchie and Crouch 2000 p 1)
Tourism selects globally recognisable elements of place over those with local meaning to create destinations, and prefers the ‘extraordinary’ or ‘wonderful’ to the everyday or ordinary. Given the global nature of tourism, it is desirable from a marketing point of view that the core elements of a destination’s image are recognised world wide. On the other hand, taking a local approach adds additional meaning structures, which can help the product become stronger, as the finer nuances are added to the core images (Therkelsen 2003 p 139). These can help to differentiate it from other destinations and broaden its appeal. Therkelsen uses the term glocal to convey the idea that image formation processes have both global and local elements. Global tourism frequently leads to loss of authenticity through the changes that it brings about to town and landscape character. It also frequently leads to loss of a sense of meaning and diminishes the use value of places and landscapes. (Relph 1976; Wang 1999; Terkenli 2002).

In the sample of Barossa marketing imagery examined in this paper, it is clear that the dominant theme being presented is wine. However, the search for the universally recognisable image has shrunk the representation of the Barossa from a cultural landscape to a wine glass. The tourism agencies have many more images to choose from, as the photographs on the South Australian Tourism Commission’s website attest (SATC 2005). attention were paid to local elements of cultural landscapes in tourism planning and representation, as well as through heritage management, then it might help to alter some of these adverse effects of tourism.

Tourism images are generally constructed from the outside by marketers. They tend to the global, as they seek to project images which will be widely understood. Local communities will construct the same destinations from a different starting point, and their representations can provide the richer detail and finer nuances that Therkelsen refers to. They are more likely to tap into the richness of contemporary life, to reflect their own value systems and to have multiple layers of meaning.

Destination image has a crucial role in individuals’ decision to travel to a particular place. It is also a crucial factor in visitor satisfaction, as the previously held image is compared with the visitor’s perceptions of the destination when they are actually there, and assessed according to whether it meets expectations (Chon 1990; Selby and Morgan 1996; Ritchie and Crouch 2000).

Although tourism marketing rarely constructs it this way, the cultural landscape of any place is an integral part of any destination, and therefore will have a profound effect on the tourism experience. It will
surround visitors wherever they go, but their awareness of this will depend on what they already know about their destination and the information they get when they are there.

Many visitors will arrive at a destination with little information about it. Their ability to find out about it once they are there will depend on how committed they are to independent research (usually not very), or on interpretation – usually through a guided tour or other interpretive media. A culturally well-informed guide is a precious find for visitors wanting to understand the meanings of the cultural landscape around them, but they tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

Suvantola (2002:181) argues that experience of place is much more intense when it is discovered by the traveller, ‘lived’ rather than ‘seen’. But this requires time, and a willingness to engage at a fairly deep level in learning about the cultural and landscape and cultural practice. To achieve this intense experience of cultural landscapes, it is necessary to go well beyond their representations in tourism marketing imagery,

As The Barossa Valley Wall Hanging shows, place representations developed by local communities can be richer and more complex than those developed specifically for tourism, and contain additional meaning structures, because of the depth and breadth of community cultural memory.

The potential richness of the local is lost in the typical process through which cultural landscapes are constructed as destinations and represented in tourism marketing imagery. If the deeper veins of knowledge and memory were recognised in place marketing, destinations would more readily be differentiated and alternative cultural landscapes become accessible to travellers.

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