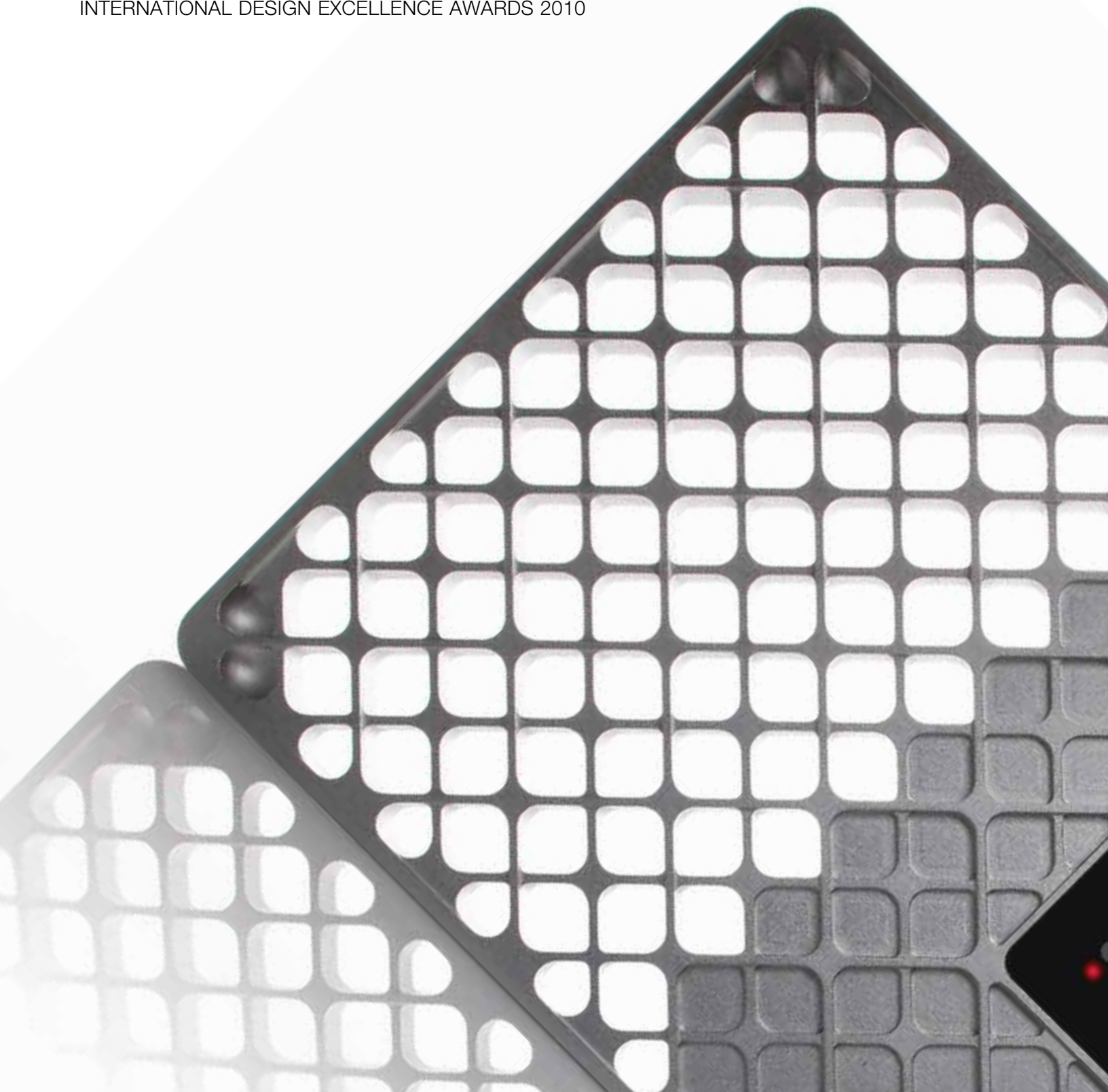


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Bronze IDEA winner Beats by Dr. Dre's Heartbeats by Lady Gaga. See page 80.

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2010 YEARBOOK OF DESIGN EXCELLENCE

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 From the Executive Editor
By Alistair Hamilton, IDSA | 19 Applauding Design Excellence
By Verna Talcott |
| 8 2010 Student Merit Award Winners
By Mary Beth Privitera, IDSA | 20 Build a Better Mouse Trap
By Linda Tischler |
| 16 Bigger & Better
By John Barratt, IDSA, 2010 IDEA Jury Chair | 22 Meet the IDEA2010 Jury |
| 18 New Times Ahead
By Joice Joppert Leal | 210 2010 Finalists |
| | 221 2010 IDEA/Brasil Winners |
| | 222 2010 Index of Winners |

2010 IDEA WINNERS

Commercial & Industrial Products

- 30 Electrosurgery Unit Tester (ESU Tester) for Developing Countries**
- 32 ESR 5000 Series Reach Truck**
- 34 Geocell RDFW™**
- 36 Silver IDEAs**
Adaptive Fritting ■ AURORA C2010R ■ Easy-Riser/Valve-Saver Utility Riser and Cover for Manholes and Valve Boxes ■ Kitchen Nano Garden ■ Rescue Wizard
- 42 Bronze IDEAs**
Belkin Conserve Surge with Timer ■ Digital Control Inc., Digitrak F2 Drill-Head Locator ■ M2 Monitor Arm ■ T-Tech LED Dimmable Light Bulb/Nature ■ USAF Extrication Tool

Communication Tools

- 44 Jawbone ICON Headset**
- 46 Silver IDEAs**
AT&T 3G MicroCell™ ■ Palm Pre Plus and Palm Touchstone Charging Dock
- 48 Bronze IDEA**
GD880 (MINI)

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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

41 Bemis	189 IDEA 2011
c2 Cesaroni Design	15 LaFrance Corp.
123 Cesaroni Design	7 LDA
56 Coway	c4 Lextant
1 Dow Corning	145 Minimal
21 The Henry Ford Museum	c3 NewDealDesign
99 Hitachi Data Systems	207 objeto brasil
29 Hyundai	91 SEGD
	181 Samsung
	9 solidThinking



Cover: Slingbox 700U, Best of Show and Gold winner. Photo: Mark Serr.

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- 50 LaCie iamaKey, CooKey and WhisKey USB Flash Drives**
- 51 Silver IDEAs**
Aerohive HiveAP 300 Series ■ Dell Adamo XPS ■ Gateway One
- 54 Bronze IDEAs**
Dell Vostro All-in-One ■ Imagemate All-in-One and Multi-Card Reader Family ■ litl webbook ■ Pano Logic Zero Client Computer ■ Que Proreader ■ Western Digital My Book and My Passport External Hard Drives: Essential, Elite and Studio Models


Design Strategy

- 57 The Launching of the Guaraná Jesus New Can (Lancamento da Lata Guaraná Jesus)**
- 58 Lifetuner.org**
- 60 Li-Ning Design Strategy**
- 62 Silver IDEAs**
Panasonic Integrated Smart Monitor
- 63 Bronzes IDEAs**
EILEEN FISHER: Reframing a Brand for an Emerging Audience ■ Investigative Learning Curriculum for Ormondale Elementary School

Ecodesign

- 64 PACT Underwear**
- 66 Silver IDEAs**
A Traffic Light ■ Firebug ■ Herman Miller Ardea Light
- 69 Bronze IDEAs**
Herman Miller Twist LED Task Light ■ Tazzytotes™ - Produce Bags ■ Zen Wagon


Entertainment

- 70 Beats by Dr. Dre Solo**
- 72  Slingbox 700U**
Story by Tim Adkins
- 76 Silver IDEAs**
Bose L1® Compact System ■ JamHub® Silent Rehearsal Studio ■ LED TV 9000 ■ Tony Hawk: RIDE
- 80 Bronze IDEAs**
Barnes & Noble – Nook ■ Beats by Dr. Dre's Heartbeats By Lady Gaga ■ Bose® Soundlink™ Wireless Music System ■ DJ Hero ■ Mustang UX: Mobile Experience for Us ■ Sling Touch Control 100 ■ Zune HD

Environments

- 83 Media Bus Shelter**
- 84 The Soccer Museum (Museu do Futebol)**
- 86 Urban Graphic Design for Bixiga Neighborhood (Trabalho Gráfica Urbana para o Bairro do Bixiga)**
- 87 Silver IDEAs**
China Design Now Exhibition ■ Emergent Surface ■ hei solar light™ Champ
- 90 Bronze IDEAs**
Exhibition of the Book 'Pez de Plata rBarcelona: Reflect, Recycle, Respond' ■ Mellon Town Residential Lobby – Bamboo

Home Living

- 92  Easy Latrine**
Story by Jennifer Yankopolus
- 96 Fuego Element**
- 98 Herman Miller Ardea Light**
- 100 Hwaro**
- 101 LED Light Bulb**
- 102 Virus Doctor**
- 103 Woven Bin (Cesto Trama)**
- 104 Silver IDEAs**
Base Brands Reduce™ Smash Can™ ■ Easylock Handle (Maçaneta Easy Lock) ■ Flow 2 ■ govino™ wine glass ■ LED Mini Star ■ linna armchair ■ Mini Automatic Floor Cleaner ■ OXO Good Grips 360° LiquiSeal Travel Mug ■ Speed Dial™ Set-Your-Own Combination Lock 1500iD ■ Still One ■ Tami Bar Primo ■ Vignette® Modern Roman Shades in Tiered™ Design Option with LiteRise® ■ Whirlpool Glamour Oven ■ Zoku™ Quick Pop™ Maker
- 118 Bronze IDEAs**
Blackfire Clamplight ■ Body+Soul ■ Bosch Autochef™ Induction Cooktop ■ Demoiselle Dinner Table (Mesa Demoiselle) ■ Grohe Rainshower Collection ■ High&Dry ■ Jenn-Air 30" Double Wall Oven with V2™ Vertical Dual-Fan Convection System ■ Laundry Pod Concept ■ OXO Steel CorkPull ■ Recess_Lav ■ Skybar™ Wine Chill Drops ■ The Simple Garden ■ Viking® Designer™ Series (Kitchen Appliance Product Line) ■ YUBO Lunchbox

Interactive Product Experiences

- 124 CompleteSpeech Palatometer**
- 126 Virtual Wallet for PNC Financial Services Group**
- 128 Zune HD**

130 Silver IDEAs

(RED)WIRE ■ Hitachi IT Operations Analyzer User Experience ■ Impact: Efficiency for the Smart Grid ■ Lexmark Desktop UI Strategy ■ Sonos Controller 200

135 Bronze IDEAs

Flightpath: An In-Flight Entertainment (IFE) Design Concept ■ John L. Scott Website and Application Concept ■ litl OS ■ Microsoft® Project 2010 ■ OVI Suite 2.0 ■ Vitality Glowcaps

Leisure & Recreation Products

138 Meyerhoffer™ Surfboard

140 Silver IDEAs

Fitbit Tracker ■ Jimmyjane FORM2

142 Bronze IDEAs

AXIS1Eagle ■ Digital Camera ■ Matrix G7 Premium Strength System ■ Nike Lunarglide+ ■ NPX Lucifer Drysuit ■ Perfect Pushup V2 ■ Relax Backpack

Medical & Scientific Products

146 Fitbit Tracker

148 SILS™ Port

151 Ventus PROVENT® Professional Sleep Apnea Therapy

152 Silver IDEAs

Cimzia Prefilled Syringe ■ Eli Lilly HumatroPen 6mg, 12mg, 24mg ■ G-Cube ■ MRI Chair ■ S Series™ BTE featuring Sweep™ Technology ■ Zōn™ Series Hearing Aid

158 Bronze IDEAs

NPANT System for Bedridden Patients ■ Siemens Acuson S2000™ ABVS ■ Trilogy100 Ventilator ■ Valo Dental Curing Light

Office & Productivity

160 LIM (Light in Motion)

162 Very seating family

164 Silver IDEA

NeatDesk

165 Bronze IDEAs

Herman Miller Twist LED Task Light ■ OXO Good Grips Office Products for Staples

Packaging & Graphics

166 litl webbook packaging

168 Method Laundry Detergent with Smartclean Technology™

Story by Tim Adkins

172 Silver IDEAs

Belkin Conserve Surge with Timer Packaging ■ Incase Packaging 2009

174 Bronze IDEAs

Jawbone Icon Headset ■ *Out of the Box: Access to Mobile Communications for Older People* ■ *Tony Hawk: RIDE*

Personal Accessories

176 Silver IDEAs

BROOKE ■ PACT Underwear

Research

178 Lilly Patient Posters

180 Silver IDEA

Designing Stronger Communities

Service Design

182 Collaborative Service for Best Western

184 Silver IDEA

Spence Diamonds Service Design

Student Designs

185 980 TATOU - Sport Shoe for Le Parkour

186 CAS Air System

188 ONEDOWN

190 Silver IDEAs

1881 'American Red Cross Fashion' Branding Strategy ■ ezSlide ■ Numlock Handle ■ uni-eco ■ WORX-lift ■ Write? Light!

196 Bronze IDEAs

2IN1 ■ Angel Wings ■ BIRDHOUSE ■ Dew Bank ■ Echochole Surgical Imaging System ■ Eco Friendly Toothbrush Sanitizer Charcoal ■ Future Living ■ Insic Wall Socket ■ Lifelong Crutches ■ Luxy Vespa Helmet ■ Nordicpul: All-Weather Women's Work Gloves ■ Pico - The Projector Camera ■ Project: Latrine Design ■ Remax Snowboard Boot ■ Roly Poly Iron ■ Spirit: New-Generation Sustainable Automotive Seat ■ Toy Guardian ■ Transformable Earphones ■ Ville ■ Waste Bin

Transportation

204 Silver IDEAs

ATNMBL ■ Mission Motors 'Mission ONE' Electric Sportbike ■ Traffic 2.0 Metro

208 Bronze IDEAs

CMYK Elektrik Bike ■ FREERIDER ■ Mini Countryman ■ Motorcycle Padlocks (Cadeados de Moto) ■ Panasonic Integrated Smart Monitor ■ Skyloft

BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP

The winners of the 2010 International Design Excellence Awards can help you ride the waves, grill a burger, catch varmints and save the earth.

The minutes are ticking down, and a fleet of town cars idle outside the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., ready to leave for the airport. Inside the building, though, the 18 design luminaries serving as jurors of the 2010 International Design Excellence Awards (IDEA)—the field’s top honors—are unmoved. Over the previous 48 hours, they have blazed through a pool of nearly 1,900 entries from 29 countries, choosing 38 gold-medal winners. And now they are stuck, deadlocked over the final selection for Best in Show.

Choosing the medalists in some of the 18 categories—everything from medical devices to home decor—was easy. And seeing the reach of modern design has been exhilarating. For instance, Thomas Meyerhoffer’s elegant surfboard takes top honors in leisure and recreation, while the judges deem IDEO’s poignant posters for pharma giant Lilly “a simple but beautiful moment of creativity,” awarding it Gold in design research.

Best in Show proves to be the knottiest problem. The finalists affirm the wild diversity of the competition; they are so different that judging them against one another is like picking between apples and oysters. There is the packaging for Method laundry detergent, which the jurors love for its ability to change daily consumer behavior. The minimalism of the Slingbox multimedia broadcaster has many fans. “If this were the standard,” one juror jokes, “it would put us all

out of business.” And then there is the innovative low-cost latrine from Cambodia, modest on physical beauty, perhaps, but high on social responsibility.

The jurors are hypersensitive about the signal their choice will send to the larger design community. Jury chief John Barratt, CEO of product development firm Teague, insists that the winner be something that people throughout the industry “could be proud of vicariously.” He also reminds the panel, “This award is the bellwether of where the industry is and where it’s going.”

There had been a heated discussion at dinner the previous night about whether the environmental impact of a design should be a consideration in every category, not just in the “ecodesign” niche, as in this year’s awards. Designers Accord founder Valerie Casey, one of the eco-design category’s judges, urged her fellow jurors to make a bold statement by recategorizing that group’s entries and measuring the eco-responsibility of all the entries. The debate continued long after the dishes were cleared, until 2 a.m., when IDEA officials decided that changing the rules midstream, not to mention the logistics of rejudging everything the following morning, made Casey’s suggestion unworkable.

One significant result of the discussion: a major change in judging criteria for subsequent years. “When considering products for awards in the future, they will be evaluated on their social, ecological, cultural as well as economic responsibility,” says Clive Roux, CEO of IDSA, which produces the IDEA program. “The design profession can no longer claim excellence in design unless we have considered the concept of responsibility as a central part of the design problem.”

Visit FastCoDesign.com, *Fast Company*’s new design site, for an exclusive look at the 191 medalists, plus videos of the judges explaining their choices. ■

—Linda Tischler
Fast Company, July/August 2010

Welcome, innovator.



Pierre Omidyar
Creator/Chairman, eBay



Steve Wozniak
Cofounder, Apple Computer



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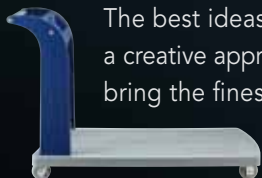
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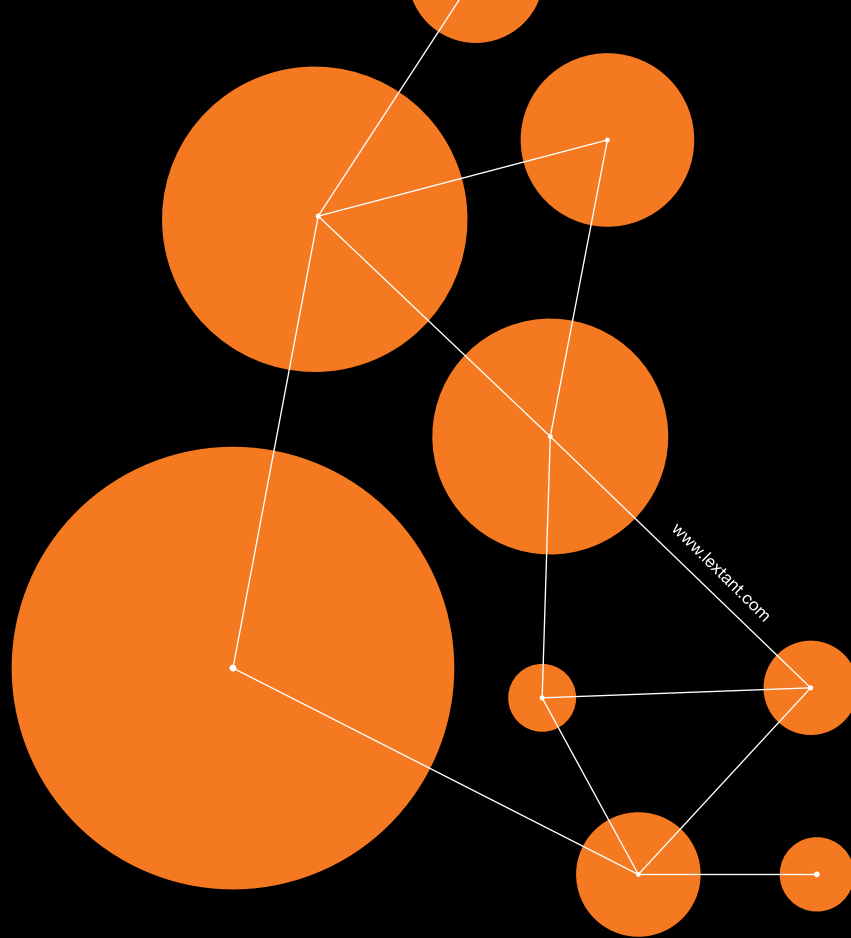
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