

## 50 LEED Platinum Apartments with Jeremy Knoll | Transcript

- Speaker 1: [00:02](#) [Inaudible].
- Charlie: [00:58](#) Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. I'm your host Charlie Chichetti and I've got a LEED Professional with us coming to us from Kansas city, Missouri, Jeremy Knoll. Jeremy, how you doing?
- Jeremy: [01:12](#) Doing all right, thanks. Good morning.
- Charlie: [01:14](#) Well we're going to get into not just are you a LEED Professional but you've done a tremendous amount of work, different rating systems, especially LEED and even recognized at a very high level with your LEED work. So we'll get into that. But Jeremy, I always like to ask the question, Hey, take us back. Where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?
- Jeremy: [01:31](#) Sure. So my parents are both career long haul markers, so I grew up in Kansas City, Missouri as a result and then went to a fine arts high school here in Kansas City. That led me then to Washington University in St. Louis pursuing an architecture degree. Part of my time in Washington University was also spent abroad in Copenhagen where I really learned an enormous amount about sort of sustainability, not just in textbooks but in actual practice. And then following that move back to Kansas City and started my career as an architect.
- Charlie: [02:05](#) No kidding. I think that international influence must have rubbed off on you. If you could unpack that some more. What did you see at the time when you were in Copenhagen? Because some of the other podcast guests, Jeremy, I've had, they too were influenced by working abroad or studying abroad and then coming back. What was that like?
- Jeremy: [02:23](#) Sure. So I would say as much as anything else, the problems that people are trying to solve in every culture around the world are pretty similar to each other. It's about housing, it's about where do you work, it's about how do you stay out of the elements. But the way that people have solved those problems tends to vary from country to country and from city to city. So traveling abroad was a really big influence on my early career. I feel like every place in the world has similar issues or problems that cultures are trying to solve. Things like keeping people dry and warm or cool and fed but how we go about solving those same questions varies a little bit from place to place. And so what I saw in Denmark, and while I was there I also traveled around Spain and Germany and up into Sweden, and England a little bit.

And what I saw there was a practice of sustainability that was in many ways taken as normal or as sort of a normal, as part of the just a development normal everyday process. Things like double wall systems in Germany for the cladding of skyscrapers. Super efficient building envelopes in Denmark, things where they were talking about things like circadian lighting and heating and cooling in much more efficient ways than I feel like we're still talking about them in America. But it gave me as much as anything else, it gave me a glimpse of what was possible so that when I started my career I could, you know, even as somebody right out of school, it could be like, well, I've seen this done in a way that we're not talking about. What if we looked at this other way of solving this problem or answering this question.

Charlie:

[04:03](#)

Yeah. It just makes sense. Exciting times for sure. And it was commonplace. I fell in love with Stockholm, Sweden, the middle of 2018. I was fortunate to go teach a WELL class there and man, what a neat place. At what point did you know I'm going to make a career in the Green Building Movement? Was there an aha moment? Was there a certain position you had at a certain company? How'd you know? You know what, I like this enough. I'm going to pursue it for a career.

Jeremy:

[04:30](#)

I don't know that there was a single moment. When I was in college I remember some of the architects I was interning with over the summers would talk about sustainability because I was interested already and some of the questions I would ask the response that I was getting was like, well it is a thing but it's not something that most people know about or do anything about. So it's not a great use of your time to focus on it. But I did focus on it at school because it was something I figured, well if this is my only chance to learn about it, I'm going to learn everything I can instead found that when I graduated and came out into the workforce in 2004, the first company I was with was actually really excited that I knew anything about it.

Jeremy:

[05:11](#)

And I was like, wait, you know something about this, put on this tie, come to this board meeting and talk to this developer about what you just said to me. But I would say that the sort of moment that a switch flipped for me, if I could point to any one particular event or anything, was probably my first maybe six months at work, I was in our copy kind of coffee area and this intern brought in these three stacks of printed full-size drawing sets and put them on the silver trashcan, the one trash receptacle that we had in the office. And I was like, what? What's going on with those? And it's like, Oh they were obsolete by the time we printed them. So I'm throwing them

away. And then it was first time I asked the question like, well, don't we recycle?

Jeremy: [05:54](#) And the answer was no, we did not recycle. And so I had the guy or helped me take all the sheets that he had just put into what was going to landfill and take them to my car so I could go then and figure out where to take them to get them recycled. And within a week had a recycling program set up for the company and was starting to think about things like, well I need to find other people who are trying to figure this out too. And so that's when I started volunteering with the U.S. Green Building Council and it kind of snowballed into my volunteering and leadership with that and other organizations from there. But I think it was really that first kind of realizing that all of that paper was going straight to the landfill without ever being opened. I just couldn't buy that. And that sort of became my opening to think about the operations of architecture as well as the actual architecture being produced in the firms.

Charlie: [06:48](#) Absolutely, man. Thanks for taking us there. Tell me about mentors. Was there anyone along the way that maybe opened some doors for you, you met with or maybe somebody you didn't meet with but they were an influence on you, you followed their work or you read their material. Did you have any mentors?

Jeremy: [07:04](#) I've had a lot of mentors along the way, but I think the ones that I would point to first and foremost would be two of the people that I met and initially was inspired by and then met and got to work with in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans that was Pam Dashiell who was the neighborhood association president and started an organization called the Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development post Katrina Lower Ninth Ward. And then another guy named Mack McClendon who opened a place called the Lower Ninth Ward Village. So these were two residents that in 2005 were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. And then in coming home and looking for leaders within their community to help them rebuild in a more sustainable way and to take a leadership position with the community and to help sort of create the ways by which people would rebuild their lives in a much more sustainable way.

Jeremy: [08:00](#) Kind of found that leadership within themselves and took on roles that before were not part of their lives. I just found that so inspiring and admirable. I couldn't help but to get engaged and to meet them and to help bring resources to them and ended up starting a nonprofit organization called Historic Green that is still doing operations in the Lower Ninth Ward today. And

anyway, and the other part of their mentorship was hearing from them how they talk about community, how they think about neighbors and the sort of difference between the idea of charity and philanthropy and the idea of just helping and just being a resource and empowering people. Those are very different ideas. And I really learned that from the two of them. I'd say the other lesson I learned from them is about the balance that that type of constant work takes.

Jeremy:

[08:57](#)

But both of them have passed away from what could really be primarily attributed to stress related illnesses and problems that came from just working so hard and so selflessly for so long that they just wore themselves down, down to nothing and died as a result. And so as a young person coming into my career, watching their passion and getting really inspired by them, but then watching their decline as they just went too far in one direction without seeking to restore their own selves and I took as a deep lesson for myself. And then professional mentors, the two I would point to, and there are quite a few I could, but the two that I think have had the most lasting and sort of constant influence in my career have been Bob Berkebile, who's the B in BNIM, as well as Bill Dupont, who is a professor at the University of Texas, San Antonio.

Jeremy:

[09:54](#)

So I got to know Bob when I started Historic Green and he served as a mentor to us. A lot of the work that the neighborhood was doing in the Lower Ninth Ward was building on a series of charrettes that Bob had helped to lead. And so he really helped us get the organization started and became really somebody I felt like I could turn to for questions about how do I grow this thing I'm trying to do in a way that makes sense. And I can only hope that when I get to where I am in my career, where he was when I first started talking to him, that I am also willing to spend, you know, an hour or two every couple of weeks with a 24 year old kid out of school, helping them to develop a crazy nonprofit that doesn't make any sense and build upon.

Jeremy:

[10:39](#)

The other person I mentioned was the national architect for the Historic Trust. And so I met him at Greenbuild and I just kinda went up to him after his talk all about sort of the connection between sustainability and preservation and had a conversation with him about this organization that we were starting to help people in the Lower Ninth Ward and wouldn't you like to join us and be a part of it? And he just jumped in and became a real leader of the group with us and became a peer and a friend, but was also instrumental in really opening my eyes to the conversation between sustainability and preservation and the

sort of synergy that exists between those two things. That they aren't different things necessarily but they're very similar in many ways.

Jeremy: [11:33](#) And the other thing that I feel like I really learned from working with him is the idea of not just architectural preservation, but cultural preservation. The idea that preservation is deeper than buildings and it's about people, it's about culture, it's about music, it's about food, things like that, that all intertwine together to create place and meaning to a culture and learning that I feel like helped really change the trajectory of how I talk about buildings and how I talk when I'm meeting with communities and so forth, and think about the architecture that I'm making, being not just building but containing so much more.

Charlie: [12:07](#) That's amazing. Yeah. You've had some incredible mentors and influence and I keep hearing more and more from experts like you about place or something. I'm happy to hear you're trying to preserve that as best you can. And my next question is looking back and it's okay I encourage to look back on the highlight reel. You mentioned some work in New Orleans and now you want to talk about that more. I see the 50 LEED platinum projects there on the residential side, but what else? What else are you really proud of? What's on the highlight reel here so far?

Jeremy: [12:37](#) Well, so 2019 was a pretty big year for me. I finally finished an architectural license I've been working towards for the better part of 15 years, if not longer. I was given a title LEED Fellow by the U.S. Green Building Council. So those were pretty big accomplishments that took a long time to build up to and to get through. And so I'm super proud of those, but I think, and I talked a little bit about Historic Green earlier and during my time, just a few things that in my application for LEED Fellow I kind of distilled into some stats that I can share is that in my time, our efforts resulted in the renovation of 152 homes, 48 gardens and landscapes, 18 community spaces like playgrounds or community gardens, things like that. We worked with over 1500 volunteers over a hundred days and we averaged about 15% energy savings on every home across all the homes that we touched in that time.

Jeremy: [13:37](#) But the one thing that I always come back to are the one kind of impact that I really feel like all of that effort was worth it for was that we were working actually here in Kansas City on a build out for affordable housing renovations in Roland Park, Kansas. And we were working on about eight or nine homes in the area. And

we worked with one family in particular where every home we did, we did an energy audit of the property before we decided on exactly what we were going to do. And so for one family we did an energy audit and through that process discovered that they had a cracked heat exchanger that was dumping carbon monoxide into the basement every time it kicked on. And when we shared that with the homeowner, because that's a really very dangerous thing and a huge deal.

- Jeremy: [14:28](#) And it resulted in us changing a way from just doing insulation, air sealing. We actually completely switched out that heat exchanger and did some other work to improve the safety and added sensors and things like that. So they would be alerted if there was any following problem. But talking with the dad of this family, he was saying, you know, my kids have been complaining about headaches and they've been having issues with nausea through last winter. But then they'd go to school and they'd be fine and better and I couldn't figure it out. And we were getting ready to do a bunch of air ceiling and installation ourselves this summer. And if we had done that without addressing this issue or even knowing it was a thing, it could have killed me and my entire family and my kids. And so just the idea that through this work, trying to save energy, trying to help families save money and so forth, that we had actually saved lives and really made such a deep impact into even one family's life was just really something I'm just deeply proud of that we had the right team in the right place, working with people that really benefited from the work in a direct way.
- Charlie: [15:36](#) This is an inspiring interview here man. You get me excited. You've done great stuff and hey man, you've still got a lot left to do, but congrats on the architectural license and the LEED Fellow.
- Jeremy: [15:49](#) It's a relief.
- Charlie: [15:51](#) Validation, you know? Now tell us a little more about what's keeping you busy today. So I know you spent time at one architecture firm and then being an IM where you're at now. I mean, you've been there over eight years or so. How about some stuff
- Jeremy: [16:08](#) Sure. So I've been helping with a number of our LEED projects across the firm, but also this time last year we were just launching our 2020 sustainable action plan. And so coming into 2020 here, we're developing our first report taking all of the measurements that we did across all of the projects in 2019 and figuring out what types of impacts we're making on everything

from energy to water to carbon emissions to accessibility and all kinds of other measurements that we now measure on every project that comes in the door. And so that sort of holistic view is something that I'm increasingly working on and enjoying here at BNIM. And sort of through that where I've been working for the last couple of months on developing a new service that we're calling value that is essentially working with current and past clients.

Jeremy: [17:03](#) And some clients we never had to identify and measure their operations of their buildings specifically starting with utilities. But then expanding that to include things like occupant comfort air quality and digging deeper into how they're using energy in their buildings to the point where through that service we're actually stepping are the folks that we're working with through all of the steps to develop a LEED operations and maintenance certification for their building or at least understand what steps are needed to get them where they can go. Because I can't tell you how many LEED projects I've worked on where at the end of the project we cut the ribbon, we shake hands, everybody's happy, and then we walk away. And I almost never ever hear how that building is performing today. I have no idea how the majority of those buildings are actually performing in the real world through the life of the building.

Jeremy: [17:57](#) And so this service is kind of designed to help us start to get a handle on that and start to actually be a trusted advisor, not just for the creation of the building, but actually through the life of the building. Help people to save money both on the utility side, but then also improve the health and comfort and safety of their workers in a way that generates value for their buildings and just happiness overall for the spaces that they occupy. So that's a lot of what I'm focused on right now. I continue to do some great K through 12 work I'm really proud of. But the other things that I'm focused on right now at work are, I can't say a lot about it, but I am working on data centers, some hyperscale data centers. And I'm excited about those because we were brought on specifically to help figure out how to make these gigantic buildings much more sustainable in a way that I don't think anybody's thought about or talked about yet.

Jeremy: [18:54](#) And so thinking about a type of building that very rarely gets talked about and very rarely has that much innovation put into it because they're kind of like big warehouses for servers but they are so energy and water intensive that if we can start to create replicable means by which to reduce the initial footprints of those buildings and then the ongoing climate and local impacts of those structures in a way that those companies then

want to repeat on every future when they build. Boy that'll make probably a bigger impact than all the rest of the work I'm proudest of through the rest of my career if I can help to move the needle on data centers. Fortunately or unfortunately that'll have an enormous impact on the future of what I've been able to touch.

- Charlie: [19:45](#) No, it's the biggest base opportunity and I'm really excited to hear you set up some of your projects for EBOM too. I mean on the existing buildings we have to design and build green, but we have to operate green. Actually EBOM is really my favorite overall rating system. There's just so much opportunity. You know, our 2030 goals, but then our 2050 goals, you kind of alluded here is if we don't go back and retrofit our existing building stack, we're way off. So gotta do it.
- Jeremy: [20:12](#) Right. I've got a quick and funny story on an EBOM, which is that I was used to be seen national office. I was on one of the committees when they first launched existing buildings operation and maintenance and at the meeting I was in they kept talking about EBOM, EBOM, EBOM and nobody had broken down the acronym yet, so put my smartphone under the table. I'm like, what the heck is EBOM? The first hit that came up was the evil brotherhood of mutants. And so like, Oh God, I'm in the wrong meeting.
- Charlie: [20:42](#) That's funny. Yeah. Eb Bomb O plus M. There are a lot of acronyms.
- Jeremy: [20:49](#) Keeping up with the acronyms is a job in itself.
- Charlie: [20:52](#) It is. My next question I'd love to ask a green building expert like you is, Hey, if you had a crystal ball, Jeremy, what's around the corner? What should we all be reading up on now? What's coming?
- Jeremy: [21:04](#) I really think the next decade is all about carbon emissions and accountability. Similar to the 2030 challenge, helping to get a handle on the operational emissions of energy use of our buildings in the planning process. I really see a huge change in the way that we're talking about the emissions both in the construction of our buildings, sort of that first embodied energy that goes into the construction, manufacture and extraction of materials, but then also the operation emissions themselves, that's sort of a collective total that has to be accounted for in some way for our buildings. We've just never measured that in a consistent way. And I'm seeing already some new tools coming into 2020, such as the EC3 that will help us start to get a handle



on that and the piece that nobody is really talking about in a clear way yet.

- Jeremy: [21:56](#) But I see that within the next two, I would say between two and five years, something that I think we'll be talking much more seriously about is carbon sequestration. You often hear carbon reduction and sequestration used as if it's the same thing, but actually pulling greenhouse gas out of the atmosphere and putting it into soil or into concrete or other methods of keeping it out of the atmosphere are kind of the next horizon that I see that we haven't really started to talk about in a cohesive or measurable way. And I guess where I hope that goes, at least in the near term, is so BNIM has both an architecture practice and a landscape architecture practice in our walls. And so what I hope is that our landscape architects are increasingly able to quantify how much sequestration the deep rooted grasses, the native trees and the wetlands that are part of our projects account for versus the emission reductions that we're able to affect on the architecture itself. And seeking on our projects to find a balance between those two. So over a period of time we're looking at buildings that not only emit less but actually sequester more or at least equal to what they emit on an annual basis.
- Charlie: [23:15](#) Yeah, no, I think you're onto it there. One of my favorite continuing education courses we have at GBS is forest sequestration down in South America and preserving that perpetuity. But, but also you're right on the material side, you know, the timber frame construction and just so much more there.
- Jeremy: [23:32](#) And concrete and steel, especially in the Midwest. We're in a place where I think we have the ability in the Midwest especially to really affect those industries and to come up with some ways to impact what is essentially equal to the building industry just in those two materials in terms of annual emissions. If we can start to chip away at the heat that it takes to create the cement that goes into our concrete and the sources of electricity that go into the ways that we melt and forge steel, I think we'll start to make some pretty enormous impacts overall.
- Charlie: [24:06](#) Those are the big carbons. Thanks. A very good point. All right, so some rapid fire questions here. What's your specialty or gift? What do you think you're best at?
- Jeremy: [24:15](#) I'd say that what I feel like I strive to do most is if I could boil it down to one word would be empowerment, trying to do the most good myself, but generally doing it in such a way that

leaves, whether it's the building owners or the community or the neighbors, whoever it is I'm working with or for feeling like they have ownership and a real stake in the future outcome and actions necessary.

Charlie: [24:45](#) Got it. Got it. What routines or rituals do you have that help you stay successful? Do you have any really good habits or just some best practices you like to keep in your routine?

Jeremy: [24:55](#) Well, I probably need some more good habits. But I would say that the ones that I try to stick to is that when I'm sort of at my best is to avoid email until 10:00 AM. I generally keep it on a separate monitor and I'll turn that monitor off until it's 10 o'clock and that way I'm setting the agenda and setting my plan for the day and starting things going and before I let somebody else set the agenda for me. So that's one thing I've tried to do with mixed success and I should say that typically I'll get a text if there's some emergency that needs my attention before 10 but that's a practice I try to stick to. And I'd say the other one is sort of on the other end of that, which is that when I inevitably miss a meeting that doesn't show up on my outlook or I'm running late to, or some kind of commitment is trying to as quickly as possible, apologize and recommit to a new meeting date or whatever the original commitment was, but not letting it languish and turn into hard feelings or anything like that.

Jeremy: [25:57](#) So if I miss a commitment then recommitting quickly and apologizing.

Charlie: [26:03](#) What I heard is not being intentional and then taking ownership. But man in 2019 a book that really had impact on me about habits, it's called Atomic Habits by James Clear. I really enjoyed it. I mean his whole premise is just, man, if every day we can just be 1% better and it really has a compound effect, but he really just had a different way to talk about habits. I thought it was pretty approachable and then do the reverse and then you can break bad habits, but take a look at Atomic Habits.

Jeremy: [26:34](#) Sure. I read one, the one that started me on the new email until 10 was a book called Deep Work that was about sort of having so many things pulling for your attention all day long that you end up not being able to get into kind of a flow state of work. And so that morning time that I try while I'm drinking my coffee and kind of getting my head right for the day, that oftentimes becomes my deep work kind of flow state into about the 10 o'clock hour.

- Charlie: [27:00](#) Well, that's a good segue to our books, but everyone also check out *Deep Work* by Cal Newport. That is a great book, Jeremy. We'll go there next. Any other books you'd recommend? It doesn't even have to be about the Green Building Movement, but what else has had
- Jeremy: [27:14](#) Yeah, sure. So I actually really love science fiction a lot. And I also love audio books a lot. So if you see me walking with headphones, I'm probably listening to science fiction of some kind. So I've actually got three books that I have recently read, or at least within the last year, read or listened to that I just really enjoyed. So number one is called *Seveneves* by Neil Stephenson all about sort of suddenly having to get off of earth and what is the science and how do we go about forming culture and strategy in a way that would allow us to survive? Basically the earth becoming suddenly uninhabitable. The next is *Artimus* by Andy Weir, which is just a very fun kind of a thriller mystery on the moon. Very, very fun and wonderfully read on the audio version.
- Jeremy: [28:08](#) And then the last one is called *Pushing Ice* by Alastair Reynolds and that last one I just love because it's got a very deep scope in terms of space and time and kind of how culture and people and thinking evolves over time and what we take with us and what we leave behind. Anyway, I like science fiction because I feel like it gives us so many sort of ideas of where our trajectory can go and the best science fiction I always feel like is looking beyond the problems that we're trying to solve today in 2020 and are looking to what are the problems we're trying to solve after we've solved those problems or didn't solve them depending on the book.
- Charlie: [28:49](#) Wow. Great. Great recommendations. We're going to put links to the books that Jeremy recommended in the show notes. Thank you so much. I'm a fan of the bucket list and are there one or two things you could share that might be on your bucket list.
- Jeremy: [29:02](#) So I actually started on a bucket list here when you said that and the first thing I started writing was places like I'd love to go to Jazz Fest in the middle of July in Copenhagen. I think that would just be so fun and wonderful. And I've always wanted to go to the Olympics and have never gone. But I feel like what my real bucket list is actually things I want to do at home and to my house. So I really want to learn how to grow potatoes. It's not a hard thing I'm sure. I just have never tried it. And just thinking about climate change and climate resiliency, being able to have

confidence in growing a calorie crop to feed myself and my family seems like a pretty good idea. And then the other thing that I just in the past few weeks have been looking at and thinking about is installing a battery backup, my solar array on my roof and thinking about how to first come up with a redundant heat source and then to actually replace my natural gas furnace with a non-fossil fuel based furnace. But just thinking about resiliency at home and I've got a bucket list that I always feel so happy when I accomplish anything on the list of things that I'm trying to do to my house to make it more resilient and healthier and so forth.

Charlie: [30:22](#) Now when you do have a bucket list, I actually do recommend you categorize them. So you've already gotten started on your travel and got started on your resiliency bucket list. That's good stuff, man. Well, I mean you've done a tremendous amount of work already in the Green Building Movement and I wanted to kind of close with a two part question. One, is there anything you wish you'd known earlier in your career? Let's start there.

Jeremy: [30:43](#) The thing I feel like I had to learn the hard way was that everything you say yes to is something else that you eventually have to say no to. That was kind of a hard lesson for me after joining every committee and every organization that asked for my time early in my career and suddenly just feeling like I was giving everybody, you know, 75% instead of 100% and nothing feels worse to me than feeling like I'm not delivering on what I commit to. And so that was kind of a hard lesson for me to be thoughtful about, to give a thoughtful no rather than a hasty yes.

Charlie: [31:20](#) Words of wisdom there. I think those listening probably want to be eager and say yes and over commit, but you're right, it's taken away somewhere else. So the last thing is, there are some listening that have been doing this for awhile and others that maybe just jumped in to the Green Building Movement. So Jeremy in closing, any words of encouragement for them?

Jeremy: [31:42](#) Yeah, I mean I think first is to find for yourself what your particular passion is in the movement. There's a lot to tackle and a lot of problems and challenges ahead of us. So knowing where you are most passionate and want to focus is probably the first thing to try to work out for yourself. The thing that I felt like set me up for success early in my career was again back to that story of starting the recycling program at my first company is I realized within a week like, well surely I'm not the only one trying to figure this out. What I need is a network of people like me and that's what I found. That's what I personally found in

the U.S. Green Building Council. And so finding that kind of network for yourself and then starting to volunteer and show up regularly and help where your passion lies can only grow that network and can only grow your success.

Jeremy: [32:42](#) Having a network like that when I was not even two years out of school meant that I had people coast to coast who were not just architects but were contractors and engineers and developers. And if I came across a question on a project of you know, how to measure something or do something I didn't know the answer to, I suddenly had this big group of people I could call on and would find some kind of answer from. But it was only by showing up that I was sort of given the time from the people in that network. So that's, I think what I would encourage most is to find your passion and then follow that passion to a network of people who share that.

Charlie: [33:20](#) Excellent advice and you've clearly done that. Jeremy, thanks for being on the podcast. Congrats on the LEED Fellow and keep up all the good work there in Kansas City. Thank you so much.

Jeremy: [33:30](#) Sure. Thanks. Thanks very much.

Charlie: [33:34](#) I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the Green Building Matters Podcast. Me and the entire team are stoked and just so glad you continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you.

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