

THE MANOR THAT MOVED

Architect Pradeep Sachdeva's 300 year old Kerala weekend homestead transcends memories and boundaries with dark timber interiors and aged but enduring furniture

TEXT BY **PRADEEP SACHDEVA**

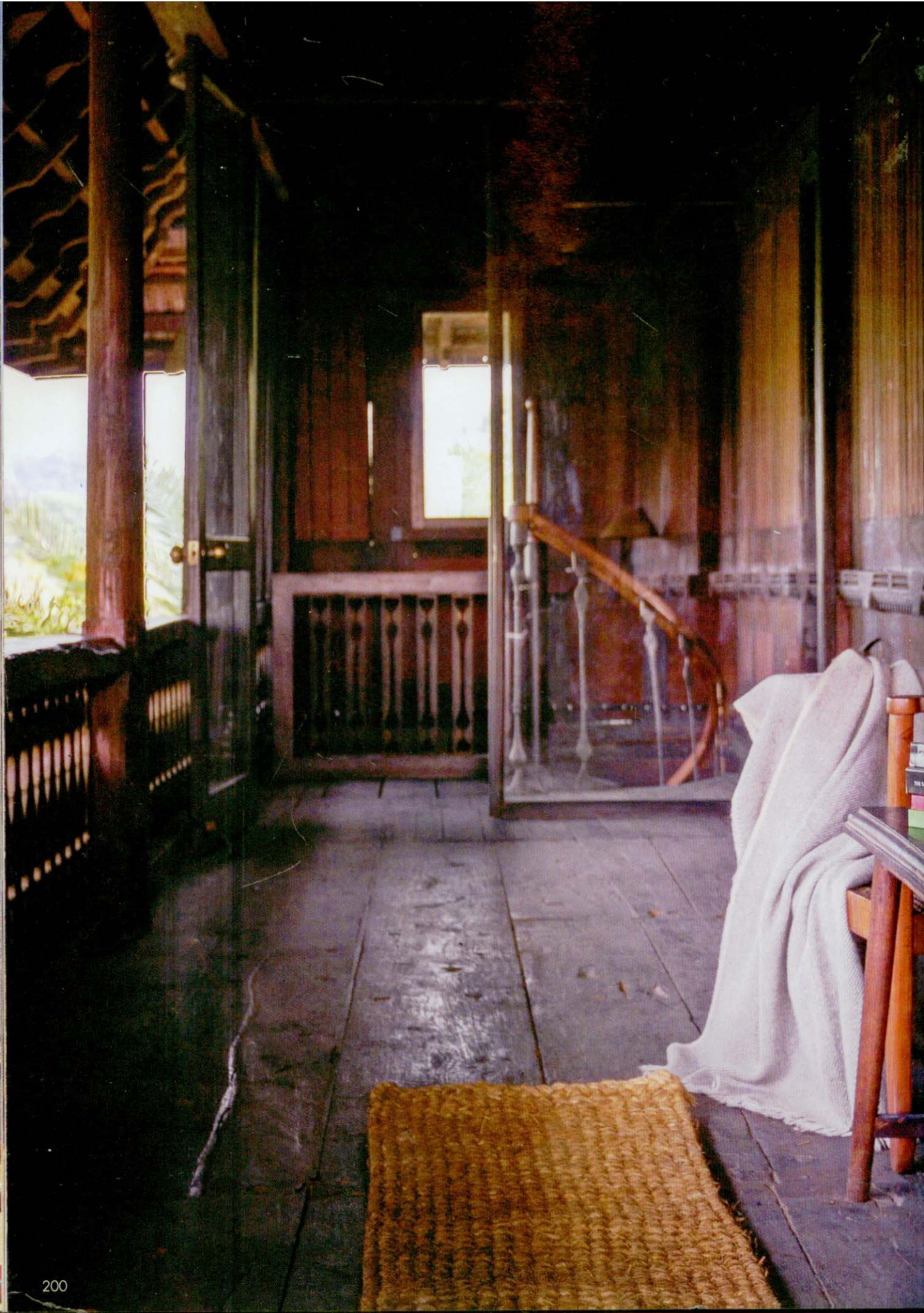
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Clockwise, from Top Left Outside the door of one of the two bedrooms, brass oil lamps from Kerala recreate a common sacrosanct scene at a traditional South Indian temple; A copy of "The Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro", made and gifted by Pradeep's sculptor friend KS Radhakrishnan; Evidences of the old Meda fit right into its new avatar, like the original rosewood doors with slightly tarnished brass clasps; Near a suite on the first floor is a typical timber ladder that leads to the attic; In the dining area on the ground level, glass vases bought from a local market prepped with white roses grown right outside the house accompany brass candle stands, also bought from a nearby bazaar Left Disassembled and transported piece by piece all the way from down south, the house Meda is now settled in a quiet village near Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, Gurgaon. It boasts a Mangalore tiled roof and is surrounded by tropical greenery

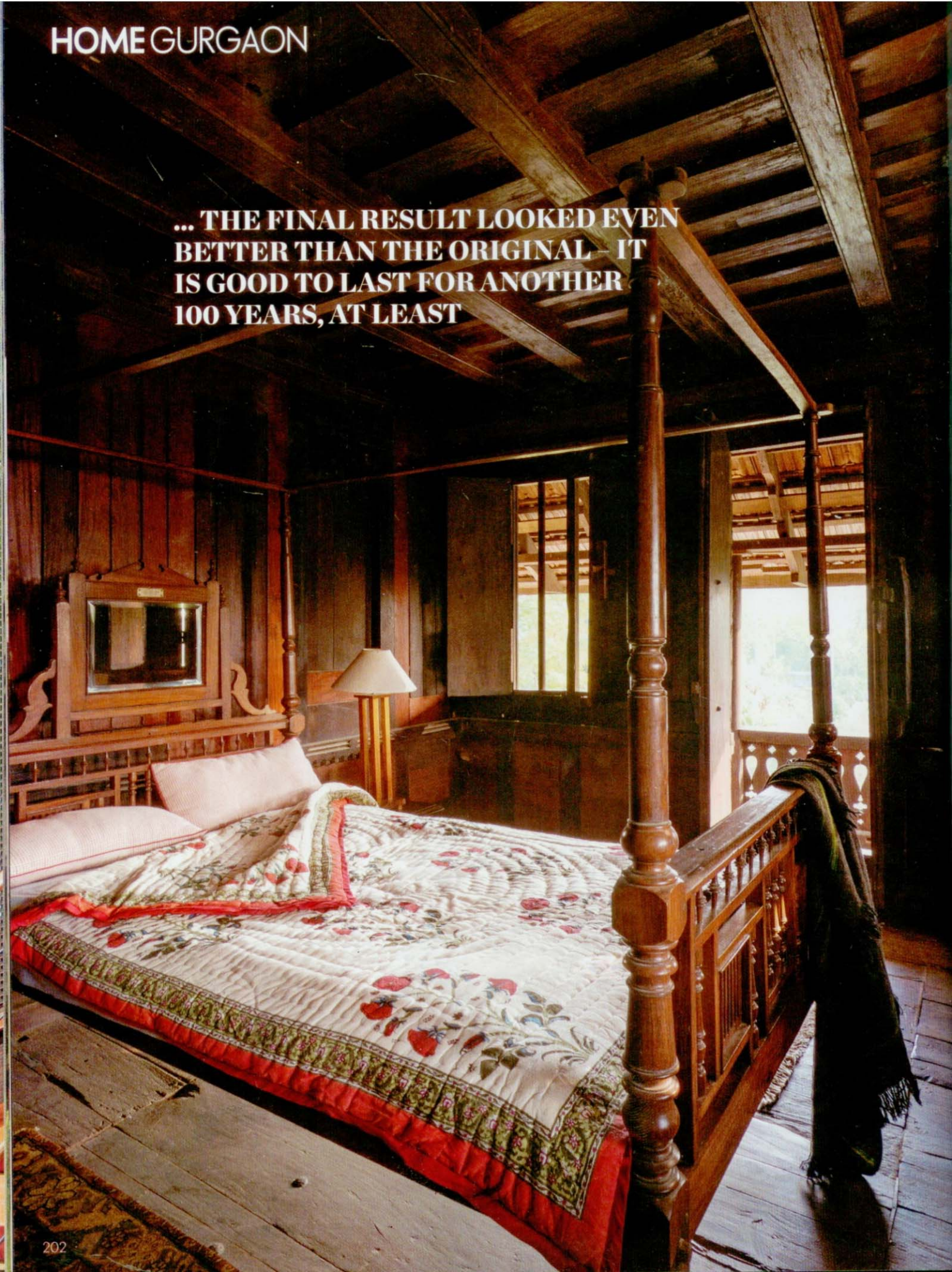


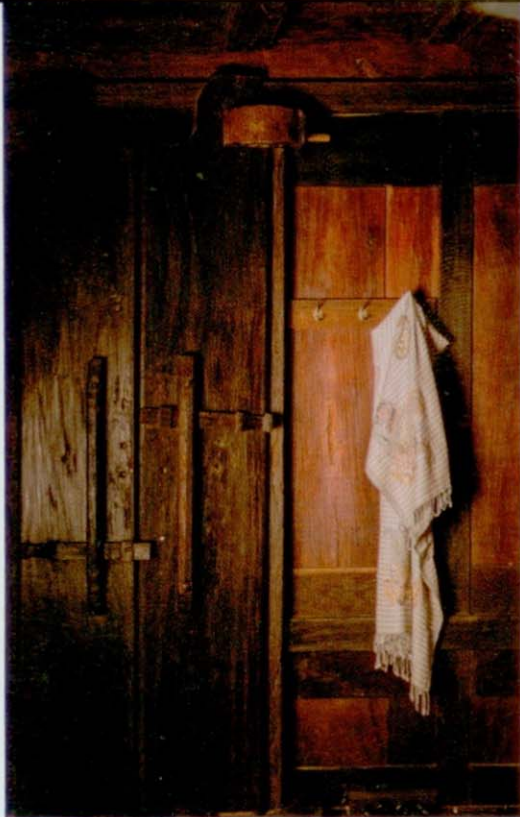




On the first floor outside one of the bedrooms, the verandah makes an enviously warm coffee sipping and reading corner. While the table and chairs are Pradeep's own treasured possessions, the lamp with an onyx base was a present from a friend who got it from Pakistan. The spiral staircase at the back was cast in iron especially for the house, by another good pal of the architect, John Bowman

... THE FINAL RESULT LOOKED EVEN BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL – IT IS GOOD TO LAST FOR ANOTHER 100 YEARS, AT LEAST





Clockwise, from Top Left The washroom door: The patinas of the two different tropical timbers as well as the use of old time latches and locking systems, stoke nostalgia; Sand coloured canvas shoes hang casually by the verandah, a poetic ode to the place's insouciant ambience; On the Naga wood table in the living room – another priceless possession of the owner – lies a marble elephant by Ayush Kasliwal; Inside one of the bedrooms, an onyx lamp from Pakistan and a vase with fresh flowers from the garden outside, rest atop a chest of drawers from Windmill Interiors, New Delhi Left The second boudoir has a four poster bed with a mirror attached to its headboard. The bedside wood lamp is also from Windmill Interiors



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Meda belonged to the Oomen family in Kerala for three centuries. Constructed completely out of timber, the house was located in a village called Mepral, outside the Syrian Christian town of Thiruvella. And since it was next to a river prone to occasional flooding, its lower level was built in laterite stone. My friend George Oomen, who lives in Boston, owned and looked after it. Over a drink, he mentioned that while he loved the villa very much, he was finding it difficult to take care of it from a long distance. In an impulsive move, I offered to buy it from him and bring it up to Gurgaon. Thus began the great adventure of physically moving Meda from one place to another that is about 2,200 km away. Spread about 1,000 sq ft per floor (ground and first), it is now in a village named Sadhrana in Gurgaon, near the Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary. I already possessed the land and had a small place used mainly on weekends.

This bungalow became a new and surprising addition to the agricultural landscape. A group of architects from my studio and I went to Mepral, measured the structure and made detailed drawings. We also hired Narayan Achari, one of the few carpenters skilled in traditional timber house building craft of Kerala. He and his team took about two months in the winter of 2010, to dismantle the villa and load the components in three trucks to bring them to North India. Right after, they arrived in New Delhi and starting assembling it together. It took them less than three months to do the job and the final result looked even better than the original – it is good to last for another 100 years, at least. In retrospect, the job seemed complex and challenging; but surprisingly the process of relocation and restoration was generally smooth and eventless. I have furnished it to match the original character, which is austere and understated. Inside, there are little fragments of the place preserved well; for instance, the top of the dining table was made using leftover pieces of the house, while a corner wall in the same area has a cluster of framed photographs that document Meda's epic journey. ♦



The bathroom was added to the new version of Meda. The shower tray at the bottom was specially added to keep the wood from getting wet, while brass washbasin etched with leaves, was cast by John Bowman. Right: A view of the bedroom with an opening leading to the balcony. The brass lamp was purchased from Khairati Lal, Janpath in New Delhi.

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