

**a bunch of stuff  
about**

# **Draperies & Curtains**

**A guide to affordable and beautiful  
window treatments**

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## A Bunch of Stuff About Draperies and Curtains

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my first ebook! About hanging window treatments..... golf clap...aaaaahhhhhh...

Not how I envisioned my first book. My first was supposed to be a hilarious, yet poignant, collection of personal essays. The crowds would laugh, they'd cry, I'd crush David Sedaris on the Bestsellers lists. Epic.

Instead this ebook came about as a result of all of the costly window treatment mistakes I made before I became an interior designer, and from the multitude of homeowners I see going down those same rabbit holes. Who hasn't been sucked in at the retail level?

Remember those darling curtain panels you bought that day? From \_\_\_\_\_ (enter your retailer of choice; Z Gallerie, Pottery Barn, whoever)? Sure you do. Only \$129.95 per panel. This could only be legendary. But then you hung them at home and they went all Gollum on you. They were too short, too long, the seams puckered, and of course they weren't wide enough. So you bought more of them. Why not? You can simply add more panels to make them thicker and wider. And that works if the look you're going for is "even worse". Because then you have even more puckered seams, more fabric hanging limp and uneven, and light is coming through between the panels. But you live with them. Until you can't. And then there are six curtain panels en route to a donation center and you start over. Not the best use of budgeted funds.

No judgement. Great retail merchandising is the Devil. I just bought a mini bottle of Barefoot rosé champagne to put in my husband's Valentine's Day gift bag because the end cap was so cute and it matched the gift bag. Neither of us likes Barefoot wine. He was super grateful.

Just as sure as you buy these individual curtain panels from a retailer, you'll be disappointed and you will be purchasing them again. And while I understand that not everyone can afford or even wants to hire an interior designer, there might be a more viable option somewhere in between in the form of semi-custom drapes. Purchasing through a semi-custom retailer may be a viable option that can save you money in the long run.

*So what's the difference in a semi-custom retailer versus a retail store?*

## A Bunch of Stuff About Draperies and Curtains

A retail store typically sells fabric panels that are, on average, about 54" wide. They come in one or 2 lengths. They may have an inexpensive lining on the back side but in most cases not. And a 54" wide panel will never look good on your windows. Because these aren't made for your window. They're mass produced and intended to sell a product. There is no concern for quality or appearance.

A semi-custom retailer is a business that gives you options, usually online. For instance, check out [Loom and Decor](#). They offer a means of ordering curtains at your own length and width. And they offer several fabrics, heading styles and linings from which you can select.

Recently one of my clients actually tried her hand at value engineering, hoping to save money by doing semi-custom window treatments from a retailer. I wasn't happy about it but stomped my feet in the privacy of my own office. It looked like she was going to save a gajillion, and that made me choke on my bean burrito. Until I noticed that the order she was about to place would deliver drapes that were too short, too narrow, too slight, and installed way too low. After I swallowed my pride I gave an abbreviated lesson on a few of the basics of hanging fabric window treatments and was able to convince her to revise her order. In the end she still paid a bit more than she was hoping but she was also happy with the finished product and was still able to save enough money to feel good about the decision.

Whether you're working with a designer or ordering through a semi-custom retailer, there are things you can understand about window treatments that will help you to make more informed decisions. My goal in writing this captivating bit of literature is to share some of the key elements of drapery design so that you can realistically think through your needs, more confidently communicate, and perhaps save your budget from an agonizing death.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

One of the biggest obstacles for a homeowner can be a breakdown in communication when a designer or even a retailer uses common industry terminology that can be easily misinterpreted. And you'll look like all Mensa when you can speak with confidence and expertise. So let's go through some terms that you've likely heard and perhaps misused or misunderstood, and then we can dig in to the anatomy of the treatments in the "Digging In" section.

### Window Treatment

A window treatment is a catchall phrase that refers to any number of window coverings, from hanging fabric drapes to shades. So any time you want to put something on your windows for aesthetic purposes, or for function such as privacy or blocking light, you're discussing a means of treating the window.

### Curtain

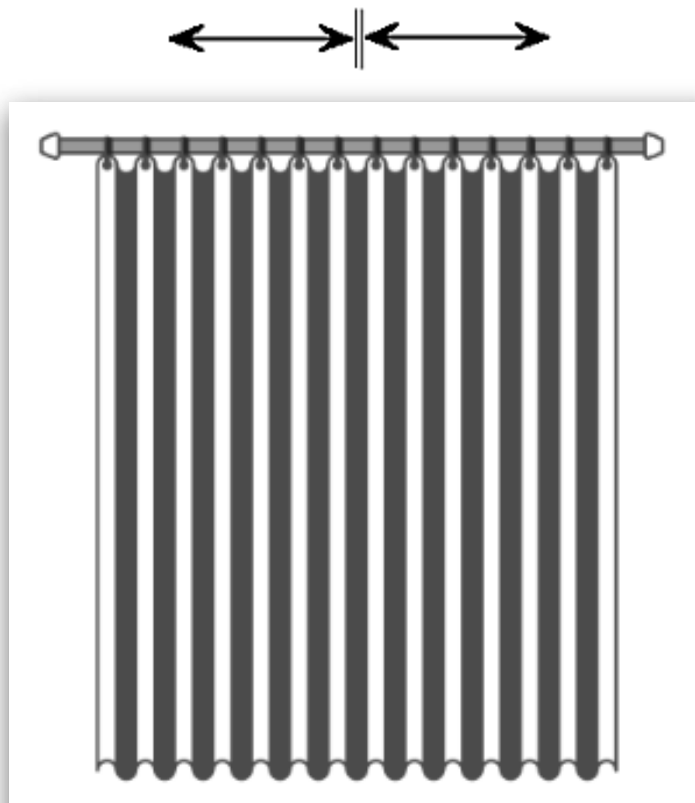
This is another catchall phrase you may hear every now and then. It refers to hanging vertical fabric window treatments. It could mean drapes or side panels, but just know it isn't a very specific term so if you tell a workroom you want curtains.....they're going to need a whole lot more info. But we're getting to that.

### Drapery

A drapery is a fabric window treatment that hangs vertically on one or both sides of a window. It *opens and closes across the window*. Draperies can be sewn with one of several types of linings on the back side of the fabric that can provide privacy, filter light, or block light. They can also be fabricated of sheer fabric with no lining at all to offer a minimum amount of privacy. There are three main configurations of a drapery.

## Drapery Pair with Center Close

This is pretty much what it says. It's a pair of draperies that meet in the center of the window when they close. When opened there will be a gathered stack of drapery on the left and on the right side of the window. A pair of drapes can meet in the middle or they can overlap in the middle. I like an overlap when trying to block light or for complete privacy





## Single Drapery with Left Draw

This is a single drape that will move to the left side of the window when you open it. The cord that operates it will also be on the left side of the window. And it will move to the right when you close it to cover the window

This photo (R) represents a left draw drapery in it's open position



## Single Drapery with Right Draw

Single drapery with right draw is a drape that will move to the right to open. The cord to operate the drape will be on the right side of the window. And it will move left to close across the window.

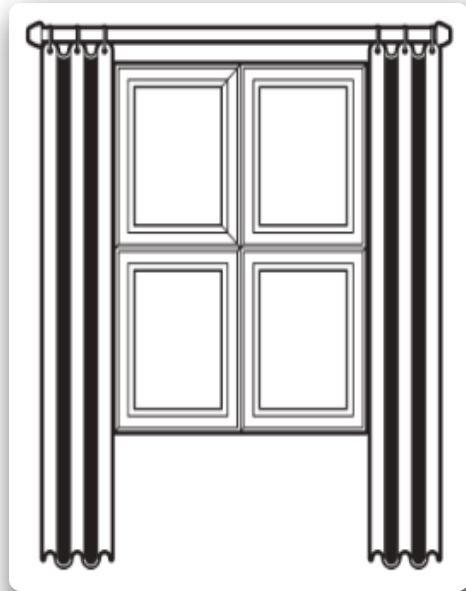
Photo (L) represents a single drape, right draw in its open position





## Side Panels

Side panels are similar to draperies in that they hang vertically on one or both sides of a window. The difference is that a side panel does not move. It is a decorative element. We use these frequently and most often in a space that doesn't need the hanging treatments for additional privacy or light filtering. This type of treatment can change the look and feel of a room without blocking a view.



### Stack

When you think of the stack, think first of a drapery that is pulled open so you can see out the window. When that drape is pulled back to the open position, the fabric gathers together on one or both sides of the window. That gathering of the fabric is called the stack. Side Panels also have a stack because they are always in the open position. We'll talk more about the proper widths of a stack as we move forward.

### Hem

Anyone who doesn't know this term is clearly greater in stature than 5'-2". Hems have been the bane of my existence since first grade. And no, ankle length isn't even a real thing in my world. The only time I was cool with it was in the 70's. Then I was the only girl who could always wear her bellbottoms dragging the ground if I could get out of the house without my mom seeing me.

Anyway, the hem on curtains is the finished sewn bottom edge of the drape. I typically like a nice deep bottom hem, around 4", to add weight and to look like a professional job.

### LeadingEdge

This is the vertical finished edge of the fabric that will move when you open and close the drapery. The leading edges of a pair of drapes come together in the middle. The leading edge of the single panel drapery would be the edge that moves left or right as the treatment is opened or closed. On a side panel, the leading edge is the edge that is on the side of the glass pane of the window.

### Outside Edge

Don't let this one trip you up.....the outside edge is the *opposite* of the leading edge. It is the vertical finished edge of the drapery or side panel that is outside the window and is stationary in most drapes.

### Repeat

Any fabric that is not solid in color and texture is considered to have a pattern, and therefore, a repeat. A pattern can be a decorative printed motif or it can be one that's created with a particular kind of weaving method that adds a visual textured pattern. Patterns are a recurring or repeating motif in a fabric and in most cases the patterns will need to be matched at any seams so that it appears to continue smoothly across the treatment.

The height or width of a repeat is the distance between the beginning edge of a decorative motif to the beginning edge of the next repeat of that motif. And there are both vertical and horizontal repeats.

A repeat will effect the amount of fabric you'll need. If a side panel requires 10 yards of a solid fabric, that same side panel will require a bit more if it has a 2" repeat and significantly more if the repeat is 27". If you're using a professional workroom to sew your window treatments, it is imperative that they know the repeat sizes.

### Heading

The heading is the top part of the drape that attaches to the rod or rings. It's usually some sort of decorative sewn treatment and can define the style of the window treatment.

### Return

A return simply means that at the outside edge of the drape or side panel, the fabric will turn and go back toward the wall instead of sticking straight out parallel to the wall. On average a return is about 3" but is usually determined by how far from the wall your rod projects.

Imagine walking into a room and you can see the outside edge of the drapery or side panel. Do you want to see the edge of the side hems and the gap between the wall and the fabric? Or would you rather see that outside edge bend back toward the wall to neatly fill in that gap?

A return isn't always necessary but it really adds a nice finished edge to the treatment and it helps somewhat in concealing light gaps and giving you just a little more privacy.

My vote is almost always a big "hell yeah" for the return.

## Finished Length

This is pretty much self-explanatory but important to your design and will be one element in determining the amount of fabric to purchase. Finished length is the overall height/length you want your drapery treatment to be in its finished form. Measured from the top of the drape to its bottom. There are several factors to consider here so we'll dig in on this one.

## Finished Width

Good guess. This is the width of your treatment in its finished form measured from side to side. There are several things to take into consideration when determining your width, so we'll dig in a little later. And, of course, the width will also effect the amount of fabric you'll need.

## DIGGING IN

So now we have some essential terminology. Let's dig in a little further. If I've already blown your mind with my colossal brain, you'll need a cocktail for this next section.

### Headings

There are as many decorative heading styles as there are Tribbles on the USS Enterprise on a bad day. And the only limitation is one's imagination and the willingness and talent of the drapery workroom. But there are a few standard styles that are used most often and they can help to establish the design style of a space.

### Pinch Pleat

A pinch pleat is a heading that gathers the fabric 3 times, creating a single fan-like pleat. This is repeated every so many inches across the width of the drape or side panel. I love a pinch pleat and I've used it in traditional, shabby chic and modern spaces. It just gives the fabric a nice clean drape when it hangs. Pinch pleated draperies do require more fabric than some other styles but the look is classic.

There are a number of variations of the pleated heading including a single pleat, double pleat, goblet pleat, inverted pleat. But the pinch is one of the most popular varieties and it makes for a timeless treatment.



### Ripplefold

Another favorite of mine is the ripplefold heading. Ripplefold is a very soft rolling of the fabric across the width of the drape. It is not a sewn heading. Rather the ripples are created by the carriers in the curtain rod. The more carriers, the closer and smaller the "folds". This is a fantastic header that I love to use in a more modern or transitional home. They look fantastic when the rod is attached to the wall but they look even better if you can install the rod from the ceiling. A ripplefold heading requires less fabric than a pinch pleat because you don't need all of the extra fabric to gather for the pleat.

The photo below is of a ripplefold heading on a drapery that's installed behind a wooden cornice board so no hardware is not visible at all.



### **Grommet**

You've seen these a million times. A grommet heading is a flat heading that has a series of metal circles, open in the center, and sewn across the width of the drape at intervals. These metal grommets simply slide over a rod and the homeowner can manually move and arrange the grommets to shape them to hang as preferred.

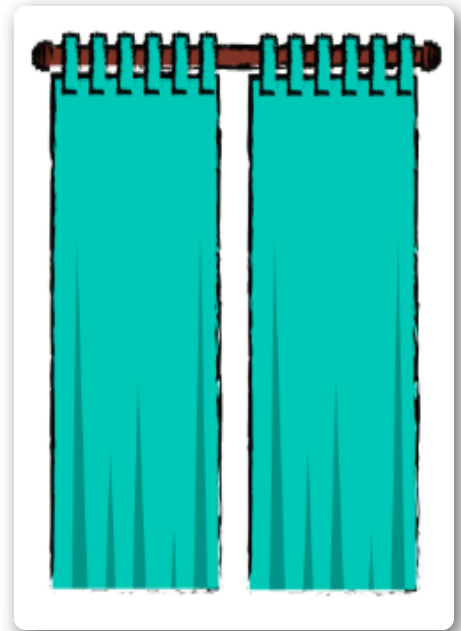
I use these ONLY as side panels because opening and closing them requires manual movement and it takes too much time to rearrange the grommet spacing every time they move. And these treatments don't look good when they get messy. They're intended to have a nice clean hang from top to bottom. A homeowner would have me arrested if I put these in a home with small children or in a heavily travelled pathway because every time you brush against them they move. Runs me out of my mind.

Good news is that they need less fabric than pleated treatments.



### Rod Pocket and Tab Tops

I'm grouping these 2 together because they're pretty self-explanatory and they simply slip over a rod. They are typically used in more casual settings and in themed interiors that call for a throwback style. For instance you may see these in shabby chic, rustic cabin, or country-style interiors that celebrate vintage.





### Finished Length

So we talked briefly about this but there are a few things that need some clarification.

### Rod Height Installation

Before you can determine the length you want your draperies to be you have to consider where you're going to install your rod. And man have I seen some ugly in this department. We like to use the phrase "high and wide". That means take your rods high so that the ceilings look higher and take them wide, meaning you want your treatments to extend outside the window trim on the sides. But...in the end the height is somewhat dictated by the architecture.

So let's say your ceilings are 9' or 10' high and you have a crown molding. I almost always install the rod right under the crown. I love the way it sweeps the eye upward, making the ceilings feel high and grand. And if there is no crown, I take it to the point where the wall meets the ceiling.

Sometimes the top of the window is significantly lower than the ceiling and you have to make a judgement call. Imagine you have a 12' ceiling but the top of the window is only at 7'. It's going to feel disproportionate if the rods go to the ceiling in this case. That 5' of dead space makes you think the architect checked out and went to the bar on window design day. So I would perhaps install the rod at a 9 1/2' height so that there's something going on in that dead space and now the window and ceiling look like they're friends again.

And what if there's a 2-story window? A lot of times I take the rods all the way up. But that doesn't always make visual or financial sense. In those cases I may try to find a visually rational starting point. I would think about the window height in thirds and try to find that point approximately 2/3 of the window height from the floor and put my rod there. IF it corresponds to a reasonable breaking point in the architecture of the window itself.

A note about 8'-9' ceilings: Always take your rods as high as possible! An 8' ceiling is common in older homes and will need all the sensation of height that you can give it. While a 9' ceiling is not "short", it's a rather common ceiling height and installing a rod lower than the ceiling or crown will make it feel like an 8' ceiling.

## The Long and Short of It

If you haven't heard anything else I've said, please hear this. Drapes and side panels should go to the floor even if the window sill is 30" above the floor. Please don't stop your treatments at the sill unless you're doing some sort of shabby chic cafe curtains.

You should leave only 1/4"-1/2" of space between the floor and the bottom of the treatment.

The only time this rule of thumb doesn't apply is if you're Puddling your drapes. Puddling is when you add length so that the fabric lays on the ground in a "puddle" of fabric. In 20 years as a designer I have yet to meet a client who would let me do this. It's a gorgeous effect, but imagine what the maintenance is like trying to keep those beautiful folds dust-free and laying neatly in a random pattern. Who would sign up for that? My Roomba is threatening to strike as it is.

## Finished Width

### Finished Width of Draperies

Let's start with that "high and wide phrase". *You always want your rods/drapes to extend horizontally beyond the outside edges of your window trim.* As a general rule of thumb I suggest that they extend a minimum of 10" beyond the window trim on sides of the window. But I prefer at least a 20" extension when I work with a client.

Let's do some math. I'm installing a drapery treatment on my window that is 72" wide. PLUS the trim is 4" on each side. AND I want the treatments to extend 10" on each side.

$$72" \text{ window} + 8" \text{ of trim} + 20" \text{ total extension} = 100"$$

BUT I also want a return on each outside edge so that the fabric turns back to the wall and I want a minimum of a 3" repeat on each side.

$$100" + 6" = 106" \text{ finished width}$$

The person fabricating your drapes will want to know your preferred finish width of 106" in order to help calculate the fabric yardage needed. He or she will have to add in the side hem requirements

### **Finished Width of Side Panel**

When determining the width of a side panel, I like to first decide on the width of the stack I want, meaning I want to know how wide the gathered panel will be on each side of the window. As mentioned before, 18" is the minimum finished width I like for my side panel stack with 24" being my preferred minimum width. And that often has to be adapted based on the size of the window and the amount of space on each side of the window. If I'm treating a window that is a 15' high window, then 18" will seem too narrow. So think about proportion.

On the inside, or Leading Edge side of my side panels I like the panels to start just inside the trim about 2" or so in order to preserve as much view as possible.

So If I want an 18" wide stack I might start the panel so that it covers 2" of window pane on the inside. Add in the 4" of trim, that will be covered and that leaves 12" extending outside the trim. This is calculated PER PANEL.

### **Fullness**

Another element that needs to be considered in the finished width is the fullness. Fullness refers to how lush and thick you want your treatments to look. The greater the fullness, the more luxurious and professional they will look when installed.

#### ***1x Fullness***

I'll be frank with you. I don't like 1x fullness and I would never suggest it to a client. The finished treatment looks skeletal in draperies and side panels alike. Imagine you're baking a pie with an Oreo cookie crust and you use one crushed Oreo. Good news...you'll never be asked to bake an Oreo cookie crust pie again. Bad news, you threw away time and money by disrespecting the Oreo.

#### ***2x Fullness***

2x fullness, or double width, is really the standard. Let's go back to the drapes on our 72" wide window. We settled on 106" finished to cover the window, the trim, the amount of overhang on each side, and the repeats.

But we want the fabric to be nice and full so we go with a 2x Fullness. In that case we'll end up doubling the amount of fabric we'll need to arrive at that 2x fullness. But when our treatments are installed they look proportionate to the window size, they're nice and fluffy even when they close across the window. And they don't look like we cut ourselves short on the Oreos.

There are other fractions we can use in the fullness equation. Sometimes a 1 ½ x fullness is used as a way to meet in the middle on the cost factor. Or even a 2 ½x or 3x fullness for a very luxurious treatment. But 2x is the factor that will give you a beautiful treatment in almost any situation.

And don't freak out too much about this. The fabricator will help you walk through this and determine the fabric yardage required. But it's good to know what this means when you sit down to discuss.

### **Lining**

Linings are uber important to window treatments and there are three basic types of linings you should be aware of when you're considering the right lining for your project. File this little nugget in your mental Rolodex: every additional layer of fabric adds weight to the window treatment so you'll want to make sure your drapery hardware (rods and brackets) will accommodate the weight.

#### ***Standard Lining***

I use standard lining (sometimes called privacy lining) most often. It's what I use on any drape or side panel that doesn't need to block light. Standard lining is usually white or off white and it's attached to the back of a drapery to provide substance and to protect your fabric from sun damage. This is imperative for protecting your investment and it will give your fabric a cleaner drape.

#### ***Interlining***

Honestly I only use interlining with silks because sun deteriorates silk quickly. Interlining is layer of lining that goes between the standard lining and the fabric. It adds an extra layer of insulation and protection. It also makes the drapes significantly fuller and heavier.

#### ***Blackout Lining***

Now this is something I use frequently because so many people need a dark room in order to sleep. Blackout lining is heavy and a bit rigid but it does the trick. But let's be adults....nothing will totally black out all light so please don't expect to feel like you're sealed in a cryogenic chamber. Even with a blackout lining, there will be small light gaps on the outside edges. And just note that in broad daylight your bedroom isn't going to feel like would at midnight. But it will significantly cut down even daylight brightness. I'm someone who can't sleep with any light and my blackout drapes are enough to solve the problem.

### Hardware

So what do you need to know about drapery hardware? I'll share with you some of my favorites but this doesn't in any way cover all of the options. Some drapery rods can be made to custom lengths but the majority of them come in several standard lengths and can be cut to size. But I advise a professional installer to do the job. My installer is basically Dumbledore. I've ordered rods that draw in the wrong direction and watched him disassemble and reassemble so that I don't have to go through the return/reorder nightmare. A professional installer is well worth your money.

### *Traverse Rod*

This is the DQ Blizzard of hardware for draperies. It has everything delicious and more. With the Traverse Rod, you simply pull a cord on one side of the window and the drapery treatment moves to close across the window or to open. There's no getting your dirty paws on the fabric and no dragging it from side to side with a wand that bends nearly in half. It does the work for you. And it can as easily operate a center close pair of draperies as it can a one-way draw single drape.

So what are my favorite styles of traverse rod? Well, I like my drapery rods to be small and more obscure. I want the treatments to be the focal point. So if I'm going to use a visible decorative rod, I go for smaller diameter metal traverse rods. I like a 1 3/8" rod or maximum 2" like the Kirsch Estate 2" collection.

Another favorite of mine is the Kirsch Superfine Traverse Rod. It's a really simple white rod with clips so it can take a Ripplefold or a pleated heading. When a drapery is open you can see the rod but it's a really low profile white rod that kind of just goes away. I just love the more modern look. It can be mounted on the ceiling as well, and it can be cut to size.

### *Decorative Rod with Rings*

A simple rod with rings that slide across the rod. These are pretty common with any kind of pleated heading. The pin on the back of the drapery heading will slide into a small circle at the bottom of the ring. Rings are then fed onto the rod and they're moved manually by hand or with a batton.

This Rod/Ring combo is also great with a side panel but is not really an option with the Ripplefold.

Again, I like my rods smaller so I opt for 1" or 1 3/8" metal rods in most cases. I will use a wood rod if I can find something smaller in diameter and very clean. Many of the Wood rods/rings are available in larger diameters and often come in more ornate styles, smooth or reeded poles, fussier finials.

## The Final Word

While this reference guide is just a taste of the details concerning hanging fabric window treatments, I hope it will give you some food for thought.

But of course I can't sign off the air without a little promo. The folks who design, fabricate and install professional custom window treatments are truly artists and engineers with years of education and experience.

If you're thinking about window treatments, check out the resources below and do some online pricing. And then perhaps reach out to me and let me prepare a quote for you as well. You may find that doing a custom product is not as far outside your budget as retail pricing can be. And you get the added benefits of personal service and someone to do your legwork and work through the complicated details on your behalf.

Thank you for reading along and stay tuned for a bunch of stuff about Shades and Blinds coming soon!

## Resources

*Interior Design Services: including Window Treatment Design, Furnishings, Decor, Kitchen and Bath Design:*

[Design Theory Interiors of California, Inc.](#)

*Retail Semi-Custom Drapery and Side Panel Suppliers:*

[Loom Decor](#)

[Restoration Hardware](#)

*Custom Drapery Hardware:*

[Kirsch](#)



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