





bread & vine

All Night

By Bryce Parks

Restaurateur Eric Bonnetain already has a wildly successful French-style patisserie in Galena with plans in motion to expand that model in other cities across the U.S., but as he calls the Tri-States home now, he still wanted a dinner and nightclub experience locally that he himself enjoyed. And since he could not quite find that, he did what any entrepreneurial restaurant and nightclub developer with decades of experience would do: He made his own. Eric's desire for the things he wanted is a gift to the rest of us. Prepare for a night out, unlike anything you've ever experienced in Dubuque before. Presenting: Bread & Vine Dubuque... all night long!

The Vibe

Part high-end dining venue and part disco-flavored nightclub, Bread & Vine Dubuque in downtown Dubuque's Millwork District is located inside the recently restored warehouse at 168 E. 10th St. It recently housed The Magnolia, but the business never quite found its footing, and COVID didn't help. But it's lit up like Paris on a Saturday night now! And yet, somehow dark and sexy. I guess the atmosphere is everything.

"I really like to open places I can find on my own," shares Eric Bonnetain in his thick French accent. "I really Like Dubuque and Brazen, but there's not really a place to go for an after party or cocktail as they close early, 9 or 10 o'clock. So I decided that I think Dubuque has enough of a

good crowd to open an establishment with good food and also keep the people late for a cocktail or have a late dinner."

Like a true Frenchman, he adds, "Also, I think there are a lot of beautiful women in Dubuque who like to dress up and go out, and so I think coming here is different and special. Since we've opened, I see the difference that people coming here are enjoying getting dressed up."

We certainly agree with Bonnetain that it's a cool place for a date. When we first walked down the short hallway to the entrance to the venue, we were greeted at the hostess stand by a lovely young woman in a black, leather corset. Between that and the music and colors emanating from the room behind her, we knew we weren't in Kansas anymore.

The music is different. During our interview, it was 6 p.m., and some European-style house, electric-fusion, lounge music was grooving at a not-quiet, but conversational level. A disco ball slowly turned the reflected light around the room, which is otherwise sparsely lit with some sexy modern ceiling lights as well as a good amount of non-direct colored lighting accents which can change color and alter the vibe of the room with the touch of Eric's phone. But as they go later in the night, the music changes to match the crowd and the mood. So, the DJ is reading the crowd—and yes, there is a live DJ there—spinning the modern disco-flavored tunes that evolve from dinner to dance tracks Eric describes as "disco house." As the evening progresses,



MAX VALENCIANO, BREAD & VINE DUBUQUE BAR MANAGER



PINK PANTHER AND DANCING QUEEN



#IYKYK

the lights are joined by some laser light displays bringing the room to life.

"The last two weekends, we have people partying until midnight, dancing and enjoying cocktails," Eric tells us. "It's a different crowd."

Also different is the business model. As Eric wants people to have a place they can dine but also just stay and have cocktails and dance into the night, he's in no hurry to turn your table for more guests. We can certainly see the 5–6 p.m. diners having a unique and wonderful dining experience but still making it to the theatre on time, for example. But if you start your night a little later, expect to have some new options for the remainder of your evening, and don't feel like you have to leave to open the table for a new group. Or, move to the bar and keep the night hopping.

"If you have a reservation at 8 p.m., you can stay all night. We don't kick you out at 9 p.m. because we are closing the establishment," explains Eric. "Again, this is something Dubuque needs to learn because there is no establishment like this. So I can see the difference between people coming later instead of 5 or 6 p.m. because the fun doesn't really start until 8 o'clock. We offer bottle service after dinner so people stay. We had parties of 12 and 15 over the weekend, and they were not going anywhere."

Drinks at the Bar

While dinner is awesome, and we'll get to that very soon, Eric is quick to point out that there is a big, beautiful bar here

with numerous seats including a row of barstools with a counter just across from the bar, so a good party can mingle there. That said, you do not have to have dinner in order to come to Bread & Vine Dubuque for drinks and atmosphere, be it before a show or after you have dinner elsewhere. This is a nightclub too, and you are invited.

A talented crew of well-dressed bartenders is led by bar manager Max Valenciano, "the master" as Eric calls him. "I have nothing to do with the cocktails. He took that from A to Z." And along with a host of great brews and traditional mixed drinks, Max has developed a slate of a dozen specialty cocktails with an attitude and atmosphere of their own to match the rest of the venue. Drinks introduce flavors from cinnamon and banana to lavender bitters and the taste-altering buzz button flower. The Pink Panther is created with liquid nitrogen and is prepared in front of the customer and finished with cotton candy whipped cream. And the Dancing Queen, served in an actual disco ball, features a sweet mix of raspberry vodka, peach schnapps, lemon juice, simple syrup, and soda water. "We sold 250 specialty cocktails on Saturday night," Eric added. "It was amazing."

All of the lights, music, fancy drinks, and atmosphere are not there to distract from a run-of-the-mill menu. Indeed, as sexy as this joint is, the food is still the star of the show. We finally got to enjoy it on a blizzarding Thursday night (aren't they all lately). We had expectations, and they were all exceeded.

"My food is obviously different from our place in Galena," explains Eric. "It is 'Frenched,' not French. So, it's like French-American food. I blend it."

The menu is displayed inside a double-vinyl album sleeve with the actual album itself listing the dessert menu. See, everything here is just a bit special.

"My sous chef from Galena is now my chef there, and my chef there is now my chef here," notes Eric. Those magical talents are named Laura and Emmanuel Gutierrez, and yes they are married. "Those two are amazing. I opened Galena because of them, and I told them, 'If you don't come, I'm not opening Galena,' and now they run two restaurants. They came with me from Chicago to Galena. They are devoted to me, and so dedicated. Laura is now my Director of Culinary, and Manny is my Corporate Chef. Laura is in charge of both locations and is our pasta chef, as we make all of our pasta from scratch every day. Laura works so hard."

The Food

What they have created is a tempting menu with something for everyone including gluten-free and vegan diners. So let's sample a taste.

The appetizers are generally all delicious things you can't get anywhere else from the more adventurous Angus tartare with raw quail egg and foie gras terrine "au torchon," to the escargot and bone marrow featuring French Burgundy snails and butter sauce. If those things are a little too outside your comfort zone, then

the lobster sliders with butter-toasted bread, lemon garlic aioli, and salmon caviar will take you straight to heaven, and the "Everything but the Bagel"-style seared ahi tuna isn't far behind. In French style, there are, of course, charcuterie and cheese boards with bread, jams, nuts, mustards, and more. A great starter for sharing.

A classic Caesar Cardini salad is joined by the Goat Cheese & Pear salad for light delicious ways to start you mean. Three flatbreads include a vegetarian option with crème fraîche, roasted vegetables, caramelized onions, and pesto. The Classic French Alsatian Flammekueche features a bacon and balsamic glaze, and an Alaskan Salmon brings horse-radish crème fraîche with caramelized onions and baby arugula to the table.

I already told you they make their own pasta, and it shines in the following three dishes. Tagliolini "Au Gratin" features French ham and "Gratin" Parmesan with the crème fraîche. The Sautéed Shrimp Beet Tagliatelle highlights toasted hazelnut, feta cheese, and large sautéed tiger shrimp on top of the beet-infused pasta. But, oh my, the Fresh Lobster Pappardelle with chunks of fresh lobster meat and creamy brandy lobster sauces was simply divine. The wide noodles and the rich creamy sauce were to die for.

And we're just getting to the meat and fish features: All 12 of them. You can go as traditional as a very fancy B&V burger, or an herb-roasted small rotisserie chicken served in a cast iron dish, or go steak with a New York strip with a béarnaise or

bordelaise sauce. And since this place is all about bringing the “special” to your event, yes, you can get a 35 oz. tomahawk ribeye for a mere \$125. It’s huge. Or, go for a 39 oz. tomahawk with the Kan-Kan Pork version, a Puerto Rican-style pork chop with fingerling potatoes and chimichurri sauce. Roasted “Moullard” Duck features honey balsamic syrup and gratin dauphinois (French-style au gratin potatoes) while the New Zealand Roasted Rack of Lamb looks like a work of art with a mustard garlic panko crust, lamb jus, and creamy mashed potatoes.

Fish options start with an Alaskan turbot (mild white fish) with basmati rice, chorizo sausage, and lemon beurre blanc and an Atlantic Coast branzino (European Bass) with a sauce vierge (lemon herb) and Mediterranean vegetables. The Tequila Tiger Shrimp are flambéed tableside, which is fun to watch, and then finished with garlic butter and truffle mushroom risotto. The Prince Edward Mussels & Fries is a favorite brought over from the Galena location. This extremely generous pot of East Coast mussels is served with a creamy orange garlic broth. You’ll want to dig deep in the pot right away to get that creamy broth on every mussel. So rich and so delicious. And speaking of delicious, how can you ever go wrong with a plate of Maine Diver scallops? They’re sautéed and served on a garden pea puree and saffron beurre blanc which is a reduced white butter sauce made with white wine, vinegar, and shallots. Yeah, it’s amazing.

Finally, the “Crudo” section of the menu is not technically raw, but it’s so very special. Fried New England Bluepoint oysters are served with a horseradish crème fraîche and American caviar, and the traditional Hawaiian tuna poke is served with Japanese seaweed, mirin soy vinaigrette, and jasmine rice. Both are great options. But the dish everyone’s talking about and ordering is The “Smoking” Seafood Tower.” It features 6 oysters, 12 large tiger shrimp, tuna ceviche, half a Maine lobster, salmon rilette, 3 king crab legs, and 12 East Coast mussels. With liquid nitrogen providing the cascading smoke falling over the multi-tiered tower, it is served while a sparker shoots into the air high atop the spectacle of a dish. You won’t forget ordering this showstopper or even seeing one go by your table. And at \$135, you shouldn’t.

“What I was very interested in was being special,” Eric emphasizes. “I was not sure about presenting the seafood tower. First of all, it’s not cheap at \$135. But we sell a lot of them. I like to have my fun, so we put liquid nitrogen on there and a sparkler, so when it enters the dining room, everyone’s looking at it. We flambée the shrimp in front of the customer with tequila. It’s a show.”



We should mention the sides because they are anything but also-rans. Baked Potato Caviar, gratin dauphinois, Pommes Alouette (truffle Parmesan matchstick potatoes), creamy mashed potatoes, roasted Mediterranean vegetables, sautéed mushrooms, gold flake truffle fries, french fries, jasmine rice, truffle mushroom risotto, and asparagus. You can make a memorable meal without ever leaving the “sides” menu.

All great meals end with dessert, and if you have room left, you are not going to want to skip this course. Traditional French Profiteroles offers 3 French puff pastry “choux” filled with Tahitian vanilla ice cream, hot chocolate sauce, and toasted almonds. Or have a giant chocolate soufflé, a thinly sliced apple tart, or, be like my gluten-free wife who loved the crème brûlée three ways. Well, she took the vanilla and matcha flavors and let me have

the coffee one which I could eat to no end. Not to be outdone by the rest of the menu, there are a couple of ways to make your dessert memorable too, beyond just the flavors. The Ménage à Trois Martini is great for sharing with strawberry and vanilla ice cream, white and dark chocolate brownie, fresh berries, and chocolate sauce, topped with whipped cream and an assortment of candies served in a giant martini glass. And Laura’s Pastry Tower (yes, another tower!) boasts an assortment of fresh-cut fruit, lemon meringue tartlet, salted caramel and chocolate tartlet, key lime tartlet, crème brûlée tartlet, cheesecake, vanilla ice cream, and raspberry sorbet.

So you read all of that and you are probably thinking, “that can’t be cheap.” And it is not. It’s high-end and not like something you’ll find anywhere near here. And while to most, Bread & Vine Dubuque will be a very special occasion kind of

place, in just a couple of weeks, they’ve already had numerous repeat customers, 2, 3, and 4 times. Eric was a bit worried about the prices, but so far it has not been an issue. He’s introducing a new price point in Dubuque but also a new level of experience. “There’s definitely money in Dubuque, and it’s coming out,” noted Eric.

I compare it to concert tickets. There is always a block of seats up front that cost more than the rest, and a lot of people look at those and think, “Who can afford those?” But I also know that those seats are the ones to sell out first. If you are offering a product that people want and enjoy, and there is a big enough market out there of the kind of people who will pay a little extra for a truly unique and special experience, then the numbers make sense. Having said all of that, if you don’t go for the seafood tower or the signature cocktails, a couple can still have an amazing and memorable night here for under \$100. The appetizers and pasta start at \$22 while the meats and fish range from the \$26 vat of mussels to the aforementioned \$125 tomahawk ribeye. It all comes down to what you order.

Brunch Anyone?

If the main and dessert menus weren’t enough, after just three weeks of being open, Eric introduced his Sunday brunch menu on March 12. “It’s classic American dishes like biscuits and gravy, but instead, I do croque madame and gravy,” he explains. “Crepes instead of pancakes. Pork Belly Benedict [served on a bao bun].” And based on the photos of the food, the presentation takes everything up a notch as well.

“I just try to make it interesting,” adds Eric. Consider avocado flatbread like you’ve never had before with crème fraîche, poached eggs, and tomato. Or an acai bowl for those who want to be healthy with bananas, fresh raspberries and blueberries, toasted coconut, and granola.

“We weren’t going to open brunch until it was right,” Eric noted. “Today, I cooked with the staff to make the dishes perfect. The waffle has got to be soft and moist inside, you know. And we’re there now.”

Indeed, the photos of what they created look stunning online, and I look forward to my return visit so I can prove that with my own mouth.

Sunday brunch runs from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., as a brunch should. (Who ends brunch at 11 a.m.? That’s called breakfast!) Just like the dining hours, they close three hours after the kitchen closes, at 6 p.m., so people don’t have to rush out whatsoever after they dine. Bottomless mimosas, anyone?

Closed Monday and Tuesday, on Wednesday and Thursday, Bread & Vine

Dubuque is seating dinner from 5 to 9 p.m., but the bar is open until midnight. On Friday and Saturday, they stop taking dinner orders at 10 p.m. That's different from the kitchen "closing" at 10 p.m.; it doesn't mean the restaurant closes then. You can absolutely order dinner at 9:55 p.m. because they will be there, making sure you have a great time until midnight anyway. So, the kitchen hours are for placing orders, not for you to finish dining. You can make reservations online through OpenTable. For now, visit [BreadAndVineRestaurants.com](https://www.breadandvine.com) for the OpenTable link or call the restaurant for reservations at **563-239-9121**.

So, if you are looking for a truly quiet, intimate night out, this might not be your thing. But hold on a second—this might be exactly the spark in your life you didn't know you needed until you got here. We're blessed that we can get some amazing meals in several high-end restaurants around Dubuque. But this might be the place where you most remember, not just the food, but the evening for some time to come, as Bread & Vine Dubuque is designed to be more than just a meal; it is an experience.

A Little Background

Well, you've had a nice overview of what the Bread & Vine Dubuque experience will be like when you try it for yourself, but we talked about a lot more than that when we sat down. So, if you want a little more background and philosophy of the venue, stick around, and we'll go back and get a little deeper into what and how this all came together.

The Bread & Vine Dubuque experience is not a model that Eric Bonnetain is copying from anywhere, but Eric does bring extensive experience from New York and Miami as well as internationally, and he wanted to showcase something different to Dubuque. A cool vibe, something fun. Well, vision accomplished there.

Eric Bonnetain is a wonderfully fascinating native Parisian, who, thanks to fate, stumbled upon Galena during the COVID summer that never was in 2020. When we first met Eric in June of 2021 after the opening of Bread & Vine in Galena, he shared how the whole thing started.

"When COVID hit," Bonnetain began in our 2021 interview, "I was in China working on a massive project involving a Chinese restaurant, a Japanese restaurant, a Korean restaurant, an American brasserie, a French restaurant, and a nightclub, and suddenly, I lost my job with COVID. So I took a sabbatical here with my wife, who is in Chicago, to think about my future. We were traveling here to Galena over a weekend, and this little town was on fire with activity



THE B4 BENEDICT (BAO BUN BELLY BENEDICT)

last summer while everyone was complaining in New York and Chicago."

Skip ahead 18 months, and clearly, the "risk" he took in 2021 paid off in a big way. The bakery and French patisserie along Galena's main drag is consistently one of the busiest eateries in the community filled with great dining experiences, and this solidified Eric's plan to take the model elsewhere like Texas and Alaska for starters. This is Eric's "brand," but the Dubuque location, as noted at the top of this story, was his chance "for me to have fun but also to have a restaurant that I love personally for me around here."

It's a real adult nightclub. This isn't a sticky-floor dance hall where the dark room hides the scratches and cheap drinks bring the crowds. Eric agrees, he's not cheap, and it was very important to him not to invite that kind of crowd. You can have an incredibly fun night but not worry about the room degrading into a drunk pit of college kids because he does not want to tarnish the reputation the venue is establishing. And he never wants it to be awkward for other people in the restaurant. So far, he's very pleased. The clientele he has here are the same that go to Brazen, Woodfire,

L.May, and Pepper Sprout: more mature adults who still like to get out and have fun. Let's face it, for the most part, the younger crowd can't afford to be here all night long and drinking. The cocktails are around \$12. They have a doorman on Friday and Saturday as it's very important to Eric to control the crowd and the vibe.

"It doesn't have to be just for special occasions, but if you want to celebrate your special other person, even just for a drink, this is a unique and memorable place to spend time together," offers Eric. "This is the type of bar we like to be, and I can't find another place in Dubuque like this. I like to go to the bar at Brazen because he has amazing cocktails, but then after 9 p.m., where do I go?"

And Eric says that as a mature adult (though he does have some pretty playfully bold, orange glasses). "It's not just young people out there partying. It might be a risky business creating a space for those other people, but Galena was also a risky business for me, and worked out very well."

Finding the home in Dubuque's Millwork District was fortuitous, finding a Dubuquer who was already a fan of his Galena location. Dr. Bobby Koneru who owns the

building and is responsible for the beautiful renovation of the space to make this all possible is now Eric's partner in the venue. Eric had been working on a deal for months elsewhere in the Millwork District to do a food court idea, an idea he now plans to bring to the ballroom next door to his current restaurant. That first foray fell through—too big of a risk for a man who's clearly open to some level of chance-taking. Then, he met Dr. Koneru in Galena and was invited to check out The Magnolia space. He was immediately in love with it the moment he walked in the door. Eric has opened so many entertainment venues and restaurants in his life that he can walk into a space and see what it will be. He saw the space and said, "This is what I want."

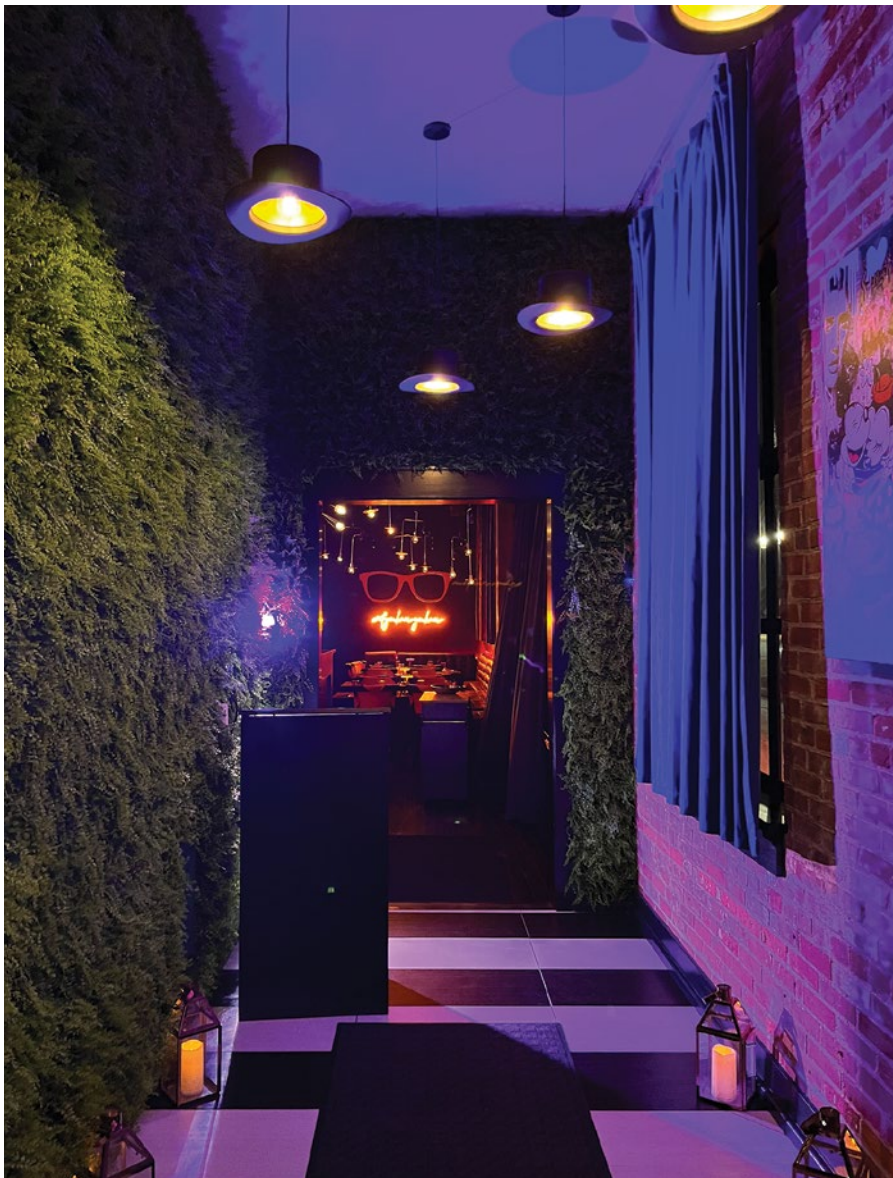
"The space reminds me of the meat-packing district in New York," notes Eric. "and now that's where the most expensive restaurant in New York is. And it looks the same too. This district is becoming a destination."

The decor, while in the beautifully restored vintage industrial brick and timber of the building in the Dubuque Millwork District, is also very modern and European feeling, with the music, lighting, and attitude. The well-dressed staff, some even provocatively sexy, accent their black attire with glowing orange, especially as the night progresses. They're suddenly all wearing orange glasses that glow in the black light, and the feel of the room evolves from dinner to nightclub. That's when the lasers and rotating lights kick in to ramp up the night from dinner with friends to dancing with friends.

"I didn't change that much, colors, lighting, music," Eric admits. But it all works together to create something new. He's filling a niche that no one is currently really touching. That even counts for the Sunday plated brunch, except on special occasions.

Bonnetain is currently looking for different performers to accentuate the experience at Bread & Vine Dubuque. He'd love to have an electric saxophonist or violinist who can accompany the DJ as he's playing. He would also love to see drag queen performers light up the venue and belly dancers and the like. So if that's you, find Eric!

"My general manager, Britany Hyde, is amazing," added Eric. "She did a wonderful job on the opening. On Saturday, we did 140 covers, 130 on reservation. The weeks since we opened have been truly amazing [even with consecutive Thursday-night blizzards]. We had six days to train the front-of-house people, and that was my challenge, but they are doing better and better. It's a very difficult level of service that people are not accustomed to, but they are all very genuine with my guests, and that is so important. I just have great feedback on



the service as well as the food which is great, and it's just going to get better as everyone gets comfortable. With such a big menu, in six days, I put a lot of pressure on them to make sure they understood it. Everyone is excited to see the process and energy we see on the weekends."

Next up for Eric is to prep the private room upstairs and turn that into an exclusive sexy, cool, members-only club. Before then, he needs to build the vibe downstairs, creating a loyal following to make the club a necessity.

Then next year, after they complete the wedding reception bookings that were already guaranteed in the large, white reception space right next to the restaurant, Eric plans a big expansion to completely change everything in that space. It will be a food court type of space to house his bakery as well as a sushi bar and a pizza bar unlike any pizza bar you've ever tried, plus a fresh-made pasta retail space. There's no place to buy fresh pasta locally, so he's going to fix that. Since he already

invested in the infrastructure to make his own pasta for the restaurant, he figured others would like to cook with fresh pasta too. So, the exciting things happening now are hopefully only step one with more excitement to come over the next year.

But there is excitement, intrigue, and amazing food awaiting you right now. So, plan your next special night out now, or just go ahead and make this weekend special just because you went. Go for dinner or go for drinks, and see what all the buzz is about. And by all means, tell them Bryce sent you! ■

Bread & Vine Dubuque

168 E 10TH ST, DUBUQUE, IA

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BREADANDVINERESTAURANTS.COM

Facebook: Bread & Vine Dubuque

Kitchen Hours: Wed-Thu: 5-9 PM (Bar to Midnight); Fri-Sat: 5-10 PM (Bar to Midnight); Sun: 11 AM-3 PM (Bar to 6 PM)

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