



Deconstructing *Paon*: Spatial of Meaning within the Balinese Domestic Realm of Penglipuran Village

Cliff Jevond Audoric Hakim¹, Widad Raditya², I Putu Divta Adnyana Wedanta²,
Lintu Tulistyantoro^{*1}

¹Department of Interior Design, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Universitas Kristen Petra, Surabaya, 60236, Indonesia

²Department of Interior Design, Faculty of Fine Art and Design, Institusi Seni Indonesia, Bali, 80235, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: lintut@petra.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 December 2025

Revised 07 January 2026

Accepted 6 June 2026

Available online 30 June 2026

E-ISSN: [2721-3463](https://doi.org/10.32734/koridor.v17i1.25882)

P-ISSN: [2086-910X](https://doi.org/10.32734/koridor.v17i1.25882)

How to cite:

Hakim, C. J. A., Raditya, W., Wedanta, I. P. D. A., & Tulistyantoro, L. (2026). Deconstructing *Paon*: Spatial of Meaning within the Balinese Domestic Realm of Penglipuran Village. *Jurnal Koridor*: 17(1), 067–075.

ABSTRACT

In Balinese culture, the domestic environment embodies cosmological, social, and gendered meanings rooted in the philosophy of *Asta Kosala Kosali*. Within this system, the *paon* or Balinese traditional kitchen is not merely a utilitarian zone but a symbolic domain where fire, femininity, and sustenance converge. Despite its rich historical and cultural significance, the *paon* has rarely been examined in architectural discourse, often overshadowed by studies of Bali's temples and sacred compounds. This lack of scholarly attention limits understanding of how everyday domestic spaces express cosmology and social hierarchy. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the *paon* in Penglipuran Village, one of Bali's most intact traditional settlements, as a key site of spatial meaning and ritual continuity. Using Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space alongside *Asta Kosala Kosali*, this qualitative descriptive research applies ethnographic observation and interviews with local residents. The findings reveal the *paon* as a socially produced space where physical form, spiritual symbolism, and daily practice interweave, reflecting the balance between sacred and profane realms. The study contributes a new perspective that connects global spatial theory with Balinese cosmology, advancing discourse on domestic sacredness and gendered spatial production in vernacular architecture.

Keyword: *Asta Kosala Kosali*; Balinese Architecture; Gendered Space; *Paon*; Production of Space

ABSTRAK

Dalam budaya Bali, lingkungan domestik mengandung makna kosmologis, sosial, dan gender yang berakar pada filosofi *Asta Kosala Kosali*. Dalam sistem tersebut, *paon* atau dapur tradisional Bali tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai ruang memasak, tetapi juga sebagai ruang simbolik tempat api, perempuan, dan keberlangsungan kehidupan keluarga saling terhubung. Meskipun memiliki signifikansi budaya yang kuat, *paon* masih jarang dibahas dalam kajian arsitektur dan cenderung terpinggirkan oleh penelitian yang berfokus pada pura, bangunan sakral, dan tata ruang tradisional Bali. Keterbatasan kajian ini menyebabkan pemahaman mengenai bagaimana ruang domestik sehari-hari merepresentasikan kosmologi, nilai budaya, dan hierarki sosial masih belum berkembang secara memadai. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji makna spasial dan peran budaya *paon* di Desa Penglipuran sebagai salah satu permukiman tradisional Bali yang masih terjaga. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan observasi semi-etnografis dan wawancara kepada masyarakat setempat. Analisis dilakukan melalui integrasi teori Production of Space Henri Lefebvre dan konsep *Asta Kosala Kosali*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *paon* merupakan ruang yang diproduksi secara sosial, di mana bentuk fisik, simbolisme spiritual, dan praktik keseharian saling membentuk secara berkelanjutan. Posisi *paon* yang relatif terpisah dari ruang publik tidak merepresentasikan ruang yang marginal,



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<http://doi.org/10.32734/koridor.v17i1.25882>

melainkan menunjukkan nilai kesakralan serta perannya sebagai pusat keberlangsungan kehidupan domestik. Penelitian ini memberikan perspektif baru mengenai *paon* sebagai inti kehidupan hunian tradisional Bali sekaligus memperluas kajian ruang domestik vernakular melalui integrasi teori spasial global dan kosmologi lokal.

Kata Kunci: *Asta Kosala Kosali*; Arsitektur Bali; *Paon*; Ruang Bergender; Produksi Ruang

1. Introduction

The Balinese domestic compound operates as a spatial articulation of the island's philosophical foundations, most notably *Tri Hita Karana*, which requires balanced relationships between the divine, the human community, and the natural environment (Luxiana & Parwata, 2022; Parwata, 2011; Suwondo & Arifin, 2023; Windhu et al., 1984). This worldview is materially enacted through *Asta Kosala Kosali* (Lontar Asta Kosala-Kosali, n.d.), a prescriptive architectural system that governs orientation, zoning, proportional hierarchy, and spatial order (Luxiana & Parwata, 2022; Mahapatni et al., 2023; Parwata, 2011; Parwata et al., 2018; Purnama et al., 2022). Through this system, the domestic realm is organized into the zones of *utama*, *madya*, and *nista*, creating a tiered spatial hierarchy that encodes cosmological meaning into everyday built form (Arrafiani, 2012). Within this ordered framework, the *paon* (Balinese traditional kitchen) is a structure whose cultural significance extends far beyond its utilitarian function (Agusintadewi, 2018; Budasi & Satyawati, 2021).

Although modest in size and often placed in peripheral or “less sacred” positions, the *paon* is a space where elemental fire, nourishment, female domestic labor, and ritual preparation intersect (Budasi & Satyawati, 2021; Tulistyantoro et al., 2021). Fire, associated with Lord Brahma, is not only an instrument for cooking but also a medium of purification and transformation (Budasi & Satyawati, 2021; Putra & Yulianasari, 2020). Daily practices conducted within the *paon* sustain familial continuity, transmit culinary and ritual knowledge across generations, and support the preparation of offerings that form the basis of Balinese spiritual life (Agusintadewi, 2018; Budasi & Satyawati, 2021; Putra & Yulianasari, 2020). This combination of symbolic and practical roles positions the *paon* as a paradoxical space: architecturally humble yet cosmologically charged, designated as *nista* yet functioning as a spiritual and genealogical center of domestic life.

However, architectural scholarships on Balinese vernacular compounds have rarely foregrounded the *paon*. Existing studies either emphasize technical aspects of the kitchen, such as natural ventilation, material performance, and fire-based cooking systems, or focus predominantly on sacred structures like the *sanggah* and ceremonial *bale* (Purnama et al., 2022; Putra & Yulianasari, 2020). This separation between functional and symbolic research domains has produced a significant blind spot, leaving the *paon* under-theorized despite its cultural centrality (Agusintadewi, 2018). Furthermore, in Penglipuran Village, recognized for its preserved spatial and cultural integrity local accounts and field observations indicate a notable deviation: the *paon* is positioned in the *madyaning utama*, a location higher in the spatial hierarchy than prescribed in *Asta Kosala Kosali* (Sudarwani & Priyoga, 2018 ; Lontar Asta Kosala-Kosali, n.d.). This suggests a localized reinterpretation of cosmological planning principles, yet its meaning and implications have not been critically examined.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing the spatial meaning, configuration, and cultural role of the *paon* in Penglipuran Village. The research integrates *Asta Kosala Kosali* (Lontar Asta Kosala-Kosali, n.d.) with Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991) to construct a comprehensive analytical framework capable of bridging prescriptive cosmology with lived spatial experience. Through this synthesis, the study aims to explain how the *paon* is conceived through cosmological codes, practiced through daily domestic routines, and lived as a site of symbolic continuity. The objective is to reveal how the *paon* embodies a unique convergence of spatial hierarchy, ritual function, and gendered practice, and how its distinctive placement in Penglipuran reflects a dynamic negotiation between tradition and local interpretation (Dharma & Pradana, 2022; Kasuma & Suprijanto, 2011; Priyoga & Sudarwani, 2018; Rijasa, 2020; Sudarwani & Priyoga, 2018).

Beyond addressing the limited scholarship on the *paon*, this study contributes to vernacular architectural discourse by challenging the common perception of the kitchen as a marginal, secondary, or purely utilitarian domestic space. The findings demonstrate that the relative separation of the *paon* from public areas should not be interpreted as a sign of inferiority or exclusion, but rather as an expression of sacredness and domestic

significance. Through its association with fire, ritual preparation, nourishment, and intergenerational continuity, the *paon* emerges as a symbolic center of household life. This study therefore offers a new perspective on how vernacular domestic environments construct and sustain the cultural foundations of everyday existence.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design supported by semi-ethnographic observation. The research was conducted through two structured field visits to Penglipuran Village, each lasting several hours, during which the researcher documented spatial organization, circulation patterns, thermal conditions, and everyday domestic activities occurring within the *paon*. The documentation process included drawings and photographic recording.

Semi-ethnography in this study refers to short-term immersion without full integration into household routines. The researcher interacted with residents to clarify activities, observed cooking practices and ritual preparation, and recorded how spatial elements such as the *lengatan* and *lobangan* were used in daily life. This approach allows for capturing embodied spatial experience while minimizing disruption to household dynamics.

2.2 Site and Participant Selection

The research focuses on a single traditional household compound in Penglipuran Village, selected through purposive sampling. This case was chosen because it fulfills three criteria:

- The compound preserves its original architectural configuration in accordance with village customary guidelines,
- The *paon* retains traditional spatial components such as the *lengatan* and *lobangan*, and
- The household actively maintains traditional cooking and ritual practices relevant to the study.

The selection of a single compound is appropriate for qualitative spatial analysis because Penglipuran implements a standardized architectural order across all compounds, as documented in Sudarwani and Priyoga (2018). This relative homogeneity supports the use of a representative compound as a suitable case for examining the broader spatial logic of Penglipuran Village. To minimize the limitations of a single-case approach, findings from this compound were triangulated with descriptions of *paon* placement and function in related studies, including Purnama et al. (2022) on Banjar Cekeng and Agusintadewi (2018) on Bali Aga domestic cosmology. These comparative references provide contextual support for interpreting whether the Penglipuran *paon* represents a typical expression of Bali Aga spatial logic or a localized deviation from broader Balinese architectural patterns.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through several techniques:

- Spatial documentation consisting of plan sketching and photographic mapping of kitchen components.
- Non-intrusive observation of daily activities to capture functional, sensorial and behavioural aspects of the *paon* without directing participants.
- Informal interviews conducted in conversational format to elicit narratives on symbolic meaning, spatial reasoning and inherited customary knowledge.

2.4 Analytical Framework and Data Processing

Analysis follows two interpretive frameworks

- *Asta Kosala Kosali* to examine cosmological ordering, directional hierarchy and locational symbolism; and
- Lefebvre's spatial triad to interpret the interplay between conceived, perceived and lived space.

Field data were transcribed into descriptive matrices and coded thematically. Coding categories emerged inductively from repeated patterns of spatial behaviour, material characteristics and ritualized practice, then aligned with theoretical constructs. Triangulation was conducted across observational notes, interview statements and established literature to strengthen interpretive validity. As characteristic of qualitative research, emphasis is placed on meaning-making mechanisms rather than statistical representation.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design supported by semi-ethnographic observation. Semi-ethnography here refers to short-term immersive observation without full participant involvement, allowing

spatial behavior to be documented with minimal disruption to household routines. All participants were adults, participation was voluntary, and no personal or identifiable information was recorded to maintain confidentiality. Observations and informal conversations were conducted with respect for domestic boundaries and cultural norms. Artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT) were used solely for language refinement in the manuscript and did not contribute to data collection, coding or interpretation.

3. Discussion

3.1 Spatial Positioning of the Paon: Hierarchical Anomaly within Asta Kosala Kosali

Field observations indicate that the *paon* in Penglipuran is positioned in the *madyaning utama*, the central–upper zone of the cosmological grid. This spatial decision diverges from broader Balinese domestic typologies where kitchens are typically placed in the *nista* or *nistaning madya* zones due to their association with heat, impurity, and quotidian labor (Eiseman, 1990). In Penglipuran, the upward relocation reframes the kitchen from a marginal utilitarian zone into a structurally and symbolically central domestic element.

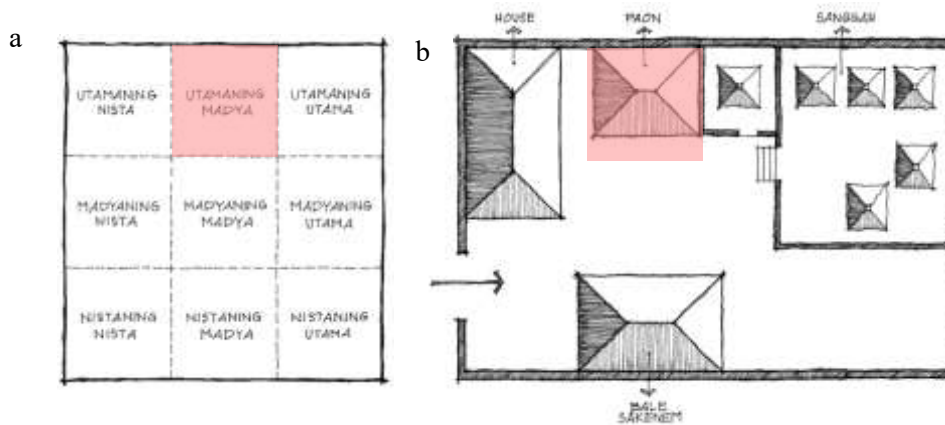


Figure 1. (a) The Sanga Mandala Concept; (b) Site plan of Penglipuran houses.
 Source: Author's illustration

This placement becomes even more striking when read against the macro-zoning of Penglipuran Village itself, which mirrors the *Tri Angga* cosmological structure: the uppermost *parahyangan* zone contains the temple and the sacred bamboo forest, the middle *pawongan* zone houses the residential units, and the lower *palemahan* zone contains the cremation grounds and burial area (Budihardjo, 1991; Sudarwani & Priyoga, 2018). Within this broader triadic ordering, every house compound internally repeats the same sacred hierarchy. The presence of the *paon* in the *madyaning utama* therefore represents a rare inversion in which a function typically associated with the profane *nista* layer is elevated into the core of the *pawongan* realm.

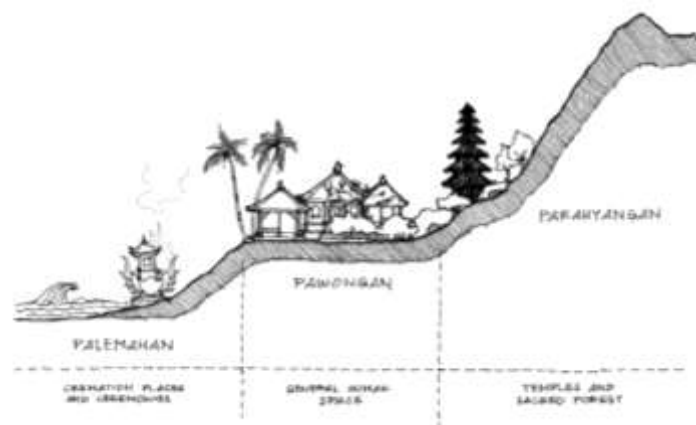


Figure 2. Implementation of the Tri Angga concept in Penglipuran Village
 Source: Author's illustration

This phenomenon resonates with Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus, in which cosmological values are internalized and materialized through spatial organization. Residents describe the *paon* as “the space where life begins” referencing its roles in warmth, nourishment, and protection. Situated toward *kaja*, an axis aligned with the preservative domain of Vishnu, the *paon* acquires a symbolic association with continuity and sustenance. The *paon*’s placement therefore constitutes a spatial anomaly that challenges generalized academic assumptions regarding the kitchen’s inherent profane status in Balinese architectural hierarchy. The *paon*’s placement thus constitutes a significant spatial anomaly that challenges generalized assumptions about the kitchen as an inherently profane architectural element.

3.2 Material Construction and Environmental Logic

The *paon* employs bamboo mat walls, timber posts, and thatched or *sirap* roofing materials integral to Balinese vernacular environmental logic (Purnama et al., 2022). Bamboo offers controlled permeability essential for smoke ventilation, while timber posts embody vertical order and structural stability (Mahapatni et al., 2023; Sudarwani & Priyoga, 2018). The thatch roof facilitates heat absorption and smoke diffusion, forming a warm microclimate necessary for cooking and preservation.



Figure 3. Exterior View and Materials of the *Paon*
Source: Author’s documentation

This material assemblage aligns with Waterson’s (1990) arguments that Southeast Asian domestic architecture expresses kinship, identity, and cosmological order through natural materials. Rapoport’s (1990) view that built environments communicate meaning beyond function is likewise evident here: materiality orchestrates sensory experience, ecological performance, and symbolic coherence. Drawing from Ingold’s (2000) dwelling perspective, the *paon* materializes a relational environment where human activity, climate, and material agency shape everyday life.

3.3 Functional Complexity: Lengatan, Lobangan and Everyday Practice

The *paon* integrates multiple functional layers within a compact spatial envelope. The *lengatan*, a wooden rack suspended above the hearth, functions as an organic preservation system in which corn exposed to heat and smoke develops resistance to pests and moisture. The *lobangan*, traditionally used as a resting platform for elders, symbolizes protection, warmth, and intergenerational care embedded within the domestic core (Purnama et al., 2022).



Figure 4. (a) Interior View of the *Paon*; (b) *Lengan* above the hearth; (c) *Lobangan* within the *Paon*
 Source: Author's documentation

These overlapping functions embody what Carsten (1995) conceptualizes as the moral heat of the hearth, where relatedness is produced through shared sensory and material interaction. The *paon* exemplifies Oliver's (2006) notion of social density in vernacular architecture, where domestic space accommodates concurrent cycles of cooking, storing, resting, and caring. Rather than a specialized room, the *paon* emerges as a convergent node where social, ecological, and symbolic processes intersect.

3.4 Ritual Practices and the Integration of Brahma-Wisnu Domains

Fire within the *paon* represents the transformative and purifying energy of Brahma, while the spatial orientation of the kitchen aligns with the preservative axis of Wisnu (Purnama et al., 2022). This dual alignment produces a cosmological synthesis in which heat serves ritual, symbolic, and practical purposes simultaneously. Activities such as preparing *banten*, heating water for purification, and supporting household ceremonies demonstrate the *paon*'s sustained ritual relevance (Budasi & Satyawati, 2021; Putra & Yulianasari, 2020).



Figure 5. Fire as Symbolic Element in the *Paon*
 Source: Author's documentation

Hobart's (1990) argument that Balinese ritual knowledge becomes domesticated through everyday practice is reflected in how fire-based activities are integrated into daily life. Geertz's (1980) theatre-state framework further illuminates how symbolic performance extends into domestic environments. The *paon* therefore operates as a threshold between sacred and profane, embedding ritual practice within ordinary rhythms of existence.

3.5 The *Paon* as a Socially Produced Space: Lefebvre's Triad in Action

Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad provides a lens for understanding the production of meaning in the *paon*. As conceived space, the *paon* is shaped by *Asta Kosala Kosali*, which prescribes orientation, axis, and hierarchy. As perceived space, it is enacted through routines of cooking, storing, caring for elders, and ritual preparation. As lived space, it embodies sensory memory warmth, smoke, texture, and familial closeness producing an affective environment that carries symbolic weight.

This triadic synthesis echoes Carsten and Hugh-Jones' (1995) insight that domestic form is not just functional but charged with cosmology and memory. The *paon* thus emerges as a socially produced world where practice, belief, and experience mutually reinforce one another

3.6 Relevance to Contemporary Domestic Design

The *paon* offers relevant lessons for contemporary domestic design, especially in thermal zoning, multifunctional layout, and sensory intimacy. Carsten's (1995) insights on warmth and relatedness illustrate how spatial configurations can foster social bonding. Vernacular strategies seen in Waterson (1990), Rapoport (1990), and Oliver (2006) underscore the potential of natural materials and ecological thinking in creating human-centered environments. By integrating ecological responsiveness with culturally rooted spatial logic, the *paon* serves as a model for sustainable and meaningful kitchen design in contemporary settings.

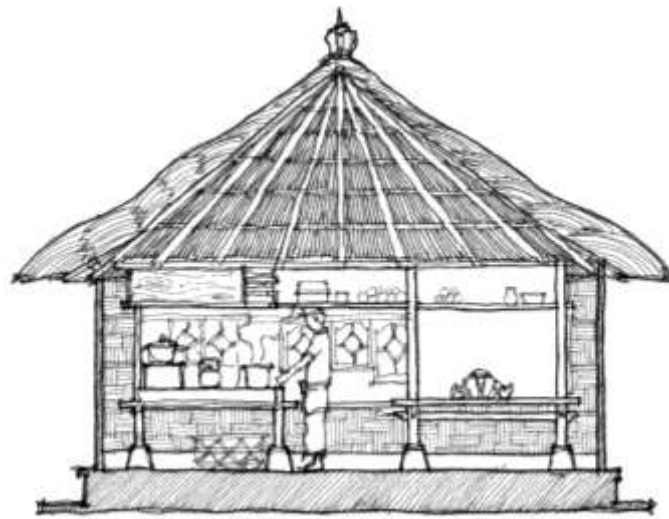


Figure 6. Sectional view of the *Paon*
Source: Author's illustration

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the *paon* of Penglipuran Village constitutes not merely a functional cooking area, but a spatial nucleus shaped by the interwoven forces of cosmology, gendered domestic practice, and embodied tradition. Its position within the *madyaning utama*, which diverges from normative Balinese compound configurations, reveals a localized reinterpretation of *Asta Kosala Kosali* that elevates the ostensibly profane realm of fire into a genealogical and symbolic center of the household. Interpreted through Lefebvre's spatial triad, the *paon* emerges as a socially produced environment in which conceived cosmological order, perceived routines of everyday life, and lived spiritual experiences mutually reinforce one another. Architectural-interior elements such as the *lengatan* and *lobangan* reflect a multilayered understanding of continuity, ancestral care, and the cyclical nature of sustenance embedded in daily domesticity. By deconstructing the *paon*, this study reveals its mediating role between sacred and ordinary realms, reaffirming its function as the experiential origin of family identity and cultural resilience. These findings contribute to broader discourses on vernacular domesticity and suggest pathways for integrating indigenous spatial epistemologies into contemporary kitchen design and sustainable domestic environments.

Theoretically, this study contributes to vernacular spatial studies by demonstrating that the significance of domestic space cannot be understood solely through physical hierarchy, visibility, accessibility, or functional designation. The findings suggest that spatial importance may also derive from symbolic, ritual, and life-sustaining functions embedded within everyday practice. By integrating *Asta Kosala Kosali* with Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, this research proposes that the center of a dwelling is not necessarily the most visible or architecturally dominant space, but rather the space through which cultural continuity, social reproduction, and the sustenance of life are maintained. This perspective contributes to broader discussions on

domestic sacredness, gendered space, and vernacular spatial meaning.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, scholarly literature specifically examining the *paon* as a symbolic and socially produced domestic space remains relatively limited, restricting opportunities for broader theoretical comparison. Second, the research focuses on a single case study in Penglipuran Village and therefore reflects a specific cultural context rather than the diversity of Balinese and Nusantara vernacular settlements. Third, although the findings reveal important relationships between the *paon*, domestic life, and cultural meaning, comparative studies across other traditional communities remain limited. Future research may therefore explore similar kitchen spaces in other Nusantara dwelling traditions to examine how domestic sacredness, gendered practices, and cultural continuity are spatially expressed across different cultural settings.

5. Acknowledgements

The authors express gratitude to the households in Penglipuran Village who generously allowed access to their kitchens and shared their insights during the field observations. Appreciation is also extended to the community representatives who facilitated access and coordination during the research process. The authors acknowledge the institutional support provided by the Department of Interior Design, Petra Christian University, as well as the Department of Interior Design, Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Bali, for their academic guidance and administrative facilitation. This study received no external funding.

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