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06-12-2026 | DESIGN

Bruce Springsteen’s new center in New Jersey is a jewel box monument to his music

Surrounded by a meadow of grasses and flowers, the Jersey Shore institution appears to float on a coastal dune.

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[Photo: Alex Ferrec/©CookFox Architects]

BY NATE BERG

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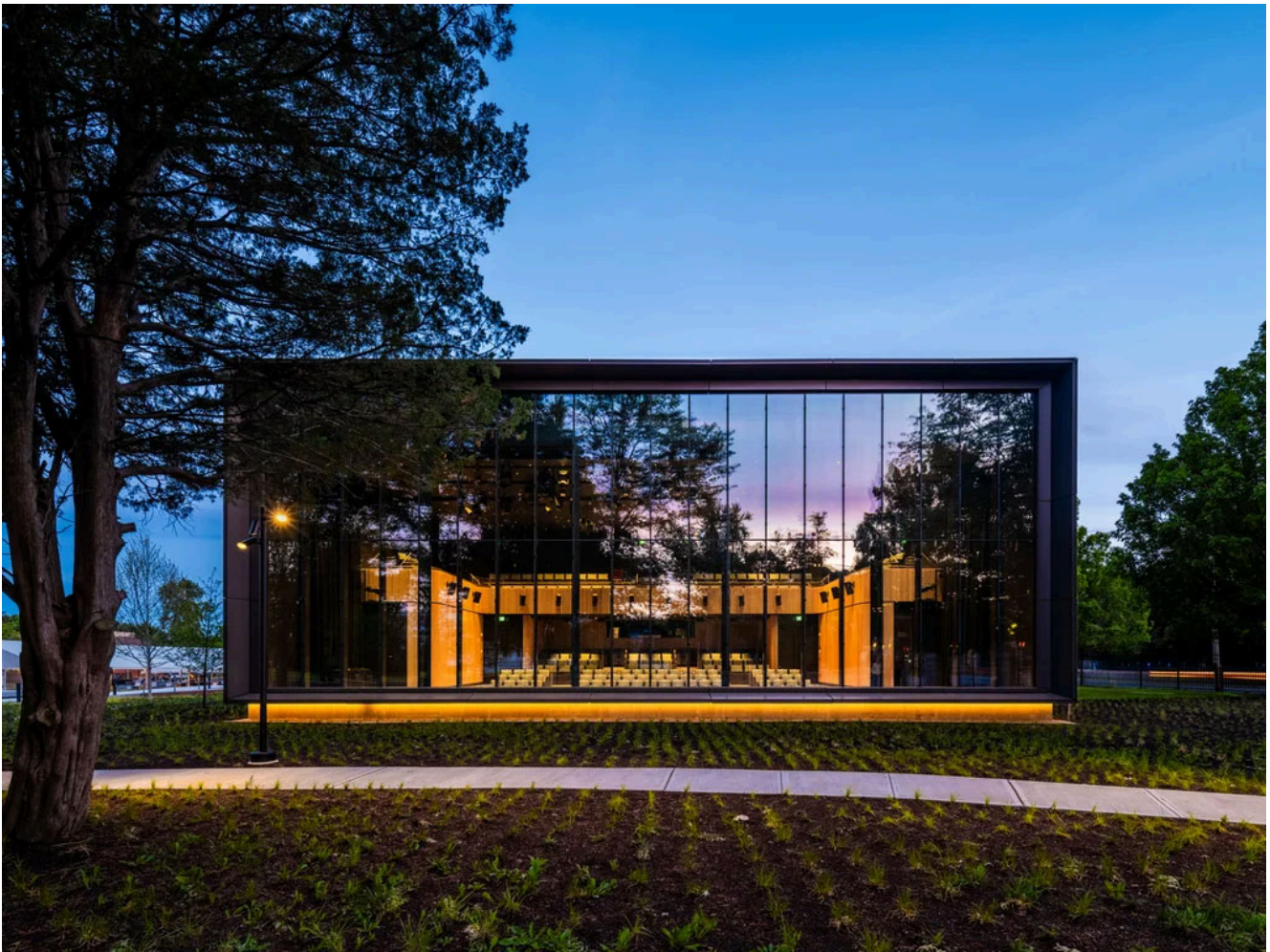


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From the wood boardwalk that leads to its front doors to the weathered steel of its facade to the rough-hewn timber beams inside, there's an unmistakable postindustrial feel to the new **Bruce Springsteen Center for American Music**. Opening to the public on June 13, the center is a space built to house Springsteen's archives and exhibitions on his life and music, but also to tell the broader story of American music. It's also a tribute to the working-class American environment so central to Springsteen's music and life.





[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

Naturally, the center is on the New Jersey shore near his hometown. It is located in West Long Branch on the campus of Monmouth University, where Springsteen played many of his earliest shows. It also sits just four blocks from where The Boss wrote his 1975 masterpiece “Born to Run.”

As the center’s name suggests, it’s not a museum solely about **Bruce Springsteen**—a distinction made at the behest of the ever-humble musician himself. The idea for the center came from Bob Santelli, a longtime *Rolling Stone* journalist who was among the founding curators of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, which opened in 1995, and several other music-related museums in the three decades since. In Springsteen’s music



he saw an opportunity to explore a deep connection between the art and the place it's from.



[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

MORE THAN A TRIBUTE TO A SUPERSTAR

Santelli, who has been writing about Springsteen since 1973, reached out to him to ask if he'd be interested in creating a museum. "This was an opportunity to make sure that Bruce's legacy is preserved and celebrated in the state that he's synonymous with," Santelli says. Springsteen was not keen on the idea of making a museum all about himself. "He said, my feeling is that I'm a part of the American music story. I'm a chapter of it." So Santelli reworked the concept, and broadened it to place Springsteen within the longer arc of American music.





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[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

The architecture firm **CookFox** won an invited 2018 competition to design the center. Its cofounder, Rick Cook, says that although he first saw Springsteen in concert back in 1977, he was not exactly an enthusiast. “The truth was I wasn’t a Bruce fan because I’m not a music fan specifically,” he says.



But then Cook read Springsteen's 2016 autobiography, *Born to Run*, and soon after went to see *Springsteen on Broadway*. He became a convert. "Bruce has his own magic act, and its foundation is storytelling," he says. "So I started to view the project through that lens."



[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

A TRIBUTE TO PLACE

Cook's team drew on the working-class themes of Springsteen's music and persona to develop the center's design concept. "We wanted it to speak about the kind of postindustrial America that Bruce writes about, the beauty and nobility of these places," he says.

Santelli says the idea was a good fit from the start. "There wasn't a whole lot to change, to be quite honest," he says. "We were really, really please



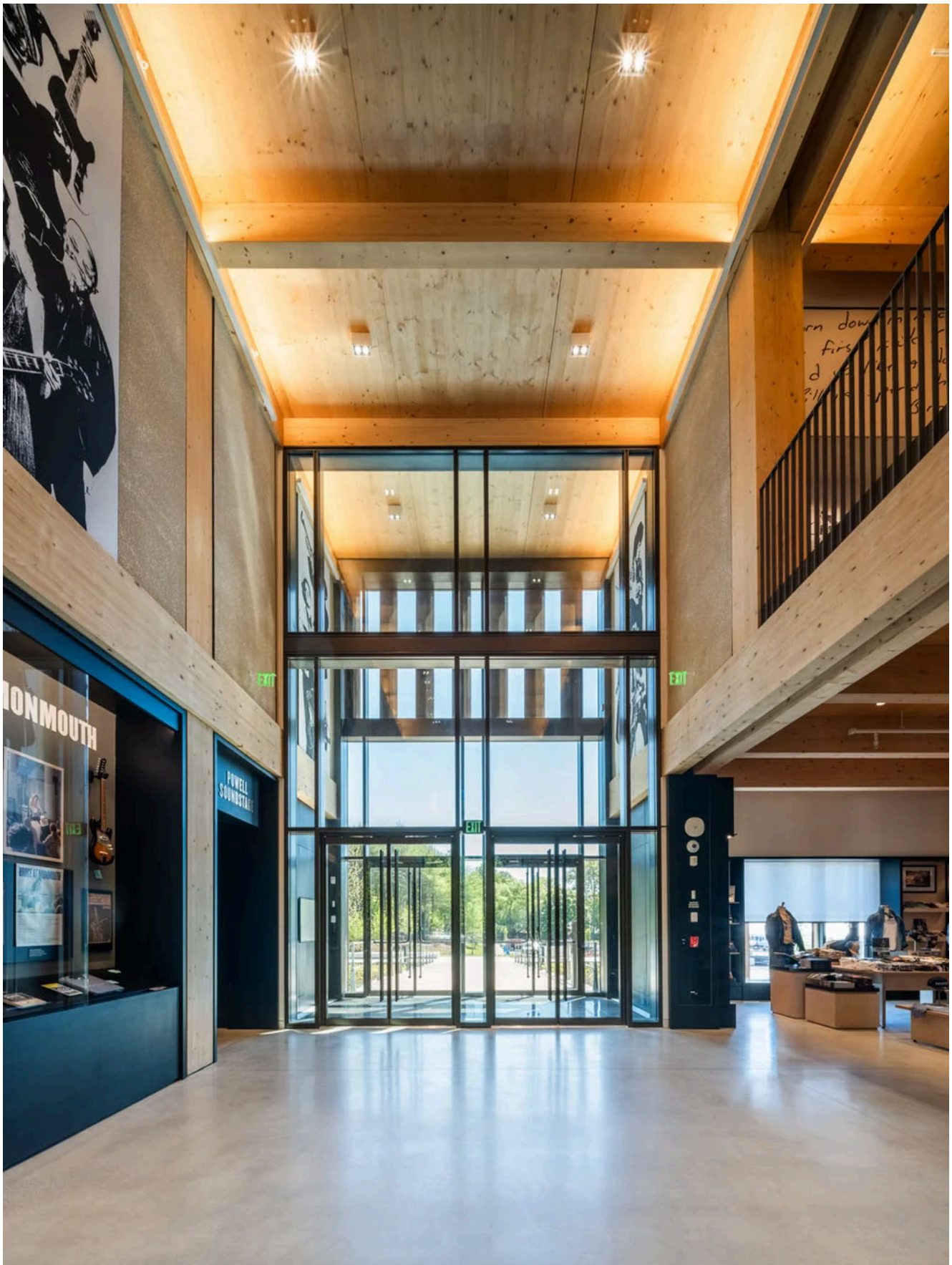
with the simplicity, but the elegance also . . . it captured the industrial workmanlike environment that Bruce wrote his songs in and writes songs about.”



[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

The building is a relatively simple rectangular form with its two stories clad in rusted, weathering steel. Surrounded by a meadow of grasses and flowers, it appears to float on a coastal dune. And the main entry to the museum is approached by a boardwalk, another Jersey shore reference. “The idea wasn’t so much that it was the literal representation of a boardwalk,” Cook says, “but that everybody crosses that threshold together.”





[Photo: Alex Ferrec/©CookFox Architects]



Inside its doors, the center opens up into a double-height space framed with huge pieces of rough timber. “The big wood columns and big wood beams hold the floors up. So there’s a directness to the storytelling and the architecture that we believed was consistent with the honesty and the directness of American music and Bruce’s music specifically,” Cook says.

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[Photo: Alex Ferrec/©CookFox Architects]

The ground floor features a 240-seat auditorium where visitors watch a 25-minute introductory overview of the center, narrated by Springsteen himself. Designed to concert-grade technical and acoustical standards, it will also be used for live performances. The rest of the floor is less Springsteen specific, with a large permanent gallery tracking the evolution of American music from Indigenous songs to contemporary recordings, a temporary gallery space with an inaugural show about protest songs, and a few smaller galleries on the history of the electric guitar, and Springsteen's connection to Monmouth University.



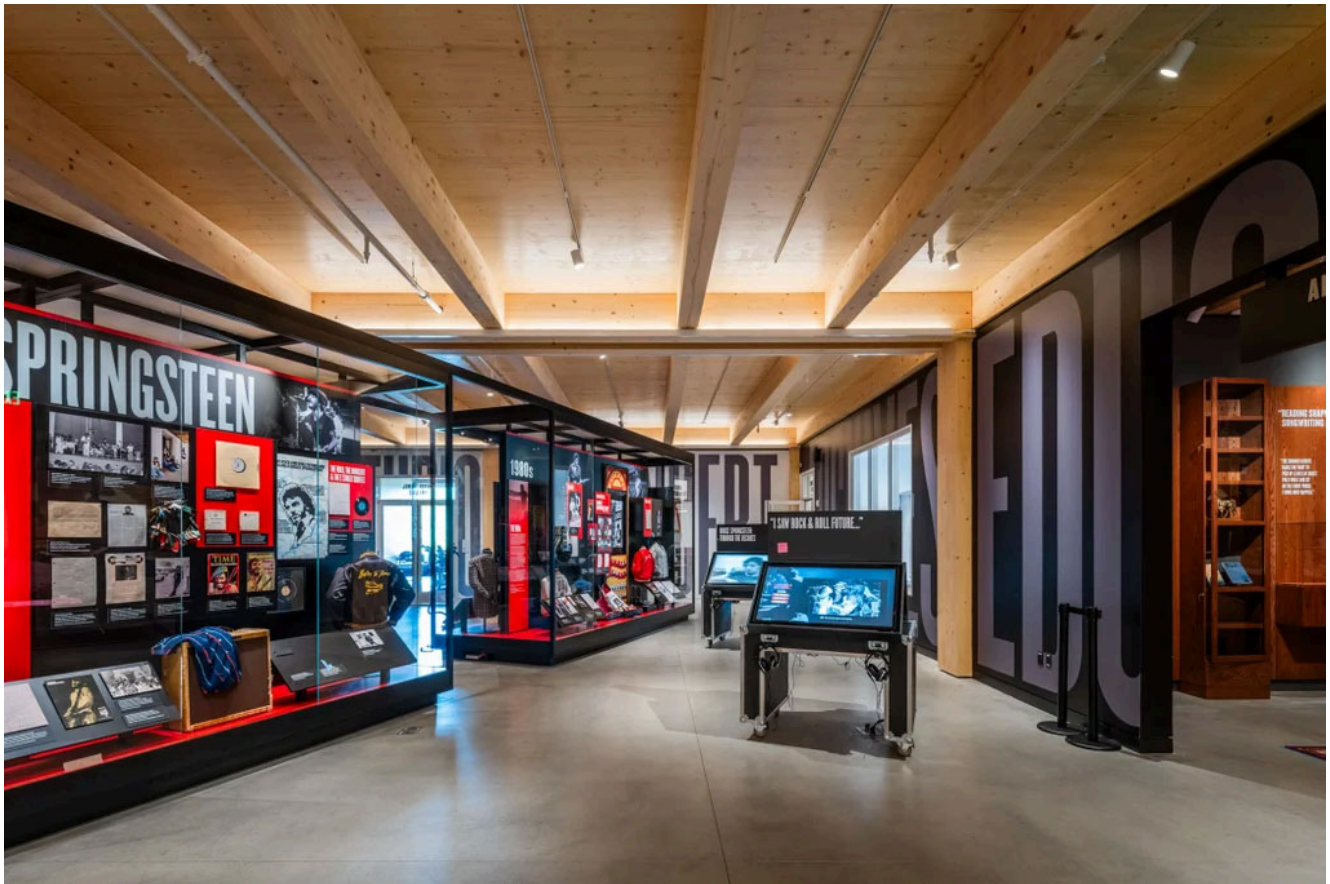


[Photo: Alex Ferrec/©CookFox Architects]

Upstairs is all Springsteen, with several galleries documenting his story, his various bands, and his long career leading the E Street Band. Interactive features include a music studio where visitors can remix “Born to Run” and a space where people can get a virtual drumming lesson from the E Street Band drummer, Max Weinberg. Much of the 4,200-square-foot floor is used to house Springsteen’s 48,000-item archive of handwritten lyrics, concert posters, magazine clippings, and paraphernalia from tours around the world.

“It is not a biographical series of exhibitions,” says Santelli. “Rather, it is primarily a story about the creative process, about how he created the music, and what his music means to New Jersey and America in general.”





[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

FAN SERVICE

Santelli comes to his role as executive director of the Bruce Springsteen Center for American Music after 16 years leading the Grammy Museum, and creating music museums like the **Woody Guthrie Center**, in Tulsa. “I’ve seen my share of egos,” he says. But the experience working with Springsteen was unlike many of the interactions he’s had with famous musicians. “We found Bruce almost too humble,” he says.





[Photo: Alex Ferrec/@CookFox Architects]

However, as a New Jersey native and a graduate of Monmouth University, Santelli knew the project would have high standards to meet. “There’s a lot of pressure when you’re dealing with someone like Bruce Springsteen in the state of New Jersey to make sure that you’ve done the legacy right, you’ve told the right story, and you’ve made it educationally relevant, which was the point,” he says.

Springsteen was mostly hands off during the design process, and only made his first visit to the space with its exhibitions installed in early June, less than two weeks before its public opening. “He gave us a double thumbs-up,” Santelli says. “Of course, I was very relieved.”

There will certainly be some scrutiny, though, especially among Springsteen’s large fan base. A fan group called **the Spring-Nuts** recently



got a sneak peek at the center, and many more longtime fans are sure to visit. Santelli's confident they'll get the experience they expect. And it's sure to win over new fans, too. After eight years working on the project, Cook, who didn't follow music beforehand, is now a devotee to the artist. "I'm one of those Springsteen fans who knows every word," he says.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nate Berg is a staff writer at *Fast Company*, where he writes about design, architecture, urban development, and industrial design. He has written for publications including *The New York Times*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Wired*, *The Guardian*, *Dwell*, *Wallpaper*, and *Curbed More*

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05-08-2026 | TECH

This AI startup wants to help smooth complex industrial materials sales

While other companies focus on general purpose AI, Emanate is targeting a highly specific sector's needs

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BY STEVEN MELENDEZ

While many AI companies are betting their products can be useful to a broad segment of businesses, a startup called Emanate is taking the opposite approach, building highly targeted tools designed for complex sales transactions in the industrial materials sector.



Founder and CEO Kiara Nirghin says the somewhat esoteric market, which includes manufacturers, distributors, and service providers working with materials from steel building materials to metal piping, has intricate sales processes involving generating quotes for bespoke orders, connecting existing customers with goods they may need, and proactively finding new customers.

The industrial materials sector, which provides raw materials like steel and aluminum and manufactured parts like wire and pipe, is vital to both the push to boost U.S. manufacturing output and the shift to a greener economy, which itself requires manufacturing solar panels, wind turbines, and **electric vehicle** charging stations. The **metals and minerals industry** alone is a multi-trillion dollar sector, and Emanate argues quickly generating more precisely quotes and closing sales faster can boost **productivity** and reduce waste from mistargeted production.

But right now, even generating quotes with existing systems can take as long as three to four weeks, says Nirghin, and until recently AI systems weren't sophisticated enough to take over for humans. Now, she says, they can generate useful quotes close to instantaneously.

“That was only recent—in terms of the last approximately six to eight months,” she says. “So there is a very big change in quality and step function in terms of actually applying the models.”

But, says Nirghin, the real key isn't the underlying AI models but the so-called harness—the framework of AI-callable tools, integrations with other systems like enterprise resource planning (ERP) software and databanks of corporate knowledge, and custom configurations—that wrap around them to form AI agents.



Emanate, which has received funding from investors including Andreessen Horowitz and M13 (though Nirghin declined to disclose the exact amount of funding the San Francisco-based company has raised) and currently has 10 employees, is explicitly betting that markets like industrial materials will benefit from sector-specific AI tools rather than simply adopting standard off-the-shelf AI agents

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