

How long do you boil cabbage?

Once a year I do something really stupid for no other reason than... just because.

One year I thought I'd surprise wifey by painting the basement stairwell and, because I tried to do it on the cheap, damned near killed the both of us with the fumes from the bargain basement paint.

Another time I bought an "easy-to-assemble" bookcase and spent the better part of a weekend and two bottles of glue trying to get the first two pieces to stay together. The wood later became kindling for a neighbour's fireplace.

Since it was raining Monday, and I had the day off, I opted to play chef. Something exotic, I thought, that might actually require more than two minutes in the microwave.

After much consideration, I settled on cabbage rolls. Can't be too hard I figured. Boil some cabbage leaves, stuff 'em with rice and ground beef, bury them in tomato sauce and voila— a European delight.

And just in case I ran into trouble, I figured I could rely on "America's No. 1 selling cookbook" *The Joy of Cooking* to help me out.

Wrong!

The only place the words cabbage and rolls share the same page in this book are in the index under "rolls, stuffed with rice and cheese, pg. 268."

So I turned to page 268 and was instructed to see Dolmas, pg. 431. Dolmas? Didn't he play quarterback for Seattle in 1983?

I turned to page 431 and found the recipe for Stuffed Grape Leaves or Dolmas. Grape leaves? Aren't they just a tad small to be stuffed?

Ah, but there right before the Dolmas recipe was one for Ground Beef in Cabbage Leaves. That sounds like cabbage rolls, I thought.

The first instruction was to wash and parblanch the leaves. Parblanch? What the hell is parblanching? See pg. 132.

Parblanch: "Place food to be blanched into a large quantity of cold water, bring it slowly to a boil, simmer it for the length of time specified.

THIS
'N
THAT



John McGhie

Following the hot bath, drain the food and plunge it quickly into cold water to firm and further arrest the hot water cooking. This process leaches excess salt from tongue and removes excess blood from a variety of meats and effectively firms meats like brains."

Tongue? Blood? Brains? All I wanted to do was find out how long I had to boil cabbage leaves for. Nobody said anything about brains, although if I had any I would have quit there.


Not finding an answer to what I thought was a relatively easy question— How long do you boil cabbage leaves for cabbage rolls?— in the book's 849 pages, I opted for the trial by error method.

I brought a big pot of water to a boil, dropped in the leaves and waited for them to get good and floppy. If I had to roll them, I figured they had to be as limp as a Beverly Hills hairdresser's wrist.

When they got good and soft, I tossed them into cold water (parblanching!) so I could handle them. I then took the rice and cooked beef and tried rolling it into the individual leaves. After having the rice/beef mixture shoot out the ends several times, I jabbed a few hundred toothpicks into the "rolls" to keep them together.

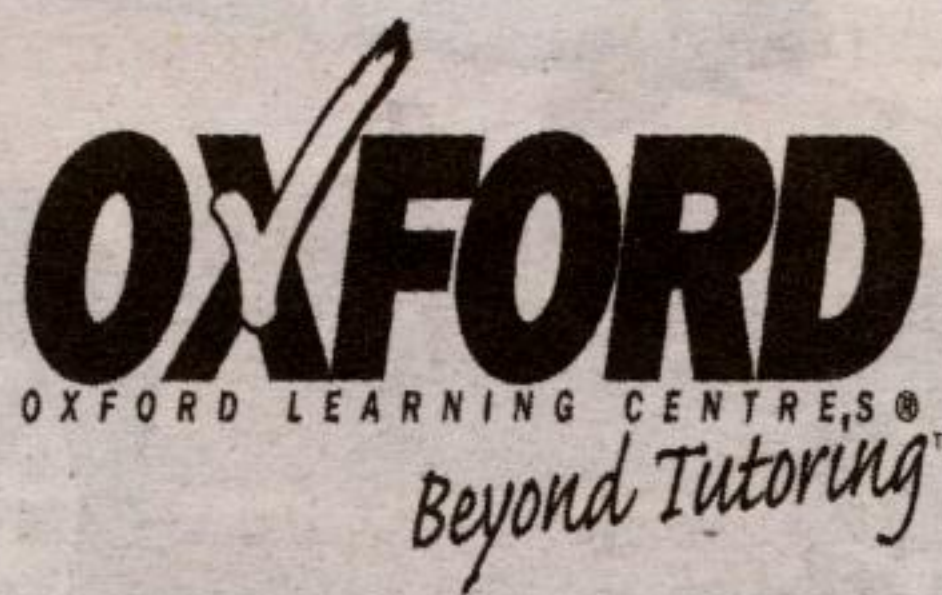
I then popped them into the oven, set the temperature for 375F and went outside to do some yard work.

It was only later— much, much, much later— I remembered them...



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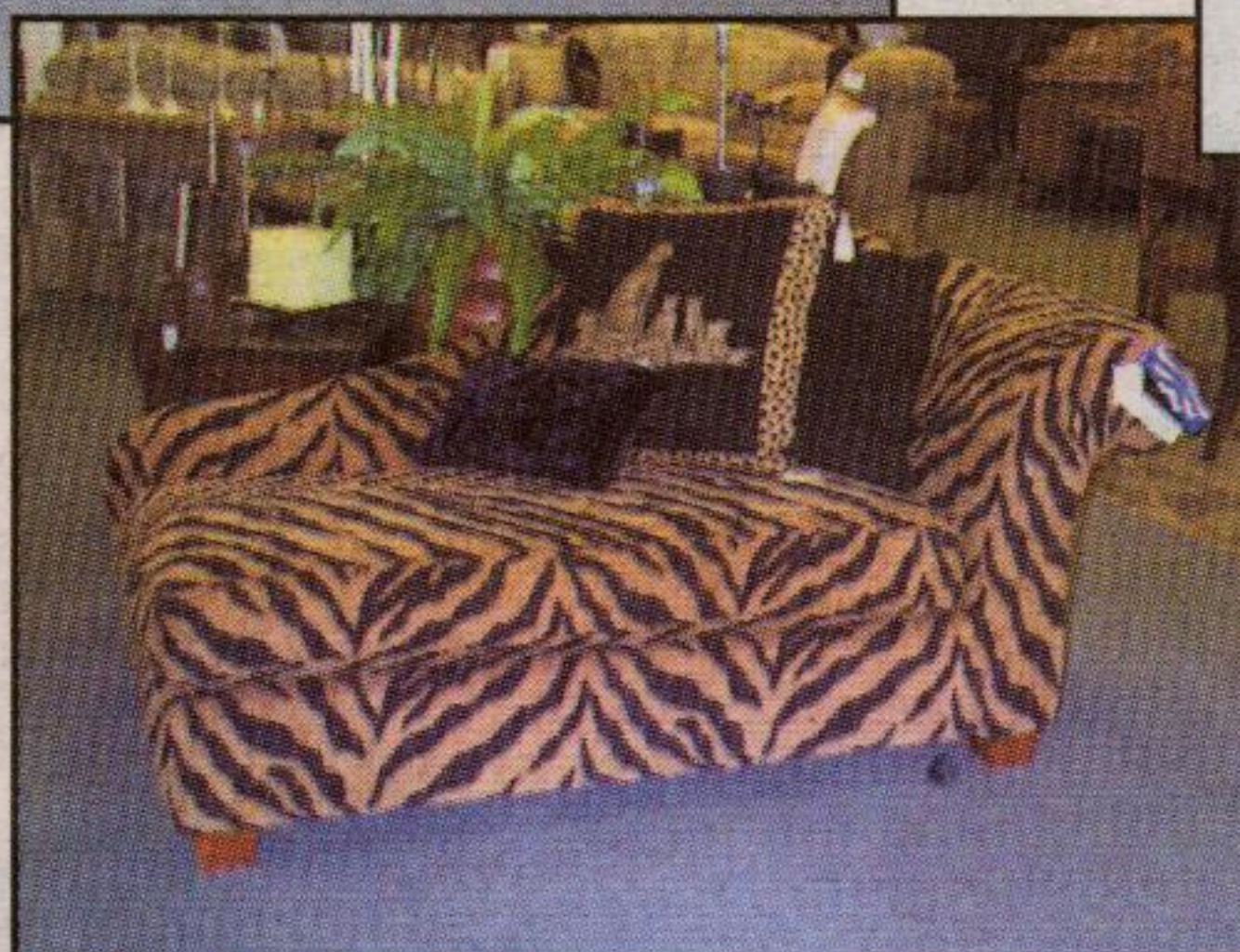
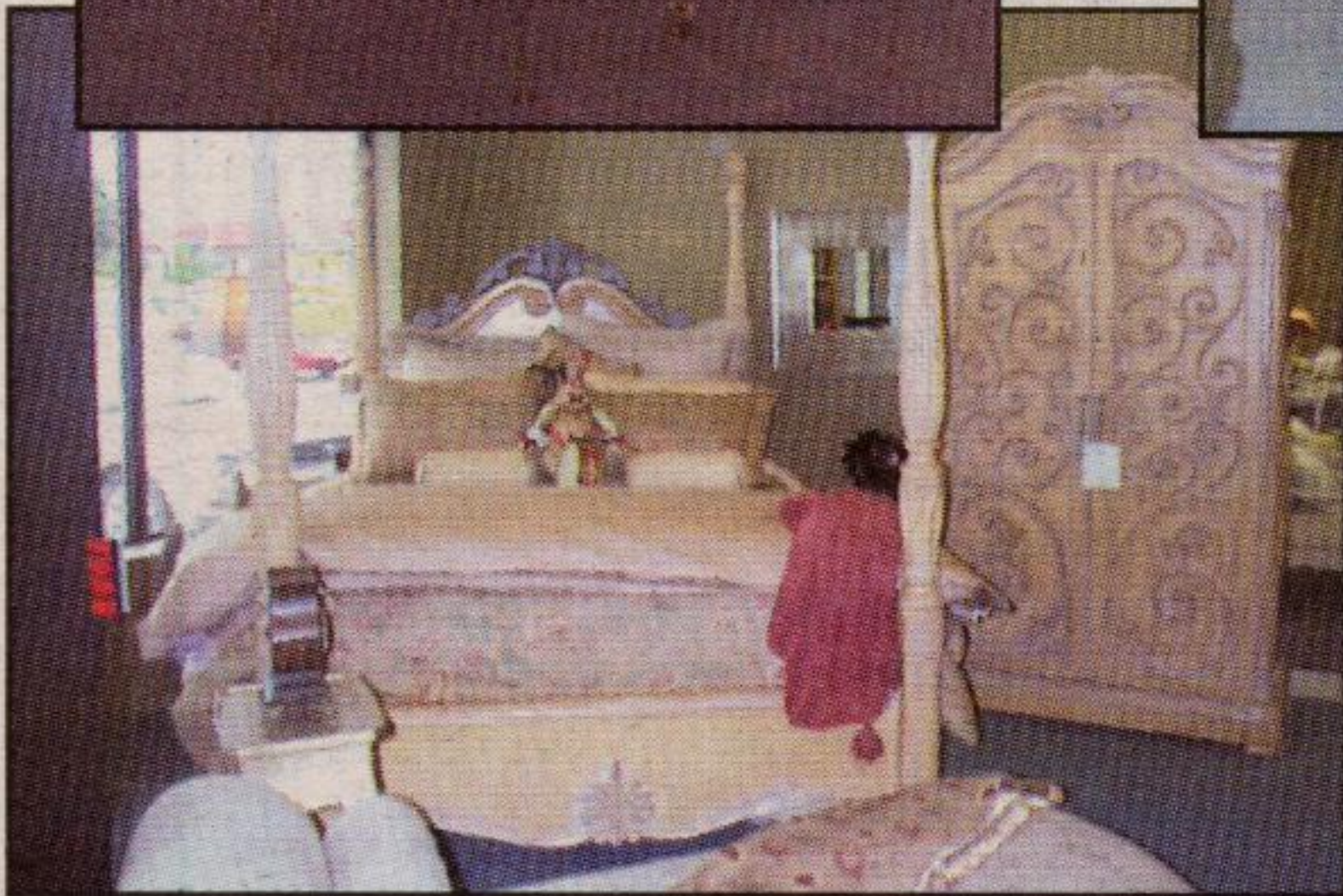
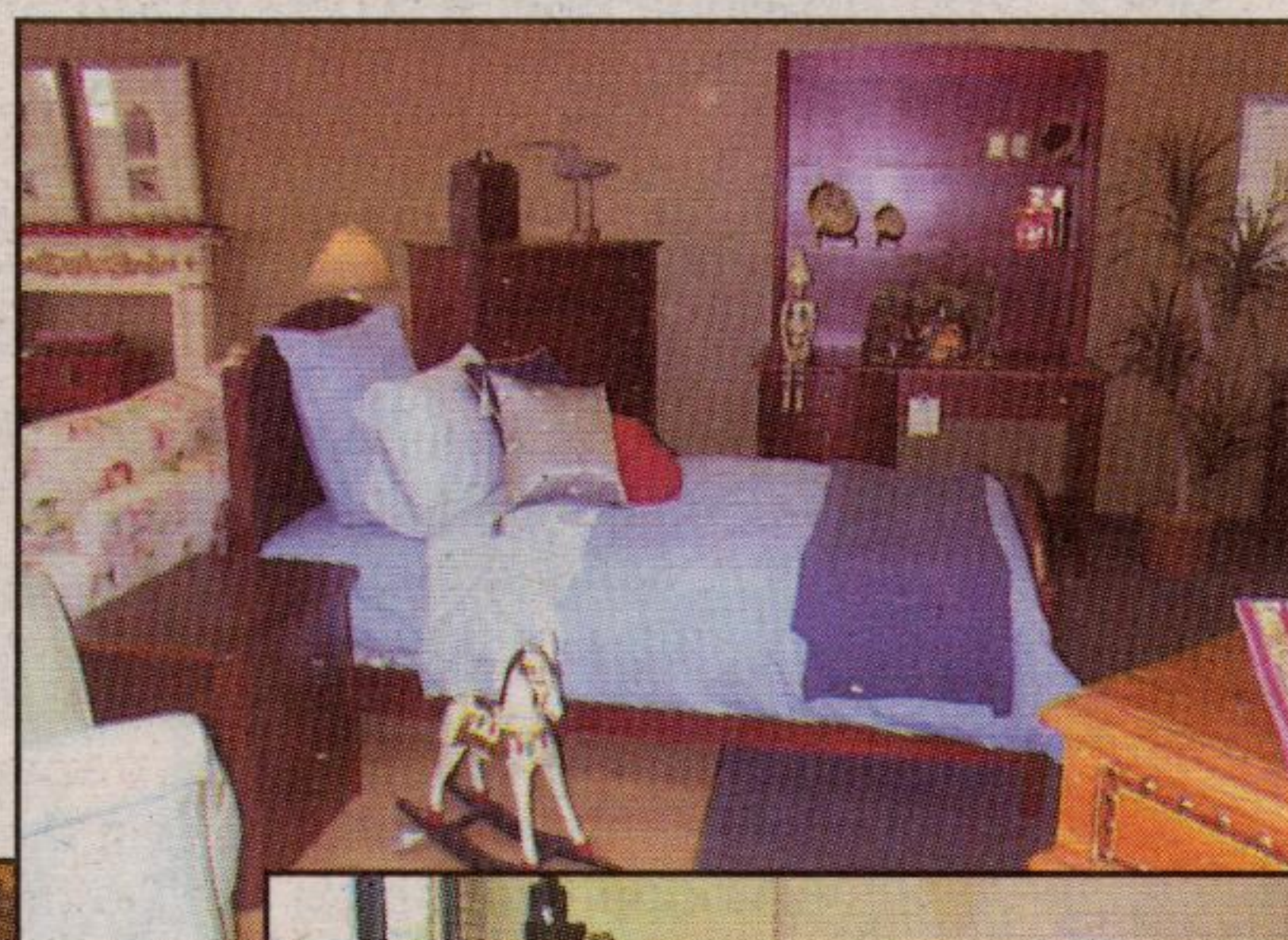
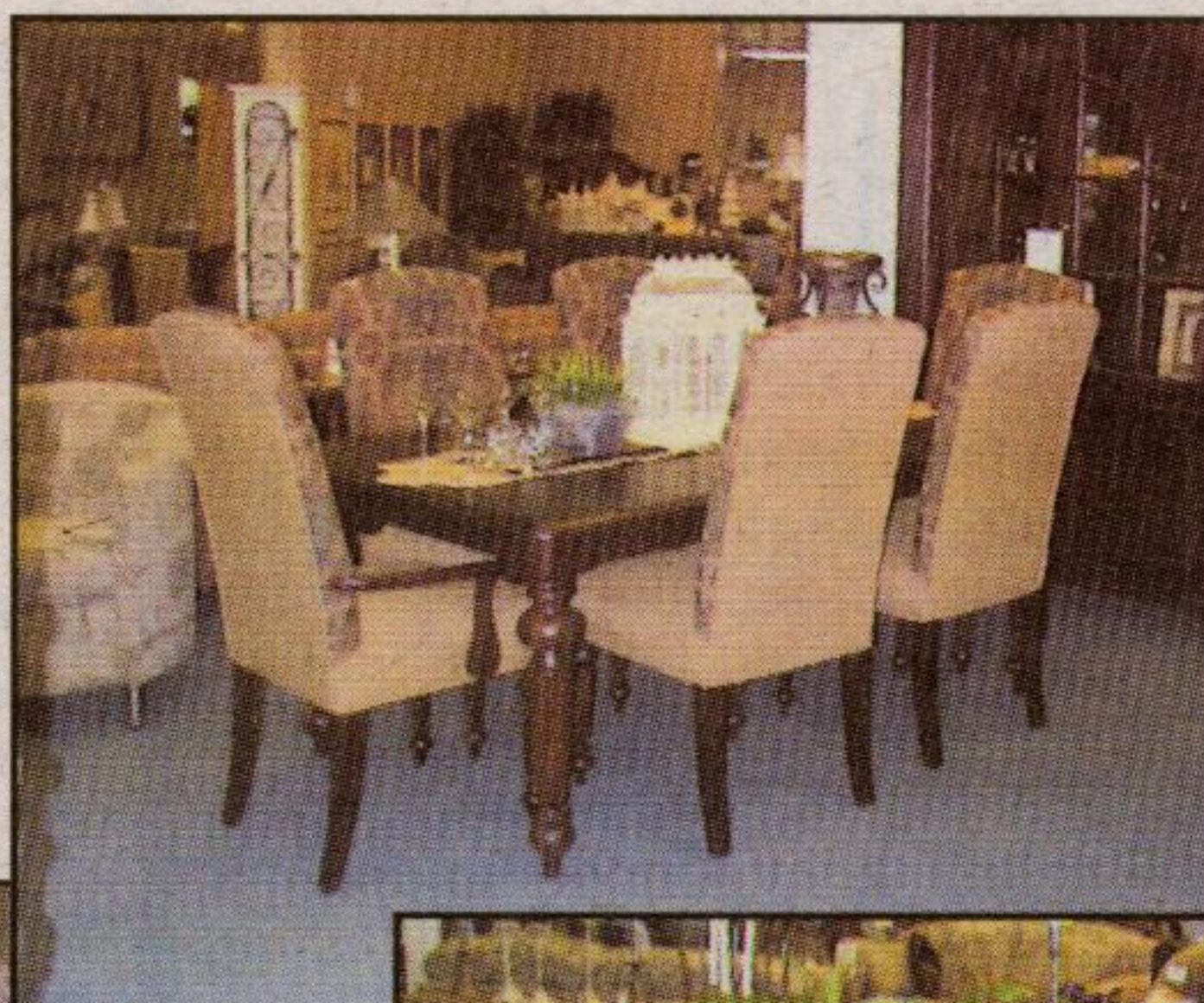
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