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# The Y10k Problem

Look > Alexander Dryer on December 8, 2006 at 11:32 am PST



**In a man-made cave** high on a limestone cliff in eastern Nevada, inventor Danny Hillis hopes to build what may be his most lasting creation: a clock that will keep time for 10,000 years.

Hillis is best known for pioneering blazingly fast supercomputers. But his passion for designing the machines of the future eventually led to a dilemma: he could not imagine the future itself. His 10,000-year clock—the Clock of the Long Now, as he calls it—is an attempt to address that problem by expanding our collec-tive imagination. After

describing the clock in a 1995 article in *Wired*, Hillis and a group of friends completed a basic prototype in 1999. A final design is still in development (at a cost estimated in the tens of millions of dollars). The completed clock, which will chime once every 100 years, will likely keep time by using a lens to synchronize itself with the sun's position at noon.

Even before the final device is built, Hillis is achieving his goal. "The main point here is to help change the discussion around problems in the world that are basically unsolvable in the time spans we currently conceive," explains Alexander Rose, the executive director of Hillis' Long Now Foundation, which is building the clock. In a culture that can barely recall last week's headlines, the clock will serve as a constant reminder of the enormity of time. "This is something to get people's attention," says Rose. "Once you have that attention, the conversation is very different."

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**INSPIRATION** People say that when ceiling beams in Oxford University's centuries-old New College Hall needed replacing, carpenters used trees planted by the original 14th century builder in anticipation of the time when new beams would be repaired.

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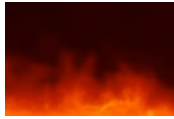
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