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Jeff Bezos and the Clock That Will Outlast Civilization

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WIRED ICON

Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, orbital enthusiast

GOES LONG

The 10,000-year clock¹

Inventor and computer scientist [Danny Hillis](#) spent the 1980s and early '90s designing machines worthy of the new millennium. But by 1995 he realized that he had never given much thought to what lay on the other side of the year 2000. “Those three zeros,” he wrote [in](#)

[an essay for WIRED](#), “form a convenient barrier, a reassuring boundary by which we can hold onto the present and isolate ourselves from whatever comes next.” To see beyond that barrier, he felt, humanity needed the slowest machine possible: a mechanical clock that would tick faithfully for [10,000 years](#).

This past winter, inside a mountain on [Jeff Bezos](#)’ sprawling West Texas ranch, Hillis and his colleagues began assembling the device. It is housed in a cylindrical 500-foot shaft cut into solid limestone. Visitors will enter through a jade-paneled door and climb a staircase that spirals around the clock’s gargantuan innards —5-ton counterweights, 8-foot stainless steel gears, a 6-foot titanium pendulum. If they choose to engage the clock’s winding mechanism, they’ll be rewarded with one of 3.65 million unique chimes composed by musician [Brian Eno](#). But the effort is optional; at the top of the stairs is a cupola made of sapphire glass, which will keep the clock fed with thermal energy and sync it up with solar noon. Left unattended, it will mark the millennia on its own. Bezos, who helped pay for the project, [told WIRED in 2011](#) that “whole civilizations will rise and fall” over the life of the clock. That leaves plenty of time to think about what’s beyond the four-zero barrier.

¹ *It was actually our idea to put the clock in this issue. —Editors*

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