



## Press Coverage

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## Time moves slowly: Foundation wants to build clock that would tick once a year

By Doug J. Swanson  
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SAN FRANCISCO - Stewart Brand, one of those '60s gurus who has managed to stay current, takes the long view. He's working on the Y10K problem.

Mr. Brand and his band of dreamy, futuristic cohorts want the world to slow down and improve upon its "pathologically, short attention span."

So they're designing a timepiece unlike any ever built: the Clock of the Long Now.

As envisioned, the clock would tick only once a year for 10,000 years. Visitors to its remote mountain site would be able to contemplate "deep time" across centuries, not moments.

The clockmakers say they believe this would make the world a better place.

"Intractable problems become tractable on these types of time scales," said Alexander Rose, executive director of the Long Now Foundation.

But that is decades away. For now, the 3-year-old foundation has set up shop in what was once a general store in the Presidio, the former military base at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge. Its founder and co-chairman is Mr. Brand, who earned his hippie chops with that bible of the counterculture, *The Whole Earth Catalog*.

First published in 1968, the catalog he created was a sort of almanac for communal living. It catered, as Mr. Brand saw it, to "bands of adventurous malcontents who were setting out to reinvent civilization."

Hippie communes are about as hard to find these days as Jefferson Airplane eight-tracks. And Mr. Brand has graduated to other concerns, such as international business consulting with a holistic touch.

Now 60, he said he got to thinking several years ago about the destructive effects of a market-driven economy that values faster and cheaper delivery of products. He soon hooked up with famous computer scientist Danny Hillis who was pondering a Stonehenge of the post-Industrial Age. Mr. Hillis wanted to build a clock that would tick once a year, bong once a century and cuckoo every millennium.

The clock, Mr. Brand concluded, "would do for thinking about time what the photographs of the Earth from space have done for thinking about the environment."

Current plans call for a three-stage process: the \$600,000 prototype, an interim, medium-sized version, and then the big Long Now Clock. The project will cost hundreds of millions of dollars and may take 100 years to complete.

The ultimate clock would rise about 80 feet, with plenty of room for time-pilgrims to walk within it.

"Tall enough to be theatrical," Mr. Rose said. "You want to go, 'Time is really big, and here I am inside it.' "

The pendulum-driven clock should be accurate to one day in 20,000 years. But should it stop, timekeepers of the future can use a star-map on its face to re-set it.

The most likely site, for now, is an abandoned silver mining claim near Baker, Nev. The foundation recently spent \$140,000 for 80 acres in this isolated place of ancient bristlecone pines and soaring limestone cliffs.

In Baker, population roughly 100, the news was greeted with wary enthusiasm.

"It's given us something else to talk about," said JoAnne Garrett, a member of the Baker Citizens Advisory Committee, the local form of government. "It's entertaining, but after the first thrill, a certain amount of suspicion set in, because, after all, these are a bunch of entrepreneurs."

Long Now does have some high-powered capitalists on its board, such as Mitch Kapor, founder of software giant Lotus Development Corp. But it is the nonprofit foundation that is in the thick of soliciting donations for the prototype.

About \$350,000 has been spent so far, and five patents have been filed. When finished, the prototype - principally made of a nickel-copper alloy - will stand about 8 feet tall.

Its face will show a combination of stellar displays, solar and lunar logos, and Gregorian calendar years. Assembly is taking place in a Sausalito, Calif., machine shop.

Sounds are being designed by avant-garde musician Brian Eno.

"He's actually inventing some new types of bells and chimes," Long Now director Mr. Rose said.

After the prototype, they want to build the interim clock that would tick away in an as-yet undetermined city, perhaps Jerusalem.

"You can't build this giant clock that's going to last 10,000 years on the first try," Mr. Rose said.

Also, the interim clock could serve as a fund-raising vehicle for the real thing.

Then, within 10 years or so, work should begin on the full-size version.

Long Now principals cheerfully acknowledge they won't live to see the fruit of their labor. This is, after all, supposed to have "mythic depth," as Mr. Brand puts it.

Building the clock "should take longer than my lifetime," said Mr. Rose, who is 27. "We would have made a mistake if we built it in a single generation."

Added Mr. Brand, "One of our mottoes is, 'no hurry.' "

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