

Amazon's Jeff Bezos reportedly spending \$42 million to build a 10,000-year clock

The massive Clock of the Long Now is being built under a Texas mountain.

By John Platt

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Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos prompted a flurry of headlines when he purchased the Washington Post for \$250 million earlier this week, but it's not the first time the billionaire has marched to the beat of a different drum. Last year, he financed a mission to recover parts of the Apollo 11 spaceship from the bottom of the ocean. He's also putting money behind the [Clock of the Long Now](#) project, which is building a mechanical clock that will keep precise time for 10,000 years.

As Bezos explains on the 10,000 Year Clock website, the clock is "designed to be a symbol, an icon for long-term thinking." Expanding on that thought, he wrote, "As I see it, humans wonders but also civilization-scale problems. We're likely to need more long-term thinking."

The clock — the brainchild of Danny Hills, who has been working on the concept since 1989 — is being built right now inside the Sierra Diablo Mountains in Texas. The tunnels and chambers being carved into the mountain — 2,000 feet above sea level — will include not just room for the clock but also rooms for each of five key anniversaries, where animations will play in honor of the first, 10th, 100th, 1,000th and 10,000th years of the clock's eventual operation. (Only the first few anniversary animations will be designed by the current team; the rest will be left for "future generations.")

As it gets to those anniversaries, the clock will tick just once a year and will generate a different sequence of ringing bells every day for the full 10,000 years. Meanwhile, a special mechanical device called an orrery will display the solar system and all of the interplanetary probes launched during the 20th century once a year "at solar noon."

Bezos [explained](#) last year that thinking about long-term projects like this clock should allow us to think about more than just what's going on today. "If we think long-term, we can accomplish things that we couldn't otherwise accomplish." He also seems to indicate that the project is intrinsically hopeful, positing that human civilization will be around in 10,000 years to see the final anniversary animation. "We humans are getting awfully sophisticated in technological ways and have a lot of potential to be very dangerous to ourselves, and it seems to me that we as a species will have to start thinking longer term. This is a symbol; I think symbols can be very powerful."

Although Bezos says humans will still be around, he does expect some changes. "Over the lifetime of this clock, the United States won't exist," he told [Wired](#) in 2011. "Whole civilizations will rise and fall. New systems of government will be invented. You can't imagine the world — no one can — that we're trying to get this clock to pass through."

Bezos has invested a reported \$42 million in the project, which is also being supported by [Stewart Brand's Long Now Foundation](#) and a few corporations that are helping with the construction and clock mechanics.

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