

# Wood Technology

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## Wood's wonderful world

**Y**ou could get discouraged from time to time about the future of wood. It seems like some save-the-forests group launches a new attack on harvesting trees and/or using wood products about once a week. If that isn't enough, President Clinton is looking to "save" federal lands to establish a legacy as an environmental president.

Whatever comes of his notion to set aside federal roadless areas, and regardless of Green campaigns to discourage wood consumption, new uses of this amazing, natural and renewable material continue to surface.

One of the most spectacular may sprout from a field east of Paris. This is where proponents want to build a wooden tower 660 feet tall—200 meters to most of the world. The Eiffel Tower is 300 meters tall. But the 19th-century iron tower is much more massive at its base than the slender Tour de la Terre (Tower of the Earth) will be. At its base, the Eiffel Tower measures 125 meters in diameter (412 feet); it can withstand up to 1,000 metric tons of wind force.

Architects claim Tour de la Terre's much smaller 18-meter-diameter base will take twice as much wind force. They say it will stand up to winds of 230 km/h, or just over 140 mph.

This slender structure will offer four habitable floors suspended between 260 and 330 feet above the ground. Each floor will boast 6,450 square feet of space to house restaurants—of course, we're in France—as well as living and working spaces. A French flair will crown the tower: a huge "flower" nearly 150 feet tall with five metal petals that will fill 37,600 square feet of air space.

Paris architect Nicolas Normier said his firm chose to build the tower of wood because, "Wood is the only material understood by six billion people and which is capable of reflecting the objectives stated and global ecological awareness."

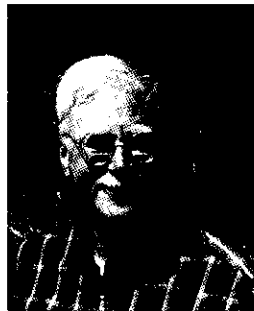
Clearly, these guys understand that wood is a fine material to use to build a "tribute to modern technology and engineering."

Normier called Tour de la Terre "a symbol of the environmental problems we face" and said, "We wanted to use wood as it is a renewable resource, which is a great way to mark the end of the century. Other civilizations use wood in construction, and it is a material that is very close to Man. We hope the project will advance the image of wood in the construction industry [and] we want to overcome the technical challenges of building something out of wood."

Plans call for the first 100 feet of the tower to consist of eight laminated veneer lumber pillars, each more than six feet in diameter. From 100 to 345 feet, Douglas fir plywood will be the material used in supports. From there to the 510-foot level, maritime pine plywood reinforced with steel or carbon rods will support the tower. The metal flower will top the wood sections, which will have metal cross-braces. (Fair is fair, so we have to note this.)

As of this writing, structural feasibility tests were still going on. If they work out as the engineers expect them to, buyers will start seeking 1,600 cubic meters of timber products from French suppliers. (If this were full-sawn lumber, it would be about 680,000 board feet. But it's not, so conversions are risky.)

Backers figure Tour de la Terre will cost around US\$40 million to put up. If this "quite exceptional structure" does get off the ground, it will showcase wood as a building material in a uniquely French fashion.



Ted Blackman