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China unveils plans for world's first pollution-eating 'Forest City'

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China is no stranger to contemporary architecture that boggles the mind or appears to side-step common sense, from an LED-lit horseshoe in Huzhou to a glowing teapot in Wuxi. But in 2016, China's State Council released guidelines forbidding the construction of "bizarre" and "odd-shaped" buildings lacking character or cultural heritage, shifting their focus to the "economic, green and beautiful."

Newly unveiled plans for Liuzhou Forest City, designed by the Italian firm [Stefano Boeri Architetti](#) to be built in southern China, certainly seem to fit the bill. The 342-acre, self-contained neighborhood will comprise more than 70 buildings -- including homes, hospitals, hotels, schools and offices -- all of which will be covered with 40,000 trees and almost a million plants. Eventually, up to 30,000 people could call the Forest City home.

"(This is) the first experiment of the urban environment that's really trying to find a balance with nature," firm principal Stefano Boeri said on the phone from Milan.

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The plant life is expected to absorb almost 10,000 tons of carbon dioxide and 57 tons of pollutants per year, and produce 900 tons of oxygen a year, while also decreasing the air temperature and providing a new habitat for displaced wildlife. Solar panels on the roofs will collect renewable energy to power the buildings, while geothermal energy will power air-conditioning, adding to the project's green appeal.

Underneath the trees, the building's curvilinear shape will channel what Boeri calls the "poetics of architecture" to become "a place where nature is flowing."



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For years, China has been an architect's playground, with lucrative funding and interest in foreign 'starchitects' giving rise to imaginative buildings. In 2016, China's State Council released new urban planning guidelines. According to the document, "odd-shaped" buildings -- or "bizarre architecture that is not economical, function, aesthetically pleasing or environmentally friendly" would be forbidden in the future. The document follows a 2014 call by Chinese President Xi Jinping for less "weird architecture" to be built. Credit: courtesy wanda group

The project comes on the heels of Stefano Boeri Architetti's Vertical Forest, two residential towers in Milan covered in the equivalent of five acres of forest. Completed in 2014, they remove 30,000 to 35,000 pounds (15 to 17.5 tons) of soot from the air each year, according to Boeri, meeting his team's expectations.

"We started to imagine if it was possible to create an urban environment created from many of these vertical forests," Boeri said. China, he said, provided the perfect backdrop for such an ambitious project.

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"We've seen what's happening (in terms of pollution) in Beijing and Shanghai, but at the same time, China has to create to cities" to accommodate the population, he said. Indeed, the Chinese government announced last year that it planned to move two million people from remote villages into cities by 2020 in an attempt to alleviate rural poverty, and as a show of modernization.

But while the Liuzhou Municipality Urban Planning Bureau has approved the plan, the project's completion is a long way off. Construction is set to begin in 2020, Boeri said there is still a lot of planning and research required before a projected completion date can be set. He remains, however, optimistic about the project, and confident in its aim.

"I really think that bringing forests into the city is a way to reduce climate change," he said.

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