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4 Projects That Show Mass Timber is the Future of American Cities

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- by [Niall Patrick Walsh](#)



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As architects face up to the need for ethical, sustainable design in the age of climate change awareness, [timber architecture](#) is making a comeback in a new, technologically impressive way. [Largely overlooked in the age of Modernism](#), recent years have seen a plethora of advancements related to [mass timber](#) across the world. This year alone, [Japan announced plans for a supertall wooden skyscraper in Tokyo by 2041](#), while the European continent has seen plans for the [world's largest timber building in the Netherlands](#), and the [world's tallest timber tower in Norway](#).



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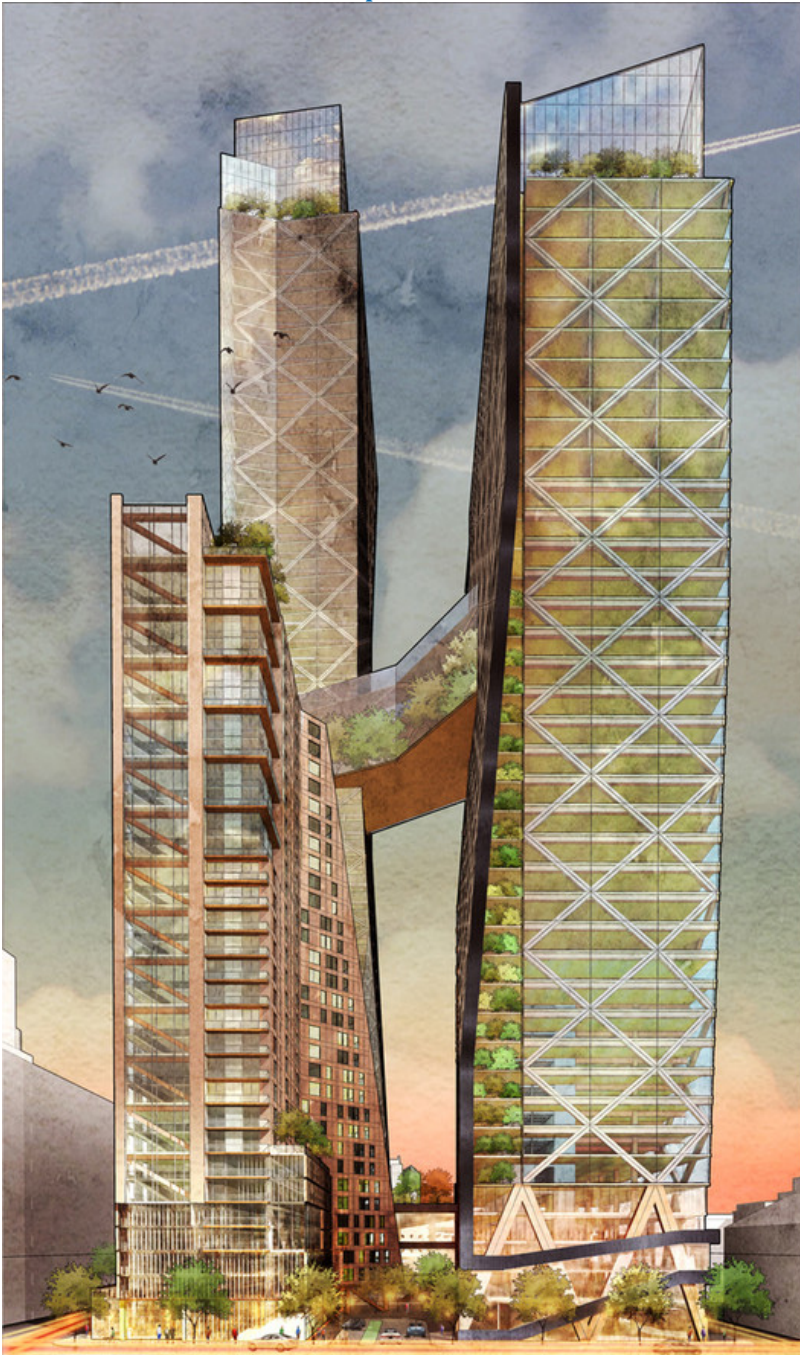
The potential for mass [timber](#) to become the dominant material of future sustainable cities has also gained traction in the [United States](#) throughout 2018. Evolving codes and the increasing availability of mass [timber](#) is inspiring firms, universities, and state legislators to research and invest in ambitious projects across the country.

The year has seen milestones such as [Oregon becoming the first U.S. state to legalize mass timber high rise buildings](#), [MIT unveiling its technology-driven, prefabricated Longhouse](#), and the [University of Arkansas beginning construction on the country's first large-scale, mass timber higher education residence hall](#). The benefits of mass timber were also [displayed at the AIA Conference on Architecture 2018](#), as part of the "Blueprint for Better Cities" theme.

In recognition of the growth and potential of mass [timber](#), we have assembled four projects currently being researched and conceptualized across the U.S. that are redefining what is possible with wood. From a bridge in [Brooklyn](#) to [timber](#) towers across [Philadelphia](#), [Chicago](#), and [San Francisco](#), the future schemes offer four in-tree-guing examples of how mass [timber](#) might redefine the skylines of future American cities.

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[Timber Towers in Philadelphia](#)



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DC Designers led by Sean McTaggart from Hickok Cole were [shortlisted for the Skyhive Skyscraper challenge](#) for the [Philly Timber Towers project](#), demonstrating the viability of the mass [timber](#) high-rise as an alternative to steel and concrete. While in the process of designing the new landmark for [Philadelphia](#)'s skyline, the group also received a grant to work on a [mass timber](#) Ranger Station in DC.

[80-story River Beech Tower in Chicago](#)



Courtesy of Perkins+Will

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Architects at Perkins+Will, working with engineers at Thornton Tomasetti, have conceptualized an 80-story mass timber building in [Chicago](#). The scheme features 300 duplex units using an exterior diagrid system that leverages the natural axial strength of timber. This concept has been informed by recent [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Timber Towers research](#) which found that [timber-concrete hybrid systems](#) can support loads of 82,000 pounds (8 times the required load) along with some steel hybrid systems that could be marketable in terms of bay sizes and floor openings.

[Mass Timber Multifamily in San Francisco](#)



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Jose Brunner, a designer at DLR Group's [San Francisco office](#), designed a modular [timber tower atop a landmark building in San Francisco's Mission District](#) for the "Mission: Housing design competition." The project exploits mass timber's potential as a strong but light-weight material for alternative development, providing additional housing in the heart of the city without the need to demolish of existing structures or displace existing residents.

[Timber Bridge at LongPoint Corridor in Brooklyn, NYC](#)



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For the past few years, architect Jun Aizaki of CRÈME has been working on the [Timber Bridge at LongPoint Corridor](#); a floating passageway he proposes should be made of wood. Linking [Brooklyn](#) and Queens, the bridge exploits an opportunity to improve pedestrian transit, create green spaces, and connect the communities of Long Island City and Greenpoint into a new neighborhood coined "LongPoint."

Learn more about [tall wood buildings](#) and check out [completed taller wood projects](#). You can also stay up to date with the latest timber projects by following our [mass timber](#) tag.

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