

Is it possible for humankind to improve upon our planet, which has been honed and perfected by billions of years of evolution?

I think so, but only if we tread lightly and proceed with deep respect for our natural antecedents. Centuries ago, Buddhist Monks sought to build a sanctuary for healing and contemplation in the foothills of Kyoto. Their space, Ryoan-Ji, proved uniquely successful and enduring because of its humility and simplicity. It remains one of the world's most sublime spaces *because* it seeks unity with nature. Using meticulous arrangements of rocks and stones, it mimics natural entities like seas and forests, but enhances them to provide visitors an even greater space for introspection and meditation than the woods and oceans that inspired it.

My Urban Confluence design, *Lightning Trees*, picks up where Ryoan-Ji left off. It features twelve glass and titanium "trees" in the shape of inverted lightning bolts, and four glass "pools" that are actually made of solar panels. The trees refract sunlight by day, and contain LEDs that light up at night, creating the illusion of magical flashes of lightning and alluding to the region's vibrant, electric passion for innovation. This motif is mirrored in the site's walking paths, which are also shaped like lightning bolts. The pools and walkways are ringed with LEDs too, bathing the whole site in a beautiful glow with the daily setting of the afternoon sun.

Therefore, *Lightning Trees* is entirely carbon neutral -- the pools power all lights. As visitors walk the park, passing beneath a lightning tree or taking a glass footbridge over a solar pool, they'll marvel at the site's surreal beauty. However, they'll also gain a new appreciation for Silicon Valley's innovations, which have channeled the Zen spirit of respectfully improving upon nature. In a post-pandemic world, we recognize that Silicon valley has taken human interaction, a natural and even primal experience, and made it better: smoother and more gratifying, warmer and more delightful than ever before.

*Lightning Trees*, then, honors our improving upon the world in order to achieve harmony with it. The glass pools echo stone ponds of Buddhist gardens, triggering in visitors a rush of calm and a spirit of meditation. As we make great strides in the world of technology, we move humanity forward by generations -- but we also pay homage to cultures of old, and to our ancient, beautiful and magical planet.