We’re not talking about building some quaint little microcosm. We’re talking about building a top-of-the-line big-ass universe— with exploding stars, black holes, and things that go bump in the night. If you’re thinking that it’s been done, or that one universe is enough, think again. At the moment, a mysterious force called dark energy is tearing the universe apart, and in as little as ten billion years there might be nothing left but black holes. Nothing to see in any direction in the sky at night!

While it’s possible that black holes could be portals into other hitherto unknown universes, Stephen Hawking isn’t betting on it, and you shouldn’t either. So, with the fate of our universe in jeopardy and you with time and energy to spare, there’s no time like the present to begin building a new universe.

Consider first the type of universe you’d like to build. Be decisive. Don’t spend half a lifetime thinking about whether you want a universe of nothing but purple daisies or iridescent soap bubbles—just build one that works. Stick to the obvious: your main choices are finite and infinite.

If your goal is to construct an infinite universe before you die, you probably should have started by now. The time frame for building such a behemoth could very well be eternal, so you’ve really got your work cut out for yourself. If you’re not yet dissuaded, be sure to will these instructions to your progeny (and their progeny) who can continue your legacy. Nobody wants to see a half-built universe.

Building a finite universe, on the other hand, should not be seen as a project for people who can’t handle infinity. A finite universe is perfectly respectable, and its successful completion would make any artist proud. You can hold your head up. One thing to be aware of, however, is that like massive dead stars, civilizations and houses of cards, finite universes tend to collapse. This can be avoided in two ways: (i) by making it infinite (see above) or (ii) by making it expand (see below).

Contrary to what you might think, the best way to create a finite universe
is to begin with nothing. Creating something out of nothing—let alone an entire burbling universe—is not a matter to be trifled with, so tread carefully. Exploit the fact that in physics, empty space contains miniscule energy fluctuations that pop into and out of existence. If conditions are right, these can expand to cosmic proportions, ultimately creating galaxies, stars, and planets with purple daisies. Unfortunately, the right conditions might depend on using string theory, the latest eleven-dimensional “theory of everything” which, it’s safe to say, absolutely no one understands. Just create a positive, nurturing environment and hope for the best.

You can generate some empty space by forcing all the air out of a balloon and then stretching the balloon, making sure that no air molecules sneak back in. No one knows how wide the balloon needs to be stretched for energy fluctuations in the empty space inside to do their thing. Pretend you’re Christo, stretch it across the country and see what happens. If the space inside the balloon begins expanding, stand clear because there’s a reason astronomers called the Big Bang big. If it doesn’t expand, seed the inner surface of the balloon with yeast. Who knows? It could work. (According to string theory, you may also need to clear the space out of the space, so that you truly start with nothing. Good luck with that.)

Note that an expanding universe in the middle of the country could very well be a threat to civilization as we know it, so investigate channeling it into other dimensions until you’re ready to show it off. Ask a string theorist if you need help, they are always itching to feel useful.

An expanding universe should be able to take care of itself, but you have a couple of things to watch out for. If it expands too fast, matter—forming out of the energy fluctuations—won’t have time to clump and you’ll never evolve stars, planets, plants or people to water them. Similarly, if it expands too slowly, then gravity will gain the upper hand and re-collapse your universe before you reach your next birthday. Why our universe exists in the middle of these extremes is a big-ass cosmic mystery whose solution is best left to the experts. Whatever you do, aim for a cosmic expansion rate, also known as the Hubble constant, in the Goldilocks range—you can fine tune on the fly if necessary.

Make sure, too, that your universe has its own laws of physics. Keep them
hidden so that any future scientists who evolve in your universe can have the joy of discovering them. Everybody loves a good mystery.

Finally, as it expands and cools, your universe should convert energy into matter and in no time you should have stars alighting out of the primordial gas. This is a good sign. Your universe is underway. Congratulations.

But before you go onto projects like building galaxies, say, or managing a hotel with an infinite number of rooms, factor some advertising into your budget so that people can actually see the wonders of your universe. If you just broadcast the existence of your newly invented universe to all and sundry, people will likely see you as a crackpot, so we don’t recommend that. Instead, try the poetic approach, e. e. cummings-style. Whisper to your companion, “Listen, there’s a hell of a good universe next door; let’s go.” Worry about where exactly “next door” is when the time comes.

You should also decide if you actually want anyone to know about your universe. There’s a lot to be said for having your own secret universe. Those people you see on the bus smiling while listening to their headphones? They’re probably smiling about their own secret universes too.

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**ANALECTS OF THE CORE**

Paradise Lost: What is dark within me, illumine.

Emily Dickinson: Not knowing when the dawn will come / I open every door.

Virgil: Optima dies . . . prima fugit (“The best days are the first to flee.”)