It is early summer in the year 2020. In a large clearing in a heavily wooded area, the sleek transport cars of an ultra-speed hovercraft train lie waiting on the monorail siding. Small robotic trucks load stacks of logs while uniformed technicians consult small, hand-held computers.

Logs?

Won't logs become obsolete in this super-automated environment just three decades into the future? Not if the projections of America's forestry school deans are on the mark.

That is the paradox of trees and the wood products they provide. As old and familiar as the applications of wood may be, the experts still believe we'll be using wood far into the future. In a world that will otherwise little resemble the one we know now, these experts believe that wood products will serve us in ways we can scarcely imagine.

In Forestry, The Future Is Always Now.

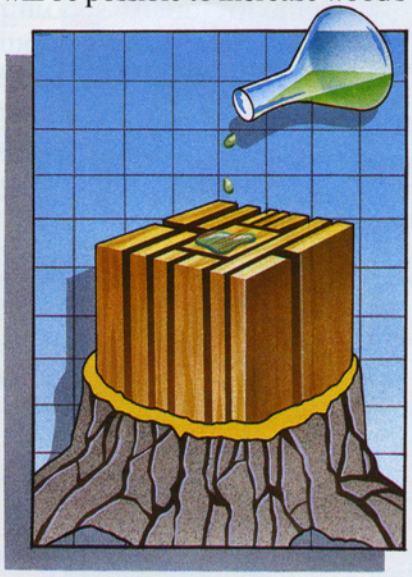
The forestry deans may be right because, like all foresters, there is something of the futurist in each of them. Accustomed to the long growth cycles of the forest—which range from thirty to seventy years—foresters know that many of the trees they plant today won't be used until 2020.

When forestry school deans peer two or three decades into the future, they see an increasing emphasis on our renewable natural resources like trees. Dean

John C. Gordon of Yale University foresees a transition from "a fossil-carbon society to a greater reliance on carbon from photosynthesized sources." Wood being the primary one, of course.

Wood, The Most Resourceful Of All Materials

Not only is wood a renewable resource, it is one of the most malleable and diverse materials known. Scientists, like Dean Benton Box of Clemson University, believe it will be possible to increase wood's



strength and applications through chemical modification of its molecular structure.

By combining the lignin and cellulose found in wood cells, researchers think that new silvi-chemical compounds, or polymers, can be constructed that will be superior to those derived from petrochemical and other non-renewable substances.

One result of such breakthroughs will be fuller utilization of some wood species that today have little value.

That's why Dean Charles

Lee of Texas A&M University shares the excitement of other forestry researchers about the growing potential of wood. "We've only begun to scratch the surface on wood use," he told Green-America. "We'll combine wood with other materials and create whole new products." It's what Dr. Thomas Hansbrough of Louisiana State University calls "breaking trees apart and putting them back together in new ways."

Some forestry deans predict that by the year 2010—when their current students are at the peak of their careers—the biochemical conversion of wood will become a reality. That will open the door to revolutionary new applications of wood.