

A toilet heaven for RM5.6m

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SEOUL: Sim Jae-Duck was born in a restroom and now he plans to live and die in one — a US\$1.6 million (RM5.6 million) toilet-shaped house designed to promote his tireless campaign for cleaner loos worldwide.

Sim will open what is billed as the world's one and only toilet house on Nov 11 to mark the launch of his World Toilet Association.

The 419-sq-metre concrete and glass structure is rising on the site of Sim's former home in his native city of Suweon, 40 km south of here.

Before he moves in, anyone who is flush with funds can rent it for US\$50,000 a day — with proceeds going to his campaign to provide poor countries with proper sanitary facilities.

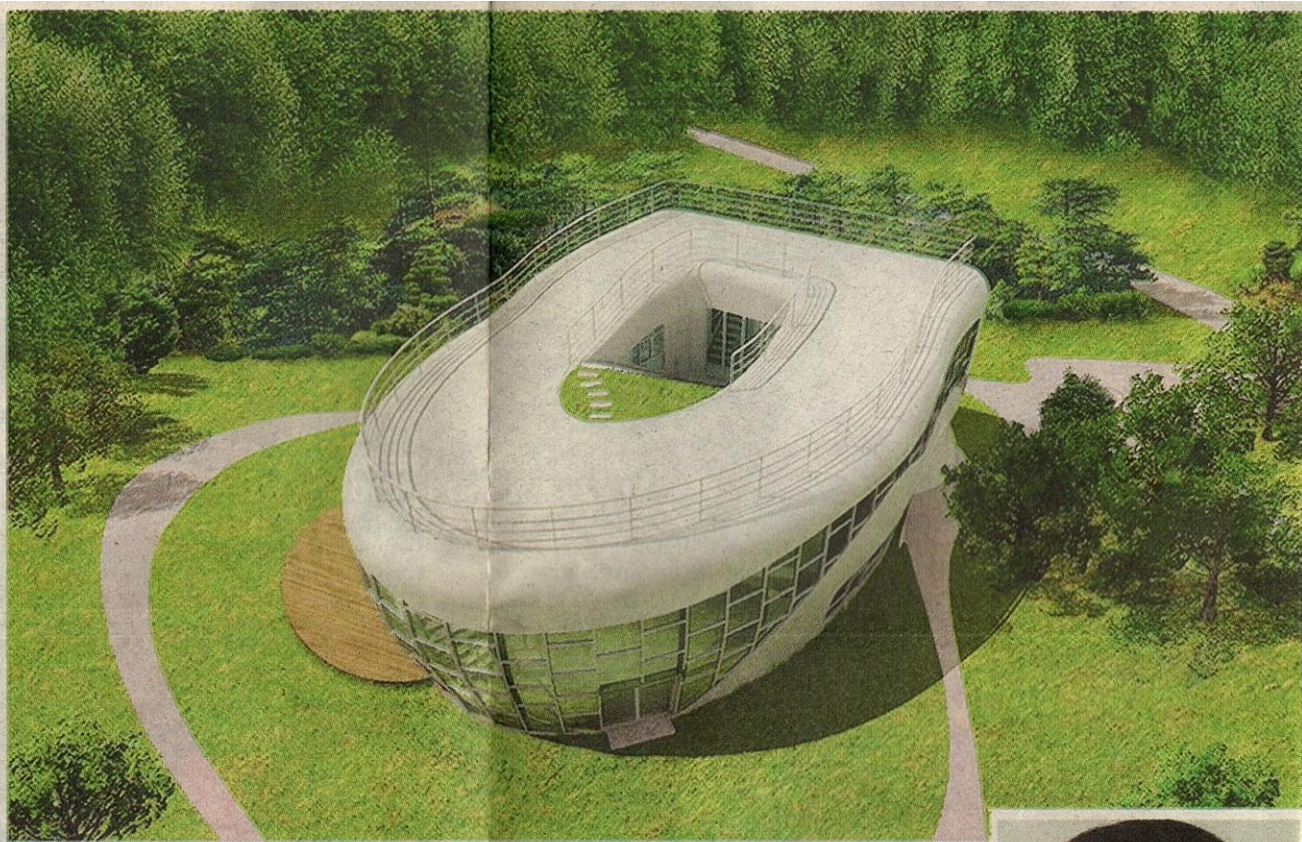
Apart from two bedrooms, two guestrooms and other rooms, the two-storey house — of course — features three deluxe toilets. Unlike the giant "toilet" in which they are located, they will not be see-through affairs.

"A showcase bathroom screened by a glass wall is located in its centre, while other toilets have elegant fittings or water conservation devices," Sim said.

The showcase loo will feature a device producing a mist to make users feel secure. An electronic sensor will raise the lid automatically when people enter, and there will also be music for patrons.

The house, complete with a stream and small garden in front, is named Haewoojae, meaning "a place of sanctuary where one can solve one's worries". Sim's birth in a restroom was in line with traditional beliefs.

"It was intentional. My mother followed advice from my grandmother that people



A computer graphic image shows the toilet-shaped house in Suweon, 40km south of Seoul. The house is owned by South Korean sanitation activist Sim Jae-Duck (inset). — AFP pictures

born in restrooms will enjoy long lives," said the 74-year-old.

Sim's campaign began during his term as Suweon mayor from 1995 to 2002. His drive to transform toilets into "clean and beautiful resting places imbued with culture" earned him the nickname "Mayor Toilet".

Public restrooms in the city were jazzed up with paintings, fresh flowers or even small gardens.

His achievements prompted Sim to launch the Korea Toilet Association in 1999, in time for South Korea's co-hosting with Japan of the football World Cup three years later.

Then he decided to take his clean toilets drive worldwide. The proposed World Toilet Association might be seen to rival squeaky-clean Singapore, where the World Toilet Organisation is based, but Sim has said the work of the two bodies will not overlap.

Indeed, he hopes his toilet house will highlight the global need for better sanitation.

"My family has already agreed to preserve this house as a symbol of South Korea's new toilet culture after my death," he said.

"The house will be remembered as an example of saving mankind from diseases and

protecting the environment." Sim, a member of parliament, will host the World Toilet Association's inaugural meeting which he hopes will attract 300 representatives from 70 countries.

On the final day, he plans to invite all participants to his house, which he said "envisions a new concept to place toilets in the centre of our life".

Sim said his campaign would focus on setting international standards for clean public toilets, adding that countries such as Mongolia, Indonesia, Turkey and Brazil were actively supporting it. — AFP

