

Sneak peek: The Port of Seattle's new Norwegian Cruise Line terminal at Pier 66 (Photos)

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It is a huge challenge creating new space where none existed before inside an older, cramped building, all on a very short deadline.

That's what's going on right now inside the Port of Seattle's Bell Street Terminal 66 building, which is fenced off to the public while it undergoes a gutting and major \$30 million renovation inside.

Behind its exterior walls, architects, construction engineers, electricians and other workers are in a rush against time, working to complete the modernization project in early April before the new cruise season launches.

That will give [Norwegian Cruise Line](#) and other port and federal government employees time to move in and test all the building's new systems before cruise passengers converge on the facility in May, said [Jim Brown](#), the founding architect at Urbanadd Architects in Seattle, who is overseeing the project.

[Turner Construction](#) is the lead contractor. Working with them is Port of Seattle engineer [Fred Chou](#), the leader of major capital investments.

Terminal 66, which partially sits above the water, is home to the Norwegian Cruise Line but also [Bell Harbor International Conference Center](#) up on its third floor.

In the summer of 2018, Norwegian will sail a new monster ship into Seattle -- the Norwegian Bliss -- which has the capacity to carry 4,000 passengers to Alaska, along with hundreds more crew members.

To properly receive the Bliss and its thousands of extra passengers, the Port of Seattle signed a 15-year lease/investment agreement with Norwegian in 2015 under which the port agreed to expand and modernize its cruise terminal facilities. The port and Norwegian are each investing \$15 million on upgrades that give Norwegian's ships priority, though not exclusive, use of facilities at Terminal 66.

Brown and Chou recently gave *The Puget Sound Business Journal* a behind-the-scenes walk through of the new facility. It aims to process passengers on and off ships within an average of 15 minutes.

"Some of the spaces we're excited about are the new ticketing, the 86 check-in areas kiosks and the sweeping passenger waiting rooms," Brown said.

The renovation features an entirely new floor erected inside the building (itself a fusion of three different, older buildings), including new steel, concrete and building systems -- without increasing its actual height.

"One of the big struggles we've had was that because the third floor was already there, we couldn't make any more height," Brown said. "We had to be careful because we only had so much space to install the mechanical systems and the lighting systems. It has a pretty industrial feel because we didn't have a lot of headroom to do a more interesting design."

The building's third floor is also home to the Conference Center, which holds events in the late fall and winter primarily (but not exclusively) when the cruise terminal is not operating and handling passengers.

Builders are installing a moveable wall partition as part of the project to allow the conference center to offer bigger event spaces on lower levels when cruisers aren't using the facility.

"It gives us a lot of flexibility to transform the space pretty quickly," Brown said. "It's really a dual-purpose facility, with cruise being the primary activity during cruise season."

Chou added: "There will be many events happening between visits from the cruise ships."

The project also includes:

-- A new Department of Homeland Security self-contained customs and immigration interior structure.

-- Earthquake safety upgrades using metal braces, updating 1990-era safety features.

-- New VIP passenger lounge, featuring floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the docks, the waterfront and the Olympic Mountains across the water (when the ship isn't calling).

-- A new custom-designed baggage handling conveyor system capable of rapidly handling 4,000 passengers' bags.

-- New escalators to accelerate passenger loading and unloading and movement through Homeland Security customs and border control.

- This story was updated to indicate that the Norwegian Bliss will call in Seattle in the summer of 2018.