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SFO UNVEILS DRAMATIC OUTDOOR OBSERVATION DECK

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A dramatic new outdoor observation deck opens to passengers at San Francisco International Airport this week. The deck is just one part of a recent \$55 million upgrade to the airport's International Terminal.

The observation deck is located at the far end of the G side (United/Star Alliance) of the airport's international terminal. It will be open daily from 7:00 am until 11:30 pm starting Wednesday, February 6.

Since the outdoor lounge is behind security, only passengers using Terminal 3 (United) and the International G-side will have access to it.

Airport authorities offered SFGate a preview of the new space on Monday, which you can view via the slideshow at the top of this post. The 2,997 square foot, roofless deck, offers expansive 180+ degree views of the ramp and runways on the north side of the airport and beyond.

SFO's biggest birds park nearby, including an Air China 747-8 we saw at around 11 am, as well as Lufthansa's big A380 from Munich, which docks downstairs from about 7:30 pm until 9:30 pm each evening during the winter. On a clear day you might be able to see Salesforce Tower from out there, but it was stormy during our visit.

To keep out the wind, the space is encircled by crystal clear, 10.5-foot panes of "bird proof" glass. That's right, it's bird-proof. If you look at the glass up close and from an angle, you can see vertical bars in the each pane-- apparently it's something birds can see a lot better than humans can. In any case, it should help prevent strikes from any hapless birds that may buzz onto airport grounds.

Speaking of birds, the deck also includes several xeriscaped planters, with small, scrubby, succulents that birds don't like. Visitors can relax or work at several wooden chairs and tables, along with three leisurely chaise lounges, all outfitted with electrical outlets nearby. I was not able to test the wi-fi.

The space is punctuated by three tall bronze sculptures by Bay Area artist Woody De Othello

titled "Light," "Time," and "Turn," each weighing 600-700 pounds.

The team who built the terrace (and showed us around) joked that they would like to name it the "No Smoking Deck" to prevent passengers from using it as a smoking area. (Mind you that this is in the international terminal where there are likely a lot more smokers than you'll find in other SFO terminals...) Signs, peer pressure and several security cameras will hopefully keep smokers in check. The worry is that wind could lift a lit cigarette butt up and out of the enclosure on a windy day.

Food and drink from nearby vendors is allowed on the deck. Specially designed trash cans keep paper napkins, plates and wrappers from flying out of the deck and onto the airfield.

The new deck is part of an overall \$55 million improvement project for SFO's International Terminal, which includes the addition of 2,200 tables, chairs and lamps, new LED lighting in the corridors and soft leather benches in the post security re-compose areas.

There's also a new behind-security elevator and entrance to the Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse lounge (on the A side) and new hydration stations that dispense both hot and cold water.

Plans are in the works for an airline lounge as well as a public access observation deck to open on the roof area of Terminal 2 (previously the SFO control tower) later this year.

The project to upgrade the International Terminal involved multiple groups. The design-build team is made up of Webcor and a joint venture between Woods Bagot and TSAO Design Group, while the construction management was provided by a joint venture of The Allen Group and Avila & Associates.