

Space station gets room, huge window to see Earth

February 12 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



This image provided by NASA TV shows astronauts Robert Behnken, left, and Nicholas Patrick installing the Tranquility room to the International Space Station backdropped by the blackness of space and earth early Friday Feb. 12, 2010 as they pass over Australia. The new room, named Tranquility, and domed lookout represent \$400 million in home improvements. The lookout, with its seven windows, including the largest ever sent into space, already has astronauts salivating over the anticipated views of Earth. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- Astronauts put the last big addition on the International Space Station early Friday, attaching a new room with an enormous bay window that promises to provide unprecedented panoramic views of Earth.

The room, named Tranquility, was hoisted into place by a giant robot

arm as a pair of spacewalking [astronauts](#) floated nearby, excitedly watching everything take shape.

"We've got a whole bunch of camera views ... and every one of them looks spectacular," astronaut Stephen Robinson radioed from inside the shuttle-station complex.

"It looks spectacular from here, too," replied spacewalker Nicholas Patrick.

Patrick and Robert Behnken carried out the first spacewalk of the mission with amazing speed. They were an hour ahead at one point and picked up some extra chores 220 miles up.

Behnken pushed out so hard and fast that Mission Control urged him to slow down as he moved over to Endeavour's payload bay and got the new compartments ready for installation on the space station.

The Tranquility hookup job is so big and complicated it will require three spacewalks. Thursday night's excursion - which stretched into the wee hours of Friday - was the first.

Robinson noted it was a "noble start" to this spacewalk extravaganza.

Tranquility and the domed lookout represent \$400 million in home improvements. The lookout, with its seven windows, including the largest ever sent into space, already has astronauts salivating over the anticipated views of the home planet, as well as their orbital home.

Behnken and Patrick had to wait for the 23-foot-long Tranquility to be anchored onto the space station before they could hook up power and data cables. The heavy lifting fell to the astronauts inside who operated the space station's [robot arm](#).

The plumbing will be tackled during the second spacewalk Saturday night.

Mission Control informed the spacewalkers that all their cable connections were successful, and that crucial heat was flowing to Tranquility.

"Let the activation" begin, Behnken called out as the 6 1/2-hour [spacewalk](#) ended.

The dome - which resembles a bay window 5 feet deep and nearly 10 feet in diameter - will be moved to its final location on Tranquility next week. Only then will the window shutters be unlocked and raised.

The central window is a circle 31 inches across. The six surrounding windows are smaller and shaped like trapezoids.

NASA readily acknowledges the observation deck and its 360-degree views will improve the quality of life aboard the orbital outpost, where astronauts spend six months at a stretch.

The Italian-designed Tranquility and dome leaves the space station 98 percent complete, with a mass of nearly 800,000 pounds.

Tranquility - named after the Apollo 11 moon landing site - will house life-support equipment, exercise machines and a toilet. The European Space Agency supplied the room, along with the dome.

Four more shuttle visits remain before the fleet is retired, primarily to stockpile spare station parts and supplies. NASA hopes to wrap everything up by the end of September.

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