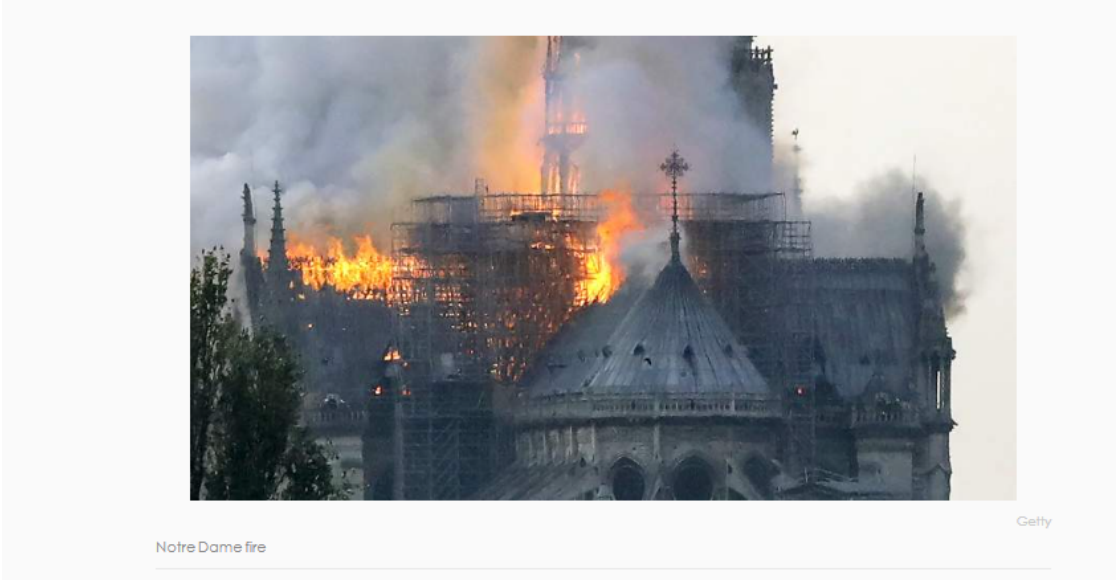
Notre Dame Renovation Project: 5 Fast Facts

By Janet Winikoff | Heavy | Published Apr. 15, 2019 at 5:50 p.m. | Updated Apr. 15, 2019 at 5:50 p.m.



Notre Dame fire | Getty

As flames engulf the iconic Notre Dame Cathedral, the Paris Fire Brigade is trying to determine if current renovations to the Cathedral's spire are to blame for the horrific blaze that tore through the building today.

Here's What you need to know about the renovations at Notre Dame:

1. Notre Dame Cathedral Was in Severe Disrepair

Architects and historians all seem to agree that Notre Dame was in dire need of repairs. When the cathedral burst into flames, a $6.8 million project was underway to repair the church's glorious spire. In 2017 it was reported that the church needed major repairs. One of the cathedral's famed gargoyles used to drain water had fallen off the building and another one was disintegrating, resulting in the Archdiocese using plastic pipes instead.

"The flying buttresses are in a pretty bad state and we can't afford them falling down because it would risk the structure of the whole cathedral. It's urgent!" Michel Picaud, President of the charity, Friends of Notre Dame told FRANCE 24. According to Picaud, the walls are chipping, the lead roof tiles are disintegrating. While it was still relatively safe for tourists to visit the building's safety was described by one expert as being at "the tipping point."

Picaud also revealed to the news agency that other repairs were critical. There are large cracks have appeared across the church's façade and the supporting structure holding up the cathedral's impressive stained-glass windows could collapse in the event of a storm.

2. The Last Major Renovation Was in 1840s

With original construction starting in 1163, Notre Dame took over 200 years to complete. Since then, it's been repeatedly looted and damaged. The Huguenots and a French king vandalized the church, believing its statues, tombs, and stained glass were idolatrous. During the French Revolution, the cathedral served as a food warehouse and the heads of many of Notre Dame's majestic statues depicting royalty were removed. Until the mid-1800s, the grand building was in such poor shape it was set to be demolished had Napoleon not insisted

that his coronation be held in the famed building.

In 1831 Victor Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame was published, and the cathedral experienced a resurgence of interest. The church underwent restoration between 1845-1870, and new buildings were added. Unfortunately, inferior materials were used during the project. Much of the original building is in better shape than the areas restored in the nineteenth century. The result has left Paris with a crumbling icon.

A smaller restoration program was started in 1991 with a focus on cleaning up facades and sculptures. A number of historical artifacts and pieces of art were removed from the church to protect them while the building was under repair.

3.There Was Disagreement Over who Should Pick Up the Renovation Tab

Notre Dame is one of Paris' most popular attractions, receiving between 30,000-50,000 visitors daily. The Archdiocese believed the government should pay for the renovations since it owns the building. But it's the Archdiocese that's been paying the bills, with the Ministry of Culture only chipping in 2 million euros ($2.28 million). The Archdiocese says the amount barely covers the cathedral's most basic repairs.

Although the French government eventually relented and promised additional funding over 10 years, the Archdiocese was forced to start the "Friends of Notre Dame" campaign, with the hope of raising at least 100 million euros. "There is no part of the building untouched by the irreparable loss of sculptural and decorative elements, let alone the alarming deterioration of structural elements," the organization says on its website. The cathedral, it says, "is in desperate need of attention."

The French government disagreed with the Archdiocese's assessment. "France has thousands of monuments," said an official interviewed by TIME, who was not authorized to speak to the media. She made it clear that Notre Dame's condition was not a primary concern for the government. "It will not fall down," she added.

4. Renovations Were Needed Because "Pollution is the Biggest Culprit"

While weather, foot traffic and time have all done their fair share of damage to Notre Dame, Philippe Villeneuve, architect in chief of historic monuments in France blames Paris' pollution for causing the historic cathedral's deterioration. "Pollution is the biggest culprit," he told TIME in 2017. "We need to replace the ruined stones. We need to replace the joints with traditional materials. This is going to be extensive."

In 2016, Forbes reported that Paris' pollution was so bad that city officials had made greater efforts to control traffic, including driving bans for private vehicles on alternate days determined by their license plates.

5. Americans Were Expected to be the Greatest Contributors to Notre Dame's Renovation Campaign

With the cathedral in serious need of repair, The Friends of Notre Dame committee obtained U.S. nonprofit charity status in 2017 and decided to take their show on the road. There were plans to visit the United States in 2018 and make financial appeals to philanthropic Americans who consider Paris to be one of their beloved tourist destinations.

"I think the Americans consider part of the history that took place in Europe as part of their own," Picaud said. According to Picaud, it was Americans have always had a soft spot for Notre Dame. The multi-city fundraiser was set to visit Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Picaud stressed that Notre Dame is as much a historical monument as a religious structure.

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