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Aerial view of Citta 50, with
the existing building at lower left.

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Historic building before renovation.

Citta 50 Furthers the Transformation of Logan Circle

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

The 1400 block of Church Street, NW, is a veritable catalogue of recent condominium apartment buildings, several of which have won design awards from the Washington Chapter/AIA. The latest project to be so recognized is Citta 50 (*città*—pronounced *chee-TAH*—is the Italian word for “city,” and the “50” refers to the building’s address at 1450 Church). The name may be partly Italian, but the project is quintessentially Washingtonian in its incorporation of an existing, historic structure, combined with new elements that reinterpret the architectural vocabulary of the original building in a clearly contemporary fashion.

The existing building was built in the 1920s as a coal distribution facility, and was designed by John Lankford, Washington’s first African American registered architect. As was typical for light industrial structures of that era, the Lankford building was simple, with very little ornamentation, yet had a certain dignity owing to its proportions and materials. By the time that Citta 50 was

conceived, however, the historic structure had been abandoned for four decades and was in very poor condition.

In designing the new project, Bonstra | Haresign Architects restored the façade of the Lankford building and rebuilt much of its structure, while creating a full basement level beneath it. Windows and doors were replaced with replicas of the original versions. The area once occupied by a coal truck scale was “memorialized” as a double-height space in one of the new apartments.

The massing of the new structure facing Church Street defers to the historic building in several ways. At ground level, an open-air entry court sits adjacent to the old structure, allowing it to be “read” in three dimensions. Moreover, the part of the new structure above the historic building is set back from the street line and is sheathed in a glass curtain wall, in a deliberate contrast to the masonry and punched windows of the Lankford building.

The other new façades are mostly of brick, though its color contrasts with that of the original building, thus clearly distinguishing new and old. The project is marked by subtle asymmetries, as in the window openings along Church Street, in which inset panels of dark gray bricks run along one side of each opening. Citta 50 culminates in a surprising crown—an oval of translucent blue panels, lit from behind at night, which shield mechanical equipment while abstractly recalling the water towers that once capped many an urban building. 🏡



Courtesy of Bonstra | Haresign Architects



Project: Citta 50

Washington, DC

Architects: **Bonstra | Haresign Architects LLP**

(Design Partner in Charge/Project Designer: William J. Bonstra, AIA, LEED AP; Project Manager: Andrea Aragon; Project Architect: Charles Witmer)

Contractor: **Camden Builders**

Engineers: **Capitol Engineering Group and Structura**

Interior view of the building, showing a modern staircase and a brick wall.

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