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# ADSW PRESERVATION CASE STUDIES

## HECHT COMPANY WAREHOUSE

ADSW assisted with the actions shown in *Italics*.



**Location:** 1401 New York Avenue NE, Washington, DC

**Original Name:** Hecht Company Warehouse

**Original Use:** Industrial & Manufacturing

**Originally Constructed:** 1937

**Original Architect:** Abbott, Merkt & Company, NY (additions in 1948, 1961, 1986, 1994)

**Current Owner:** Douglas Development Company, Washington, DC

**Current Architect:** Antunovich Associates, Arlington, VA

**Current Status:** Redeveloped as Residential Apartments

*LANDMARKED 1991-1992. ADAPTIVE REUSE COMPLETED IN PHASES DURING 2015-2019.*

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Hecht Company Warehouse deserves its nationwide reputation as an Art Deco masterpiece. This streamlined industrial building was designed by Abbott, Merkt & Co. of New York, department store specialists. When built in 1937, it was particularly noted for the use of glass block and won a prize in a nationwide competition sponsored by Pittsburgh Glass Institute. It is well known to Washingtonians and visitors as a landmark for travelers on New York Avenue.

A masterpiece of Washington's family of Art Deco buildings, the Warehouse is a supreme example of the original intended meaning of Louis Sullivan's "Form Follows Function". Hecht's takes inspiration from the intended use and marries it with materials that were both popular and distinctive in the day, namely, glass block and glazed brick for the exterior. The glass block exudes a crystalline translucency while serving an important function: admitting as much natural light as possible while limiting unwanted public views to the messy inner workings of a warehouse serving a major regional department store company. The wonderful qualities of the block are further heightened with a streamlined sensibility in a restrained use of curves at corners, culminating in a feature corner tower capped with a prismatic star-shaped crown.

## ADSW PRESERVATION

Recognizing the threat to this iconic building in the early 1990's, ADSW became a party to the original landmark nomination.

When the Hecht's department stores were absorbed by another company in 2006, the warehouse was empty and unused. In 2013, plans were launched to repurpose the oldest parts of the building, now protected as a DC landmark, for offices and retail use.

For this adaptive reuse, ADSW was reengaged in a collaborative effort with the building's current owner, Douglas Development of Washington DC. Douglas' original plan called for transforming the building into an office building and plans included removing most of the

distinctive glass block. Plans were subsequently revised to a retail and loft apartment project which would retain the glass block (replacing sections as needed in kind). However, the floor plates of the original building are significant (over 100,000 sf each), and their extensive depth was not conducive to apartments. An interesting plan was developed whereby a series of interior courtyards were cut into the middle of the floor plates, affording needed natural light exposure to inner units, with other units facing the existing perimeter walls. The building's original structure, including distinctive cast-in-place concrete "mushroom" columns, was retained. The interior finish theme of the apartments is true to the original building, with the original concrete, brick and structure exposed for an industrial loft feel. The project entailed over 340 rental loft style apartments and approximately 200,000 sf of retail and restaurant uses.

The Hecht Company Warehouse, no longer owned by a department store, is now a successful residential redevelopment. ADSW worked closely with the owner and their architects, offering advice and support for the best way to preserve the character defining features of this iconic Art Deco building while adapting it for successful reuse.