



BUILDING PLANS / PUBLIC BUILDING

Renewal of the St. Michael's Cathedral in Veszprém

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The St. Michael's Cathedral, one of the 18 historic buildings in the Castle District to be renovated by the Veszprém Archbishopric between 2020 and 2025, will reopen for visitors this year. On Építészforum (Architects' Forum), we aim to provide an opportunity for the presentation of the designers' perspectives and plans regarding the buildings involved in the investment. The first presentation will focus on the renovation of the cathedral, designed by Czita Architectural Office, which has garnered significant attention in the press.

The main church of the Diocese of Veszprém is a basilica minor ranked Cathedral. Its construction began under Queen Blessed Gisela between 1030 and 1040. Following medieval alterations, the baroque and modern reconstructions significantly influenced the architecture of the building. The internal alterations and renovations are primarily justified by the deteriorated technical condition, alongside a concerted effort to renew the liturgical space in a unified manner. In the main cathedral, it will be possible to celebrate Mass by Easter 2023, and the final works are scheduled to be completed by 2025.

The Christian heritage is a thousand years old

The history of the Veszprém Archdiocese and the Cathedral stretches back to ancient times. Early descriptions mention a church dedicated to Saint Michael in Ortahuba, identified with Veszprém, dating back to 866. The Saint George Chapel, presumably built in the late 10th century, is referred to in the legend of Saint Emeric. Although the histories of these two buildings are not uniform, they are inseparable.



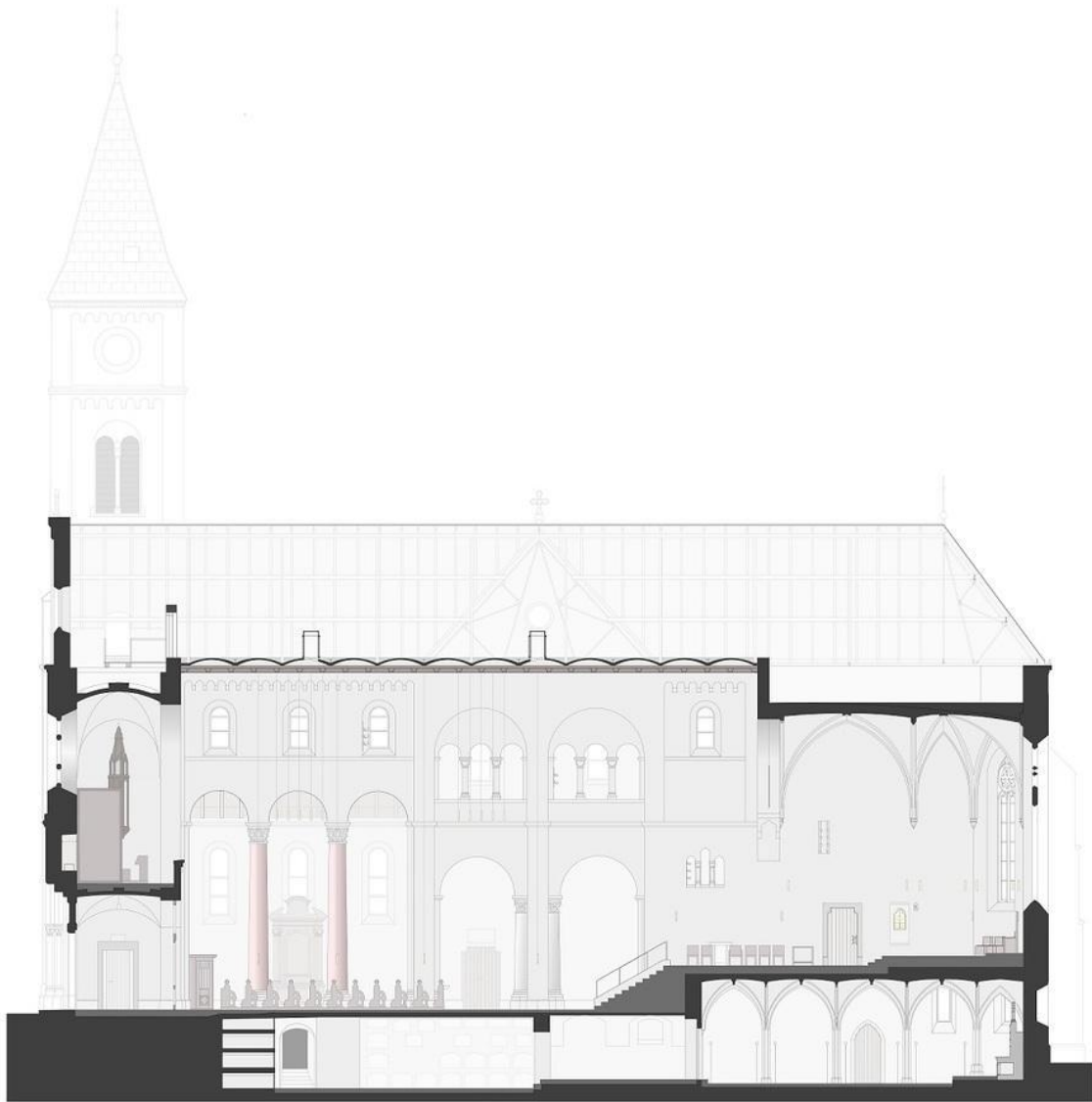
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The renovation of the Saint Michael Cathedral in Veszprém, Designed by Czita Architectural Office (Czita Építész Iroda)

In the early 11th century, following the establishment of the bishopric, the first significant royal constructions took place on the Castle Hill (Várhegy) in Veszprém. The construction of the cathedral can be dated between 1030 and 1040. The building underwent significant alterations during the medieval period, with various Romanesque and Gothic periods identifiable. The extensive remains of the building, initiated by Queen Gizella, are integrated into the current walls of the cathedral and have survived to a considerable height in some places. This also demonstrates the

building's outstanding national significance. Due to the adversities of the Turkish era and the presence of imperial troops, the building fell into ruins. Although some minor repairs were carried out, it wasn't until the Baroque period that a complete renewal was undertaken. In the 1720s, this was the first building of the castle to be reconstructed in a distinguished style.

Following several minor renovations, another significant transformation took place between 1907 and 1910, which essentially defines the building visible today. During this period, all Baroque elements and structures, as well as medieval plaster layers, were dismantled, and a historicist architecture was constructed, incorporating Romanesque and Gothic forms. Over the past 110 years, numerous external and internal alterations have occurred. Partial archaeological research and wall analysis were conducted between 1968 and 1973, while external and internal renovations, as well as the liturgical rearrangement of the main sanctuary, took place from 1969 to 1978. The roof and facade renovation carried out in 2010 only partially addressed the condition of the building. This current renovation contributes to the thousand-year-old historical heritage by continuing the exterior work initiated over 10 years ago, ensuring the satisfactory arrangement of the technical condition, and making the interior space fully functional.



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North longitudinal section, Renovation of the Saint Michael's Cathedral in Veszprém,
Designed by Czita Architectural Office (Czita Építész Iroda)

The building structures have been affected by damages caused by moisture in several areas. Leaks resulting from roof failures are known. Although the renovation ten years ago eliminated the root cause of the problem, it did not address its consequences. Near the ground level and in contact with the soil, the walls have suffered significant deterioration due to moisture from the ground, affecting the base walls of the church and the entire crypt. Salt contamination has also appeared in both cases, affecting the interior surfaces, and the moisture has affected the entire cross-section of the wall structures - as credibly confirmed by diagnostic examinations.

The restoration of damages resulting from previous level and structural alterations posed a challenging task. A comprehensive technical correction was required, which,

in addition to subsequent wall and floor insulation, necessitated structural and static modifications as well. Naturally, such a complex structural renovation affected numerous visible and concealed elements, making it essential to reconsider the architectural coherence of the interior space as well.

Research results and heritage preservation

A technical renovation of this scale also presents an opportunity, as research and explorations are required not only to the extent generally prescribed, but also to understand the building's construction periods in detail. Survey and research are inherently complex, and when integrated into the design process, they require particular attention. Historical and archaeological research has been supplemented and interpreted at numerous points by the individual interpretations and examinations of various restoration disciplines—thus, important results have been achieved concerning wooden, metal, stone, silicate, and painted elements alike.



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One of the defining results of the research process is the identification of the comprehensive repainting of the interior in 1978, as well as the investigation of the wall fabric and significant medieval stone remains revealed through construction observations. This includes carved elements uncovered in situ and in secondary positions in the Gothic closure of the sanctuary, main and side chapels, as well as in the northern and southern walls of the nave. Additionally, elements such as the reinforced concrete core of the nave from 1910, made using faux marble technique, and the bricking up of the baroque sanctuary closure in the crypt, have also been revealed.

The renovation in the 1970s, as confirmed by painting restoration research, fell short of the standards expected for a cathedral. The repainting done in 1978 was executed at an industrial cooperative level, without the involvement of artists or restorers. Consequently, its artistic value is low, with inaccuracies in compositional elements, materials, and colours.

During the renovation work, despite the explicit request of the heritage authority (OMF) – likely due to central pressure and directives – the original decorative painting by Antal Szirmai was entirely repainted. (It is inconceivable that such work contrary to any official directive could have been carried out at that time.) The original decoration was so extensively damaged beneath the oil-based paint that its

restoration can only be envisioned partially.



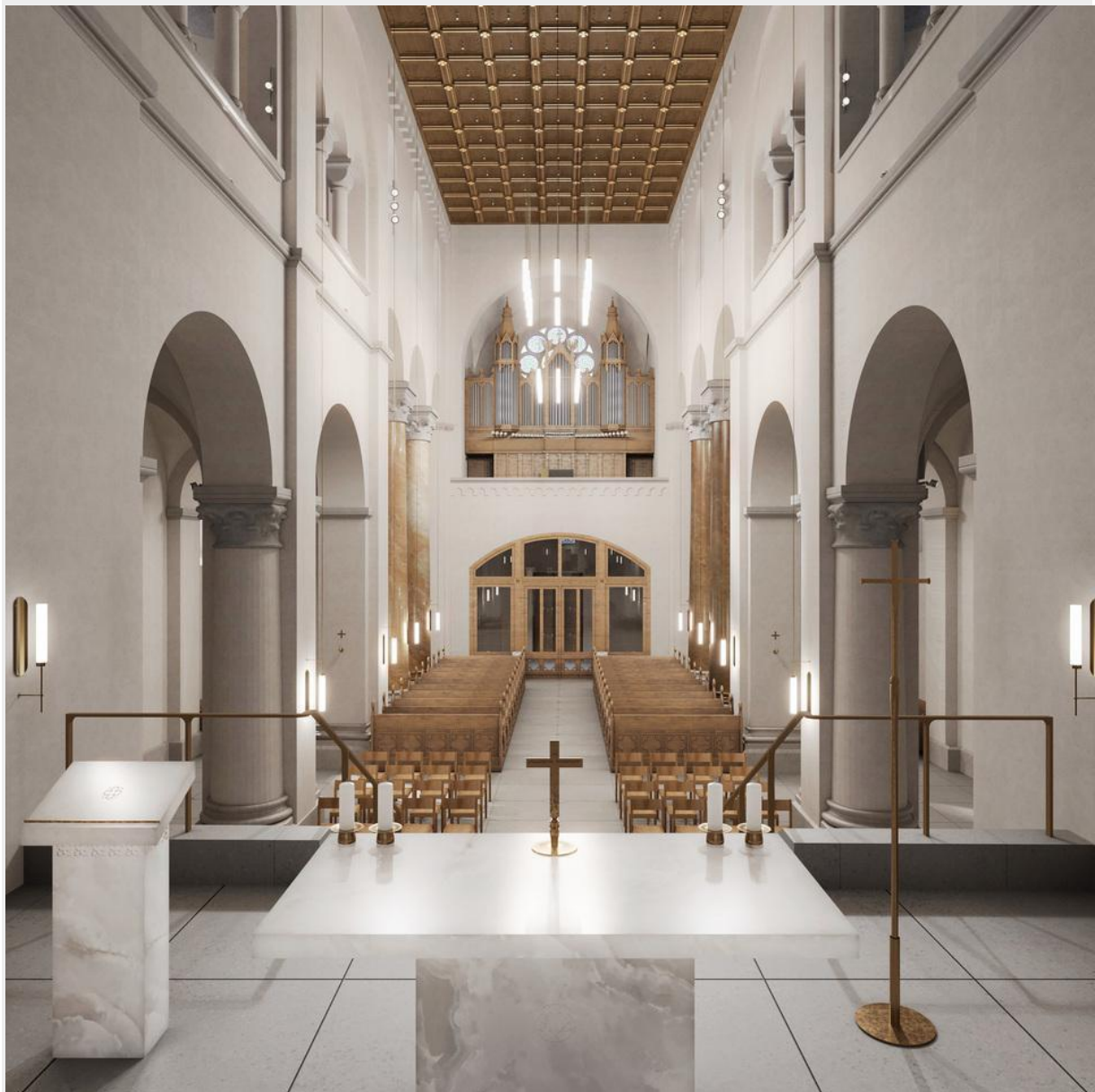
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An important result is the precise investigation of the condition and original design of the stained-glass windows. As a result, it became known in detail that among the currently five different types of glass, there are six remaining original pieces by Gida Waltherr, created for the 1907-1910 renovation, as well as the depiction of Saint Michael, which made similar to the contemporary stained-glass window in Veszprém, in Vetés, Transylvania. A smaller, functionally significant find was the discovery of interior connections and staircases next to the western gate, which, although mentioned in the survey by Ferenc Strono, had previously only provided access from the street to the organ loft and towers. After highlighting valuable elements found in the interior space, they will undergo restoration and be placed in the Archdiocesan Collection for preservation.

The spatial structure of the cathedral

The architectural character of the building, including its spatial arrangement, is fundamentally defined by carefully crafted, well-proportioned interior spaces that partially conform to the medieval remnants. The main nave aligned along the east-west axis, the tightly composed transept, and the double side aisles exude a powerful atmosphere. Following the system of ancient basilicas, the historized spatial form creates a cohesive unity despite the significant level difference between the sanctuary and nave floors. The beautifully layered vertical architecture encompasses the vaulted, Gothic sanctuary and oratories uniformly, representing a unique architectural value that can be understood independently. The ancillary spaces, resulting from the Baroque alterations, stand above the side chapels in the crypt, with an alternative approach provided on the southern side. The character of the crypt and the main sanctuary preserves Gothic traditions, with each connecting to a side chamber in the three-part vaulted space. The operation is streamlined and orderly.

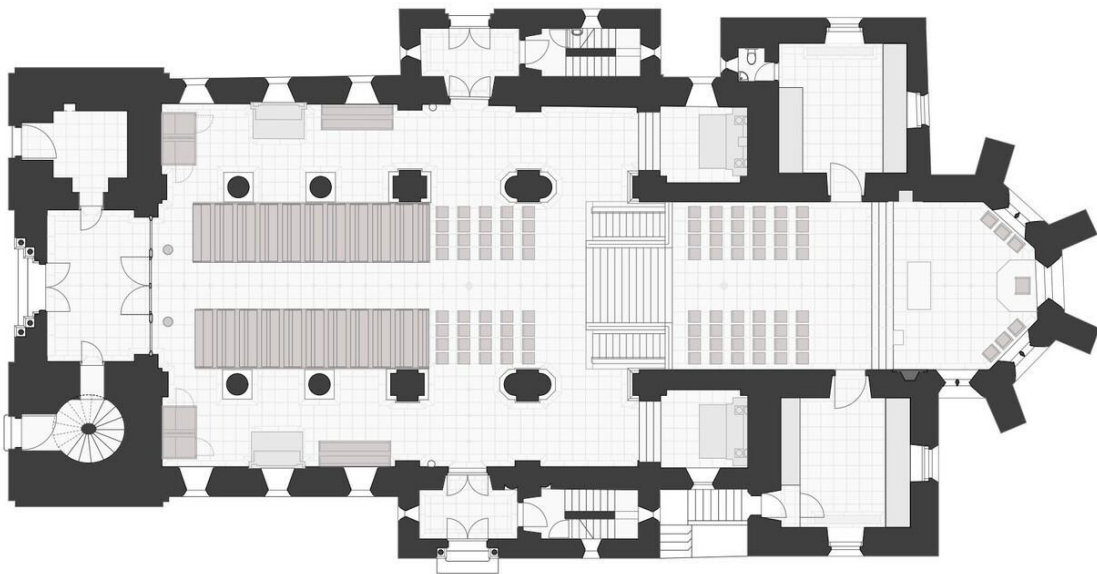


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The space for the dignified celebration of the liturgy

The essential changes in the spaces are provided by the harmonized use. The liturgical spaces fully comply with the relevant ecclesiastical regulations. The goal of the renovation, surpassing mere preservation, is to have a high-quality interior space that fits the significance and ancient aesthetics of the cathedral. It is of utmost importance that the space is collectively suitable for contemplation, retreat, and the dignified celebration of liturgy. Functional auxiliary areas have been incorporated into the ancillary rooms to support and ensure the primary use of the space.

The sanctuary is divided into two parts separated by stairs, thus, together with the nave, creating a longitudinally triple-structured temple space. The elevation of the upper part of the sanctuary, the dual position of the altar and ambo, the newly placed cathedra, and tabernacle ensure a rich and versatile use of space. The variously sized liturgical and cultural events exhibit different patterns of space utilization, and the adjustable furnishings provide greater flexibility and improved visibility.



Floor plan. The renovation of the Saint Michael's Cathedral in Veszprém, Designed by Czita Architectural Office (Czita Építész Iroda)

"High quality materials"

The architectural elements undergoing renovation support unified spatial design in terms of material quality and composition. The liturgical objects: altar, tabernacle, ambo, holy water font, and the baptismal font of the St. George Chapel will be carved from a single block of onyx stone. The liturgical tools will feature gold surfaces following a unified design principle to draw attention to them. The supplementary objects and furniture will be made of solid oak. Custom-designed and manufactured lighting fixtures and additional technical elements will receive uniform surface treatment. The stained-glass windows will be renewed in a material and geometrical system faithful to the original.

Walls, windows, acoustics

The large wall surfaces receive a uniform surface treatment to preserve the historical layers and allow for potential later reconstructive painting. The base colour of the stone-like surface, with its narrow range of variations, enhances the form of the divisions. The division of the floor covering is aligned with the spatial arrangement, and its material and surface structure match the wall colours, as well as the original marble columns and artificial stone base elements.



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The restored original and the renewed stained-glass windows allow natural light to filter into the internally illuminated space with new lamps, while the renovated and expanded organ fills the acoustic environment of the space with new life.

The faith of our ancestors is the hope of the future

The millennium-long history of the St. Michael's Cathedral is exceptionally rich and its future is of paramount importance. The purpose of its interior design is clearly to renew it in a manner befitting its status. Harmonizing its distinctive architectural spaces, reopening its layered spatial connections, and collectively renewing the St. George Chapel and its surroundings once again elevate it to one of Hungary's defining ecclesiastical and cultural centres. The clear motto of the Veszprém Archdiocese, "The faith of our ancestors is the hope of the future," comes to life anew.

Tamás Czigány

Anikó Páll

Róbert Papp

The presentations of the renovation projects on the Veszprém Castle Hill will be collected in this dossier in the near future.

Editor: Viola Pleskovics

Project Information:

Location:

Veszprém, Hungary

Architects, creators:

CZITA Építésziroda Kft. (CZITA Architectural Office Ltd.)

Tags:

heritage

URL:

CZITA Építész Iroda (CZITA Architectural Office)

Year of design:

2021-2022

Year of construction:

2022-2025

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Utility planning: Ádám Szabó

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Organ reconstruction: Attila Budavári, Tamás Gábor

Restoration of stained-glass windows: Barnabás Wölfinger

Design and manufacturing of stained-glass windows: Barnabás Wölfinger,
Bernadett Hegyvári

Design and manufacturing of liturgical objects: Kristóf Gelley, Zoltán
Mátyás

Restoration of wooden furniture: Áron Erős