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Taubman College of Architecture
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WINTER 2024

time : tbd
course # tbd
room # tbd

FIN·ISH

/ˈfinəSH/

1. *bring (a task or activity) to an end; complete.*
2. *complete the manufacture or decoration of (a material, object, or place) by giving it an attractive surface appearance.*

The range of architectural finishes has become more comprehensive and complex than ever before. Competing logics of building technology, economy, consumer capitalism, material extraction, net carbon, labor, and culture all intersect in a complex context that shapes how buildings are constructed. In the US, traditional natural materials of the past have largely been replaced with cheaper, less labor intensive, manufactured alternatives. Wood can be tile, brick is a sheet good, and marble comes on a roll; the likeness of any material can be molded to any form. This faux representation of material has created an image-mapped architecture of finishes.

This shift to a representational materiality, while offering infinite formal potential, creates a crisis of traditional tectonic expression in architecture. No longer is the aesthetic of material tied to its performance. Traditional tectonic expressions of structure and materiality are now clad with performative requirements of continuous exterior insulation, fire-rated wall assemblies, and sound transmission class, as we will see.

A primary task of architects, then, is to detail faux-material finish conditions so as to perpetuate the ruse of authentic material expression. A likely danger of finish is that as it is, at best, minimally required, it can become an easy target of value engineering. Among the questions we will address in this course are: Why don't we move beyond these historical associations of material? What does this say about our cultural relationship to technology that we are resistant to change? Why are architects accepting this role of finish designer? Why do we work so hard to disguise the structure and systems that actually support the building? What is an expressive architecture of tiles, sheets, and rolls?

In this course, students will be encouraged to explore new formal potentials to propose an expressive architecture of finishes.

COURSE STRUCTURE:

This course will be structured as a 2-part workshop with both a representational and fabrication component. The first half of the course will be dedicated to deriving a catalog of image-based textures and material surfaces, which students will develop into a constructed detail condition in the second half of the semester.

PT 1: REPRESENTATIONAL MATERIALITY

Working in groups, students will establish a still-life composition of typical construction materials (such as the 2×4, CMU, OSB, plywood, metal stud, etc.) whose materiality remains un-aestheticized and still provides a functional purpose. A looping framework of *original, replica, functional, pastiche,* and *imaginary* will guide the investigation.

The course will begin with a demonstration of studio photography techniques, DSLR operation, key and fill lighting, tethered capture, and editing using Adobe Lightroom. The still-life investigation may also work with backdrops, utilize green screen technology, and engage with the schools TV Lab. Digital workflows such as 3D scanning, photogrammetry, developing texture maps, and using rendering engines will allow the compositions to be brought into the computer before being recreated through analogue fabrication methods. Sewing machines will be available for student use, and the studio will work with textiles and sewing techniques in particular as a means to explore representational materiality. Students may also integrate digital fabrication techniques such as CNC routing, 3D printing, and laser cutting.

PT 2: DETAIL EXPRESSION

Students will critically examine common vernacular detail conditions and propose a 1-to-1 mockup which will explore the current crisis of material expression instigated by the adoption of the tile, sheet, or roll as primary finish materials. Textile and sewing techniques will be encouraged. The chunk detail assemblies will utilize the representational material techniques developed in part 1.