May 15, 2009

To: Terminal studio students 2009-10

The attached description contains information about my studio and associated fall seminar that I would otherwise have given at the presentation. I will be returning from Italy late Friday night May 29th, and will be available from then until the end of preferencing next week. I’m happy to meet with people individually, or to answer questions by email. In either case, just email me at hdavis@uoregon.edu to ask a question or set up a time to meet. I will respond to emails when I get back.

Thanks.

[Signature]

Howard Davis
Old Town hybrids: re-thinking the urban block

Present land uses in the Old Town district, with fine-grained mix and small lots

On sites within a single block in Portland's Old Town/Chinatown, each student will choose one of three projects, each about 60,000 square feet, and representing a new combination of familiar uses:

1. Living [over the workshop]. A building for crafts and craftspeople, including dwellings, workshops, gallery and combined dwellings/workshops. It will include people who do "traditional" crafts as well as technologically-newer processes such as digital fabrication.

2. Learning [in the garden]. A small high school focusing on issues of eco-urbanism, with a balance between indoor and outdoor space on a tight urban site. The building will be a public demonstration of advanced, changing ideas of urban ecology, and provide high school students with a place to learn and a base for projects of public outreach.

3. Performing [in the street]. A community theater and public square/performance space, with housing for visiting performers. The theater, of 300-400 seats, will allow for a variety of theatrical forms, including traditional stage as well as more open and experimental configurations. The outdoor stage/square will be a neighborhood focus during the summer.

(Hybrids of these hybrid programs may also be proposed on an individual basis, as careful thinking about the possibilities of the site will lead to creative ideas about the program. To allow for a reasonable amount of design development in the second term, there will be a maximum of about 60,000 square feet in any one project.)
Building 82%, hybrid building by Lewis Tsurumaki Lewis, New York

The studio has several intentions:

- To design hybrid buildings that require new and innovative interpretations of traditional building types, within a diverse, mixed-use urban district
- To design green buildings that represent the best current—and speculative—thinking in issues of social, economic and ecological sustainability
- To deal with an urban neighborhood to which the University of Oregon has made a major commitment, and in which there is a variety of new projects, project proposals, and an active community
- To design beautiful and well resolved buildings, that are theoretically significant in the larger world of architecture, drawing on contemporary ideas and built precedents

Two views of Old Town

The block will be chosen by the studio group, during the fall-term seminar. A block will be chosen that consists mostly of buildable sites (existing parking lots and buildings that can be replaced) as well as a historic building that might be a candidate for adaptive reuse, and that can be incorporated into one of the programs. The neighborhood is an active place that is undergoing renewal partly because of the presence of the UO in the White Stag Block, but which also has continuing needs for housing and public facilities.

The fall seminar will deal with site investigations, discussions with people from the city of Portland and the community, studies of relevant precedents and architectural ideas, and
programming of projects. An important task will be the development of ‘thesis statements’ describing individual intentions with respect to the design project.

The seminar will also include a short urban design charrette in which various proposals for the block will be designed, to form a context for building designs during the studio, to help the actual building design get off to a quick and well-informed start during the winter term.

In addition, Howard will be teaching a 484/584 studio in Portland during the fall, on a site in the neighborhood, and the terminal studio students will be encouraged to be involved in critiques of this studio. [The fall seminar will take place in Eugene, on Monday evenings, but will involve one or two Saturday sessions in Portland. The seminar is not officially required, but in the past all students in the terminal studio have been involved. It can be taken for variable credit (2-4 units).]

The intention of these activities in the fall is to bring the terminal studio group to a point where architectural design can begin in the first week of winter term, so that there can be schematic resolution of the project by the end of the winter term—allowing for development of the design during the spring term.

Work from HD terminal studios: Kelsey Buzzelli, 2008; Tuan Vu, 2008; Jared Abraham, 2007

In the studio, the choice of project and the development of individual intentions will give people a sense of ownership over their own work—to be balanced with the common site and the opportunity for exchange with other people working on the same project.

The studio will be conducted in an intense, collaborative way, with weekly pinups through most of the first term. There will be active design investigation, with a variety of media at a variety of scales, intended to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of the project. Two midterms, in Portland and in Eugene, will allow for varied external feedback. A variety of conceptual approaches will be encouraged, based on students’ individual interests, ranging from more speculative experiments to carefully considered contextual interventions. In all cases,
designers need to be accountable to the program, to the place, and to the idea that good architecture may be a force in building sustainable community and elevating the human spirit.

By the end of the first term, it is expected that the projects will be resolved schematically, so the second term can be devoted to detailed development investigations. The second term will be organized with a different topic of investigation each week—structure/environmental systems; façades/envelope; site and ground floor development; detailed design of major rooms and public spaces. Three or four weeks will be set aside for the final presentation.

The three possible building programs are connected to the instructor’s interest in hybrid buildings and sustainable, mixed-use urban districts. Having this choice will allow students to pursue individual interests, but for the group as a whole to work together, to investigate possible synergies between these building types on the same block—represented by a single site model. Although students will be designing individual buildings, there will be attention to how the buildings are working together on the block, without limiting individual expression.

Hopefully, there will be a roughly equal number of students designing each program, and we will frequently look at how the three different buildings, on different sites in the same block, work together to create a new idea for the life of urban districts in the twenty-first century.

Work from HD terminal studio: Erik Winter, 2005; Bart Chui, 2006; Heather Rusch, 2008; Brian O'Reilly, 2008