Our project is beautifully detailed heavy-timber shed covering the wood-fired kilns across the Millrace. The building has pre-cast ornamental concrete column bases, a post-and-beam braced timber frame with carefully tapering round columns, ornamental timber structural lattices, large exposed timber roof trusses, and curving diagonal wind braces in the roof.

This year we are finishing the project. We will be working on the masonry elements on the ground plane: finishing a concrete bench at the opening of the big kiln, including pre-cast acid-etched concrete caps, precast concrete water dispersal pads for the ground drain system, and we may be pouring the concrete for Japanese drainage gutters on the ground under the eaves (we are currently building the formwork for this, and when done we will fill the drains with smooth black stones). We will also be installing concrete pavers set in a herringbone pattern over the floor, and making an entry pathway. At every step we complete the detailed design for what we will be building, and will make full-scale mock-ups for that purpose.

An explicit aim of this course is to engage students in the act of making. Construction experience should be a significant part of your education, both in terms of deepening your understanding of the substance of buildings—materials, processes, finishes: the physical heft and emotional feel of what we put together to make a building—and for the purely pragmatic reason that as a professional you need to know how buildings are built: what works, what doesn’t and why; how work on a job is organized; what it is really like to do the labor.