Working at home (and nearby):
A prototypical urban building for the post-Covid era

A large expansion of home-based work as a permanent feature of urban life is predicted by many contemporary writers and journalists, and stories about it have appeared in news sources including The New York Times, PBS, the BBC, The Wall Street Journal, and others. This raises many questions of urbanism and urban architecture, including the fate of office buildings and public transportation, the design of neighbourhoods, the class differences between people who work and home and people who don’t, a new appreciation of suburbs and rural settlements and towns, and not least, the architecture and design of dwellings and dwelling groups that can also accommodate work of different kinds—the topic of this studio.

This studio involves the design of a mixed-use building that incorporates dwelling and work, and that can help support neighbourhood life. It will include dwellings with and without attached workplaces, a production facility or communal art studio that is separate from dwellings and a café, restaurant or other community function that helps bring people together and that provides common space for people working at home. The idea is a prototype for a new “fabric building,” with mixed-use at the scale of the building and of the dwelling/work units themselves, that can replace buildings that were characteristic of functional modernism and that are still pervasive in our cities. The site is still to be determined, but will be in Oregon, New York or London. Although a site visit might not be possible, the site will be extensively documented.

This is an intense design studio that will begin with design, but also involve research into the architectural typologies of home-based work, current issues impacting the nature of work, and introduction to many relevant precedents, many of them in the UK, northern Europe and east and southeast Asia. Howard Davis has taught several studios connected to this subject, but this one is taking on new meaning given our current circumstances. Author of Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life, Howard is now involved in the London-based initiative The Workhome Project advocating for changes to make home-based work more possible. The group includes architects and others who have worked on this question, and will participate in the studio.

The studio will involve weekly pinups, an early midterm, and the encouragement of working with varied media for the fluid expression and elaboration of design ideas.

This studio will combine online and in-person teaching, following University, State and CDC public safety guidelines. Students are expected to be available for scheduled class sessions, and there will be some flexibility for shifting work to asynchronous or synchronous interaction outside of these hours.