In times of uncertainty and austerity, developing a sense of self-reliance and capability is crucial. Our studio will examine the academic and practical impact of self-production furniture designs in the 20th and 21st centuries. Dozens of designers have made open source plans for simple furniture to be made by the end user, with minimal tools and common materials. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these concepts? Do they have validity in the era of IKEA? Is it demanding or condescending to ask people to make their own furniture? Does the simplicity of joinery lead to a major compromise in durability?

We’ll read and write about Rietveld, Mari, Papanek, Judd, and other authors and designers who have grappled with these questions. You’ll also be issued a set of simple hand tools, and throughout the term you’ll be assigned physical projects of increasing complexity. Starting by working to extant plans, by the end of the term you’ll have designed and built 2-3 full size pieces of your own design. We’ll focus on developing hand drawing and physical prototyping skills at a variety of scales, with little use of the computer.

There are no course fees; your tools will be provided at no cost. You’ll be responsible for buying your own material - expect $200-$400 in costs at the home improvement store. While the course will be taught remotely, students will have optional access to the University's wood shops if they’d prefer to work in those spaces. Those working at home will be at no disadvantage!