TheCraft of Design: The Signature Cabin

The signature cabin or retreat is a classic design problem—coveted projects that have afforded architects occasion to explore the expressive potential and practical realities of materials and details in stunning landscape settings. In so doing, architects have built some of their most exquisite and compelling work.

Purpose
This studio will emphasize design integration in the context of an explicit intention to craft evocative, aesthetically meaningful buildings. Students will be asked to make buildings of strong character with an identity that derives primarily from the materials and systems of construction they employ. The goal will be to make beautiful space, light, and architectural form using expressive systems of structure, construction, and high-performance enclosures and kinetic devices. This studio will be an opportunity to make comprehensive designs in preparation for the terminal studio level and should be considered an advanced vertical studio drawing on students’ substantive preparation in systems of construction, structure and ECS, or their willingness to develop competence in those technical issues quickly.

Project
The project will draw on the rich typology of cabins, retreat houses, and second homes; Individual sites will be selected by students in keeping with their vision of place and purpose. Buildings must engage the landform and demonstrate an ethos of appropriate technology and environmental responsibility. The principal building material will be wood, with careful use of concrete, steel, glass, rammed earth or others, at the designer’s discretion.

Process
Working through the elements of an essential and distilled cabin program, from small to large, a construction vocabulary will be developed for the cabin as a whole. The full range of media for design development will be required: sketches and topographic models to explore the site; digital and physical models to test the relationship between space and structure and to develop kinetic building elements; freehand and measured drawings for generative details in the systems of structure, construction, and enclosure.

Program and Site Selection
Students will be developing individual programs and selecting their own sites for their projects. In the weeks prior to the start of summer term, students should be developing an explicit vision of their cabins to use as the basis of the rapid definition of the program in the first days of studio. Given the shortened duration of summer term, students are also expected to come to the first class with alternatives for the site, or better, a site selected. Once we know who will be in the studio, we will hold a Zoom meeting to discuss both.