

Surface | Thickness

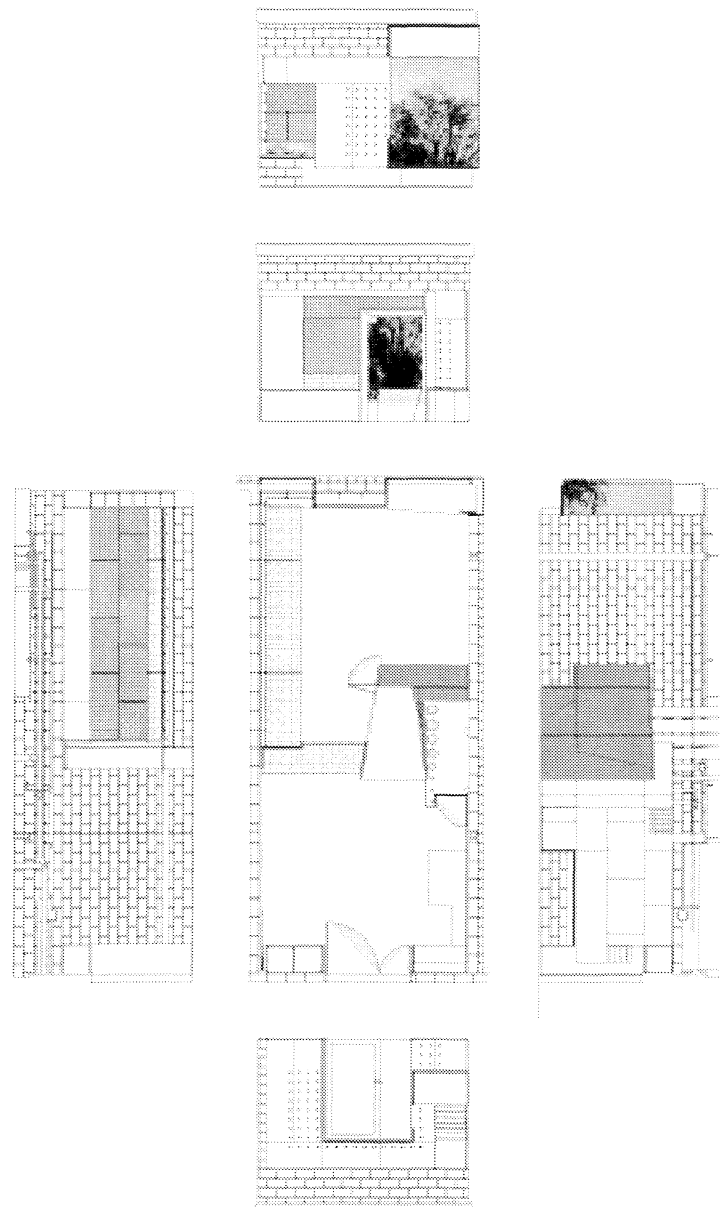
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The Building-Design Workshop at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning pursues the integration of teaching, design research, and the design build process. The program brings University sponsored projects into teaching contexts, offering a unique forum for testing pedagogies about making. The project shown here is a renovation of the College's Faculty Resource Room, a support facility for the research and teaching of the Architecture and Planning faculty. (fig. 1)

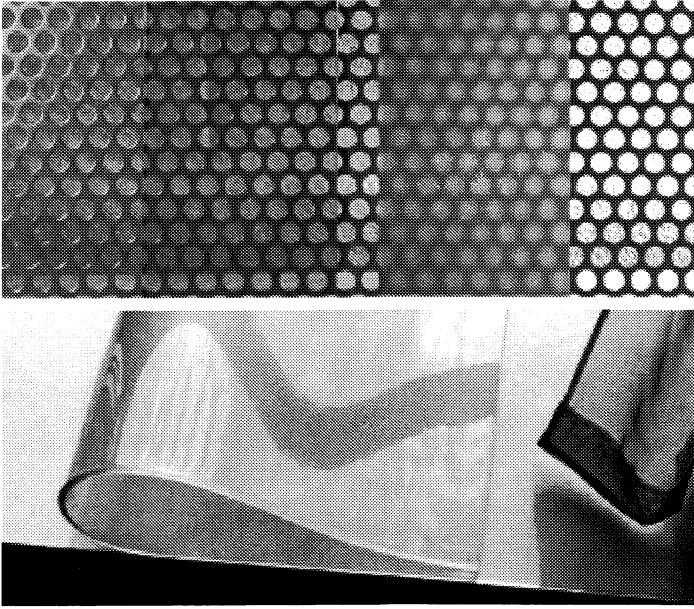
Capitalizing on the potential of the design-build process to amplify the dialogue between the design's conceptual terms and its materials and methods of construction, we focused on the visual and tactile qualities of materials and explored how they might be fabricated to gain desired effects (fig. 2, 3). Because we were ostensibly working with something as simple as a wall panel, we asked the students to test how the 'liner' might be made to reveal something about its materiality, use, or perhaps visual complexity. Together, we built mock-ups to test constructional capabilities and gauge visual results. In these investigations, the notion of thickness was likened to constructional methods that could resist the typical thinness of contemporary building products. We also used the material and constructional explorations to question the inherent thinness and planarity that the insertion of a lining nominally implies (fig. 4,5).

Very few working drawings were employed. Instead, implications of detailing and construction emerged through the making of prototypes, with material mockups and test pieces acting as visual specifications. Throughout this phase, the design-build process acted as a pedagogic tool to encourage the students to integrate construction technologies and materials into their thinking, and to bring full-scale fabrication into the design at an early stage.

The liner evolved into a series of separate but intertwining pieces that formed a snaking figure. We worked to maintain the visual continuity of this figure by alternating readings of edge, surface and volume. Materially, the liner became a variety of surfaces that both formed and suggested separate spaces, becoming storage, desk surface, window seating, lighting, photography backdrop, wall and floor covering, door frame, and room divider. This re-conceptualization allowed us to expand our ideas of spatial thickness to the notion of multiple levels of 'interior.' We thought that



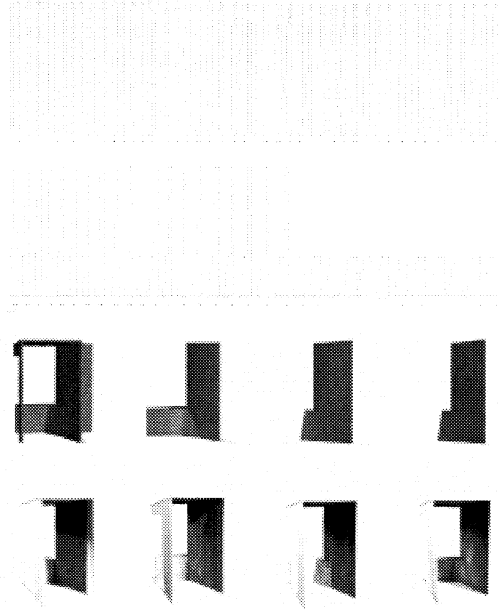
1. Unfolded plan of room



2. Desktop mousepad material studies

3. Top layer of rubber bench after casting

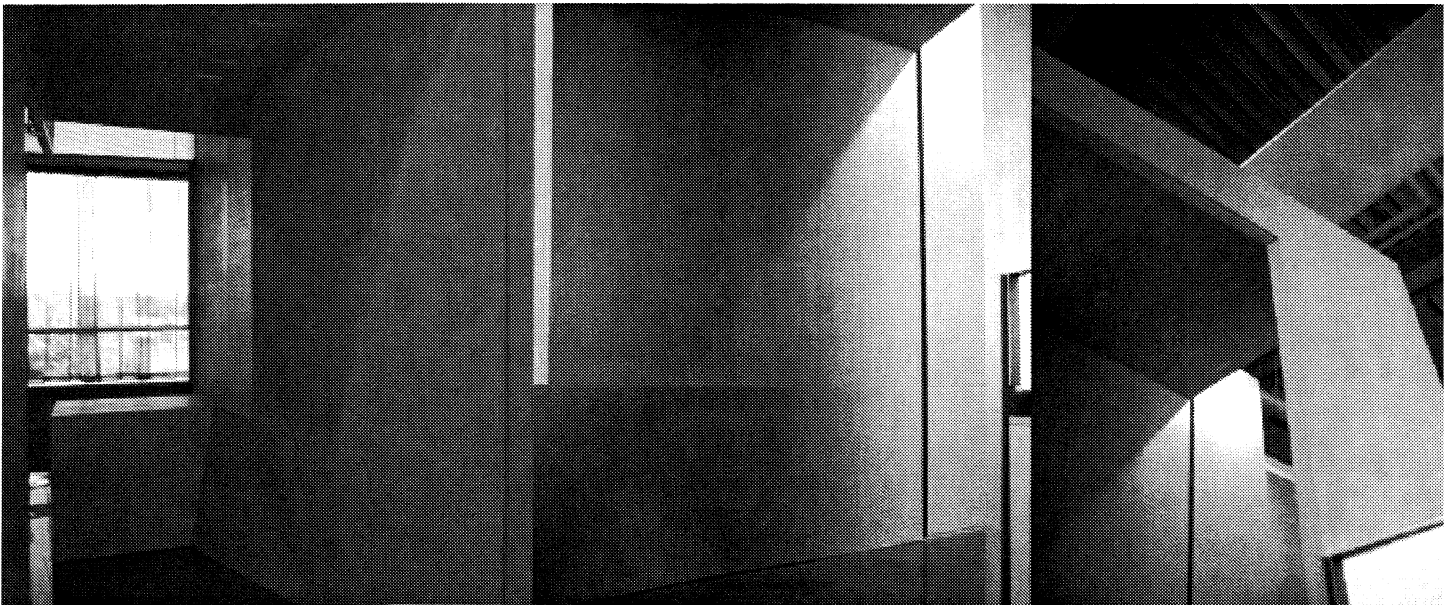
certain constructed elements — such as the funnel, doorframe, and window seat — could be seen both as isolated moments inserted into the room and as parts of the liner. Using the visual agenda of the project to call out these and other predominant areas, we sought out materials that could both give visual depth and be responsive to particular programmatic needs. Here, we explored the sensuous possibilities of less conventional products such as cast rubber, liquid applied epoxy flooring, and sheet vinyl. Again, each material was tested to see how it could be transformed from its normative status through fabrication or use.



4. Above: Plots of funnel pieces in order of lamination: Below: Studies of funnel

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Assistants: John Comazzi and Anselmo Canfora



5. View of funnel