

When I started teaching a mass timber seminar at Rice Architecture in 2015, the technology was beginning to appear in the US. After being developed in Europe and Canada, it was unclear how it might be assimilated in a country with an idiosyncratic culture of building with wood.

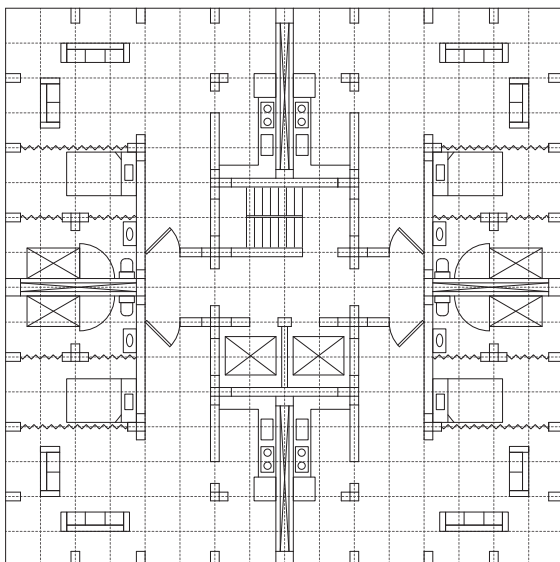
Despite the euphoria among architects, early discussions focused on technical issues and ignored the method's constructive and aesthetic potentials. This was not surprising, as new construction technologies often take time to be absorbed culturally. Tall Timber explored this gap between the invention of a material and its normalization.

Since 2015, global conversations about mass timber have shifted: from utopian dreams to the minutiae of building codes and from speculations on a new generosity of massiveness to the pragmatics of market infiltration and vertical integration. In each iteration of the seminar, we tried to locate the most pressing topics and produce a critical point of view unburdened by economic interest.

One assumption for this course was that architecture, in its embodiment as construction, plays a major role in material culture. Another was that a focus on aspects like form or program disregards the potential for materials to define a project's discourse. Construction materials are not a stable repository of disciplinary and technical traditions. We should not take them as a given; instead, we should approach them in a subversive and progressive manner. Materials can produce new knowledge and new architecture.



Fall 2016: Tower—Michael Houy, Tiffany Xu, Wenqi Chen.



Fall 2017: Tower—Erin Chen, Carlos Eric Iñigo,
Grey Peterson, Ling Sha.



Fall 2018: Pavilion—Yumeng An, Brendan Carr,
Cohen Hudson, Rui Qui.



Fall 2019: Church—Andrew Bertics, Kati Gullick,
Michael Hernandez, Mai Okimoto, Emma Scott.



Fall 2020: Pavilion—Pouya Khadem, Lene-Mari Sollie.