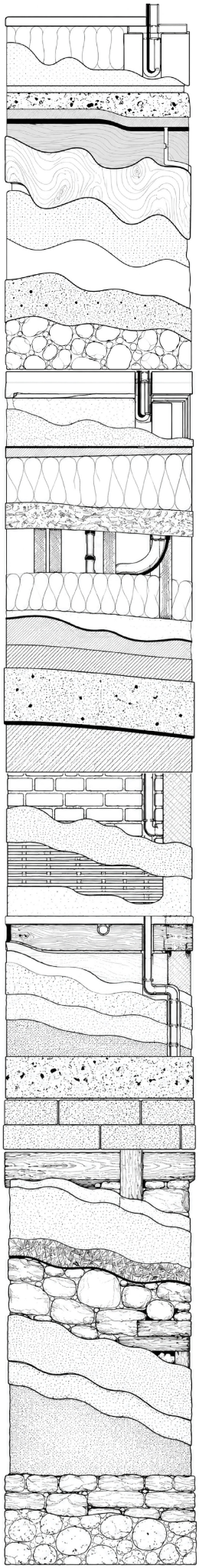
ARCH 490:
DESIGNING *BEYOND* THE NUCLEAR FAMILY



Why do houses look the way they do?

How did cooking become separated from collective life? Why did bathrooms move from public bathhouses into private interiors? Why did bedrooms become spaces of privacy and individual ownership? Why do walls contain plumbing, insulation, electrical systems, surveillance technologies, ownership boundaries, and decades of assumptions about what constitutes a "normal" home?

More importantly, how have these spaces organized, classified, and governed bodies over time? What forms of labor, intimacy, dependency, care, exclusion, and control have been designed into the architecture of everyday life?

The rooms of the house did not emerge naturally. They were shaped over centuries by changing technologies, material innovations, environmental systems, economic structures, public policies, cultural values, and family formations. Plumbing, electricity, insulation, ventilation, appliances, building codes, property law, media, and domestic technologies all transformed how space was organized and how daily life unfolded within it. Embedded within these systems are assumptions about labor, care, privacy, ownership, efficiency, health, and what forms of work are considered legitimate.

This course asks a deceptively simple question: How did we get here?

The modern home is often treated as a universal model for living. Yet many of its rooms, technologies, and spatial arrangements emerged alongside the rise of the nuclear family as the dominant social and economic unit. By examining the histories embedded within domestic walls, we can begin to see that other forms of living have existed in the past and that alternative futures remain possible.

Once we become conscious of how constructed this inheritance is — that it was designed and passed down — our imagination can begin to open wide.

The course is equally an investigation into how architects research, represent, and construct knowledge. We will learn to move beyond the "Pinterest case study" and instead develop deep architectural research built from archival documents, construction details, media, policy, and material systems

The semester culminates in a series of material experiments and speculative wall prototypes that test alternative futures for collective life. We will strengthen skills in graphic representation, physical model-making, material investigation, and design excellence —building a toolkit that can be applied to advanced studios, thesis work, exhibitions, publications, and professional practice.

*OPEN TO UNDERGRADUATES + GRADUATES

TUESDAY
2:00–4:50 PM

FALL 2026

PROF. ASKER