

Metropolitan Warehouse Renovation A New Design Hub for MIT



In the renovated Metropolitan Storage Warehouse building, old and new elements of the iconic structure form a symbiotic relationship.





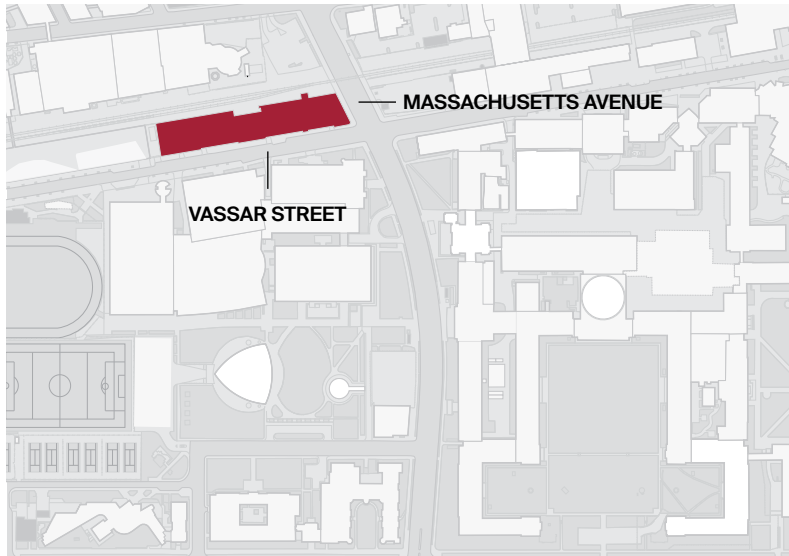
The Met Warehouse resides at the nexus of Massachusetts Avenue and Vassar Street. This image reveals the new entrance to the building.



The Future of the Met Warehouse

The Metropolitan Storage Warehouse (Met Warehouse) on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Vassar Street has long been a familiar presence to the MIT and Cambridge communities. Now, an innovative renovation project is converting this iconic building into a modern hub for interdisciplinary design research and education; a new home for the MIT School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P), uniting many elements of the school in a single place; and a location for the largest community-wide makerspace on campus, managed by Project Manus.

As our faculty and students demonstrate time and again, design is the bridge between invention and innovation, sparking bold approaches and solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges, from climate change to transportation to public health. The renovation will usher in a new era for design, architecture, urban planning, and entrepreneurship at MIT while adapting a remarkable historic structure for contemporary use.



As MIT's new design hub, the renovated Met Warehouse will bridge the east and west sides of campus.

Built in stages between 1894 and 1916, the Metropolitan Storage Warehouse building is among the most recognizable surviving landmarks of its time.

To bring the building into the modern era and create a dynamic educational and community resource—including 217,000 gross square feet for academic, research, gathering, and makerspace purposes—MIT is collaborating with the award-winning architectural firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro, in association with Leers Weinzapfel Associates.

The architects' design approach, known as "Plus Minus," augments the existing structure while addressing the distinct challenges of a building constructed for possessions rather than people.

A series of subtractions (“minus”)—the partial removal of floors, columns, and the roof and façade—will make way for a series of insertions (“plus”) to create state-of-the-art studio and research spaces. The design brings light and air deep into the heart of the structure and reveals the architectural character of the Met Warehouse in surprising and unexpected ways. Large glass façades create the opportunity for new visual relationships between the activities of the building, the campus, and the city of Cambridge.

In an extension of the spirit of MIT’s Infinite Corridor, various departments, labs, centers, and programs will be accessible from a shared spine linking the building through an open grand stairway. An ecology of stops, breaks, rests, overlooks, and niches will facilitate crucial connections between students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

The Met Warehouse will be the new home for the Department of Architecture, along with research units and studios from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, the Center for Real Estate, and the Norman B. Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism. For the first time, the life and work of the oldest architecture program in the United States will be consolidated under one roof, animating the Met Warehouse with innovative teaching, research, and public programming such as conferences, lectures, and exhibitions.

For SA+P, a major home of design at MIT, the move augments the school’s recognized strengths and unmatched collaborative capacity. It also foregrounds the importance of recycling and adaptation of the world’s critical cultural, physical, and historic structures as a central tenet of sustainable design education and practice.

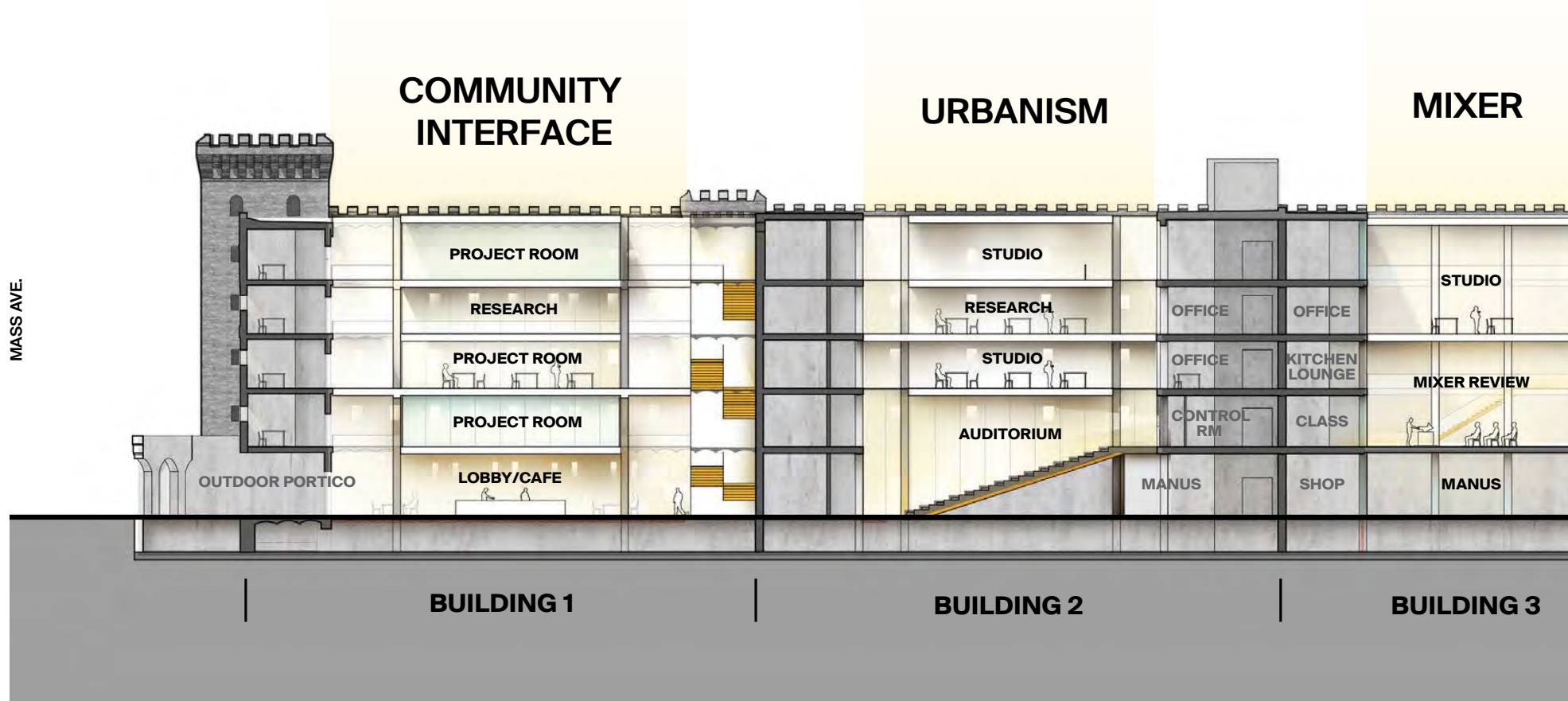
The adaptive reuse of the Met Warehouse is a striking reminder of the critical importance of design research and education. In the hands of curious and inventive minds, design-inspired innovation applied to complex problems can reveal simple, clear solutions that make a better world.

5 Buildings with a Shared Purpose

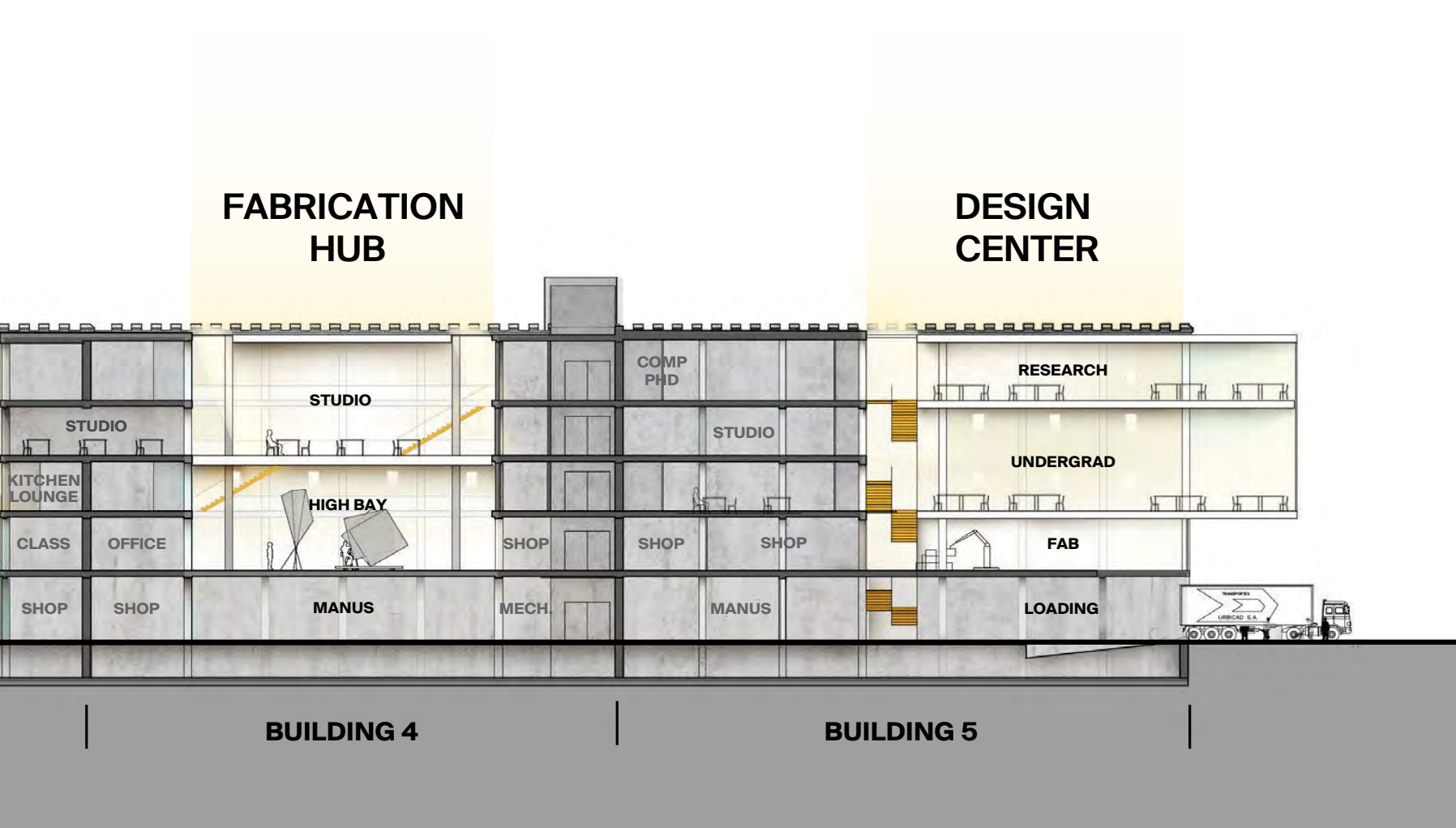
The Met Warehouse structure consists of five connected buildings, the earliest constructed closest to Massachusetts Avenue in 1894 and the fifth completed in 1911, five years before MIT's Main Group was finished.

The presence of these five buildings creates an opportunity to break down the scale of the massive Met Warehouse structure while maintaining a shared community and purpose. In the design plan, smaller neighborhoods in each building will have their own sense of identity and place within the larger whole.

The opening of the Met Warehouse in 2025 is the beginning of a process of inhabitation that will determine the structure's ultimate future. Students, faculty, and staff will occupy, transform, extend, and remake the building; it is intended to remain definitively unfinished.



Each of the Met Warehouse's five buildings will have its own identity, as seen in this cross-section looking in from the north side of the structure.



FABRICATION HUB

DESIGN CENTER

BUILDING 4

BUILDING 5

- NEW CONSTRUCTION
- ORIGINAL BUILDING



KITCHEN

PROJECT ROOM

The community-focused Building 1 houses the lobby and gallery as well as new research, project, and office spaces.

RESEARCH

STUDIO

OFFICE

STUDIO

PROJECT ROOM

OFFICE

LOBBY/CAFE

GALLERY

OUTDOOR TERRACE

1. Community

Fronting on to Massachusetts Avenue, Building 1 is the welcoming face of the Met Warehouse, connecting with and drawing in the energies of the Institute, the city, and visitors from around the world. The strong fortress-like character of the red brick façade, designed by architect Frederic Pope in 1894, is conserved while the spaces within are transformed.

A soaring, daylit lobby immerses visitors in the energy and creative breadth of the building and its inhabitants. A planned cafe, a space for browsing books, a gallery, and a project room immediately surround the lobby space, which will hum with day-to-day activities and larger public events, gatherings, and exhibitions.

Focused on community engagement, this multistory neighborhood features both new and renovated spaces. It plans to house the SA+P administration and dean's office as well as departmental programs such as the Community Innovators Lab; Senseable City Lab; City Innovation Lab; History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Art; and the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture.





The towering lobby space welcomes visitors and sets the tone for the building.



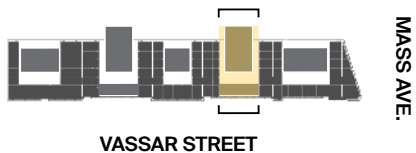
The urbanism-focused Building 2 features interconnected studio and research spaces.

2. Urbanism

Building 2 creates a neighborhood focused on urbanism in teaching, research, and engagement. Here, MIT's leading experts in urban studies and planning and their students and others will engage with such challenges as financial turmoil, population shifts, sustainability, and political disruption that are reshaping the identity of cities and nations around the world, especially in the era of Covid-19.

Directly connected to the Met Warehouse's main lobby, this building has its own entrance—a highly flexible lobby off of Vassar Street that will provide a setting for informal gatherings and community activities and a reception area for the Met Warehouse's auditorium.

Upstairs, a central tower of contemporary spaces integrated with the surrounding renovated historic structure forms a vibrant, multistory academic neighborhood, a planned satellite for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning; the Center for Real Estate design studios, classrooms, and research labs; and the Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism.



Building 2 includes planned studio space for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.



The Project Manus-run makerspace welcomes the entire MIT community.





STUDIO

REVIEW

PROJECT MANUS

The Building 3 mixer space features a double-height design space surrounded by classrooms and meeting rooms.

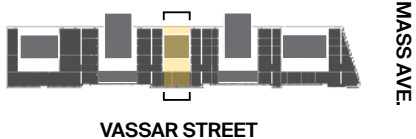
3. Mixer

The literal and figurative heart of the Met Warehouse, the Building 3 “mixer” is where teaching, research, and making intersect in a dynamic exchange of ideas. Centrally connected to all levels by the main public stair, the mixer features a double-height design review space with an all-glass wall bringing in abundant natural light. Here, students, faculty, staff, and visitors will gather for presentations and reviews, project displays, charrettes, school events, and more.

Surrounding meeting and classroom spaces support team-based teaching activities and breakouts. The mixer is flanked by a high-bay shop space for construction and assembly of large-scale student fabrications and by the auditorium.

Overlooking the mixer, a welcome lounge for the Department of Architecture is highly accessible to students. Above sits a vertical neighborhood of double-height architectural design studios and research spaces.

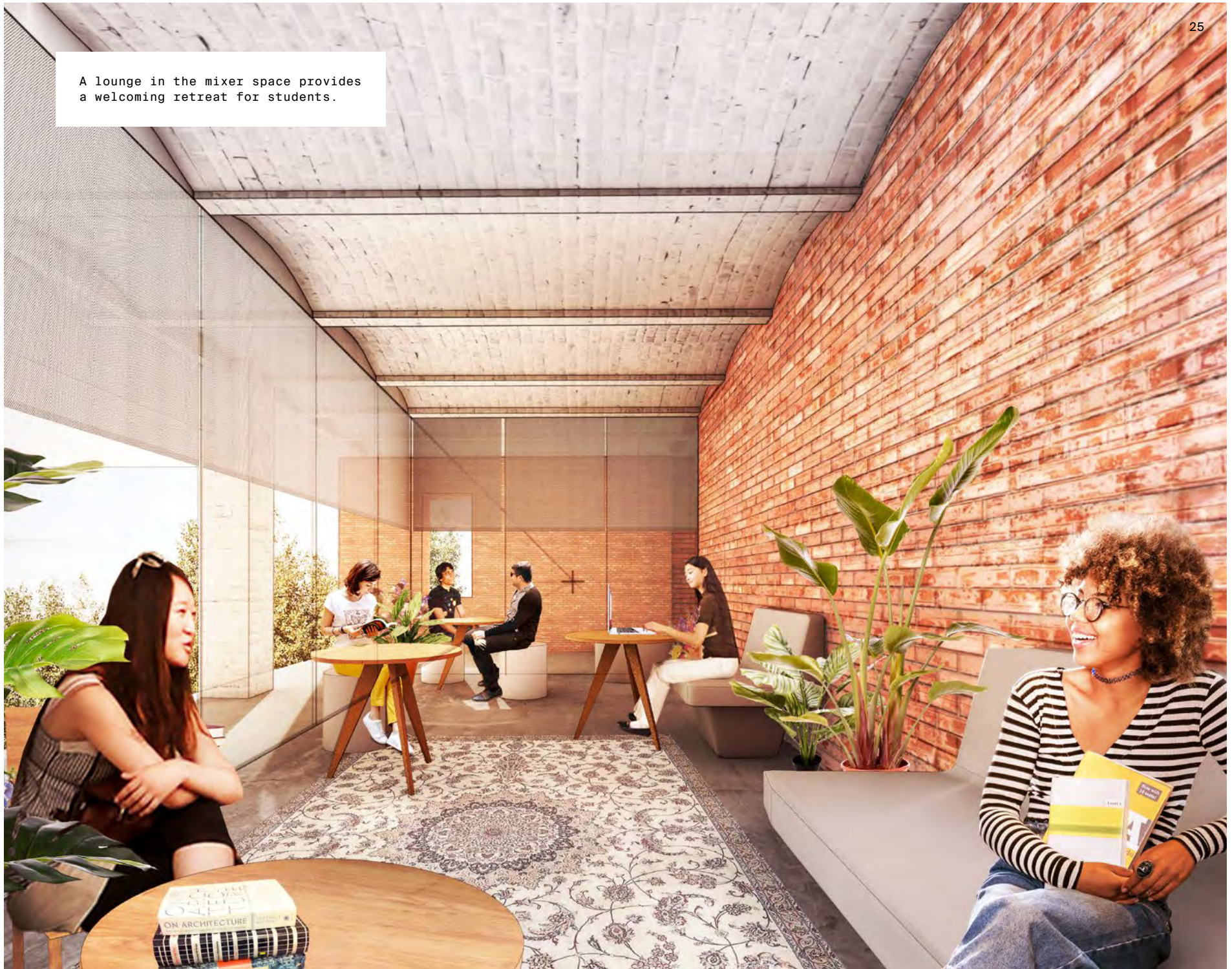
At street level, the Project Manus makerspace, the largest fabrication space of its kind on campus, is visible to the public and open to the entire MIT community.

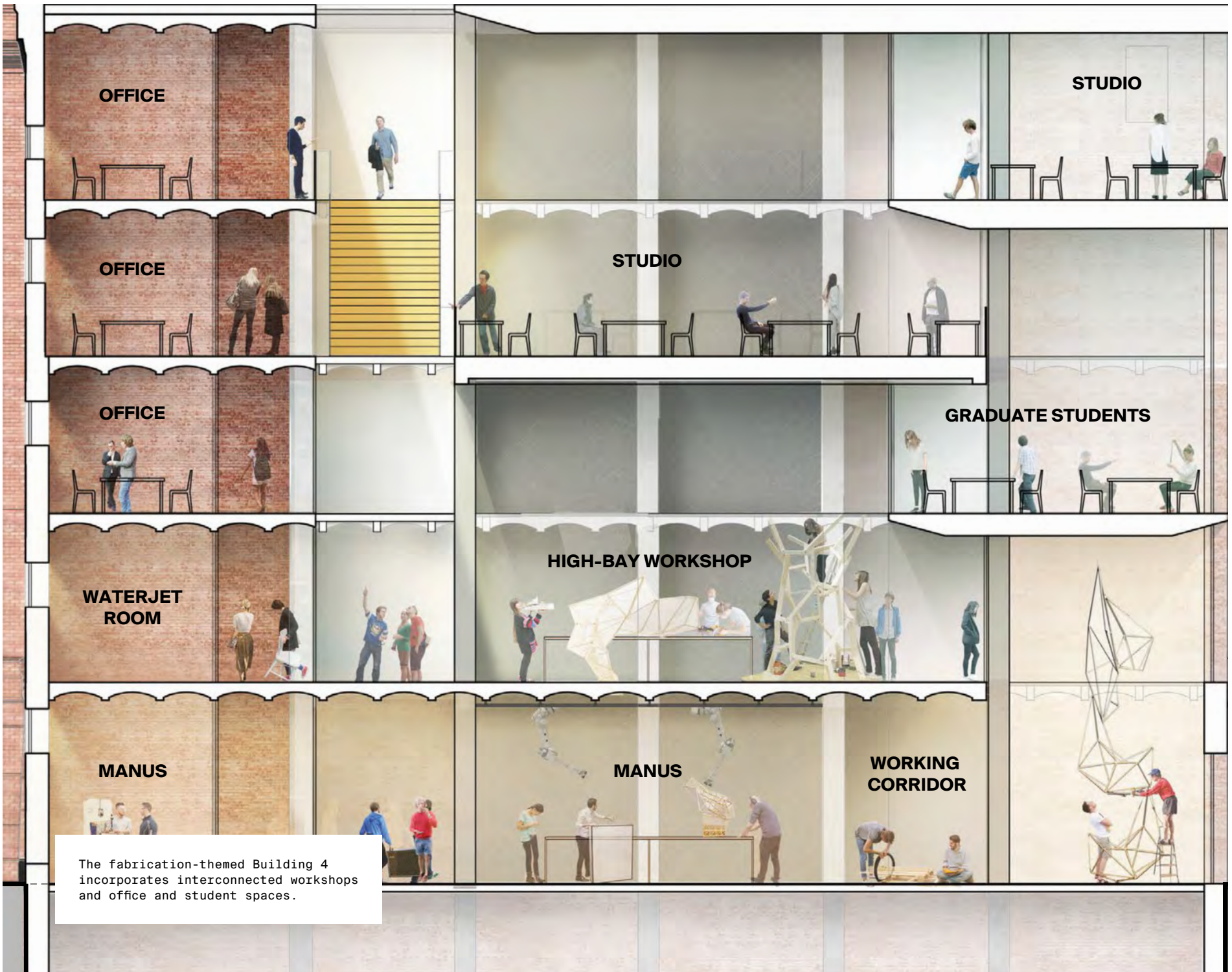


Double-height design and review space on the second floor showcases student design work.



A lounge in the mixer space provides a welcoming retreat for students.





The fabrication-themed Building 4 incorporates interconnected workshops and office and student spaces.

4. Fabrication

The spirit of making is central to MIT's residential education and critical to the Institute's innovation ecosystem, which supports the creation of practical solutions with real-world impact. Building 4 is an expression of this spirit, bringing together physical making and design teaching in a dynamic fabrication hub. At street level, windows onto Vassar Street showcase activities within the new Project Manus-run community makerspace and invite the whole MIT family in to experiment. The building's entrance feeds into a large elevator that connects the fabrication shops and studio spaces.

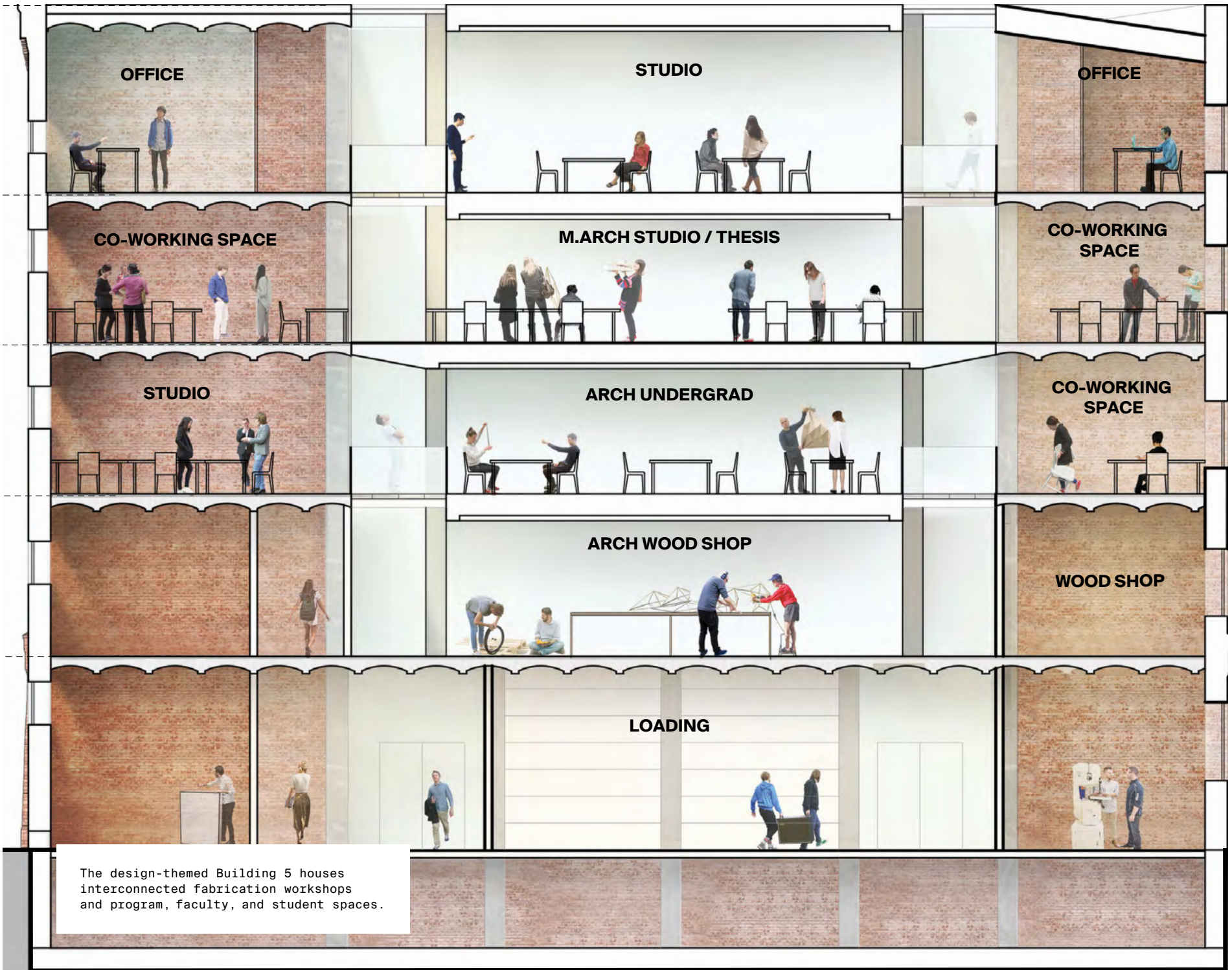
At the second level, the soaring high-bay shop space challenges student designers and inventors to build and test architectural and structural assemblies at full scale. Surrounding the high bay are planned architecture research lab spaces and a robotics lab.

At the levels above, a central tower of contemporary open-floor design studios bathed in northern daylight is surrounded by the planned headquarters of the Department of Architecture plus design faculty offices and additional research labs.



Large-scale making projects will come to life in a soaring two-story space.





The design-themed Building 5 houses interconnected fabrication workshops and program, faculty, and student spaces.

5. Design

Building 5 brings together building technology, computation, and making with studio learning to further foster and nurture MIT students' strong interest in design and its capacity for positive impact on the world.

The entrance off of Vassar Street opens a window onto fabrication activities taking place inside the Project Manus makerspace, inviting participation from the community. At the second level, planned shop spaces complement SA+P design education and research with traditional hands-on activities such as woodworking and casting as well as modern rapid prototyping and waterjet cutting.

Above, a dramatic tower of column-free double-height studio spaces serves students in the undergraduate design major and minor and master's teaching programs. These studios include planned space for SA+P's entrepreneurial incubator MITdesignX and facilities for two Department of Architecture discipline groups, Building Technology and Computation. A special project room will foster connections with the MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing.



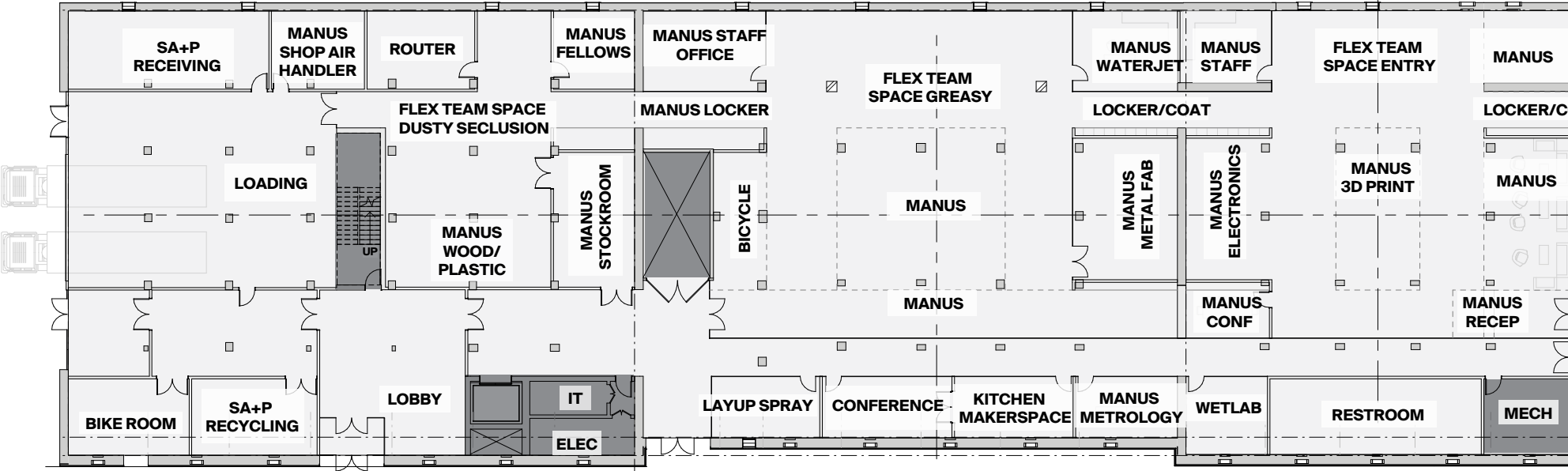
Open-floor design studios are contemporary and brightly lit.

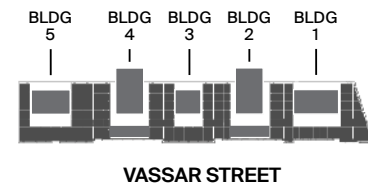
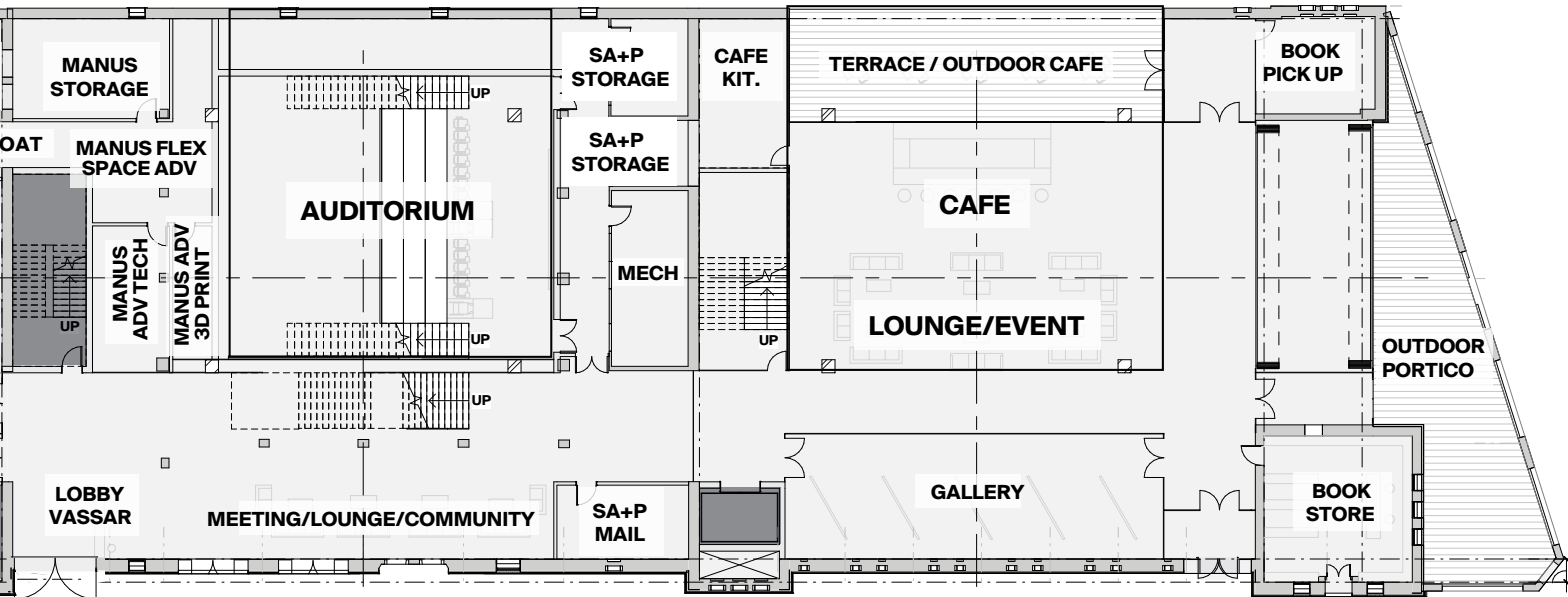


The exterior of Building 5 showcases the Met Warehouse's signature glass façades, which will both admit light and be welcoming to the community.

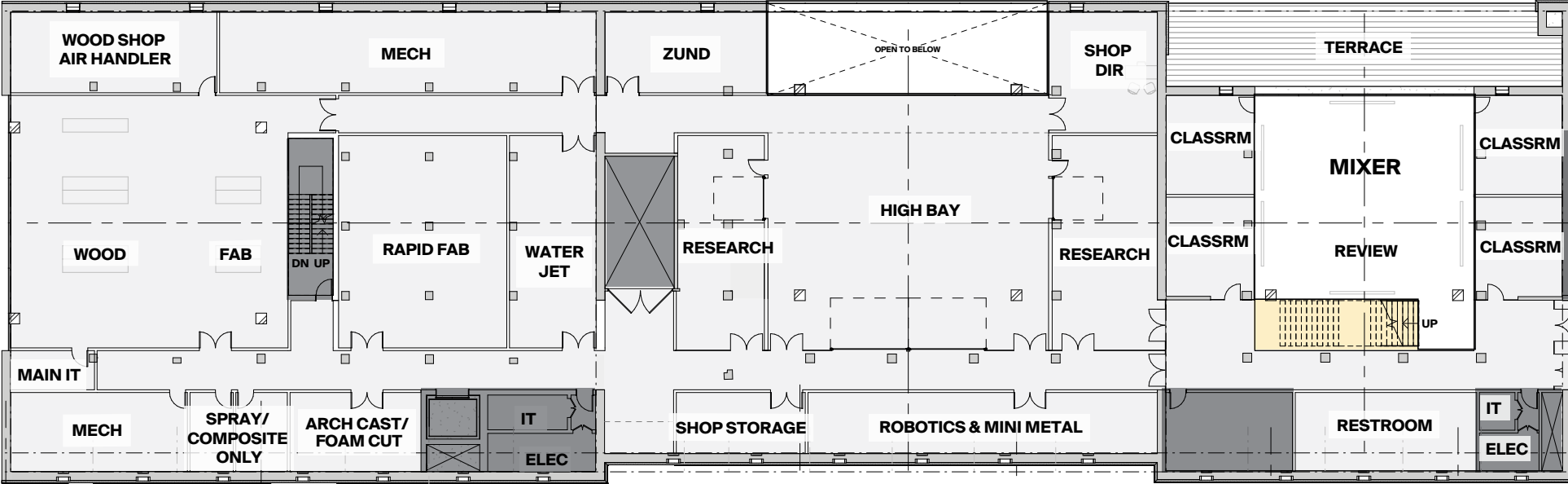


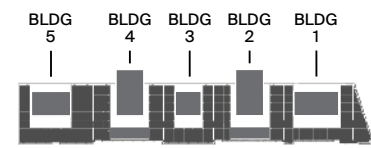
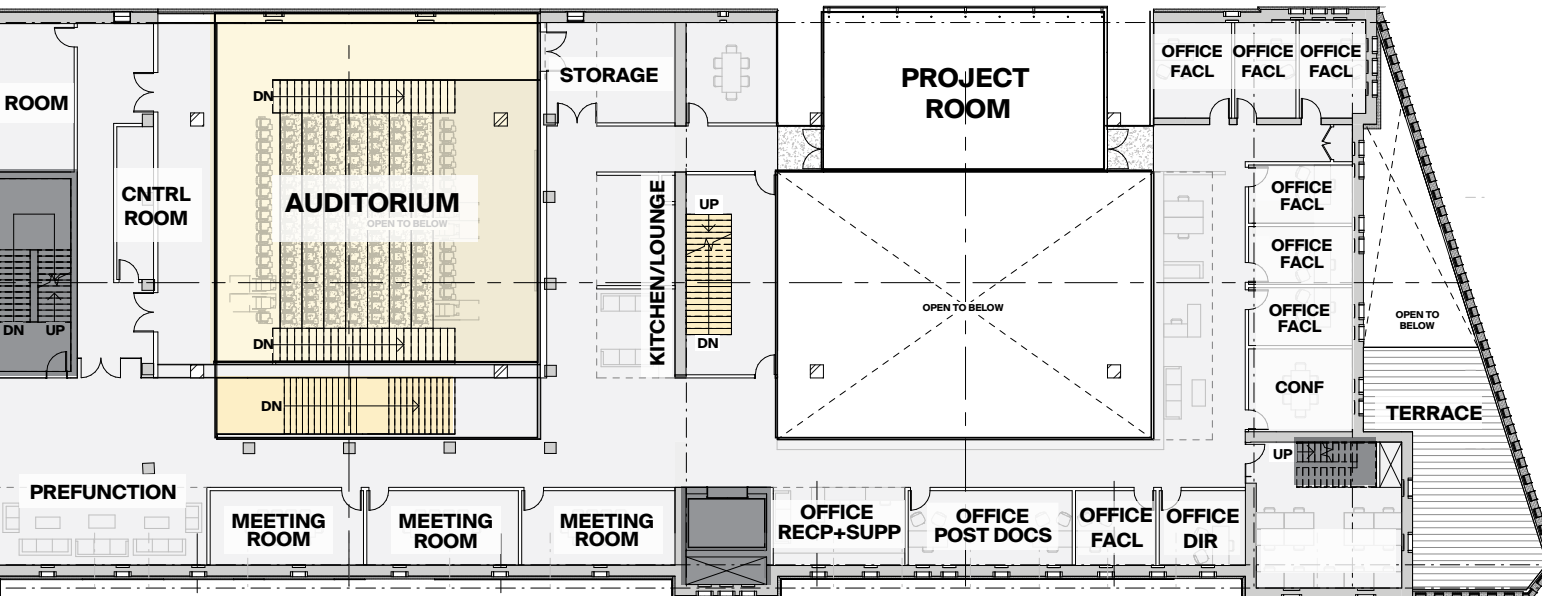
Ground Floor





Second Floor

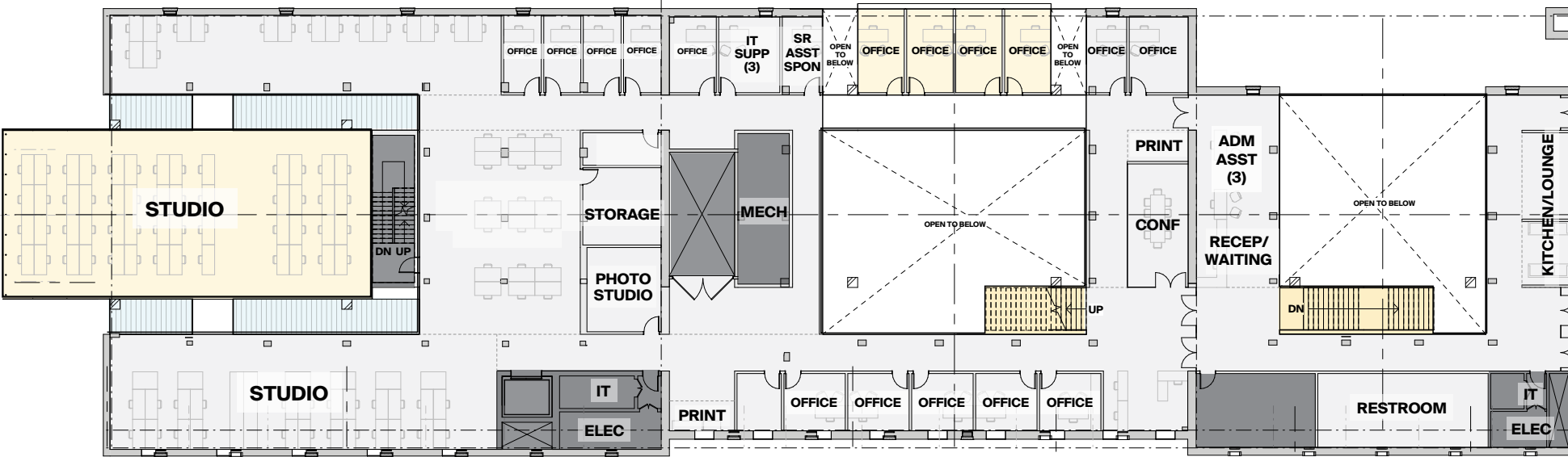


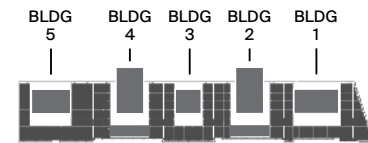
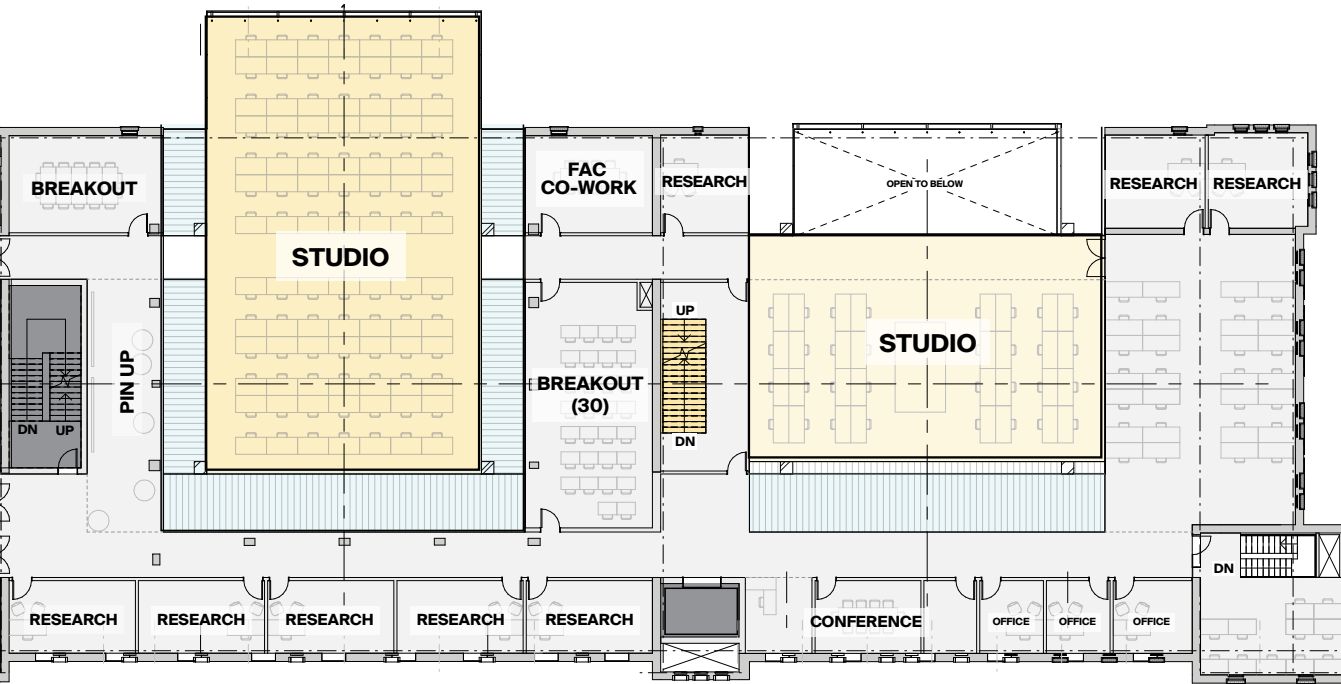


VASSAR STREET

MASS AVE.

Third Floor

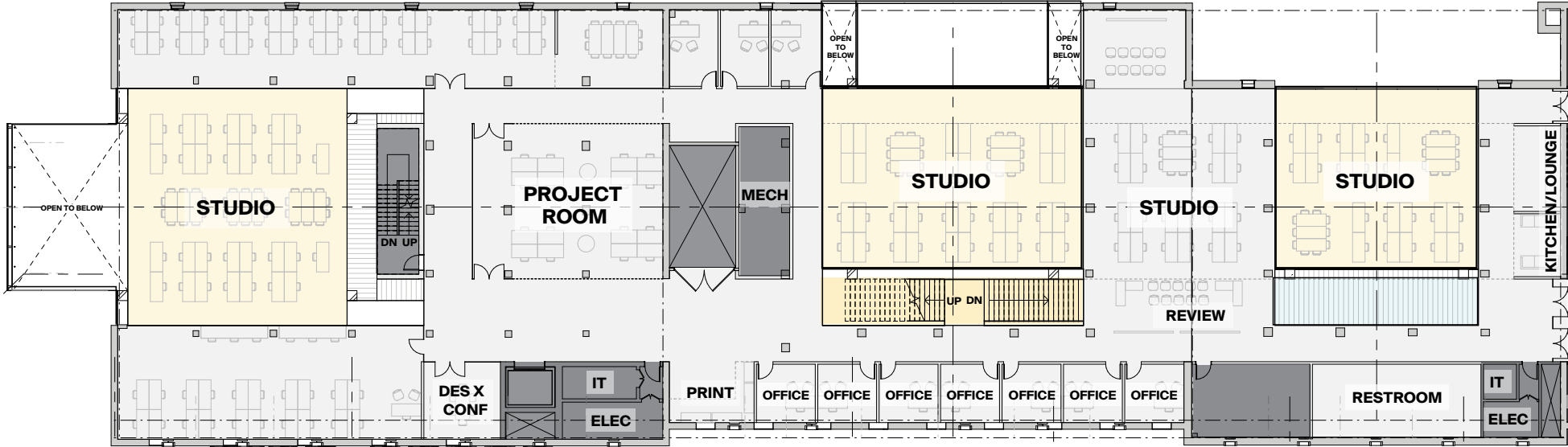


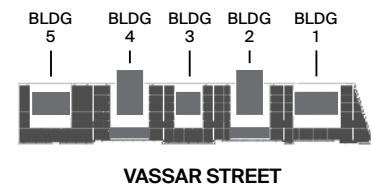
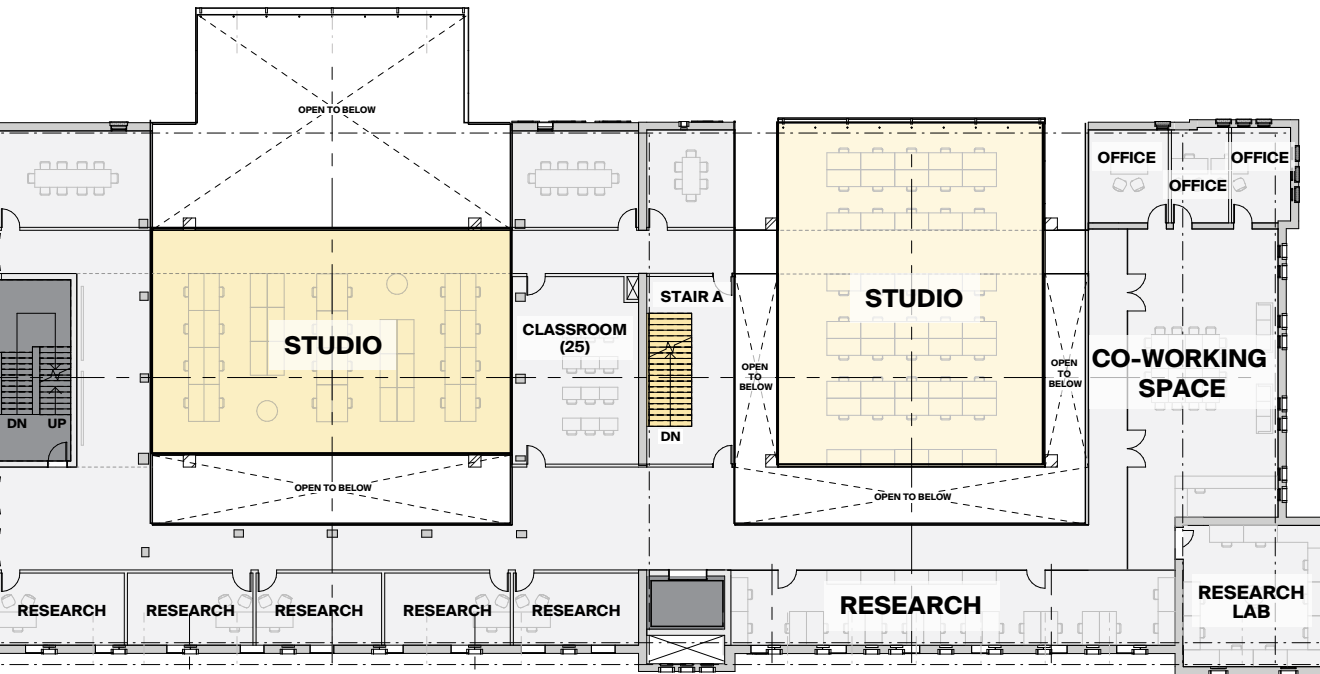


VASSAR STREET

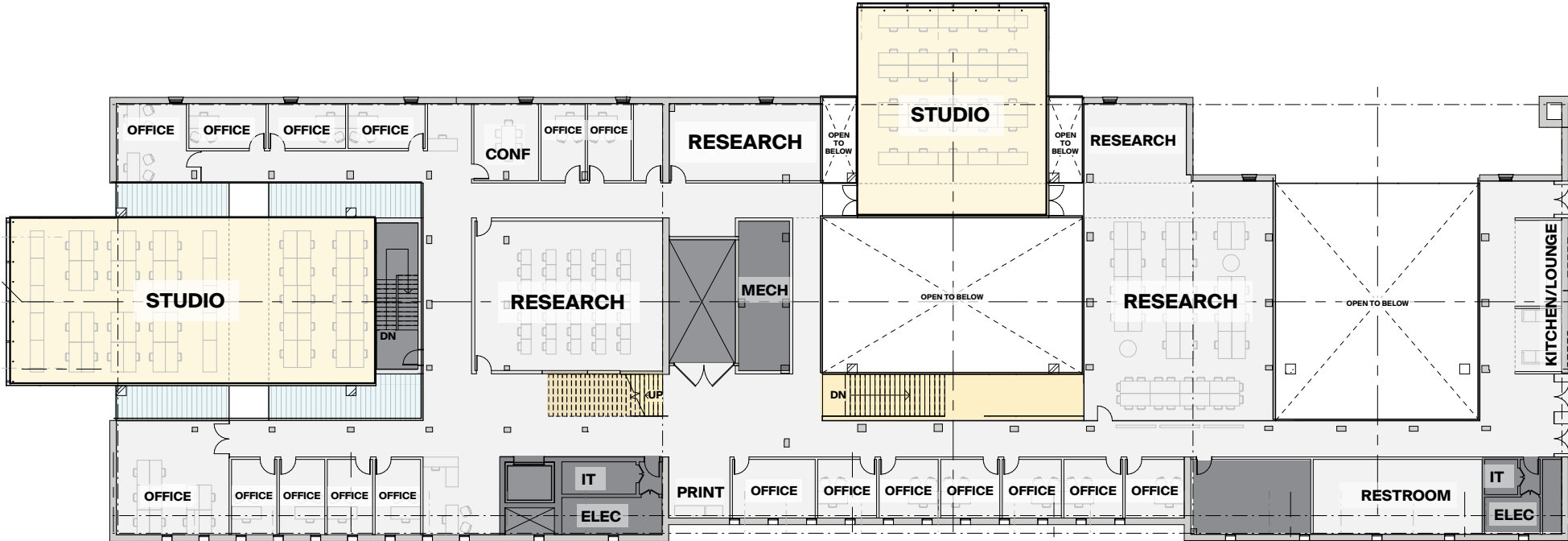
MASS AVE.

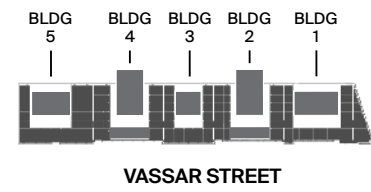
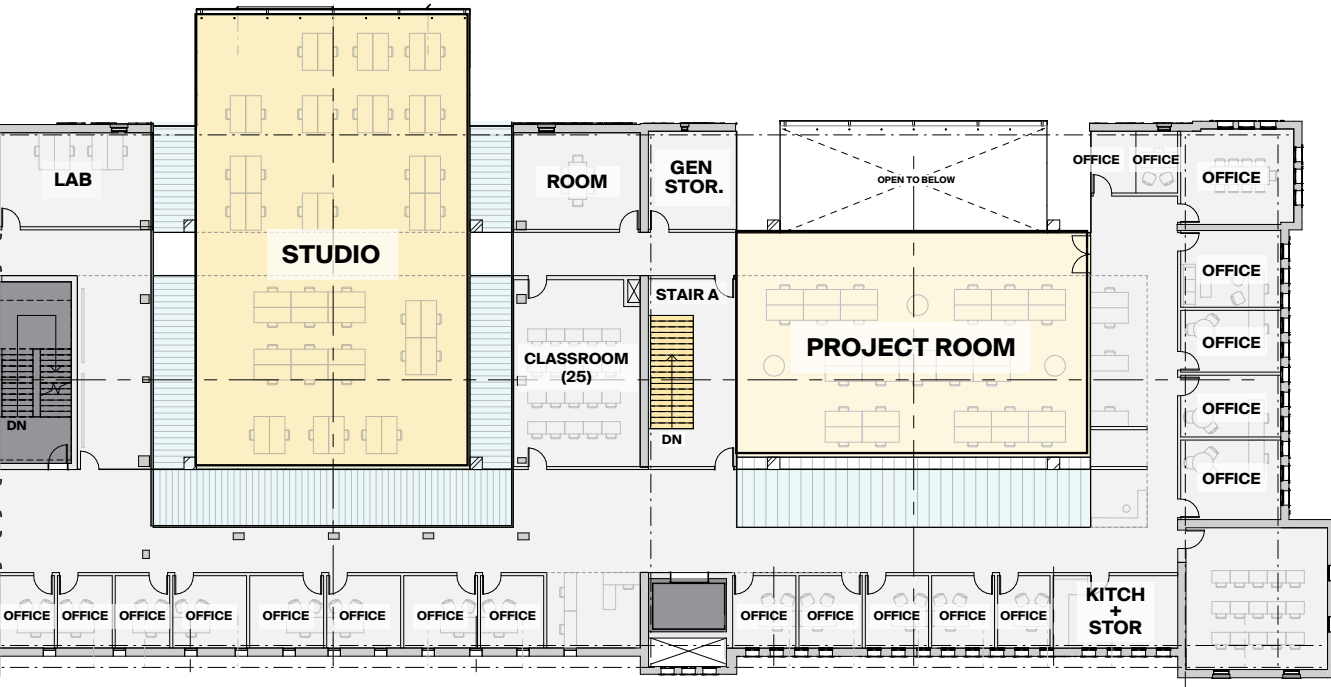
Fourth Floor





Fifth Floor







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