

TEN YEARS AGO JEROME ABEL SEGUIN VENTURED TO THE ARCHIPELAGOS EAST OF BALI, AND, WHEN HE CAME ACROSS THE ISLAND HOUSE HE HAS SINCE BUILT IS A SERENE BACKDROP FOR THE WOODEN FURNITURE HE SCULPTS, PART OF HIS PERSONAL

Trunk Call



AGE AT A MOUNTAIN'S FOOT WHERE MEN SWEATED AWAY MAKING DUGOUT CANOES, HE KNEW HE WAS DESTINED TO STAY.
LE AGAINST 'THE DREARIFYING OF THE PLANET.' TEXT: CATHERINE DE CHABANEIX. PHOTOGRAPHY: GILLES DE CHABANEIX



Monolithic blocks of wood in various stages of refinement are stored under the eaves of Jérôme's island house





Jérôme's benches and sculptural pieces mix seamlessly with traditional chairs and a pirogue, or dugout boat, on the veranda



A house like a great barn, freshwater wells, the beginnings of a vegetable garden and a studio, all facing a coral sea with a shore lined with coconut trees. Such are the surroundings of furniture designer Jérôme Abel Seguin on Sumbawa, east of Bali.

As minimal as the work of its owner, Seguin's house seems to unite all the conditions for an ideal existence. Its story began ten years ago when he was designing for companies such as Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Christian Dior, Lanvin and Air France. The airline gave him a chance to travel to Indonesia to source objects for the company's displays. Trekking around the archipelagos with his Indonesian friend Putu Aryasa, he came upon a village at the foot of Mount Tambora, on Sumbawa, where men sweated their days away cheerfully making pirogues, or dugout canoes.

Watching them, memories of the books that had enchanted him as a child came flooding back. He made a sudden decision – and there and then resolved to concentrate his energy on making past dreams of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island* come true, and to make this part of the world the focus of his life and his work.

As he began to travel to Indonesia more frequently, his work took on a different complexion. In his Paris studio he amassed a collection of pirogues and miscellaneous chunks of wood. In 1991 he created his *Wooden Wall*, which was purchased by the *Fonds National Contemporain* in Paris. But eventually his instinct for adventure impelled him to move back to the Indonesian islands, and he rented a house and a studio on Lombok.

He continued to buy old furniture from Javanese merchants, as well as ironwood and pirogues, and jungle creepers from the Sumbawa forest people. At the same time he assembled a team of Indonesian craftsmen – Jos, Amat, Made, Iman and Anan – with whom he created one-off mural compositions and pieces of furniture.

In his use of solid wood blocks, many of them solid teak (felled 20 years ago), Seguin gives expression to his sense of luxury and rarity: 'I want to contribute to the battle against ordinariness and the drearifying of the planet.' The chaise longue, the benches, the console table, the day bed and the minimalist table are all made from single chunks of timber. His work is always made using local techniques and tools, right down to the final polishing stage – a process which requires the patience of Job.

Soon Seguin's vague desire to build his own house became a practical necessity and at Sumbawa he found the site of his dreams. A forest path led him to a valley, and eventually to an inlet fringed with coconut trees. By pure chance, the place was not too far from the road, and hence it offered easy access for building materials.

Seguin sketched out a design for a modern, practical house, like a cabin in spirit, opening on to the sea. Above all he was keen that it shouldn't be a touristy, *faux*-Balinese house. He took his sketch to a Paris architect friend, and completed the resultant plans with an Indonesian team which adapted them to local building techniques.

Seguin's building materials were simple: wood, bricks and cement. The only concession to the Balinese style was the use of the *alang-alang* above the tree-trunk roof beams. Running at right angles to the beams – which look like upended ship's timbers – are lengths of bamboo, to which the fibrous *alang-alang* is lashed. On the roof outside it is left loose rather like thatch.

The living room was conceived by Seguin as a kind of art gallery, where his work could be displayed. The cool off-white walls, made of a blend of grey and white cement, perfectly offset the wood – especially

This page, top: Jérôme Abel Seguin in his workshop. Much of his furniture is made from a huge stock of 20-year-old teak. Left: a solid teak seat by Jérôme. Right: members of Jérôme's team of local craftsmen at work outside the house

