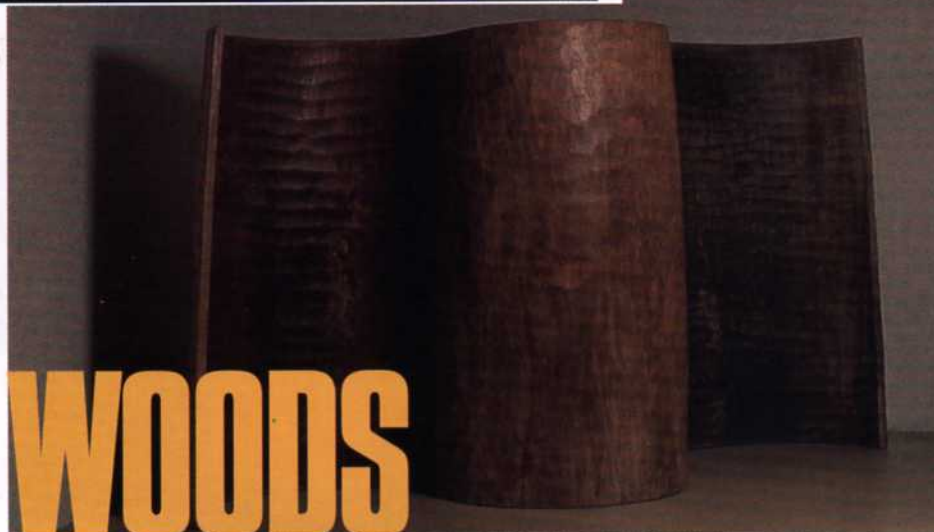


TRUNK CALLING: wood you credit it? Clockwise from far left, Jérôme Abel Seguin in his Paris store. Table. Screen. Benches. Each piece is a one-off which can take months to create



OUT OF THE WOODS

There's nothing nasty in Jérôme Abel Seguin's woodshed. His massive carvings are streamlined, elegant and very modern indeed, writes **Suzanne Trocmé**

On entering Jérôme Abel Seguin's shop, squeezed in between name fashion boutiques on one of Paris's key shopping streets, my first thought is one of glee as I discover he doesn't actually sell clothes but gargantuan *objets*. My second is of something the American naturalist and philosopher Henry David Thoreau once wrote: 'I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.'

Screens, tables, chairs and columns confront you – all of monumental proportion, organic in every sense, in look and tradition, and all hand-carved from single pieces of hardwood from the Indonesian archipelago. They were created by Seguin and crafted by his fifteen-strong team on Sumbawa, an unspoilt island just two down from Bali, using a small metal tool known locally as a *binggu*. One piece in the shop – a curved, solid wood form – is large enough for an adult male to hide in.

Seguin is pure French, originally from Bordeaux until studies in sculpture brought him to the Paris Ecole Boulle. His background in the *beaux-arts* coupled with his instinctive visual talent encouraged a spell as a designer for companies such as Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Christian Dior and Lanvin, before a contract with an Air France subsidiary gave him the chance to travel the globe to source objects for the company's displays. Arriving at the foot of Mount Tambora on Sumbawa (now his adopted home when he's not in Paris), he discovered men making *pirogues*, or dug-out canoes, and had a vision. 'It was a moment of very profound emotion,' he says. Back in his Paris studio, he amassed various enormous chunks of wood and soon created his 'Wooden Wall', which was bought by the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain in Paris.

'I am fascinated by pulling up wood, sometimes out of the water or sand, and giving it importance,' he explains. 'My principal obsession is to use just one piece of wood – to work within that confinement.' A



good craftsman with a keen eye, he has a second obsession: to end up with a wholly modern end result. 'It must also always be very simple, but expressing luxury.' Seguin's streamlined pieces take the team months to complete, and are always one-offs since the inspiration comes only from the piece of wood at hand and the artist's expression and interpretation of it.

Seguin has his passions – Isamu Noguchi remains an inspiration. He also has his fans. Fashion designer Junko Koshino is a favourite client. The Japanese, in general, love his work, but their apartments are often too small to house his pieces.

Seguin is currently producing entire walls, floors and columns for his next exhibition, an ambitious project involving the construction of a temple. He will have to exhibit in the States or London since Paris, he says, doesn't have an interior space large enough to house it.

It is difficult not to feel dwarfed and overpowered by the scale of some of the pieces and by the uncompromising Monsieur Seguin. As I test the comfort factor of his chairs and tables, he reminds me that all the materials are completely solid: nothing is hollow or veneered. 'So what about the stainless-steel legs?' I ask gingerly. 'Solid too. What else?' comes the reply. Was it Voyagey who said: 'To be simple is the end, not the beginning, of design'? ✨

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