



Jérôme Abel Seguin lives the escapist's dream. The artist and furniture maker swapped his flat in Paris for an island home on Sumbawa in Indonesia. He did not want merely to imitate the local architecture, but to absorb the surroundings into his life and work, making the structure simple, 'as much like a barn or hut as possible'.



Above: Jérôme Abel Seguin at work in his home in Indonesia, which he built mindful of traditional building techniques, but focused on open space. Opposite: the open roof structure and tall white walls form an airy setting for Seguin's monumental wood pieces.

Describing the allure of island life, Jérôme Abel Seguin invokes Robinson Crusoe and the characters of Robert Louis Stevenson, childhood heroes whose adventures greatly influenced him. Yet, looking at his pared-down approach to island living, one is reminded of another literary escapist, Henry David Thoreau. 'I went to the woods so that I could live deliberately,' was Thoreau's great declaration against the burgeoning machine age, and his exhortation to 'simplify, simplify' is something with which Seguin probably sympathizes.

His materials, pre-shaped and otherwise, seem to Seguin to possess a life and spirit of their own that will speak to him as long as he has the patience to wait. Sometimes he will keep a piece of wood for two to three years before he thinks 'yes, this is the right idea'. Then with his team of native workmen – 'who have no habits and can sometimes have a more creative approach' – he sets about the painstaking task of hand carving and fine polishing.

This dedication to an end result of luxury is inspired by 'noble materials, space, time, freedom, realizing exceptional things in very rare materials.'

It was while studying at the Ecole Boulle and the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris that Seguin discovered his affinity for primitive art. In Indonesia, while searching out primitive art, Seguin's fascination with wood and nature began to seriously take hold and he became captivated, at least in spirit, by the island existence and, he says, by the idea of Paradise.

Seguin brought some large pieces of wood back to Paris and started working alone there, but then decided to move to Indonesia to be close to natural sources and local workers. On seeing the islands off Indonesia, he muses, 'I started to dream because it reminded me of my childhood', which he spent 'on the beach and in the forest,' around Cap Ferrat in France.

Jérôme Abel Seguin













Seguin uses his house 'to check pieces', keeping them around so he can decide 'if they are right'. Left: a large hollow tree trunk has been finely polished on the outside but left raw on the inside as a reminder of its natural state. The stairs and table are also polished wood.

Below: some of the large wooden mortars which are widely used in the area for grinding and which Seguin has reclaimed.

Seguin found the ideal location on the island of Sumbawa, where he built his modern house using traditional materials, and he has never looked

His understanding of the material is intimate: in opposition with the vines, which are in fact like bones, and represent death and eternity, a section of teak is like flesh which represents sensuality and living time.' For him a tree resembles the human body – roots, trunk and branches symbolizing bones, body and appendages – and the 'memory of time' found in the layers of rings.

Finished pieces in polished, bleached or rough forms articulate and set off the otherwise clean white spaces of a house designed to be open to elements. His work and living areas are somewhat separated, but always the mood of creation pervades, creation that is not aided by shutting the outside world, but by heartily inviting it to result in an inspired simplicity that many self-proclaimed escapist would admire.











The house has few exterior walls. Only grass shades enclose the space at night. Left: rough and smooth: the luxurious finish of the table and benches is highlighted by an unfinished piece of wood which Seguin has mounted as a sculpture. Posts are also made from unfinished wood and the light fixtures were created from woven bamboo fish traps.

Below: 'This piece is like part of a human trunk', Seguin comments of the large hollow trunk for which he has yet to find a direction or use.

