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OLD SCHOOL

Patrick Seguin, champion of Modernist furniture, opens his new London gallery with a few choice trophies. Linda O'Keeffe pays the heavyweight dealer a visit.

Patrick Seguin's Paris gallery is spacious, airy and beautifully sober. A former warehouse in the Bastille, its 33-foot high ceiling and rows of skylights were re-conceived by Jean Nouvel to complement furniture created by an edited coterie of mid-20th century French modernists. It's where poetically blunt chairs, tables and chaises designed by Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret mingle with Jean Royère's stylized cabinets and shapely sofas.

By comparison, a satellite London gallery Seguin is about to inaugurate on October 11 in Mayfair is bijou-sized, but the scale of his opening exhibition defies that fact. The exhibition will feature two important architectural works by Prouvé: *Temporary School of Villejuif* (1956) and an adaptation of the 6x6 *Demountable House* (1944) by Richard Rogers and his London-based architectural firm, Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners. The house was installed at this year's Design Miami/Basel and will dominate more than half the space in the gallery. *Temporary School of Villejuif* also made an appearance earlier this year in Manhattan's Gagosian Gallery, where it hovered above several of John Chamberlain's metal assemblages.

Seguin's audience expectations for his new venture are similarly grand. "London is much bigger than Paris and it has an extremely dynamic art scene with a large collector base," he says before quoting Artprice's latest statistics where British sales currently corner 75 percent of the European

market. Since his early days as a dealer in the late 1980s, Seguin has used the words "art" and "Modernist furniture" interchangeably. His intuition always told him to display any work he planned to sell in a minimalistic setting where it could be appreciated as pure, sculptural form. "The strong link between contemporary art and design seems to be truer than ever," says Seguin. "One may consider these two fields quite porous nowadays."

Ironically, back when Seguin first encountered Prouvé's work more than 25 years ago, it was anything but fashionable or sought after. In fact, he had a hard time selling his first two finds—a *Standard* school chair from the early 1930s and a *Compass* chair from the 1950s—for a reasonable price. Today, Prouvé is decidedly blue chip and highly coveted in good part because Seguin's determination to unearth and restore the self-trained architect's demountable buildings is relentless and unprecedented.

Seguin is a secure and well-respected advocate of French Modernism and has no future plans for his loyalty to waver. Nouvel is one of his life-long friends and collaborators; India Mahdavi has conceptualized mise-en-scènes for his booths at art fairs, but beyond that, Seguin doesn't feel qualified to comment on any aspect of today's design scene. "I follow it from afar, but I have no expertise because it's not the domain in which I am most invested," he says. "Marc Newson and Jasper Morrison's work always appealed to me, but I'm not especially involved in new creations."

Apart from size, another notable difference between the two galleries is location. The Bastille

space is slightly off the beaten track, while the London address assures Seguin of high visibility. One reason is because it's a stone's throw away from Claridge's, the grand dame hotel long favored by heads of state and Hollywood royalty. But more apropos is the district's reputation as the hub and the heart of the city's established art scene.

At home, on the ground floor of a 17th century mansion in the Marais, Seguin and his wife and business partner Laurence surround themselves with patinaed, museum quality examples of the Prouvés, Perriands, Le Corbusiers, Jeannerets and Royères they've championed for decades. After so many years, their reverence for the pieces has never diminished and never touches on pretension. Here too art plays a significant role and a Warhol, a Calder and a Basquiat have age, but there are more recent acquisitions sprinkled in: an abstract painting by Mark Grotjahn, narrative photography by Judy Linn, a conceptual construction by Liam Gillick. "The designers we represent are from the past, but their work still has a true international resonance," says Seguin. "Anyone can understand it even though it is complex and rich."

Also in October, as a continuation of Seguin's Carte Blanche series where he periodically hands his Bastille space over to independent curators, Lawrence Luhring and Roland Augustine will exhibit work from several artists they currently carry in their two New York galleries. The show opens October 23, a day after the opening of FIAC, Paris' four-day, international contemporary art fair, and runs for five weeks.

Patrick Seguin, whose London gallery opens in October with an exhibition that includes an adaptation of Jean Prouvé's 6x6 *Demountable House*, top left.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALERIE PATRICK SEGUIN

