

Wallpaper*

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*THE STUFF THAT SURROUNDS YOU

THE DESIGN ISSUE



A large, industrial-style interior space with a high ceiling featuring exposed metal trusses and corrugated metal panels. Several long, rectangular fluorescent light fixtures are mounted on the ceiling. In the foreground, a long, low-profile structure with a green metal frame and a light-colored corrugated metal roof is visible. This structure has a series of glass doors and panels, some of which are open. The floor is a smooth, light-colored concrete. In the background, there are large, closed metal roll-up doors and a metal walkway with railings.

Architecture

TOP OF THE FORM

Jean Prouvé's 1948 Croismare school, the largest demountable structure ever built by the self-taught architect, is up for sale

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Photographed here at the Galerie Patrick Seguin warehouse, the Croismare school will be at New York's TEFAF fair, along with nine other Prouvé buildings



Above, Jean Prouvé's school for glassmaking apprentices was built in 1948 in Croismare, in north east France, and closed in 1953

One highlight of this year's European Fine Art Foundation (TEFAF) fair in New York will be a jewel of post-war French architectural history: two yellow steel frames, resembling massive upside-down tuning forks, each standing 3m tall. They were fabricated in 1947-1948 as part of the Croismare Professional Training School for Glassmakers, the largest demountable structure ever built by French designer and self-taught architect Jean Prouvé. Design dealer Patrick Seguin, who has championed Prouvé's legacy since the late 1980s and owns the world's biggest collection of his architecture, is featuring Croismare along with nine other Prouvé buildings at the fair.

After the Second World War, France needed to rebuild, and quickly. Prouvé, who trained as a metal craftsman, had developed an ingenious system for making small, demountable buildings with load-bearing portal frames, for purposes ranging from military barracks to refugee housing. The nomadic quality of his buildings also reflected his embrace of environmentalism, seeking to make what he called 'architecture that leaves no trace on the landscape'.

One of Prouvé's friends was master glassmaker Paul Daum, a member of the French resistance who

died in a concentration camp in 1944. Prouvé and the Glassmakers' Union honoured Daum's wish to ensure the industry's future by building a training centre for young apprentices. Despite Croismare's impressive size (8m x 32m plus awnings), Seguin says, 'There is no difference between the construction principles of Prouvé's 6 x 6 house and this monumental building.' The former could be assembled by three people in a day, while Croismare took six men one week to construct, armed with little more than a screwdriver and ladder.

Croismare contains all the fundamentals of Prouvé architecture. Its interior is traversed by a succession of portal frames, six yellow and one green, marking the separation between classroom and refectory (an adjoining dormitory now belongs to a collector). Jointed central beams connect the portals along the length of the ceiling, while floor-to-ceiling glazed doors offer light and expansive views of the landscape.

In 1953, Croismare was closed, and the building was abandoned until the 1990s, when Seguin and his partner, Philippe Jousse, acquired it. After the two dealers parted ways in 2000, Jousse kept Croismare. He started restorations, including replacing a stone section with wood panels identical to the »



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others, and removing the dropped ceiling to expose the remarkable skeleton of Prouvé's work. Seguin bought Croismare from Jousse four years ago and continued its meticulous restoration, from retouching the paint on the portal frames to replacing the poured concrete base with a portable system of Ductal concrete blocks (first developed by Jean Nouvel for another Prouvé structure).

Seguin recalls Pritzker Prize laureate Richard Rogers once saying, 'If we taught architecture at high school, Prouvé would be the best person to do it', since his methods were so elegant and simple to understand. Prouvé made no distinction between constructing furniture or buildings: form equalled function. Seguin holds up an archival photo of a 1953 building for which Prouvé built a metal awning, comparing it to a photo of his 'Compas' table. 'All that's missing is the chairs.'

It's impossible to guess who might buy Croismare; in the past, Prouvé's buildings have been snapped up by collectors from Azzedine Alaïa to Richard Prince. A new book by Seguin's gallery, *Jean Prouvé: From Furniture to Architecture, The Laurence and Patrick Seguin Collection*, offers a look at how the couple live with Prouvé's works. It contains photos of their apartment in Paris, where midcentury chairs and tables exist happily alongside artworks by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Wade Guyton, and their home in the south of France, where Prouvé houses are scattered around the property, as modern as ever. ★
TEFAF New York is on show from 9-13 May at the Park Avenue Armory, tefaf.com, patrickseguin.com

Above, the Croismare school photographed at Laurence and Patrick Seguin's estate in the south of France

Photography: © Galerie Patrick Seguin