

LIFT HIGH THE ROOFBEAMS, CARPENTERS

John McKean

in appreciation of Walter Segal who died 27 October 1985¹

In the history of housing in our century Walter Segal has and will retain an important place. What is this place, and how did it arise? This essay will centre on that question. It is not much to do with the imagery of architecture; but certainly to do with the image of Walter Segal.

Old youth. I have only known three people born in 1907. The first is my father who, of course, has always been The Old Man; but indeed he was for me, and is, old. The others who, it seems, have always been young, are Charles Eames and Walter Segal. (The coincidence of their births encourages a comparison of Segal and Eames which is revealing of each; not least in their views of technology and culture, exemplified in their designs for chairs and, of course, their own houses. This is worth returning to.)

Though I scarcely knew him, Eames seemed to me perpetually young. After we first spent a day together, I wrote in Building Design "Charles Eames looks as if he could have been born in 1930. In fact, in that year he set up his own architectural practice..." (BD 26.9.1975) He had the fit image of the relaxed astronaut: close cropped hair, loose suiting and sneakers. And so it was a shock when he died.

And of Walter Segal? "He is one of today's liveliest young architects," I ended an appraisal in Building Design when he was nearly seventy (BD 27.2.76). But he has always been young in a different way, and probably never looked youthful in the way of Americans, concerned with fitness and youth. His pixie form, old jersey (never seen in coat or jacket) and Startrite (child's) shoes imply a different glimpse of youth. Segal has had little time for the elderly in spirit for many years now, and the generation born with him has no longer been his generation. "When people get to be over fifty," he said to me, "after a few minutes contact I find them rarely stimulating or amusing; they tend to have their own problems and, of course, I understand this. But they are not my problems." Segal's youth, which also over the years has endeared him to students and they to him, is in the bustling glee, infectious enthusiasms, and a not too rare Mozartian childish prank recounted with a glint in the eye, or a sudden most unmusical lapse into an old Ticinese folksong.

Now he is dead. And only as I try to write this do I realise how much of what I've written in the past has been penned with Walter in mind as the reader. An underpinning I can no longer lean on. I will miss him.

We live at a time when architecture is struggling to relocate the issues of dwelling, of place-making at its centre. The act of dwelling, the concept of

¹ Text written in the days after Segal's death; commissioned by Ian Latham, *Building Design*, but unused. It was later published by Giancarlo De Carlo, *Spazio e Societa*, Milano, 1986

housing as a verb, the role of architect as enabler; all working to facilitate this primordial human need, that is the activity of dwelling, of coming home, and making our place our own. These are goals which the architectural activities of Walter Segal over half a century have quietly been furthering. And his example will be his memorial.

At a very different scale, of course, this is what the best architects are doing today; what, at a cultural, monumental level great designers have always been doing - facilitating the wider community, within its institutions, to give form to its institutional life and communal beliefs. The great architect's purpose is to resonate to these needs, to provide built forms which do not just express or display these communal organisations, but which embody them and hold them strongly.

Walter Segal has had very little interest in that world, and been instinctively shy of it. Linking it with the bogey of *Heroes and Hero-worship* (he quotes Carlyle's book of that title), he has delighted only in the foibles, where architects, perhaps with self-importance, have failed to resonate to the social needs. He loves to quote how Charles Garnier was not even invited to the opening of the Paris Opera. He greatly enjoyed the debunking of James Stirling in *the Architects' Journal* early in 1985.

Thus Segal has always written the word art as ART, slightly to mock, but also a bit timorous of its power. The same can be said for architecture with a capital A. Segal is not a great architect; and his skepticism of great architects contains a real shyness and also, perhaps, a fear of the uncomprehended world of their concerns?

Walter talks, like a charming, innocent, but twinkling-eyed child of visiting Studio Le Corbusier in the Rue Du Sevres in 1929. Going up the stairs, knocking and asking the way to the Square du De Blanche [where the Maison La Roche had recently been built]. "Monsieur Le Corbusier is here now, would you like to see him?" "Oh, no," replies Walter, "unfortunately I have to go, I have an appointment." And he backs out. "What could I say to such a man?" he asks. "He was a great, wonderful artist of space - ever since I saw that exhibition of his drawings when I was 18 I'd been under his spell, but no... it was not the world for me."

In the world of architectural culture, Segal talks of personalities - Feininger was absolutely charming, Kandinsky was most disagreeable, and so on; but he never dares approach their works and the works' meanings. His viewpoint on these people is indeed that of a child, who sees the foibles but not deep emotions and ideas they are trying to express in their work; yet who also can see the naked emperor. Segal would not have music in the house, even though his wife was a music teacher, claiming to all and sundry to be tone deaf.

"Moholy-Nagy? Oh, his first wife, she and I ... Raoul Haussman? His second wife, I think he had three at the same time, she was a blonde Siberian. Oh how he loved large women!" Another day Hugo Haring is mentioned, and before the conversation can grapple with his quirky but interesting theories, Walter has moved off to shallower waters: " Oh yes, Haring's wife was an amazing woman - handsome, but she had no lips! she was an actress, and played the lead role in Mädchen In Uniform..."

"Execrable," he said of his father's expressionist murals in the Ascona cemetery, astonished that I bothered to see them and admire their naive Munch-inspired power. And yet Walter is always charming about his father, a lovable innocent, it seems. "How could anyone not love the man?" he asks, adding: "But I have no filial piety, for the man or his paintings."

And, in a sort of parallel, therefore, his career was not in the world of capital A Architecture. He never joined RIBA, and refused to submit a statement, a manifesto, to the big book of *Contemporary Architects*. He has always enjoyed recounting how he turned down offers of working with Bruno Taut (whom he really liked), with Mendelsohn, with Gropius.

It's nearly 2am; "Walter is unstoppable!" someone whispers. Drinking in a duplex apartment in Corbu's Maison Clarte in Geneva; all evening, interrupting with difficulty when he sips or lights another cigar, we have been listening to Walter on Berlin in the '20s - family friends included Grosz, Schwitters and Heartfield, and he has anecdotes about Busoni. And then of his arrival in London and invitations to tea from Raymond Unwin and Epstein (who became a friend). But most, we laugh at the merging of art and anecdote in Dada and Surrealism.

The life-enhancing qualities of making one's own dwelling place is not something which came to Segal late in life. It is nonsense that he stumbled into this area by chance when having to build a temporary house for his own family in the late '60s. For his very first building, a timber-framed little house in Ticino, built in 1932, contained the germ of these feelings. It was his first attempt, if partly unreflective, to embody a home-coming. And the timber-framed ski lodge which he built in the '50s for himself, high in the Swiss Alps, confirms this feeling.

On the other hand, it is equally untrue that this architectural goal has been a life-long obsession. Segal, as he has often said, married his wife not architecture. "I love my friends, and the world - but I love my privacy," he has said to me. But his street door is not the defensive brick wall or intimidating gates of some lovers of privacy. No, it is just a low, bland garage front. There is a small door but no bell to ring nor name-plate. The visitor must open the door, pass through this covered storage porch, then cross the small open court to reach the house door. When more privacy is wanted, the street door can just be bolted. Typically, it displays a very unaggressive but firm and uncompromising understanding of social boundaries and physical site planning. His long life of great happinesses and deep sadnesses, of privation and contentment, is private.

And equally discreet is his architectural life; while it could never be called boring, it includes a wide range of modest and careful residential, industrial and commercial buildings, particularity in the post-war quarter century, whose appearance might seem of no great interest, nor indeed the special qualities which they define.

So it is not an Architectural career of importance. Yet, of course, it is fascinating, not least for its aims which remained consistent and, of course, of their time:

- integrity, economy, and attention to detail;

- directness and uninhibited use of the most appropriate materials and technology, whether building in calculated metal frames, calculated 4½ inch brick cross-wall construction or, more recently, with timber frames and uncut sheets;
- carefully and exhaustively refined plan and layout arrangements.

And the hatreds remained equally consistent:

- impatience with bureaucracy and the building regulations juggernaut;
- impatience even more with the impertinence of planners' aesthetic control.

His spleen has been vented on such subjects in print over many years and at any opportunity, often with telling irony but never allowing pessimism to overwhelm it.

The essential word is common-sense. His architectural project is based on a logical step-by-step common sense, very like that of Paxton and Fox at Crystal Palace or even closer to Brunel. When designing his timber-frame Crimean War hospital shipped out to Renkioi and erected so fast, Brunel's thoroughness, very like Segal's, even extended to designing details of transportation, then unloading and construction by a few chosen carpenters.

Segal construction details are based on things which touch and aren't fixed - the posts sitting on leads caps on simple, individual foundations - indeed just on paving slabs if permissible; the uncut wall panels held by pressure only, the roofing felt bottom layers free to move, all based on sensible and obvious issues of humidity, leaks, expansion and so on; the similarly Segal planning details, like the two doors neatly within the four and a half inch brick wall between dining and living space in his own house (and the remarkably successful door-stops of square-section bitumenised polyurethane joint filler), based on simple acoustic privacy.

After a long lecture, Walter is asked a question about his windows. He takes an hour to answer - diverting to les ideologues, to ancient Hindus banning the arch, Japanese Buddhists (at least so Bruno Taut told him) banning diagonals... until the description of the window is revealed as simplicity itself. A sheet of glass, with a small glass nib stuck on to slide it, glides in the metal channel with judicious use of polish, a rub with a candle ("In my first houses I used little wheels.."). He seems to go on for ever disseminating all this folk knowledge; ordinary, direct, inspiring to the students. My students, who have never seen anything like this, are enthralled.

Segal's approach to architecture can appear dryly practical and down-to-earth. He has compared the design process of houses to the game of chess. "I go step by step, and see how little decisions affect bigger ones; changing the position of a table alters the convenient position of a door, which affects the entrance space, whose alteration means the stair must move, and so on.." Not untypically, for a house in Chailey in the early '70s, he produced 28 plans before he reckoned he'd covered the possibilities. For the latest and current Lewisham scheme, Segal and Jon Broome produced 19 varied house layouts within same basic frame and core, for the self-builders to consider.

Home and Environment, that most fascinating book of chess gambits which he

published in 1947, is packed full of plans and layouts, largely worked out during the war years. As a quietly revolutionary document it is magnificent; and utterly down-to-earth: literally. For it demonstrated conclusively, and in marked contrast to almost all its contemporaries, from Sharp's pre-war *Town Planning* onwards, that humane, low-rise, high-density residential areas are sensible and achievable goals. It is a theme Segal was still playing with 30 years later, proposing to anyone who would listen varied new layouts for home and environment. This book first stated the case with cool dryness.

But it is spiced with hidden chillies. There are jibes at the Greats: "Unfortunately," he says, in typical ironic style on p91, and amidst details of heating and plumbing systems, "the smallest but by no means least important room of the house still receives only scant attention from architects, who are too busy reforming life elsewhere. And when they condescend to waste some thought on this matter, like Le Corbusier, it is merely to castigate the imbecile who makes his w.c. large and comfortable."

This amusing aside might seem peculiarly unthoughtful, as it illustrates a blindspot about the rhetoric of Architecture. For clearly the bathroom and w.c. design at the Villa Savoye, say, or the ludicrously contorted two-door toilet in the Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau, are not chance mistakes! But Segal refuses to join a discussion about their meaning, simply guffawing as it edges towards *Pseud's Corner*.

Although Segal shows little sympathy with the history of Great Architecture, he has always been an avid reader of history. Indeed, his reading of Aristotle and Plato is evidenced later in that same down-to-earth *Home and Environment* when, mixed in with layout and traffic planning, he uses the classics as source for a discussion of ancient town layouts.

In 'Villa Bernardo' in the resort of Ascona, in Ticino, where Switzerland is nearly Italy, on a wall next to Legers and expressionist oils, is a small and most evocative, atmospheric painting. ("The Van Goghs are in the museum," she says as I arrive, "as the burglar alarms kept going off so annoyingly!") She is charmingly bemused by my interest in this little painting. By Arthur Segal, dated 1934: the view out of Casa Piccola, his son Walter's first building. By the open doorway, a rush stool and book on it. The verandah and ballustrade beyond containing the view over Lago Maggiore. A magical evocation. Amazingly, it seems to have been painted from love, an arcadian dream, and a photograph. For Arthur Segal had left Ascona years before and never seen the little house itself. Today it hangs, modestly, in the pretentious villa in whose grounds stands the little house itself. I'm not sure if Walter Segal ever saw this painting, this tribute from the father to the son's concern for dwelling.

Certainly, this little house has been of iconic importance to Walter Segal himself. Bernard Meyer, a hard practical man, and his father's patron, commissioned it as soon as young Segal's architectural education in Berlin was complete, in 1932. In a few days, Segal had prepared the design, calculated all the details, and produced the working drawings.

Meyer's daughter, now an old lady, was having her siesta when the grand-daughter shows me in. There was a call from upstairs. In German

she shouted up "It's a friend of the son of the painter Segal, mother; he would like to see the son's little house.."

There it was, almost hidden now in the trees, but an unmistakable Segal house: dark timber cladding, the rhythm of the frame and panel, the virtually flat roof, the verandah and slim ballisters; the direct and simple typology of two single-facing dwelling spaces separated by the narrow service strip, kitchen at front, washing at back. The Oregon pine plywood wall and ceiling panels; even the paper lantern make it so typical! All dark, warm wood and sunshine - and the rush seats still in place. The occupant proudly shows us round her little home, talking on the verandah with its stupendous view.

As a student, Segal had been made uneasy not just by the simple line drawings of reductivist Modernism imagery, by their banal cardboard-like or smooth chrome-and-glass veneers. But he was even more upset by the fact that the concrete design, which made it possible, was based on fudging; it was not comprehensible. His goal was to be a comprehensible way of building; which could be understood and thus anticipated, calculated. "There is no complexity in comprehensible, calculated joinery," he later said.

Colin Ward's fine book *Anarchy in Action*, describing "precisely the kind of product which an anarchist society would need," called for "objects whose functioning is transparent; products having a transparency of operation and repair." Ward did not know Segal at the time he wrote this, but in this sense Segal has always been anarchist by instinct.

"I was in a state of rebellion," he said, "I was determined to make this little building as insignificant as possible - and I passionately wanted it to be liked, which it was. From this plenty can be deduced." Indeed it can. Even the rush-seated chairs which he designed were strong polemic in the context of Bauhaus chrome and leather. It was Segal's first attempt, rather than to fashion Architecture, to embody a 'coming home' in building.

Just as his father's little painting of this house captured that arcadian dream, so it was to remain as the image of Walter Segal's root position. Thus it is understandable that, although being born in Berlin, and in fact only living in Ascona for a few impressionable years either side of the age of ten, he always acts as if the Berlin of his birth and of his student days was a foreign land, and Ticino his real home.

"I went back to Ascona to build," Walter Segal has said. "I am still grateful for my decision then, to be and stay average in the no-man's land between Boheme and Bourgeois. It became clear to me that one can have a small path and tread it alone."

Yet, as he said another time, "for many years afterwards I never had this enjoyment as at Casa Piccola." In the late 1960s, as is well known, that began to change and the new enjoyment in making dwelling, budding in the early 1970s, came into full-bloom when, after tedious year upon year of bureaucratic strangulation, in the late '70s and early '80s it was finally possible to begin enabling unskilled people from the council housing waiting list to build their own homes.

For this to be possible, both the construction process and the inhabitation process had to change. Segal hates the general contractor - the *entrepreneur* as the French say, one who literally gets in between, in the way between designer and craftsman. Always he was searching for the relationship he had achieved with the fine old anarchist carpenter at Casa Piccola. And he hated the idea of the local authority housing estate. With the timber-frame houses of the late 1960s, he worked directly with a master carpenter for whose skill he had boundless respect. "If you wanted to revitalise the whole field of building and architecture," he said in the mid '70s, "it could be done through carpenters." But then came the self-builders, a trickle of individuals followed by the Lewisham flood, drowning out the image of patronised local authority tenant. Now, although designing public housing, it was for, and thus with, real individuals, whose own action it would embody.

All Segal's career moves towards individual freedoms;

- liberating himself wherever possible from unproductive tasks - from drawing instruments, or dyeline prints - from the hierarchy of bosses or assistants, and intolerant of bureaucrats or anyone exercising unthinking control;
- liberating individual clients through his designs, and, obviously, in enabling their constructive participation; in his site planning, moving to argue for individual units against terraced streets, for example, and following up fast with a catalogue of their advantages before you can even mention things like the huge external surface/floor ratio or the urban fragmentation.

Between the two contrasting currents today - the search for reconstructing the public domain of street, urban place, social realm and, on the other hand, the search for a more individual expression of separate dwelling, private domain and potential for self-build - between these two, Segal's site-planning can be seen as a key problem. Perhaps his lack of space for the collective, for the social realm, is the strongest criticism of Segal's position. His buildings do not become part of the city, do not assist in its visual re-integration. There is no acceptance of what, say, a Krier might see as the root position, and which could be stated as : the *least* an architect can do is to make a street!

Segal's position, though, as corollary of the lack of capital A Architecture, is to say that communality is not embodied in the image of connected urban spaces, but much more in collective *action*. The separate houses on the hillside in Bromley have a stronger cohesive agent than building line or cornice level. They are the homes of friends, of friendships made strong through shared activity. The houses, the "architecture" if you like, embodies the shared values as they act as the catalyst of this social cohesion. The inhabitants are involved in place making, not in sharing a made place.

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The Segal building method, of course, is based on precision high technology: total calculation and precise optimisation of resources - like using finest, high-cost, stress-graded timber members and avoiding 'second shaping' by careful scouring of the market and using uncut sheets. The point is not 'hi-tech', of course, but a system which becomes humanised into 'appropriate technology.'

If one compares, say, images of the frame of a two-storey Segal house with the well-known steel and glass house of Patty and Michael Hopkins, the point is quite

clear. Each is a remarkably lithe, slender, elegant frame structure; it is a rational, ordered box. But while the Hopkins' one is then just wrapped in cling-film, as it were, the Segal one is filled out into a recognisable house.

The contrast is centred in the primacy of the object's image for the Hopkins (and, naturally, for most architects) and its peripheral importance to Segal and his builder-inhabitants. But each building has an image, of course. So the Hopkins offer images of their *machine*-structure, of skin, and the clarity of technique in their being held together. Segal inevitably lets an image of a house enclose his frame. Walls seem solid enough, windows are in the right place, the front door, the verandah or balcony are appropriate.

And here we come back to Eames and Segal. While the Segal and Eames houses have considerable conceptual similarities - both, for example, aiming to use industrial products as given, without an intermediate second forming - the essential differences remain of interest. Both have a quasi-industrial image, an order born out of the material and its structural nature; frames, varied infill panels, St Andrews' cross bracing (although Segal's crosses, unlike Eames', are designed as compression, not tension members, in the tradition of Norwegian carpentry). But the elegance of the Eames house, with its bony frame, black and white and full of careful bright colour, cool and pristine as a hi-tech museum, breathes a different air from the more homely, enclosed Segal spaces, the close-spaced intrusive timber rhythm, wooden floor and (on the earlier houses) wall covering; all enveloping and warm.

For deep cultural reasons, the clean and cool and open imprints itself on the visual consciousness of the modern architect (and an RIBA Gold Medal committee which honours Eames and not Segal), in a way that the ordinary, homely, enclosable rooms, the warm and woody image never does. Its importance is every bit the equal of the Eames, but it is essentially of a different nature and not centred on its aesthetic. "I prefer casual visual relations when built," Segal says, "which do not show the conscious effort.. For aesthetic values are fleeting are they not, depending on our mood or the sunshine?..."

Essential differences between Eames and Segal are more explicitly and extremely shown in their design of chairs. Both designed chairs over half a century. In the '30s, and having been doing genuinely original research on ancient Egyptian chairs, Segal moved from the Cairo Museum to the museums of Europe and, having reached the British Museum Egyptian collection, he stayed in London. His own chair designs were being marketed by Gordon Russell and Heals before the war; Charles Eames, with Eero Saarinen, began designing chairs shortly thereafter.

The Eames achievement is epitomised by the subtle, and luxuriously comfortable lounge chair and ottoman for Billy Wilder of 1956, rosewood ply moulded in three-dimensions, flexible aluminium connectors, and composition of seating taken to the limits of possibility. And all expressed with an elegant clarity and sold by Hermann Miller or Vitra for thousands of pounds. The Segal achievement is epitomised by chairs he made simply because he had build a new house for his family and needed easy chairs. Using the latest technology, and with an equally lively imagination, Segal experimented with unjointed timber chairs, structurally based on the shear strength of the then new Resin W pva glues. The chairs were cheap, comfortable, practical and have given two decades of good service. They appear chunky not lithe, as that is what the materials implied. Their elegance is in

their comfy utility.

Few architects live among neighbours for and with whom they have designed their homes, in a road named after their partner, the prime enable of the enterprise. Jon Broome, of Segal Close, Bromley, keeps this potential alive today. Other seeds sown by Segal begin to germinate, but very few; from David Lea's lovely collection of sheltered cottages at Quinettes, Churt, in the early 1970s, to the recent Stuttgart self-build which began when Segal inspired Peter Hubner and Peter Sulzer.

It is a long way from the benevolent paternalism of the 'GP' image with which, say, Rod Hackney says "hi!" to his Black Road neighbours, offering advice about the blocked rain gutter. That figure, the Hackney architect, at its best becomes the James Herriott, the local lad who understands us and offers a special skill in time of need. At its worst, it offers a populist front to a rigidly hierarchical commercial architectural business, lubricated with fast cars, fame and fortune. The Segal/Broome role is quite different. For it is enabling people, severally and jointly, to regain their own powers of dwelling. And in this it is equally far from "self-build" organisations, like the Colin Wadsworth one, where the house is reduced simply to buried treasure (as Martin Pawley precisely puts it), which is a prize made accessible through boring tedious labour.

Segal in all his activity, has implicitly followed William Morris' own motto : I want to design things that people get pleasure in making, and I want to make things that people get pleasure in using. Inevitably, the clients are neither benevolently patronised nor stuck into an acquisitive tedium. It is fascinating to see how the Segal system encourages personal growth. In two different but intertwined activities, this is partly in the doing with one own hands, creatively constructing; and partly in the making of one's own nest. They are not just feathering it, but forming its very armature. When the first Lewisham group made a video of the whole thing, based on interviews with them all, a socialist Lewisham politician suggested that they were all becoming prima donnas. "Nonsense!" they replied; "But - now we'll try *anything*; there is nothing we won't try!"

Holed up in a blizzard in beautiful 18th Century timber chalets, downhill from the new ski-resort of Verbiers; drinking, eating, playing games and drinking. But Walter, with incredible energy, is ever talking, fretting at the wet snow which prohibits his beloved skiing. Describing perhaps his most exhilarating moment, he conjours the wondrous image: Walter Segal skiing naked in the sunlight...

Eternal optimism is an impossibility, and keeping really alive in the times we live in today is not easy. A few months ago, Walter Segal was invited along with chosen architects world-wide to a conference in the renovated Bauhaus at Dessau. He went, if a bit reluctantly; wondering about sleeping in the Gropius dormitories, and perhaps also with a memory of having rejected Gropius enough already - he refused a student place at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, and he turned down the offer to assist when Gropius followed him to England in the '30s and was commissioned to design a wooden house.

But Walter Segal could take no more than one night at the Bauhaus in 1985, and the next day was on his way home. His introduction to East Germany was to a

horror of bureaucracy and control, a new Nazism, he called it, of unredeemable depression. But state controls and bureaucracy, in ways, are equally unavoidable here, I suggested, and the priorities of our government are little more attractive. He was pessimistic, at last; he replied (in Latin, and had to translate for me) "Among the weapons, the muses are silent."

It can be a surprise to find in one so touchy about intellectualising, a wide classical knowledge and omniverous historical reading. If the conversation is spiced with the latin tag or gossipy anecdote, it often seems that the anecdote, pricking an achilles heel or deflating the pomp of a hero, is the more important tool. Yet I think it was also from him that I first heard quoted Socrates' "the philosopher is one who practices dying." I would rather put it that one who is really alive need not fear death. And we are most alive when most fully living in the present. This, I feel, Walter acted. And thus he had no interest in historicisms or wasms.

One who has finished building his house has finished with life. So runs the ancient Egyptian proverb quoted by Hassan Fathy in *Architecture of the Poor*, and known to that Egyptologist, Walter Segal.

Watching the women and men coming from the Lewisham council's housing waiting list, digging their houses on the weekends is a most potent image. It not only has a memory of Winstanley and his Levellers on Richmond Hill, but it gives a glimpse of the nearest we have to Ghandi sitting at his spinning wheel. Identically, it is a metaphor for a future, not a idyll from a past. And it will hold a central place in the history of housing in capitalist bureaucracies.

It has not the transience of the image, say, of Militant Liverpool squeezing co-ops till they squawk in agony and calling it socialism - or any of those debates about "housing provision." Rather this image touches a deeper chord, it makes the heart leap as at the great scene in the recent film *Witness*, where the Amish community jointly rebuilt a two-storey timber-framed house as a celebration of creative communality. In many other times, with less specialised roles and that ancient communality, the whole village would "make" the new house required. Segal's achievement is to make it easy, to facilitate that again for our fragmented private worlds. His interest is the process of housing and inhabitation, not the product of architecture.

This image of the colonisation of land by ordinary people amidst the decayed late-20th-century-welfare-state-capitalism, seeing their self-evident skilling and confident maturing through the making of their homes, is remarkable. It allows the imagination of a new conviviality in dwelling.

ENDS

It might be valuable to add, in small print, a basic bibliography:

On Walter Segal's life:

The Architectural Review, January 1974, p31-8; *Building Design*, 20 and 27.2.1976; *The RIBA Journal*, July 1977, p284; *The Architects' Journal*, 7.4.1982 p33.

On his timber-frame system:

Architectural Design, May 1976, and numerous articles, especially in *The Architects Journal*, on individual projects. A full bibliography up to 1977 is in *Contemporary Architects* (Macmillan, 1978).

Illustrations

This kind of text, of course, is not to be a visual retrospective of Segal's work's pictorial qualities. But it could use:

1. Frontispiece to Home and Environment. Patio houses, neatly planned, forming squares of terraces, enclosing a subtle hierarchy of open spaces; WS drawing dated 1943/46
2. Perspective of latest Lewisham scheme, on steeply sloping site, showing variations within the basic system. (Published as fig 12, *The Architects' Journal* 25 Jan 1984, p37)
3. Shadow of WS, relaxing as a visitor in the first of his self-built houses, Woodbridge, Sussex. (Photo John McKean)
4. Photo of WS, used in *Building Design* 20.3.76, p10/11. (Photo Jamoula McKean)
5. Lewisham self-builders digging their own houses: a new conviviality in dwelling.
6. Casa Piccola (from the third edition of Yorke's The Modern House, or better if possible - I don't know of it.)
7. The ski house (from *RIBA Journal*, July 1977,)
8. recent timber frame houses - a telephone call to *Architects' Journal* library might lend you prints; I have a number of slides, both of Lewisham ones and other (pitched roof) one, etc. - one or two of which I showed at Ilaud 1984 when talking about "The Ordinary Tradition" in British architecture - which you suggested I write up for the ILAUD yearbook, and I have not done!