The Walter Segal Method

Walter Segal (1907 - 1985)

Born in Berlin, Germany.

Studied Architecture in Berlin and Delft, Netherlands.

Moved to London in 1936.

Studied and taught at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

In 1962, after settling down with his second wife, Segal built a temporary accommodation for his family in their back garden while renovations were being carried out on their home. It is here that Segal questioned how buildings are designed, built and relate to their users. He used this project as a testing ground for a quick economic model of construction. This developed into a self-build housing system based on, but not limited to, timber-framed construction.

Impressed by the speed and practicality of the method of construction, Segal received a series of clients who wanted to use this same method across two dozen private houses in England and Ireland. Successes with this method also reached Germany in the form of a students’ residence called Bauhausle, in Stuttgart, which the students themselves designed and built under the supervision of Segal in 1981. Furthermore, according to Broome (1986), a Segal style house was even designed and built in Australia in 1980 via two long telephone calls between Segal and the Australian based client.

Segal’s ideology was to empower any individual in creating their own home using the materials readily available to them and their bare hands. This typically meant timber elements that are easily movable and fixed together without any wet construction needed. His drive was to provide every self-builder with basic plans, sections and instruments that described the sequence of construction. Once the positioning of the timber frame, services and circulation core are set, internal module panels can be positioned in the desired arrangement of the builder. The construction would therefore be lightweight and demountable with screwed or bolted dry joints, giving the owner the ability to extend, change and improve their home for many years to come. It also meant that any home under this method would have an extended lifespan due to the ease at which elements could be replaced after damage or wear.

The Segal Method also incorporated a modular grid, usually a standard size of material like a span of a timber beam. This made for easy calculations and kept waste to a minimum. Foundations and ground-works were also kept to a minimum. Due to the system of using materials and techniques that are readily available, rather than specially manufactured, the Segal Method’s pedagogy remained open to all regardless of lack of income, capital or building skills.

References:
