

TEXT BY
Mark Johanson

PHOTOS BY | @NICOSAIEH
Nicolás Saieh



Camilo Fuentealba and Eduardo Díaz met in 2010 while studying architecture in the Chilean city of Concepción. They hit it off—both personally and professionally—founded their own firm, Estudio Sur, in 2016, and moved to the resort town of Puerto Varas a few years later.

“We saw there was an emerging market and not much competition, so we settled down here to try our luck,” recalls Camilo. Surrounded by volcano-studded parklands on the shores of Chile’s second-largest lake, Puerto Varas boomed during the pandemic, giving the young couple (then in

their late 20s) a flood of new clients just as they took on their most challenging project yet: building their own home.

Funds were limited, but the pair found an affordable plot of land about 15 minutes west of the city. Its biggest selling point was that it was still encased in native Valdivian rainforest. To protect the site, they went with a small footprint (about 1,075 square feet), building up instead of out. Then they placed square windows to frame the surrounding trees—from trunk to canopy—so that as you rise through the open, split-level plan, which is arranged

around an atrium, you can “view the forest from different perspectives,” Camilo says.

The region’s cool, rainy climate influenced many decisions in the design. On the roof above the atrium is an 11.5-foot-wide window, the couple’s biggest splurge, which floods the home with light, saving on energy costs. The kitchen’s Bosca wood-burning stove is not only ideal for making traditional *kuchen cakes*; it’s also the main source of heat, which rises through the five levels and warms the open rooms. Even the exterior walls, made from impregnated pinewood, are painted black >

Southern Exposure

An architect couple craft a \$60K home in Puerto Varas, Chile, that respects its forested site.



Architects Camilo Fuentealba and Eduardo Díaz created a split-level layout (left and opposite) for their vertically aligned home (above) near the Chilean resort town of Puerto Varas. Rooms branch off from a central atrium as you climb up stairs and ladders. “The idea was to replicate the way trees grow to look for light,” says Camilo.

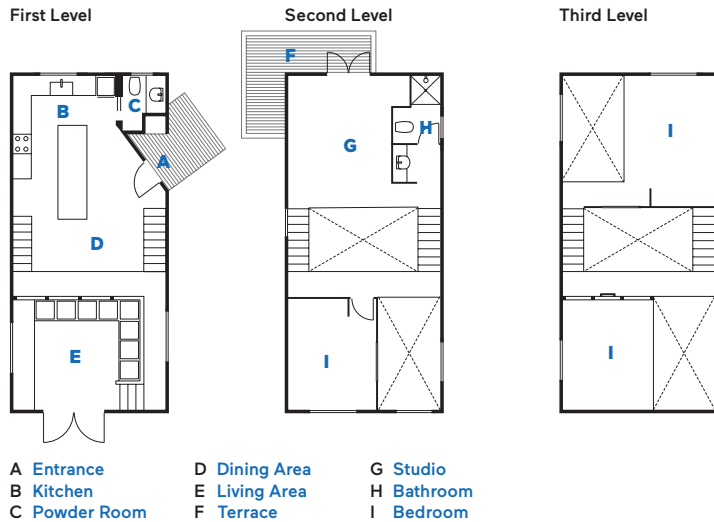


CABINS

Casa Cero



ARCHITECT **Estudio Sur Arquitectos**
 LOCATION **Puerto Varas, Chile**



“I love having extra height in the central space because, no matter where you are, you’re aware of what’s happening elsewhere.”

CAMILO FUENTEALBA, ARCHITECT AND RESIDENT



Heat rises from a *Cocina a Leña Bosca* stove tucked under the second level in the kitchen (left) to warm the house, while sunshine flows in from a skylight (above). “If there was a main money-saving element, it was the design itself,” says Eduardo.

to sponge up sunshine on cold, clear days. “The climate here in the south is tough,” Eduardo says.

The couple oversaw the entire project, using independent builders. They also crafted nearly every piece of furniture themselves, including sleek countertops in the kitchen (made from budget-friendly microcement) and built-in seating in the sunken living room (where they indulged in underfloor heating). “We thought, What can we do on our own, how can we do it, and do we have the tools to do it?” Eduardo says. “Then we dared ourselves to get it done.”

As it was a pandemic project, completed in March 2021, the architects included a home office, which they still use for everything except client meetings. (Those take >

CABINS

BUDGET

ELECTRIC	\$\$	1,055
CISTERN	\$\$	650
SEPTIC	\$\$	950
FOUNDATION	\$\$	1,170
WINDOWS & DOORS	\$\$	5,294
FRAMING	\$\$	4,117
CONST. ASSISTANCE	\$\$	12,940
BUILDING MATERIALS	\$\$	17,645
INSULATION	\$\$	3,294
PLUMBING	\$\$	1,175
WOOD SIDING	\$\$	1,410
ROOF	\$\$	705
STRUCT. ENGINEER	\$\$	1,355
WOOD FLOORING	\$\$	1,880
WOODSTOVE	\$\$	705
PAINT	\$\$	1,175
DRYWALL	\$\$	940
KITCHEN	\$\$	1,410
BATHROOM	\$\$	820
WARDROBES & CABINETS	\$\$	715
BALCONY	\$\$	715

\$60,120



From their minimalist, plant-filled home office (above), Camilo and Eduardo can step out on an L-shaped balcony (left) to monitor their golden retriever, Roco, enjoy some fresh air, and observe the surrounding woodlands. “There are still native trees here, and that was super important to us,” Camilo says. “We wanted to be inserted in the forest.”

place in Puerto Varas.) A door opens from the office to an L-shaped Cor-Ten steel balcony used for morning coffee breaks. Meanwhile, the two split levels above hold two minimalist bedrooms, as well as a third sleeping nook reached by ladder.

What would the architects have done differently with more cash? They might have swapped the pine for native wood, tacked a coatroom onto the entry, and added square footage for en suite bathrooms. Yet, working with a \$60,000 budget, they were pleased to achieve three distinct sleeping areas, which come in handy when family comes calling. So, too, does the nearly 11-foot-long kitchen island, which doubles as a dining table for up to 15 guests. “It’s a relatively small house,” Eduardo says, “but a lot of people can fit here.” ■

