

RECORD HOUSES

MOST VACATION homes along the sinewy Lake Vichuquén, four hours south of Santiago, Chile, either perch on stilts atop pine-covered hills or rest along its level shore. Twin House does neither. Brothers Nicolás and Mauricio Urzúa Soler, whose architectural practice is based in nearby Curicó, embedded the house in a steep bluff with robust concrete retaining walls, allowing its two parallel timber volumes to project toward the lake as if suspended above the landscape.

“The two buildings are held in a kind of tension with one another,” says Nicolás, “yet they have a clear rhythm and an obvious structural logic.”

Visitors enter Twin House from behind, walking along a walled bridge to the upper floor. On the left lies the primary volume, containing the owners’ suite and, below it, a living room and enclosed kitchen. In the volume to the right are three bedrooms, while a detached apartment on the lower level offers two additional rooms, a sitting area, and kitchenette.

The layout gives the owners, businessman Carlos Casanueva de Landa and museographer Trinidad Moreno, total flexibility when they escape Santiago for long weekends and summer holidays. The couple needed a big house to accommodate their five children. But when they visit alone, they wanted to be able to close off half of it and retreat to the main wing. Meanwhile, friends and extended family don’t intrude on the family’s personal space when sleeping in the independent apartment.

Between the two wings is a sheltered central courtyard inspired by Chile’s Spanish colonial houses. “We tried to keep these ideas that have worked well in traditional architecture but give them a more contemporary language,” says Nicolás. Protected from Vichuquén’s frequent winds, the courtyard holds two gardens fed by rainwater and a sunken firepit.

The emphasis on shared spaces like this, as well as the adjacent *quincho* (barbecue pavilion), was deliberate. Casanueva de Landa asked for comparatively modest bedrooms and generous communal areas to encourage mingling. “Even though it’s a large house, the idea was that you could always feel connected,” he explains. A roof projecting 10 feet beyond the house along its entire perimeter creates roughly 2,100 square feet of sheltered outdoor living space to complement the structure’s 5,800 square feet of conditioned interior. The patio, terraces, and covered walkways become rooms in their own right, softening the boundary between architecture and landscape.



Seeing Double

Urzúa Soler Arquitectos envisions a two-volume house for a dramatic lakeside site in Chile.

BY MARK JOHANSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCOS GUIPONI



RECORD HOUSES



Some of the family's fondest memories come from mountain lodges and lakeside inns in southern Chile, where evenings naturally revolved around a fire. To create that atmosphere, Nicolás made a hearth the focal point of the living room. A sculptural steel hood, shaped like a bell, is suspended from the double-height ceiling over a firebox set into a 2.25-ton stone sourced from the bed of Chile's Villarrica volcano.

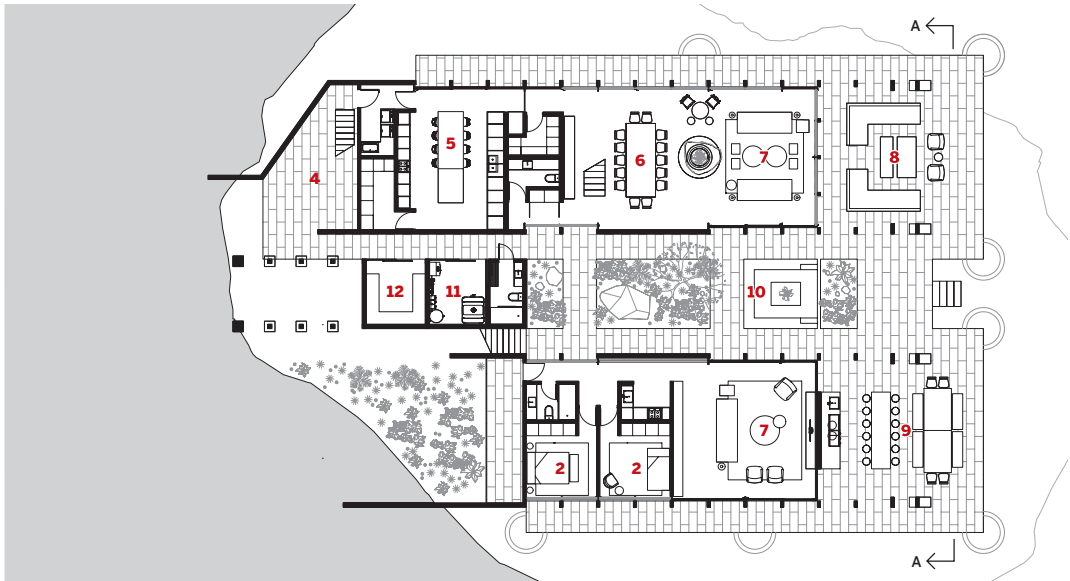
The sense of warmth continues throughout the house, whose walls were constructed with glue-laminated timber columns and beams made of high-precision engineered wood; these components were fabricated off-site with precise CNC-cut interlocking joints, ready for on-site assembly. "For a long time, people in Chile associated timber with temporary or lower-quality construction," Nicolás says. "The arrival of engineered timber has completely transformed the way people see it, and today, it's considered a premium building material."

As in much of Northern Europe and the Pacific Northwest, mass timber has become

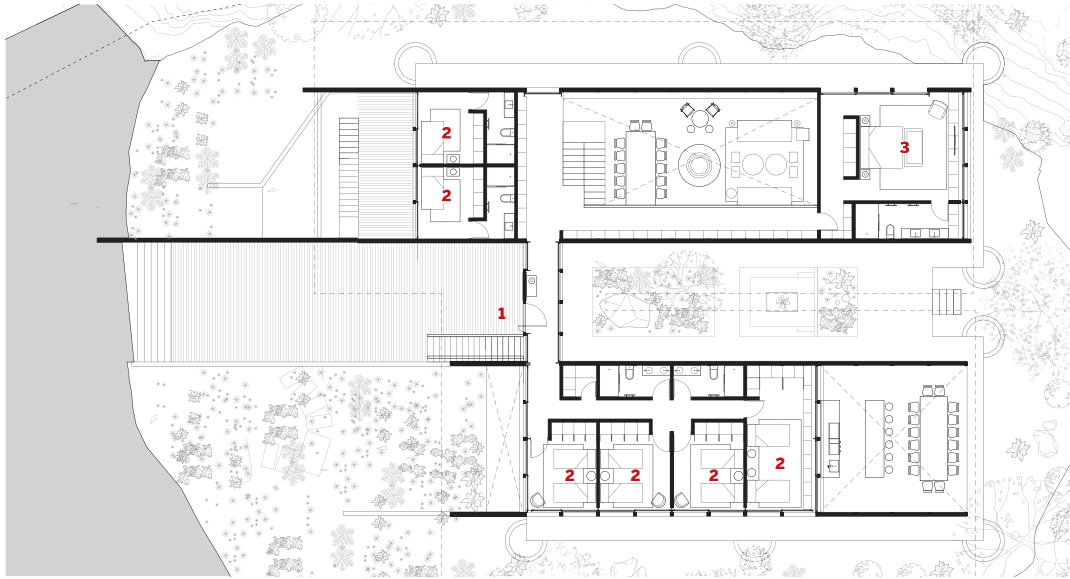


Wood is the primary material for both exterior cladding (opposite, both) and interior cabinetry (this image).

RECORD HOUSES

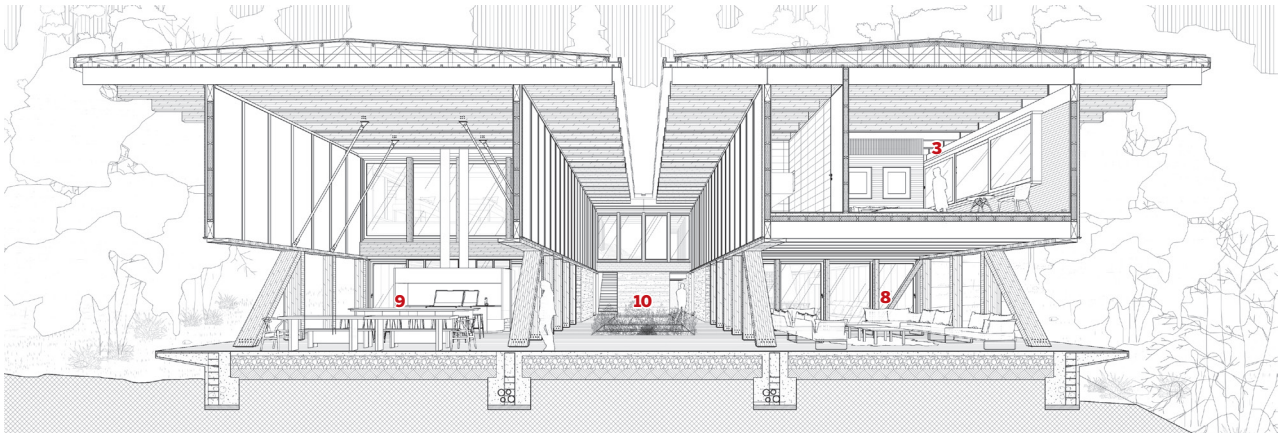


LOWER-LEVEL PLAN



UPPER-LEVEL PLAN

0 15 FT.
5 M.



PERSPECTIVE SECTION

- 1 ENTRY
- 2 BEDROOM
- 3 PRIMARY SUITE
- 4 SERVICE PATIO
- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 DINING
- 7 LIVING
- 8 DECK
- 9 QUINCHO
- 10 COURTYARD
- 11 MECHANICAL
- 12 WOODSHED



Views of the lake are maximized throughout the house, including those in a bedroom (above) and an outdoor dining area (right).

increasingly common in Chile's contemporary vacation houses. Nicolás created a structural system of beams that rhythmically repeat along the length of the house. Vichuquén lies just four miles from the Pacific Ocean, so this wood is apt for the environment, meant to weather the salty air more gracefully than metal.

Much of the custom chestnut cabinetry was conceived as a continuation of the timber architecture. Along the hallway leading to the primary bedroom, for example, the vertical members of the built-in shelving turn sharply to merge seamlessly with the exposed ceiling beams. The architects also kept the material palette deliberately restrained, pairing timber with exposed concrete and beige travertine floors so that everything remained within the same warm color family, allowing the rich textures to take center stage without overwhelming the space. Santiago-based interior design firm Preece Undurraga completed the remaining interiors, reinforcing the calm, restrained language with custom wood furnishings.

Wood may dominate the aesthetic of Twin House, but it doesn't feel heavy. Perhaps that's because the lower floors are almost entirely encased in sliding glass walls, which allow breezes to pass through while extending daily life onto the terraces, and building a deeper connection between landscape and house.

Chile's seismic setting along the Pacific Ring of Fire also



RECORD HOUSES



shaped the design. Diagonal timber bracing allows the structure to flex during earthquakes rather than collapse like a row of dominoes, while carefully placed steel frames provide additional rigidity and seismic resistance. “Rather than hiding the engineering,” Nicolás says, “we wanted those structural elements to become part of the architecture itself.”

The build-out took approximately one year and eight months, a timeline extended by Vichuquén’s summertime construction ban and the logistical challenges of assembling a substantial structure on a steep lakeside peninsula. Because use of a large crane was not possible, each engineered-timber element had to be transported down the slope and assembled in its final location using a smaller crane that was lowered to the base of the house. The result, unveiled this May, is a home that highlights the complexity of its design. “Every time I walk through it,” says Casanueva de Landa, “I notice something different.” ■

Mark Johanson is an American journalist based in Santiago, Chile. He writes for publications including Condé Nast Traveler and National Geographic.

Visitors enter the house from behind, by walking along a walled bridge into the upper level.

Credits

ARCHITECT: Urzúa Soler
Arquitectos — Nicolás Urzúa Soler,
Mauricio Urzúa Soler, Jorge Paredes

ENGINEER: VPA Estructural
Engineers (structural)

CONSULTANTS: Angela Croxatto
(lighting); Carola Schmohl
(landscape); Preece Undurraga
(interiors)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
Urzúa Soler Contractors

CLIENT:
Carlos Casanueva de Landa

SIZE: 5,800 square feet

COST: \$987,000 (construction)

COMPLETION: May 2026

Sources

STRUCTURE:
Timber Engineering (mass timber)

CLADDING: Arauco, Topwood
(wood); Petreos (concrete); Villalba
(roofing)

CURTAIN WALL/GLAZING: Jacima

PAINTS/STAINS: Cutek

LIGHTING: Interdesign

PLUMBING: Hansgrohe