



Architects Nicolás Tovo and Teresa Sarmiento (below) designed their glass-encased vacation home (left and opposite) for a site in Patagonia, a two-hour flight from their studio in Buenos Aires. Nicolás calls it “a magical enclave” overlooking Nahuel Huapi Lake. “It’s a panoramic viewpoint where we can watch what happens,” adds Teresa.

Proof of Concept

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PHOTOS BY | @ESTUDIOPALMA
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Two architects show their clients why modular construction works so well in far-flung places with a vacation home in Patagonia.

Since the start of the pandemic, Nicolás Tovo and Teresa Sarmiento, founders of the architecture and design studio La Base, have pivoted much of their work to prefabricated construction. They find modular construction appealing in a country as vast and wild as Argentina after having created their own “living example”: a prefab vacation home in the Patagonian town of Bariloche, a short flight from their place in Buenos Aires.

“We saw that there was a big resistance from clients regarding the modular system, and we decided to do this house as a test,” explains Nicolás. In 2022, he and Teresa teamed up with Leandro Seoane at Place, an Argentine prefab company, to design the one-level, one-bedroom, 840-square-foot house. A friend, Martín Llan de Rosos, had the site: a terraced plot on a forested hill above an Andean lake. >







“There is much more study involved in modular construction because you can’t go solving things while the house is being built. You have to think of everything in advance.”

TERESA SARMIENTO, ARCHITECT AND RESIDENT



A wood-burning stove (above) heats the 840-square-foot home during winter months. The pendant in the kitchen (top right) is from Huup Iluminación. The kitchen’s Sticotti shelving system and the bathroom’s modular hangers (right) are by the couple’s studio, La Base.

They all share the house, using an Excel spreadsheet to block out dates, such as popular ski weekends in winter.

“Bariloche is a complex place to build for reasons such as climate, scarce labor, and availability of materials,” explains Seoane. “In that sense, modular construction is quite beneficial because we can get there with the house completely finished.”

Some 90 percent of production occurred at a Buenos Aires factory, with the remaining work done on-site. The result, according to Seoane: more quality control, less environmental impact (due to reduced site disturbance), and a shorter execution time. The whole project comprised only three months of design, two months of production, one day of assembly, and five days of adjustments.

The most striking element of the Bariloche home is its glass facade, which provides views of a small port on Nahuel Huapi Lake, where ferries glide in and out of view. Glass can leave one exposed, so the couple added built-in storage spaces to hide valuables, as well as a slatted-wood exterior screen, which can fold open. “There’s this whole game of seeing and not being seen,” Teresa explains of the screen. A walkway between it and the glass doubles as a balcony for breakfast or afternoon yerba maté. >



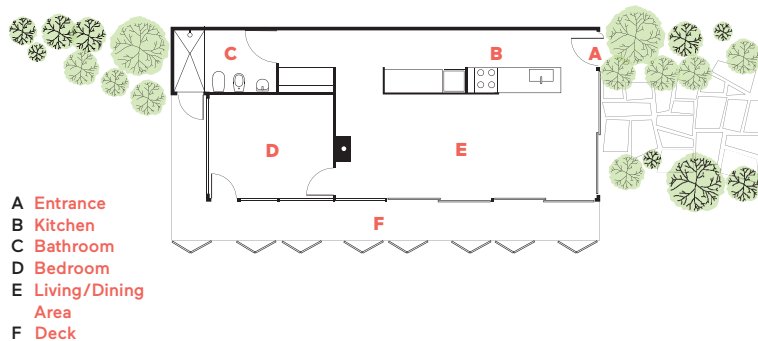


Movable slatted-wood panels allow Teresa and Nicolás to control the flow of light as well as the level of privacy from the nearby road. The space between the screen and home acts as a small deck.

Refugio Bariloche



ARCHITECTS **Nicolás Tovo and Teresa Sarmiento**
 LOCATION **Bariloche, Río Negro, Argentina**



The interiors are minimal. There’s exposed metal and wood, as well as Carrara marble for the kitchen countertops and volcanic stone for the roof. “There are no tablecloths, no curtains, nothing that covers what we want to see and touch,” says Teresa. And because the house consists of just four 9-foot-8-inch-by-19-foot-7-inch modules supported by a foundation plate, it’s mobile. “If we want to move it, we can,” she adds. “We could get a crane and disassemble it and then reassemble it on the coast.” ■