



Up to the Edge

TEXT BY
Mark Johanson

PHOTOS BY | @ESTUDIOPALMA
Cristóbal Palma

A surfer couple escape their hometown to build a cliffside perch on the Chilean coast.

“We like the feeling of floating in the air,” Constanza Ríos says of the home she built with her husband, Pierangelo Caimi. Peering out at sky and ocean through wall-height windows that wrap the living area of their cabin, which rests on a cliff on the Chilean coast, you can’t help but feel weightless. It can be jarring for some. “People with vertigo sometimes come to our house and say they can’t get near the windows,” says Pier, laughing. “They feel like they’re going to fall into the ocean.”

In 2018, he and Constanza, both dentists, yoga instructors, and surfers, were seeking a deeper connection with the outdoors

when they decided to move from their hometown of Viña del Mar, a metropolis of 325,000, to the remote beach community of Puertecillo. “We always lived in the city, so it was like, Let’s go to a place where we can slow down,” says Pier. While renting a tiny bungalow in town, they found an empty plot of land with spectacular seaside views that stole their hearts. There were also a lot of kids in the area, making it perfect for their daughter, then 14 months old, and workdays could be bookended with cliffside Ashtanga. Plus, the surf was just an ATV ride down the hill.

Next door lived architect Jorge Manieu.

His firm, WMR Arquitectos, is responsible for more than 300 houses, each recognizable for its boxy shape and expansive glass facades, in Chile’s south central surf towns. Manieu has developed a recipe of sorts for homes that can withstand the area’s stiff winds and corrosive salty air. Brick homes are common here, but he often designs wooden structures, painting them black to blend with the local pines. The painted wood also ages well, he says. “It will look the same in five years.”

For their house, the couple wanted to capitalize on the site’s incredible views, of course, but they also wanted something >



Pierangelo Caimi and Constanza Ríos's family home in Puertecillo, Chile, requires a balancing act. The cliffside residence showcases broad views to the south through glass walls in the open-plan living spaces (left), while a north-facing skylight above the kitchen (below) maximizes heat absorption, helpful in the cool climate. A lattice covering the guest bedroom's patio (right) dapples the sunlight, and its porous design also makes it less prone to deformity in the damp, salty winds, says architect Jorge Manieú.



“You get used to living in a house like this, and then someone comes over who’s never seen it, and they’re like, Wow.”

CONSTANZA RÍOS, RESIDENT



Excavating the site and setting the home into the cliff allowed the architects to create an entrance that doubles as a sunny central courtyard where the kids can play outside while still protected from stiff southerly gusts (left). The guest bedroom (below) feels private without being closed off, thanks to ample glazing. “Our houses are skeletons with windows,” says Manieu.

simple and to be able to keep an eye on their two kids. Manieu created a house with roughly 2,270 square feet of interior space in a “butterfly distribution”—bedrooms to the sides that open completely to central living spaces. Walls of glass provide maximal visibility inside and out, while timber finishes and a woodburning fireplace keep things cozy.

Burrowing the home into the cliff allowed Manieu to create a series of integrated outdoor spaces. The ground-level roof doubles as a viewing deck, while a sunken entry courtyard serves as a sheltered play space for the kids. The bedrooms open onto terraces, which Manieu covered with irregularly patterned slatted wood to allow just the right amount of sunlight to filter through to the interiors.

With its hunkered-down profile, the south-facing cabin could have been quite gloomy. But Manieu captured yet more sun with a skylight craning diagonally to the north. “It goes up kind of like a big neck, swallowing all the heat of the morning and diffusing light across the living room,” he explains, noting that natural temperature control is key for a house like this, which runs on 10 solar panels. Come evening the sun plunges down the window walls into the Pacific, where silhouetted surfers glide along the horizon. ■



● **Casa Caimi Ríos**



ARCHITECT **WMR Arquitectos**
LOCATION **Navidad, Chile**

- A Entrance
- B Bathroom
- C Bedroom
- D Garden
- E Walk-In Closet
- F Kitchen
- G Living/Dining Area
- H Guest Room
- I Laundry Room
- J Storage Room
- K Hot Tub

