

Lodge Life

A stylish family cabin that's designed for recreation and relaxation.

By catherine warmerdam | photography by kele dobrinski/colossus mfg.

“It’s just a really magical place.”

That’s how Christina Valencia describes the community of Serene Lakes atop Donner Summit where she and her husband, Kele Dobrinski, completed a top-to-bottom remodel of an outdated A-frame mountain cabin owned by his family.

Having just renovated their own residence in Sacramento’s Land Park neighborhood, the couple, who run the do-it-all creative studio Colossus Mfg., were up for the challenge of upgrading the home, a cramped two-bedroom with no insulation and poor lighting.

“It required a lot of vision,” says Dobrinski. “It took some thinking about how to make this into a place you can come to with three families and feel comfortable enough to spread out into different areas.”

They started by removing a wall that separated the living room from the kitchen, which Valencia describes as “a tiny little box.” They also reappropriated a large underutilized bathroom and expanded the living space into the bottom floor, which had previously functioned as a basement and had no heat. The smart new configuration resulted in a four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath home that feels airy and spacious.





The kitchen nook (above) utilizes space-saving bench seating. "It's great for families fitting a lot of people into a space," says Christina Valencia, "and I just love the casual nature of it." More seating is available at the kitchen counter (left).

The installation of sliding glass doors and clerestory windows in the two principal bedrooms allows natural light to flood the rooms during the day. "At night, we can see the moon and the stars through the windows," says Valencia. "It's like you're camping, but indoors."


For the interiors, Valencia and Dobrinski cleverly merged the look of a high-end Nordic chalet with a campy 1970s ski vibe. "We try on our projects to mash up two different styles because I think that brings a fresh perspective," explains Valencia. "Kele and I wanted to make it unlike all the other mountain homes up there."

Durable surfaces, including a practical tile backsplash in the kitchen and engineered-wood floors in the main living area, can withstand the inevitable mud and snow that come with cabin life. "We associate the area with skiing and hiking and biking and having fun," says Valencia, "so the house had to accommodate that."

Likewise, the furnishings were chosen as much for their practicality as their beauty. "We wanted the home to feel comfortable, like nothing's too precious," says Dobrinski. "We looked for a lot of vintage stuff, which is both really well-built and has a lot of character but is also not a huge expense. If it's going to get beat up, you don't feel terrible about it."

In the living room, a massive rock fireplace was replaced with a compact gas fireplace clad in Venetian plaster, a look that's simultaneously sleek and warm. A gaming nook in one corner is where kids congregate to do puzzles or play board games. "I honestly thought this would be a throwaway area, but it gets a lot of use," says Valencia. "Our kids love to do puzzles and play Jenga or Legos there. Everyone's got to have a game table at a cabin."

The summer-camp vibe that drew Dobrinski's family to Serene Lakes is now reflected in the home itself, which is what the designers had aimed for all along. "Being able to be in the mountains with your kids, you get a lot of family time and you can strip away all the distractions," says Valencia. And what could be more magical than that? 🏡

A man wearing a grey beanie, an orange jacket, and blue jeans is walking from left to right in a modern living room. He is slightly out of focus. The room features a fireplace with a white surround and a dark metal insert, a large window with a wooden blind, and a dining table with dark chairs. A potted plant sits on a wooden stool near the window. A pair of dark boots with white fur lining is on a red rug in the foreground. The ceiling has exposed wooden beams.

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Ripping out the massive stone fireplace that once stood in the living room “completely transformed” the space, says Kele Dobrinski. The designers clad the new fireplace in Venetian plaster, which has the look of concrete.

The geometric quilt in what the designers nicknamed “the black room,” one of two principal bedrooms, once belonged to Dobrinski’s grandmother.





The designers found the table and chairs in the gaming nook (top) at the Alameda Flea Market.

Blue is featured prominently in the home, including a bathroom (left) and one of the principal bedrooms (above). "The color blue really spoke to us," says Valencia. "Against the forest, it just looks so pretty." Adding wood planking to the upstairs ceilings "is something interesting that adds a little cabin feel."