



And Now for Something

Completely Different

Story by Elisabeth Korb | Photos by Asa Gilmore

(facing page) The kitchen features lyptus butcher block island, glass pendants from an artist collective and precast cement and recycled paper countertops. **(above)** Viewed from the home's back, bright-hued walls and the connector's family photo gallery are seen through red-clad windows.

A Truckee home proves
that living small lives large.

Architect: Ted Brobst of Ward-Young Architecture & Planning
Builder: Gabe Shacter of Mountain Craft
Interior: Kevin & Christine La Presle
Year completed: 2009
Square feet: 2,072





Kevin and Christine La Presle’s Truckee home is an anomaly. Not only is it a 2,000 square foot new build, almost unheard of in Tahoe, it’s the first full-time residence to take top honor in our TQ Mountain Home Awards’ seven-year history.

The fascination stems from its architectural integrity—and size. Curious passersby often stop in front of this Glenshire home to catch a glimpse of the single-story structure with its low-pitched shed roofs and thoughtful mix of materials that are at once utilitarian, modest and aesthetic. Two wings (one for public living spaces and another for bedrooms) connect via a multifunctional indoor gallery space and a raised outdoor deck and private garden. A covered deck on the living wing extends the home out to capture views of the Sierra Crest.

“We didn’t really have a plan; we just wanted to be here,” Kevin La Presle says of finding the lot in 2004 with his wife of 28 years, Christine. Both California natives, and with Christine’s parents now living in Tahoe City, the Pasadena couple knew

they wanted to live in Tahoe, they just weren’t sure how.

“We thought we were priced out of the market,” says Christine. “Just to torture ourselves we would drive around and look at property.” Through a twist of fate, the couple found a great deal on the one-acre Glenshire parcel and bought it the very same day. “It was definitely impulsive,” says Christine, a flight attendant for Southwest Airlines. Kevin, a captain at the Pasadena Fire Department, agrees, “We spent more time buying a car stereo.”

They knew they wanted the smallest house possible and a definite departure from their “track house hell,” says Kevin, who notes their Southern California home was so close to adjacent properties that they would run to answer the phone when their neighbor’s was ringing. “The first book we read during our idea-gathering process was *The Not So Big House* by Sarah Susanka,” he says. “A lot of our friends were in the same boat as us, with the kids leaving the house, and were moving from 1,800 to 5,000 square foot homes. We just didn’t understand it.



“The world produces so many cheap, poorly made things to fill homes with. Everything that we picked out was based on quality.”
 —owner Kevin La Presle

(facing page) The home’s low-pitched shed roofs root it into the landscape. An earth-toned palette includes low-maintenance stucco, clear western red cedar and Cor-Ten rusted steel. **(above)** The living room is accented by a traditional stone fireplace, inspired by the owner’s Irish heritage, that is tied into the home’s contemporary style with a steel mantel. **(right)** Interior spaces pop with color, and include many elements handcrafted by the homeowner, like the powder room’s walnut pedestal.



We preferred to save money on the square footage and spend that on nicer, quality things. We both feel strongly about not contributing to more waste.”

They began researching architects, and cobbling together poster boards of design ideas. “We’d cut out things from magazines and write why we liked or didn’t like it,” says Kevin. The couple also looked at buying plans off the internet. “But if we did it ourselves, the mistakes we’d make would easily add up to the money we’d pay an architect,” he adds.

Following their gut paid off. The La Presles met their match in architect Ted Brobst, with Truckee’s Ward-Young Architecture & Planning, and they approached him with their requirements: that the house be single story, 2,000 square feet (the smallest allowed by their neighborhood code) and include a great room.

They also shared their poster boards. “They were showing us work that was out of the box for this area,” says Brobst, who managed to incorporate most of those elements in the final design, from the window trim and steel beams to the private garden and fireplace’s stacked stone inspired by Christine’s Irish roots. The La Presles’ fresh approach also resonated with their builder, Gabe Shacter of Truckee’s Mountain Craft.

“The owners and Ted were both very open to new ideas, so it made it a nice process for us all to work together as a team,” Shacter says. The La Presles and Brobst repay the compliment, applauding Shacter for his passion for quality, comprehension of the project’s overall vision and bringing ideas to the table, like the steel mantel design.

Kevin and Shacter worked side by side on numerous aspects of the home, including the Squak Mountain Stone countertops made of precast recycled paper and cement. Kevin, who learned woodworking from his grandfather, made all the cabinetry and built-ins, as well as the kitchen island countertop, of lyptus, a sustainable hardwood, and the powder room’s



(top) All the home’s window seats, seen here in the master bedroom, double as storage, and the window trim detailing (single pieces of vertical grain Douglas fir notched over a gypsum wall board finish) create clean contemporary lines. **(right)** The gallery connector is more than just a hall: the north wall (seen here) displays family photos.





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“There’s not an inch of this house that we don’t use.”
—owner Christine La Presle

walnut pedestal. He designed the home’s dining room table and created a shelving system from electrical conduit and unfinished plywood in the gallery connector. Christine is credited for the home’s bold use of color: orange, red and lime green walls pair with muted beige and chocolate brown.

The La Presles’ rather unique Tahoe home well reflects their belief in sustainability and simplicity. The neighbors seem to agree with that approach. Two-thirds of the way through construction, the La Presles received an anonymous letter thanking them for bringing something new to the neighborhood. As if to illustrate the point, an older man stood staring at their home one day. “I said, ‘Hey, how are you?’” recalls Kevin. “He looked up at the sky, shook his fist and said, ‘Finally, something different!’” **TQ**