

CAMP

Just like in any home, the outdoor kitchen is the hub of camp. It's outfitted with modular pieces that can be easily stored in winter.

By Chantal Lamers

LIFE

A Louisiana family with a love for the West dreams up an idyllic outdoor retreat tucked among fir and cedar trees more than 2,600 miles away from home in Southern Oregon.

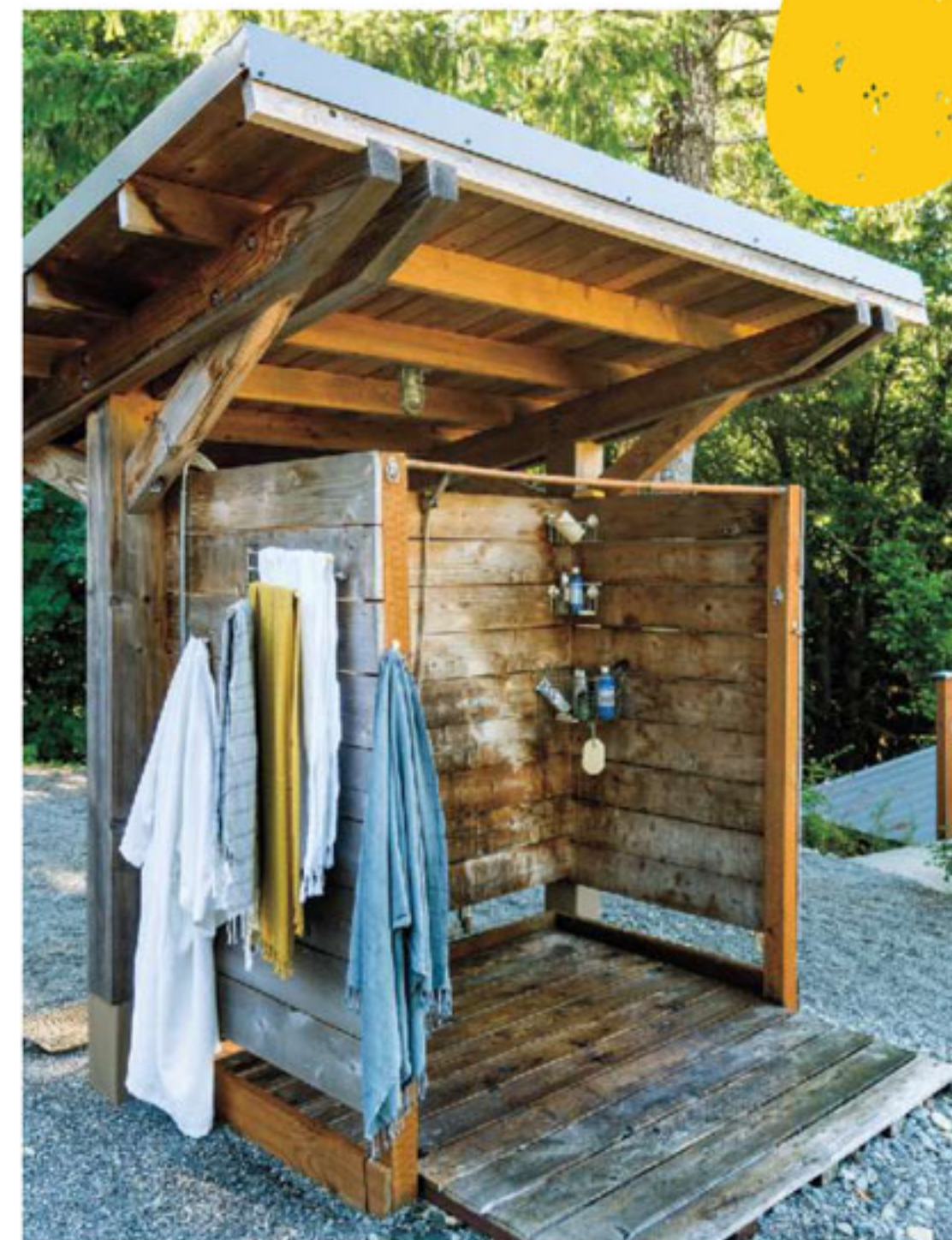
Photographs by Thomas J. Story

The Morris family loads their kayaks onto their Land Cruiser. From left to right: Neal, Natalia, Owen, Henry, and Anne.



When

summer descends on Louisiana, many locals escape the unfriendly heat and humidity by catching a plane to a cooler climate, or they head to summer camp in a neighboring state. Then there are more adventurous Louisianans, like Neal and Anne Morris and their three kids, Owen, age 12, and 16-year-olds Natalia and Henry. Each summer, the New Orleans family packs their Westfalia camper with swimsuits and flip-flops and drives 48 hours to explore the wilderness of the West.



We reached a point in our lives where we don't have to be practical. We love being outdoors in the West, so let's do what we love.

—Neal Morris

After more than two decades of road trips (pre- and post-children) to dude ranches in Wyoming, the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington, and countless national and state parks, the Morris family has yet to shake its collective affection for the region. “We reached a point in our lives where we don't have to be practical,” says Neal. “We love being outdoors in the West, so let's do what we love.” True to that laid-back Big Easy spirit, they doubled down on an acre of land off Oregon's Chetco River, where they built the outdoor camp of their dreams.

A remote pop-up campsite at the river's edge wasn't always in the cards. In fact, there was a point after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 when the couple struggled with whether to stay put and help rebuild the ravished community (their home was mostly spared) or move on to the West permanently. In part because Neal is a real estate developer, the decision to stay to help rebuild was pretty obvious. Yet as the kids got older, and road trips to Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings

CLEAN UP IN COMFORT

The other side of the bathroom features a riverside-facing shower. Its on-demand hot-water heater (and the kitchen's hot water and the refrigerator) runs off liquid propane.





DESIGN A CAMP-WORTHY KITCHEN

The outdoor, open-concept kitchen—built from locally sourced Douglas Fir and topped with a sloped metal roof—was essential to making the camp functional. “There are typically multiple people cooking and multiple people doing dishes,” says Anne, who confesses that, to her amazement, even after several weeks of cooking outside she doesn’t miss her home kitchen. “Dish storage is on drip racks above the sink so you don’t have to put away the dishes after they dry. Plates and cups go directly from the rinse tub to where they live,” she says. The kitchen is also equipped with a portable gas stove and camp oven, while the refrigerator, food storage, and garbage are tucked behind a rolling metal door that they lock up at night.



the satellite images. He couldn’t believe his luck. “In the photos you can see people kayaking and camping along the Chetco, and I thought, ‘We found it.’”

In 2014, the first year after the purchase, they’d managed to complete a portion of the 1,700-square-foot deck and drop a 40-foot shipping container on the property. The container, which had been gifted to Neal in New Orleans, was hauled to Oregon filled with coolers, cooking equipment, tents, kayaks—even a car—and basically all the fixtures they’d need to complete their camp. It was also prewired for a six-panel solar system, which ekes out enough power to run the lights and router and keep their gadgets charged.

They slept in nylon tents until the following winter, when they called in a local contractor to expand the deck and cable railing and build the kitchen and bathroom stations. But the sloped terrain is what really guided the layout. An existing septic tank (which allows for a real flushing toilet) called for a bathroom at the uppermost level. And because the lowest level floods in winter, they carved out a generous living space in the middle. Over the next few summers they made more tweaks—adding a backup generator, water filtration system, and satellite internet. “I may be away from home for seven weeks, but I’m not off work,” says Neal. “The time difference allows me to get up and start work early. I work until about 3 p.m. Louisiana time. It’s only 1 p.m. on the West Coast so that leaves all afternoon to hike or paddle or go for a bike ride.”

What’s come as a surprise, though, is how comfortably they’re able to live outside and the number of options for adventuring that the vast landscape provides. “Floating down the Chetco is just the best,” says Neal. “The northernmost grove of redwoods in the U.S. is on the drive up to camp. The Oregon Dunes are a couple of hours up the coast. The road cycling is great, and there is even a tolerable beach break at Crescent City, 30 minutes away. We’ve had guests come for a long weekend and then ask, ‘Um, is it cool if we stay a week?’ There’s a lot to do if you are into the outdoors.”

NAME YOUR CAMP

“French immersion schools are fairly common in New Orleans,” says Anne. “Our kids all went to one and they speak French. Owen was 7 when he named the camp ‘Allons-Y,’ which means ‘let’s go!’”



Canyon national parks stretched on longer, they decided that it couldn’t hurt to keep an eye out for a small piece of property. So about seven years ago, Neal came up with a list of locations: Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana all made the list. “We knew we wanted to build a camp so our criteria were pretty much, chilly at

night and on a river,” he says.

Neal conducted a routine search online for vacant land about once a month for nearly a year. He was inching toward throw-in-the-towel status when something finally popped up, a parcel just a smidge over an acre outside of Brookings in Southern Oregon. To get a better view, he zoomed in on



SOAK IN YOUR SURROUNDINGS

The claw-foot tub, salvaged from a home that flooded during Katrina, is situated near the edge of the slope for optimal river views. A pair of stumps is a catchall for shampoo and towels.



PITCH A PERMANENT TENT

"Safari tents are the perfect balance of indoor-outdoor, temporary-permanent," says Neal. "They're extremely durable and they stay up all year. The sun fly will be replaced two or three times before the tent itself wears out."



ROOM AT THE INN

After being towed in their first summer, the 1967 Airstream Caravel is now a permanent fixture at camp and typically reserved for the summer's influx of visitors. "There are three beds inside, so when we have guests with little kids it ends up being a fort or a kids' bedroom," says Neal. ▴



KEEP IT CRAFTY

In addition to countless rounds of UNO, one of the kids' go-to activities (some more than others, now) is painting the rocks they collect by the river. ▽