



A Book, A Biblioteca and The City of Bogotá

By: Audra Clemons



After being in Colombia for a few months, I was craving to know everything I could about the country: *What makes its heart beat? Why are the people so friendly? Why is this city synonymous with passion?*

One of the most effective methods to gain knowledge is through literature, so I purchased myself the English rendition of the Nobel Prize winning book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The literature of Marquez has long been an international representative of Colombia – and in my opinion, one of its best; He has been so influential that the country now promotes itself as a destination of “Magical Realism,” adopted from Marquez’s writing style.

“What matters in life is not what happens to you, but what you remember and how you remember it.”

~Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

After endless hours of immersing myself into the exquisite Marquez novel, it seemed only natural to find a library where I could pay homage to the works of this literary genius. Luckily for me, I knew one of Bogotá’s best architects, Manuel Guerrero Sandoval, co-owner and Design Director of Tectus Ltda., and who also happened to design *Biblioteca El Tunal*.

After receiving a tour of the library from Don Manuel, I surmised that this would certainly be a library Marquez himself would appreciate. Beyond receiving the *Bill and Melinda Gates Access to Learning Award*, and beyond the beauty or structure that makes it one of Bogotá’s most famous architectural buildings, Biblioteca El Tunal is a piece of Bogotá’s heart.

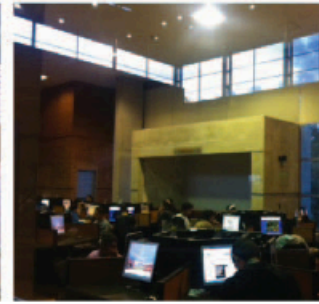
The library is situated in the poorest neighborhood, or *barrio*, in Bogotá, which the city classifies as “Estrato 0,” meaning that the majority of people in this area have no source of income. In 1998, under the leadership of Mayor Enrique Peñalosa four libraries were constructed in Bogotá’s most crucial areas. Two of the libraries were given to architects who had already made a name for them selves, and a design competition was orchestrated to construct the library in Tunal. Manuel Guerrero Sandoval was 29 when he won this design competition, outshining 20 contenders from across the globe. When I asked Manuel what the key to his success was, he answered: “I wanted to make a difference in Bogotá. This was more than a project; it was freedom, trust and art. The people that live in this area don’t have access to anything outside of where they live. As an American, you can’t really connect to the idea of this. This library can take a person anywhere in

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the world. Through books, through music, through videos and through

art, this community is given a sense of hope and freedom.”

Biblioteca El Tunal has approximately 4,000 visitors per day who are given access to a 23,000 sq. foot library offering them: books, computers, Internet, an audio room, a video room, a children's library, a wall of current magazines, a cafeteria, conference rooms and a hi-tech auditorium that can host everything from a keynote speaker to a musical performance.

My experience at Biblioteca El Tunal had turned out to be more than just a visit to pay homage to one of the greatest literary writers of all-time, it also partially quenched my thirst in finding out what makes Bogotá, and Colombia, such a passionate place.

For more information on Biblioteca El Tunal, please visit: www.biblored.edu.co

For more information on architect Manuel Guerrero Sandoval, please visit: www.e-tectus.com 