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2009 Curry Stone Design Prize Finalists



Image by Sergio Gomez

“Our most beautiful buildings must be in our poorest areas.”
– Sergio Fajardo

The remarkable, four-year revitalization of Medellín has become a model for cities around the world. The construction of visually striking libraries, schools, parks and science and cultural centers in some of the city’s most impoverished neighborhoods, has turned Medellín, once considered the deadliest city in the world, into a thriving, livable urban hub.

Beginning in 2004, a team of renowned architects led by Alejandro Echeverri, former director of urban projects, and Sergio Fajardo, former mayor, implemented this initiative in consultation with local neighborhood residents. Together, Echeverri and Fajardo, as well as an extensive team of architects and technicians, helped champion and realize this cornerstone belief: “Our most beautiful buildings must be in our poorest areas,” as expressed by Fajardo.

Paired with sweeping social programs, including education and micro-lending to small businesses, these projects helped rout the city’s deeply entrenched social inequalities. “From the beginning, we involved the people in the activity of using public spaces to solve social problems and to change the lives of the community,” said Echeverri.

A number of these projects have become landmarks of the city, including the Orquideorama, a 42,200-square-foot structure whose defining feature is a soaring, fractal-like canopy of wood-framed hexagons that shelters the Botanic Garden's orchid collection and houses cultural events. One of the Medellín's most visited attractions is the iconic Parque Biblioteca España, which resembles three massive, etched black boulders and is perched in the hilltops of Santo Domingo, a barrio once notorious for drug violence.

In 2004, the design process helped extend the city's modern railway system by building an elevated gondola tramway that connects some of Medellín's poorest and most isolated neighborhoods to the rest of the city. Today, residents from the sprawling hillside slums of cinderblock shacks have more opportunities to take advantage of schools and the growing construction, textile, and tourism economies of the city.

These architectural and urban projects have "changed the skin of the city," in Farjardo's words. A guiding principle of these public works projects was el efecto demostrativo, or using the "power of example" — in this case, the dramatic symbolism of modern architecture — to instill a sense of pride and possibility in the minds of local residents and beyond.

The Curry Stone Design Prize was founded by architect Clifford Curry and his wife, H. Delight Stone. Curry is a 1970 alumnus of the UK College of Architecture (now the UK College of Design) and for most of his career, a principal architect for William Colson, recognized as a pioneer in senior housing. Please see <http://currystonedesignprize.com/> for more information.

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