Bogotá Dresses in Green
The transformation of a Latin American metropolis.

BY JIMENA MARTIGNONI

Between 1997 and 2003, Bogotá, Colombia’s capital city, invested in public space like never before. A legislated land use program, the Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT), which took effect in 1997, compelled all Colombian city councils to draft a public space renovation plan and put it into action within three years. In Bogotá, where poverty and crime had physically degraded many neighborhoods, the result was nothing less than a transformation, as three successive mayors created a sweeping overhaul of the city’s public spaces.

The POT seeks to work beyond the level of aesthetics, fostering social and environmental sustainability through urban design. Specifically, it focuses on community participation, restoring and preserving the natural environment, and improving the quality of built public space. The program’s criteria will be used to guide all new urban projects in Bogotá until 2010, especially those involving pedestrian areas, vehicular connections, and green space.

The inclusion of landscape architects in the multidisciplinary teams that planned and carried out the projects sounds a hopeful note for the profession in other Latin American cities, which have been slow to recognize landscape architecture’s value. In Bogotá’s planning phase, the main task of landscape architects was to outline master plans for the parks system and for the restoration of natural water systems throughout the city. These large schemes broke down into 30 short-term projects to be finished by 2004, 30 more to be completed by 2007, and 30 more (as well as the consolidation of the primary ecological network) to be done by 2010. Most of these project teams include landscape architects.

Reversing the Decline of a City

Partly as a result of the explosive growth that Bogotá experienced during the past 30 years—rising from a population of less than 1,000,000 to 7,000,000—this city became one of the most chaotic and insecure in Latin America. An environmental study conducted between 1993 and 1996 was an important turning...
supports small stands of frailejón, or bamboo, and páramo bunchgrass (Espeletia spp.). From about 990 to 1,100 feet, the páramo and sub-páramo—Andean-region tropical habitats, usually wet and cold—contain grasses, sedges, mosses, lichens, and other low-growing plants. Here, at the highest elevation, brooks and streams originate.

In the renovation, the project team has treated water as a visual thread linking mountains to city. Water now runs in channels (some lined with stone, brick, concrete, grass, and other materials) through parks and linear green spaces, forested avenues and streets, bike paths and walkways. All of these features have been conceived and designed under the impetus of the POT and its new environmental standards. As well as stitching natural and built landscapes together, these corridors promote a more natural environment within the city and connect the metropolitan area with the larger region. They also reestablish the large-scale ecological zones needed to guide migrating birds and support other wildlife.

The restoration and redesign of three linear parks—Parque Nacional, Parque del Virrey, and Quebrada de la Vieja—illustrate how the reconnection plan works. The latter two projects received a great deal of community participation, and all of them involved landscape architects as consultants or as principal designers.

Parque Nacional (shown on this month's cover), the largest of the three, begins within the mountains as a more natural area and then continues down the western slopes and through the city as a ribbon of green space. As it approaches the urban grid, the park becomes more urban, furnished with benches and other amenities for both active and passive recreation.

Parque del Virrey runs along a former riverbed. Quebrada de la Vieja (not shown in the photos), designed for strolling and relaxing, is the most naturalistic in style of all the parks in the Capital District. In all three parks, water is the focal point. In the first two, it flows along narrow, bricked channels whose grassy borders are usually filled with people. In Quebrada de la Vieja, small cascades descend beside wooden stairs and tropical vegetation to create an urban oasis where people walk, jog, or just relax. Behind all three stand the East Hills.

As part of the Public Space Renovation plan, bike paths were added in many parks and other public areas throughout the city. Parque del Virrey is one of the most used by joggers, bikers, and walkers.

San Francisco, the river that once flowed here and now runs more than 25 feet beneath the surface. As part of the reforestation plan for Avenida Jimenez, two native species, California pepper (Schinus molle) and a native palm (Ceroxylon quinquelurum)—the national tree of Colombia—have been planted to celebrate the local landscape. Traditionally, Bogotá's streets and avenues have been lined with exotic species. In this case, landscape architects were part of a committee that amended the design and planting plan after the engineering features had been mapped out.

This avenue also serves as the compositional spine for the renovation of central Bogotá. It starts in La Candelaria neighborhood—the site of the original Spanish settlement—and reaches Parque del Tercer Milenio, or Third Millennium Park. Part of the urban parks system, this park embodies the plan's overall social agenda to serve

**Colombian Landscape Architects Build on Steady Gains**

Although the grand scale of Bogotá's urban renovation has given the profession a boost, the increase in status has hardly taken place in a vacuum. Two landscape architects who were independent members of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) founded the Colombian Society of Landscape Architects in 1981. Ten years later, Cartagena, a World Heritage City, hosted the IFLA Annual Congress, and in 1992, the Universidad del Valle in Cali introduced postgraduate studies in landscape architecture as part of the architecture program.

Today, the president of IFLA is Colombian landscape architect Martha Fajardo—the first woman and Latin American professional to hold this position—and Los Andes University and the National Javeriana University now require landscape design credits in their architecture programs. Tadeo University also requires landscape design credits in its postgraduate program on urban design. Landscape architect Gloria Aponte is working to roll out the country's first undergraduate program in landscape architecture at Sabana University and hopes to launch it in 2005.