



When it became clear to Pablo Escobar that he had to surrender to Colombian authorities, he made a deal which allowed him to spend his “confinement” at La Catedral (“The Cathedral”).

It was a place he designed himself, situated high above the Honey Valley southeast of Medellin (and near his home base of Envigado).

Here, the mountain air is cool and the view is stupendous. It seems very little like a prison, particularly when we learn that the security detail in place to keep Escobar in check were his own men.

It was 1991—a particularly difficult time for Escobar who had personally caused so much damage to his country and its citizens.

A group known as *Los Pepes* (short for “People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar”) had formed with one essential task in mind—to seek revenge against Pablo and his associates. True to its purpose, this group would eventually assassinate more than 300 of Escobar’s friends and family.

Then there was the Cali Cartel, a rival drug-cartel whose mission was to eliminate Escobar (and end his standing in the drug-lord world).

Beyond all of that, the government was charging and convicting other people involved in the Colombian drug trade.

After negotiating for six months, Pablo and the Colombian government reached a deal. He would live in a place where he had a direct line-of-sight (via a telescope) to the home where his wife and children lived (in Envigado).

The place was called *La Catedral* and this image provides a view of it. His negotiated deal would help Escobar avoid what he feared the most—extradition to the United States where he could not bribe judges, prison guards and all manner of other people who were supposed to be part of a fair system of justice.

On the other hand, it was also a “good deal” for the government. Its leaders could say that they had forced Colombia’s most-notorious drug lord to stop his drug-trafficking ways.

Except ... it didn't.

Escobar arrived at his new “prison” on the 19th of June, 1991. He flew-in by helicopter.

Thereafter, his family visited him three or four times a week. Doing mostly whatever he pleased, within the nature of his confinement at The Cathedral, life went along fairly well for Escobar. Then, once again, he crossed the line.

After four of his lieutenants had a major dispute over money, Pablo ordered that they be tortured, then killed. When word of this reached the Colombian authorities, they decided to change the type of confinement Escobar was enjoying.

Instead of life at The Cathedral, Pablo now faced confinement at a military institution. The plan—the chief of the national prison system told Escobar—would be temporary. It would only last until *La Catedral* could be made more secure.

Escobar did not believe him.

After thirteen months at his scenic place in the mountains, Escobar fled it altogether. Although officials are not sure who helped him leave, he must have bribed some individuals to disappear the way he did—at least that

was the thinking at the time.

Juan Pablo, Escobar's son, tells us how his father *actually* escaped. Anticipating that one day he might need to flee *La Catedral*, Pablo ordered that a way out should be built into the structure's perimeter wall:

My father had created this escape route during the construction phase; the section of the wall had been mortared with a very weak mix of concrete, so all it took was two kicks to break it open. (See *Pablo Escobar: My Father*, by Juan Pablo Escobar.)

It took the soldiers who stormed Escobar's prison around twelve hours to realize that Pablo had escaped. Once he left *La Catedral*, Escobar was never in custody again.

An embarrassed Colombian government asked for help to find Escobar. A 600-man Special Ops unit called "Search Bloc," formed by Colombia's National Police, included U.S. Delta Force members and Navy SEALs.

The country placed a bounty on Escobar of \$6 million. The drug lord was reduced to staying in safe houses for the rest of his life.

Within the decade after Escobar left his cathedral in the mountains, people began taking parts of it away. For some it was a way to have a souvenir from the Escobar era.

In 2007, a group of Benedictine monks began to use the disintegrating mansion. Envigado city officials allowed the monks to purchase the property so they could turn it into a place where poor and elderly people of Envigado could have a home.

It is used, for that purpose, to this day.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Pablo-Escobar-La-Catedral-Prison>

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