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### Terraza 7: a bar for the Queens community

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PHOTO BY JACKIE STRAWBRIDGE

Diego Obregon plays marimba at Terraza 7.

Posted: Thursday, February 20, 2014 10:30 am  
 by Jackie Strawbridge, qboro contributor | 0 comments

Between Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, in the nucleus of the most diverse region on Earth, Queens doctor and entrepreneur Freddy Castiblanco has created a hub of cultural and political collaboration, that also sells a killer Pisco sour, at Terraza 7.

He wanted it to be a bar for and composed of the community. He remembers discovering, after moving from Colombia to Queens in 2002, both the diversity and the cultural isolation of the borough.

Communities "didn't really share among themselves, so what I tried to create was a place to share between cultures ... the idea was to create a cultural bridge through music." What this translates to is a collection of performances, readings, classes, film screenings and workshops, as well as an open space for "local and like-minded nonprofits" to meet.

Terraza 7's primary attraction is its live music, which it offers throughout the week. Many of the performances could be described as Latin or jazz, but the featured musicians, who come from across the globe, in general prefer to identify their music by geography and rhythmic roots, rather than a particular genre.

For Castiblanco, Terraza 7, located at 40-19 Gleaney St., shouldn't just showcase different types of music, but should foster a new sound, born of Queens. He believes that immigrant artists can use jazz to explore and blend their "cultural and acoustic memories" from their home countries: "We need to create a new culture based on the tools that we find in our environment in New York."

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Some performers at Terraza 7 are established musicians and some are local up-and-comers, and all put on a tight show that, especially on the weekends, gets the audience moving. The bar has featured several Grammy Award-winning artists including Oscar Stagnaro, Aquiles Baez and Juan Medrano Cotito.

"Music was a way to empower people here," Castiblanco said, and to promote "a sense of belonging ... our model was not just to show the beautiful things in our culture."

Rather, he believes that it is also the obligation of small businesses in the area to discuss the tragedies faced by many immigrants in both their native countries and new home.

As such, Castiblanco was a founding member of the Roosevelt Avenue Community Alliance, and is active in causes such as immigration reform, healthcare reform and controlling rising rent. He uses Terraza 7 as a place to explore and discuss these issues, and has held events including a lecture on human rights in Colombia and a discussion on violence against women; upcoming in March, Terraza 7 will host a conference on the social and environmental cost of Colombian coal mining.

Aside from its cultural value, a great part of the bar's appeal is its look. After his father found the space in the early 2000s, Castiblanco set to work transforming it from a minimal storage garage.

The overwhelmingly Instagram-able decor currently includes subway signs, figures painted for Dia de los Muertos, colored Christmas lights and stools made from repurposed beer kegs. From the lower level, customers can look up at the musicians' tapping feet through the steel grate stage floor.

Terraza 7 has a dance floor on its lower level next to the bar. The audience can also pay a cover to enjoy performances in the upstairs arena, where dancing invariably breaks out as well.

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