

Colombian attorney helped build his law firm with a much broader legal purpose in mind



By Brian Cox

Three central pillars of Rodrigo Prieto Martinez's decades-long career as a successful attorney in Bogotá, Colombia, are family, education, and client service.

"From a very young age, I knew I would study law," says Prieto Martinez, who was one of five children growing up in Bogotá. There was no question for him that a career in law was where he would end up, shaped by those greater influences in his life.

While his father built a business, his mother was a nationally recognized painter who managed the household and raised the children. From both, he says, he learned lessons that would remain important throughout his life and in his professional career.

"They were people who instilled in me the value of hard work, family, and striving to do what's best for others," he says.



Rodrigo (left) on the Rucu Pichincha summit, a 15,407-foot inactive volcano peak overlooking Quito, Ecuador.

Another strong influence on his development as a young man was the Swiss school he attended in Bogotá, where he encountered an educational culture that stayed with him.

"Its open-minded culture clearly left a lasting impression on me," he says.

His decision about where to attend university was influenced by family, too. His older brother had already decided to become a lawyer and had begun studying at Universidad del Rosario. Prieto Martinez opted to take a different path, enrolling at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, which was founded in 1623 and is one of the oldest and most traditional Colombian universities. He earned his law degree in 1981. The university's impact on him went well beyond learning law, however.

"The humanistic and anthropological education I received throughout my undergraduate studies has shaped the way I approach not only my professional practice but also my entire family and social life," he explains.

His thesis focused on a comparative analysis of family law legislation in different countries, an early indication of the breadth of interests that would eventually characterize his practice. He later continued his legal education in Spain, earning a specialization in civil and commercial law at the University of Navarra.

As a young lawyer fresh out of law school some 40 years ago, Prieto Martinez chose to join the family business and work for his father, an entrepreneur who helped create Colombia's cemetery park industry. This work gave him an opportunity to handle a variety of legal matters while also becoming involved in other institutions and causes. He devoted time to social initiatives in marginalized areas of Bogotá and helped strengthen

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Rodrigo is an avid traveler and enjoys hiking.

the corporate governance of Universidad de La Sabana and its business school, INALDE.

Over the ensuing years, the combination of business, law, education, and social involvement has remained a constant in Prieto Martinez's life. In the second half of the 1990s, that combination would lead him to co-found Pinilla, González & Prieto Abogados (PGP).

The seeds of the law firm grew out of an innovative business proposal.

Felipe Pinilla, his college classmate and future business partner, approached Prieto Martinez about an idea that was considerably more ambitious than a traditional law firm. Pinilla wanted to launch an online legal consulting initiative with Prieto Martinez and Juan Manuel González.

Ultimately, the enterprise proved unsuccessful, but it also provided an opportunity for the three young lawyers to prove their resilience and to learn from failure. They discovered that having a good concept wasn't enough. They came to understand that they didn't yet have the public credibility necessary to make the online venture succeed.

Out of that disappointing experience, however, something positive emerged because not long afterward, the trio decided to establish Pinilla, González & Prieto Abogados.

The firm's beginnings were modest. The three partners were joined by two secretaries and a court clerk. Pinilla and González brought with them an existing client base, giving the new firm a solid foundation to build on.

The partners soon moved into an office in Bogotá's financial district. Prieto Martinez says the location helped them establish greater confidence among clients. Three years later, they moved into their current office, another step in establishing the firm.

The lesson Prieto Martinez took from those early years was relatively simple.

"For those who wish to start their own firm, I recommend being very selective about who you choose as partners and taking great care to serve your clients well: they are the primary drivers of growth," he says. "If they feel well taken care of, they will recommend your legal services."

The firm's early clients also helped shape its practice. PGP quickly became involved in real estate and urban planning, areas in which González had particular experience, including his previous work as legal director of a Bogotá urban-planning agency.

Prieto Martinez developed a practice centered on corporate law, educational law, and family law. His work has included advising businesses and foreign companies, statutory reforms, and liquidations, as well as matters involving schools and universities. One of the firm's projects for Universidad de La Sabana involved a lengthy urban-planning licensing process.

His connection to the education sector has never been limited to legal representation. He has served on the board of Universidad de La Sabana and on the board of INALDE Business School, while also participating in organizations, including the Regional Chamber of Construction, the Colombian-American Chamber, the Colombian-Chilean Chamber, and the legal chamber of the Association of Colombian Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

But perhaps the clearest indication of what education means to Prieto Martinez is found outside his professional résumé.



Rodrigo and several friends helped establish a foundation that has awarded more than 600 scholarships to students pursuing degrees at universities in Bogotá.

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He has long supported efforts to help people without the resources to attend college. Together with friends, he helped establish a foundation that has awarded more than 600 scholarships to students pursuing degrees at universities in Bogotá.

That work has helped put Prieto Martínez's legal career into a larger context. His path has taken him from the legal department of his father's cemetery business to the founding of a respected Bogotá law firm, from corporate and educational law to institutional governance and community service. Through it all, education has remained a constant – both as something he values personally and as a means of developing the people and institutions around him.

It is also central to the way he thinks lawyers should approach their profession.

"I think it is important for a lawyer – and for any professional, in general – to develop their character through study, to stay up to date, and to educate themselves on the ethical principles of the profession," he says, "so that they can be a person of integrity who strives to do their part in building a more just society."



In 2025, Pinilla, González & Prieto Abogados was named Legal500 Real Estate Firm of the Year.