

Huge interest as work set to begin on city film studio

A new era is about to dawn for South African film industry as it finally gets a 'home'

Building of the R430m Cape Town Film Studios begins later this month. Nico Dekker, former chief executive of Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios, has been appointed chief executive officer.

You're obviously very excited about the Cape Town Film Studios, given that it has taken so long to get off the ground. What makes you so confident about its future?

Yes, I was a bit sceptical myself initially. Maybe due to, as you say, the long time that has passed. But I suddenly realised this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us as a film industry to create something of a home. The South African film industry is a little bit without roots, or foundation. What makes me excited is that it will be the first time in our lives that we will see the birth of a film studio of this magnitude on the African continent. And it gives us as an industry a place of belonging. I think we are an industry charac-



Nico Dekker



terised more by mobility. We're a bit of a service industry and this studio could be the beginning and a basis for a long-term foundation for the real film industry.

What happened to the name "Dreamworld"?

I think there were a few reasons it was dropped. One was because it was very close to DreamWorks, Steven Spielberg's company. And the name was outdated. People felt it didn't represent the excitement it should have. There were lots of

jokes in the industry. People were saying "dream on", but that was before my time. People felt they wanted to change the name to connect two of the great icons in the world – the new film studio that hopefully will become an icon and Cape Town, one of the most magnificent cities in the world.

Four studios are planned. How big will they be?

The studios will range from 2 100m², 1 850m² and there will be one smaller studio of about 1 200m².

They will not be like anything you've seen before. They'll be similar to Hollywood-style studios in height and in the capacity, technical facilities, totally different. They'll be comparable with the best in the world.

Building begins on October 20 and the first phase is expected to be completed in early 2010. Are any projects lined up once they're completed?

It's interesting. We've kept things very quiet. I myself wanted first to make sure everything was in place before we spoke to the media, but just since we've started, since last week when we began speaking to the media, we've had inquiries from other parts of the world. There was one specific inquiry that was so exciting and incredibly mind-blowing, with major stars, but we won't be ready for them. So it's a good sign, I think. People immediately said to me: "Nico, please can we come next year in April?" And I said: "Well, we won't be ready in April, that's a bit optimistic!" But it shows, I think,

that if we prepare things right, people elsewhere are still open and excited about us.

Will there be any restrictions when it comes to the size of the projects the studios can accommodate?

No, I think that these studios will be able to accommodate almost any film project of the magnitude of the biggest films in the world. You think of the old Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios, which were able to house parts of *10 000 BC*, but we could have attracted in the past major productions maybe, perhaps even James Bond, with the right studios. People always like to come to our country because of the location and the crew and the general attractiveness of, especially, Cape Town. And on numerous occasions people have said: "If you can just create the right studio environment, the right studios, you'll have enough work."

Do you know which international films have been shot in

Cape Town in the past couple of years? You've mentioned *10 000 BC*, where \$50m was spent on filming alone.

Parts of international films – *In the Dust*, a smaller one – *Mercenary for Justice* – a Steven Seagal movie ... There were a few. I would say 99% came here for locations. There was also the Leonardo DiCaprio film, *Blood Diamond*, again it wasn't shot in Cape Town, but some of it was. Some of the greatest directors in the world have worked here on commercials, so they know us. For big film directors it's often a very lucrative business to shoot advertising and, through that, people fell in love with the city and the environment in the Cape and that's where we started hearing people saying: "Well, if you have the right studios, we are going to support you."

Will our local film industry be able to afford to use the studios?

I'm embracing our industry. I'm inviting everyone. At this stage, we are already getting an overwhelm-

ing reaction from our local guys. Obviously, if we have big international productions in all the studios we can't prevent them from using us, but I will always be open to helping local productions and find ways for them to work there. It isn't only four studios, there are also massive workshops, production offices. There will be hopefully a whole town full of different film servicing companies, commercial facilities etc. It's going to become a real film environment, village – you can work there, you can live there.

What do you think the studios will mean for our local film industry?

I think that the studios will begin a new era in the local film industry's life. I think it will begin a new era in our history because it is going to be a place where people are going to move to. Already, in one week, after one press release, there are a huge number of companies that want to move there.

● Interview by Lesley Byram