



HOLLYWOOD COMES TO FAURE

BOOST FOR BOLAND

Norman McFarlane

After 100 years of film-making in South Africa, there is finally a permanent production facility with state-of-the-art sound stages and associated infrastructure, according to Nico Dekker, CEO of Cape Town Film Studios.

Mr Dekker was speaking at a media day at the historic Vergevoegd Wine Estate opposite the impressive film studio, taking shape at the intersection of the N2 and the R310 in Faure, some 10km from Somerset West. The first two of four sound stages – in excess of 7 000 square metres of filming space – are nearing completion, and according to Mr Dekker, all four will be completed and operational by April 2010, together with back-log space for the construction, workshops and a substantial supporting commercial infrastructure of related businesses.

Of the 300 hectare site, 67 hectares is devoted to the film studio, and most of the balance is given over to conservation, according to Mr Dekker, including a substantial wetland. The project, originally dubbed Dreamworld Film City, is the brainchild of respected local filmmaker, Anant Singh, who also spoke at the media day. The project was launched in 2004 when Mr Singh's Dreamworld consortium won the bid ahead of two other consortia, to develop the multi-million Rand film studio.

When the bid was awarded to Dreamworld in early 2004, the plan was to complete construction and have the studio operational by 2006, but it was bedevilled by delays. Mr

Singh told Bolander: "With the process of getting the studio off the ground, negotiations with City and Province, and changes within government in those regimes caused probably 18 months of delays," he said. "While that was happening we bought the land and went through a whole development process. We announced a year ago we were going to open the studios, but when you're dealing with City and with Province approvals and all that ... it took longer than we anticipated. At the end of the day, you want to do it right and that's the first and foremost objective."

On the changing of the name, Mr Singh said that Cape Town's brand identity was the deciding factor: "Cape Town is such a brand, and rather than take something like Dreamworld, let's use the brand and the fact that people know, and want to shoot in Cape Town, let's call it Cape Town Film Studios. It works within the parameters of promoting the city, the province and the country."

Construction eventually commenced in 2008 with earthworks and foundations, and soundstages One and Three were started at the beginning of this year.

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Completion is anticipated in the first quarter of next year, and the studio should be operational in the second quarter, according to Mr Dekker. He also said there had been great interest expressed by supporting industry in setting up shop there. "We have more than 80 companies that have put their names down in writing who want to relocate to Cape Town film studios for the future."

He said the state of the art studios will not only provide much-needed facilities for the local film industry, but will also attract foreign filmmakers by "the bringing in of international major features to the country ... people that would use these facilities and work with us." According to him this will generate an economic impact of around R1 billion in production expenditure, which in turn will generate a further R2.5 billion rand in "alternative industries".

The international appeal of the studio is based on production value for money. "For one rand you get more when filming in South Africa than many other places in the world. We believe this (studio) will stimulate this production value for money even further."

Turning to job creation, Mr Dekker said other than the many short-term construction jobs, around 7 500 sustainable jobs will be created, directly or indirectly the film studios and related operations in the next five years.

Mr Singh noted the tremendous support of government for the film-

making industry. "The fact that the Department of Trade Industry (dti) and the South African government have identified the film industry as a strategic industry, is very significant to us," he said, adding that the dti's commitment to its incentive programme had resulted in many major foreign productions being made in South Africa. "If you look at the quality and the product that we have to offer as South Africa, we are able to do so pretty much as the best anyone can offer anywhere." He said that despite competition from other countries, many filmmakers still prefer coming to South Africa to make their films, citing well-known producers like Rob Cohen and Ridley Scott among others. Expanding on the relative affordability of film-making in South Africa, Mr Singh said "If we spend \$45 million (making a picture) in South Africa, it's going to look like an \$80 million movie, and that's the amazing benefit we have to offer."

During the site tour after the media briefing, Mr Singh noted that he and Nico Dekker will be travelling overseas in the near future to promote the new studio to the major producers. "The intention is to bring the big studios in ... like when Bond wants to shoot, they need this kind of stage, and they went four of them, and they come in for like six months."

Mr Singh also said that our technical and creative capacity is world class, another plus factor in drawing foreign productions to our shores. He lauded the dti for its ongoing support to the local film



■ Above: Anant Singh, left, chairperson of Cape Town Film Studios (CTFS), explains to trade and industry minister Rob Davies how the lighting grids in Sound Stage One will function. CTFS CEO Nico Dekker looks on.

■ Left: An enormous precast concrete panel is lowered into place, as Sound Stage One nears completion at Cape Town Film Studios, in Faure, outside Somerset West.

industry, which has enabled it to grow tremendously, and noted that many of the employment opportunities created will benefit local people from surrounding areas such as Macassar, Blue Downs, Khayelitsha and Mfuleni.

The media day was organised by the dti in conjunction with Cape Town Film Studios, to mark the occasion of trade and industry minister Rob Davies' visit to the site. The dti is providing R16.3 million of the estimated R450 million needed for the project, through its enterprise organisation division. Minister Davies commented on the growth of the South African film industry, noting how much more frequently local places are seen in major international films. He also

hailed "this industrialisation of the film industry", which will lead to a world class one stop shop for making top quality local and international films.

Turning to local films, he said that other than the obvious economic benefits of the industry, "... a movie is an expression of your culture, an expression of your history, and is very important in terms of the projection of your national identity", citing examples like *Tsotsi* and *Yesterday* among others, noting that where films of that kind are made in the future, the dti will "be able to stretch in terms of the support and facilities we are providing."

He concluded by saying that government sees the film industry as a

critical strategic industry.

Bolander also spoke to board member Phuti Tsukudu, who is responsible for ensuring that the communities within a 15 kilometre radius – including Macassar – benefit from job creation opportunities. She said that the community liaison committee which she sits on provides a much-needed link between the studios and the local communities.

She supported Mr Dekker's comment about the creation of sustainable jobs in the future, noting that the local communities have been invited to engage with the studio through their representatives on the liaison committee in order to ensure that local community members benefit.