

CAPE TOWN FILM STUDIOS EMERGES AS GLOBAL BRAND

INDUSTRY

THE Callsheet visited Cape Town Film Studios (CTFS), where our team was lucky enough to be given a tour by CEO Nico Dekker and general manager Ross Rayners.

NICO'S enthusiasm for the studio and for every aspect of its running is infectious and upon seeing the facilities – perfectly understandable. The studio is a 17,000 square metre complex of four soundstages, offices, set-production warehouses and 37-seat grading cinema that is 2D and 3D enabled. It's hard to believe the studio has only been fully operational since October 2010, particularly given the profile of talent that's worked there. Stars include Stephen Fry, Denzel Washington, Lena Headey, Ryan Reynolds, Karl Urban, Wood Harris, Olivia Thirlby and Michael B. Jordan. Ranked by *The Hollywood Reporter* as one of the top seven studios in the world in May 2011 and praised on Twitter by Stephen Fry during the filming of Working Title's *The Borrowers* - the studios are starting to emerge as a global brand.

When Nico took over as the CEO in 2008 his objective was to contribute to a sustainable local film industry that offered jobs for South Africans. Nico said: "The studio is changing the game, because there's such a huge

difference between a studio-based film and a location-based film. The studio-based film is a job creator, it's a massive job-creator because of all the construction that happens. The people that would normally work on a film, the normal crew, there's a certain group of people that always work. But when a studio comes in it creates hundreds of jobs, for people in carpentry and woodwork and metalwork and labour that you normally would not see on a film set and that is what government wants – it's ideal for our industry. It also of course creates longevity, the studio has been designed for one purpose; it can't be used for other things." This was visible on the tour of the studio, as a walk around reveals massive industry happening wherever you look, from set-design and building inside the workshops to busy construction crews on the backlot and the general maintenance required for the smooth running of such a large complex.

Nico believes that choosing to build world-class studios was the correct decision for Cape Town. He mentioned several times that during design and construction major international studios were consulted and their suggestions and recommendations were used to help build a great complex. Many of the mistakes made by international studios were taken into account



Andrew MacDonald (producer DNA Films) and Nico Dekker

during the construction of CTFS. Nico oversaw the construction of a hill on the new backlot, taking only ten days to complete the complex project in order to secure a major production. He said: "We reshaped the whole site, even the big contractors said they've never seen anything being built this quickly. Everyone expected it to take six weeks at least. But if we hadn't taken just ten days to build it, they would not have been able to make the programme we have booked for the backlot".

When asked about the future of the studio, and work on the horizon Nico revealed that there are several big productions headed to the studio, although

with negotiations at a sensitive stage, he couldn't name any names. Nico said: "This is a journey, considering the studio isn't even a year old, we already had DNA Films' *Dredd* (Kalahari Pictures) here, we had *Safe House* from Universal Pictures (Moonlighting) here for selected scenes with Denzel Washington. We had *Chronicle* (Film Afrika), for 20th Century Fox – the first time they've shot at studios in Africa. We've had Working Title's *The Borrowers* (Moonlighting) with Stephen Fry. His tweet was major for us (Stephen Fry tweeted: Must say deeply impressed with brand new Cape Town Studios. Make Pinewood etc look v shabby.)"

He concluded: "Hopefully there are still big things to come in the next ten years. The first few studios, workshops and setup here was supposed to provide either a workable environment for the local and international producers or not. The question was whether they would accept it, and I think that question has been answered now. The next steps can be taken now. There have been many companies who've put their names down with us who want to move here permanently. About 140 companies have indicated they would like to come here."

Kate Hodges