

A REASON TO SMILE: NICO DEKKER, CEO OF CAPE TOWN FILM STUDIOS IN ONE OF THE NEWLY COMPLETED STUDIO HALLS WHERE THE FIRST EVER ACTION 3D MOVIE IN AFRICA IS BEING FILMED

SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

THE ARRIVAL OF BLOCKBUSTER *DREDD* AT THE RECENTLY COMPLETED CAPE TOWN FILM STUDIOS COULD HERALD IN A NEW GOLDEN PERIOD FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN FILM INDUSTRY

WORDS BY PIERRE DE VILLIERS

EARLIER THIS YEAR Nico Dekker, the CEO of the brand-spanking new Cape Town Film Studios, found himself in a dreadful predicament. The studio complex he runs had just been picked to host the production of the much-anticipated new *Judge Dredd* movie, which would have been unmitigated good news had the place actually finished construction.

"Getting the studio ready so filming could start was a monumental

challenge and a real race against the clock," says Dekker. "I was genuinely fearful because it wasn't easy controlling production on the one hand and construction. But we worked day and night and, although people were still painting when filming started, we completed the most essential aspects in time."

For Dekker and his team failure simply wasn't an option given the enormous benefits that came with

the new *Judge Dredd* offering. Called *Dredd* it is the first ever action 3D film to be shot in Africa and heralds South Africa's arrival as a major player when it comes to making technologically-advanced movies.

"People always spoke about the missing link in our industry and that was the lack of a full-time, high-end studio facility," Dekker points out. "Until now South Africa has been very strong when it came to movies



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THE NEW CAPE TOWN FILM STUDIOS IN FILM CITY BOULEVARD IS IN FAURE NEAR SOMERSET WEST

being shot on location, using part-time warehouses to shoot some elements indoors. Now we attract a different film, a more hi-tech manufacturing movie where the filmmakers stay in the country longer. They shoot for the full duration – you build everything here, you shoot it here and you use

So why did the studio behind *Dredd* pick the Mother City? Money played a big role with Andrew McDonald, of DNA Films, the production company behind *Dredd*, saying: “The affordability of SA and the new high-tech Cape Town Film Studios provided the ideal combination.”

for them is to adjust to the film’s needs. For instance we specially created a 35-seat, 3D grading cinema, which is the first in our country’s history. It enables you to watch the stuff in 3D that you have been shooting throughout the day and do basic editing on it.”

Constructing a 3D screening room has been just one of the ways local crew members have been able to improve their knowledge of the film industry, part of a comprehensive skills transfer that have taken place during the *Dredd* shoot.

“We have about 400 people on the film of which the vast majority are South African,” Dekker explains. “As South Africans we are benefiting from the skills transfer because for the first time we now also get trained on the job and we are learning from very talented people. The Director of Photography is Anthony Dod Mantle who won

an Oscar for *Slumdog Millionaire*. The production company DNA did *The Last King of Scotland*, *Trainspotting* and *The Beach* and they brought some of their top specialists. Every department – set dressing, make-up, special effects, are benefiting tremendously. The 3D technology is so different and the guys are learning every day.”

While the benefits of luring big productions to South Africa are clear (Dekker predicts that the economic impact of *Dredd* on the Cape Town economy could be as high as R250-million), the opening of Cape Town Film Studios could be beneficial for local directors. Dekker hopes the studio complex will become a cinematic information centre that will boost the local film industry, dubbed “Sollywood”.

“I believe the studio will become a very important meeting place for



South African and international filmmakers,” he says. “The studio is a permanent base. We know it is not going away. It could become the entry door into our country. It will impact on all the provinces because we can set up partnerships with everyone in the country. The studio can be the place where you can ask people where, for instance, is the best place to go to make a film in a game reserve or to shoot in Johannesburg.”

For Dekker’s dream to be realised more international productions need to be lured to Cape Town and that starts with successfully putting together *Dredd*.

“If these guys are happy it will open new doors,” he says. “*Dredd* is still a medium range film. If we position ourselves as a place where hi-tech movies can be made then it might attract the big boys from Los Angeles. Everybody is looking to this movie because production costs have shot up, if we show the world we can make films for a fraction of the price then they will come here. That is why we have worked so hard and will continue to work hard to make the Cape Town Film Studios a success.” ✕



WHO IS JUDGE DREDD?
Judge Dredd – a brutal cop who acts as judge, jury and executioner in futuristic metropolis Mega-City One – was created by writers Peter Harris and John Wagner and artist Carlos Ezquerra and first appeared in comicbook series *2000 AD* in the 1970s. He is known for his grumpy demeanour, “lawgiver” handgun and the fact that he never takes off his helmet. The character first stepped onto big screen in *Judge Dredd*, a 1995 film directed by Danny Cannon and starring Sylvester Stallone. The movie was savaged by critics and fans, who hated the fact that Dredd walks around for the majority of the film without his helmet on and cuddles up to fellow cop Judge Hershey. *Dredd*, which is being released in 2012, stars New Zealand actor Karl Urban as Judge Dredd and is being directed by Pete Travis. According to Dekker the film should see a return to the classic Judge Dredd the fans know and love from *2000 AD*. “We have spectacular sets and the film itself is going to live up to the expectation better than the last film,” he says. “It is going to be darker and more exciting.”

PHOTO ALLSTAR

“ THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DREDD ON CAPE TOWN COULD BE AS HIGH AS R250MILLION ”

South Africa’s great locations. With this studio complex, Cape Town could now become the Hollywood of Africa. That *Judge Dredd* is being made here is a major breakthrough for the SA film industry, the guys making the movie could have gone anywhere – America, Britain, Australia – but chose us.”

Dekker continues: “*Dredd* has a budget of US\$35-million, but if it was made in the US or elsewhere it would be right up to US\$100-million. The labour is affordable and that makes us competitive. We also take a more comprehensive, canvas approach to film production. What we tried to do



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THE CAPE IN GOOD SHAPE

MARK VISSER OF THE CAPE TOWN FILM COMMISSION EXPLAINS WHY THE MOTHER CITY IS THE PLACE TO BE IF YOU WANT TO SHOOT A FILM

JUST HOW IMPORTANT is it for the development of the SA film industry to have a state-of-the-art studio complex in Cape Town? Cape Town has always been on international par in terms of crew, locations and equipment hire, however has not had the required sound stage and studio capacity in general. This studio will go a long way in enhancing the production capacity of South Africa. The studio is also a catalyst for job creation as well as a driving force behind investment.

Have you seen an increase in the number of people who want to make films in the Cape since the opening of the Cape Town Film Studios?

As of yet, statistical data is not confirmed on the current

season's production activity, but it is safe to say that the season is currently off to a good start and with the feature production of *Dredd* and other productions scheduled for the course of next year, it looks to be a good film season.

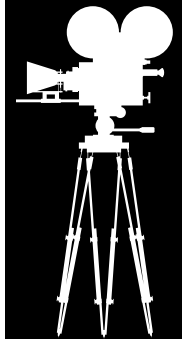
How big an advert was the World Cup for Cape Town as a film location?

The World Cup was a huge promotion for South Africa, not only as a country but as a capable destination for film production. The country has had to meet international broadcasting standards to accommodate the media. This includes skills development for crew as well as infrastructural enhancement and procuring state of the art equipment. There are a number of international productions that

are in pre-production that are a direct result of the country's exposure during the World Cup

Apart from the Studios, what makes Cape Town such a desirable place to make movies?

The Department of Trade and Industry has provided financial incentives for filmmakers to shoot here in partnership with South African companies. Furthermore, and particular to Cape Town, there's a crew base estimated at over 3,500, and has received accolades from international filmmakers on their professionalism. Furthermore, we have state of the art infrastructure and equipment rental facilities as well as an award winning hospitality industry to cater for internationals visiting the country.



STUDIO FACT SHEET

→ Five years in the making, the Cape Town Film Studios is South Africa's first large Hollywood-style film studio complex and it is located off Baden Powell Drive outside Somerset West.

→ The studios, which cost an estimated R450 million to construct, is owned and financed by Anant Singh's Videovision Entertainment and Marcel Golding's Sabido Investments.

→ It has 17,000m² (200,000ft²) of production facilities available including four top-end sound stages, four production offices and at least one major workshop.

→ The ground that Cape Town Film Studios stands on used to be farmland. The development will only cover 100ha, which is about half of the total land area. The rest, especially the wetlands, will be rehabilitated.