

Cape Town Film Studios ready for **Action!**



Industry scepticism about the establishment of the Cape Town Film Studios can finally be put to rest with the appointment of **Nico Dekker**, former head and CEO of Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios, as the CEO of the 10-year, multi-million rand project. In an exclusive *Screen Africa* interview, Dekker reveals some of his plans for the road ahead.

What finally convinced you to take on the position of CEO?

It took a while for both the shareholders and I to make a final decision. Like many others, I had been sceptical and critical of the project's development and I wasn't sure whether it could be realised successfully. It was the tremendous dedication and commitment from the shareholders, Anant Singh and his team, as well as Marcel Golding and his team, that swung the decision for me. Their willingness to back this project with their own money as well as their belief in, and commitment to, the Studios and to making it Africa's leading studio complex impressed me tremendously. I've also admired the professional team that is working flat out behind the scenes. The project management is in the hands of Target Project & Construction Management Services, one of our country's leading project management companies who worked on the Cape Town International Convention Centre and are currently managing the upgrading of the Cape Town International Airport and Cape Town Station.

Many people in the industry would agree that I do not take on something unless I believe it can succeed. During the last 10 years, I have been fortunate enough to steer three different companies - The Editing Café, Cinegate Africa and Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios - to profitability within 24 months of operation. Cape Town Film Studios will be a tremendous challenge, but I am excited to be involved and will give it my best.

What does your appointment mean for the industry?

With my involvement in a full time capacity, the team has now been consolidated and provided with a leader who has a track record in successfully managing film studios. My commitment to the development of the South African film industry is widely acknowledged, as is my belief that Cape Town Film Studios will finally provide a home for the South African film community. What's most exciting is that tangible progress is happening on site. Foundations have been laid in preparation for construction of the main building and work will commence in late October 2008. In preparation for the construction of the studio buildings, earthworks of approximately 180 000m³ of filling material were used during June, July and August to create building platforms and beams. Construction of the main boulevard has also commenced.

What can the industry expect from the Studios and what is the time frame for development and completion?

The development is planned in various phases. Our main aim is to get the Film Studio Core up and running first. Phase 1 of the development is valued at a quarter of a billion rand and includes four sound stages of varying sizes (1 x 2 100m², 1 x 1 200m² and 2 x 1 850m²), plus production offices of 1 500m² and workshops in excess of 2 800m². The first phase is scheduled for completion during the first quarter of 2010.

What are your major job functions as CEO and how do you see yourself fulfilling this obligation?

My main task is to take the current model and develop it into a profitable business. This includes finding additional income streams that can be unlocked and establishing partnerships that will benefit the

Studios in the long run. The job also means that I take final responsibility for all management issues, including staff, financial management, communication, marketing and deal making. As the CEO, I also have the obligation to look after the interests of the shareholders. I have learnt a lot about what works and what doesn't under especially difficult circumstances whilst developing and running Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios and I believe I can add considerable value in my new role here.

What are the major challenges and how will they be resolved?

One of the main challenges is certainly the negative perception in the film industry regarding this development. I'm totally convinced that we would be able to win the "hearts and minds" of everyone once they realise the tremendous potential of this project and the positive impact it is going to have on our industry. This is the single biggest investment in the South African film industry to date and it is not simply about building Studios - it is also about establishing a home for the film industry in South Africa. The location of the Studios on the site near Faure has not changed.

What will the Studios offer the international community and how will they benefit the local industry?

Our vision is for the Cape Town Film Studios to be the bridge between the South African and the international film industry. Through active partnerships we envisage bringing productions into the country that previously could not be accommodated. The Studios will also unlock financial opportunities that were previously not available to the industry.

How do you feel about the future of the industry in

these turbulent economic times?

As we all know, at times of crisis, the entertainment industry normally flourishes. The make-believe world helps people to escape from their worries. Historically the industry has always shown strong growth during periods of peril. Most certainly monetary constraints will mean a clamp down on budgets, but South Africa has, and will continue to, benefit from this situation. People still get more production value for their money by shooting in South Africa. The Studios and all associated companies, service providers and partners will help bring productions to South Africa that would normally be realised in North America or Europe. So the timing of the Cape Town Film Studios is perfect.

How will the Studios work with the industry?

Cape Town Film Studios cannot succeed without the full participation, assistance and support of the local film industry. I firmly believe the Studios will become our own "Universal" or "Pinewood". We are inviting all players in the South African Film Industry, as well as related industries, to become partners on the site. People can rent, purchase and even buy property to make Cape Town Film Studios their permanent home.

With the help of the industry, we are hoping to create a powerful hands-on training facility for crew and previously disadvantaged filmmakers.

We are busy finalising a marketing drive that will be coordinated with governmental, non-governmental and private institutions that market South Africa abroad. We are planning visits to major feature film production cities like Los Angeles, London, Paris, Berlin and others and will also take part in trade shows together with our shareholders, Anant Singh, Marcel Golding and organisations like the Film Commissions, the Department

of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). Even at this early stage, we have already been approached by some major production companies wanting to come to South Africa and use the Studios or the back-lot facilities.

Who forms the core team of the Studios?

Rashay Magan, who was my operations manager at Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios, will be the general manager and my deputy. Diana-Jane Weaver, who has also worked with me for many years, will be responsible for administration and serve as my PA. Fadiel Martin has just been appointed as company accountant. The initial principle is to sub-contract a lot of work out until we have reached the operational stage. Until our permanent offices are completed on site, we are temporarily based in Woodstock, Cape Town.

How can interested parties become involved?

Our chairman, Anant Singh, has just announced a waiting list for parties interested in buying commercial, industrial or residential property or interested in renting premises from us.

The timing is ideal for the industry to become involved in this project as we are still at an early stage. We will keep prices very reasonable for first comers so those "who snooze will lose". The industry must ask itself whether it can afford *not* to be involved with Cape Town Film Studios.

Is the site open to visitors yet?

We are planning an exciting series of site events on a monthly basis that would create tremendous networking opportunities and where people can experience the progress with their own eyes. We will keep everybody informed via the website, press releases and e-mails. 📧