

'Safe House,' 'Chronicle,' Now 'Black Sails': Inside Cape Town Studios



Clara Paget in Starz's "Black Sails."

Starz

After hosting Hollywood tentpoles for the past two-and-a-half years, the cutting-edge shooting facility welcomes Michael Bay.

This story first appeared in the May 17 issue of *The Hollywood Reporter* (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/>) magazine.

Since opening its doors in October 2010, Cape Town Film Studios has had no trouble luring the holy grail of foreign film shoots: the big-budget Hollywood production. The **Denzel Washington-Ryan Reynolds** Universal Pictures thriller *Safe House* was shot there, as were the Fox sci-fi thriller *Chronicle* and Warner Bros.' *Mad Max: Fury Road* with **Tom Hardy** and **Charlize Theron**.

But in recent months, the studio has been hosting a Hollywood blockbuster of a different kind — *Black Sails*, **Michael Bay**'s gritty pirate adventure series for Starz.

The series is something of a coup for such a young studio: The eight-episode first season of the original drama, set for a 2014 debut, is the TV production with the biggest-ever spend in South Africa, according to Cape Town Film Studios CEO **Nico Dekker**. "It is comparable to a big film," he says.

Cape Town is standing in for the Bahamas' New Providence Island, which is expected to be portrayed in *Black Sails* as a paradise location full of debauchery.

The Cape Town facility has four stages with 75,000 square feet of space, two workshops, a medieval backlot that Dekker and his team decided to keep after the *Black Sails* shoot, a greenscreen and production offices, along with a cinema and state-of-the-art fiber-optic network to send rushes to any location in the world.

So how much does it cost to shoot there? "Each show [and film] is different, and deals are made in accordance with the needs of productions," says Dekker.

In some cases, such as the TV miniseries *Labyrinth*, the **Nelson Mandela** biopic *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* and *Black Sails*, the studio complex has invested in additional facilities. "In the case of *Black Sails*, we have built the infrastructure for a Caribbean world, including a deep sea tank, a beach tank, a beach and an island," says Dekker.

He and his team are willing to spend money because the studio "likes to be a partner." Notes Dekker, "We want to be like a living entity rather than just a collection of buildings," adding that he hopes to get repeat business from strong word-of-mouth.

STORY: Ahoy: Preview the Key Art for Starz's Pirate Drama 'Black Sails' (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/black-sails-key-art-starz-501117>)

Since the Bahamas also aggressively courts foreign shoots, landing *Black Sails* is another impressive accomplishment for such a new facility. Indeed, the fact that a Hollywood production would make the trek to Africa instead of the neighboring Caribbean is revealing. "Longer series of this nature typically don't travel to Africa, and this show is set in the Caribbean, so it must be some form of compliment," says Dekker. "We invested heavily to make this series possible, and hopefully they will be back for more seasons."

The studio also benefits from its geography: South Africa's location puts it in an ideal position to capitalize on a rapidly changing global film sector. "With the BRIC [Brazil, Russia, India and China] countries being a big focus, we are playing an important role because South Africa is seen as a gateway to Africa," says Dekker.

Mandela producer **Anant Singh** says he would like the strong production values of his \$35 million film to play a key role in showcasing the studio's skilled workers and state-of-the-art facilities: "I'm hoping that given the profile and hopefully the quality of the film that we will also get more films to shoot in South Africa."