

Local is indeed very lekker with French Toast



By [Daniel Dercksen](#)

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If there's one local film that provides ample cheer it's the delightful French Toast, another winner from Hartiwood Films, which gave us Liefing: Die Movie, and Pretville.

Filmed on a wine farm near Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, as well as in Paris, France, French Toast's crackling screenplay by Tina Kruger (who co-wrote Leading Lady with Henk Pretorius) is vividly brought to life by director Paul Krüger and Anél Stolp.

Lika Berning is charming as photographer Lise le Roux, who lives with her father (a super performance from Deaon Lotz) on a wine farm near Stellenbosch. Her mother passed away some time ago, leaving a secret French Toast family recipe behind as a symbol of her legacy. One day, Lise stumbles upon her mother's old diary and, to her astonishment, finds out that she has a brother or sister somewhere in France. Despite the fact that Theo, her father's right-hand winemaker (Paul du Toit delivering another memorable performance), is about to propose, Lise decides to travel to Paris in order to find her lost sibling and, hopefully, some truth about her mother.

French actor Thierry Ballarin is ideally cast as Jean-Pierre Baptiste, who helps the damsel in distress to find her sibling. If there's one reason to see the film, it's for the magnetic chemistry between Berning and Ballarin.



A work of passion

French Toast is clearly a work of passion for Krüger, who has been talking about the film French Toast since 2010 when we were busy shooting Liefing, die Movie.

"Our dream was to create a film that would touch the hearts of people," says Kruger. "We tackled a very sensitive topic, but tried to convey the message on a lighter and more entertaining level. We approached French Toast from a totally different angle, in that we decided from the word go that we will use a very small crew to produce this film - the main reason being that we were going to shoot abroad and the travel implications on a budget would not allow for a big team. But the advantage of a small crew is that nothing is stronger than a close-knit team, sharing the same passion for filmmaking.

"As with any film, French Toast had many challenges," says Kruger. "During filming one of the major challenges was the weather in Stellenbosch. We had to move the shooting schedule constantly to fit in with the weather, and just as we started shooting a scene, it would start to rain! But in the end everything worked out perfectly and the scenes shot in Stellenbosch are beautiful. Our greatest challenge was shooting in France. With a team of only 10 people we had 12 days to shoot all the scenes in Paris - a difficult task to accomplish with thousands of tourists roaming the streets of the city. We had to be very creative, for example by hiding the camera to prevent onlookers from constantly looking into the lens! We shot the film on the Red Epic, and our DOP, Gustav Germishuizen, did a phenomenal job in capturing the beauty of Paris and South Africa, resulting in a visual feast."



Superb soundtrack

The music soundtrack in French Toast is superb, offering a fantastic mixture of Afrikaans and French songs by Music Director Machiel Roets.

"Roets brought everything together with the music he composed for the film. The music complements the pictures and takes the film to an international level," says Kruger.

"We all thought it was going to be like a walk in the park, but it was quite the opposite," says producer Linda Korsten.

"We worked with a small crew and this was quite challenging. This time around, I had to do all the organising on my own with no help from an assistant. I had to see to it that everybody was happy, that nobody was hungry, that all the locations were organised and that the cast were where they had to be at the right times. I always had to be one step ahead of the others, because the success of a movie depends a lot on the pre-production and pre-arrangement of everything. At times I felt as if everything was too much for me - especially dealing with the French and organising the locations in Paris - but in the end I realised that all the sweat and tears were worth it. It was a privilege to be part of French Toast."



Last venture

For Korsten, this is her last venture. She was also the producer of *Liefeling, die Movie*; and the producer and director of the film *Pretville*.

"I have decided to make *French Toast* my last adventure in the film industry, as it is time for the young ones to put fresh ideas and working methods into place. I am retiring with my husband at the coast, but will still be busy with small projects and will watch the South African film industry closely. My thanks to Paul Krüger for allowing me to take part in the films *Liefeling*, *die Movie*, *Pretville* and *French Toast*. I will remember the times we had with fond memory."

Hartiwood Films was born in 2006 and was one of the first companies to import the Red One camera from the US. This camera allowed him the freedom to explore a number of different projects, culminating in the feature film box office hit, *Liefeling, die Movie*, which still holds the record for the biggest Afrikaans feature film box office to date.

There's life after the film as Krüger decided to build a coffee shop in Hartbeespoort, next to the R511, in front of the aquarium. All the interior and exterior shots of *Café Alexandré* were filmed here.

"Bathoni Robinson, our art director, did an enormous amount of research to create the right look and feel," says Kruger. "We had to build various sets in Hartbeespoort to shoot the Paris scenes, and she did a magnificent job in recreating those sets."

After the filming was completed in July 2014, the *French Toast Koffie Kafee* opened to the public and light meals and drinks

are served here. Many people already visited this coffee shop.

In the near future, a miniature Eiffel Tower will be erected at the shop, as well as a small "lock bridge" where couples will be able to seal their love with a lock.

Make sure to take a bite out of French Toast, it's a delicious treat! French Toast is a film in Afrikaans and English with a touch of French.

For more on French Toast and other new films opening this weekend, go to www.writingstudio.co.za

ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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