

Justin Bonello



By Louise Marsland

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Justin Bonello, Cooked in Africa Films creative director and partner, is celebrating, along with executive producer and managing partner, Peter Gird, the success of the company's *Ultimate Braai Master* series becoming the first home-grown television series to be produced internationally. The format rights have been picked up by global format rights giant, All3Media, which has secured options for replication of the *Ultimate Braai Master* franchise in America, Canada, Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, Poland and Brazil. And 10 years after the first 'Cooked' pilot was shot, Bonello will also host a reunion, along with his original group of friends, on the island of Reunion, shooting a 10-part series entitled, 'Cooked: The Reunion', over a two month road trip.

Q: What is your main business challenge?

A: I have to get a commission right. One of the hardest things we do is raising funding for any show we produce. It should come out of national broadcaster budget for the original content we produce. I also have to ensure that the project has global legs.

Q: Most important attribute needed to do your job?

A: Make promises and keep them. Be honest, be open, be humble. I often meet people who come up to me with a great idea for a TV show, but rarely with a promo locked down or a budget. It is rare that they do it.

Q: The biggest trend to note in your industry?

A: In terms of reality TV, 'fire' is the new number one food trend across the globe. Then, cooks and chefs have become more famous than rockstars. This is a trend that will continue in the future, but it comes with a caveat: it is now not only about preparing the dish, but about the ethics behind the dish. We have to develop a social consciousness when it comes to our food - its origin, ethics, farming practices, does it benefit the locals...

Q: How will you make an impact?

A: Through the journey I've had in food. In the beginning it was easy - go out with a bunch of mates and cook food. As I got deeper in it, I found I had a voice, that people listened to, so I had to talk about food with a social conscience. Farmer's margins are getting tighter and tighter. The more we become urbanised, the more children are becoming disconnected from the earth and respect is less and less. My role has to be to make people connect with the earth and respect it, without that, we will eat our way through this planet and any other, to keep ourselves alive.

Q: What is currently at the top of your to do list?

A: Install my grey water recycling off my bath and shower.

Q: What inspires you?

A: The thing that makes me work above and beyond everything, is time. The thing I value most is time to be completely myself. Nowadays we don't have that, there is never a moment of respite. So I work to have time to spend with my family, to be out in the wide open spaces.

Q: Tell us something about yourself not generally known?

A: As much as I'm on the box, I'm a very private person. I've had the same group of friends for my whole life. I never expected this (TV fame). I'm a cook, a gardener, a farmer.

Q: At the top of my 'bucket list' is...

A: I have a bucket book! I'm adding to that book daily and I'm through many pages. But I think what I would like to do is travel without a camera. At heart I'm a gypsy. At some point I will disappear without a camera for six months with my family.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMOG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.

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