

# Interview with Ivan Botha and Donnalee Roberts

 By [Daniel Dercksen](#)

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Daniel Dercksen shares a few thoughts with superstars of the local film and TV industry, Ivan Botha and Donnalee Roberts, who charmed film-goers with *Pad Na Jou Hart*, sizzle in their latest charmer *Vir Altyd (Forever)*, which they wrote and co-produced with Danie Bester, whose Johannesburg-based company, The Film Factory, produced three of the top six highest grossing Afrikaans feature films at the South African box office: the very successful teen comedy trilogy *Bakgat!*, *Bakgat! 2* and *Bakgat! 3*; box office hits *Ballade vir 'n Enkeling*, *Wolwedans in die Skemer*, *Hoofmeisie* and *Pad na Jou Hart*; as well as the critically acclaimed *Roepman* and *Verraaiers*.

The delightful *Vir Altyd* is a romantic adventure movie that is guaranteed to wow audiences. An honest and sincere journey into the hearts and souls of two young lovers on the rollercoaster of love and life, it's a heartfelt film about love and how Cupid's arrows pierce the hearts of those who want to love, but are hopelessly lost in their search for meaning and understanding, and revered conquerors of love celebrating its joy and anguish.



Love and its myriad faces challenge the lives of Nina (Donnalee Roberts), an aspiring author and owner of a book shop, is about to get married, and Hugo (Ivan Botha), a successful travel photographer, returns home to Paarl for the first time in 10 years.

As kids, Nina and Hugo shared their childhood in the vineyards of Paarl and were always inseparable. As adults, fate forces them to revisit a past that caused them to drift apart, and a fairytale future that challenges them to re-examine their feelings of love and friendships.

During their escape from a reality where love and life become unbearable, they visit Mauritius, the island of love, where they experience the different seasons through the eyes of two couples: Ben and Marietjie Botha (Dirk Stoltz and Ilse Roos), who are in Mauritius on their second honeymoon in an attempt to save their marriage and to learn each other's love languages; and Uncle Paul and Tannie Betsie van Zyl (Wilson Dunster and Elize Cawood), who were married in court half a century ago and are finally on their honeymoon to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

**■ Well done on a great film. Where did you meet and did you know then that you would team up as actors and writers?**

Thank you so much, we really appreciate your feedback. We met on the set of 7de Laan in 2009. We worked together for five years and in the process discovered that we shared the same passion for storytelling and the film industry. We then started a production company and developed and wrote Pad na jou Hart, which released in February 2014.

**■ You mentioned that, as writers, you are passionate about symbolism in your work. In Pad Na Jou Hart you went on both a realistic and symbolic life journey with the characters. And in Vir Altyd, the journey has transformed into more of an adventure as we travel through all the seasons of love in one's life. Tell me more about this?**

Yes, it is exactly as you say, Pad Na Jou Hart was a literal and symbolic life journey, whereas Vir Altyd is an adventure through all the seasons of love, relationships and friendship. We used the adventure to the island of love as a thematical binary and setting. Therefore this thematical binary becomes symbolically ironic to have our characters who are dealing with relationship problems and issues in an environment that is supposed to be synonymous with romance, love and happily ever after.



**■ What inspired the screenplay for Vir Altyd?**

As a writer you are always inspired by your own life, lessons learnt, experiences, dreams and hopes. You are also always in tune with moments all around you that inspire stories or characters. Working within the romantic genre with this film we started taking notice of relationships all around us. Couples that are still in the honeymoon phase, older couples that inspire when they still hold hands or even a middle-aged couple who go out for dinner and the only conversation they are able to have is about 'the special on the menu'. We realised we wanted to open a conversation about relationships and that is how Vir Altyd was born.

**■ They say that you should always write what you know: How do you relate to the journey of your characters in Vir Altyd?**

We agree, it does help to write what you know. However a writer's responsibility is also to explore and research the unknown. Just because we have not lived to be 70, nor have we been in a 50-year relationship like two of our characters, it does not mean we didn't capture their journey honestly and realistically. As human beings we can relate to all our characters' questions and struggles with love and relationships. We explored universal themes and believe everyone will be able to relate to us and our characters.

**■ Love stories will always seduce the senses and allow us to take an emotional journey**

## into love and loving. What is your view?

We completely agree. As mentioned in our previous answer, 'love' is such a universal theme. Whether you are a romantic or not, we have all been in love, or loved someone or we've been hurt by it or aspire to it. Love as a theme still dominates the film and storytelling world.



### ■ Are you a hopeless romantic?

Donnalee: Yes I am a complete hopeless romantic. Within our writing team I tend to write more from an emotional perspective and Ivan's strengths can definitely be seen within the story structure and dialogue.

Ivan: Mmm, well I am part of the writing team that created Pad Na Jou Hart and now Vir Altyd - two very 'hopelessly romantic' sounding titles. Haha. So I am going for yes.

### ■ What do you think makes the perfect romance?

Great question. The person who has the answer to the 'perfect' romance please contact us, we would like to write the story for it. Haha. We suppose learning to speak each other's love language helps the romance in a relationship.

### ■ Do you think it's possible to live without love?

No we don't. Love is something we all aspire to. Sure love does come in different shapes and forms, so what we consider as love might not be our neighbours perspective on what love is. However the feeling, the emotion, this love word is what makes most things worthwhile in life.

### ■ You hope and dream that Vir Altyd will inspire people to study each other's love languages, work on a strong friendship, never stop holding hands and not miss out on the moments in-between. Tell me more about this.

We don't want to pretend like we have the answers to a perfect relationship, because we don't. But having researched love languages we realised it is actually such a simple conscience and practical application to help your relationship. We all already speak in different love languages, whether you know it or not, we all have a certain way of showing someone we love them and we have a certain way in which we feel loved. Love languages are not a foreign concept, we just believe people are not always aware of it. Hopefully, Vir Altyd opens the conversation or sparks the thoughts in our audience, of how I can learn to speak my partners love language better or even fluently.





■ **I fully agree with you that “sometimes it’s not the happy ending that matters, but the adventure on your way to the destination’.’ What do you think makes the adventure worthwhile?**

The tagline of the film is ‘In ‘n oomblik ...” In a moment. What we mean by this it is the little moments in relationships, the here and now that make up the happily ever after.

■ **Tell me more about working as a team writing Vir Atyd.**

Being our second screenplay together the writing process was only a joy. We both have certain writing characteristics that are stronger than the other and we are aware of it and embrace it. We don’t allow ego into the writing process, if you feel strongly about a certain point we believe in convincing each other so that we can both feel as passionate about it. We allowed our director Jaco Smit into the writing process of Vir Atyd, and he in return allowed us into the directing process. It was a creative collaboration that worked. We kept focus on what is best for the story.

■ **Are you satisfied with how your words were translated into film?**

We could not have asked for more. We are not precious writers, if an actor brings a better suggestion to set we are more than happy to apply it to the script, once again, whatever is best for the story.

■ **How much has the local film industry changed since you made your debut, and what do you think the future holds for the South African film industry?**

Ivan: Since Bakgat 1 the industry has grown into a serious business. We made Bakgat for less than R1 million, it was all about the passion, there was no market, it has been an amazing journey to be a apart of young pioneer filmmakers focussed on building an industry and constantly exploring ways for it to grow and be better.

Donnalee: I had the privilege of making my film debut with the very heart-warming romantic comedy Klein Karoo, most of the team were 'first-timers' so it was also very much a passion project, but I agree with Ivan, since then it has had to become more of a business in order to make it more sustainable for filmmakers. And, yes, it is a wonderfully exciting place to be at the forefront of pioneering an ever-growing and expanding film industry in which we can tell stories that are home grown and make films that are truly proudly South African.

### ■ What do you hope audiences will get from watching Vir Altyd?

We hope to start conversations within people about relationships. As writers our goal is not to give people answers, but rather to ask questions.

### ■ Vir Altyd leaves us wanting more. Is there a sequel in the pipeline, or a third film to complete a 'trilogy of love'?

We like that it left you wanting more. That is what we were trying to say with the film, that it is not about the perfect ending, the 'happily ever after'. It's about each moment in-between. There won't be a follow up. But, yes, we will be making more films together and love, romance; life and adventure will be a big part of it. However, for now, we are exploring some other themes and stories. So, yes, there is a new story being developed.

### ■ Tell me about your future plans?

We are expanding as a company and will be focussing on growing the marketing and media division of our business. As mentioned above, we are developing a new story, it will be a strong female-driven cast with adventure awaiting the characters. Donnalee will be playing one of the leads and Ivan will make his directing debut. Exciting times!

Read more about Vir Altyd and other new releases at [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Derksen 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](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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