

Aiming true

By **Liesl Venter**

Left to right
Front row: Desiré Mathey,
Sweetness Zazela,
Arthur Khabu
Back row: Paul Luff,
Kirsten Knox,
Shaun Meiring.

Liesl Venter talks to David Da Silva about what makes The Powder Keg stand out from run-of-the-mill gunshops, and how his business strategy continues to add value to the hunting and sports-shooting fraternity in South Africa.

David Da Silva is a man of principle. Truth, accountability, responsibility are not merely descriptive words, but an inherent approach to life. It is the same approach he has brought to The Powder Keg, the Johannesburg firearm dealership he purchased two years ago.

While this former South African now resides in Slovenia, his connection with his roots, and his deep love of firearms, continue through The Powder Keg. He is quick, however, to point out that this is not just a gunshop. For the past two years, much time and effort has been spent developing an integral strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of the business.

GOLDEN THREAD

"If you don't know where you are going, then any road will take you there. We know what will be the golden thread at The Powder Keg," says Da Silva, who spent most of his professional career in the corporate world, where he oversaw million-dollar deals and led largescale teams.

"The decision to walk away from the corporate world was a carefully considered one. I have always been passionate about firearms and shooting, and started looking at business opportunities within this field." It was time, he says, to merge his passion and his business sense.

40-YEAR HISTORY

A friend told him about The Powder Keg, a dealership started some 40 years ago by Dr Lucas Potgieter. "At the time Paul Luff, a professional hunter and firearm expert, was managing the business on behalf of the Potgieter estate, as it was going up for sale. We talked, and I bought quickly."

The rest, as they say in the classics, is history. Luff continues to manage the business in South Africa, with a strong core team on the ground, while Da Silva has taken up a strategic role from Slovenia, from where he has orchestrated the massive turnaround strategy for the business.

AIR-RIFLE SHOOTING RANGE

"The Powder Keg is an established, well-known name in the hunting and sports-shooting industries. It is extremely well-positioned, just off the N1 in the West Rand," says Da Silva. "We have also purchased the premises next door, and are in the process of obtaining business rights there, with a plan to utilise this space as an air-rifle shooting range. It gives us flexibility for the future, allowing us to control our expansion strategy."

The first few months saw him deal with several legacy issues. Da Silva is a man who believes in doing things right, preferring respect over like, and who does what

he sets out to do what he has committed himself to, no matter how difficult or challenging.

VALUABLE LESSONS

"I don't want to corporatise this business, but I do bring some valuable lessons from my experiences in the corporate world, including the importance of starting with a clean slate. It has taken time, but we have achieved this, and are now starting to move into the next phase of our strategy."

Da Silva's goal for The Powder Keg is to not just to be another shop where one can buy guns. "We want to stand out from the rest," he says. "Competition is healthy for, and critical to, the industry. I don't concentrate on what our competitors are doing, but rather focus on doing well in our own area."

FRESH NEW LOOK

The business boasts a completely new and fresh look. This not only refers to the new logo and website, but also the gunshop

itself. Shelves have been cleared of excess stock, and the overall presentation has improved. The business no longer trades in secondhand firearms, or offers storage to firearm owners. A social media strategy has also been implemented.

'COMPETITION IS HEALTHY FOR, AND CRITICAL TO, THE INDUSTRY.'

"Partnerships are important. I don't want to sell a firearm to someone once in a lifetime, but rather build a relationship," Da Silva says. With his own collection of bespoke European calibres, has been purchasing firearms from a young age. This knowledge as a customer himself has played a key role in positioning The Powder Keg.

PROS AND CONS

"I just don't think a flea-market approach works when it comes to buying firearms. It is not about moving product at the cheapest price. I don't want to do that. When you buy a firearm, you need to take your time, and consider the pros and the cons. You must not just buy because you have been offered a great discount. In order to achieve that, we build a relationship with you for life by means of the gunshop."

"It's quite simple, really. We provide our customers with the highest-value price related to the performance equipment and service." With this in mind, Da Silva has opted for a two-brand approach to most of the product segments at The Powder Keg. "We are not going to be everything to everyone. I have sourced brands that will specifically add value to the hunting and sports-shooting fraternity in South Africa."

PREMIUM PRODUCTS

Here Da Silva has secured exclusive representation of Kahles and Delta optics, Chevalier clothing, Huglu shotguns, and custom guns from Grulla and Ales Spendal. "We

have chosen an entry-level brand in some sectors, but not in others. Instead we strive to offer premium products in all of our market segments," he says. "I have to sell something that I believe in. I don't want to be just an order taker. When we select a product, it is one we have utmost faith in, and that we use ourselves."

Visiting The Powder Keg therefore means one is not only getting a value-added service in being able to interact with product experts, but the products themselves can be found nowhere else. The next phase is to develop the wholesale side of the business. "This only applies to products that we import exclusively," Da Silva adds.

TWOFOLD GROWTH

While he is not rushing growth, it is important that the business grows twofold every two to three years. "We are not going to push water uphill. If we are not growing, then there is no point to it all. We are, however, focused more on our value proposition, because that will translate into returns."

Da Silva has high expectations of himself and his team. Skype meetings are held daily, and he is on top of developments in the local firearm industry. "We have to bring more people into shooting," he says. "It is still too exclusive. We have to do things differently especially, in light of growing anti-firearm sentiments." This means encouraging family involvement, especially women, and a broader racial representation. "If we don't encourage more participation, the South African industry will not survive."

A lifestyle and an experience With this in mind, The Powder Keg remains committed to selling an experience, a purpose, and a lifestyle, and not just firearms. "We look continuously at what value we can add," Da Silva explains. "We aim to shoot and win. It means we must differentiate our value. If we are not different, then we are not going to be noticed. We have our roadmap, and are en route." 🎯

BOWHUNTERS FOR LIFE

By **Jan Herholdt**



I will never forget the feeling when I shot my first arrow: The vision of turning flèches, and their arcing flight. Watching the impact and power of the arrow as it hit its mark. At that moment, I fell in love with archery, and could never have imagined the influence it would have on the rest of my life.

ARCHERY GIVES CHILDREN A GREAT PLATFORM TO LEARN AN INVALUABLE LIFE SKILL

As a child, I recall how my brother and I dreamt about bowhunting and travelling the world. We read Chuck Adams's

books about hunting in Alaska! We ventured with Randy Ulmer as he hunted elk in the west, and saw Jeff Hopkins with bow in hand! Our dreams were big, but our goals were large as well. Our goals are still big, and continue to shape our lives.

As a child, I will always be grateful to John Gibson for taking us under his wing, and teaching us about archery. Now those whom he inspired are involved in the sport themselves, helping to cultivate the next generation of bowhunters. It is a privilege for me to teach children the fundamentals of archery, as you never know what impact this might have on their lives. Our children are the future, and archery gives them a great platform to learn an invaluable life skill. 🏹