

BONCAFE CEO BREWS UP A MOVIE

'Bitter/Sweet' has coffee industry as backdrop for new tale of romance

LEKHA J SHANKAR
SPECIAL TO THE NATION

To Urs Brunner, CEO of Boncafe Thailand, producing coffee and movies is the same thing, as both industries are highly palatable as commercial ventures.

"Movies are as much a niche product as coffee, and as much a business proposition," said Brunner, who recently completed his first feature film, "Bitter/Sweet", which uses the coffee industry as the background to a multinational love story.

The film was shot in the rarely seen coffee plantations of Krabi, with

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the closing shots in Brunner's own coffee-making plant. Inspired by "Sideways", which boosted the sales of Merlot and Pinot Noir wines, Brunner wanted the same result for coffee.

The Boncafe factory in Thailand sells 1,000 tonnes of coffee domestically, with an annual turnover of US\$20 million (Bt712 million).

Brunner has converted one of his holding companies - Angel & Bear - into a movie production unit, and for "Bitter/Sweet" teamed up with a couple of US production companies, including Jon Karas's Capitol Motion Pics.

The latter will supervise the film's sale in the US, while Brunner plans to handle the film's release in Thailand.

The film is set for its North American premiere today at the



Thai actress Napakpaha 'Mamee' Nakprasitte in 'Bitter/Sweet', a new movie produced by Boncafe CEO Urs Brunner and set on a coffee plantation.

WorldFest-Houston International Film & Video Festival.

"We have also spoken to sales

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**URS BRUNNER
CEO, BONCAFE THAILAND**

agents in other countries, and are targeting all markets that are commercially viable, including DVD, cable and satellite," said Brunner.

"Bitter/Sweet" was entirely shot in

Thailand, including the post-production work.

It has a big Thai-American cast, including popular Thai names like Napakpaha "Mamee" Nakprasitte and Akara Amarttayakul, along with James Brolin and Kip Pardue from Hollywood. To make the film more marketable, pop-singer Tata Young makes a guest appearance. It is directed by American director Jeff Hare, who promised to come back to Thailand for the next film.

Karas of Capitol Motion Pics has just completed shooting his second film in Thailand, "Shadows", with a Thai-American cast, including Hollywood star William Hurt.

Brunner plans "to continue making Thai films with a multinational cast, in order to target the international market". Their common fea-

ture will be that all the films will be set and shot in Thailand, with a Thai crew.

Brunner said that, in spite of the high rates of the Hollywood stars, which can range between 5 per cent to 50 per cent of the film's production cost, it was still "extremely cost-effective" to make a film in Thailand.

"Bitter/Sweet" was made within a budget of \$5 million, including some expensive aerial shots. The movie was shot with the new HD-Sony Red Cam, which also helped to cut costs.

"I'm aiming at both the festival circuit and the commercial circuit, which I'm told is contradictory," Brunner said. "But I'm a businessman and I love challenges. Besides, a small film like 'Slumdog Millionaire', which made big money, has given us all hope."