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Robe iSpiiders for Big Brother South Africa

Products Involved

iSpiider® ESPRITE® LEDWash 300™

South Africa based television lighting specialist Blond Productions supplies technical production for a slew of popular reality TV shows which have included several iterations of Big Brother over the years. There was much anticipation this year when the South African version – Big Brother Mzansi – returned for the first time since 2016 produced by Red Pepper and broadcast on Mzansi Magic.

Blond's Ryan Lombard (head of the Show Lighting department) designed and operated the lighting, working closely with a slick new set design created by Michael Gill, and several of his go-to Robe moving lights including ESPRITES, LEDWash 300s and six of Blond Productions' new iSpiiders to make the studio lighting rock!

Blond made this initial purchase of 12 x iSpiiders for "I'm A Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here (Germany)" which was shot in the South African bush – more about that in a separate story – for which they needed some hardy, weatherproof, high quality LED wash fixtures which were delivered by Robe's SA distributor, DWR.

However, Ryan grabbed six for the Big Brother Studio after he could not get more than 12 LEDWash 300s for the show as they were all out on other jobs!

For Big Brother, the ESPRITES, iSpiiders and LEDWash 300s were a "no brainer" as Ryan explained how he needed to produce a nice general wash enveloping the studio floor that could also illuminate various set pieces around the walls and sides, complemented with excellent key lighting for which the ESPRITE is a favourite.

The series was recorded at the Red Pepper Studios in Linden, Johannesburg, in a charismatic found space that was formerly a parking garage, with the actual Big Brother house nearby. Due to the compact nature of this, all of the lights had to work in a truly multi-purpose context to maximise the studio space.

Punchy back lights were required at the rear of the set, something for which Ryan would normally have used LEDWash 300s, but the 12 on the plot were needed for other duties, so the six new IP65 rated iSpiiders were positioned upstage to provide these solid general back washes, plus additional eye candy using the flower effects which looked cool for the low angle camera shots.

"I didn't need to worry about dust or any other environmental elements," stated Ryan referring to the iSpiiders' sealed optical chamber. Blond also purchased the wireless DMX modules with their iSpiiders which have proved useful for daisy chaining fixtures together and saving on data cabling.

The Big Brother Studio was actually a compact space, but this was ever apparent from the innovative set design and lighting which allowed it to be maximised on camera.

Some of the 12 x LEDWash 300s were positioned in the roof with the rest along the sides of the space at floor level for eye and camera candy.

This general all-encompassing wash lighting approach covered all positions around the studio including the presenter and contestants for these segments, while the ESPRITES were applied for detailing and closer key lighting.

Six ESPRITES was a perfect number for this front overhead work and when needed they could also be layered on top of the iSpiiders and LEDWashes for additional drama and reinforcing the streamlined style and contemporary set aesthetic. During artist performances, Ryan used the ESPRITES for beam-work and creating patterns, swapping functionality depending on the action of the moment.

ESPRITE is a favourite profile LED fixture for Ryan, and he likes everything about it including the excellent range of CT whites, the colour mixing, the quality of the light, the brightness and all the other features and effects available.

He rarely runs ESPRITES above 40 or 50% in a studio scenario like this, so there is plenty of additional power and headroom if needed and they can also be used in much larger spaces.

Ryan has worked with Red Pepper Productions on several previous projects including the last two seasons of Big Brother Nigeria, and his challenge on this one was to blend and match the lighting to the set. "It's always a pleasure working with Michael," he commented, "we engage in a lot of discussion beforehand, and his environments are designed with lighting in mind, which makes the end results fun to produce and more visually coherent!"

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland





