

## Costa Champanis – Ultra Sound



Costa Champanis from Ultra Sound was born and bred in Stellenbosch, in the Cape wine-lands. He went to Rhenish Primary School and thereafter moved to Paul Roos Gymnasium. Here he excelled in hockey, cricket, and karate; he achieved regional and provincial distinctions; academically he was an average student, he laughs, and exclaims that studying was not his highest of priorities.

One of the memorable times for Costa was when he was electrocuted; he was repairing a lighting control unit in a night-club. The club owner, who did not want to disrupt his patron's entertainment, had Costa work on the control unit while it was still powered and operating. "I shocked the daylights out of myself," Costa can now chuckle!

Before he could do that, however, Costa spent two years in the army. "That was an interesting time," he says; though one immediately realises his statement is somewhat cynical. "It's a time when you are at a very influential age and suddenly you are stuck in the army. After matric (1986), he decided that he needed a break and did national service of two years, where he was drafted to Pretoria, then moved to Zeerust and ended up in Bloemfontein at the armed corps. He finished basic training and then specialised in the Tank brigade as a gunner; where he was moved to Angola to participate in operation Hooper and Modular. Thankfully the adrenalin kept him from thinking too much about the situation he was in. "You are being fired upon and you are firing on others; It was do or die," Having a cool head under fire; helped then and still helps today, in tough situations.



With the military behind him (1988), Costa could finally start studying and whilst doing so ran his own mobile disco called Charisma. Enrolling at the Cape Technicon, Electrical Engineering, light current, was the obvious choice. This he completed while repairing and maintaining sound and lighting equipment for other mobile disco's and moved on to the local night clubs. His first equipment was self built; amplifiers, speakers and lighting control units.

Costa completed his practical training working in the repair workshop for a company that hired out video arcade games. Costa lost interest in working on the DJ side of things but had the ability to repair equipment. "I was able to repair broken equipment as at that time Robe was not available," he adds jokingly "The ability to repair equipment was what initially put Costa into the rental game, gear that was now out of commission had to be replaced, so a basic stock level was held which he could offer to his clients "ULTRA was born.



After graduation a store was opened in conjunction with Mark and Brandon; fellow college students. "We sold, installed, repaired, manufactured, maintained and rented; Costa reminisces;

"Those were tough but good times, buying your first vehicle, hiring your first staff, not banking a hell of a lot of money but making ends meets," he says. "You have the drive and take a leap, but it was all about small steps"..."

With his foot in the door, Costa was soon assisting night club owners with the upgrade of gear. “I sourced the equipment for them and slowly built up a network.” As clients started approaching Ultra Sound for rental equipment, a strictly dry hire approach was put into place. Over a period of time, people requested Ultra Sound to design, operate and oversee the technical aspect of the shows.

“The business just evolved and morphed from one thing to the next. It gradually just progressed,” says Costa. Lighting Design has proved a satisfying part of the show, and something he really enjoys. He is now able to look back and be proud of the Ultra brand, which literally started off as an idea when he was working as a student.



Ultra, which Costa admits could not be possible with the people in and around his life, has steadily grown. Firstly in Riebeeck Street, then 1994 they moved to larger premises in Bree Street and in 2001 expanded and relocated to Sir Lowry Road. In 2007 having bought premises in Observatory, Ultra will continue to serve the industry and its interests.



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