

SPECIAL
FEATURE

THE GLOBAL CANNABIS

GLOBAL CANNABIS TIMES

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ONE INTERVIEW AT A TIME



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Cape Town's smoke scene

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**CANNIBISTERS /
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

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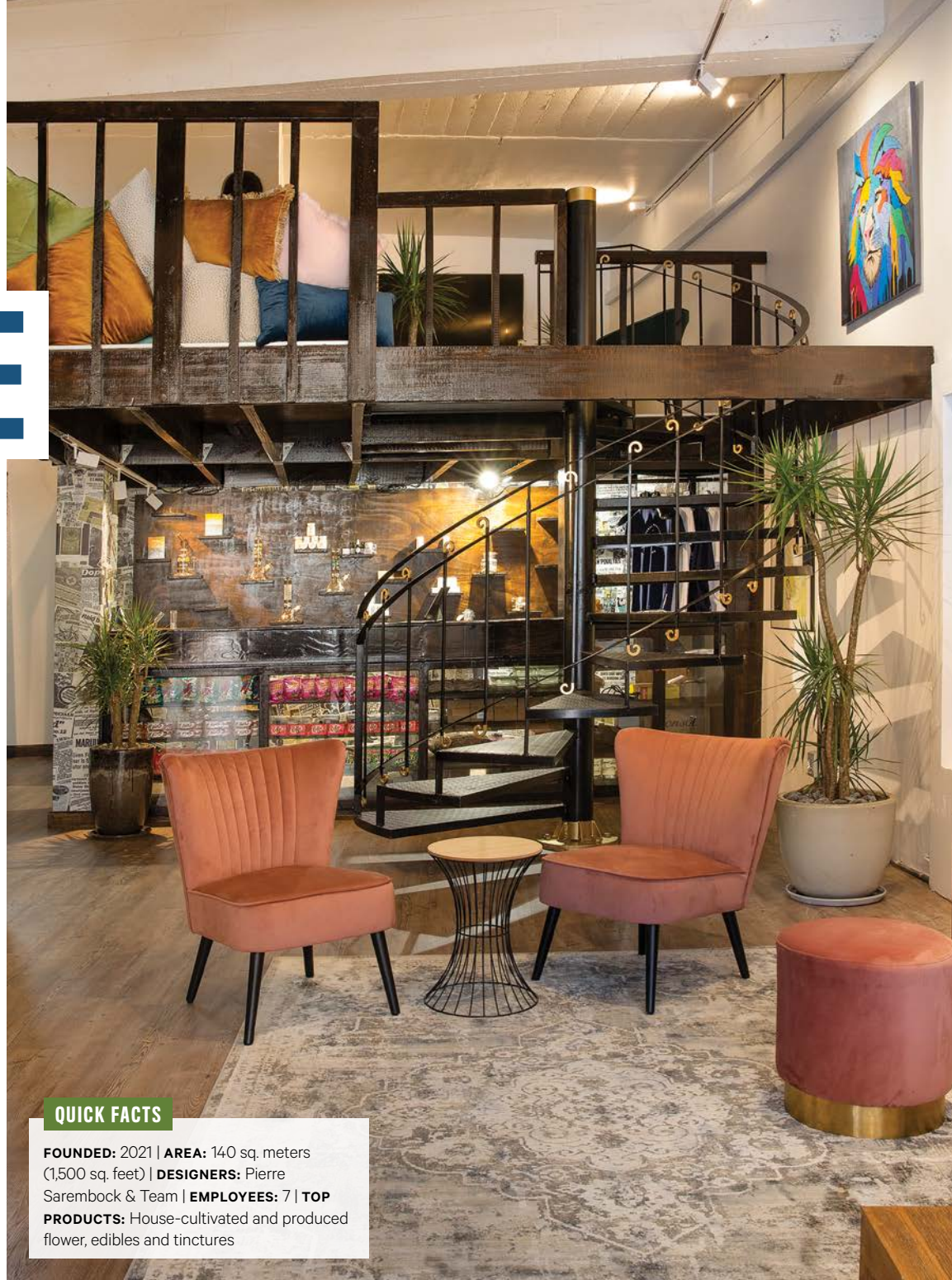
Cannabis entrepreneur Pierre Sarembock was content to wait until the time was right to open his dream cafe in an affluent Cape Town suburb.

BY KERRI TYLER

A tsunami of change is rolling across the world, opening more countries to legal cannabis and giving more people the freedom to enjoy a safe and healthful plant medicine. But change is by no means hitting everywhere at the same pace.

Most continents have their leading lights of legality. Canada paved the way to legal cannabis in North America. Uruguay has led the way in South America. Portugal and, of course, the Netherlands set the pace in Europe. In Africa, the country that's leading the cannabis charge is South Africa.

Cannabis, especially popular with Cape and Transvaal colony laborers in the 19th century, was fully criminalized throughout the Union of South Africa in 1922. Laws around cannabis (or “dagga” as it's known here) started loosening up again in 1965, when the country's Medicines Act elevated it from a substance with zero medicinal legitimacy to one that could be pre-



QUICK FACTS

FOUNDED: 2021 | **AREA:** 140 sq. meters (1,500 sq. feet) | **DESIGNERS:** Pierre Sarembock & Team | **EMPLOYEES:** 7 | **TOP PRODUCTS:** House-cultivated and produced flower, edibles and tinctures

scribed in certain circumstances.

Activists have been chipping away at the legal barriers since then, with protests in the streets and even a political party—the Dagga Party—keen to draw attention to the health and economic benefits legalization would bring. In 2018, a landmark court ruling decriminalized private and personal usage.

These days, there's a strong feeling

SPIRAL STAIRS: Pierre Sarembock and interior designer Donne Stratford created Cannibisters to be chilled, chatty and cozy down to the last detail.

that full legalization is only a few statutory steps away.

SERVING SEA POINT

While South African lawmakers prevaricate over the small print, one Cape Town resident has been playing the long game—and his patience has finally paid off. Pierre Sarembock comes from a family of high-end clothing manufacturers. But his



dream has always been to open a fully legal cannabis outlet in South Africa.

That dream has come to fruition in Cannibisters, a members-only “herbal apothecary” in the affluent Cape Town suburb of Sea Point. Sarembock wanted to deliver a cannabis experience reminiscent of luxurious coffee rituals overseen by skilled baristas. He wanted to provide cannabis-based and other herbal medications to alleviate health issues and provide palliative relief not available elsewhere, all in a space where connoisseurs could relax and savor powerful strains of weed lovingly cultivated by Sarembock himself.

Sea Point boasts a kilometer (0.6 miles) of the highest real estate prices in the whole of South Africa. The vibe at Cannibisters is perfect for this nautically tipped nub of the culturally diverse and artsy Mother City, as Cape

CAFÉ DE L'ESPRIT: The club has some of the best coffee in all of Sea Point, says Sarembock. Members use the space for more than just a smoking room—many receive other palliative care treatments and some even pop open laptops and get some work done.



VISIONARY: Pierre Sarembock has carefully set up Cannibisters to function as an apothecary to stay within South African law.

Town is affectionately known.

The club is located at 65 Regent Street in a thriving shopping district just a few strides from the beach, sitting cheek-by-jowl with craft beer houses, art outlets and trendy coffee bars housed in picturesque low-rise colonial shophouses. It's also close to the MOJO Market, a hub of gourmet food stalls, bars and live music.

The sidewalk crowd here is style-forward, eco-conscious and culturally switched on. They can't get enough of Cannibisters since it opened its doors in December 2021.



rosemary to give a nice smell inside, too,” he says.

“We even went down to our own purified water. All the water we have in the club—which is free—we have on tap. Lemon water, cucumber water for members to go and take during the day. I’ve tried to make sure that I was holistically whole as a business.”

AN ORCHESTRAL APOTHECARY

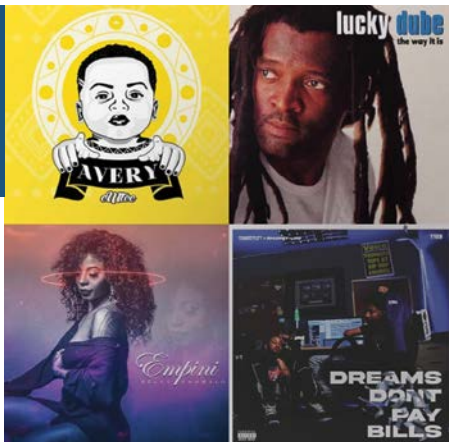
It’s no accident that Cannibisters’ popularity has snowballed. It’s been very carefully orchestrated.

“We’re different to any other place. We are a herbal apothecary. I have a doctor who has been approved to prescribe our goods. We’re allowed to physically script patients after having consultations,” Sarembock says.

Cannibisters is also dedicated to informing club members about what they’re getting instead of surprising them with unexpected effects. The club explains the THC:CBD ratios and terpene profiles of its flower strains and lists the CBD mixture in its tinctures, down to the milligram.

“Every item in Cannibisters is medicinally tested. Every item is organi-

THE SOUNDTRACK



← Tunes for a healing hunker down at Cannibisters

CATCH A SEA BREEZE

The club’s aesthetic is stylish ocean cool, with breezy white walls and wood floors punctuated with vibrant pops of color. The styling was overseen by interior designer Donne Stratford, Sarembock’s long-time PA. Other key members of the Cannibisters team include Sarembock’s business partner Dr. Andre Sorger and club manager and “cannologist” Clive Kruger.

It’s chilled, chatty and cozy—almost a family vibe. The clientele drift into the shop in waves. Daytime coffee snobs pop in from 10am for a brew and a smoke. Then, almost on the dot, regular influxes of customers turn up at 6pm, 7pm and 8pm, Sarembock says. The club closes at 10pm, but there’s been a clamor for a later finish and opening hours may be extended—watch this space.

Sarembock and Stratford have overseen every detail of the club’s evolution, up to and including the club’s absence of that signature smell outside its doors.

“I have the most incredible ventilation system of extraction units and fresh air, so my club doesn’t smell from the outside at all. Everything is controlled—all the smoke goes out of the building above so it doesn’t go into the street. I commissioned special units that push out lavender and

- Roll Up Emtee
- Empini Kelly Khumalo
- The Way It Is Lucky Dube
- Jele DBN Gogo, Sino Msolo, Busiswa, Kamo Mphela, Young Stunna
- Make It Bun Dem Carlos DjeDje
- Zange Bongeziwe Mabandla
- Dagga YoungstaCPT, Shaney Jay
- Trouble Parov Stelar, feat. Nikki Williams
- Purple Rain Shane Eagle
- Nne Na Inwi Colbert Mukwevho
- Usesemncane Mnqobi Yazo
- Daydreams Chunda Munki
- Innie Boland Middelvinger, YoungstaCPT, Jack Parow
- Ammaggedon O’Yaba
- Abalele Kabza De Small, DJ Maphorisa
- Ami Faku Ami Faku
- Suited Shekhinah
- For What It’s Worth Miriam Makeba
- Roll Up Re-Up Emtee, feat. Wizkid & AKA

LISTEN TO THE SOUNDTRACK! Check out *GCTMag’s* Spotify playlist for Cannibisters at tinyurl.com/ybct8kew



cally made. There are rules of engagement that I put in place, so the club is this chilled place where people come and work during the day, where other people come and share and exchange, and we have grown to 7,000 members in eight months.

“And we have recurring members already numbering 1,500—members who are using the club every single month.”

Sarembock has been meticulous in sticking to the letter of the law so as not to fall foul of rules limiting how and where cannabis can be consumed. The only licenses for growing or manufacturing cannabis in South Africa are issued under the Medicines Act. Private, personal, recreational consumption of cannabis is allowed under the 2018 Constitutional Court ruling—but here is where it gets tricky.

Other cannabis clubs in the country have followed the cultivation blueprint used by Cannibisters—members provide the club with seeds to cultivate and then receive the product after it’s been harvested and processed. This is dancing on the line of what’s currently legal in South Africa, as far as “private, personal” use is defined. But unlike some earlier clubs that were shut down, Cannibisters’ issuance of prescriptions keeps it within the law.

THE OG STRAINS

Cannibisters only provides club members with its own homegrown flower and extracted products, which include edibles and tinctures with more or less potent blends of THC and CBD.

“I do an incredible OG cannabis—very strong with very good terpenes. It’s holistically rounded cannabis with CBD in it as well,” Sarembock says.

“We have a variety of close on 92 strains on our shelf. It’s like walking into Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. I make all of them. I have a team of growers who make and grow under

my license.”

The club has a broad appeal, attracting everyone from Nigerian royalty in brand new Porsches to 18-year-olds trying dagga for the first time in a place they know is safe, according to Sarembock. Women make up 40 percent of the club’s membership. There are older clients who stick to edibles and even some who are there for the “best coffee in town.”

People in advanced stages of terminal illness represent the best purpose of Cannibisters—providing palliative relief with cannabis, acupuncture, botanical herbs and CBD treatments.

“We have specifically gentle products for medicinal use,” Sarembock says. “We have a 1 percent—99 percent CBD, 1 percent THC. We have a 4 percent, with 8 percent CBD and 4 percent THC. We have another strain that’s 10:10 and that is as low as I go—from there, it’s 15 percent THC and up.”

Sarembock is happy to provide club members with low potency dagga—but he makes no secret of where his own tastes lie.

“I push boundaries,” he smiles. “I believe in less combustion. I’d rather have one hit and know I’m stoned for four or five hours than keep smoking joints chasing that high. If it ain’t strong enough, it’s not going to make my club.”



5 COOL THINGS ABOUT

YOU'RE A STONER, HARRY:

Sarembock's pet bulldog Hagrid is the gentle-hearted mascot of Cannibisters.

CANNIBISTERS

1 THERE'S NO HEIRARCHY. Owner Pierre Sarembock mops the floor sometimes and has even been known to drive clients home when they're too stoned to move. "I do whatever needs doing!" he says.

2 EMBRACE OF TECH. The online membership system is rigorous and secure, and you can use a specially modified tablet to make your order and it will be brought to your seat. There's an app on the way.

3 KAYA ROCKS THE CAFFEINE. Barista Kaya makes the best coffee in Sea Point. Except on

Sundays, when clients have to make do with Sarembock's "adequate" Americanos.

4 IT'S A KOSHER HIT. Cannibister's potent edibles are certified Kosher, as well as delicious, so the club has special appeal to Cape Town's Jewish community.

5 THE DON OVERSEES PROCEEDINGS. Hagrid, Sarembock's bulldog, is a regular fixture at the club and there's even a portrait of him on the wall. "We call him the Don," Sarembock says. "Clients ask where he is when he's not with me—but he can't stay too long, or he gets stoned on secondhand smoke!"