Creator Cristian Conti, star Juan Pablo Raba and ZDF Enterprises’ Robert Franke discuss the new series Wild District.

By Kristin Brzoznowski

From the creators of Narcos, Wild District follows the story of a man who escapes the Colombian armed conflict only to find himself facing a new, more personal war. The ten-part series, which features a mix of drama and action, was conceived by Cristian Conti, co-founder of the Bogotá-based production house Dynamo. The idea came to Conti more than ten years ago, after he sat down with former guerrilla fighters who were going through the process of being reintroduced into society following the signing of the Colombian peace agreements. “The stories I heard were so sad and terrible,” says Conti. “I thought, these people deserve to have their stories heard, but the time wasn’t right back in 2006 because the situation in Colombia was too tough.” Once he saw the peace process coming together, Conti felt the timing was right, and the series began to take shape.

ZDF Enterprises came on board early in the process, co-developing the show—its first co-production in Latin America—with Dynamo. Robert Franke, VP of ZDF Enterprises, says that the company was enticed by the concept and by Dynamo’s track record. “We heard the pitch and thought it was really relevant, given the fact that the peace process is continuing in Colombia,” says Franke. “At the same time, we thought it would be something that resonates very well internationally, and it makes for a compelling background to tell a story about somebody who has to find new meaning in the world after leading a life of violence.” Wild District was produced as Netflix’s first Colombian original, with ZDF Enterprises holding rights for the rest of the world. It has been renewed for a second season by Netflix.

At the center of the action is Jhon Jeiver, alias “Yei Yei,” played by Juan Pablo Raba (Narcos, 7 Años, S04. Yei Yei was kidnapped by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) at age 13 and trained as a one-man army. A lethal guerrilla fighter, he escapes the jungle and tries to reinsert himself in society and reconnect with his long-lost family. He links up with Prosecutor Daniela León, played by Cristina Umaña (Narcos, Salto de Urgencia), and must infiltrate a dangerous criminal organization run by another ex-FARC.

“It’s probably the most complex role I’ve ever played for many reasons, one of them being what it meant for Colombia, for the history of my country,” says Raba. “It was interesting that Cristian was able to develop a universal story based on something very local, not centered on the guerrilla or its ideologies. It focuses simply on one person with specific qualities, with the post-conflict in Colombia as a backdrop.”

For Conti, it was important to make a series that would resonate internationally but would also accurately portray the reality in Colombia today. “I really wanted to focus on Bogotá and the idea of a Latin American metropolis and how it ticks. I found, through the main character of Yei Yei, a way to look at it from the eyes of somebody who has never seen it before.”

Franke adds, “Even though the backdrop is that of a political conflict in Colombia, the core is a very human story. It’s about finding your place in life. That is certainly something that everyone can relate to.” Plus, he adds, “There aren’t that many action shows around that really deliver on their promise. We find this very compelling. Action works in every market; there is always an audience for it.”