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Billie Josephs savours South African specialities

## Fit for a Zulu king



Shaka Zulu: dine amid £2 million of authentic African décor

**A** FABULOUS new restaurant and night spot dedicated to the memory of one of South Africa's fiercest warriors has opened in Camden Town with a menu containing such traditional veldt dishes as "monkey gland sauce" (pickle with chilli and garlic) and Zulu cabbage.

**Shaka Zulu** is the latest brainchild of entrepreneur Roger Payne, whose dedication to bringing fine South African cuisine to London gourmets is said to have been endorsed by the reigning Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, as well as by several British royals.

The establishment, named after King Shaka, one of the Zulu nation's most militarily successful leaders, is breathtaking. Just the cost of creating its interior décor, which celebrates Zulu culture and history, amounts to around £2 million from a set-up budget of £5.5 million. It features huge hand-carved wooden mosaics showing scenes from Zulu life, tribal masks and a "warrior wall" with a 60ft statue of King Shaka among his warriors. To ensure authenticity, the developers had extensive meetings with leading members of the Zulu nation

in South Africa and also with the British Museum, which has a vast African art gallery.

King Shaka himself might not have been a particularly amiable dinner guest. A South African history buff relates that, when the king's mother died in 1827, he put a large number of people to death "because they did not appear to be suitably grief-stricken".

However, entertainment and fine food are the main themes of Shaka Zulu, where the opulent surroundings include both a vast cocktail bar and a restaurant that seats over 400 people.

Diners are serenaded by drum beats and African music. The main restaurant, although offering ostrich, springbok and beef from the royal estate at Sandringham, also includes a number of non-meat dishes. Highly recommended are starters such as Cape Malay pickled fish (sea bass with rare spices and shallots); salmon smoked in-house using oak shavings and Rooibos tea (served with a pickled cucumber) and mango cucumber and melon salad (with a sauce of lemon, goat's milk curd, toasted sesame seeds and honey and mustard dressing).

Among main courses are butternut pumpkin risotto and roast cod with a tangy curry and cardamom paste and green beans. Side dishes

include Zulu cabbage (a bell pepper with tomato and curry) and *msamba* (spinach leaves with peanuts, tomato and onion).

For dessert, it has to be the South African classic, *koeksisters*, deep-fried, braided doughnuts dipped in a honey and sugar syrup, or the "boutique" cheeses with salt bread.

Although the restaurant is clearly not a kosher establishment, it is happy to offer vegetarian food and welcomes kosher caterers. It is shortly planning a barmitzvah party for around 1,000 guests, for which the kitchen surfaces will be covered with foil and guests will be offered non-meat delicacies.

For those planning a private dinner, executive chef Barry Vera offers a place at the "chef's table", where he and his staff will build a menu to suit guests' preferences. On the night itself, diners will be greeted by the chef who will present the menu and the key ingredients. Guests will be able to nominate one person to go into the kitchen and assist. The aim is to "immerse you in the drama and creativity and the passion that is delivered from the kitchen to the table, making Shaka Zulu much more of a memorable experience than just a restaurant."