



Publication: Trends Magazine

Date: 14th October 2010

Circulation: 13,006

ARCHANT } LIFE



DINING OUT

ENTER ANOTHER WORLD

PREPARE to be amazed, says Shaka Zulu's website – and I'll bet my bottom rand that you've never eaten in a restaurant quite like this before.

This purpose-built, 844-seat, subterranean South African-themed behemoth of a nightclub opened in August and lays claim to be the biggest of its kind in Europe.

Boasting a traditional "Braai" grill restaurant, a lounge bar, an oyster bar and a nightclub spread over two sprawling, escalator-linked floors, Shaka Zulu takes its name from the ancient warrior king depicted here in a towering 60 foot-high statue.

The ribbon on the celeb-heavy opening night party was cut by the unlikely duo of Amy Winehouse and His Majesty Goodwill Zwelithini, modern day King of the Zulu nation.

It took 40 shipping containers – each 24 foot in length – to transport the thousands of hand-carved wooden mosaics, murals and ceiling panels of monkeys, elephants and spear-wielding tribesmen from Africa.

Each one was painstakingly handcrafted to the last millimetre, slotting perfectly into place, jigsaw-like, on the walls and roof of this purpose-built underground eaterie on the other side of the world.

A scary looking shaman dressed in a loincloth and a headdress beats a huge skin drum at the entrance, it's bounding beats echoing across Camden's Stables Market.

A herd of zebra camouflage themselves on the walls of the toilets, which boast crocodile skin patterned porcelain hand basins.

Joss sticks burn, perhaps to mask the occasional whiff of fresh cement, and a tasteful selection of world music is piped in over the speakers.

You could be in Las Vegas rather than on

safari, and you half expect Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo to jump out from behind a plant pot to serenade you in between your starters and mains.

It cost £5.5million to build and, in theory, it's as subtle as a brick.

Yet somehow, miraculously, it all works.

It helps to get in the spirit of things of course and a zingy, palette-cleansing Prosecutor's Passion cocktail (Tanqueray gin, passion fruit, lemon juice, elderflower and egg white) certainly does the trick.

A bottle of South African Shiraz with stunningly long legs was an absolute corker of a house red, negating the need to negotiate an 18-page wine list.

Starters of seared ostrich carpaccio and Cape Malay pickled fish were every bit the equal.

The former – a delicate, raw slice of dark meat from a bird I had never tried before – was perfectly matched with the subtle kick of "ras el hanout" spices which, according to head chef Barry Ver-a, you can now buy down your local Waitrose.

It was not the only first of the night.



By **MATT HUMPHREYS**

SHAKA ZULU
Stables Market,
Chalk Farm Road,
NW1 8AH
Tel: 020 3376 9911

My main of Springbok steak had been succinctly sealed with a quick flash on the Braai, oozing flavour and just enough pinkish blood in the middle to melt in the mouth. Paired with a tangy beetroot glaze, it was worth every penny of its £24 price tag.

Had I paid the same for my dining partner's on-the-bone Speyside Highland rib, I would have been a tad disappointed – nothing wrong with the dish per se, but I've had comparable steaks for half the price.

It was the only suspicion in an otherwise faultless meal that some of the multi-million pound set-up costs may have been transferred to the menu.

We declined to ask our impressively knowledgeable waitress which gland exactly the accompanying monkey gland sauce had been gleaned from, or which species of monkey for that matter – sometimes ignorance is bliss.

A traditional sweet fried dough dessert rounded things off nicely, and two "Rum Blazers" from the liqueur list of saw us bow out in style.

The hundred-or-so heads steadily filling up the restaurant turned in unison as the bar tender set light to the warmed alcohol, turned the blue flame a fiery gold with a sprinkle of cinnamon and left us to savour the caramelised, rum-soaked fruit.

And that's Shaka Zulu in a nutshell – decadent, flamboyant, a touch sickly but a whole lot of fun.

Forget the recession and banish your middle class mores, because life is short and Shaka Zulu is one big, brilliant, guilty pleasure.

Mains: from £14.50
Wine: from £18.50
Children welcome: yes
Disabled facilities: yes