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## Design fit for a King

8th September 2010, 12:14pm

**Featuring Europe's longest bar is just one of the unique design elements at The Pan-Asian Gilgamesh restaurant in London. Operations director Jeff Lim explains to Eat Out how the team achieved their aim of “bringing something to London that had never been seen before”.**

The Gilgamesh, which opened its doors in June 2006 in the heart of Camden Town Stables Market, London, boasts an "Eastern gastronomic and entertainment experience" operated by the renowned Ian Pengelley.

The restaurant features a 40ft high ceiling with a fully retractable roof and last year one of London's largest event spaces, Gilgamesh Studio, was launched last year. Located above the restaurant, the new space has a capacity of 500 standing and 300 seated.

Whilst the space has the same original wood carvings as the walls in the main restaurant downstairs, it is essentially a blank canvas and can be dressed or themed in any way the client wishes.

### **Who was Gilgamesh?**

Gilgamesh was the ancient Babylon king – two thirds God and one third human, and was perceived by all of his time as a superhuman force.



### **What was your aim when designing this venture?**

To create a unique space on a huge scale, reminiscent of an ancient Babylonian palace fit for the king that Gilgamesh was. We really wanted to bring something to London that had never been seen before.

### **How did you achieve this? For example what fabric/furniture did you use?**

The floor to ceiling glass windows give the room an al fresco feel when the roof is completely retracted. The Lapis stone bar is one of Gilgamesh's main features and is hand-crafted by the same 10,000 strong Indian design team responsible for the ancient Babylon interior style throughout the building. The bar's deep wooden base is covered with intricate hand carved bronzing depicting scenes of Babylon from the Gilgamesh period.

### **What would you describe as the key and unique features?**

The 40ft ceiling with a fully retractable roof and the stunning handcarved wooden 'tree of Life' in the stairwell. It also has the longest bar in Europe. There are huge towering sphinxes on the stage.

The upstairs event space is also a huge blank canvas and can accommodate events large or small, such as fashion shows, canapé parties and concerts. There are glass windows offering great views over the London skyline and the ornate and intricate carvings really give the restaurant the real 'wow factor.'



### **Stage by stage how did you approach this project?**

It was planned for years and then we started the build about 10 months before the restaurant opened. It took several months to get all the structural work done and then from there the furniture, wall carvings and bar were all sent over from India.

All the carvings then had to be painstakingly installed in all the correct areas and the furniture then had to be brought in. The final stage was an intensive, industrial clean up of the entire site before we could throw our doors open.

**Where did you get your inspiration from?**

We were inspired by ancient Babylon with all its splendour and beauty. The tale of Gilgamesh is extremely epic so we wanted to create a restaurant on an epic scale which really does tell a story and transports diners out of the urban surroundings of Camden into another world.

We were also highly motivated by our executive chef, Ian Pengelley, who has spent much of his life in Hong Kong and other Asian countries so we wanted to create a restaurant whose oriental surroundings perfectly reflected the delicious Pan-Asian cuisine on offer.

**What is the size of the venue?**

7,000 square feet.

**Timetable, how long did it take from start to finish?**

Three years in the planning and the making.

**What are your plans for the future?**

We will be opening another venue in the next few months but I can't say more than that-watch this space!

**What do you like most about the design of the venue?**

The opulence and the sense of truly inhabiting another faraway magical world.

**Fit out cost?**

£16 million.

**If you were to change on the design of this place, what would it be? And why?**

I wouldn't change one thing. When we opened four years ago we were the most spectacular restaurant that London had ever seen and I don't believe that any other venue has equaled us since.



### **How important is feedback from your customers? What kind of feedback were you getting?**

Very important, the customer is always right and we really want all our customers to leave feeling that they have had a wonderful experience. Most of the feedback we get is very positive; people love the food and decor and always tell us how unique they think the space is.

### **Do you think you used the space to the best of your ability?**

I think we did and we have created an extremely versatile space. It offers everything from restaurant, bar, events space, private dining area and nightclub at weekends in the form of the Babylon Lounge.

### **Tell me about some of your other projects?**

I have worked in the nightlife sector for over 20 years, including everything from nightclubs to restaurants.

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