

Behind the Idea Pioneering people and ideas in the creative industries

Like Heston meets Crystal Maze

Suz Mountfort, founder of immersive dining pioneer Gingerline, explains its new Chambers Of Flavour experience

What's the big idea?

Our most ambitious project to date – the Chambers Of Flavour – invites curious guests to enter The Machine. Designed in 1882 by the world's first interdimensional flavourologist, Sir Lionel Stirling Grey, intrepid adventurers are given safe passage and unprecedented access to a series of connecting realities.

Brave travellers enter The Machine in groups and enjoy a four- or five-course meal. Each course is in a different room with a contrasting theatrical experience – it's a little like Heston meets the Crystal Maze.

Guests book having no idea of what to expect and can journey through anything from enchanted forests to a spaceship to a sunset beach, meeting all sorts of crazy characters along the way.

It's designed for the hungry, the brave and the discreet. To protect The Machine's existence, every detail of the experience is banned from being shared once visitors are inside so it doesn't spoil the surprise for future guests.

Where did the idea come from?

It came from a desire to create our idea of the ultimate night out. A sense of adventure, great food and booze, an opportunity to be transported for the evening into a completely different world – or five different worlds, in this case.

In 2010 we created Gingerline Classic Tomfoolery and began running secret theatrical supper clubs in east London. We've always wanted to firmly cast the dining experience as a creative space to stimulate not just the taste buds but all of the senses and to broaden imaginations at the same time. We've really honed the



Box fresh: Salmon covered in sesame seeds may be one of treats on offer

immersive dining genre but, after five years, we wanted a new challenge, something which would take all of the things we've learned and use that knowledge to really blow people's minds and take the genre up a gear. Hence the Chambers Of Flavour was born.

Who was involved in bringing the idea to life?

For Chambers, we have four set-design teams, lighting teams, performance and casting teams, choreographers and dance teams, and a really big sound-design team. Each experience echoes melodies in the musical score to subtly link all the worlds together. Our new head chef is Natasha Walsh, who has worked in Nobu in San Diego and Michelin-starred restaurants in San Francisco.

What were the main obstacles you had to overcome?

The logistics are hugely challenging. We have up to eight groups of 16 guests entering the experience each



Swinging times: The entertainment matches the food as diners move between different worlds

night, all of whom are fed simultaneously in different chambers. It requires a lot of coordination and precise timings. We had to design software to make sure the whole experience appears seamless. Start-up funding was an issue but we managed to do that in a way that meant the project was funded through ticket sales alone.

Was there any point at which you thought it might all go wrong?
Many times. I lost count of the people

who told us we should just keep doing what we were doing with our regular format. The risk was huge, and there were moments of doubt, but if you believe in an idea, you can't do it by halves. And once you've set something like this in motion, with this many clever creative people around, there's seldom a problem you can't solve.

In general, what's your method for coming up with ideas?
Even when I'm not working, Gingerline projects are always just

below the surface of my consciousness. Something relatively minor or seemingly insignificant can suggest a new concept and start me thinking about which experience it can be incorporated into. Thankfully, there are a trillion ideas we haven't done yet and a billion ways we'd like to do them, so an idea drought is unlikely!

Chambers Of Flavour is sold out until March 2016. New tickets go on sale at midday today at chambersofflavour.co.uk

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