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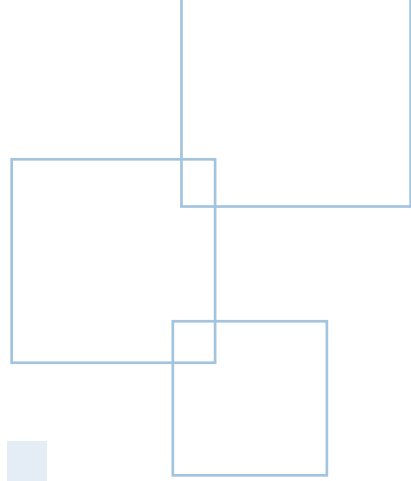


rocking out

Think there's nothing to ice but frozen water? Get ready to be schooled in cool.

Story by PAUL CLARKE

Photographs by STUART MULLENBERG



Four hundred thousand years ago, give or take, our earliest ancestors domesticated fire, making it possible for future generations to enjoy all the benefits of cooked food, heated homes and multi-burner propane grills. Since then, we've been so enamored by fire that it wasn't until relatively recently that anyone got around to thinking much about ice. And so *Quest for Fire* became a story for the ages, while *Ice Run* might only describe a typical Saturday night. But when it comes to the world of mixology, ice beats fire cold.

"Ice is really the cornerstone of the American bar," says Chad Solomon, a New York-based cocktail consultant with Liquid Relations, and co-founder of Cuff & Buttons cocktail catering. Solomon is one of the growing number of bartenders across the country who are taking a fresh look at ice as not just a cocktail accessory, but an integral component of a well-made drink. Solomon credits Frederick Tudor—known as Boston's "Ice King"—for creating

both the supply *and* the demand for commercially distributed ice in early America. In the first half of the 19th century, Tudor approached hotel bars and fine drinking establishments with the idea of chilling their juleps, cobblers and punches; the result was a total transformation of the country's drinking culture. "It was a quantum leap in terms of the enjoyment of mixed drinks by patrons," Solomon says. "People were hooked almost immediately to the colder, more refreshing kinds of drinks."

While less than 200 years separate Tudor's icehouses from the rattle and crash of modern ice machines, much has happened to ice along the way—and for many contemporary bartenders, this hasn't been entirely a good thing. The conditions under which early commercial ice was formed and harvested meant that bartenders often worked with ice that was firm and frigid, with little of the dissolved air or impurities that shorten ice's life span; as a result, insulated blocks of this pond ice could last through the summer. Much of today's machine-made ice, by contrast, is lighter and relatively warmer; it melts quickly, rendering drinks watery and insipid. But thanks to the work of dedicated bartenders, patrons once again are experiencing the quantum leap in quality that good ice can bring to a drink.

Thad Vogler, bar manager at Camino Restaurant in Oakland, Calif., compares using good ice in cocktails to upgrading your kitchen stove. "Say you're working on a two-burner electric range, and all of a sudden someone gives you a six-burner industrial Wolf gas range. What you'd be able to do with heat is entirely different from what you'd ever imagined," Vogler says. "It's sort of what happens when you use good ice: Your job is to make things cold, and all of a sudden you have this tool that works so much better. It immediately raises a drink a couple of points on a scale of 1 to 10 when you use good ice."

By freezing purified water in large blocks or custom molds, and by using ice from high-end machines, these bartenders are making drinks colder and with precisely the desired amount of dilution. And while the art of shaking or stirring drinks with custom ice is a field unto itself, perhaps nowhere is ice's impact more evident than in the drinks that are served with ice as a component. From simple pours of whiskey on the rocks to elaborately swizzled punches, bartenders are acknowledging that ice is as important an ingredient to these drinks as any spirit or mixer. Once typically viewed as a simple filler in the glass, ice has become cool.



Cachaça Aperitif

This intriguing drink from Camino combines the grassy flavor of cachaça with the savory taste of fresh sage, served in a glass with two large Kold-Draft cubes.

1 ½ oz. Armazem Vieira cachaça (Esmeralda bottling)

½ oz. honey syrup

¾ oz. lemon juice

5-8 fresh sage leaves

Sparkling Vouvray or other dry sparkling wine

Ice: large cubes

Tools: shaker, strainer, tea strainer

Glass: double old fashioned or rocks

Garnish: sage leaf

Combine all ingredients except sparkling wine in a cocktail shaker and fill with large ice. Shake well and double-strain through tea strainer into glass. Add two large ice cubes. Finish with a splash of sparkling wine. Garnish.

To make honey syrup, combine equal parts honey and warm water and stir until honey is completely dissolved. Cool and store in refrigerator.

Thad Vogler
Camino, Oakland, Calif.

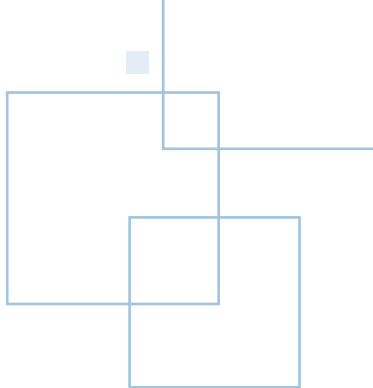


Picon Punch

The rarity of one ingredient can make this classic highball challenging to assemble. Amer Picon isn't currently distributed in the U.S.; as a replacement, use Torani Amer, made in California, or better yet, the recipe for replica Amer Picon that appeared in our July/August 2007 issue.

1 tsp. real pomegranate grenadine
2 ½ oz. Amer Picon, Torani Amer or replica
1 oz. Cognac
Chilled soda water
Large ice cubes or long ice spear
Glass: highball
Tools: bar spoon

Pour grenadine and Amer Picon into highball glass. Add ice, and fill almost to top with chilled soda water. Gently stir; carefully pour Cognac over back of bar spoon so it “floats” on top of the drink. Serve with a straw.



short and long

While wandering through Osaka one night in late 2006, Buffy Charlet and her friends decided to stop for a drink. They sat down at a tiny bar that served only whisky, placed their order, and were astounded by what was placed in front of them. “When the glasses came out, we thought it was just phenomenal,” says Charlet, a bartender at Ford’s Filling Station in Los Angeles. “The ice was in these big, perfect cubes; it was absolutely beautiful.”

Charlet and her friends cajoled the bartender into showing them the preparation: A large block of ice was brought out from a back room, and with a few precise maneuvers with a sword, he sliced flawless two-inch cubes from the block. “It fit perfectly in the glass, and they did that for each glass of whisky,” Charlet says. “I’ve never encountered anything like that since—and I’m a bartender.”

While swordplay is still blissfully rare behind American bars, several bartenders are taking their own stabs at crafting large, dense cubes for drinks served on the rocks. The aesthetics are certainly impressive, as Charlet would attest, but the reasons go beyond simple appearances. “Anything on the rocks—be it a simple whiskey or an Old Fashioned or something like a sour—you want to set that down in front of a guest at its absolute coldest, with a nice, large piece of ice that’s going to preserve the drink in its ideal balance of strong and weak,” Solomon says. “As the clock ticks, it’s going to be a totally different drink based on the size and density of the ice.”

Most cocktails are served “up,” without ice, and are meant to be consumed quickly, before they become unpleasantly tepid. Drinks served on the rocks, however, provide a chance to slow down. Perhaps the quintessential and most venerable rocks

drink is the Old Fashioned, a mixture of bourbon or rye, sugar and bitters; excellent variations include versions made with aged rum or genever, a malty gin from the Netherlands, as well as the Oaxaca Old Fashioned, a tequila-and-mezcal approach served at Death & Company in New York. Other classics—such as the bitter, garnet-hued Negroni, the classic New Orleans Vieux Carré and the Whiskey Sour—are often served on ice, as are contemporary drinks such as Beretta’s simply named Cachaça Aperitif.

When served on the rocks, a drink can be lingered over and enjoyed as it develops in the glass. When the ice is of low quality, however, what often develops is a watery mess. Solomon estimates that, by using a single large piece of very cold, dense ice, a drink’s life expectancy—the time when it’s at peak quality—can be more than doubled. Vogler agrees. “A large piece of ice retains a lower temperature longer, and it’ll keep a drink colder longer, without turning it to water,” he says.

To reach cocktail perfection, bartenders are turning to the past, and to the best of modern technology. Solomon says that several years ago, while tending bar at New York’s Milk & Honey,

he and owner Sasha Petraske, along with other bartenders, began experimenting with freezing large blocks of ice in industrial freezers, then custom-carving large chunks for individual drinks. While the process eventually proved burdensome and inefficient to do for every drink, some bars continue the practice for at least some drinks on their bar menus, such as the Whiskey Cocktail served at Slanted Door in San Francisco. Solomon and other New York bartenders have found satisfaction in special molds that produce perfect 2-inch cubes. For quality ice on a larger scale, ice machines from Kold-Draft—ones that produce dense, frigid, 1 1/4-inch cubes—have become standard equipment at some bars.

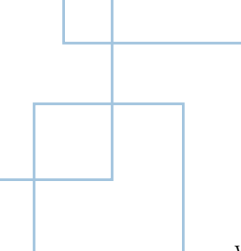
spears

Long pieces of ice the height of a highball or Collins glass are ideal for serving in tall drinks; these may be carved from a larger block of ice, or frozen in special molds.

cubes

Many progressive bartenders work with cubes as large as 2 inches on each side for drinks served on the rocks, and with 1 1/4-inch cubes from Kold-Draft machines, which are used for shaking and serving drinks, and may be cracked into smaller pieces for stirring drinks.





Skeptics may discount the role that larger, colder cubes of ice play in a drink, but when Charlet and her friends were served their whisky in Osaka in glasses with bespoke cubes, the effect was memorable. “The ice was what caught your eye, and you started to notice more the color of the whisky and the smell,” she says. “It was stripped down to basics, and it really focused you on the drink.”

Classic tall drinks, such as the tequila-based Paloma or the whiskey-based Presbyterian, along with the familiar Gin and Tonic, also need care in the ice department to prevent the delicate balance of flavors from collapsing into a diluted mess. Some bartenders address the issue with stacks of Kold-Draft cubes; this is the approach Vogler takes with his Agricole Mule, and that is used in drinks such as the Company Buck at Death & Company.

Other bars, such as Little Branch in New York, use long spears of ice that are shaped to the size of the glass. The spears can be carved from large blocks, but an easier and more efficient way to make them is to use customized molds. “The idea is that once the drink goes over ice in the glass, you just want one giant, solid piece of ice that touches the bottom of the glass,” Solomon says. “The fact that it’s solid instead of cubes means that the drink cannot attack the surface areas of the ice and make it break down. That single, solid spear is far more durable.”

crushed

But bigger is not always better. A rock or spear of ice can minimize dilution while providing a chilling base, but some drinks have flavors so strong or concentrated that they *need* additional dilution. These drinks call for a supremely icy chill, both to make the drink more refreshing but also to pace the rate of dilution, extending the life span of the drink.

Some of the first drinks to be iced were powerfully flavored slow-sippers, and bartenders used finely crushed or shaved ice to create the desired effect. The practice applies to long drinks, such as juleps, as well as to short drinks, such as smashes (basically a smaller julep) and brambles, including Vogler’s own Rangoon Gin Bramble. “You can sip a drink like a julep really slowly over time,” Vogler says. “It’s intense and concentrated and strong, and at the end of the drink it’s still palatable, but it’s softer because of the gradual dilution.”

One of the best examples of the benefits of crushed ice is the category of drinks known as swizzles. Typically served in tall chimney glasses that have been packed with crushed ice and gently agitated with a bar spoon or, more properly, a multi-branched lele twig from Martinique—the original swizzle stick—swizzles are intensely cold and richly flavored, not to mention a spectacular sight. “You get a cool effect where it chills down the glass and the whole thing freezes, with a strong frost standing out on the glass,” Vogler says. “The ice just won’t melt—it’s so packed in there that you have a critical coldness, and it melts very, very slowly.”

Usually made with robust rums and lime juice, and often employing flavorful bitters, syrups or liqueurs, swizzles are a product of the Caribbean. Perhaps the epitome of swizzledom is the Queen’s Park Swizzle, a fragrant, minty drink that originated at the Queen’s Park Hotel in Trinidad; in 1946, Victor “Trader Vic” Bergeron wrote that this drink was “the most delightful form of anesthesia given out today.”

crushed ice

Larger cubes or chunks of ice that have been crushed into pebble-sized pieces are preferred for swizzles, juleps and many other exotic drinks.

shaved ice

Smaller than crushed ice, shaved ice can be as fine as snow. Due to its fragility, shaved ice is used in only a handful of drinks.

shaken & stirred

The choice of ice also matters for cocktails that are shaken or stirred and then served straight up. Daiquiris, margaritas and other shaken drinks benefit from the use of large pieces of ice in the shaker, which chill and agitate the mixture without excessively diluting the drink; 2-inch cubes are used in some New York bars, while others use a few large Kold-Draft cubes. And while size matters, the temperature of the ice is even more important: Cold, dry ice that is sticky to the touch is preferable to warmer, moister cubes, such as those found in many restaurants. “Because it’s colder, you’re able to shake a drink longer without getting too much dilution,” says Thad Vogler. “[With] regular restaurant ice, you shake it and the drink’s not as cold—it gets so soft and full of pores that you get a really diluted drink that has no spine.”

For stirred drinks, such as Martinis and Manhattans, many bartenders hand-crack Kold-Draft cubes into shards ranging in size from half a cube to pebbles; this creates more surface area to rapidly chill the drink, while providing the desired degree of dilution. But bartenders continue to experiment; Chad Solomon currently prefers using a very large piece of ice to stir a drink for the first 6 to 10 seconds, then packing the mixing glass with hand-cracked ice. “This exponentially increases the surface area of the ice in the glass,” he says. “It acts as an insulating jacket on top of that solid piece of ice—in an ideal world, it will go down to 18, 19 degrees Fahrenheit. That will pretty much take you home to where you need to be.”

Twenty Seventy Swizzle

Martin Cate created this richly flavored swizzle for his customers at Forbidden Island. "It's inspired by the classics, but with some twists," Cate says.

1 oz. Angostura 1919 rum
1 oz. Lemon Hart 151 Demerara rum
½ oz. fresh lime juice
½ oz. rich simple syrup
½ oz. honey syrup
¼ oz. St. Elizabeth Allspice Dram
4 drops Pernod
2 dashes Angostura bitters
1 pinch freshly ground nutmeg
Crushed ice
Glass: chimney
Tools: lele twig, or bar spoon

Add all ingredients to glass. Fill with crushed ice. Insert barspoon and swizzle—gently twirl spoon between the palms of your hands—until frost forms on outside of glass. Top with extra ice if needed. Serve with a straw.

To make rich simple syrup, combine 1 cup Demerara sugar with ½ cup water in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir until sugar is completely dissolved and syrup just comes to a boil. Cool and store in refrigerator.

To make honey syrup, combine equal parts honey and warm water and stir until honey is completely dissolved. Cool and store in refrigerator.

Martin Cate
Forbidden Island, Alameda, Calif.



Southside Fizz

Drinks known as “fizzes” are traditionally served without ice so that they may be consumed more rapidly. Serving this venerable fizz with several large cubes or a long spear of ice may violate rules of mixological nomenclature, but it also results in a fine slow-sipper. For extra decadence, substitute chilled dry champagne for the club soda to make a minty French 75.

2 oz. dry gin
¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. superfine sugar (or use simple syrup)
8–10 mint leaves
Chilled club soda
Large ice cubes or ice spear
Glass: highball
Tools: muddler, bar spoon, shaker, strainer, tea strainer
Garnish: mint sprig

Place mint leaves in cocktail shaker and gently bruise with muddler. Add gin, lemon juice and sugar, and stir to dissolve. Fill shaker with large pieces of ice and shake gently—to keep from pulverizing the mint—for about 10 seconds. Double-strain into a highball glass filled with large cubes or ice spear. Top with chilled club soda. Garnish.

Adapted from The Bartender’s Book, Jack Townsend & Tom Moore McBride, 1951



cool tips

From old-fashioned ice saws and picks to more recent innovations, such as Kold-Draft machines, industrial freezers and commercial ice crushers (Martin Cate extols the virtues of the Clawson Hail Queen, “a giant stainless-steel box with these whirling blades of death that can make 30 pounds of ice in, like, five seconds”), bartenders have many tools on hand for making excellent ice. Fortunately, home mixologists also have several readily available implements at their disposal.

Among the more useful items are silicon molds by Tovolo (available at amazon.com and at many kitchen and housewares stores). Tovolo’s ice trays make 1 1/4-inch cubes that Chad Solomon says are identical in size to those produced by a Kold-Draft machine. Better yet, with a sharp knife or pair of scissors, the trays can be modified to create molds for longer ice spears, suitable for use in serving drinks in highball or Collins glasses.

Another option for short drinks is to serve them over 2-inch-diameter ice spheres; Japanese-made molds are available at momastore.org. To make cracked ice for stirred drinks, one option is to place cubes in a clean dishtowel or a canvas “Lewis” bag, then smash them with a mallet or rolling pin; ice bags and mallets are available in many kitchen stores.

Small batches of crushed ice are also easily made at home. “If you’ve got a good blender and you’re using good cubes, you can get good crushed ice,” Cate says. “There are good hand-cranked crushers, too.” The ones from Deni are useful, and reasonably durable; these are also available at amazon.com or at many kitchen and housewares stores.

Whether you’re making large cubes for Old Fashioneds or crushed ice for swizzles, always use filtered or purified water to minimize off-flavors. Keep ice fresh to avoid lingering food odors; if your ice is more than a week or two old, replace it before mixing drinks. It also helps to place trays or molds in a deep-freeze or at the rear of a refrigerator’s freezer compartment, where it’s usually the coldest. For larger gatherings, store-bought ice is usually fine; just be sure it stays very cold. You can also liven a party with decorative ice: For punches, freeze freshly boiled water (this makes clearer ice) in cake molds, placing fresh fruit or edible flowers in the mold for color. Tiki-style drinks can also be adorned with ice cones, made by firmly packing shaved ice into a tall pilsner glass, then poking a chopstick down the middle for a straw; carefully remove the cone from the glass and wrap in plastic, then place in the freezer overnight before using.

Many of today’s swizzles are descendants of the Queen’s Park, such as the Twenty Seventy Swizzle served at Forbidden Island in Alameda, Calif. Bar owner Martin Cate explains that the powerful flavors of a swizzle’s ingredients mean the gradual dilution from crushed ice is a necessary component. “If you were to just stir these drinks with ice and strain into a cocktail glass, it’d be really rich, and just too much,” Cate says. “But swizzle it, and let it sit and look at it for five minutes, and it gets better and better. It has a long curve before it tastes watery.”

cracked ice

Ice ranging in size from half a cube to a pebble, often made while preparing a drink by holding a large cube in one hand, then smacking it sharply with the back of a bar spoon; similar results may be obtained by using a clean dishtowel and a mallet, or a special canvas “Lewis” bag. Cracked ice is preferred for stirred drinks.

Tiki pioneers, such as Donn Beach and Trader Vic, were masters at applying the swizzle concept to a range of exotic drinks, and Cate uses their techniques in drinks served at his bar. Beach, for example, advocated flash-blending drinks—such as the Port-au-Prince and the Pearl Diver’s Punch—with crushed ice for a few seconds using a stand drink mixer (the type used to make milkshakes and blended coffee drinks), which resulted in a resolute coldness, a gentle and long-lasting dilution and a pebbly texture far removed from the slushy goop disgorged from industrial drink-mixing machines today. Cate replicates this technique using a drink mixer and small cubes of standard restaurant ice—“You put a Kold-Draft cube in a drink mixer, it’s like listening to a car accident,” he says—and says that the result is a cold drink that maintains its flavorful integrity without turning into a watery slurry.

For shaken drinks, such as a Mai Tai or Zombie, Cate uses a tip he learned while tending bar at Trader Vic’s: He combines both large cubes and crushed ice with the drink ingredients in a shaker. “It actually changes the texture of the drink to use different types

of ice,” he explains. “The cubes give it more agitation and froth, and the crushed dilutes faster and chills, so you get that nice, icy frost on the outside of the glass.”

Professional bartenders have an arsenal of implements and machines that help them create the perfect ice for each drink, but similar feats can be accomplished at home (see sidebar on this page). While a few special tools may need to be purchased, the results will make the investment worthwhile. “The two things with ice in drinks is reduction in temperature and dilution. It depends on how much you want to invest to do those things well,” Vogler says. “Once you’ve used good ice, it’s really hard to go back.” ■

For bonus recipes using different styles of ice, visit imbibemagazine.com.