



FOOD EXTRA

MARVELLOUS MUSHROOMS
KNOW-HOW, PERFECT PIES

NICE ICE, BABY



MARK VAN MANEN/PNG

Earls Restaurants' Cam Bogue shows off ice nuggets of various sizes from their Scotsman machine, the first in Canada.

How to achieve frosty perfection for your cocktails

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Cameron Bogue is gazing proudly at his brand new Scotsman ice machine as it churns out tiny nuggets of ice destined for Mojitos, Mai Tais and Whisky Smashes. He is, he admits, just a little bit obsessed with ice.

"It's a bit nerdy," says Bogue, who is Earls Restaurants' director of beverage development. "But ice is fun."

Ice, after all, is the unsung player in cocktails, and its performance can elevate the ordinary to the sublime.

Its main role is to chill drinks and add dilution. In fact, as much as a quarter of a cocktail's volume is water added through shaking and stirring with ice.

But not all ice is created equal. The shape and size of the cube, the type of water that is used and the temperature at which it is frozen all make a difference in how ice works in a drink.

A perfect cube of ice is crystal clear, reasonably large and feels hard, heavy, dry and very cold. But most commercial ice (known as "pillow ice") is

small, lightweight and cloudy with a slick, even watery, surface. It melts quickly, shatters when shaken and makes drinks murky and watery.

And so the perfect ice has become an obsession with many bartenders, both professional and amateur, who will go to extreme lengths to obtain it.

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MARK VAN MANEN/PNG

Earls' beverage director Cameron Bogue says the Scotsman ice machine makes perfectly symmetrical little ice nuggets that provide even dilution.

FROM THE FRONT

Cool trendsetters

At BarChef in Toronto, for instance, bar manager Frankie Solarik carves ice to order from a large block sitting on the counter, just as barmen did back in the 19th century.

In St. John's, Nfld., bartenders head to the beach to gather "bergie bits," chunks of ice that break off the icebergs that drift by each spring. Iceberg ice is some of the cleanest, densest and coldest ice on the planet.

In Japan, bartenders store ice at different temperatures (-5 C and -20 C) based on what it will be used for, and hand-carve ice spheres as if they were diamonds.

And all over Vancouver, perfectionist home bartenders are crafting crystalline cubes from distilled water and silicone trays (see sidebar), while professional bartenders install high-end Kold-Draft

ice machines, which produce large, clear, slow-melting cubes (www.kold-draft.com).

And now, for drinks that require crushed or cobbled ice, there's the Scotsman (www.scotsman-ice.com).

The U.S.-made machine installed at Earls' newly renovated Vancouver flagship location (905 Hornby St., www.earls.ca) is the first in Canada, and is just part of a huge cocktail program overhaul for the chain.

"We're going to make some bartenders jealous with this ice," Bogue says. "Hopefully, we're just starting a new trend."

What sets the Scotsman apart, he explains, is that it makes perfectly symmetrical little ice nuggets that provide even dilution. In contrast, traditional crushed ice is a mix of chunks, shards, chips and slush that dilutes

quickly and unevenly. Unfortunately, it's still the only real option for home bartenders. (Note that the easiest way to make crushed ice at home is to place it in a lint-free canvas bag and smash it with a mallet.)

The nuggets are ideal for drinks that are sweet and viscous, such as juleps and tiki drinks.

"A Mai Tai served neat wouldn't be a very good cocktail," Bogue says. "It benefits from having crushed ice."

On the other hand, spirits-forward cocktails like the Manhattan, Old Fashioned and Sazerac benefit from being served with a single large, slow-melting cube or sphere with a limited surface area. And regular cubes are fine for most other purposes.

There is, it seems, always the right ice for the right drink. And that's just plain cool.

RECIPE

Updated bourbon beverage puts a modern spin on a classic cocktail

EARLS SIGNATURE OLD FASHIONED

Cameron Bogue, the director of beverage development at Earls Restaurants, recommends serving this updated classic with a single big, square ice cube.

2 oz. Maker's Mark Straight Kentucky Bourbon

¼ oz. demerara simple syrup (see note)

4 dashes Bittered Sling Plum and Root beer Extract (see note)

Place all ingredients into a mixing glass with ice and stir gently until you have reached your preferred level of chill and dilution. Strain into a rocks (old fashioned) glass over a single large ice cube. Garnish with a tart cherry such as griottine or amarena (available in some gourmet stores) and a slice of orange peel. Serves 1.

Notes: To make demerara simple syrup, place 1 cup of demerara

sugar and 1 cup water in a small pan and bring just to a boil, stirring constantly, until sugar is completely dissolved. Remove from heat, cool, then cover and keep chilled for up to two weeks.

Bittered Sling extracts are produced by Vancouver's Kale & Nori Culinary Arts and are available at Legacy Liquor Store or through www.kaleandnori.com.

MARK VAN MANEN/PNG

Earls Signature Old Fashioned



HOW TO MAKE THE PERFECT ICE CUBE

Achieving cubic perfection isn't difficult, but it does take a bit of effort.

Most experts recommend using distilled water, but tap water is fine if you purify it. Filter it to remove any minuscule contaminants, then boil it to remove any lingering impurities and minute oxygen bubbles.

Let the water cool slightly, then pour it into a silicone ice cube

mould like the ones by Tovolo (available at Cookworks, www.cookworks.ca) or Cocktail Kingdom (www.cocktailkingdom.com).

Meanwhile, clean out your freezer and remove any particularly pungent food because ice will absorb its aromas. Alternatively, wrap your ice cube trays in plastic wrap while the water freezes. Place the ice cube tray in the

freezer until the water is frozen solid. Remove the cubes and place them in Ziploc freezer bags so they are ready to use, but won't absorb food odours in the meantime.

And if all this seems like too much work, you can always purchase premium bagged ice from a commercial producer such as On the Rocks (http://ontherocksice.com) instead.