

Ice Age

The demand for artistic ice sculptures is growing, and ice carvers are meeting the challenge.

By Suzanne Hall



Billy Redd, left, under the guidance of Paul Germain, carved this likeness of the late Joseph Amendola at the 2008 ACF National Convention in Las Vegas.

Attendees at the 2008 ACF National Convention in July in Las Vegas admired the ice portrait of the late Joseph Amendola, CEPC, CCE, AAC, HOF, displayed on the trade-show floor. Created by chefs Paul Germain and Billy Redd, CEC, it was an appropriate tribute to Amendola, who died in January 2008 at age 87. He was a baker, a teacher, an ambassador for The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y., and the author of several books, including *Ice Carving Made Easy* (Wiley, 1994).

When Amendola's book was published, the centuries-old tradition of ice carving was enjoying a revival. The same is true now. Ice carving, or ice sculpting, is challenging flower arranging and other artistic expression as the decoration of choice for both social and business functions.

Learning curve

Germain is the owner of Ice Sculpture World, a custom ice-carving business, and the Academy of Ice Carving and Design, both in Fresno, Calif. The latter is a school created specifically to train chefs and others to sculpt ice, as well

as to help chef-instructors create ice-carving programs in culinary schools.

“Ten years ago, I was one of only a few full-time carvers, Germain says. Today there are more than 300. The demand for ice carving is growing by leaps and bounds.” And for good reason, he believes. “Today’s high-end wedding planners might spend \$20,000 on flowers, and few people will remember them. But if they spend that on an ice sculpture, it will long be remembered.”

Redd, a 1991 graduate of the culinary-management program at Gulf Coast Community College, Panama City, Fla., has been an instructor at the college since 2002. He recently earned Certified Professional Ice Carver status from the Academy of Ice Carving and Design, and has completed two of four levels for Master Carver certification. He uses Gulf Coast Community College’s facilities to practice his ice carving, and pays the college \$75 for every block of ice he uses. The money goes into an account for student-culinarian scholarships. Redd includes ice-carving instruction in his garde manger class, and is developing an ice-carving class for the college that will begin in January 2009.

“Safety was the college’s first concern regarding ice-carving classes. How to use the tools and handle the ice are the first things we teach.”

—Billy Redd

“I’ve seen a growing interest in ice carving here in Panama City, due in large part, I believe, to the growth in convention and special-events business,” he says. “Also, there’s an increased interest in food presentation, and food and ice carving in particular.”

Chefs who train other chefs or those who will become chefs pass the art of ice carving from one generation to the next. Across the country, Charles Hartz, executive chef at Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Neb., and owner of a custom ice-carving business and spice company in his hometown of Beaverton, Ore., learned to carve ice while working for executive chef Chris Olson at The Country Club at DC Ranch in Scottsdale, Ariz.

“He knew how to carve, and I wanted to learn. He was very supportive,” Hartz says. “I would work—after I went off the clock—with blocks of ice and books with pictures of fish, birds or whatever I wanted to carve. I would visualize how it went together, and then draw it out on paper before I started to carve.”

Today, Hartz divides his time between Mullen (May to October) and Beaverton. At Sand Hills Golf Club, once or twice a



Such memorable pieces as this grand piano carved by Paul Germain help explain why the demand for ice sculptures is growing.

week, he creates golf bags or other ice carvings to display in the dining room. He also sends a complimentary ice carving to any wedding held in Mullen, a town of about 500 residents.

Richard Rosendale, CEC, owner of Rosendales in Columbus, Ohio, did his first ice carving while a student at Westmoreland County Community College in Youngwood, Pa. He further honed his skills during his time at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., and mastered his craft under the tutelage of carver Joe Mastro, master ice sculptor at Mastro Ice, Inc. in Pittsburgh. “I worked at The Duquesne Club in the afternoon, and carved ice from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m.,” Rosendale says. “The carving was hard work.”



This carved chili pepper, with colorful chiles frozen in the ice, is the work of Charles Hartz.

“Especially for holiday parties, companies are looking for carvings that are specific to them and their business.”

—Charles Hartz

The right tools

When not done properly, ice carving can be dangerous. “It’s as dangerous as cooking can be,” Rosendale notes. “You have electricity, water and sharp tools. You have to be careful and respect the equipment.”

“Safety was the college’s first concern regarding ice-carving classes,” Redd says. “How to use the tools and handle the ice are the first things we teach. You never want to be in a position where you have to catch that 300 pounds of ice or drop it on your toes.”

Safety also includes using the right equipment, and that equipment can be expensive. Among the tools of an ice-carver’s trade are chainsaws, starting at around \$150 to \$200, heat guns at \$120 plus, chisel sets, which range from \$150 to \$400 or more, and items such as tongs, chippers, routers, design templates and display materials.

Ice, of course, is the most important tool, and just any ice won’t do. “To have crystal-clear ice, the freezing process has to go from the bottom up. That way, any impurities and bubbles are forced out the top,” Germain explains.

To create that ice, carvers swear by ice makers from Clinebell Equipment Company, Inc., Loveland, Colo. Prices for their block-making machines start at about \$6,000. “They’re the industry standard,” Germain says.

“We were paying a fish company \$100 a block for ice, and it was chipped and cracked,” Redd says. “The two-block Clinebell machine is small enough to fit in the kitchen, and gives us quality ice all the time.”

For ice carvers with high-volume business, “there are machines that let you prepare your design on the computer, and then it cuts out your ice,” Hartz says, noting that he does all his work by hand. “What might take me working in the freezer for an hour, it can do in 20 minutes, and I don’t have to be in the freezer.”

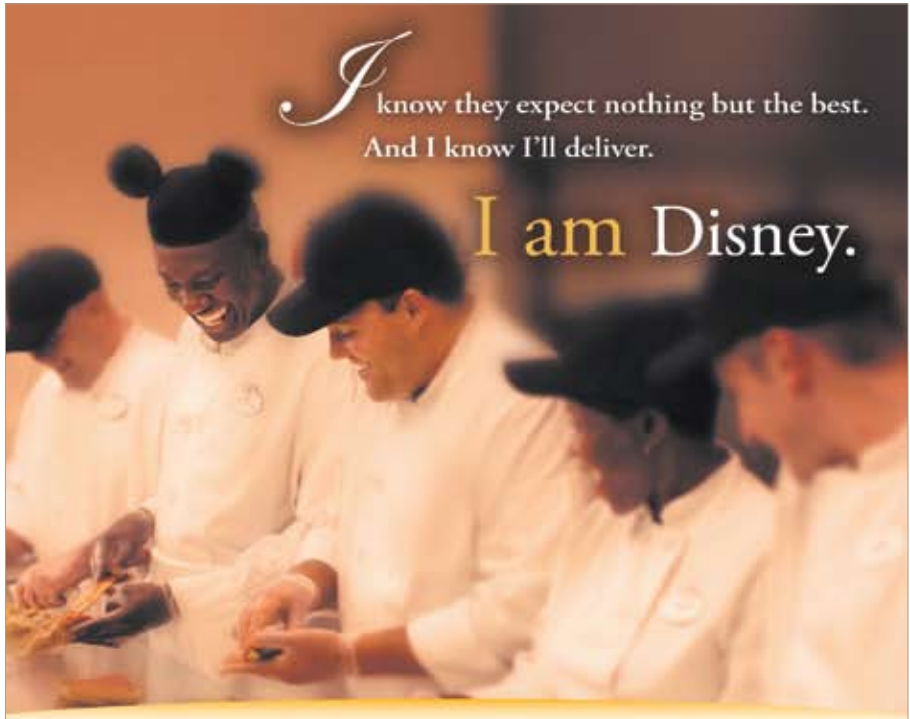
At a price of \$30,000 and up, he says these machines won’t replace hand carving. “You still have to go in with the chisel grinders and other equipment and give it that artistic flair.”

What’s hot?

Because nearly anything can be sculpted from ice, the market for ice sculptures is a large one, and it’s growing. The traditional

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swans, fish and flower baskets continue to be staples at wedding and on hotel and restaurant brunch or buffet tables. Especially popular and profitable right now, though, are corporate logos and other symbols used at business meetings.

"Especially for holiday parties, companies are looking for carvings that are specific to them and their business," Hartz says.

Among the most impressive sculptures, and ones that are increasingly popular, are ice bars. Some are purely decorative; others are set up to serve drinks, tapas or other menu items.

Around the holidays, Rosendale has carved Christmas trees and a Santa Claus out of ice, and also created a complete winter wonderland, using the "scrap ice to create Santa's workshop with elves, tools, a work bench and little toys," he says.

Whatever you chose to carve, make it an excellent example of what Germain calls "the vanishing artwork that leaves a lasting impression."

Suzanne Hall has been writing about chefs, restaurants, food and wine from her home in Soddy Daisy, Tenn., for more than 25 years.



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