

SHOPPING WITH
EBEN FREEMAN

On the Rocks

Ice needs to do more than chill a drink; it has to entertain, too.

VISIT any of the “proper” cocktail bars in New York and it is clear that the ice in one’s drink has become almost as important as the drink itself. The once humble cube of frozen water is now mentioned in terms usually associated with the other “ice” (cut, clarity and size) and is made into balls, cylindrical columns and squares of all sizes, sometimes even hand-carved.

“Ice used to be seen as the thing that fills up the glass,” said Eben Freeman, director of bar operations and innovation for Altamarea Group, a company that owns restaurants like Marea and Ai Fiori. “Now, big, square cold-draft cubes are the hallmark of a serious cocktail bar.”

Mr. Freeman, 43, considers himself an ice aficionado, having spent more than two decades working in dining and drinking establishments like wd-50, Eleven Madison Park and Red Cat.



TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

CUBIST Eben Freeman and an 824 compartment box at T&T Plastic Land; about \$19, (212) 925-6376, plasticland.com.

With outdoor entertaining season already in full swing, he set out on a recent sweltering afternoon to find trays for making good-looking ice at home.

The key is to “take the time to fill the trays all the way up,” he said, “and to always wash them after you’re done. Don’t just refill them.” Also, it helps “not have stinky stuff in your freezer, because ice can absorb the smells.”

His first stop was T & T Plastic Land in TriBeCa. Four years ago, when Mr. Freeman was opening the now-defunct restaurant Tailor in SoHo, he found that the machine being used to create near-perfectly square ice cubes couldn’t keep up with the volume required. “I started getting these compartment boxes from Plastic Land and using them to make cubes,” he said. Made from food-safe plastic, they come in various sizes, with and without lids, though Mr. Freeman prefers the ones with lids, which can be stacked in the freezer.

At the Museum of Modern Art Design Shop

in SoHo, he chose the spherical ice-tray set as a practical alternative to the Taisin ice mold, which many bars use to make round ice. “The Taisin is a very expensive piece of equipment,” he said. “But it makes nice big balls that people want in their drinks, without needing electricity.”

He also picked out the Island Dogs ice shots mold, which makes ice in the shape of a shot glass. “It reminds me of the Willy Wonka movie, where he drinks from a tulip cup and then eats it,” Mr. Freeman said.

The Fred Bone Chillers were his kitschiest choice. “I like the irony of putting a skull-and-crossbones into an alcoholic beverage,” he said. “Because we have to remember, for all our fancy ice, we are still peddling poison to people.”

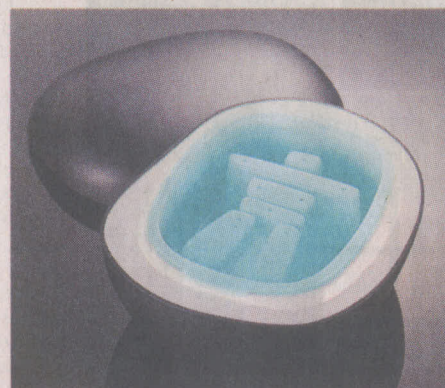
RIMA SUQI



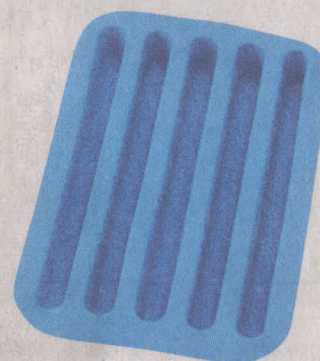
Stainless steel ice cube tray by Onyx; about \$31 at the Tickle Trunk, (604) 657-8381, thepickletrunk.com.



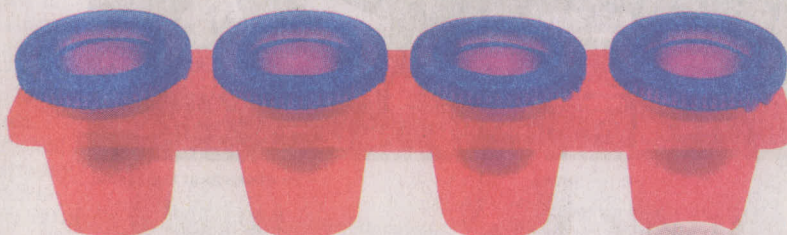
Taisin ice mold; from \$205 at Japan Trend Shop, japantrendshop.com.



Polar ice tray; \$59, (888) 690-1908, polaricetray.com.



Water bottle ice cube tray by Harold Import; about \$10 at Amazon.com.



Ice shots by Island Dogs; about \$5 at Bewild, (866) 320-2537, bewild.com.



Spherical ice tray set; \$16 at MoMA Design store, (800) 851-4509, momastore.org.



King Cube ice trays by Tovolo; about \$8 at Chef Tools, (206) 933-0700, cheftools.com.



Bone Chillers by Fred; about \$8 at the Spoon Sisters, (800) 716-4199, spoonsisters.com.