

# how to

BY PAUL GERMAIN



*Chef Billy Redd (left), an instructor in the culinary management program at Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Fla., created this sculpture of Master Chef Joseph Amendola after his training at AICD (pictured right is AICD president, Paul Germain).*



## tap into ice and food carving

Chisel out a niche by learning how to create stunning frozen sculptures, and intricate fruit and vegetable designs

In the past decade, the catering industry has experienced an explosion in the demand for innovative, skillfully carved ice sculptures. To meet this demand, the number of ice carving companies in the United States has grown from just a few in 1991 to more than 325 in 2011, some of which are multimillion-dollar enterprises. What used to be an item that simply added interest to a buffet table is now a symbol of a caterer's creativity and expertise, and a sought-after promotional item.

Fueling the trend are international ice carving competitions, which attract

*Among the thousands of custom ice sculptures created by Germain are an ice castle (left) and designs that enhance buffet presentations (right).*

competitors and spectators from around the world, and are often televised. For example, the Sapporo Snow Festival in northern Japan—where ice carving is believed to have originated—attracts close to 2 million spectators a year, while the World Ice Art Championship in Fairbanks, Alaska, has grown to become the largest international ice carving competition in the world. The Food Network recently debuted a series, *Ice Brigade*, which chronicles an ice sculpting business in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Savvy caterers can tap into this trend by becoming trained ice carving professionals. Instead of simply offering a sculpture of a swan or a heart for a wedding reception, a caterer who possesses professional ice carving skills can gain a competitive edge by designing ice carvings that guests can associate with the unique personality and interests of the bride and groom. This ability to customize is particularly profitable when it comes to creating memorable company logos in ice as a focal point for food presentations. Custom ice sculptures help caterers competitively transcend their services from being mere "decoration" to providing actual entertainment value.

### **Extreme Food Artistry**

Many trendsetting caterers and chefs are taking it one step further by integrating innovative ice carving techniques with highly artistic fruit and vegetable carving skills, such as Thai-style carving. This intricate method of carving fruits and vegetables has been associated with honoring Thai royalty and other dignitaries for centuries. Now it is being introduced into the United States to meet the needs of very high-end buffet presentations.

While a growing number of caterers and chefs are interested in learning ice and Thai-style carving skills, many have expressed uneasiness when it comes to depending on



the artistic skills—such as realistic drawing and three-dimensional imaging—that are needed for designing truly masterful ice sculptures. In addition, specialized programs for teaching chefs the skills that are necessary to meet the demand have been limited. Thus, few carvers outside of the booming commercial ice carving industry have had the chance to learn the plethora of specialized techniques and skills that have been developed in the past 20 years. What's more, safety issues associated with handling large blocks of ice and dangerous tools have caused concern.

To meet the need for artistically advanced instruction, the Academy of Ice Carving and Design (AICD), based in Fresno, Calif., was established more than 10 years ago to serve the catering industry. AICD specializes in providing hands-on, private instruction for caterers, chefs, culinary instructors and career ice carvers in individually customized programs of total immersion. AICD's most popular three-day program, the Chef Ice Artist Program, integrates a day of highly concentrated drawing and design instruction within its program of comprehensive ice

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carving instruction. The Academy also offers a Food Artist program and a Food and Ice Artist program for chefs, among other options.

Chefs and culinary instructors have traveled to AICD from around the world to learn the skills and safety protocols of professional ice carvers while also becoming certified through its intensive instructional programs. AICD also provides curriculum guidance and accreditation for culinary schools desiring to establish reputable programs of ice carving instruction. For example, AICD is currently in the process of providing ice carving training, certification and accreditation for the Pittsburgh Job Corps, which helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through technical and academic career training.




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*Thai-style fruit and vegetable carvings are a growing trend.*

### From Craftsman to Artist

Billy Redd, an executive chef, college culinary instructor and TV personality, completed several levels of instruction, including AICD's 5 Star Master Ice Carver Program. The first level of this advanced program provides instruction in carving a realistic human portrait. The chef's project was to carve a 40-inch-tall realistic bust in honor of Master Chef Joseph Amendola, the beloved culinary instructor from the Culinary Institute of America (and ice carving book author), who had recently passed away.

When the sculpture was completed, in just one weekend, AICD transported it to Las Vegas to display at the American Culinary Federation's National Convention in 2008. Master chefs from around the world instantly recognized the sculpture, which paid tribute to a man who had been a dear friend to many. After successfully carving the sculpture, Redd said he no longer considered himself just a craftsman. He had earned the confidence needed to call himself an artist. ●

*Paul Germain is president, master teacher, and master ice carver at the Academy of Ice Carving and Design, based in Fresno, Calif. For more information, visit [www.academyoficecarving.com](http://www.academyoficecarving.com).*



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