

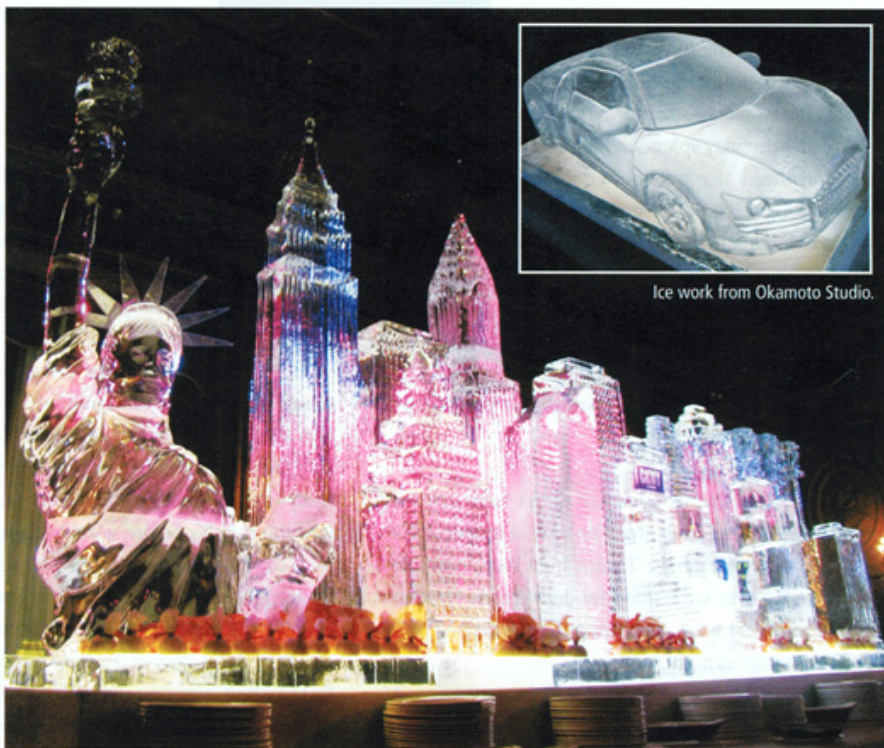
# Limited Time Only

We went behind the scenes with the ice carvers at Okamoto Studio to learn how ice sculptures go from running water to works of art. BY HASSAN NOVOA

WHEN YOU THINK of ice sculpture, what usually comes to mind? A tragic, half-melted swan at a wedding you probably wouldn't want to attend? As it turns out, the world of ice sculpture extends far beyond water fowl, and the right ice sculpture can add a sense of elegance and fantasy to any event. Their limited life-span lends them a sense of extravagance, and in the right hands, a piece of ice can become a chic choice of centerpiece.

Sculpting ice presents a number of difficulties because the medium becomes very delicate as soon as it is taken out of a freezing environment. The ice must be carefully selected to suit the sculptor's purposes. Typically, ideal carving ice is made from pure, clean water. Fewer impurities not only make the block clearer, but also makes it tougher and longer lasting. In order to produce the type of blocks that are favored by ice carvers, special machines and processes are engaged to remove impurities and "slow freeze" the ice. Ice is also sometimes sourced from "ice quarries"—frozen lakes, ponds and rivers from which blocks can be carved to fit almost any size (though sometimes, for a complex project, two blocks of ice must be partially melted and then melded back together in the freezer).

The goal is not always to start with clear ice. White ice blocks are sometimes chosen to give a "snowy" effect. Colored blocks can be produced by adding dyes, colored sand or even colored gels to the ice, but a drawback to these methods is that, as the ice melts, it can be messy. An alternative method to add color is to use clear ice and place the sculpture on top of a light installation. Colorful flair may also be added by incorporating one or more whole objects into the ice, but those objects must be chosen carefully—keep in mind that certain things may break or become freezer



Ice work from Okamoto Studio.

burned during the freezing process.

Ice sculptures can be adapted to fit a variety of occasions and serve several purposes. Though often the sculpture functions simply as an artful centerpiece, the ice may also be carved into a "luge," which is decorative funnel used to chill and serve drinks. It may even be used as a platter to keep food cold. (For a big impression, you can even have drinks served from a bar made out of ice.)

Some sculptures can be completed in as little as ten minutes, if the carver uses power tools (such as chainsaws and/or a die grinder fitted with specialty bits). Ice sculptors generally use razor-sharp chisels that are specifically designed for the task of cutting ice. As various technological advances are adapted for use

with ice carving, many sculptures are now created largely by machine. These machines and "molding systems" are especially useful when crafting complicated logos, but the carvers at Okamoto Studio admitted that, in some cases, they have to improvise to find the right tool to complete the task.

An ice sculpture's lifetime can range from mere minutes (in extreme conditions) to months, depending on several factors: the size of the sculpture, the amount of detail, its surface area, the temperature where it is displayed and, of course, the purpose for which it is used. Make sure you speak with your sculptor about your expectations in terms of its longevity or you may end up with a merely momentary masterpiece. ■