

ODD JOB

The Ice King

Need a frozen work of art for your next party? Call Robert Chislett.

BY LEEANNE JONES



When a buzzy Bay Area tech company wants to celebrate its IPO launch, party planners bring in Robert Chislett to make the event even cooler. The artist and owner behind Chisel-It Ice creates elaborate frozen sculptures that last for only a few hours, but won't soon be forgotten. *Diablo* visited Chislett's Concord studio to learn more about his chilly craft.

Career Change

While training to be a chef at the Culinary Institute of America, Chislett took an ice-sculpting course. After graduating, he worked in kitchens from New York to the Bay Area—helping to open The Club at Ruby Hill in Pleasanton and the now-shuttered Patrick David's in Danville—but kept carving ice as a hobby. Then, “someone offered to pay me for it,” he says, “and I thought, *Maybe I can do this.*”

Tools of the Trade

When Chislett began ice sculpting full-time in 1998, he primarily worked with chisels and chainsaws. Today, the Chisel-It team uses computer-programmed machines to cut shapes before carving in details by hand. The most surprising tools? An iron, for cleaning up edges and clearing cloudy ice, and a hair dryer for rescuing machines that have (literally) frozen.

Office Space

Chislett's studio comprises one 40-by-20-foot freezer set to 15 degrees. To drown out the blare of compressors, machines, and chainsaws, the 8-to-10-person crew blasts jazz fusion and rock 'n' roll tunes. They also go through a lot of hand warmers.



A detailed salmon is one of many animals the team has crafted.



Chisel-It created a stagecoach for a Wells Fargo event.



Robert Chislett, pictured with an ice-etched self-portrait, says his work is “a reminder that everything is temporary.”

Dress Code

Ski pants and jackets, hats, steel-toe boots, earmuffs, and safety goggles are standard studio attire. “It's like going to Tahoe,” Chislett quips. But installing the creations at events often requires a change of clothes. To position a 10-foot Taj Mahal replica in the middle of a swimming pool, for instance, “I had to get into swim shorts while the waiters were all walking around in tuxedos,” he says.

Labor of Love

Chislett has done business with many big-name brands—Facebook, Google, and the Warriors among them—and says the most common request is for logo-emblazoned sculptures. He also makes a lot of ice thrones, chandeliers, and luges—the latter for pouring liquor through. The creations can last up to six hours in optimal conditions. Chislett's most ambitious effort was a 100-foot bar for a party in Atherton. “I thrive on that type of stuff,” he says. “I love a creative challenge.”

Side Hustle

Want to beat the summer heat? Chisel-It sells coolers filled with snowballs. And thanks to the craft-cocktail trend, the company also makes ice cubes in specialty shapes like spheres and diamonds, and ice with objects such as flowers or plastic babies frozen inside. chiselit.com.