

Rethinking The Frozen Cocktail

Old summer standbys have been reinvented with a tilt toward quality and creativity

Frozen cocktails have long been a favorite drink for warm weather occasions, but they haven't always been known for using the best-quality ingredients. More recently, however, on-premise venues with an artisanal mindset have been incorporating frozen and blended cocktails into their drinks lists, switching out unnatural colors and artificial syrups for well-crafted spirits and house-made ingredients.

"Because I grew up in the South, frozen drinks have always been a part of the landscape for me, especially during the summer," says Kelly Fields, chef at New Orleans restaurant Willa Jean. The restaurant specializes in Southern cuisine and offers the F'Rosé (\$11), a slushy-style concoction made in a Bunn Ultra 2 frozen drink machine with Charles & Charles rosé and simple syrup. The cocktail is served at brunch, lunch and dinner and nods to the local shaved-ice specialty known as a sno-ball. "A slushy cocktail was the most natural way I could celebrate the combination of New Orleans' sno-ball culture and appreciation of good times," Fields explains.

Paying respect to a particular drinking culture also inspired the frozen cocktails at Brooklyn, New York's Battery Harris, which serves elevated, innovative Caribbean food. "We molded everything around the Dark and Stormy," says general manager Chenelle Ricco. "The rum-based classic seemed perfect for our Caribbean beach bar vibe." Battery Harris' Frozen Dark and Stormy (\$11) is made with Admiral Nelson's Spiced rum, fresh lime juice, house-made ginger syrup and "magic spice," a proprietary blend that includes clove and cinnamon. The ingredients are mixed into a 50-quart frozen drink machine and served with a float of Gosling's Black Seal rum. Battery Harris also offers the Frozen Piña Colada (\$11), made with Santa Teresa Claro rum infused with lime leaves, fresh pineapple juice, Coco Lopez cream of coconut and a fresh pineapple garnish.

Snow & Co.—a Kansas City, Missouri, bar founded by former insurance agent Jerry Nevins and two fellow business school graduates—has taken frozen cocktails to a new level. "We started looking at what other bars were doing and what was popular, and many of them were going back to drinks from Prohibition," Nevins says. "We thought, why not do that with frozen drinks?" Snow & Co.'s idea has taken off, and it now has two locations in Kansas City.



Frozen cocktails have become more sophisticated. An homage to New Orleans sno-balls, the F'Rosé at the city's Willa Jean restaurant is made with rosé and simple syrup.

One of the bar's earliest hits was the Rockefeller (\$7.99 a 6½-ounce serving; \$11.99 a 13-ounce serving), which is made with cherry-infused Old Overholt rye whiskey, Cinzano Rosso sweet vermouth and Angostura bitters. The drink is blended in a Bunn Ultra 2 and served with rye whiskey-infused cherries. It's one of Snow & Co.'s most popular drinks, but Nevins says it took time to shift customers' expectations of what a frozen cocktail could be. One selling strategy was to offer flights, a sampling of three (\$12.99), five (\$16.99) or all eight frozen creations (\$29.99) in 3-ounce serving sizes.

Nevins and his partners also aim to create balanced recipes, avoiding drinks that are too sweet or too watery and ensuring that the ice and spirits don't separate. Early on, they tried using blenders, frozen drink machines and even a gelato maker, which Nevins says worked surprisingly well. "It was trial and error," he adds. Snow & Co. is planning to bring upscale alcoholic slushies to the masses with a book of 100 recipes that will be published in spring 2017. "When we first started to do high-end frozen cocktails, people had a hard time adjusting to the price," Nevins says. "We have built up the trust so now they know the drinks are going to be good."

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