

Iceless or useless?

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How useful is the Kaelo, the world's first iceless ice-bucket, and is it really worth its cool but chilling price tag? When I discovered that the cheapest model, which fits flush with a work surface, costs £995, while the free-standing version is priced between £1,295 and £1,395, I was horrified and nearly dropped the idea of testing this device. After all, does the ice bucket need reinventing? And even if it does, what advantage could its reinvention possibly possess that might be worth a thousand pounds? After all, a perfectly adequate thermally insulated stainless-steel ice bucket can cost less than £8 on eBay.

Four months on, and I am glad I went ahead. Not because the Kaelo gets an unqualified thumbs-up (it does not), but because it is a fascinating product with some interesting properties that make it uniquely suited to specific situations.

Kevin Jabou, who has a degree in product design from the University of Sussex, invented the Kaelo in his mother's garden shed, funding it through all sorts of part-time jobs. The name Kaelo is a fusion of *kaizen*, the Japanese for continuous improvement (or seven years in a shed) and "halo," which represents the circle of light at the top of Kaelo's chamber. Jabou is nothing if not an adherent of the *kaizen* philosophy, having taught himself to weld, sand, and shape all grades of metal simply to discover which best suited his needs. He plowed through numerous permutations of materials, manufacturing processes, and finishes before deciding to mill the chamber from a solid 6.6lb (3kg) block of aluminum and the rim from a 6.6lb block of stainless steel. To chill the bucket, Jabou used a Peltier device, which effectively "sucks" heat from the Kaelo's bucket, dumping it into a heat sink equipped with a dissipating fan.

The Peltier effect is not new; it was discovered in 1834, and its first practical application was made in 1954. A Peltier device is a solid-state refrigerator that

has been used for everything from transporting organs, to cooling CPUs in a computer. Jabou was not the first to think it could be used for cooling beverages. There might have been even earlier examples, but Evan Blas wrote about the possibility of cooling beverages with a Peltier device in 2005 (see <http://tinyurl.com/yb49rkze>), while Valojuova from Finland posted photos of a working Peltier Beer Cooler 2006 (see <http://tinyurl.com/h7vvr>).

It took two years for Jabou to find a firm with a polishing process that matched his demands. The stainless-steel rim is the only part of the bucket that is visible, and it is also sensitive to touch for controlling the Kaelo's features, so its properties and finish were always going to be vital. To know what standard of finish he required, Jabou bought a grinding machine, learned how to polish, and spent months achieving the desired result. He then took his polished rim to manufacturers who were used to negotiating contracts worth hundreds of thousands of pounds and asked them to polish one small piece of metal in a specific way. Jabou reckoned that some of the people he saw thought he was crazy, but he eventually found a firm with a process that could replicate the required finish, and it turned out to be a company that also polishes parts for Rolls-Royce.

What do I think of the Kaelo?

I tested the free-standing Kaelo podium and found it to be cumbersome and limited by where it could be plugged in. Even though this version received a resounding "no, thank you" from me, I loved the idea of this iceless ice bucket set flush into a worktop. As a replacement for a simple ice bucket in most situations, the Kaelo is over-engineered and overpriced, but if I were ordering a £20,000 kitchen, I would not think twice about installing one. It might be more about style than substance, but

style has its place, and it really sets off a granite worktop in a new kitchen.

The only visible part of the Kaelo is its stainless-steel rim, and this bit of hidden gadgetry is the key to why there are no unsightly controls. It is touch-sensitive. Tap any part of the rim with your finger, and the Kaelo is ready for immediate use. Do not touch it for two hours, and it will switch to standby mode. Set into this rim is the halo lighting, which is also controlled by tapping. You can choose any one of 27 colors or set the halo to scroll automatically through the full spectrum. If you intend keeping a clear-glass bottle chilled for 60 minutes or more, I would stick to the yellows, oranges, and reds. (If Jabou brought out a version restricted to 524–730nm, he could legitimately advertise it as "light-struck free.")

A row of Kaelos would look great in any upmarket tasting venue, and its halo feature makes it perfect for a low-lit environment, such as a bar or a nightclub. The Solera wine bar in Sydney, which opened last December, was the first commercial venue in the world to install the Kaelo, with ten units set into the middle of its tables. According to Jabou, a well-known UK establishment has just ordered 130 integrated Kaelos, and I cannot wait to find out what that place is. A marine version of the Kaelo, with a special stainless-steel rim that does not corrode in the salty atmosphere, has also been installed in dozens of super-yachts, and Jabou is currently working with both private and commercial airplanes.

I have gone from being shocked by, and highly skeptical of, the Kaelo, to being an extremely enthusiastic fan, providing it is the integrated model. It makes the ideal excuse for an apéritif while preparing a meal, and it draws guests in when entertaining. But if the price offends you, there is always the stainless-steel ice bucket that sells for less than £8 on eBay. ■