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Ice dream

New York's too hot — especially when it comes to wild and exotic ice cream flavors

By ANDREA STRONG

WHEN the temperature outside flirts with the century mark, ice cream cones come out in full force. These days they are everywhere — dripping down the chins of both shorts-wearing children and suit-clad adults.

And while a Mister Softee will do in a fix, there's a lot more to the city's ice cream landscape than jingle-wired trucks.

The latest addition to the world of cold comfort is **Maggie Moo's** (1437 Second Ave., between 74th and 75th streets); [212] 472-6249), a Columbia, Md.-based chain that opened its first Manhattan shop in June. This cheery "ice cream treatery" is a cartoon-come-to-life experience, fully equipped with an 8-foot-tall mascot cow — the charming Ms. Maggie Moo.

While all this may seem a bit too cute for jaded New Yorkers, the ice cream is primo — just sweet enough, super-creamy and smooth, with a fresh, just-churned quality. The freshness makes sense. All 50 of the companies all-natural flavors are made in-store from a proprietary formula that shuns chemicals and ingredient short-cuts like substituting cheap high-fructose corn syrup for sugar.

The hook at Mag-

gie Moo's, other than the cuddly cow, are custom mix-ins like fresh fruit, cookie dough, nuts and a roster of candy bars that are hand-folded into the ice cream on a frozen granite table. Unlike **Cold Stone Creamery** (2 Astor Place, at Broadway; [212] 228-4600), a chain with a similar mix-in approach to ice cream, the staff at Maggie Moo's does not (thankfully) break out into song, and the ice cream is far superior in taste.

Turning from the milk of the cow to the "milk" of the soybean is **California Louie's**, (527 Columbus Ave., at 86th Street; [212] 580-5100), a new concept that hopes to cater to sweet tooths who want a soft-serve, lactose- and cholesterol-free soy alternative.

There's no soy in the mix at **Cones** (272 Bleecker St., between Morton and Jones streets; [212] 414-1795), a sleek gelato joint where fans line up for cups of their cult-status, Argentine dulce de leche. The shop, which opened five years ago, is owned by Raul and Oscar D'Aloisio, two brothers from Argentina

with no previous ice cream experience.

Raul, an architect, recalled the day he and his brother decided to ditch it all and open an ice cream store in New York City. "Oscar was working in construction in Argentina and was hired to build the first

Haagen Dazs [there]. After he built the store, he tried the ice cream and said, 'This is the best that they have over there? Well, we can beat these guys.'

So the brothers teamed up with a master gelato-maker in Argentina, and in 1988 opened their first Cones, where Old World-styled gelato is made by hand.

Racy tinctures like black sesame, red bean, and wasabi are on scoop at the newly opened **Nolita Ice Cream Factory** (85 Kenmare St., [212] 966-2881), a sunny little storefront owned by Henry Seid, whose family also runs the **Chinatown Ice Cream Factory** shops in Flushing (59-16 Main St., [718] 353-6889) and Chinatown (65 Bayard St., [212] 608-4170). But the king of flavor creations is Jon F. Snyder, the

owner of **il laboratorio del gelato** (95 Orchard St., [212] 343-9922), an urban gelateria where wild fans clamor for gelato like Tom Cruise does for Katie Holmes (but they mean it).

Snyder makes his thick and impossibly creamy gelato in small batches daily, beginning at 4 a.m., so the gelato you devour on your evening stroll was probably made earlier that day. His menu features a rotating selection of 130 flavors. In addition to his best-selling vanilla, Snyder's avant-garde menu includes fresh peppermint, chocolate with Thai chili peppers, and mascarpone.

Snyder's perfect gelato is the product of a lifetime of experiences. He was the original founder of Ciao Bella Gelato, the company he launched when he was 19 years old. After turning the company into a runaway success, he sold it in 1989, and returned to college to get his degree. After working on Wall Street for seven years, Snyder decided his passion rested in ice cream, not equities. "It took me years to figure out that I wasn't really happy down there," Snyder says. "I never thought I'd get back into ice cream, but when an idea came to me to do it again, it made a lot of sense — I thought it was time to open a spectacular ice cream place in the city."

And lucky for us, he did.

