



SWISS Experience

Absinthe: The “Green Fairy” of Switzerland in our SWISS First Connoisseur Weeks

Absinthe, often called “Green Fairy” due to its distinctive colour, is a highly aromatic liquor with a complex history. In this season’s Connoisseur Weeks, where SWISS First guests can enjoy a variety of exquisite seafood delicacies, the spirit has found a special place in the main course – spaghetti with lobster butter sauce and prawns – making it one of the highlights offered to our guests from 21 August to 3 September 2024.

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Building the foundation for global success

Rooted in the Jura region of Western Switzerland, absinthe's origins can be traced back to the Henriod family of Couvet in the Val-de-Travers. It was their family recipe, together with the entrepreneurial spirit of a certain Major Dubied and his son-in-law Henri-Louis Pernod, that finally led to the establishment of the first absinthe factory in Couvet in 1797. The success of the Couvet factory then prompted the opening of a much larger production facility in Pontarlier, France, in 1805 – setting the foundation for its worldwide success.

The controversial rise of absinthe

Initially, absinthe was marketed as a medicinal remedy, touted for its ability to alleviate stomach pain, heartburn, malaria, and more. Soldiers fighting in the War of Algeria were often provided with absinthe as a daily tonic. Their return to their homeland fueled the growing popularity of the spirit in France as well, leading to a surge in demand and production.

As the spirit’s popularity grew, concerns about its potential harmful effects began to emerge. The lack of quality control in bars and restaurants allowed for the proliferation of low-quality spirits, which in turn tarnished absinthe's reputation. Despite these challenges, absinthe's appeal remained strong. Its unique flavor and association with bohemian culture made it a favourite especially among artists and intellectuals. Absinthe’s popularity reached a global peak in the late 19th century, as it was being enjoyed in countries as diverse as the United States, Latin America, and Japan.

A ban anchored in the Swiss federal constitution

A turning point in absinthe's history came in 1905, when a tragic criminal case in Switzerland was linked to the consumption of absinthe and other spirits. This incident fueled public fears about the liquor's dangerous nature, leading to bans in Belgium, Brazil, the Netherlands, the United States, and Switzerland – where the ban even became part of the federal constitution. In France, the heart of the absinthe production at the time, the ban was imposed only in 1914, citing the need for clear thinking of its citizens in these difficult times such as the First World War.



Absinthe's characteristic green colour is derived from its key ingredient: wormwood.

The revival of absinthe

The decades following the bans were marked by a decline in absinthe's popularity. However, the spirit's mystique and forbidden nature continued to intrigue people. In the 1990s, the European Union introduced regulations allowing for the liquors production, provided it met specific standards.

Many European countries, including Switzerland, relegalized the spirit under the EU regulations. The United States followed suit in 2007 and have not loosened the strict regulations ever since. In today’s Europe, absinthe is once again enjoyed by many, often produced using the same recipes from the early 19th century, that have been passed down through generations.

Amongst a number of Swiss producers, Yves Kübler of [Kübler Absinthe](#) was the first to revive the production of authentic absinthe in Switzerland following the lift of the ban in the early 2000s. Perfect not only as an aperitif or digestif, but as a wonderful addition to various recipes, we are thus delighted to feature their renowned absinthe, crafted in the Val-de-Travers region where the spirit originated, during our upcoming Connoisseur Weeks.



SWISS First guests can enjoy a variety of seafood delicacies during our Connoisseur Weeks from 21 August to 3 September.

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