

Abs-olutely Fabulous

Looks like washing-up liquid, tastes like ouzo, gets yer bolloxed...

The first real legal high or just a bottle of tasteless piss? Absinthe is back in the bars of Britain as the cool set and the drunkards rush to order the drink that they tried to ban, but couldn't. Ministry looks forward to green teeth as we get the bags of sugar in...

We've all seen those really wanky wine tasters on the telly. Twitching their hyper-sensitive conks, spitting perfectly good booze into buckets and coming out with all sort of drivel like "Oooh Clive, this Muscadet really is soooo fruity!" "Yes Celia, the scent of cassis and turpentine is uniquely juxtaposed by an earthy aftertaste". Well, if you think that's a load of bollocks, it's got nothing on Oscar Wilde's opinion of absinthe.

Taking poetical guffaw to new heights, the wit, playwright and well-known homosexual asked "What difference is there between a glass of Absinthe and a sunset?". Well, as far as we know, a sunset won't turn you into a raging lunatic, hasn't been banned and doesn't come with a health warning. Absinthe does. After nearly a century of obscurity, it's back just in time to toast the new millennium.

So what's all the fuss about? It's because the effects of drinking absinthe are somewhat different from those of standard drinks [the nearest

you'll probably know is the buzz from Special Brew]. It has a lot to do with the alcoholic strength — absinthe weighs in at a fucking absurd 70% proof by volume. But aside from such window-screen-cleaning qualities, the remaining 30% is crammed with *Artemesia Absinthium* — that's wormwood to you and me.

Not to be confused with being the bane of all housebuilders, wormwood, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "an emblem of what is bitter and grievous to the soul."

similar to Greek holiday grog ouzo, absinthe kicks like a mule wearing DMs.

For research purposes only, four of us attempted to demolish a bottle. I know we drunk the lot 'cos I woke up the next morning with something lying next to me. An empty absinthe bottle. Still, I've pulled worse.

The old-fashioned way of imbibing this mad green stuff is "with serenity, amid pleasant company and fine conversation." To four men more accustomed to necking JD & Cokes, taking on absinthe with the same

gusto was a big mistake. The spirit's burning glow rises from your stomach's darkest pit and slaps you across your face like an extra-large mackerel. "Urghh, it tastes like anti-freeze," says one. "I like that. I like that a lot," says another — admittedly after the third glass.

But it's the ritual that surrounds absinthe that's actually more enticing than the drink itself. Like the fun that is building a spliff, preparing your drink is part of the anticipation. A cube of sugar is placed on a spoon, dipped in

'This is the stuff which apparently convinced Van Gogh to cut his ear off and ever since been associated with hallucinations, brain damage and degenerate behaviour'

As if that wasn't disturbing enough, the Russian word for it is 'Chernobyl'. Ah. This is the stuff which apparently convinced Van Gogh to cut his ear off and ever since been associated with hallucinations, brain damage and degenerate behaviour. Mumbo jumbo aside, scientific analysis reveals that wormwood releases a chemical called thujone which has a similar molecular structure to cannabis.

Looking like minty mouthwash, tasting a bit like a sicklier Pernod and



Six steps to get to 'green fairy' land

So, you've managed to get hold of a bottle of absinthe — they don't sell it in Thresher's yet, mind — but then what do you do? It's not just a case of adding a dash of Pepsi and a couple of ice cubes. Here's our cut-out-and-keep guide...

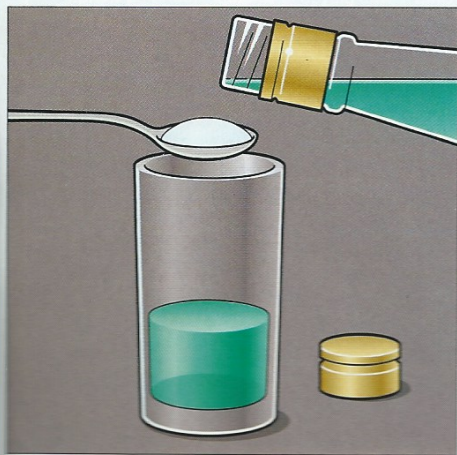


Fig.1 Pour your absinthe into a glass and then soak a spoonful of sugar with the alcohol

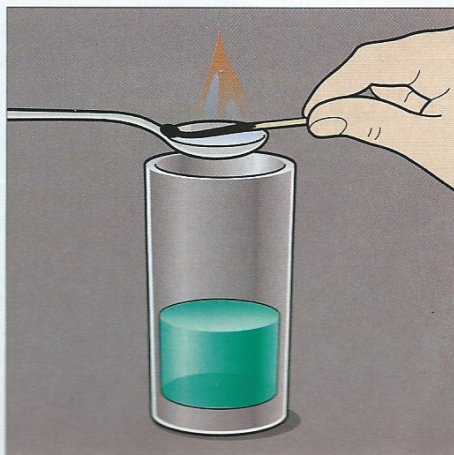


Fig.2 Set fire to the alcohol-infused sugar until the sugar turns all brown and caramelised...

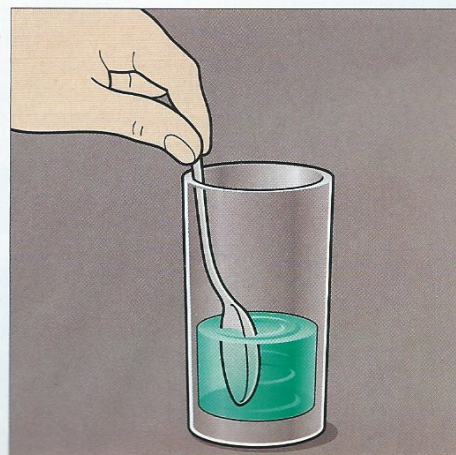


Fig.3 ...then dip the sugary spoon into the glass of absinthe and stir



the absinthe and lit; when it has caramelised slightly, it's poured into the alcohol. The mixture is stirred and the flames doused with an equal measure of water, turning the absinthe clear like Pernod. You then proceed to sip at leisure... or cane it like hell.

Sadly, green fairies and other such hallucinations [some swear that absinthe is legalised liquid tripl] were not reported that night. What it did do was get us all super-trashed in super-quick time and I felt my eyes shrink to pin-pricks within seconds. Shouting quickly became the preferred method of conversation, soon followed by slurring and a good round of dribbling.

Considering its unique heritage among the 'bohemian' community in the last 100 years, I expected at least one of us to come over all pretentious, recite poetry or, at the very least, declare an interest in cravats. Thankfully, none of us did. Still, for a truly hallucinogenic hit, long-term abuse is recommended by certain [lunatic] parties and one bloke endorsed snorting it. We declined.

Drink absinthe and prepare for 'things' to happen. Prepare to meet the contents of your tum if you overdo it. Prepare to start gurgling like an infant and suffer incontinence at one stage in the evening.

More than anything, just prepare to get ver, ver drunk... ☹

Absinthe: The Truth

What is it? What does it do?

A sort of legalised hallucinogenic 70% proof head-fuck. This aniseed-flavoured tippie, also known as The Green Fairy, is made by soaking dried wormwood in ethanol alcohol, together with herbs such as hyssop and lemon balm [yummy, eh?].

Wormwood is poisonous in large quantities and its active ingredient, thujone, is supposedly similar in make-up to your eighth of Lebanese Black. Absinthe [most people drop the last 'e' when pronounced, although the Czech makers of the main brand imported into the UK drop the 'e' permanently, as it were] was banned in Europe and America in the early 1900s over fears that it caused madness. Strangely, bearing in mind Queen Victoria's prudishness [despite having a hubby, Albert, with a pierced willy] it has never been banned here in the UK.

Where can I get it?

- **The Global Café** Soho, London. Tel. 0171 287 2242
- **The Fridge Bar** Brixton, London Tel. 0171 326 5100
- **Detroit** Covent Garden, London Tel. 0171 240 2662
- **The Met Bar** Soho, London Tel. 0171 447 5757
- **The Pharmacy** Notting Hill, London. Tel. 0171 221 2442
- **The Hoxton Square Bar** Shoreditch, London Tel. 0171 613 0709

- **The Out House** Edinburgh Tel. 0131 557 6668
 - **The Oblomov** Glasgow Tel. 0141 339 9177
 - **Boom** Bristol Tel. 0117 973 7225
 - **Nine Bar** Leicester Tel. 0116 255 1355
 - **The Reform** Manchester Tel. 0161 839 9966
- Also visit the Hill's Absinth website at www.absinth.co.uk

Infamous Imbibers

Absinthe is the drink of choice of a new generation, just like it was 100 years ago. And now we know where Picasso got his ideas from...

Past

Degas
Toulouse Lautrec [who drank it from a hollow walking stick]
Manet
Picasso
Ernest Hemingway
Vincent Van Gogh
Oscar Wilde
Emile Zola [no, he doesn't play for Chelsea]

Present

Björk
Keith Allen
Damien Hirst
Jimmy Page
Stephen Fry
Johnny Depp [who ordered a mindbending two crates of the stuff for Christmas]

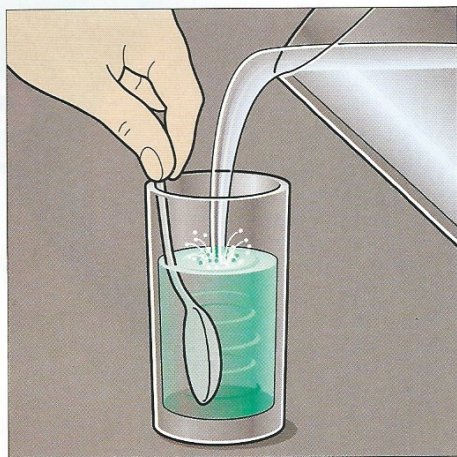
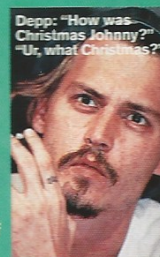


Fig.4 Then pour in an equal amount of water for the level of absinthe in the glass...



Fig.5 ...and then ram it down your throat, making sure you don't stop. It's hardly the amber nectar

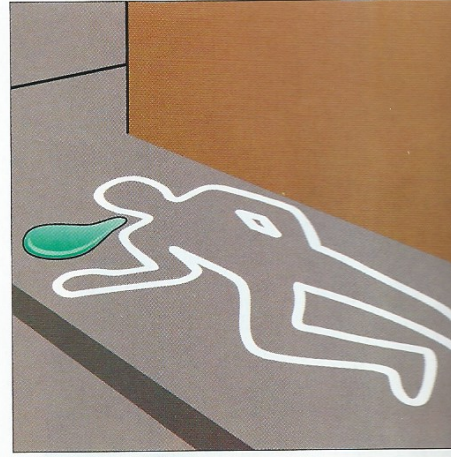


Fig.6 Repeat to fade. Make sure you hide all sharp instruments so no Van Gogh-type incidents occur