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BAR BUSINESS

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G&A

with ABSENTE



ANTOINE ROBERT, EXPORT MANAGER

The Distillery has been in my family long before I was born, so I can say that I grew up in the tanks and stills! I learned over the years to appreciate and differentiate the various spirits we make and botanicals we use. Weekends in spring and summer were often dedicated to walks in the nature and fields around the Distillery, where we harvest the botanicals that we then macerate and distill. It was obvious to me that I would work one day here with my family. I'm now in charge of the export activity, especially the U.S., which is our first market abroad.

Sazerac

1 oz Absinthe Ordinary
1½ oz Rye whiskey
3 dashes Peychaud's Bitters
Sugar cube

Add crushed ice to old fashioned glass. Stir ingredients with ice. Discard ice from old fashioned glass; strain cocktail ingredients into it. Use fresh ice or serve it up. Garnish with citrus peel.

1 Tell our readers more about Absente.

Our distillery was producing an absinthe from 1898 to 1915, no name, it was just a commodity at that time; absinthe was the most common drink and branding wasn't too common in our countryside France. Then absinthe was banned in France in 1915 [after having been banned in the rest of the world in the previous years]. When the ban was lifted in 1999, we started again using our same old recipe (seven ingredients) but modifying a little bit the proportion [of wormwood] so as to comply with US and EU legislations on thujone (a chemical compound) content. We decided to call it Absente, which sounded the closest way to our old one (using the word absinthe was forbidden in 1999). From the very beginning, we decided that Absente would be closely linked to art. So, we asked a dozen painters to paint whatever absinthe was inspiring them. We got about 10 dozen paintings. We selected the 10 best to turn them into metallic posters and soon realized that one of them (the now famous Van Gogh triple face) was getting the vast majority of interest. A few years later, in the early 2000s, one of our clients asked us to make a gift box with this painting, and to attach the spoon to the gift box. Since then we kept it as such. And our brand is fully associated to this gift box and this Van Gogh triple face. Many consumers call our brand the Van Gogh absinthe, more often than Absente.

2 What separates Absente from other absintines?

Absente was the first [and for about a decade the only] absinthe on the market since the ban was lifted. Absente is also the best-selling absinthe in most of the world [and especially in the historical absinthe markets such as France, Switzerland, USA]. We're one of few genuine absinthe distillers [who were already distilling before 1915]. Quality wise, there are several brands that follow the traditional production process, but we're one of the very few of these who export. The most important point differentiating us though is our unique connection to art. As I said, we have over 100 paintings, but especially one that is closely associated to the brand. This artistic dimension gives the product what I'd call a supplement of soul. And that is helping a lot in these troubling times we're all going through now. The Russian author Dostoevsky once said, "Art will save the world." I don't know if it's true, but at least art will save the mood. It makes people smile, forget about the pandemic, etc.

3 Are there any current trends in the use of absinthe in the on-premise market?

The trends we observed in the past year were clearly using absinthe as an ingredient for a cocktail, rather than drinking absinthe in a shot or even making the ritual with the absinthe fountain. I believe those observations belong to the past though. After the unseen crisis the on-premise has been through in the past six months, things which were true in February may not be valid anymore, and trends may have changed. That's something we'll only know when things come back to normal in the bar business.

4 What are the top misconceptions people have about absinthe?

The misconceptions are that absinthe may drive people crazy or generate hallucinations. The truth is that the molecule thujone has a real noticeable effect only in high quantities. When you drink absinthe, the effect of thujone is negligible compared to the effect of the alcohol. Artists of the 19th were using absinthe to stimulate their creativity (among many other reasons), but it wouldn't work today because the thujone rate is limited.

5 Advice for using absinthe?

I'd recommend using it when you want to give or enhance the "botanical" dimension to your cocktail. Absinthe Mojito is a good example: adding a bit of absinthe after pouring the rum respects the drink identity (it's still a mojito) but makes it a bit special. Same for absinthe in the gin and tonic. Although the most famous cocktail incorporating absinthe, Sazerac, combines absinthe to a dark spirit, I tend to think that absinthe goes best with white spirits (mainly white rum or gin) or vermouth. ☞

Absinthe Refined Mojito

1 oz Absente Absinthe Refined
1 oz Rhum Barbancourt
Fresh mint
Fresh lime
Simple syrup
Soda water

Muddle two lime wedges and freshly chopped mint in a highball glass. Add ice, Absente, Rhum Barbancourt, and a splash of simple syrup. Top it off with soda water.