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Industry Pros Discuss Tequila & Mezcal

THE TOP 100 TEQUILAS & MEZCALS

FERRARI-CARANO

THREE CHEERS

FOR THE REDS, WHITES & GREEN!



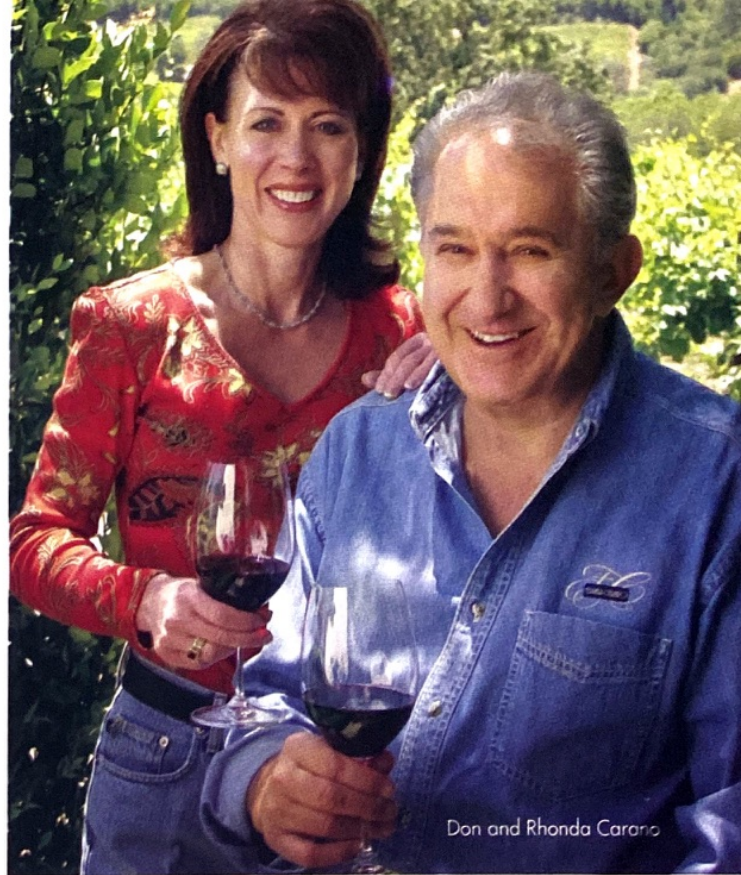
FERRARI-CARANO

*Three Cheers for the
Reds, Whites and Green*



FERRARI-CARANO STAYS SUCCESSFUL BEYOND ITS GREAT AMERICAN WINES, PUTTING MORE EMPHASIS ON ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND PRACTICES AND PROVIDING SUPERB VALUE FOR TRADE AND CONSUMERS.

For Don and Rhonda Carano, it was love at first sight when they set their eyes upon the green expanses of Northern Sonoma County in 1979. The couple, who built up the Eldorado, a successful hotel and casino in Reno, unexpectedly fell into the world of winemaking while searching for wines to enhance the wine lists at their property. The land and its bounty ended up being such a seduction that they eventually purchased a 60-acre parcel in the Alexander Valley.



Don and Rhonda Carano

Soon after their first acquisition, the Caranos, determined to learn as much as possible about winemaking, began taking classes on enology and viticulture at the University of California, Davis. However, at that time, they may have not realized that the first wines they made in their barn under the "Carano Cellars" label for friends and family, and later, the wine lists at the Eldorado, would lay the foundation for Ferrari-Carano—one of America's premiere wine producers.

By 1981, the Caranos acquired additional vineyard land and officially founded Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery. Ground was broken for the production facility in 1985, and the first wines bearing the Ferrari-Carano label were released in 1987. Those first wines, a 1986 Fumé Blanc and a 1985 Alexander Valley Chardonnay, captured the imagination of savvy sommeliers seeking the next great American wines. Today, Ferrari-Carano produces those wines, as well as a variety of other white and red wines including, Pinot Grigio, single vineyard Chardonnays, Reserve Chardonnay, Siena, a Sangiovese-based blend, Merlot, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Tresor, a Bordeaux-style blend, and two mountain vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons, PreVail Back Forty and West Face. Enhancing their cache are specialist winemakers: Sarah Quider, who specializes in white wines, and

Aaron Piotter, who focuses on the production of reds. Vineyard Director Steve Domenichelli, meanwhile, oversees everything happening in the field, figuratively and literally, to ensure grapes are maintained and harvested at their peak.

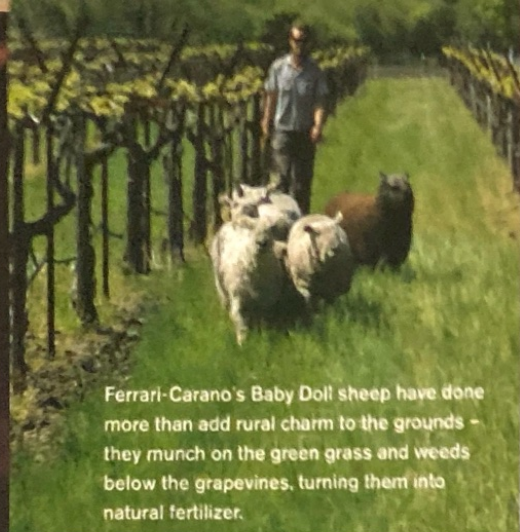
While Ferrari-Carano has been a market leader for more than twenty years, and is always developing exciting new wines to maintain their niche in California wine production, one thing that is not new to them is their green approach to winemaking, from the fields to the table. Though winemaking has generally been a "green" production process in many respects, the Caranos and their team have always made it a point to care of the earth that has provided them with the grapes that go into their acclaimed wines.

"Long before the general public became tuned in with such issues as global warming and reducing the size of one's carbon footprint, Ferrari-Carano has practiced sustainable farming techniques to help protect the lands they farm," says Rhonda Carano, who has a degree in Nutrition from the University of Nevada. "We realized early on that to achieve our goal of producing memorable wines of outstanding quality, we needed to start in the vineyards, and not focus solely on the winemaking. From the moment we opened our doors, we have been committed to sustainable farming techniques from vineyard to bottle."

LIVING OFF THE LAND

The Caranos have long-held a belief that working hand-in-hand with nature enhances the quality of the fruit. For this reason, the winery ensures natural crop nutrition by recycling organic matter, such as discarded and collected grape stems, for use as mulch in the vineyards, and planting cover crops such as mustard, herbs, wildflowers and olive tree orchards. According to Domenichelli, the Vineyard Director, use of mulch in the vineyard and planting of cover crops adds back desirable, rich, moist and long lasting nutrients to the soil and helps prevent erosion. Integration of desirable plants throughout the vineyards attract advantageous insects, such as butterflies, ladybugs and bees, which helps to naturally resist pest and disease attacks from species such as the Argentine Ant and the Vine Mealy Bug.

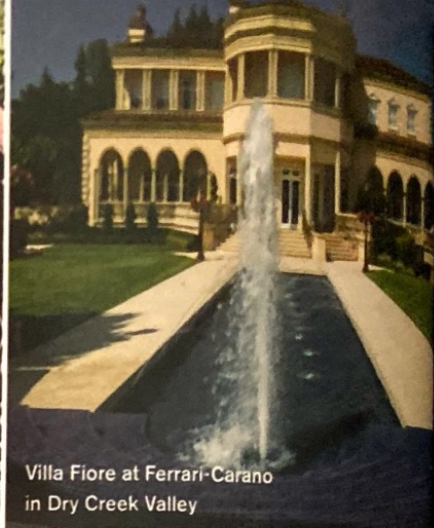
Rhonda Carano adds that sustainable winegrowing has always been the backbone of Ferrari-Carano's winemaking philosophy, though a lot of people may not realize that. For this reason, the Ferrari-Carano team strives to educate everybody in the distribution chain, ultimately to the consumer. "Our viticultural and winemaking practices are customized to match the particular



Ferrari-Carano's Baby Doll sheep have done more than add rural charm to the grounds – they munch on the green grass and weeds below the grapevines, turning them into natural fertilizer.



Don Carano in the vineyard with Steve Domenichelli, Vineyard Director



Villa Fiore at Ferrari-Carano in Dry Creek Valley

characteristics of each vineyard, to help the vines produce the best fruit possible, in the healthiest way for the fruit and the land, and, to in turn, produce the best wine possible," she says. "It's quality without compromise, as Don will tell you, in a way that is healthy for the fruit and the land."

The Caranos go on to explain that integrating four-legged animals into the vineyards and surrounding land bolsters the winery's ongoing objective to naturally enhance biodiversity and nutrient recycling. By using Baby Doll sheep to graze in the vineyards, Ferrari-Carano has decreased the use of harsh pesticides to eradicate weeds and grasses, as well as cutting down emissions in the air. The Baby Doll sheep (a small, ancient breed with sweet, woolly faces and affectionate dispositions), given their small stature – about two feet at maturity – are not tall enough to chew on the buds or grapes produced on the vines in the vineyards. However, they are perfectly proportioned to munch on the green grass and weeds below, turning them into natural fertilizer. Ferrari-Carano's cows, steer and buffalo also increase biodiversity (naturally integrating crops and livestock) while maximizing natural resources.

The addition of honeybees and nesting boxes, hawk perches and bird houses for various bird species around the vineyards, meanwhile, are an integral part of Ferrari-Carano's sustainable program. Don Carano points out that desirable owls and bird species decrease the amount of gophers and rodents that can pose a problem in the vineyard. "We are fortunate to have eagles patrolling our mountain ranches," he says. "Estate honey bees are important because they pollinate the herbs, flowers and trees on the properties, which in turn helps en-

sure a healthy landscape year after year and contributes to diversity in our ecosystem. The honeybees ultimately produce two crops each year of Ferrari-Carano Estate Honey."

Water conservation and energy consumption are also paramount at Ferrari-Carano. "One means by which Ferrari-Carano is making an impact is through the conservation of water by transitioning

ditional water and energy savings."

In 2007, Ferrari-Carano decreased irrigation hours, where irrigation is necessary, by 10 – 15%, in addition to irrigating at night in an effort to keep evaporation at a minimum. Sub-surface irrigation utilized in Ferrari-Carano's vineyards is another way to reduce evaporation while at the same time applying water directly to the grapevine root. In addition, Ferrari-Carano utilizes mister delivery systems instead of overhead sprinklers for cooling the grapes during intense heat spikes (temperatures above 100°), which in 2007 was a savings of 57% water per acre.

The Caranos have taken an additional step by implementing biofuels into their production process and equipment, which in turn helps eliminate the release of harmful carbon dioxide into the environment. Many of Ferrari-Carano's work trucks and semi-trucks operate using biodiesel fuel, and as advances in technology makes them available, the winery plans to transition to other more environmentally-friendly fuels such as ethanol or the mixture of ethanol and gasoline known as E85. In addition, electric golf carts are slated for delivery at Ferrari-Carano's estate winery in Dry Creek Valley for tours and for use in the moving merchandise and wine through the winery.

"We are continually implementing new green programs to increase our green production and farming practices," Don Carano affirms. "For example, continually increasing the number of vineyard acres that we organically farm, expanding our use of OMRI-approved fertilizers and pesticides, and introducing an organic parts washer in our vineyard shop. We are also on track to have all our ranches NOAA certified fish friendly by 2010."

Long before the general public became tuned in with such issues as global warming and reducing the size of one's carbon footprint, Ferrari-Carano has practiced sustainable farming techniques to help protect the lands they farm.

to dry farming our hillside and mountain ranch vineyards," says Rhonda Carano. "This not only conserves water and energy, but results in producing grape clusters comprised of tiny berries with intense concentration of fruit flavors. Our unique trellising systems and a complex grapevine canopy management program combined with our dry farming practices ensure ad-

FLAVOR AND BODY DRIVE FERRARI-CARANO WINES



■ 2007 FERRARI-CARANO TRÉ TERRE CHARDONNAY

Suggested Retail: \$34

Bottled: August 2008

Released: Spring 2009

Alcohol: 14.5%

Appellation: Russian River Valley

Blend: 100% Chardonnay

TASTING NOTES:

The 2007 Ferrari-Carano Tré Terre Chardonnay from Russian River Valley is a full-bodied wine with delicious aromas of citrus, pear, peach, and mineral notes complemented by rich flavors of apple, fig, nutmeg, and brown sugar spice. An elegant wine with rich fruit, the Tré Terre Chardonnay is perfectly balanced with nice acidity and depth.

VINTAGE NOTES:

The 2007 growing season was generally moderate, with early bud break in March that led to a dry spring and summer. The grapes for this wine were harvested the end of September and completed mid-October.

WINEMAKER NOTES:

Six different vineyard sites with seven Chardonnay clones comprise our 2007 Tré Terre Chardonnay. Each lot for this wine is whole-cluster pressed, then cold-settled for two days in stainless steel tanks, and within 24 hours is moved directly to barrels, utilizing 19 different French oak cooperages. Aged completely separately in French oak, the wines complete 70 percent malolactic fermentation and are sure lie aged and stirred weekly for 10 months until bottled.

FOOD PAIRINGS:

This wine's rich fruit component complements mildly spiced vegetarian dishes and rich, creamy shellfish entrées. It also works well with veal, poultry, pasta and rice.



FERRARI-CARANO'S FAMILY OF WINES

SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF

Though the balance between on and off-premise sales are shifting, and consumers are seeking familiar favorites in their choice of food and beverages, the Caranos point out there are ways to create excitement for their new releases, as well as ways on-and off-premise accounts can help their customers find joy in rediscovering classic reds and whites, albeit with fresh new twists. The new promotions and forthcoming releases from their various vineyards reflect their preparedness for those shifts.

"Some of our more recent promotions and campaigns reflect people's desire to stay closer and entertain more at home," Rhonda Carano points out. "We are focusing on Ferrari-Carano's longevity in the market, emphasizing quality and value combined. Recent Ferrari-Carano ad headlines have included, 'A Tradition of Excellence Time and Time Again', 'Fall In Love Again and Again' and a 'Tried & True Friend' philosophy in our marketing efforts."

"Ferrari-Carano is tried and

true – a consistent, familiar face that has always provided quality and value in every bottle of wine, at every price point," concurs Don Carano. "With a diverse portfolio of wines to choose from – Fume Blanc, Chardonnays, Merlots, Cabernet Sauvignons, red blends, desert wines – we are proud to be able to offer high-quality wines for every budget and every palate, while being respectful to the land for future generations."

Among this year's new releases and focus wines, the Caranos note that the 2007 Ferrari-Carano Tré Terre Chardonnay from Russian River Valley is full-bodied and rich with a delicious fruit component. Their 2006 Ferrari-Carano Cabernet Sauvignon's depth and showy tannins, meanwhile, make it perfect for pairing with red meats and strong-flavored cheeses. They are also particularly proud of their 2008 Fume Blanc, as it is such a versatile wine and an ideal must-have for consumers who enjoy entertaining at home. The Ferrari-Carano 2007 Siena, as a red, is a very approachable, medium-bodied wine that pairs well with a variety of foods.

To keep their name and their commitment to the greater community at large, they are partnering with the national Celebrity Chef Tour to benefit The James Beard Foundation. The tour kicks off in New York in April, and trav-



■ 2008 FERRARI-CARANO FUME BLANC

Suggested Retail: \$15

Bottled: February 2009

Released: April 2009

Alcohol: 13.8%

Appellation: Sonoma County

Blend: 100% Sauvignon Blanc

TASTING NOTES:

Zesty flavors and aromas of orange blossom, grapefruit and lemon mingle with a subtle mineral note that is complemented by a lingering finish of guava and pineapple in the Ferrari-Carano 2008 Fumé Blanc. Aged partially in stainless steel and older French Oak gives this wine a crisp freshness and a subtle oak character that adds great complexity and depth.

VINTAGE NOTES:

The 2008 Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc is a blend of vineyard lots from various appellations of Sonoma County — Dry Creek, Alexander and Russian River Valleys. A year of fire and ice, we began 2008 battling heavy frost in April, fires in the summer, and heat in the early fall. Reduced yields but intensely flavored, well-balanced, ripe fruit was the happy result of a very challenging growing season. Harvest began mid-August and was completed shortly after — 2008 being one of the fastest harvests we can remember.

WINEMAKER NOTES:

When the Sauvignon Blanc grapes arrive at the winery, each lot is gently crushed, de-stemmed and pressed, and then moved directly to stainless steel tanks or older French oak barrels for fermentation. Individual lots are kept separate; the wine in barrels are sur lie aged and stirred every two weeks for four months, while the wine in stainless steel tanks remain undisturbed. Individual lots are selected to create the final Fume Blanc blend.

FOOD PAIRINGS:

The 2008 Fume Blanc pairs well with simple seafood and poultry dishes, and also holds up nicely with white meats such as veal and pork. The wine has lively flavors that go well with spicy and ethnic cuisines such as Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese, Korean, Mexican and Southwestern dishes.



DRY CREEK VALLEY VINEYARDS

Dry Creek Valley is an inspired wine growing region, blessed with soil and climate that support many different Ferrari-Carano varietals at an equally high level of quality, including Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel and Petit Verdot. This beautiful valley, home to Ferrari-Carano's Estate winery, is only 16 miles long and two miles wide, but it boasts more than 6,000 acres of vines.

els across the country to major cities such as Washington DC, Seattle, Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco, Dallas, Phoenix and Denver. In addition, the Caranos are partnering with Emeril Lagasse in November for Carnivale du Vin in Las Vegas, which benefits children's programs through the Lagasse Foundation.

"We have an opportunity to tell our story, get personal with our customers via our wines and ways we allow people to get to know them," concludes Rhonda

Carano. "While wine lovers are cutting back and searching for value-oriented, quality wines, they want to identify with the personalities behind Ferrari-Carano — it's not just a bottle of wine, it's a lifestyle — family, friends, food pairings, cooking. That has always been our story. I think because many people in times like this are not as willing to try something new, they want to know there is a wine out there that they know won't disappoint." ■

■ FERRARI-CARANO 2007 SIENA

Suggested Retail: \$24

Bottled: December 2008

Released: Spring 2009

Alcohol: 14.3%

Appellation: Sonoma County

Blend: 78% Sangiovese, 22% Malbec

TASTING NOTES:

Ferrari-Carano's Italian heritage is reflected in this Sangiovese-based, easysipping, multi-dimensional blend. Select lots of grapes were chosen from our vineyards in Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River Valleys to create a beautifully balanced and medium-bodied wine. SIENA is supple and ripe with delicious fruit aromas of red and blackberry preserves complemented by cinnamon, mocha



and cedar. Juicy black cherry, raspberry jam and fresh mint create a vibrant palate that is rounded out by a smooth finish of caramel and spice. Excellent red fruit vitality is balanced with lively acidity, supple tannins and a lingering finish.

VINTAGE NOTES:

From our valley floor and mountainside vineyards, our vines for the SIENA are



FERRARI-CARANO WINEMAKERS

Sarah Quider, White Wine Winemaker, employs gentle winemaking techniques, while blending for style, quality and multidimensional complexity.

Aaron Piotter spearheads Ferrari-Carano's Red Wine Program, which is housed at the Mountain Winery Estate in Alexander Valley.



ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS

Home to Ferrari-Carano's Mountain Winery Estate, Alexander Valley is one of the largest viticultural appellations in Sonoma County, with a diversity of soil and climate unequaled in any other region of the county. More than half of Ferrari-Carano's mountain, bench land and valley floor vineyards are located here, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot grapes planted on the valley floor and bench lands, while Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Malbec, Sangiovese, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc are planted in the mountains.

farmed in shallow, rocky, low-vigor soil that adds impressive depth and concentration of flavor intensity to the wine. The season was characterized by low rainfall, absence of dramatic heat spikes and a cool fall. Harvest started early and quickly, then slowed to a beautiful pace due to the cool fall. Sangiovese vines were harvested first, the beginning of September, while the Malbec harvest was completed later, around September 23rd.

WINEMAKER NOTES:

This wine is primarily Sangiovese blended with Malbec. Grapes were hand harvested, and upon entering the winery, hand-sorted and then gravity fed directly into tanks for seven days of cold soaking. Individual lots were moved to barrels, then blended and aged in new Hungarian puncheons and older French oak barrels in wine caves for 12 months, with an additional six months of bottle aging prior to release.

FOOD PAIRINGS:

SIENA pairs perfectly with savory Italian dishes, pasta with flavorful tomato sauces or pizza. SIENA is also good with American favorites such as chicken, lamb, pork and beef.



■ 2006 FERRARI-CARANO CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Suggested Retail: \$34

Bottled: June 2008

Released: December 2008

Alcohol: 14.5%

Appellation: Alexander Valley

Blend: 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8%

Syrah, 7% Petit Verdot

TASTING NOTES:

The fruit for our 2006 Ferrari-Carano Cabernet Sauvignon comes primarily from mountain-grown fruit in Alexander Valley. Fog drifts over the tops of the coastal mountains and burns off quickly in the morning sunshine, resulting in a warm climate with almost full sun throughout the day – ideal conditions for our cabernet sauvignon mountain vineyards. With aromas of blackberry syrup, boysenberry, spicy black currant, espresso, and caramel, this wine delights with rich, delicious flavors of Bing cherry, chocolate, toffee and anise. A delicious mid-palate, excellent depth and showy tannins characterize this lovely Cabernet Sauvignon.

VINTAGE NOTES:

Our mountain vines are dry farmed in shallow, rocky, low-vigor soil that add impressive depth and concentration of flavor intensity to the wine. An unusually cool and wet winter and spring caused a late start to the growing season, while above average heat in July, and then a drop in temperature mid-August, brought the Cabernet Sauvignon to full maturity exactly when we wanted and extended the hang time for the grapes.

WINEMAKER NOTES:

This wine is composed of primarily Cabernet Sauvignon, blended with small amounts of Syrah and Petit Verdot. The hand harvested grapes enter the gravity flow winery and are hand sorted, then whole berries are gravity fed into tanks for fermenting before pressing. Individual lots were moved to barrels for malolactic fermentation, then blended and barrel aged for 19 months and aged an additional six months in bottle, allowing for the perfect balance of fruit, tannin and oak.

FOOD PAIRINGS:

Our 2006 Ferrari-Carano Cabernet Sauvignon pairs well with roasted, broiled or barbecued heavy game and red meats such as lamb, beef, pork and veal. Medium and strong-flavored cheeses, such as blue cheese or sharp cheddar, also pair nicely with Cabernet Sauvignon.

21ST CENTURY SPIRITS BLUE, GOLD AND BOLD

*Blue Ice Organic Winter Wheat Vodka
arrives just in time for today's
eco-conscious, value-demanding consumers*



Blue Ice Organic Winter Wheat Vodka, the newest member of the Blue Ice family is quickly finding a place on shelves at retailers, bars and restaurants everywhere. While the spirit's exceptional blend of pristine Idaho water and certified organic wheat make it the perfect neutral base for a range of cocktails, its versatility is heightened by its value and the distiller's emphasis on environmentally friendly production.

"Blue Ice Organic Winter Wheat Vodka isn't just a marketing hook," explains Kevin Egan, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for 21st Century Spirits. "Our embrace of our customers' demand for eco-friendly products and quality for a great price gives the spirit a real edge in today's market. Consumers and trade alike will appreciate the vodka's special distillation process developed by Master Distiller Bill Scott not only for its subtle taste and smoothness, but also the care that went into making it. The organic winter wheat specially selected for the new spirit imparts a smooth body and a crisp, refreshing finish that compliments other cocktail ingredients and is designed to please the discriminating vodka connoisseur."

Egan also points out with confidence that the highly anticipated introduction of Blue Ice Organic Winter Wheat Vodka not only completes founder Jim Myerson's legacy of creating the great American line of spirits, but also generate new enthusiasm for made-in-the-USA spirits in general.

**"Quality, affordability and
social responsibility are
just a few of the many
influences that have shaped
the rise and evolution of
the Blue Ice brand."**

— Kevin Egan, Vice President of Sales and Marketing

"Even after a lifetime of successes in the beverage industry, Myerson's creative and entrepreneurial spirit was still going strong," recalls Egan. "Just as he was inspired to launch the original Blue Ice Vodka in 2001, pressing on to carry that achievement forward was a fun challenge for Jim, and he had no intention of slowing down. Once he successfully built his premium vodka into a national brand, he wanted to show everybody what could be accomplished with

Organic Winter Wheat grown and harvested in America. Until the end, he was tuned into what trade customers and consumers wanted, and was keenly aware that a young, well-educated and socially conscious market actively sought a spirit that would be kinder to the Earth in its production yet still fit right in to today's bar and mixology culture."

Handcrafted and quality assured as a kosher and USDA Certified Organic beverage, Blue Ice Organic Wheat Vodka is distinguished with its harmonious blend of pristine Idaho water and locally harvested, certified organic winter wheat. Distiller Bill Scott, meanwhile, achieves this result using the distillery's certified organic fermentation process that uses no chemical additives of any kind.

"In a crowded market inundated with fly-by-night brands, here today, gone tomorrow, Blue Ice has successfully circumvented this fate by focusing on the fundamental priorities of today's modern-day consumer," said Egan. "Quality, affordability and social responsibility are just a few of the many influences that have shaped the rise and evolution of the Blue Ice brand. The continued success of Blue Ice Vodka's flagship potato vodka has parlayed into the birth of Blue Ice Organic Wheat Vodka, the next natural progression in this family-owned operation's devotion to bottling exceptional American vodkas." ■

Agavelution!

Tequila and mezcal have journeyed from bar and cocktail staples to a wide category that is beginning to rival vodka in its range, versatility and luxury potential.

BY JESSICA CRISTOL



Though there is controversy surrounding the true origins of the Margarita—the perennial cocktail that introduced generations of drinkers to tequila—one thing spirits industry pros, mixologists, food writers and consumers can agree upon is that there is literally something for everybody. Producers of tequila and mezcal, its hearty older brother, are keenly aware of this and have taken agave-based spirits from a category to a global phenomenon going non-stop.

While vodka is still the world's #1 consumed spirit, there is no doubt that the tequila/mezcal category has long since proven it has what it takes to be a force to be reckoned with. Along with its colorful Mexican origins and history, the spirit comes in as many variations as there is folklore to explain its allure. The versatility inherent in the three varieties of tequilas (blanco/silver, reposado and anejo) have carried the savviest brands beyond Spring Break and Mexican restaurants into every kind of establishment, from exclusive upscale lounges and chef-driven restaurants to neighborhood cafes.

As agave-based spirits have evolved (as the category now also includes pre-mixed cocktails, coolers and cream liqueurs), it is important to not only understand tequila's history and development, but what the different variations will mean for the category in the future. Though economic times are tough, quality tequilas and mezcals at every price point are still a must for bars, retail outlets and homes everywhere. Professional mixologists and retailers, meanwhile, not only need to know their blancos from their reposados and anejos, but also need to translate those nuances to their customers whether they are called for straight, on the rocks or as part of a cocktail.

100 TOP TEQUILAS



TALKING TEQUILA

To make the increasingly complex learning curve for tequila flow a little more smoothly, **BEVERAGE INDUSTRY NEWS** caught up with some tequila brand honchos to discuss how and why their products are going strong, even as the economy and the tastes of consumers are in a constant state of change.

The Great White (Spirits) Hope

BIN: Do you agree that this category is becoming as competitive as Vodka?

ANTONIO PORTILLO,
SENIOR BRAND MANAGER, SAUZA:

The tequila category has been experiencing a revolution over recent years as more and more consumers explore new and exciting ways to enjoy this spirit. Sauza Tequila is well-positioned for all tequila occasions with Sauza Gold and Blanco, our Hornitos line and the super-premium Tres Generaciones family. Our Sauza Gold and Blanco line launched its "Expect Fresh" campaign in the 2008. "Expect Fresh" challenges the standard tequila category through an emphasis on refreshment, mixability and fresh drinking experiences.

ELWYN GLADSTONE,
HEAD OF MARKETING, PROXIMO SPIRITS:

Tequila is only around 8% of the spirits category versus 28% for Vodka, so it's still much smaller. Also, within vodka, there are a large number of brands at every price category, while there are much fewer for tequila (i.e. Patron at the ultra premium, 1800 at the super-premium and Cuervo at the Premium). That said, tequila is incredibly competitive with spends getting bigger and bigger. I think of all the categories, this is going to be the one where we see the most innovation in the next few years.

KEVIN EGAN,
VP OF SALES AND MARKETING,
21ST CENTURY SPIRITS,
ORO AZUL TEQUILA:

It's an extremely competitive category. Will it ever be as competitive as Vodkas? Probably not for a long time. I think there are ultimately limiting factors stemming from the availability of the raw materials. Vodka can be made from anything anywhere. As we all know Blue Agave is not easy to cultivate, and takes a long time to

mature, and there are limited defined geographical growing areas all serving to limit production, availability and diversity.

J. GARY SHANSBY,
CHAIRMAN, PARTIDA TEQUILA:

More quality tequilas are coming to the US market than ever before, but the category is different from vodka because there is greater differentiation with tequila, and varied nuances in the taste profiles. You could almost compare premium tequila to fine wine more than to vodka, and the category has a lot more room for a variety of brands with distinctive styles. Of course, consumption needs to continue to increase to keep the category growing as Americans discover the qualities and diversity of the many premium tequilas coming to market in the US.

MATT CARROLL,
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
PATRÓN SPIRITS INTERNATIONAL A.G.:

Competition is good, especially in the ultra-premium tequila category because there is still a significant amount of education we need to do to continue to make people aware that ultra premium tequilas are not the same as low-quality tequilas people may remember from years ago. The more players there are in the category, the more opportunities there are to raise awareness of this sophisticated, versatile spirit.

DOUGLAS MCCREADIE,
PRESIDENT, MARGARITAVILLE SPIRITS:

We would probably argue that tequila is as competitive as vodka and has been for some time, particularly in the 100% Blue Agave segment which has grown dramatically over the last few years. Although early evidence suggests that we are beginning to see signs of consolidation, a trend that is likely to accelerate as consumer spending declines and fewer people experiment with new and emerging brands in favor of established offerings.

TOP 10 FLAVORED TEQUILAS

1. Gran Centenario Rosangel (Hibiscus-infused tequila) 2. VooDoo Tiki Desert Rose (Prickly Pear infused tequila) 3. Margaritaville Paradise Passion 4. VooDoo Tiki Blue Dragon (Blue Raspberry and Kiwi infused tequila) 5. Milagro Mandarinina Tequila 6. Caramba Pink Tequila 7. Jose Cuervo Oranjo 8. Tanteo Chocolate Tequila 9. La Pinta Pomegranate Infused Tequila 10. Tarantula Tequila

The Absinthe fountain and spoons are the traditional way to enjoy the spirit.



The only way adventurous U.S. drinkers could get a hold of absinthe prior to 2007 was to take their chances and order it online, or convince a friend visiting Europe to slip a bottle past customs. However, it was only a matter of time before absinthe would re-emerge in the open, especially with origins and history that would add to its legend through the years.



The mix of herbs and spices distinguishing absinthe from other spirits reads on paper as a harvest of wonderful things coming from nature—grand wormwood and anise as the anchors, and fennel, hyssop, veronica, lemon balm, angelica, dittany, coriander, juniper and nutmeg completing the lineup. When these components were mixed and distilled, however, the result took on an unexpected new life. The strong liquor, originally developed in Switzerland for medical purposes, captured the imagination of artists and writers in Europe during the “Belle Époque” of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

While these imbibers dubbed the spirit “The Green Fairy” and adopted it as their creative muse, there were others who saw the green liquid as a menace to society. The Mediterranean perennial herb *Artemisia absinthium* (Grand Wormwood) at the heart of absinthe was source for the chemical compound thujone, rumored to bring about hallucinations and other side effects. Though a major wine shortage in France at the end of the 19th century contributed to the growth of absinthe and other hard liquors, legal authorities and moral watchdogs blamed a lot of the world’s social ills on the strong herbal spirit. Prohibition in the United States, meanwhile, seemed to seal the misunderstood spirit’s fate on our shores as a curiosity.

Many spirits enthusiasts and historically savvy bartenders are familiar with Pernod Fils, devised over two centuries ago and touted to be the muse of choice for the big names of the Belle Époque, including Picasso, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh. Though the original Pernod (which some say had the “most authentic” of recipes) and its contemporaries disappeared after the French government and other nation’s governments banned it, its memory lived on for years. Today, tradition was recently revitalized, in the form of Pernod Absinthe. However, the story doesn’t end there, or with that brand. Today, legend has given way to a new category and a fascinating phenomenon.

The spirit that was once a mystery, enhanced by pop culture (i.e. movies such as 2001’s *Moulin Rouge*), would be revealed a century later, and in many different formats once the ban (or bans, depending on your perspective) were lifted. In turn, brands such as *Lucid Absinthe Supérieure*, *St. George Absinthe Verte*, *Nouvelle-Orléans Absinthe Supérieure*, *La Clandestine Absinthe Supérieure*, *Kübler*, *Grande Absente Originale*, *Le Tourment Vert*, *Artemisia Absinthe*, *Obsello Absinthe*, *La Fée Parisienne*, *Green Fairy*, *Mansinthe* by Marilyn Manson, *Mythe Absinthe Traditional*, *Libertine*, *Mata Hari Absinthe Bohemian* and (of course) *Pernod* have brought the absinthe mystique out into bars, restaurants and homes across America.

The Presence of Absinthe



The mystique-filled elixir has evolved into a full-blown spirits category, populated with brands that balance herbs and spices with a storied history and a promising future.

By Elyse Glickman

Now that absinthe is legal, here are some new classics that mixologists are creating with the green fairy.

MINT MUSE

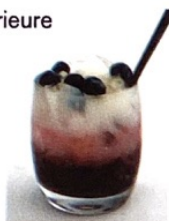
1 ½ oz. Lucid Absinthe Supérieure
2 oz. Pineapple Juice
Muddled Mint Leaves
Lime Wedge
Topped with Sprite or 7-UP



Muddle mint leaves with lime wedge and add Lucid. Add ice and pineapple juice and shake briefly. Top with Sprite or 7-UP and add mint sprig.

OL' LUCY BLUE EYES

1 oz. Stoli blueberry
¼ oz. Lucid Absinthe Supérieure
¼ oz. Simple Syrup
Splash of Lemon Juice
Drizzle of Massenez
Framboise
Gingerbeer
Fresh Blueberries



Muddle fresh blueberries and add syrup, juice and vodka. Add ice and shake and pour into highball glass. Drizzle Framboise and top with Ginger Beer. Garnish with one sugar cube.

VAN GOGH'S GARDEN

1 ½ oz. Lucid Absinthe Supérieure
½ oz. Simple Syrup
Club Soda
Kiwi Fruit
Cucumber



Muddle two cucumber wheels & two peeled kiwi wheels with the simple syrup in a double rocks glass. Fill with ice and add the Lucid. Top with club soda and add an un-peeled kiwi wheel on the rim.

ABSENTE FRENCH FIZZ

1 oz. Grande Absente
1 oz. Alize (passion)
¼ oz. of Pineapple Juice
½ oz. of Sweet & Sour
Club Soda

Shake until freezing cold, and strain contents into a martini glass. Garnish with a pineapple wedge and/or maraschino cherry.



A New "Epoque" Begins



Though many web sites on absinthe note the U.S. ban on the spirit was lifted in early 2007, products labeled legally as absinthe have appeared as early as 2000. Absente, according to Jim Nikola, Senior VP of Marketing at Crillon Importers, was the brand that set the foundation because they found a way to bring an absinthe made with a legal sister botanical, southern wormwood, into the U.S. legally with the help of lawyers, with the standard that thujone content would remain under ten parts per million. He also points out that Absente is now made with grand wormwood.

"By 2004-5, entrepreneurial types aware of our legal dialogue with the government established that the ban on wormwood could be lifted under the legal guideline our company created that stipulates thujone remain under ten parts per million, and that's when we started to see an emergence of products claiming to be wormwood absinthe," observes Nikola. "We are still in the midst of absinthe's evolution, and people in the trade need to know that companies like us have been around absinthe for nearly 10 years. Awareness and knowledge in the mainstream is still really low, so it is our job to enlighten them in any way we can. Though you have your trendsetters and market leaders demographically up on absinthe and setting the pace, as well as the art community, the mainstream is still learning about what it was, what it is and what it tastes like, how to drink it. When we first started in 2000, nobody knew what absinthe was, so we've come a long way since then, but we have

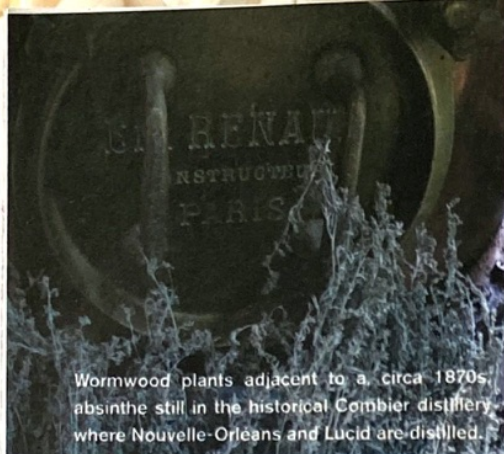


In 1805, Henri-Louis Pernod partnered with Major Dubied to found Pernod Fils and the first commercial absinthe distillery.

so much farther to go. When you visit different states and go on premise, there are still many people who don't know what it is and need a lot of explanation and training. We capitalized on the foundations we laid in 2007 with the launch of Grande Absente, one of the oldest absinthe recipes from the south of France, taking our legal precedent to the next stage."

Though absinthe is now a spirits category in the open and in its own right, T.A. Breaux, the Master Distiller of Lucid Absinthe Supérieure and strong voice for Viridian Spirits' portfolio (also including Nouvelle-Orléans Absinthe Supérieure and La Clandestine Absinthe Supérieure), points out that trade buyers and consumers should still make their purchasing decisions carefully. "There is currently no legal definition for Absinthe in the U.S. It is unfortunate because it allows unscrupulous profiteers to put green liquid in a bottle—mouthwash, basically—and charge people \$50 a bottle or more," Breaux stresses. "To distinguish our products we are emphasizing that anything Viridian puts out is absolutely artisanally distilled and completely natural. There are already products on the market that are making noise, when what's in the bottle is artificially colored sugary liquid that has no bearing on the Absinthe of 100 years ago. We have to be concerned with educating our customers, pointing out everything we distill comes from whole herbs and is made with an expensive painstaking process that justifies their price and place in the market."

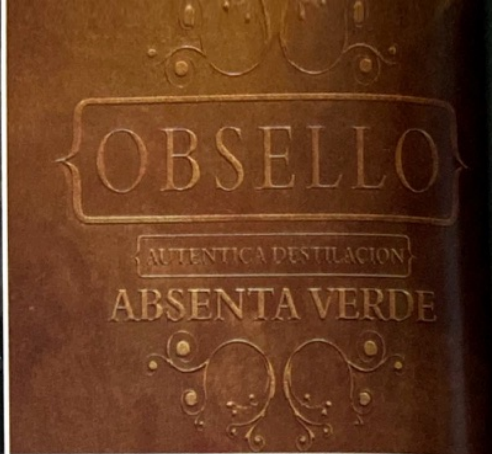
Jared Gurfein, Lucid Absinthe Supérieure's founder and CEO, adds that while Lucid Absinthe Supérieure was the first absinthe on the U.S. market, it is one of the few whose recipe is truly authen-



Wormwood plants adjacent to a circa 1870s absinthe still in the historical Comblair distillery where Nouvelle-Orleans and Lucid are distilled.



Photo of two antique absinthe stills at the Comblair distillery.



tic in every detail of how it is made. "That alone has given us a tremendous competitive advantage," he says. "Even with the hype from other distillers, it has not hurt our position in the category. We just stuck to our guns and made sure trade clients and consumers know Lucid Absinthe Supérieure is one of a small number of brands around the world that can truly claim to be authentic as a true expert would say. No matter how much money a competitor wants to throw at a product, at the end of the day, people who know what's going on are going with the quality, and they are sticking with it. This has been our secret."

Lance Winters, distiller of St. George Absinthe Verte, notes that while absinthe's appeal as a complex spirit has not changed, it has shaken off some of the horrible myths and reputation as people become more familiar with it, especially thanks to well-crafted cocktails. "It is finding a place in the bartender's lexicon, especially as they are more sophisticated today and work with flavors in many remarkable ways," says Winters. "Absinthe serves two functions. Some customers enjoy the traditional absinthe drip with water, while others use this very layered herbal liquor as they would with Chartreuse, to elevate the flavor and aromatic elements of a cocktail beautifully. It's a great supporting player for a variety of innovative cocktails. When you have eleven or twelve really loud flavors and aromas and every single one wants to dominate, to be able to get all of them to integrate and play nicely on the palate, that's where the real art for the distiller comes in, knowing exactly how much to use of each element and focusing on each flavor accordingly."

For other brands, such as Mata Hari, Obsello and Le Tourment Vert, distillers and their marketing teams face the challenge of straddling the authenticity question with formulas that contain the components but appeal to the modern American palate.

"Mata Hari, made in Vienna, Austria is made in the bohemian style," explains Steve Raye, who is responsible for marketing the brand in the U.S. "Bohemian refers to a style of Absinthe with a less-dominant licorice profile. The recipe was developed by distiller Gerry Fischer's great-grandfather Friedrich Fischer. The original handwritten formula dates to 1881 and is kept in the family safe. What characterizes Mata Hari is a lighter flavor and body profile, with less of a dominant licorice flavor, making it easier to mix in cocktail recipes. Though the distiller makes absinthe using a variety of absinthe recipes, we chose this one because it is the most mixable. This is what we found to be the way many Americans getting to know absinthe want to enjoy the spirit. People



"Absinthe is the hot new 'old' spirit, with the distinctive flavors of anise and herbs distinguishing them from industrial modern spirits."

— T.A. Breaux,

Master Distiller of Lucid Absinthe Supérieure



start off trying absinthe the traditional way, with the slotted spoon allowing it to louche (get the cloudy color people associate with absinthe). It was never meant to be consumed straight, but be diluted to cocktail strength, 20 to 40 proof."

Ashley Garver, Le Tourment Vert's Field Marketing Coordinator, affirms her brand,

though also devised for the American palate (via a lower anise content and lower alcohol content), gets its authenticity from its distillery in Cognac, France and artisanal production methods. "Because it is so versatile, it is very relevant to today's consumer," she says. "Bars throughout the country are serving it in a multitude of ways, from the water and sugar method of 100 years ago to inclusion in a variety of cocktails, shots and mixed drinks. Some bars like mixing it with Red Bull and others like to muddle it with raspberries and cucumbers and take a modern twist on older traditional cocktails. It is a real absinthe experience, formulated with the 21st century customer in mind."

Spanish-made Obsello uses its cache as a favorite among an elite group of fine restaurants and bars to introduce connoisseurs and retailers everywhere else to its twice-distilled formula, made in traditional alembic stills using an un-aged brandy base from Penedès wine stock. While honey and vanilla undertones balance out the grand wormwood base, resulting in a noticeable lack of bitterness, and a velvet-y mouth feel. Some of the award-winning establishments offering Obsello include Hungry Cat in Los Angeles and Michael Minna's establishment in San Francisco and were chosen based on their reputations for superb culinary or mixology talents, service and ambiance.

"We started with baby steps and are now taking huge strides to make the micro-distillery into a world-class spirits producer and to provide products to consumers who have been asking for more than just another drink," said Joanne Haruta, Obsello's Director of U.S. Sales and Marketing. "We think we have given consumers something they have wanted for a long time: head-turning taste and unforgettable experience. We've conducted taste sampling for hundreds of food and beverage products, but never before have we seen this amount of interest for one single product." Added said Kimberly

"It is finding a place in the bartender's lexicon, especially as they are more sophisticated today and work with flavors in many remarkable ways,"

— Lance Winters, St. George Absinthe Verte

BOHEMIAN MOJITO

Developed with Bryce Hardy of the "Olive Bar", Hartford, CT

1 oz. Absinthe Mata Hari
1 oz. Bacardi Limon
6-8 mint leaves
2 lime wedges
2 dashes Simple Syrup
Soda Water to top



Throw the mint leaves in the bottom of a collins glass. Squeeze in the juice of two lime wedges, and add the wedges to the shaker. Add the simple syrup and muddle. Add the remaining ingredients and tumble. Return to collins glass. Top with soda water and garnish with a generous sprig of mint.

CHERRY LIFESAVER

1 oz. Absinthe Mata Hari
1 ½ oz. Cherry Vodka
1 oz. Cointreau
1 oz. Cranberry Juice



Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker filled with ice and shake thoroughly. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a cherry

BELLE EPOQUE

By Erik Adkins, Slanted Door, San Francisco, CA

1/8 oz. St. George Absinthe Verte
1 ½ oz. Tanqueray 10
¾ Fresh Lime
½ oz. Simple Syrup

Put all ingredients into a mixing glass. Add ice and shake. Strain into a martini-cocktail glass.

MY OWN SUMMER

1 oz. Le Tourment Vert
¾ oz. Hangar One Kaffir Lime Vodka
1 Barspoon Simple Syrup
½ oz. Lemon Juice
½ Lime Juice
1 oz. Kiwi Puree
1 oz. Aloe Water



Put all ingredients into a mixing glass. Add ice and shake. Served up in a martini glass.



The traditional absinthe drip with water and slotted spoon allows it to *louche* (get the cloudy color people associate with absinthe).

Bulilis, Distillery Brand Manager of Vegas Market, "Where some of the more notorious brands are fading along with their brief moment in the spotlight, we think this is just the beginning for Obsello."

What Becomes the Legend Most...



While absinthe, with its strong licorice flavor and alcohol content, remains an acquired taste, the producers and their teams have different notions on how to get clients and consumers to acquire it. "There is a process people go through in learning to enjoy absinthe," says Mata Hari's Raye. "In the beginning, people find they are familiar with it via pop culture, and awareness of it being illegal in America at one time. Some may try it in the drip format of 100 years ago, and there is the risk they may abandon the category if they don't like licorice. However, what we're finding is that when we include recipes as part of the package or discussion with our accounts when we educate them, there is a greater chance people will be willing to accept it into the repertoire of drinks that they will order."

"It is amazing watching Absinthe's popularity develop," says Lucid Absinthe Supérieure's CEO Gurfein. "I almost want to take a step back to survey the landscape, especially as it has emerged as a drink that means a lot of things to a lot of people. The educated, well-traveled crowd gravitating toward art history embraces Absinthe's place in history. For the arty bohemian crowd, its reputation of being outside of the establishment and

the drink of the avant-garde crowd gives it appeal. There is the shooter crowd who like absinthe's perceived element of dare, and a high-end restaurant-industry crowd including mixologists and trained sommeliers fascinated by the complexity of absinthe. It straddled many different demographics in many different ways, and we couldn't be happier."

According to Crillon Import's Nikola, Grande Absente's approach is to connect both consumers and trade clientele to the product in a way that is upscale and intrinsically connected to absinthe's history. "Absinthe is so fascinating, because it was not only so much a part of the Belle Époque era, but had an influence on the direction of art itself," says Nikola. "We put a big focus on training our reps and our accounts, and teach these people about the history and future of absinthe. Although Absinthe brands in the U.S. market adhere to TTB guidelines, they are remarkably close to the absinthes offered in Belle Époque Paris. There are a lot of marketing myths around absinthe, so we hope to demystify the category and our brand when explaining its appeal."

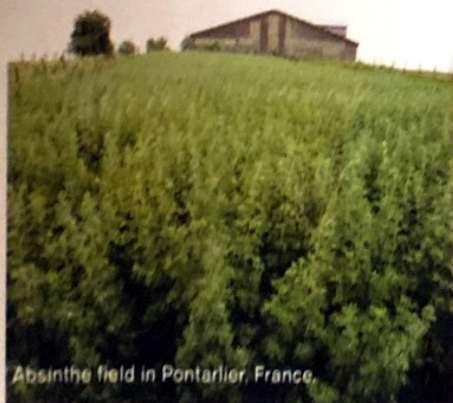
St. George Absinthe Verte's Winters, meanwhile, expresses that instead of putting out an absinthe just to be competitive, it is more important to make the product true to what has made absinthe special from the beginning. As a distiller, he feels it is most important to create products that satisfy them as artisanal producers before they put it on the market.

"If something we put out is a hit with the market, then that's great. If not, we still feel that we created something that feeds our souls as distillers," he says. "Absinthe is one of the most complex spirits

Absolutely Absinthe

To preserve the spirit's integrity, here are some helpful hints.

- Store at a cool, steady temperature, 13 - 18 °C (55 to 65 °F).
- Protect bottles from direct sunlight and vibration.
- Bottles with a cork may be stored on their sides and rotated to insure that the cork remains moist.
- Store bottles with screw-on caps upright to prevent leakage.
- To serve Absinthe using the French method, slowly pour cold water over a cube of sugar resting on a slotted spoon placed over a glass containing a small portion of absinthe. The cold water dissolves the sugar, and the solution trickles into the glass causing the absinthe to *louche*—giving the spirit its misty, cloudy appearance.
- According to Mata Hari's Steve Raye, it's a good idea to familiarize oneself with the current categories of absinthe:
 - Parisian (made from grand wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*; what got banned, "Real" absinthe, naturally colored)
 - Bohemian Style (reduced amounts of anise seed)
 - Swiss (clear white liquid without artificial coloring, that clouds up strongly and develops the typical creamy bluish-white; also known as "La Bleue")
 - Czech-Sinthe (a fabricated spirit, with artificial and natural ingredients mixed).



Absinthe field in Pontarlier, France.



that we ever made here, and we are going to continue to make it that way. This is what's going to help distinguish our absinthe from others. We have years of experience being able to distill things that are beautiful and complex, and we are proud that we can do that with our absinthe as we have done with Hangar One vodkas and our other spirits. What's even more interesting, however, is that there are several new absinthes coming up on the scene that are fantastic. There are enough ingredients in a authentic absinthe that all a good distiller needs to do is tweak a couple of those ingredients just a little bit to make it very different from somebody else's. Even with the six best absinthes on the market, you can tell each one of them apart blindfolded because they all integrate the ingredients a little differently resulting in subtle differences."

Garver, meanwhile, finds it is exciting to watch various accounts make Le Tourment Vert their own. "While absinthe was consumed in a very specific way 100 years ago, and has that allure and that history, never again will a beverage make such a dramatic comeback, back from being banned, in the way absinthe has," she notes. "100 years ago, absinthe was used in dashes and small doses in cocktails, because of its bitter taste due to anise and wormwood. In Le Tourment Vert, you can use a full ounce or two in cocktails and it still tastes great, thanks to its flavor profile and lower alcohol content. We can even say it can be considered the best cocktail absinthe on the market today because we are promoting the fact you can 'torment' any cocktail with our absinthe."

The Blackmint Distillery and Alta-

mar Brands, LLC has partnered to bring Kübler, the first authentic Swiss Absinthe, to the United States market in nearly 100 years. Named for founder Yves Kübler, the four-generations old brand became available to consumers in New York City, Las Vegas, Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco in late 2007. Last year, the brand moved into Chicago, Miami, Baltimore, Nashville, New Orleans, Scottsdale, and Kentucky, and is expected to move into other top tier markets in the near future. In 2004, when the Swiss government overturned the ban, the founder's great grandson, Yves Kübler went back into business producing original formula. At precisely the same time, he and his Export Director, Peter Karl, set their sights on the United States, and after many years of negotiations and thousands of hours of work, convinced the US government to allow the legal sale of authentic Kübler Absinthe in this country. "Dispelling the myths of absinthe was not an easy proposition," says Karl, "but in the end science prevailed and with the US authorities approval, we are able to bring our original formula to American consumers."

Artisan Imports, meanwhile, has brought Artemisia Superior Absinthe Verte into the U.S. This brand simultaneously embraces its traditional roots (using traditional European methods to bring the spirit based on an 1855 recipe to life) and modern demand for hand-crafted, artisan-hewn products.

The Artists' Colony



While reps from different brands may have differing opinions and facts on hand



Homage to Degas, one of the advertising executions for Grande Absente, which celebrates the 19th century Impressionist art and absinthe.



Pernod Fils advertisement by Charles Maire, circa 1901.

about what makes absinthe real, and when Americans were first able to enjoy the legend in a modern context, they all agree that artistry in production, from the collection and maceration of herbs to the bottles and labeling need to be executed in a way that is strictly artisanal, made with a definitive human touch.

"When a distiller has eleven or twelve really loud flavors and aromas (inherent in the ingredients) and every single one wants to dominate, it is his or her challenge to get all of them to integrate and play nicely on the palate," affirms Winters of his work on St. George Absinthe Verte. "That's where the real art for the distiller comes in, knowing exactly how much to use of each element and focusing on each flavor accordingly."

"We want to be sure that we have the highest quality absinthes we can make from the best ingredients in our bottles, and we take our production methods very seriously," says Nikola on behalf of Grande Absente. At the end of the day, consumers will either like it or hate it, so we want to present them the best product we can. Our recipe is from the south of France dating back to 1860, and we use the original still and adhere to the original artisanal methods and ingredients when making Grande Absente. We try to keep our packaging authentic to the art, history and legend, down to the slotted spoon to promote the ritual of the louche. Our packaging is also connected to artists, we have an artist series year-round gift box where artists did paintings for us and we worked that into the packaging design. Grande Absente's higher-

end product will launch a homage advertising campaign that will insert our bottle into famous paintings."

Packaging and marketing aside, Gurfein cautions that it is very easy to throw around words like artisanal, hand-crafted, handmade, because they are not susceptible to being disproved easily. "We have folks in France working at a 170 year-old distillery with equipment dating back to when the distillery was built," he attests, referring to video clips and photos that are part of their marketing efforts. "There is no better way to explain artisanal than showing how something is literally made by hand. No machines other than bottling, and Breau personally supervising the picking of the herbs. Even with the recession, premiumization of spirits has been a strong trend, as consumers want real value for their money. \$59.99, our retail price, is high because of the ingredients Ted uses and the artisanal way it is made, yet it is also a fair price considering all the work that goes into making it the proper way. The premium quality puts Lucid Absinthe Supérieure in the thick of what consumers in general have gravitated toward in the last few years—products that provide value through their quality, even though they are priced higher and produced in lower quantities."

Breaux calls attention to the fact in the nearly 100 years since Absinthe's ban, spirits producers lost sight of artisanal ways in their efforts to make things cheaper, more modernized and able to produce in greater volume. While the gradual changes resulted

in products industrial in nature and devoid of any real quality, consumers and clients immersed in the cocktail culture are looking keenly to bring fresh ingredients and authenticity back into their lives. Absinthes like those made available through Viridian address the need to get back to quality and to nature.

"Anybody who cares about what they spend and what they get for the money will reject artificial and industrially produced products," maintains Breaux. "Absinthe is the hot new 'old' spirit, with the distinctive flavors of anise and herbs distinguishing them from industrial modern spirits. Modern mixologists are on the forefront of generating a wider appreciation for the interesting, unique flavor of absinthe. While it is a challenging flavor to work with, mixologists are inspired by the challenge, and they have come up with modern absinthe drinks. Back in the day, there was one style of absinthe that prevailed, the Franco-Swiss style. Today, just like the gin category, there are now modern distillers in the US and Europe that are stretching the category. American producers, for example, are putting out Absinthe nouveau, something that while recognizable and authentic as absinthe has a distinctive, non traditional twist. It is good for the category because it broadens the spectrum. Some of these small distillery-produced absinthes lend themselves better to mixology than the "louche" style of traditional distilleries. It is out of necessity that these small distillers have widened the category. ■