



Photo: David Collier

Intoxicological Focus: The Green Fairy & The Jolly Red Elf

By Bill deTurk
Editor at Large

It is that time of year again; for the entire month of December, you get to hear me tell that joke about why Mary left the Christmas party. Ahem. ... Filled with holiday spirits, one's thoughts also turn to the happy, carefree memories of youth and visions of sugarplums that dance gleefully in your head. For the last 200 years or so, many have claimed that one way to achieve such a vision, as well as many others, is to imbibe a little of *la fée verte* (the green fairy) — absinthe.

I recently had the opportunity to share the experience of drinking this often misunderstood spirit and talk with two gentlemen with strong Louisiana connections who are playing different yet significant roles in the way we look at absinthe in our state today. Jedd Haas is the president of *Atelier Vie*, an artisanal distiller in the center of New Orleans who is producing absinthe in both traditional and New World styles. Ted Breaux is a native of the Crescent City who led the effort to get absinthe re-legalized in the United States. In 2007, his brand, *Lucid*, became the first genuine absinthe to receive a certificate of label approval for importation into the United States since 1912. While absinthe traces its origin to Switzerland in the late 1700s, its popularity peaked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jedd picks up the story with one of the reasons why. "In part because the French wine industry had suffered the devastating harvests, Absinthe was marketed as a substitute. The French wine industry

was not very happy about that. They, basically, managed to get some propaganda going and had absinthe banned in the early 1900s. It was banned in the United States in 1912. Three years later, it was prohibited in most of Europe as well.

The list of notable absinthe drinkers is quite long, and full of most interesting personalities, including Ernest Hemingway, Oscar Wilde, Vincent van Gogh, and Erik Satie. Jedd shares a little about one of the spirit's more notorious fans, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. "He is one of the namesakes of our absintnes. ... In fact, his family staged a number of interventions to try and cut down on his absinthe drinking. He resorted to carrying a hollow cane filled with absinthe." Toulouse-Lautrec was one of the few notable Parisians who loved "American" cocktails in a country full of wine purists. He is credited with creating the *Temblement de Terre* ("Earthquake") cocktail, which is three parts absinthe and three parts cognac. ... *tremblement* indeed!

As I met Jedd Haas on a recent Sunday morning to find out about his unusual absinthe, which is not green but red, he greeted me with a perfectly iced glass of one of his latest creations to hit the market, *Riz*. *Riz* is an unaged, double-distilled whiskey made from 100% Louisiana rice distilled from Crowley, "the rice capital of America." Jedd believes he is producing and selling the only whiskey of its kind in America, possibly the only one.

Jedd Haas is an artist and musician, which I suppose by virtue of being such, has held



TOULOUSE GREEN

Toulouse Green is the latest addition to the Atelier Vie portfolio. Unlike Toulouse Red, which is a "three-spirit" absinthe, this is based on traditional absinthe recipes from the 1800s. "For people who like the classic taste of absinthe, they will like Toulouse Green very much," Jedd pointed out a very special ingredient used, locally grown wormwood. "It makes a wonderful difference in the flavor. Think of the difference of using, say, fresh basil versus dry basil. There is obviously a big, big difference here." Jedd hopes to increase the use of not just wormwood, but other locally grown herbs as well. Look on the bottle for a sketch that Jedd made, based on a Toulouse-Lautrec self-portrait caricature from 1885.

than a few jobs along the way. During one stint as an electronics factory worker, he discovered an interest in mass production and making things in an efficient manner. After seeing what Old New Orleans Rum was doing in the late 1990s, he developed an interest in distilling and thought about combining his passions. "It seemed like a really cool idea. I started looking into the legalities, but it was very daunting." After years of research and red tape, *Atelier Vie* finally got its licenses and officially opened for business in August 2012.

Its flagship product is Toulouse Red. For historical precedent and inspiration, Jedd cites a poster of red absinthe from more than 100 years ago that he found on the Wormwood Society website. "Other than that, very little is known about it. Instead of re-creating a classic formulation, I decided to try something new. "It has an absinthe base, but we use hibiscus to color it red, and that gives it a floral note to it. Some people have described Toulouse Red as like drinking liquid Good & Beautiful."

In addition to Toulouse Red and Riz, *Atelier Vie* produces a traditional absinthe, Toulouse Green (see inset), and Buck 125 Vodka. Jedd describes why the vodka is special: "Buck 125 is a 125-proof infusion vodka. It is designed, really, for chefs and bartenders and creative mixologists to make their own flavors." Vodka is normally produced

at 80 proof (40% alcohol). The higher alcohol content of their 62.5% spirit extracts flavors from infused ingredients much more efficiently. Self-described *Atelier Vie* "distiller, consultant, welder" Jascha Jacobson points out that the name was inspired by the \$1.25 it costs to ride the street car in New Orleans. This spirit allows everyone to make their own flavored vodkas in just a few days — without the artificial ingredients often found in commercially available products. Keep an ear open for the ice cubes jingling around a glass of *Atelier Vie* gin in the near future as well. Since it is still in the process of expanding its distribution network, *Atelier Vie* products are available online at FederalSpirits.com if they are not available at your favorite liquor store. •

Please join me next time for the conclusion to our absinthe tale!

Bayou Root

- 1 part Toulouse Red
- 2 parts Root Beer (preferably a good Louisiana-brewed brand)

Fill a tall glass with ice. Add root beer, then drizzle absinthe for cool mixing and color effect. Stir before drinking.



Bill deTurk is the world's only known master intoxicologist, which is probably a good thing. He is the former director of beverage education at the Crescent Schools, where he oversaw the bartending and beverage management curricula at the school's campuses in New Orleans, Gulfport, Mississippi, and Las Vegas, Nevada, and is the author of *The Big Easy Bartending Guide*. He has won numerous cocktail and brewfest awards, created a river of signature libations, and speaks at trade events.