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Glencoe News (IL)

Absinthes from Lake Bluff to Paris: How they rate

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The following reviews were made using a system based on the one developed by the Fee Verte online absinthe community. A total of 100 points are available. All of the samples were purchased at retail and prepared with a 3:1 mix of water to absinthe, without sugar. If you have a favorite we've missed, please let us know. Email sburrows@pioneerlocal.com.

Lucid Absinthe Superieure

Country of origin: France. Imported by Viridian Spirits, New York

Color before water: 5/10. A bit hazy and more of a pale yellow verging on green than the peridot color of 19th century legend. Keep in mind color is a side effect of a flavoring step in production, not the main point of the beverage.

Louche action: 8/10. Good trails and a slow bottom-up clouding effect. Some people get very caught up in the "tabletop theater" of adding water to absinthe. I'm not one of them, although it's good to pay attention to the louche when you first try a new brand. It tells you something about the formulator's skill and the quality of the ingredients.

Color after water: 7/10. The pale yellow actually develops into more of a soft opalescent, if faint, green.

Aroma: 25/30. Good balance of anise with the earthy/woody aroma of wormwood and other ingredients. There's a distinct spicy note. Maybe fennel.

Mouth-feel: 7/10. Decent thickness and tongue-numbing effect. This is a tough category to judge unless you've had some of the top premium brands and some of the worst for comparison

Taste: 16/20. A good clean herbal taste with a balance of anise and bitterness with enough complexity to make it interesting. That spicy flavor grows on you in time, but it could stand to be toned down a notch.

Overall impression: 8/10. Lucid isn't in the same league as creator T.A. Breaux's Jade line of premium absinthes, but no mass-market mid price range product can compete on that field. As the first brand back on the U.S. market in 95 years, Lucid stands up very well as a traditional French-style verte absinthe.

Total points: 76/100

Kubler Swiss Absinthe Superieure

Country of Origin: Switzerland, Imported by Altamar Brands, LLC

Color before water: 10/10. Like all Swiss-style blanche absinthes, Kubler is colorless by nature, so there's little to judge but clarity. This one is crystal clear.

Louche action: 8/10

Color after water: 8/10. Soft white and opalescent.

Aroma: 21/30. Herbal and very clean but also very soft and not as perfumed as a verte. In the bottle, it almost has a butterscotch character along with the anise and wormwood somewhere in the background. With water, those aromas blossom a bit more.

Mouth-feel: 7/10. Velvety, but a little too soft at 3:1. At 106 proof, Kubler is a mother's milk of an absinthe and could stand

less water.

Taste: 15/20. Blanche absinthes have to be judged differently from vertes because there are layers of complexity which just simply aren't there in an uncolored absinthe. There's nothing off-putting at all in Kubler. It's a very soft and clean taste characteristic of well-chosen fresh herbs. It could stand a touch more wormwood. Maybe a touch more of everything.

Overall impression: 7/10. Kubler brings a very fine collection of herbal flavors to the table but uses them a little too sparingly. That said, it's a good example of a lighter style of absinthe which might appeal to drinkers who want less alcohol and no over-the-top flavors. As a final note, Kubler is probably the best bargain. Where most makers sell a skinny-shouldered 750 ml bottle for \$60, Kubler offers a full, fat liter for only \$49.95.

Total points: 76/100

Sirene Absinthe Verte

North Shore Distillery, Lake Bluff

Color before water: 9/10. Rich, natural olive color, and maybe one that's technically a little too intense, but Sirene is a young product, having rolled out in May. Green absinthe starts out with deep hues and fades in the aging process.

Louche action: 7/10. Nice thick swirls, a little quick in clouding.

Color after water: 9/10. Sirene reaches that characteristic milky green of the old paintings without resorting to artificial dyes

Aroma: 27/30. Very rich and intriguing perfume-like quality.

Mouth-feel : 6/10 Thinner and flatter than the richness of its aroma would suggest.

Taste: 17/20. Great collection of complexity and complimentary flavors that reveal themselves slowly with each sip. Something, maybe lemon balm, is playing a citrus note a little too loudly in an orchestra where herbal and earthy flavors are supposed to prevail.

Overall impression: 9/10. Sirene has been called a very good first effort by a domestic absinthe maker, the first available in the Midwest since 1912. That's a lot of qualifiers. Sirene holds up well against any of the U.S. competition at the time of this writing and a number of those you can still only get overseas on the Internet. Along with North Shore's flavored vodkas and gins, Sirene is a craft-made product. The production line is fed by one man and one still. For now, Derek Kassebaum's customers get to reap the results of that magical and fleeting moment in the entrepreneurial cycle where product decisions aren't driven by focus groups or the penny-pinching production economics of churning something out by the million. Kassebaum loves the art of distillation and works to impress himself.

Total points: 84/100

La Fee Parisienne

Country of origin: Distilled in France for Green Utopia, Limited, United Kingdom

Color before water: 3/10. An obvious dye job, not a hint of natural plant color. It's one saving grace is that it's at least a nice bright emerald, rather than the atomic neon green/tourquoise dumped in by some makers.

Louche action: 7/10. Does what it's supposed to.

Color after water: 7/10. Translucent. The green dye hits it mark consistently.

Aroma: 22/30. Heavy anise and alcohol, but there is a strong wormwood/herbal scent to balance.

Mouth-feel: 7/10. Decent fullness.

Taste: 6/10. Strong, almost candy-like black licorice blast. To be fair, there is enough bitterness to round that out but it's rather two-dimensional.

Overall impression: 6/10. When La Fee made its debut in London and on the Internet about a decade ago, it stood head and shoulders above most of the swill then available. I've purchased, and enjoyed more than a couple of bottle since. It's really not bad stuff, but given today's choices, it's not \$59.95 good either. At half the price, I'd give it a place at the back of the liquor cabinet, and if it becomes the one brand that every bar keeps in stock, I'd still order one from time to time.

Total points: 51/100

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