

After nearly a century of prohibition, Lucid (*right*) is the first absinthe legally available in the U.S. For \$59.95 (for a 750ml bottle), you could be drinking what the stars of the art world were drinking at the turn of the 20th century — and what celebrities and rock stars are drinking at the turn of the 21st.

Baz Luhrmann's 2001 film *Moulin Rouge!*, set in 19th century is, Ewan McGregor's character sips a glass of absinthe. Then ie Minogue appears as the "Green Fairy," the legendary appress associated with the opaque green liquor, and she ices him to consume more, promising magic and phantasgorical splendor. The next sip sets him all a-twitter, her promfulfilled.

Though the scene lasts less than three minutes, it encapsues the danger, seduction and alleged depths of degeneration ich have long been linked to this drink. Absinthe is a liquor dised from herbs, including wormwood (Artemesia absinthium), se and fennel (which gives the drink its distinctive color and drice taste). It was first introduced in Switzerland as an elixir; by late 18th century, it was a popular herbal remedy in France. Absinthe later caught on with artists and the intellectual wd; as a result, it was immortalized in the paintings of artists Picasso, Manet and Degas, who referred to their liquid inspiron as the "Fée Verte" (Green Fairy) because they believed it the them hallucinogenic visions and produced clarifying effects the mind. At that time, absinthe was cheap and readily availer, at its height, the French chugged it faster than frat boys at egger — to the tune of 36 million liters a year.

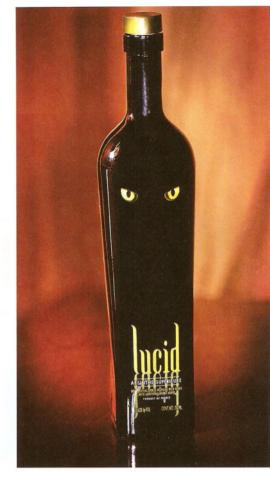
NNED THEN DELIVERED

ortly after the turn of the 20th century, the story of this Green ry took a sharp turn. Because absinthe also contained rijone — a potentially toxic compound said to have caused enity, murder and licentious behavior — several European untries banned the liquor. The U.S. followed in 1912, restrictabsinthe's availability but heightening its bad reputation.

Subsequently, modern science debunked many myths surnding absinthe, including the idea that it contains large ounts of hallucinogenic thujone. In 1988, France quietly lifted ban on absinthe production and it returned to the market, rugh it was still banned in the United States. Thrill-seeking perican absinthe drinkers worked around the ban by imbibing load, ordering imported bottles off the Internet or smuggling m back from Eastern Europe.

In 2007, the United States finally lifted its ban, making gene absinthe available in America for the first time in nearly a

century, and New York-based Viridian Spirits began importing Lucid, the first legal, genuine absinthe, from France. To counter absinthe's negative reputation, Viridian turned to an American-born absinthe expert and T.A. historian. Breaux, to develop its formula. Lucid is made using auth-



entic techniques including antique copper stills and pure French herbs. The new product has just a minute amount of thujone, allowing it to pass U.S. regulations.

AN ABSINTHE PRIMER

Since it is a whopping 124 proof, the Viridian recommends Lucid be consumed in the traditional manner, using the classic French absinthe ritual. First, pour a measure, or "dose," of absinthe into a glass. Place a sugar cube on a perforated spoon and lay it on the rim of the glass, and then slowly drip iced water onto the sugar cube. The sugar will gradually dissolve and drip, along with the water, into the absinthe. (The usual measure is three to four parts water added to one part of absinthe.) This process causes the green liquor to louche (meld) into an opaque opalescent white as the essential oils precipitate out of the alcoholic solution. The result promises drinkers heightened clarity combined with the usual effects of strong alcohol.

Part of absinthe's appeal will always be its reputation as the demon in the bottle, even though we now know that it can be consumed safely. That said, we must encourage to you to enjoy it responsibly. Consuming too large a quantity of anything can be dangerous, and even water intoxication can kill (as evidenced by a recent tragic radio stunt). As always, everything in moderation — no matter how fantastic the ride promises to be. ——