



The absinthe minded award winner

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A small distillery on the Gold Coast has taken on the establishment in Europe and won. And it's all for a brew shrouded in mystery and intrigue.

Michael and Alla Ward's Absinthe won a gold medal at the World Spirits Competition, "we actually got ninety four out of a hundred. A gold", explains Michael, "and it was in Austria. They're pretty conservative there. For a feral little lot like us on Tamborine Mountain to go over there and compete in the World Spirit Competition, it's exciting for Australia, Queensland, and Tamborine Mountain...We're not recognised as a nation that produces hard liquor. There are just so few legal operating distilleries in the whole country. To achieve what we've achieved, for the nation, is exciting."

Absinthe is a spirit made famous, some say infamous, in the 1800s, "we play along with it a little bit. It's always wonderful to have a bit of story, something that's got a bit of mystique to it", Alla says.

"It caused a lot of drama for a hundred years because it was banned!" Michael laughs. "I guess it has been laced with all this mystery", Alla adds, "In bygone years they did blame the wormwood component, but I guess in the 1800s it was cheap, the artists would buy it, and probably get sloshed by lunchtime! Essentially it's the Wormwood, that's what's kick started the fascination with Absinthe. It's the high alcohol, I think, that gets everyone a bit potty, it certainly shouldn't have to do anything with the wormwood. In controlled amounts it creates a lovely bitters. Wormwood has been used in medicines for centuries, initially it was used to purge intestinal worms."

For a nation known for its beer drinking, who drinks this drop? "I guess historically speaking it would have been a Bohemian artist, and anyone who might aspire to a historical reference to one", Alla says, "it's a personal thing. If you love that aniseed coming through, it's a nice drink to have before a meal, but there's no fixed rule how to have it." She quickly adds, "in moderation!"

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Michael and Alla Ward

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