

XVIII

ORIGINALES



AUTHENTIKES

XXI

ABSINTHES

DU VAL-DE-TRAVERS
DEPUIS TOUJOURS





Soft to the touch – silky to the eye – wormwood or absinthe is a plant full of paradox. Its tender down melts even the hardest heart, yet if you pull off one of its leaves and squash it between your fingers, it will release a bitter smell that will make your stomach turn if you are foolish enough to remain close by. So there is a paradox in the plant itself, and this paradox has found its expression in the stories surrounding it. The herb was well-known in Antiquity. The Egyptians, on the one hand, held it in high esteem as a plant of great healing, on the other hand, the Bible, in the book of Revelation, describes it as dangerous and destructive, for the name given to the star that destroys a third of all waters is wormwood.

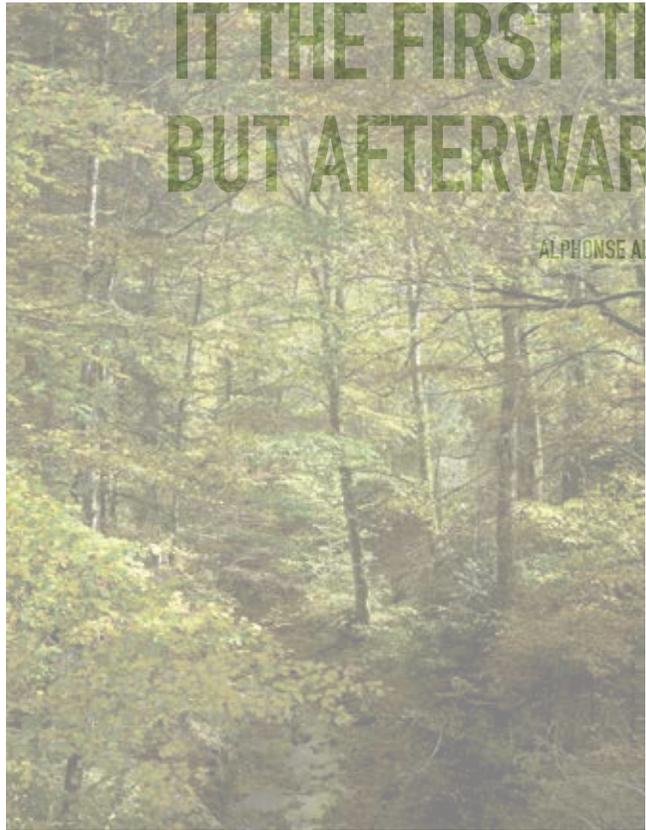
Two hundred years ago, far away from town and noise, in an isolated valley of the Jura Arc, an alcoholic drink was invented based on this paradoxical herb. Though wormwood is feared in the Bible, the bitter drink which is derived from it quickly became very popular. The very bitterness of the draught recalls the harshness of the climate of the valley in which it was first created. From its very beginning it became the favourite drink of artists, while decried by its opponents as a deadly poison. Just like the valley of its origins, the drink has known its ups and downs, its periods of glory and its periods of destitution.

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EPHEMERAL
SAVoured ON
FEARED FOR
AND IF I DRINK
IT I HAVE M

ABSINTHE IS GOOD
NOT WHEN ONE SWALLOWS

MY GLORY
ING BUT AN
L. ABSINTHE
THE QUIET,
R TREASON,
K MORE OF
MY REASON

PAUL VERLAINE, 1889



IT THE FIRST TIME
BUT AFTERWARDS

ALPHONSE ALLAIS
1885



THE SOURCE OF THE MYTH

Absinthe – the plant is called wormwood in English. But let us look at the botanical, the Latin name of the herb: *Artemisia Absinthium*. The Romans used the word *Absinthium* in imitation of a similar expression in Greek, but the origin of the word is lost in the mists of time as it is older than the Greek language. The word *Artemisia* refers to the virginal goddess of hunting, Artemis, daughter of Zeus and twin sister of Apollo. She was of fascinating beauty and had an unpredictable character, capable both of great cruelty and of great compassion.

Pliny the Elder (Latin writer of the first century AD) maintains that wormwood was used in a potion in antique Rome. Apparently, wormwood-based concoctions were offered to the winners of chariot races in order to remind them that even glory may have a bitter side.

The idea to distil an alcoholic drink based on the herb appeared in the first quarter of the 19th century. The plant had been used even earlier by apothecaries of the period for all sorts of old wives' remedies. Historians agree that the alcoholic drink by the name of Absinthe first appeared in Couvet in the Val-de-Travers. The very origin of the recipe is supposed to have come from a concoction put together by a certain Mother Henriod in the middle of the 18th century. She produced the elixir first by infusion, and later by distillation. An advertisement in the "Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel" in 1769 praised a "very good wormwood extract". An inhabitant of the village of Couvet, a certain Major Dubied, with a sure flair for business, realized the marketing potential for such a beverage. He bought the recipe and adapted it. In 1798 he opened the first industrial distillery where the present Bourquin cardboard



factory stands. At the time when the first drops of Absinthe percolated from the still, Major Dubied could hardly imagine how popular the drink was to become in taverns and pubs of the 19th century. Who would have thought that it would be the favourite drink of men and women of all social classes? Business increased fast, as a matter of fact business became so successful, that, in 1805, Major Dubied opened a second distillery in Pontarlier in the Doubs department in order to avoid customs duties. In a relatively short time, in particular in the last quarter of the 19th century, that is to say the period in which the beverage reached the height of its popularity, this wormwood- based alcoholic drink became known as Absinthe. It was savoured with a certain ritual as water was poured on to it make it opaque.

The consumption of the “Green Fairy” or “la bleue”, as the beverage became to be known, grew to tremendous proportions. In the year 1900 there were no less than thirteen distilleries in the district of the Val-de-Travers employing more than five hundred people. In France, the yearly consumption was more than 350,000 hectolitres, which meant about two litres per adult per year.





7



BSYNTHE





THE HEROIC TIMES OF THE RESISTANCE

On the 28th of August 1905, a certain Jean Lanfray, a winegrower by trade, came home dead drunk. After a violent quarrel with his pregnant wife he killed her and his children. There was a public outcry and the “Green Fairy” was blamed. Very quickly the religious press as well as the winegrowers’ publications discovered other crimes to be laid at the feet of the “Green Fairy”. Pressurized by these events and the arguments of its opponents, the Swiss people were called to decide whether to forbid the drink or not. On the 5th of July 1908 the painful result of the vote was disclosed: with 241,000 votes in favour of abolition against 139,000, all the cantons, with the exception of Neuchâtel and Geneva, banned the “Green Fairy”. From the 7th of October 1910 on, it was strictly forbidden to produce, transport or sell the alcohol. The article, inscribed in the Federal Constitution, did not forbid drinking the elixir in private. But at that time it seemed as if a page had been turned forever.

However, nobody had reckoned with the unrelenting stubbornness of the inhabitants of the Val-de-Travers: now began the long but persistent underground existence of the “Green Fairy”. Disused stills were lying about all over the area. Very quickly illicit distillers, bootleggers, resisting the new order, again started producing the forbidden drink in their basements and cellars. The state-controlled office of alcohols and spirits obviously did not approve, and it intervened regularly in the district. For instance, between 1930 and 1936, fifty-eight illegal distillers were indicted for breach of the absinthe law. In 1937 they were sixty-seven, in 1938 fifty-seven were charged with the same offence. 1960 was again a particularly black year for bootleggers, because about thirty of them were apprehended. Even an elderly woman, “la Malotte”, who had been distilling in secret, was charged and sentenced. After the judge read

her sentence, she told him: “My dear man, I’m 83 years old and I have been producing “la bleue” for sixty years. At my age, old habits die hard”. Of course it must be said that for most people the fact of being caught was no reason to be ashamed, it was considered a reference, an honour.

MYTH AND REALITY, LEGEND
AND HISTORY, EMBLEM AND
OBJECT, MUSE AND INHIBITOR,
HEROINE AND VICTIM, ANGEL
AND DEMON, PRAISED AND
CURSED, CHOSEN AND DAMNED,
BALM AND POISON, OLD
WIFE’S REMEDY AND POISONED
NIGHTCUP. PARADISE AND





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AS IF IT WERE A LAMP, AND
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AND MANY MEN DIED OF THE
MADE BITTER





THE “FAIRY” REHABILITATED.

On the 18th of April 1999, in the course of the revision of the Federal Constitution, article 32 forbidding absinthe was repealed. Yet the drink remained prohibited by a law on foodstuffs. On the 6th of December 2001, and in agreement with federal and cantonal authorities, a distillery of the Val-de-Travers, Blackmint, Kübler & Wyss at Môtiers, was the first to produce a drink made from a wormwood or absinthe extract again, exactly a week before a distillery in Pontarlier did likewise. This was brought about through a compliance with the law on foodstuffs. On Monday June 13, 2004, after the overwhelmingly favourable vote of the Senate, it was the turn of the Lower Chamber to modify the law on foodstuffs and thus ratified the rehabilitation of the “Green Fairy”.

Nearly a century after its condemnation, absinthe returned triumphantly to its country of origin. Nowadays, the “Green Fairy” is produced quite legally in the region. And the region is determined to defend the product which it created by means of a protected label of its geographic origin.



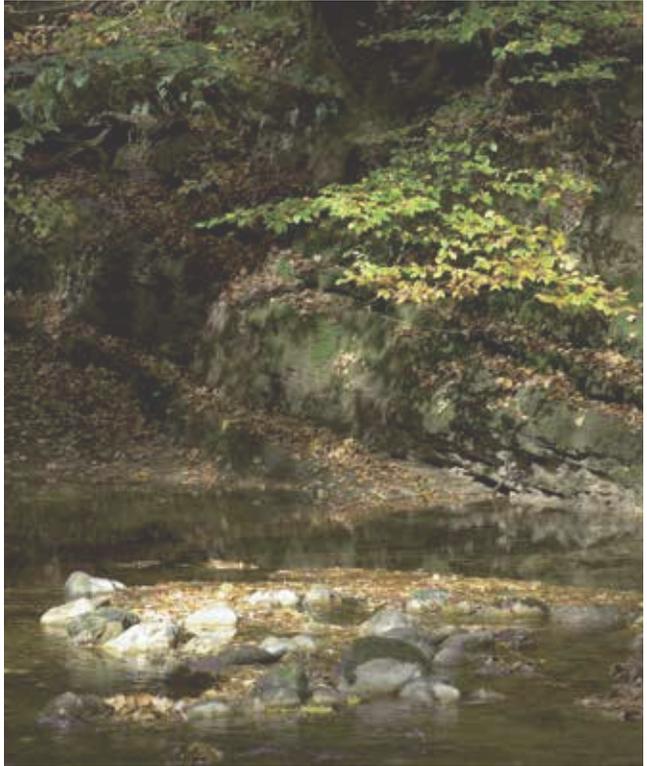


AFTER THE FIRST GLASS
THINGS AS YOU WISH THEM TO BE.
AFTER THE SECOND, YOU SEE THEM
AS THEY ARE NOT. FINALLY, YOU SEE
THINGS AS THEY REALLY ARE.
THAT IS THE MOST HORRIBLE THING
THAT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU.



SS YOU SEE
HEY WERE.
SEE THINGS
LY YOU SEE
Y ARE, AND
E THING IN
HE WORLD.

OSCAR WILDE, L'ABSINTHE



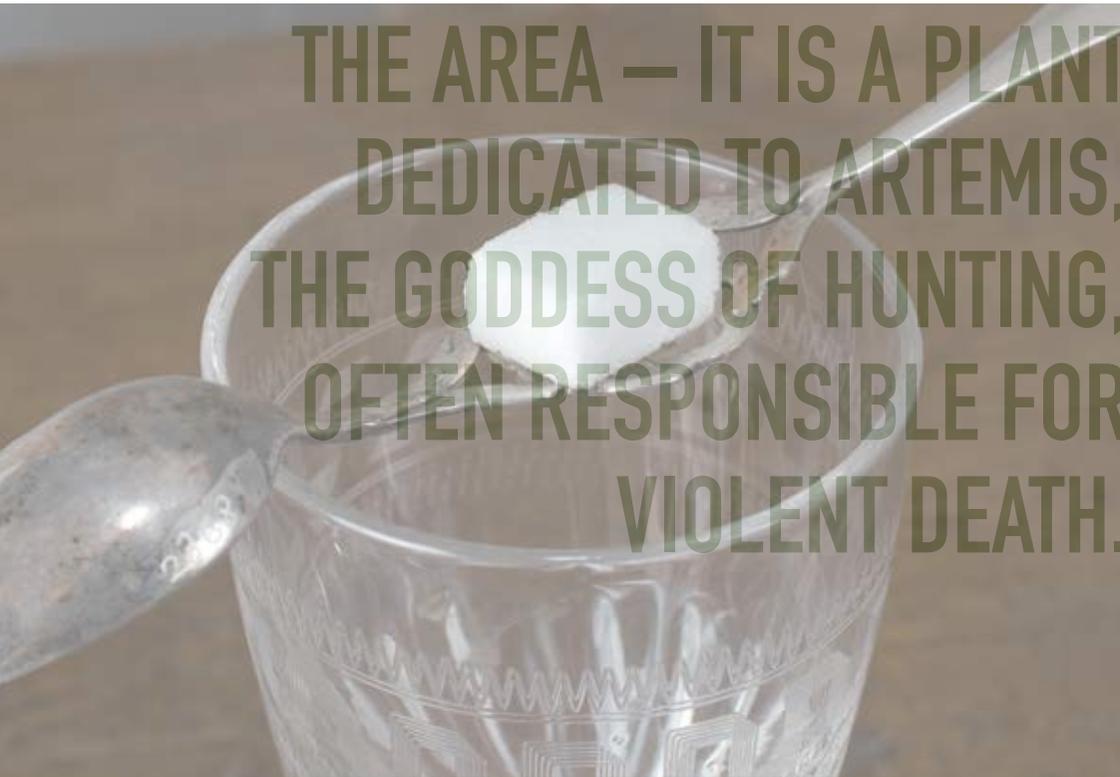


BEARERS OF A LEGACY

The interprofessional association of absinthe producers unites most producers in the Val-de-Travers. It was created at the time when the production of absinthe was again legalized in Switzerland, that is on March 1, 2005. But the beginning of absinthe production in the Val-de-Travers goes back much further in time. The famous tale of the long lasting love affair between the green valley and the blue drink need hardly be retold, historians have established the fact that absinthe was actually invented and commercialized in the Val-de-Travers. This valley surrounded by limestone mountains cuts through the Jura Arc transversally, linking Neuchâtel in Switzerland to Pontarlier in France. During the prohibition the inhabitants of the valley even became bootleggers in order to continue the work handed down to them by their forefathers.

The interprofessional association does not only intend to establish a label of origin for the product, to defend and administer it, but also to promote Val-de-Travers absinthe and to coordinate all efforts undertaken for its development. The association unites the absinthe producers of the Val-de-Travers as well as those people who grow the plants and herbs which are necessary for its production. Beside the statutory aims, the association would like to present a united front for all absinthe producers. The desire to obtain a label of origin was certainly the initial reason for the creation of the interprofessional association, but above all its members share one great ambition, to defend and promote a product of high quality, and they are justified to consider themselves the proud bearers of a century-old legacy.

CHERNOBYL, IN UKRAINIAN,
A RELATED PLANT,
MUGWORT, ARTEMISIA
VULGARIS WHICH GROWS IN
THE AREA – IT IS A PLANT
DEDICATED TO ARTEMIS,
THE GODDESS OF HUNTING,
OFTEN RESPONSIBLE FOR
VIOLENT DEATH.





DISTILLERIES AND PLANT GROWERS

ABSINTHE DE L'HERBORISTE

PIERRE-ANDRÉ VIRGILIO

Pierre-André Virgilio, rue de la Gare 5a, 2114 Fleurier
T 032 861 10 48, F 032 861 40 37
droguerie.virgilio@bluwin.ch

ABSINTHERIE DU PÈRE FRANÇOIS

FRANÇOIS BEZENÇON

What would the history and secrets of absinthe in the Val-de-Travers be without François Bezençon? This “father” of absinthe distils on the very premises which also hold his “Absinthe Room” with his remarkable collection of objects linked to the drink. François Bezençon has acquired the objects over many years and many contacts. One day he decided to open his cellars to visitors who thus not only learn about distilling the precious drink but who also discover the many objects connected with the drink in his private museum.

Bezençon Boissons Sàrl, Ruelle Rousseau 5, 2114 Fleurier.
T 032 861 23 18, F 032 861 45 33,
www.absintherie.ch, bezencon.boissons@bluemail.ch
Visits by appointment, see website

BLACKMINT SA

YVES KÜBLER

Bigger, older and probably the best known, the absinthe distillery of Kübler and Wyss at Môtiers has an annual production of several hundred thousand litres. Why so much? Perhaps to satisfy their worldwide clientele. The recipe remains identical to that of the firm's founders, which dates back to before the prohibition of the mythical product. Kübler and Wyss were the first to

produce an “Absinthe Extract” in December 2001, followed by authentic absinthe from March 1st 2005.

Rue du Creux-aux-Loups 2, 2112 Môtiers, T 032 861 14 69,
F 032 861 23 42, www.blackmint.ch, info@blackmint.ch
No visits except by professionals of the food and drink industry

BOVET RACINE SÀRL

THIERRY RACINE

There are already many years ago that absinthe perfumes everyday life of Thierry Racine. Indeed this long underground drinking, accompanied the family aperitifs in his village in Val-de-Travers. Carefully to be able to continue this tradition and to develop a quality product, Thierry Racine founded along with Sylvie Bovet and former clandestine Fritz Delachaux the Bovet Racine Sàrl. society in 2006.

Today he invites you to discover its absinthe, Opaline, which will enchant you with its balance between softness of plants and slight bitterness of absinthe.

Ch. de Montenay 1, 2114 Fleurier, T 032 861 28 68,
thierry.racine@bluwin.ch
No visits

CHRIS JULMY

From his early childhood on, Chris Julmy has been in contact with absinthe. A short time ago he got hold of his father's recipe for his own absinthe. It is not only the recipe that they have in common but also an attitude towards the drink: the desire to share this pleasure with others. He produces only a small amount, but for Chris it is not quantity but quality that matters, and he wants to cultivate the myth and ambiance that surrounds the Green Fairy.

Emer-de-Vattel 5, 2108 Couvet, T 032 863 15 26,
julmy@bluwin.ch
No visits

DISTILLERIE ARTEMISIA-BUGNON

CLAUDE-ALAIN BUGNON

Claude-Alain Bugnon was the forerunner of legal absinthe production. Already in 2004 he had a meeting with the federal office of alcohol and spirits in Bern to discuss the possibility of producing absinthe for countries where absinthe was not prohibited. His absinthe is the result of these talks and he decided to become a professional distiller. Yet for Claude-Alain Bugnon, producing absinthe is not just work, but a hobby, even a passion, and this passion drove him to fight for the re-introduction of the famous fairy. And he won't leave the green spirit alone, as he has played this risky and dangerous game for many, many years. He pretends that it is always risky to distil because of the danger that the Fairy might try to bewitch her creator.

Grand Rue 32a, 2108 Couvet, T 032 863 36 46,
www.absinthe-suisse.com, info@absinthe-suisse.com
 Visits welcome

DISTAB SÀRL

PIERRE-ANDRÉ STAUFFER

Pierre-André Stauffer produces his drink behind a chemist's shop, where, in the old days, he used to obtain all the necessary ingredients. Nowadays, he need no longer hide at the bottom of the garden in order to distil or to receive his friends who have come to taste his absinthe. Pierre-André Stauffer is also licensed to distil for other people and not only his own recipe. He has not forgotten the years of illicit production. In 2005, as he ventured into legal production, he took out a special licence allowing him to do just that - to distil for anybody. Though everything is quite legal nowadays, he likes to think that by distilling the private (secret) mixtures of individuals he contributes in perpetuating the myth surrounding the drink.

Grand Rue 9, 2108 Couvet, T 032 863 20 36, F 032 863 20 26,
www.distab.ch, pierreandre.stauffer@distab.ch
 Visits by appointment, see website

DISTIVAL SÀRL

La Raisse is situated next to a brook, at the edge of a forest and fields, and the site is worth the visit in itself. Some years ago Thiery Guizzard discovered this place and knew he had found the right spot to start his absinthe distillery. In 2005 Marco Previtali joined his business. Their joint effort led to the creation of an "Absinthothèque" in 2009, which offers a special service: not only can people distil absinthe, either their own mixture or the one used by the owners of the distillery, but they can taste all the other makes from the Val-de-Travers. La Raisse is truly a temple of absinthe.

La Raisse, 2114 Fleurier, T 032 861 42 43, F 032 861 46 48,
www.distival.ch, info@distival.ch
 Visits on request

DISTILLERIE D'ABSINTHE LA P'TITE

GAUDENTIA PERSOZ

Mrs. Gaudentia Persoz from Couvet was the first woman to start distilling legal absinthe, and at her place it is the Green Fairy herself who welcomes visitors. Nowadays, Mrs. Persoz distils in her house in Couvet, following closely in the footsteps of the famous "Malotte". She produces four sorts of absinthe, but also quite a number of by-products like absinthe fountains and liqueurs.

Rue Fontenelle 9, 2108 Couvet, T 032 863 30 88, F 032 863 30 88,
www.absinthelaptite.ch, info@absinthelaptite.ch
 Visits by appointment, see website

ABSINTHE BOVET-LA VALOTE

WILLY BOVET

"Absinthe means my whole life". Willy Bovet is right of course, as he has been distilling since 1968, nearly getting caught quite a number of times. Maybe a little too often, because in 2005 he hesitated at first, wondering if he shouldn't end his long association with the Fairy. However, he accepts the challenge which

legalization represents. His distillery is well worth a visit just to hear him talk of the crazy years of bootlegging. His eyes sparkle when he remembers the great moments of his extraordinary honeymoon with the Green Fairy. And the story goes on. Nowadays, he produces “Tradition” and “Le Chat” and “Nostalgie”. Willy Bovet, by the way, is one of the rare distillers who gathers himself the herbs he needs.

Rue de la Gare 5, 2112 Môtiers, T/F 032 861 25 02, M 079 385 40 52,
www.absinthe-bovet.ch, willy.bovet@absinthe-bovet.ch
Visits on request

ABSINTHE LA VALOTE-MARTIN

FRANCIS MARTIN

On the first of March 2005, Francis Martin decided to come out into the open though he had been distilling for ages, using his grandfather's recipe. Nowadays, he produces 3 different sorts of absinthe, two at 52% vol. and one at 72%. For the stronger one he uses a label representing an 1896 illustration. His recipe and above all his enthusiasm have remained the same ever since he started distilling in 1972. His clients enjoy his recipe as much as in former times and the older ones never fail to tell him that it tastes just like the absinthe of their youth.

Rue du Quarre 10, 2113 Boveresse, T 032 861 26 54, M 079 907 72 79,
www.absinte-originale.ch, info@absinthe-originale.ch
Visits on request

ABSINTHE LA VALOTE-FORNONI

LUCIEN FORNONI

Absinthe is Lucien Fornoni's love and passion. Nowadays, as the crazy days of producing illegally have gone forever, he proudly presents his product. For Lucien Fornoni from Môtiers, distilling his absinthe is a sport. His pride in his product is quite justified,

the many years as a bootlegger helped him develop his specific drink, an absinthe just like the elixir people used to drink in 1920.

Grand-rue 19, 2112 Môtiers, T 032 861 38 39, F 032 861 38 49, M
078 924 38 39, www.absinthe-fornoni.ch, info@lavalote-fornoni.ch
Visits on request

LES ARTISANS DE L'ABSINTHE

ALAIN REY

In Alain Rey's case, absinthe is a family tradition. At the beginning he distilled in his father-in-law's still, he now uses an instrument that he has built himself. He produces two delicious sorts of absinthe which he shows to visitors with love and justified pride.

Rue de Buttes 9, 2114 Fleurier, T 032 866 11 49,
alainrey@bluewin.ch
Visits on request

RENÉ JEANJAQUET & CHRISTIANE REY

Already early in the morning there is a lovely smell of absinthe in the air. René Jeanjaquet is well aware of the fact that the different herbs unfold their scent best in the pure morning air. This distillery is rather difficult to find, which reminds us a little of the time when the drink was illegal. People whisper – presumably because they were used to it in the old days. The work is done early in the morning, in winter when the snow is still hard and icy, or in summer, long before the sun has reached its zenith and people feel inclined to sit down on a terrace to taste the local “bleue”, the blue spirit. A genuine distillery of times gone by.

Vy-Perroud 242, 2126 Les Verrières,
T 032 866 15 03, F 032 866 15 03
No visits

ACAV (ASSOCIATION DES CULTIVATEURS D'ABSINTHE DU VAL-DE-TRAVERS)

Passionate and meticulous: those two words apply to some farmers of the Val-de-Travers, members of ACAV, who have started to grow again the plants and herbs necessary for the production of the elixir. Grand and Roman wormwood (*artemisia absinthium* and *artemisia pontica*) and other herbs and plants are grown in the same fields as they were at the beginning of the 20th century. Their work is just as hard as it was as in earlier times and their dedication to the product has never wavered.

YVES CURRIT

Le Montsegand, 2105 Travers, T 079 217 50 58
y.currit@bluewin.ch

MARILISE BAUR

Le Mont, 2105 Travers

ANNABELLE GRISEL

Les Oeillons, 2105 Travers



ASSOCIATION INTERPROFESSIONNELLE DE L'ABSINTHE
www.absinthe-interprofession.ch