

Publication of an application pursuant to Article 17(6) of Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of spirit drinks

(2018/C 110/09)

This publication confers the right to oppose the application pursuant to Article 17(7) of Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽¹⁾

MAIN SPECIFICATIONS OF THE TECHNICAL FILE

‘ABSINTHE DE PONTARLIER’

EU No: PGI-FR-01870 — 16.4.2014

1. Organisation

‘ABSINTHE DE PONTARLIER’

2. Category of the spirit drink

‘Absinthe de Pontarlier’ belongs to the category ‘Other spirit drinks’ in Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 110/2008.

3. Description of the spirit drink, including the product’s physical, chemical and/or organoleptic characteristics

‘Absinthe de Pontarlier’ is a clear, pale-yellow spirit with greenish hues that contains no sediment. Water is added to the drink when it is consumed, giving it an ivory-like opalescent shade and a cloudiness that renders it opaque.

It is characterised by aromas reminiscent of common wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium* L.). These aromas are dominant compared to those of the other plants used to make ‘Absinthe de Pontarlier’.

If the product is aged in wood for several months, its colour becomes slightly darker and golden, the taste of anise gives way to that of absinthe and the product mellows.

When placed on the market for the consumer, the spirit contains at least 20 milligrams of thujone per litre of spirits. Its alcoholic strength by volume is equal to or higher than 45 %.

4. Definition of the geographical area concerned

The cultivation and drying of common wormwood, the maceration of the plants, the distillation of the macerate and the preparation and bottling of the spirit drink are carried out in the following municipalities of the department of Doubs: Arçon, Bannans, Bonnevaux, Boujailles, Bouverans, Bulle, Chaffois, Chapelle d’Huin, La Cluse-et-Mijoux, Courvières, Dommartin, Dompierre-les-Tilleuls, Doubs, Frasne, Granges-Narboz, Houtaud, Pontarlier, La Rivière-Drugeon, Sainte-Colombe, Vuillecin.

5. Description of the production method of the spirit drink

5.1. The cultivation of common wormwood

No fertilisers or herbicides are authorised.

5.2. The drying of common wormwood

The drying is carried out naturally, without a blower or mechanical ventilation. The plants may not be exposed to sunlight.

5.3. Maceration

The different plants and seeds used in the distillation of the spirit drink are macerated in ethyl alcohol of agricultural origin and water.

The different plants used to colour the spirit drink are macerated in an alcoholic medium.

It is forbidden to use plant extracts (including natural extracts).

The mixture to be macerated for the distillation must include common wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium* L.) and anise (*Pimpinella anisum*) in seed form.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 39, 13.2.2008, p. 16.

Roman wormwood (*Artemisia pontica*) and hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*) must be used when infusing the product with colouring substances.

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and mint (*Mentha* spp.) are authorised up to a maximum of 5 kilograms per hectolitre of pure alcohol from the macerate.

Other aromatic plants, with the exception of star anise, which is formally prohibited, are authorised up to a maximum of 1 kilogram per hectolitre of pure alcohol from the macerate.

5.4. Distillation

The distillation of the common wormwood and anise is obligatory.

The stills must be made of copper. Each still has a maximum capacity of 3 000 litres.

The distillation may comprise several consecutive stages.

5.5. Colouring

Colouring is obligatory. It is carried out exclusively by adding to the distillate obtained as prescribed above in 5.4:

— colouring plants, or

— an infusion of colouring substances as defined in 5.3, with the volume not exceeding 2 % of the volume of the finished product.

5.6. Preparation

The alcoholic strength by volume may not be increased after distillation, for example by adding ethyl alcohol of agricultural origin.

The spirit may be sweetened up to a maximum limit expressed as invert sugar of 35 grams per litre of finished product.

The spirit drink may be aged in wood. There may be no reference to ageing on the label unless the ageing in wood lasts for at least six months in oak barrels each having a maximum capacity of 600 litres. The minimum duration set out above must be uninterrupted, with the exception of any handling necessary for making the products.

The reduction, the ageing if applicable and the bottling are carried out on the same site as the distillation in order to make it possible to verify that the packaged products comply with the current specification through reinforced checks on their analytical and organoleptic characteristics.

6. Details bearing out the link with the geographical environment or the geographical origin

6.1. Specificity of the geographical area

6.1.1. Natural factors

This region has homogenous morphological, climatic and soil characteristics: it is a plateau with light and superficial soils not more than 30-40 centimetres deep. The highly alkaline soil with a silky-clay texture and a great number of calcareous stones has a low water reserve.

The altitude of around 750-900 metres means that temperatures are relatively mild in the summer, with annual temperatures averaging 7– 8 °C. Rainfall ranges from 1 400 to 1 600 millimetres a year and is slightly accentuated by the hilly landscape nearby.

The land of the Pontarlier region is ideally suited to the cultivation of the wormwood plant.

6.1.2. Human factors: know-how two centuries old

In the 18th century a number of texts in the Pontarlier region made mention of a liqueur called 'élixir d'Absinthe', in particular because of its medicinal properties.

Major Dubied transferred his production from Val-de-Travers, on the other side of the Swiss border, to Pontarlier on 14 February 1805. From that date onwards the number of distilleries kept on increasing in Pontarlier and surrounding areas, hand in hand with the growing consumption of absinthe. At the beginning of the 20th century there were 25 distilleries in the region. In 1907, the absinthe industry employed a total of over 3 000 persons in the arrondissement. Daily production reached 66 000 litres in 1914. Accounting for nearly one third of France's production, Pontarlier was the capital of absinthe.

In the first half of the 19th century, 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' started being exported throughout the world (Africa, America, China, etc.). Artists in the Paris of the day were swept away by the general enthusiasm for absinthe.

In the wake of the spirit's success, a great number of counterfeit products appeared, glutting the market. They were non-distilled absinthes of mediocre quality that were mass-produced by macerating plants in non-rectified alcohol or by using essences. Such beverages contained a number of harmful constituents, both from the alcohol and the heavy oils contained in the essences. In order to preserve the image of absinthe, which was threatened by those products, and make full use of the reputation of absinthe made in Pontarlier, the region's 25 liqueur producers worked to highlight the origin of their absinthes by including the word 'Pontarlier' systematically on each label starting in 1905.

In 1908, public prosecutor Edmond Couleur wrote a report at Parliament's request entitled: '*Au pays de l'absinthe*.' (Editions Société Anonyme d'imprimerie Montbéliardaise). In that document he explains the origins of absinthe production and shows the unique, solid historical link of that beverage to Pontarlier.

The countless labels of trademarks combining 'Absinthe' and 'Pontarlier', found notably in the numerous works written by Marie-Claude Delahaye ('*L'absinthe*', '*L'absinthe, art et histoire*', '*Promenades autour de l'Absinthe*', etc.) (Musée de l'Absinthe, 95430 Auvers-sur-Oise), attest to the ancient reputation of 'Absinthe de Pontarlier'.

Up until the 19th century, distilleries throughout France use the wormwood plants of Haut-Doubs.

The know-how and methods were kept alive during the prohibition of 'absinthe' thanks to aniseed-flavoured drinks, where the same procedures and materials were used as for the production of 'absinthe' before 1915.

Unlike pastis, which is a mixture of alcohol and of anise and liquorice extracts, the aniseed-flavoured drink made by Pontarlier since 1921 was a distilled anis (made by redistilling neutral alcohol together with anise) produced from anise. During that period, at least three anis brands distilled in Pontarlier referred to their origin, 'Pontarlier', on their labels. That aniseed-flavoured drink, generally known as 'Pont', was made in Pontarlier on the same premises and with the same materials and methods as 'absinthe' produced before 1915. Only the 'recipe' had to be changed by removing the wormwood and any plants producing a green colour, because in 1921 legislation forbade aniseed-flavoured drinks from containing wormwood or being green. That distilled anis is still produced in Pontarlier today.

Since 1988, when absinthe-based spirit drinks were authorised once again, the production of wormwood and the preparation of this spirit drink have been revived in the Pontarlier region in accordance with traditions that have been maintained without interruption.

Every year since 2002, during a major cultural event in Pontarlier called 'Absinthiades' dedicated to absinthe, a competition is organised for international absinthes (English, Swiss, Czech, German, etc.) marketed in France. Between 2002 and 2014, 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' spirits obtained 13 gold medals, 6 silver medals and 6 bronze medals.

Since 2012, absinthe has competed in a specific category during the Concours Général Agricole de Paris. Between 2012 and 2015, 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' spirits obtained 5 gold medals, 1 silver medal and 1 bronze medal at that fair.

In 2009 the 'Route de l'absinthe', which connects Pontarlier in France to Val-de-Travers in Switzerland, was inaugurated in the historical birthplace of 'absinthe'.

6.2. Specificity of the product

'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is a clear, pale-yellow spirit with greenish hues that contains no sediment. Water is added to the drink when it is consumed, giving it an ivory-like opalescent shade and a cloudiness that renders it opaque.

'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is characterised by aromas reminiscent of the perfumes released by the common wormwood plant when harvested. In order to preserve these aromas, 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' must contain at least 20 milligrams of thujone per litre.

If the product is aged in wood for several months, its colour becomes slightly darker and golden, the taste of anise gives way to that of absinthe and the product mellowes.

'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is traditionally served with dissolved sugar, which eliminates any minor astringency from the distillation of anise.

6.3. Causal link between the defined area and the product

The organoleptic quality of 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is based on:

- the common wormwood plant cultivated in the defined area,
- the production process, applied for more than two centuries by local distillers.

6.3.1. Common wormwood

The perfume of common wormwood is more delicate and concentrated in regions where the climate and soil are less favourable to its growth.

Haut-Doubs has always been renowned for the cultivation of aromatic plants. The effects of continentality and of the topography, just pronounced enough to bring out the perfumes while being just restrained enough to allow optimum growth of the plant, manifest themselves in a uniquely balanced way. For absinthe, in particular, Haut-Doubs amazingly combines the three principal factors behind both the growth and the gustatory quality of the plant: altitude, continentality and a shallow soil. As the plant has been used in the region since time immemorial, this leads one to believe it is indigenous.

There is also a climatic feature of importance to the cultivation practices: the unusual decline in rainfall in July corresponds exactly to the harvesting period for wormwood, when the weather must be dry.

Wormwood plants cultivated and dried in the defined area according to the methods described above have a concentration of essential oils that give the spirit a perfume unparalleled in intensity and freshness.

6.3.2. The production process

It is necessary to apply different procedures when using this particularly concentrated raw material:

- distillation, which eliminates the bitter taste of wormwood, is obligatory,
- incorporating anise in the mixture to be distilled, as it rounds off the strength of the absinthe in the mouth.

6.3.3. Reduction and bottling

The aromatic balance of 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is complex and fragile at the same time. Obtaining it depends on the initial composition of the plants used and on the proportions of the different essential oils, in particular thujone, the minimum content of which has been defined in line with the characteristics of the product. The concentration of the different volatile compounds contributing to the aromatic balance of 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' varies greatly and depends mostly on the plants used and also on the traditional methods of distillation. The concentration levels vary according to the genetics of the plant, its development stage and nutrition, the climate and the nature of the soil. Depending on the distillation methods used, it is also possible to modify the extraction rate of these elements.

Consequently, in order to release for consumption a product sufficiently rich in compounds crucial to the characteristics of the geographical indication 'Absinthe de Pontarlier', the liqueur makers use the alcoholic strength by volume at marketing as an adjustment variable and adjust the water input at the time of reduction. Therefore, it is essential that the reduction, which comes right before bottling, be carried out by the liqueur maker.

Generally speaking, the volatile compounds in essential oils are very sensitive to stresses from the external environment, are often at play in chemical reactions and therefore show great instability:

Since the solubility of oxygen in the essential oil increases as the temperature decreases, there is a risk that the essential oils will oxidise even at a low temperature when emptying vats, pumping and bottling and produce mainly peroxide radicals and hydroperoxides, which jeopardise the quality of the essential oils.

When it is cold, small flakes of material may form and rise to the surface. Therefore if bottling takes place without warming and homogenising the absinthe, the flakes will be filtered before bottling, which in turn will affect considerably the organoleptic characteristics of the beverage. Conversely, if crystallisation occurs in the bottle after being exposed to the cold, this will have no effect, because when the product warms up it will reacquire its original characteristics without any deterioration to them.

Essential oils are also sensitive to reactions with certain plastic materials or certain metals, which may not be used during storage, handling or packaging.

In other words, the essential oils present in 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' are extremely unstable. Various reactions may change their properties substantially and consequently alter the organoleptic characteristics of this geographical indication. As a result, preserving them until and during bottling necessitates special precautions to minimise the presence of air, keep the spirit away from light and oxygen and reduce any incompatibility with certain plastic materials.

Reinforced checks in the form of analytical and organoleptic testing of the packaged products make it possible to detect any deterioration of the quality of the essential oils that affects the product's organoleptic or physico-chemical characteristics. If necessary, these checks may lead to a ban on the marketing of the defective product under the geographical indication 'Absinthe de Pontarlier'.

7. Any requirements laid down by Community and/or national provisions

Order of 12 July 2013 on the protected geographical indication 'Absinthe de Pontarlier', published in the Official Journal of the French Republic of 19 July 2013.

8. Name and address of applicant:

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9. Additional remarks (labelling)

Spirits for which the geographical indication 'Absinthe de Pontarlier' is claimed under this specification may not be offered for sale or sold without the labelling bearing the geographical indication referred to above.

The optional terms may appear on the label only if their size, including both width and height, is not more than double that of the letters of the geographical indication 'Absinthe de Pontarlier'.

The words 'aged in wood', possibly followed by the length of ageing, may only be used for spirits fulfilling the conditions set out in point 3 (penultimate paragraph).
