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Kettner's Looks to Famous Past Patrons for Inspiration During London Cocktail Week

We're not big drinkers, but when we recently found ourselves visiting **Kettner's** during **London Cocktail Week**, we sampled the offerings of new and inventive cocktails inspired by the Soho restaurant and Champagne bar's past famous patrons.

Kettner's was originally opened in 1867 as restaurant by Auguste Kettner, chef to Napoleon III, predating the nearby Palace Theatre, which opened in 1891. For more than a century, the restaurant has been popular with the famous — and the infamous. We'll drop a few names: **Agatha Christie**, **Oscar Wilde**, actress **Lillie Langtry**, and Langtry's lover, **Edward VII**, before he became king.

While they were mixing cocktails for us, bar manager Daniel Rolph and beverage manager Brendan Stegmann entertained us with stories about the upper floor's history as a discreet brothel. Then there's the famous actress, Langtry. "I hear rumors about a tunnel between here and the Palace Theatre where Edward VII would take his family to see a show, and she would be performing," Rolph says. During intermission, the prince and the actress would take the tunnel underground and meet at Kettner's.

Naturally, when they were creating new drinks for Cocktail Week, Rolph and Stegmann kept history in mind. Lillie's Lemonade, an icy concoction of raspberry syrup, gin, Chambord and mint, is described as being "just like our Lillie — tall, pretty, and a little tart!"

As a tribute to Wilde, they used absinthe in the High & Wilde, with Prosecco and a slice of fennel to complement the anise flavor. While Wilde may have been "dancing with the green fairy," as the saying about absinthe goes, remember that the absinthe sold in the U.S. since the ban was lifted in 2007 does not contain the thujone found in wormwood. (But it does pack a high alcohol content at 90-148 proof.) Since the culinary cocktail is trending on both sides of the Atlantic, below is a recipe for the High & Wilde.

High & Wilde

1 sugar cube

2 teaspoons **absinthe**

2 teaspoons **crème de pêche**

3.5 ounces Prosecco

Fennel slice



Kettner's created the High & Wilde with the favorite spirit of an old patron, Oscar Wilde, for London Cocktail Week.

Cut fresh fennel lengthways, making a long, slim slice. Drop the sugar cube into a champagne flute. Soak the sugar cube in the absinthe. Add the crème de pêche. Top with Prosecco and garnish with fennel.