

AUSTRALIA COAST TO COAST

MAY 2011

COUNTRY STYLE

ESCAPE THE
EVERYDAY

room with
a view

**NATURAL
WONDER**
The great
Australian
outback

**BEAUTIFUL
HOMEWARES
TO LOVE**

**MY HEART
WANDERS**
*How a Bathurst
farm inspired
an international
blogger's book*

**HOW A FAMILY SAVED AN HISTORIC
MUDGE FARMHOUSE FROM DEMOLITION**

Why a simple tin shed became a couple's paradise

COUNTRY COOK STEVE CUMPER ON MAKING THE PERFECT PIE

\$7 95 INC. GST NZ \$8 99 INC. GST

SMITHSONIAN
MAGAZINES



05

9 312966 128911

Honeycomb cut straight from the hive
FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM
TOP LEFT The finished product; hives
are dotted throughout a lush paddock;
tools of the trade; Tim Malfroy takes
a natural approach to beekeeping.



rare gold

WHEN IT COMES TO PRODUCING THE
BEST AUSTRALIAN HONEY, BEEKEEPER
TIM MALFROY SAYS LESS REALLY IS MORE.
WORDS BARBARA SWEENEY PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL WEE



“HONEY IS PERFECT IN ITS NATURAL STATE. THE MORE YOU DO TO IT, THE MORE IT’S DOWNGRADED.”

TIM MALFROY wanders among the beehives — freshly painted in jaunty beach-cabin shades of cream, green and ochre — in jeans and a shirt. No bee suit. At times, no veil. Just Tim and his bees.

The hives are arranged under the wide branches of the apple box in the house paddock, which is alive with silver flickering light. Knee-high grass dances to the breeze whispering in the boughs of the eucalypt, heavy with bright new growth. Listen closely and you can just hear the faintest murmur as the bees make their way to and fro from the hives. There are more hives around the other side of the small house where Tim and his wife Emma live and still more at another location in the Blue Mountains — 60 in all. The farmhouse, near the quaint hamlet of Rockley, some 30 kilometres south of Bathurst in the Central West of NSW, once belonged to Emma’s grandfather. The couple moved there in 2007, after they’d set up their honey label, Malfroy’s Gold.

Tim has spent his life around bees. His father, Frank, is an apiarist running between 500 and 800 hives, and Tim remembers coming home after school most days to help make up hives and catch queen bees.

Frank, like most commercial beekeepers in Australia, is migratory: he takes his hives to the flowers. According to Tim, each eucalypt, from which most of the honey in Australia is produced, flowers every two or three years depending on weather conditions — a very different situation to the honey scene in Europe, where native flowers follow a more predictable seasonal pattern. “It means that beekeepers here have to know trees, regions, soil types, rainfall patterns — and farmers — really well,” Tim says. “And they have to move further and further to get honey, which means it’s more difficult to cover costs.”

Australian beekeepers also have to contend with diminishing access to native bush, the spread of home building onto farmland, and contamination from crops that have been chemically treated.

“Even though I’d been involved with bees throughout my whole childhood, as an adult I started to think about it differently,” Tim says. “There is a story to be told here and I thought it would be good to do justice to the product.”

Tim decided that the future lay in producing a honey that, like wine, expressed its variety, and its location or terroir. “Honey is as pure as it can get in the hive,

so producing a really good honey comes down to the floral source and the bees’ health,” he says. “Australian honey is one of the best in the world — and it’s really rare. The red stringybark grows only on the tablelands in Australia. It doesn’t grow anywhere else in the world and it flowers only every four years. If that tree produced that honey in Europe, it would have an appellation, with rules for selling it — and it would be valued.”

Tim keeps his hives on permanent sites in preference to trucking them in search of nectar. The sites are well away from crops that have been sprayed and near to native bush, ensuring access to a regular floral source. He’s also recently switched to using Warré hives, which are smaller than the widely used Langstroth product, and designed to mimic the way bees create hives in nature.

The new hives certainly seem to make the bees happy. “They’re totally bee-friendly,” says Tim. “I can’t explain it, but since I’ve been keeping the bees in these hives, they’re so gentle. Sometimes, when I check them I don’t need to use a smoker [traditionally used to calm bees when opening a hive].”

Once the honey is ready to be collected, Tim’s approach is less is more. “Honey is perfect in its natural state. The more you do to it, the more it’s downgraded. If there’s honey that’s good for honeycomb, we just cut it and put it in a container — a 100 per cent raw product.”

The remainder of the comb is cold pressed, then the honey is put through a coarse filter and left to settle.

Tim produces a number of honeys, including yellowbox and a pure red stringybark. On occasion he adds some special one-offs, such as the Wollomi Wilderness, the result of a particularly good floral year in the Wollomi National Park. Honey that isn’t classed as coming from one source, and doesn’t fully express its variety in terms of colour and taste, is blended to make the creamed ‘soft set’ honey.

“If you keep your bees healthy, they look after themselves in many ways,” Tim says. “It’s about as natural, pure and simple as you can get — and I prefer to keep it simple.” *

Malfroy’s Gold products are available at the Blackheath Farmers’ Market as well as specialist food shops in NSW and Victoria. For more information, telephone (02) 6368 2379 or visit www.malfroygold.com.au



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Tim and Emma on their property near Rockley, NSW; Warré hives are designed to mimic the way bees create hives in nature; the Malfroys’ letterbox; hives are kept on permanent sites close to native bushland; Tim believes his methods help make for happy bees: “If you keep your bees healthy, they look after themselves.”