

A CRU FOR YOU: PICK A BEAUJOLAIS FOR CHEESE



the word on cheese

# culture

## grate TASTE

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**"On the plane ride home, I had a dream of Humboldt Fog. I saw it clearly—and exactly how to make it."**

—MARY KEEHN, CHEESEMAKER AND FOUNDER OF CYPRESS GROVE CHEVRE, CALIFORNIA, p. 36

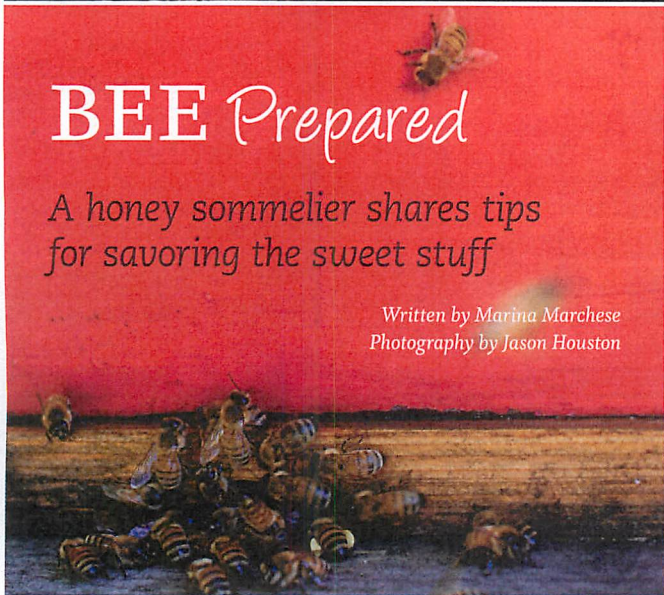




## BEE Prepared

A honey sommelier shares tips for savoring the sweet stuff

Written by Marina Marchese  
Photography by Jason Houston



### Honey with Cheese

The best pairings are when “one plus one equals three” in your mouth. The combination should create a synergy that is greater than the parts. Here are some of my favorites:

- 1 **PIAVE** (nutty, salty, Parmigiano-like cheese) + goldenrod honey (bright butterscotch and floral notes)
- 2 **OSSAU-IRATY** (smooth-textured, buttery cheese) + tulip poplar honey (dark, rich flavors with notes of raisins and currants)
- 3 **LINDY HOP** (mild, grassy, unctuous blue cheese) + alfalfa honey (mellow notes of grass and mildly sweet)
- 4 **ROBIOLA ROCCHETTA** (soft, oozy, decadent cheese) + comb honey (crisp, light, and delicate, with a waxy texture)
- 5 **BIANCO SARDO** (crumbly, earthy, salty, nutty cheese) + acacia honey (light, delicate butterscotch flavors)
- 6 **BARELY BUZZED CHEESE** (cheddar-style cheese rubbed with espresso and lavender) + buckwheat honey (dark and malty with notes of molasses)

IT WAS MY FIRST TASTE OF HONEY directly from a beehive that changed everything. The freshness and complexity of its flavor turned me almost instantly into a beekeeper, and before long I was passionate about honey, especially its sensory parallels with wine. My enthusiasm took me to Tuscany, where I discovered the formal practice of tasting and evaluating honey—practically unheard of in the States. So began my vocation as a honey sommelier.

Like my wine counterparts, I taste, study, and analyze the sensory qualities of honeys. But more often I am busy working to institute a vernacular for honey appreciation through educational writings and my Honey Tasting Laboratory Workshops, held at my apiary, Red Bee Farm, in Weston, Connecticut, as well as at cheese markets in New York City.

The first lesson in honey appreciation is to know that it's made by honeybees from the nectar of flowers. Honeybees will travel up to four miles to gather nectar, and then they carry it back to the hive, mix it with their own enzymes, and place it inside a beeswax cell. Worker bees, in turn, flap their wings to reduce the water content to 18 percent in each cell, which turns the nectar to honey. At that point the worker bees cap the honey-filled cells with beeswax.

Beekeepers harvest thousands of varieties of honey around the world, each with a unique flavor profile determined by the type of plants visited by





ABOVE LEFT–RIGHT: Marchese collecting honeycomb; Colors of honey are determined by mineral content

the honeybee. Every flower secretes a distinctive type of nectar throughout the seasons. The flavor profile of any drizzle of honey will depend on the plant life of the region.

When a hive is placed in a field of a single flower species, the honey produced will have the essence of that particular floral source. Think tupelo from Georgia, orange blossom from Florida, or blueberry from Maine, for example. Connoisseurs of honey call these single-origin nectar sources. When producing single-origin honey, timing is crucial: beekeepers must know the exact seasonality of the bloom, and bee colonies must be at their peak strength when the nectar flows.

Single-origin honeys highlight quality and character rather than quantity and consistency. Two beehives placed in the very same field of alfalfa could each yield honey that is completely different from the other in color, flavor, texture, and aroma. Wildflower honey is produced from the nectar of multiple floral sources and varies

greatly from region to region. Honey harvests can also have “good” or “average” years, and of course, Mother Nature has the last word. Ill-timed rain and wind can literally whisk nectar from a flower, eliminating an entire sweet harvest for that year!

There are styles and flavor profiles of honey to please every palate. I consider honeycomb “the jewel” of the beehive, with its honey still encased in beeswax, exactly as the bees made it. Delicate in flavor, with a waxy texture, honeycomb is considered sacred in many cultures. Spun honey, by contrast, is forced to crystallize into a fine grainy texture and then whipped until fluffy; it is cool on the tongue and resembles fondant. Liquid artisan honey is cold-pressed from the beeswax of the honeycomb; this is the style we most often see and taste. **c**

*Beekeeper Marina Marchese trained as a honey judge at the University of Georgia and is certified by the American Apitherapy Society. She is also president of the Back Yard Beekeepers Association in Connecticut, founder of the American Honey Tasting Society, and author of Honeybee: Lessons from an Accidental Beekeeper.*



## You can find a variety of artisan and premium honeys at:

### HONEY RIDGE FARMS

Based in Brush Prairie, Washington, this family-owned business has a beekeeping legacy spanning five generations. Its line includes some rare and single-source honeys such as black sage, as well as many flavored honey crèmes.

> [honeyridgefarms.com](http://honeyridgefarms.com)

### RED BEE ARTISAN HONEY

Founded by beekeeper and honey judge Marina Marchese, Red Bee sells an extensive line of single-origin honeys, as well as chunk-style honey, creamed honey, and farmhouse honeycomb.

> [redbee.com](http://redbee.com)

### SAVANNAH BEE

A range of honey products from this Georgia company includes single varieties such as sourwood, tupelo, and winter white, as well as squares, rounds, and jars of raw honeycomb.

> [savannahbee.com](http://savannahbee.com)

## HOW TO Taste Honey:

- Generally, honey should be tasted in the same progression as wines, beginning with the lightest in color, then moving on to ambers and finally the darkest.
- Since honeybees naturally keep their hive at 94°F, honey is best tasted at ambient temperatures, as certain flavors can't be detected when honey is too cold or hot.
- Water is the best palate cleanser between tastings of different honeys.
- The classic way to stage honey for evaluation is in a transparent stemmed wine glass. Begin by lifting the honey-filled glass, and allow the light to pass through the bowl to observe its color. The color of honey is related to the mineral content.
- Swirl the honey to examine the texture and viscosity. Is the honey transparent, cloudy, or opaque? Pollen content will make honey appear cloudy.
- Dip your nose inside, and sniff to gather the full aroma of the honey. Its scent is based upon the predominant botanical source and can be flowery, fruity, resinous, burnt, or musky.
- Use a white porcelain or glass spoon to scoop up a generous sample of the honey. Let it coat your tongue and melt. Feel the texture of the honey in your mouth; does it feel smooth, gritty, velvety, creamy, or runny?
- As you taste, think about the honey, concentrating on the flavor notes and how they progress. Are they mild or assertive? Are they long lasting or do they end abruptly? Artisan honeys have layers of flavors and are said to have “good character” when the floral source is clearly recognizable and it is free from fermented or burnt flavors.