



Left: A sample of Miele Thun honey. Below: Beekeeper and honey maker Andrea Paternoster.



## THE BEE WHISPERER

*The buzz behind Andrea Paternoster's honey.*

Andrea Paternoster, an affable Italian apiarist, is about to take his honeybees on a road trip. It's late July and even here in Paternoster's hometown of Vigo di Ton—a small village tucked among apple groves in the dark green mountains of Italy's northernmost region, Trentino-Alto Adige—the temperature is rising.

Bees don't like to be hot, and Paternoster, owner of Miele Thun and purveyor of some of the most exquisite honeys this side of the Alps, doesn't like to see his bees uncomfortable. As soon as night falls, the 41-year-old will drive his apiaries 3,000 feet up in the Dolomites to the town of Asiago. There, cool and content, his bees will pass the summer. Equally averse to a chill, they winter on Lake Garda.

All this movement and attention may seem extreme for a bunch of bees, but for Paternoster, a third-generation beekeeper, it's just one part of the apiculture calling. "Beekeeping isn't a job, it's a sickness," Paternoster says with an earnest chuckle, as he takes out his smoker and, with ease, approaches his humming hives.

He should know. His grandfather and namesake raised bees professionally; his father keeps them as a hobby. But it was Paternoster, who, with no practical experience, set out a decade ago to cultivate a sophisticatedly different kind of honey—one that could and would transfer the pure taste, scent and subtleties of a sole nectar. "Bees will fly all over to find the best food," Paternoster says. "They don't go where we tell them to go."

Paternoster keeps different families of bees throughout the peninsula. Some swirl in the Dolomites, where the nectars of firs and chestnuts yield dark, malty honeys. Others stay deep in Puglia, where native sunflowers produce a thick, toffee-like honey as yellow as the sunflower itself.

"Rational and nomadic," says Paternoster of his laborious process, which, when complete, produces 20 different varieties of single-flower honeys, including rarities such as Tamarisk and Rosemary.

The result of his free-range bees and cold-pressed production is the closest you can get to dipping your finger in a hive sans a sting. "Organic isn't a special category for us," he says. "It's the only category."

Watch Paternoster with his bees and you quickly realize apiculture is indeed more than just a job.

Simply by their buzz—or, as Paternoster likes to call it, their "singing"—he can deduce if his bees are happy, agitated, cramped or hot. He knows if the queen bee is ruling well or stirring havoc. Through his remarkable sensibility, Paternoster has managed to delve even deeper into beekeeping and craft the honey equivalent of a premier cru. He does so by leading his bees to the finest swath of flowers during the height of their bloom. These exceptional delicacies, which range in color from translucent blush to earthy brown with an amber patina, fall under the label *Quintessenza*. And sampling them is like taking an instant tour of Italy. All you need is a spoon and your imagination, and within a moment you can glide from the wild coast of Maremma, where heather grows, to the dry, warm earth of Basilicata, home to fragrant eucalyptus plants. "Quintessenza is an instrument to help people understand how honey should be," Paternoster says.

These "honey essences" are also part of his mission to convince people to view honey as more than just something you put in tea. Paternoster has reached out to several top Italian chefs, and today, a handful of them are incorporating his honeys, with great effect, into their dishes.

For Paternoster, his wife and two daughters, honey, whether spread on a slice of bread, drizzled on risotto alla parmigiana or dropped in espresso, remains a daily must. "We eat honey every day," he says. "Our hands are always in the jars." —COURTNEY COLAVITA