

The London Honey Company

olive meets Steve Benbow, a visionary beekeeper who works from the rooftops of some of the capital's most celebrated buildings Words EMILY KERRIGAN Photograph DYLAN THOMAS

'I was born into beekeeping. Growing up in Shropshire, my grandparents had hives in their garden - my earliest memories are of eating doorsteps of bread dripping in honey. Fast-forward to 12 years ago and I was working in London as a travel photographer but wishing I could combine city living with my rural roots. On a New York shoot, I met a guy who was making honey on Manhattan's rooftops. I realised that if he could do it, so could I.

'I started with one hive on the roof of my gardenless Tower Bridge flat. At the time, urban beekeeping was a real novelty - there was a railway bridge running alongside my hive and commuters would point and wave as their train passed by. I quickly gained a cult following and as word spread about the decline in UK bees, more and more people came forward to offer homes to my hives. These days you'll find them on rooftops across London, including Fortnum & Mason and the Tate Modern.

'The taste of London honey is a revelation. You might think all this concrete is bad for bees, but thanks to the capital's numerous parks, they actually prosper here. All London honey is beautifully rich, but I didn't expect such variation between sites. The plants growing in each postcode give really different flavours - at our London Bridge HQ, it's butterscotch. Chef Marcus Wareing is a fan - he serves my honeycomb on his cheeseboards at The Berkeley - but my all-time favourite way to eat it is simply drizzled over a torn-up peach.

'Urban bees are the future. The rise in pesticide spraying across the countryside is threatening rural bees, so it's crucial we help their urban cousins thrive. Without healthy bees, the plants that provide our own food would never survive.'

HOW ETHICAL IS THE LONDON HONEY COMPANY?

BEE CONSERVATION High London Honey works with the team at Bangor University that leads UK research into promoting the survival of British bees.

FOOD MILES Low Honey produced on the rooftops of Fortnum & Mason and the Tate Modern travels mere metres to the shops below where it is sold.

RECYCLING High Honey is packaged in recycled glass jars and recycled paper. Hives are constructed from recycled wood.

Double honey ice cream

❖ Ready in 30 minutes + chilling + freezing

■ Serves 8 ■ **A LITTLE EFFORT**

runny honey 225g

double cream 600ml

full-fat milk 250ml

large eggs 6, yolk only (freeze the whites to use later)

HONEYCOMB

golden caster sugar 125g

runny honey 1 tbsp

bicarbonate of soda ¼ tsp

ice-cream cones to serve (optional)

■ Start by making the ice cream. Warm the honey in a small pan over a low heat. In another pan heat the cream and milk together until just below boiling point. Whisk the egg yolks together in a large bowl until combined.

■ Pour the hot cream mixture over the eggs, whisking constantly. Return the whole lot to the pan and set over a low heat, stirring constantly, until the custard thickens enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Strain into a clean bowl and add the warmed honey and mix thoroughly. Cool and then chill for at least 2 hours before churning in an ice-cream machine following the manufacturer's instructions.

■ To make the honeycomb, tip the caster sugar into a saucepan and add the honey and 4-5 tbsp water. Bring slowly to the boil to dissolve the sugar. Continue to boil steadily until the caramel becomes honey coloured. Add bicarbonate of soda and, working very quickly, swirl the pan to mix evenly. Immediately pour into a greased baking tin set on a heatproof surface and leave until the honeycomb is completely cold and brittle.



■ Break the honeycomb into pieces and gently mix through the ice-cream mixture. Tip into a freezer-proof container and freeze until needed. Serve the ice cream in generous scoops in cones or bowls.

■ *PER SERVING 565 kcalories, protein 49g, carbs 41.9g, fat 43.2g, sat fat 22.9g, fibre 0g, salt 0.21g*

THREE MORE RECIPES TO MAKE USING HONEY

■ Roasted figs with mascarpone and honey

■ Chicory, bacon and pear salad with honey dressing

■ Sly's honey mule cocktail

Find these recipes and more at bbcgoodfood.com

■ For stockists, see thelondonhoneycompany.co.uk or call 020 7407 1044.

