

Sweet Inspiration



Ahualoa beekeeper
produces world-class
artisan honey

Rare Hawaiian Organic White Honey is prized for its buttery, pearlescent qualities and delicate flavor. Bon Appetit magazine calls it “a state treasure,” while National Geographic Traveler magazine deemed it “some of the best honey in the entire world.”

Story and Photography by Karen Anderson



When it comes to gourmet honey, Richard Spiegel’s Rare Organic White Honey is truly the “bee’s knees.” A favorite of resort chefs, this unprocessed, naturally thick honey is considered among the finest in the world. Bon Appetit magazine calls it “a state treasure,” while the Discovery Channel’s Epicurious TV show goes one step further and calls it “a miracle.”

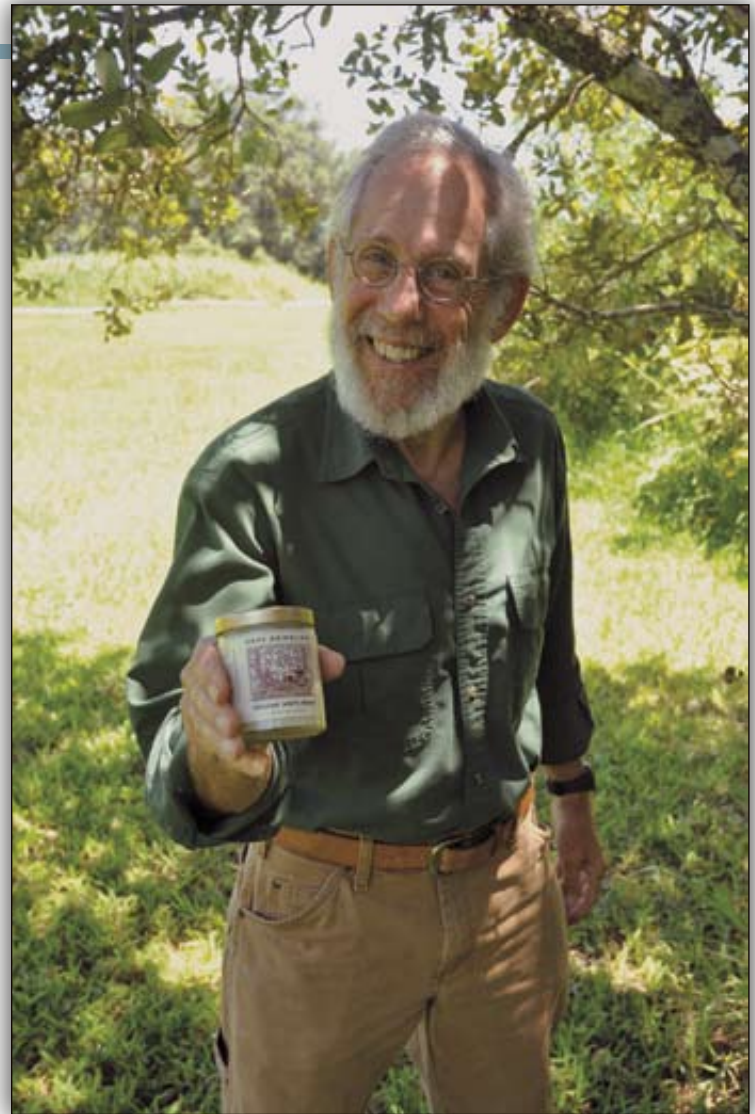
White, buttery, delicate and tropical, the meticulously crafted honey derives from a single grove of Kiawe trees in Puako. Fed by groundwater close to the surface, the trees there reach the unusual height of 60 feet tall, producing flowers laden with special nectar gathered by Richard’s bees.

From his home-based Volcano Island Honey Company in Ahualoa, Richard crafts the art of the perfect honey. Transporting the honey from the hot climate of Puako to the cool of Ahualoa helps it to crystallize faster.

Richard says he has only a small window of opportunity to hand-pick the honey at the precise moment it’s ready. Too late, and it will crystallize in the honeycomb; too early and it will be watery.

“This nectar crystallizes really fast. It comes out a pale green liquid and then crystallizes into white in a matter of one to two days. The natural color of pure, unheated Kiawe honey is pearly white.”

Richard extracts the honey from the comb by spinning it in ►



From his farm in Ahualoa, beekeeper Richard Spiegel has been perfecting his organic white honey for decades.



Volcano Island Honey Company is located in Ahualoa.



The freshly extracted honey begins as a pale green liquid and quickly crystallizes to white within a few days.

a centrifuge. While most beekeepers opt for the heat-extraction method, Richard says heat destroys the natural enzymes in the honey, compromising its nutritional value and exquisite taste.

Indeed, for cooking purposes, it's best to use the honey in a raw recipe. For a delicious candy, Richard likes to mix the honey with tahini and roll it into a small ball covered in sesame seeds. Honey blended with cream cheese makes an excellent icing. Kona Village Resort featured the honey in its salad dressing.

"You can also pair it with artisan cheese for a gourmet appetizer," says Richard, whose recipes are posted online at volcanoislandhoney.com

Although his honey is in high demand, Richard keeps his operation small, favoring the philosophy of quality over quantity.

"I'm interested in a business model that doesn't do damage to the environment or living things," says Richard, who was awarded the Kuleana Green Business Award in 2010 by the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce.

A lifelong student of beekeeping, Richard has been perfecting his Kiawe honey for more than 37 years. A near fatal chainsaw accident in the 1970s led him to the Big Island for rest and recovery, where he started his beekeeping operation and has lived ever since.

"Ahualoa is a very special place," he says. "There is an amazing community of people here." **AH**



Richard Spiegel hosts tours at his Volcano Island Honey farm, teaching guests about the inner workings of the beehive.



Richard harvests his honey in Puako and brings it to the cool elevation of Ahualoa, where it is extracted in the honey house (pictured above). He uses a centrifuge to spin the honey from the combs, thereby preserving the honey's natural living enzymes.