

# SIMPLY BEE

SIMPLY BEE WAS FORMALLY ESTABLISHED IN 2011, BUT ITS ORIGINS STEM FROM A WEDDING GIFT OF A SINGLE BEEHIVE IN THE 1950S. "MY GRANDFATHER GAVE MY FATHER A BEEHIVE AS A PRESENT. THIS WAS OSTENSIBLY TO PUT HONEY ON THE TABLE BECAUSE HE THOUGHT HE WAS TOO POOR TO BUY JAM," SAYS SIMPLY BEE FOUNDER HELENA VAN DER WESTHUIZEN.

That single hive grew into a passionate hobby with 50 hives and in 1994, turned into a full-time beekeeping business. A lifetime of beekeeping knowledge was handed down to Helena's husband, Pierre, in 2008, and Simply Bee took flight.

## KEEPING IT NATURAL

The secret of a good skin product lies in the combination of good, natural ingredients with natural processes designed to maximise purity without damaging the ingredients.

Natural ingredients are profoundly effective, they stimulate your senses, they are better for the environment and beneficial to overall well being. Natural ingredients nurture the skin with wholesome nutrients familiar to the body's chemistry, and working in harmony with the body. It's crucial for natural ingredients to come from a renewable and plentiful resource found in nature.

Equally important is the processing. I personally control the manufacturing. Any processing, including distillation, condensation, extraction, steaming, and hydrolysis are kept to a minimum. My

goal is to maximise purity without negative effects on the ingredients – simply put: my goal is to keep natural ingredients natural. This ensures full retention of their beneficial properties.

## SMALL BEGINNINGS

Being allergic to most cosmetics with synthetic ingredients and harsh preservatives led me to research products made from honey. "When I started making concoctions in the kitchen. Pierre laughed but I assured him I was going to create amazing products. I started giving it away to friends and it just snowballed from there." Helena made her first sale on 22 March 2011. "Pierre couldn't believe I was selling creams. When orders started coming in, he realized it was viable. Five months later, after working through the night sticking on labels for an order, he took it much more seriously."

"I still keep my batches small and start all of them myself," she says.

We started off with only five products, and in answering the huge demand for natural products it catapulted to over forty

products in a relatively short period. These include body lotions, hand cream, foot balm, ointments, shampoo, soaps, facial skin products and polishes.

Until February 2013, Simply Bee's products were produced in Pierre and Helena's braai room at home "because it's important to ride out one phase before going to the next". The couple now has premises in Church Street, Hopefield where all Simply Bee Products are handmade to Helena's formulas. They also have a shop and observation center to educate the public on bees and honey.

## BEEKEEPING SET-UP

Pierre started with 240 hives and now has over 600 hives, all on private land amidst fynbos. "Most beekeepers have their hives on farmers' land," she says, adding that farmers are mostly happy to do this because bees are good for their vegetation. "Our hives are not moved, except a few meters to give them shade because the angle of the sun changes during the year, or if an area becomes depleted of food for the bees." The specific set-up differs between beekeepers and depends on the

vegetation. "We only do Fynbos. We don't pollinate because we believe it stresses the bees too much," Helena says. "A bees' honey production depends on the area and what's available there – there's no exact turnaround time. If you don't stress your bees, they're more resilient and productive."

## DIY BEEKEEPING

Helena, who is on the Western Cape Bee Industry Association, says it's essential that new beekeepers register with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and belong to a beekeeping association. "It's important, even if you only have one hive because in the event of a disease outbreak, everyone can be informed immediately. Even deserted hives have to be treated so robber bees don't spread diseases. We need to protect our bees," she says.

## THE LIFE OF A BEE

In the Western Cape we farm with the Cape Honey Bee, the Capensis bee, which forms swarms of 30 000 to 80 000 bees. These consist of the queen, the hundred or so male drones that mate with the queen, and sterile female worker bees. In spring, the queen lays thousands of eggs, one per honeycomb cell. These hatch into larvae, which are fed 'royal jelly', honey, and pollen by worker bees. The bees close the cells after six days and the larvae grow into pupae, which in turn transform into adult bees. The entire life cycle takes three weeks.

The worker bee then carries out various tasks in the hive over the next 21 days.

During the first two days of her life, she helps clean and warm the brood nests. From day three to day five she takes part in feeding the older larvae with honey and pollen, and from day six to day 11, she feeds young larvae with royal jelly. From days 12 to 17, she produces wax to construct the comb, and from days 18 to 21 helps guard the hive entrance and ventilate it. After this, she joins the other bees to forage for nectar, pollen and propolis.

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FROM VERY HUMBLE  
BEGINNINGS, SIMPLY  
BEE NOW HAS OVER  
200 STOCKISTS IN  
SOUTH AFRICA AND  
EXPORTS TO ZIMBABWE,  
BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA,  
ENGLAND, USA AND  
MAURITIUS.  
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In summer, bees live for 28 days as they work hard, but they can live for up to 48 days in the winter months when they are only feeding the queen and keeping the hive warm. The colony keeps the hive at about 38 degrees Centigrade and in the winter seal it with propolis to maintain this temperature. Propolis is a resin collected from trees and bushes, it has anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties, and is used to insulate the hive and protect it

against viruses. Studies have proved that propolis fights cancer and gum disease by encouraging healthy cell growth.

## PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Fynbos honey was Simply Bee's first product. Then came the lip balm pot, soap, antiseptic balm, hand cream and wash. The biggest selling points for Simply Bee, is that the products are natural and the range is also affordable. Her most popular products are propolis serum, anti-aging cream, antiseptic balm, propolis balm and heel balm. The heel balm, propolis serum and anti-ageing cream were finalists in the UK's Natural & Organic Awards last year.

## CHALLENGES

Preserving the products without using chemicals was the greatest challenge for Helena.

"I wanted to preserve my products with propolis, a natural preservative, but it took a while to get it right. Another big problem was good quality water, imperative to conserve the integrity of the products."

"We value every individual client, whether they buy a lip balm or spend R10 000, we give our utmost attention to any complaints we may get. I've couriered a lip balm to a client at my own expense," says Helena. "People like supporting a family business that's small and personal."

"We never imagined the business would take off like it has. It has exceeded every vision I had. It almost feels as if I am telling somebody else's story."

## DID YOU KNOW

The van der Westhuizen family live in Hopefield, a perfect location filled with Fynbos for the bees to pollinate. There's no commercial farming in the immediate vicinity which makes our honey, beeswax and propolis 100% organic. Our bees are not used for commercial pollination and so there's no exposure to chemicals. The hives are placed on stands, which means they're badger-friendly too.



AS CREATORS AND OWNERS OF SIMPLY BEE OUR MISSION IS TO NOT ONLY GENERATE AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF USING NATURAL BEESWAX PRODUCTS BUT ALSO TO PROMOTE BEE CONSERVATION. THE BEEHIVES STARTED BY MY FATHER PROVIDED THE FOUNDATION FOR A FAMILY LEGACY.

