

Teasing out honey's flavours

Hamilton couple Martin and Stephanie Lynch are buzzing with excitement, writes **Denise Irvine**.

Stephanie Lynch sits at her dining-room table with a line-up of honey jars and tasting spoons, and flavours that send her visitors to honey heaven.

We try the lighter, creamy Four Brothers Reserve label with a slightly caramel flavour, the sweet Horsham Downs Country with big floral notes, then Marokopa Spring which is notable for its intense peppery finish.

We talk as we taste, discussing the local flora and terroir in the way one might do at a wine tasting, teasing out the distinctive regional characteristics.

But this is golden Sweettree cream honey not wine, and when Stephanie spreads a lavish layer on brown bread for a photograph she says: "I just have to eat this."

We nod – we can see the attraction.

Stephanie's interest in honey began when she married Martin Lynch, who'd long been a hobbyist beekeeper. His father kept bees on the family property at Ohinewai and Martin's been around hives for years.

When he and Stephanie bought land at Horsham Downs on the outskirts of Hamilton about nine years ago they set up a few hives.

Now the hobby has grown into a boutique business with 100 Sweettree brand hives at three Waikato locations. And they're producing three to four

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Sweettree co-owner Stephanie Lynch delivers regional tastes.

Photo: MARK TAYLOR/FAIRFAX NZ

tonnes a year, selling at a number of weekend markets.

Martin and Stephanie are both aged 41, they have sons Daniel, 8, and Matthew, 6, and they have day-jobs: Martin is an electrical engineer with his own energy management consulting business, and Stephanie works part-time for a software development company.

In their "spare" time, they've become serious purveyors of honey.

And Sweettree's point of difference is that their products truly reflect the rural area where the hives have been placed.

It is unblended "location specific" honey, not based on a single flower source as many honeys are

Says Martin: "We wanted to show the flavours of the Waikato rather than say: this is the manuka flower."

The Marokopa Spring honey, for example, is from remote coastal hill-country with extensive native bush.

In the first season the hives were placed on Anna and Peter Scott's Marokopa farm the heketara trees were flowering and the bees clearly made good use of this, producing a distinctive toffee-tasting honey.

The following season the heketara didn't flower and trees such as rewa-rewa and kamahi helped deliver the goods, along with hill-country pasture flowers like clover, buttercup and thistle.

The Marokopa farm was the first location Martin and Stephanie chose outside their own property.

Martin says they could see the area's unique flavours coming through, and this gave them the impetus to keep each batch faithful to its site rather than to blend them.

"Our customers at farmers' markets really like it," Martin says.

Next week: Kingsmeade Cheeses

ROAD FOOD

CENTRAL

Legends of the Game Gala Dinner

Tuesday, 6.30pm, Sport & Rugby Institute, Massey University, Albany Dr, Palmerston North.

Famous names in New Zealand sport, including former All Black greats Brian Lochore and Murray Mexted, are the star turns at this event to raise funds for emerging Central Districts sportspeople. Wine tasting, a four-course meal and dancing. Tickets (\$125 single, \$230 couple, \$880 table of eight) from the Sport and Rugby Institute 06 350 5844.

Upper Hutt Sports Legends Dinner

Friday, 6.30pm, Upper Hutt Cosmopolitan Club, 11 Logan St, Upper Hutt.

Former All Black and current Japan coach John Kirwan joins former Wallaby David Campese for a night of musings on rugby and great food. Tickets (\$70) available from the Upper Hutt Cosmopolitan Club: 04 529 0009.

NORTHERN

Wine & Wood-Fired Spit-Roast Dinner Experience

Friday and October 13, 14, 19 and 20, 7-11pm, Ascension Wine Estate, 480 Matakana Rd, Matakana.

Slow-roasted lamb on a spit, wine and live music. Do you need any other reason to get to Ascension Wine Estate? Tickets (\$75 per person) available online at ascensionwine.co.nz/coming-events

Taste at The Cloud

Open every day (11.30am-6pm) until October 23, Queens Wharf, Quay St, Auckland city.

No need to take a packed lunch if you're heading to The Cloud to enjoy the rugby crowds – some of New Zealand's best chefs are serving up the country's finest seafood, meat and fresh produce. Two tastes with two matched beverages, \$17; four with four, \$28; six with six \$42; eight with eight, \$54. Visit tasteatthecloud.com for more information.

SOUTHERN

Kaikoura Seafest

Today, 10am-5pm, Takahanga Domain, Kilarney St, Kaikoura.

Indulge your love of kai moana at the annual Seafest, which also rounds up the best artisan produce from Kaikoura, Marlborough and North Canterbury. Tickets (\$35 adults, \$17 children) – pre-sales only – seafest.co.nz or call 0800 4 SEAFEST.

Marlborough Wine and Cuisine at Brancott Estate

Thursday, gates open from 11.30am, Brancott Estate Winery, Brancott Rd, Blenheim. Wine, women (or woman – singer-songwriter Anna Coddington) and song in the grounds of New Zealand's largest vineyard. Tickets (\$55) available from wine-Marlborough.co.nz.

For more events during the Real New Zealand Festival, go to nz2011.govt.nz/experiencerealnz