

IRISH MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

€2.99 | NI £2.50

No.1
IRELAND'S
BESTSELLING
WOMEN'S GLOSSY!

COUNTRY

MAGAZINE

APRIL 2016

MODERN MOTHER
WHAT BEING A MUM LOOKS LIKE IN 2016

THE Grandparent TRAP
WHEN CHILDCARE MAKES TENSIONS RISE

fashion
DO YOU NEED A PERSONAL SHOPPER?

BODY TALK
PRE-SUMMER BEAUTY PREP

UNA FODDEN
FAME, FAMILY & THE BALANCING ACT



ALICE LEAHY | ORLA TINSLEY | PAMELA FLOOD | EMILY HOURICAN | ROSEMARY Mac CABE

FOOD

NATURE'S HARVEST

Ailbhe Gerrard produces lamb and honey on Brookfield Farm in Tipperary, and her unique concept, Hiveshare, is getting attention for all of the right reasons, writes **Klara Heron**

Photography: Ramona Farrelly

"I think it's our responsibility as farmers to build a place for the environment and nature to thrive, because if we don't, where will they go?" says Ailbhe Gerrard, as we drink tea at her kitchen table. Ailbhe bought Brookfield Farm in Coolbawn, north Tipperary, five years ago, having previously worked as project manager for construction in London.

"My parents couldn't believe it when I bought this place. They've seven kids and we were brought up here, but all of us left and were living in cities. I suddenly got a figury to come back. Farming is just a really important job. I got really into sustainability when I was in project management because so many buildings are built and there's so much waste."

Ailbhe looked for something in the area where she grew up but nothing quite suited. She was familiar with Brookfield Farm but it wasn't on the market. "I knew this farm really well so I just asked the previous owners, and they said OK. It's a bigger farm than I was looking to get but I thought just take it and let's go."

Ailbhe keeps sheep and beehives on the farm, and produces lamb, raw honey and beeswax candles, and nature is certainly well catered for on Brookfield Farm.

"It isn't a very big farm so you have to use your resources really carefully. It's a slightly complicated farm because there's forestry, tillage and lifestyle, but I love it. I still can't believe I pulled it off."

HIVESHARE

You can purchase Ailbhe's artisan lamb, which is specially reared and carefully butchered, directly from her website (www.brookfield.farm). This is also where Brookfield Farm Hiveshare is available.

Hiveshare is a unique concept whereby you can pay to share a part of Ailbhe's beehives. In exchange for your share – which can be anything from one-eighth of a hive up to a full



queen bee hive – you receive a beautiful gift box of beeswax candles, beeswax lip balm and your share of the hive's honey.

"People are really taking to Hiveshare," says Ailbhe. "They love it as a present – for weddings and that. Quite a lot of people have signed up. You get a gift box and you get updates on how your hive is doing, and you get invited to the annual honey celebration on the farm. Last year, in the middle of the party, one of the white-tailed eagles flew just over our heads. It was amazing, they are huge – you couldn't write that."

Ailbhe's honey is cold-pressed and as raw as possible, which means it still retains most of its goodness. She explains that typically, most of the honey you find in supermarkets is imported and has been heat-treat-



FOOD



ed and filtered to get volume. Once honey is heated over 40 degrees, its natural enzymes are destroyed and those enzymes are where the traditional health benefits, such as wound-healing and soothing sore throats, come from. You won't find Brookfield Farm honey in the supermarkets, however, as Ailbhe explains she doesn't have the scale for it. While she does get surplus honey from a couple of local beekeepers, she prefers to sell it through Hiveshare. "I believe it's the best way to sell raw Irish honey because it's too valuable. People really seek out Irish honey so they aren't price-conscious – they know it's really special," she says.

BEESWAX CANDLES

Her beeswax candles are more widely available, and around the time of our interview Ailbhe was busy looking after a new order in from the new Só Collective in Kildare Village. She also supplies Shannon Duty Free, Kilruddery House in Bray, Hopsack health food store in Rathmines, Artisan Parlour in Ringsend, Howbert & Mays in Monkstown and couple of local shops in Tipperary. She produces all of the candles herself by hand in a small cottage on top of a hill.



“LAST YEAR, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HONEY CELEBRATION, ONE OF THE WHITETAILED EAGLES FLEW JUST OVER OUR HEADS. IT WAS AMAZING”



FOOD

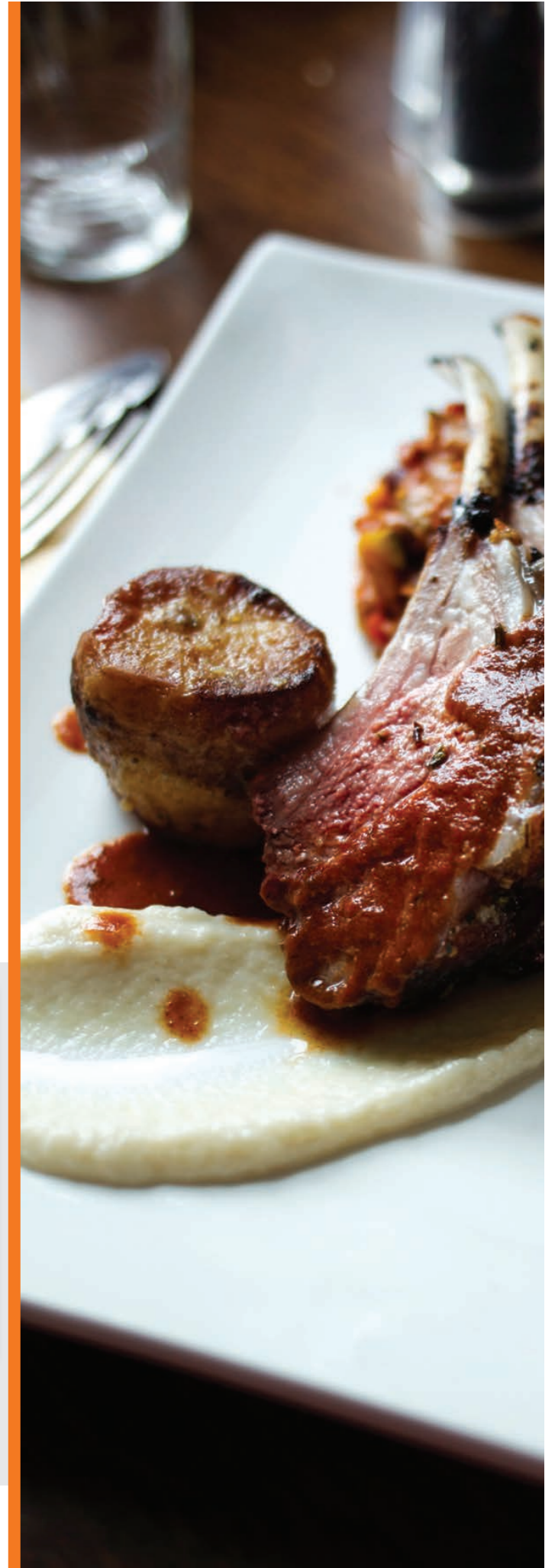


"It's kind of magical, you can look down and see the farm and the whole of Lough Derg," she smiles. "Beeswax candles are amazing, they're so natural. I do dipped candles, so you melt the beeswax and then dip the wick into it. It takes up to 20 dips, you have to keep layering it to form a candle. It is very therapeutic work. I add scent to some and some aren't scented. "They change depending on what the bees eat; sometimes they smell strongly of honey and sometimes they're different colours – it all depends." As well as keeping the farm, producing the honey and making the candles, Ailbhe teaches agriculture in a local college and is part of ACORNS.

"ACORNS is a super initiative which the Department of Agriculture has funded to help rural female entrepreneurs at startup stage," she explains. "It's really helpful to hear other women's stories and share the process. The best part of it is feeling that you have support from your mentor and from the department." Ailbhe also recently received the great news that she was awarded a Nuffield Scholarship, which will see her go on a two-month trip around the world. "It's a huge honour," she says. "It's an international research award for people they think are going to be agricultural leaders. I'm doing what's called the Japan trip. We start in Australia and we go to Indonesia, Singapore, Japan for 10 days, Israel, the Netherlands, all of America and then back to Ireland." They also fund a second research trip aimed at the scholar's own interest, which for Ailbhe is "going directly from the farm to the consumer, particularly in a form called forward-selling". This will no doubt benefit Hiveshare and all of Brookfield Farm, as Ailbhe continues her journey of sustainable farming and producing. www.brookfield.farm



Chef David Avrillier-Grange in **Le Bouchon**, Portumna, kindly used Ailbhe's lamb and honey in three delicious recipes to show off the quality of her produce. He and his wife Siobhan found Ailbhe's lamb so tasty they are keen to start using it on their menu as well as her honey, which they've been using since last year. www.lebouchon.ie





BROOKFIELD HONEY & VANILLA PANNA COTTA WITH HONEYCOMB BISCUIT & ROASTED FIGS

SERVES FOUR

For the panna cotta:

- 500ml heavy cream
- 200g honey (for this recipe David used a blackberry and clover honey)
- 1 seeded vanilla pod
- 2 gelatin leaves

- 1 Soften the gelatin in cold water for few minutes.
- 2 Boil the cream with the vanilla pod and seeds over a low heat. Stir in the honey. Completely remove from the heat when melted.
- 3 Squeeze the water out of the gelatin and add to the cream.
- 4 Divide the mixture among four ramekins and leave to cool. Place into the fridge overnight.
- 5 To extract, dip the ramekin in warm water for a few seconds and then turn over the panna cotta.

For the homemade honeycomb:

- 35g clear honey
- 70g golden syrup
- 3 tbsp water
- 1 tbsp baking soda

- 1 Line a shallow baking tray with parchment paper.
- 2 Place the honey, golden syrup and water in a large heavy-based saucepan and heat gently, stirring occasionally until the sugar dissolves.
- 3 Increase the heat and cook until the mixture starts to turn a dark golden color.
- 4 Mix in the baking soda.
- 5 The mixture will erupt into a foaming mess. Pour immediately into the prepared baking tray
- 6 Leave to cool for one hour before breaking in up.
- 7 Store in an airtight container until required.

For the roasted figs:

- 2 figs
 - Drizzle of honey
- 1 Cut the figs halfway down in the shape of a cross.
 - 2 Drizzle some honey over them.
 - 3 Bake in an oven tray in hot oven for five minutes.
 - 4 Dress your plate and serve.



AILBHE'S HONEY IS COLD-PRESSED AND AS RAW AS POSSIBLE, WHICH MEANS IT STILL RETAINS MOST OF ITS GOODNESS