



FEEL THE BUZZ

JOEL AND NATALIE SHAVE SWAPPED CITY JOBS FOR LIFE IN THE COUNTRY, WHERE THEY HARVEST HONEY WHILE RAISING A FAMILY.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



Beekeeping is a shared passion for Natalie and Joel Shave, who tend to their bees in Coolamon, NSW. "The hive lid is off and you can see the honeycomb on the top frames," says Natalie. "Because this is a calm hive, our hoods are off and we're enjoying the bees' hum – it's peaceful and soothing, evoking a strong sense of our connection to nature." **FACING PAGE** The couple harvest pure honey for their business, Waggle & Round.

FOUR YEARS AGO, NATALIE AND JOEL SHAVE'S life was the exact opposite of the hectic but happy country life they lead today. Back then, they were a corporate couple working long hours and had a toddler, a baby on the way and a serious case of itchy feet. "We wanted a change from living in Brisbane and working behind a desk," recalls Natalie, 39. "We didn't know if it was going to be a rural change or an overseas move, but COVID highlighted that we really wanted a lifestyle shift."

Having spent much of their 20s travelling the world, Natalie and Joel, 37, are no strangers to adventure. They met in Melbourne in 2010, when Joel had arrived from Canada, then lived together in the Philippines, Spain and the Netherlands before settling in Natalie's home town of Brisbane, Queensland, in 2016.

"Before we had kids, we were quite adventurous," Natalie explains. "We're both drawn to change and giving things a go. It also helps that Joel is from Canada, so he's used to moving around." At the time, Natalie was working in finance, while Joel was an engineer. Although they agreed

it was time for a change, they weren't exactly sure what that would involve – until Natalie had a serendipitous encounter at work. "A client mentioned his bee pollination business and it just clicked with me," says Natalie. "What followed was an hour-long conversation about bees. I'd always been drawn to nature and Joel is most happy working with his hands, so the idea aligned perfectly with what we wanted for our future."

Natalie immediately started learning as much as she could, joining a bee club that same night and visiting a club apiary on weekends to gain hands-on experience. After a year, she bought her first hive and over the next couple of years that number grew to 10. Then, an unexpected eviction led to more permanent changes.

"One night, Joel and I talked about giving beekeeping a proper go, then the next day we got a call from the real estate agent saying we had to move out," recalls Natalie. "If we hadn't had that conversation the day before, it would have been very stressful, but it made me feel like it was supposed to happen; it was meant to be." >



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE "You don't need to have all your bees in one spot all year round – you can move them to different sites," says Natalie. "It results in different tastes and the bees make more honey,"; Waggle & Round Honey is sold in stores and cafes around the Riverina; the bees draw out the honeycomb; inside job; "These new hives are made from polystyrene and painted by Joel to match the Riverina's autumn colours," Natalie says; Natalie uses a smoker to calm the bees. "The queen bee lives in the bottom box and lays her eggs, while the top boxes are filled with honey," she says. **FACING PAGE** "It's been a big shift – not just with the business but with our family," says Natalie of their tree change.





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Lucy enjoys wearing her pink suit and learning all about the bees and honey production; moving to Coolamon has paid off for the family. "It was like a tick of approval from the universe," says Natalie of leaving the city behind. **FACING PAGE** "Pollination is something I'm really passionate about," says Natalie. "Beekeepers provide hives to farmers to help pollinate their crops, mainly fruit and nuts. Our biggest pollination each year is the almond orchards in Victoria and New South Wales. It's such a huge industry and it depends entirely on honeybee pollination."

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With their fate decided, Natalie and Joel acted quickly. They found a home to rent in the small town of Coolamon, just outside of Wagga Wagga in south-western NSW, and moved there in late 2021, with a four-year-old and a four-month-old. They established their honey business, Waggle & Round, early the following year and haven't looked back.

Inevitably, their first three years in business have been full of highs and lows, but Natalie doesn't doubt for a minute they've made the right call, both professionally and personally. "We just love the fresh air, the space and the slower pace of life. It's such a contrast from the corporate world we left behind in Brisbane," she says. "And from a beekeeping perspective, this region is honestly a dream."

The Riverina's plentiful eucalyptus trees, nutrient-rich red soil and Murrumbidgee River are a winning trifecta that creates happy bees and abundant honey. "Our honey is all-natural eucalyptus honey," says Natalie proudly. >



“Sometimes it’s darker in colour from river red gum trees or buckwheat flower, and sometimes it’ll be lighter from the yellow box tree,” says Natalie. “What people really like about our honey is not just the flavours, but the authenticity of how it’s produced – we don’t filter it, so all the enzymes and beneficial properties are preserved.”

What started as a search for a better lifestyle has given the Shaves far more than the desired work-life balance. Three years and 300 hives later, daughters Lucy and Vivien, now seven and three, are happily adapted to country life while Mum and Dad busily plan what’s next for Waggle & Round.

The coming years promise exciting growth for the family business, as Natalie and Joel plan to increase hive numbers and expand their pollination services, all while enjoying their hard-won success, both in business and at home.

“At the end of the day, we feel like it’s a real privilege to have built this life together,” says Natalie. *CS*
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FROM LEFT Natalie inspects the brood; “With bees, you can only move them at night-time because during the day they forage,” says Natalie. “Then, the bees stay in their hive overnight. Once the sun sets, we load them onto the back of a truck and drive them to new sites or pollination crops. We unload them at dawn, and they’re ready to start flying once the sun rises.” FACING PAGE Country life offers the young family a sense of peace and fulfilment.

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