



THE FRAGILE FEAST

Routes To Ferran Adrià

HANNAH COLLINS

HATJE
CANTZ

THE FRAGILE FEAST

Her
Nona
Good food
feeds the soul

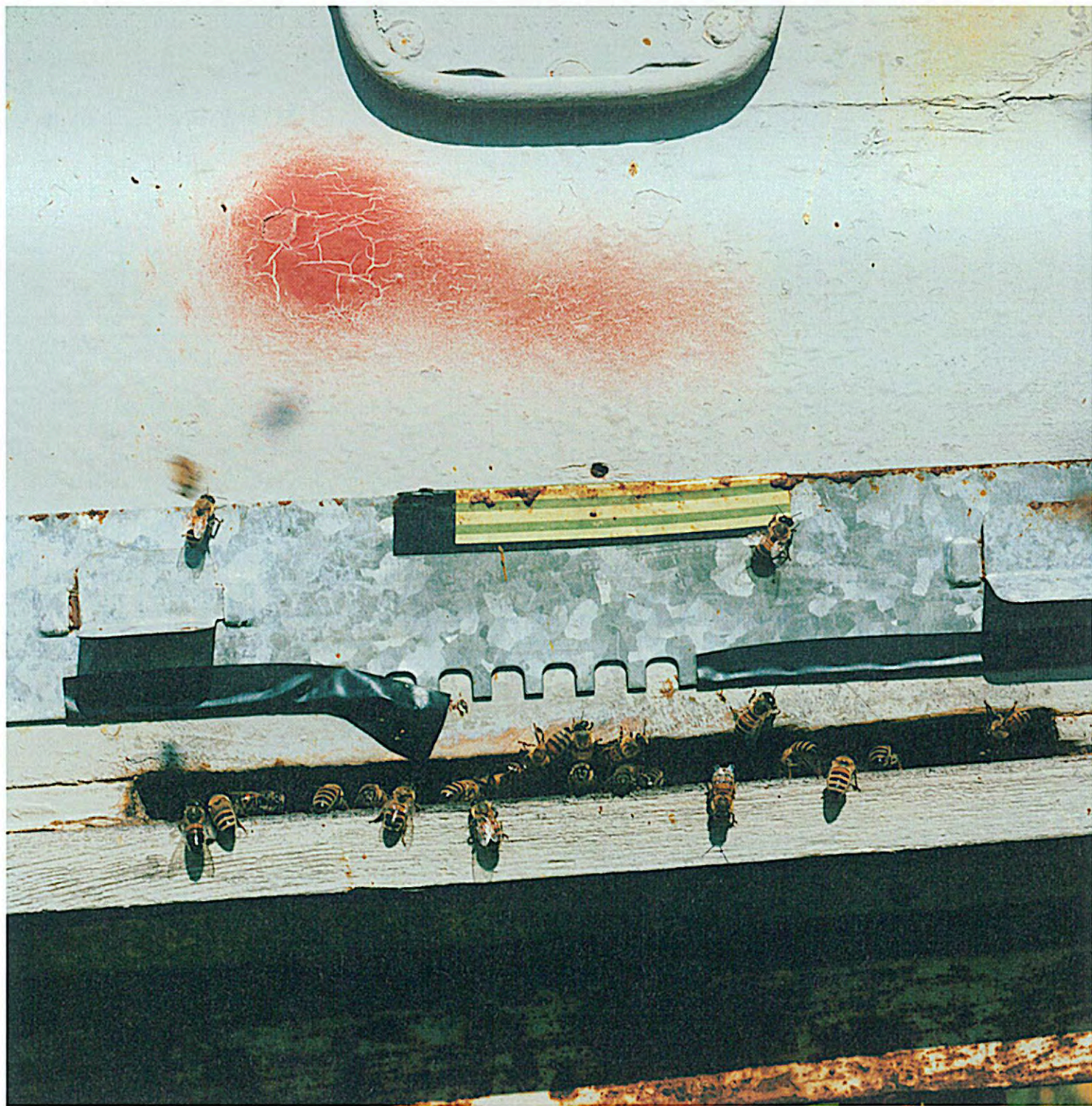
Her

Api e miele | Bees and honey

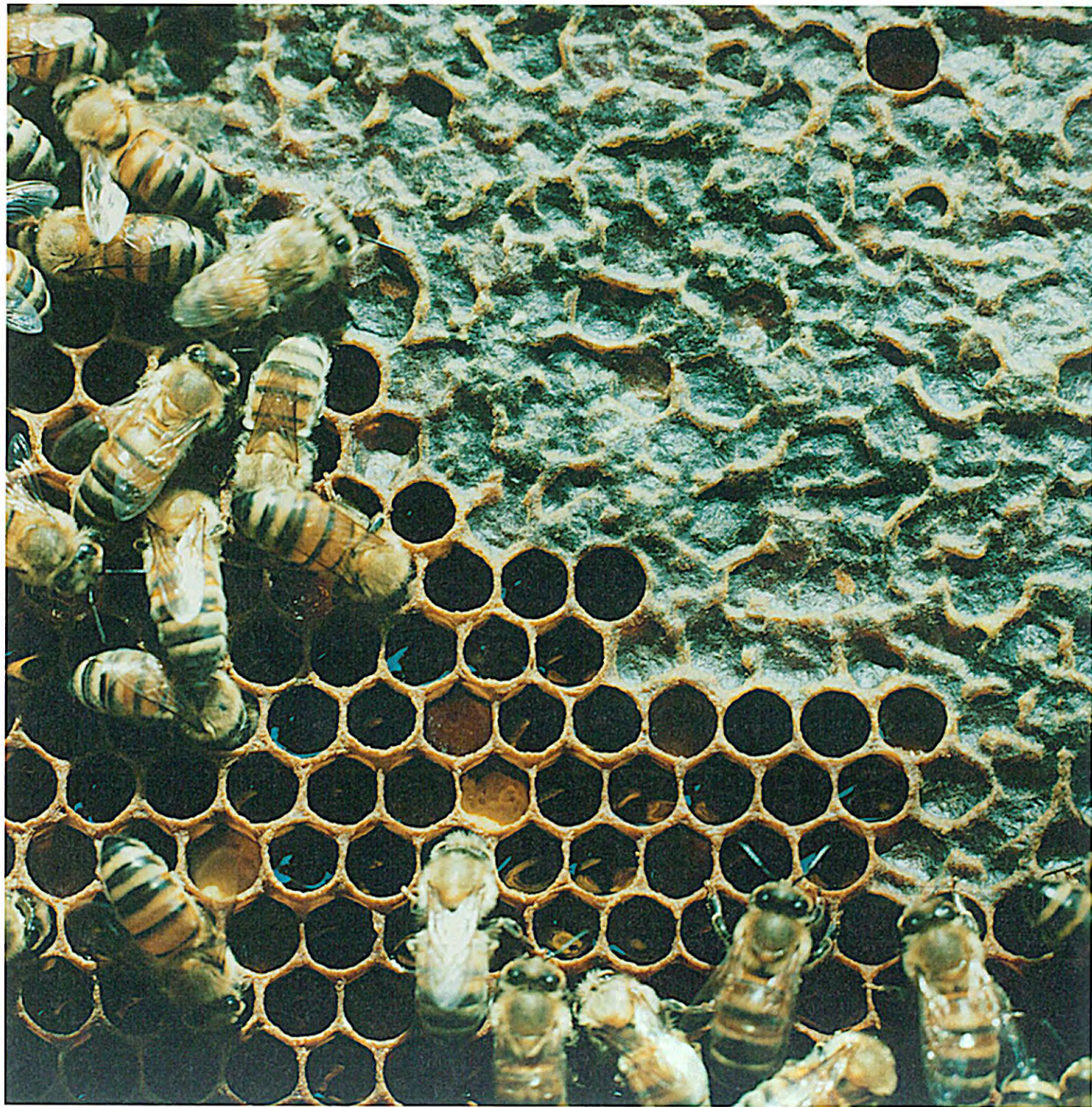
VIGO DI THUN, TRENTINO, ITALY















The nomadic bees of Thon are gleaming, with shiny wings and powerful furry bodies. These bees are exceptionally healthy and productive. Cruising among the blossoms near to the hive, they dip into the flowers, filling their sacs with nectar, covering their hind legs with pollen. The worker bee recognises a flower and returns to the same blossom each time. Patterns sprayed on the outside of the hive stop the bees becoming confused and ensure they return to their own family. When they enter the hive the pollen from the flower is removed from the bees' legs as they rub up against a grate by the entrance. Moving up through the hive they deposit the honey in the yellow wax combs left by Andrea Paternoster.

Andrea worships the female sex and the bee – his work is entirely in the service of this obsession. The idea of the single queen surrounded by her 60,000 virgin daughters and the imagined power of this intensely productive community has a mystical significance for him.

Human contact with honey and bees was first recorded in a cave painting near Valencia 15,000 years ago. The gatherer is seen climbing three thin ropes to take honey from a hive high up on a cliff. He carries a gourd ready to hold the honey he is about to steal. In the scene are several huge but benevolent bees.

Andrea's bees never need to fly far. They are surrounded by the flowers from which they will draw nectar; in April this might be acacia, apple, French honeysuckle or dandelion; in June lime, chestnut or sunflower: later ivy or carob. The hives are placed in remote spots on the top of mountains or in isolated valleys. As the flowering of each plant passes the hives are moved overnight.

The surrounding landscape has fallen into shadow and the bees have returned home. Andrea closes each hive so there is no exit and the colony is loaded onto an open truck to be moved. The hives must be in their new location many kilometres away by sunrise so the bees do not become disoriented. Relocated, the bees settle and begin to collect the nectar from the new type of flower, though not before they have taken out their irritability on anyone crossing their path. Andrea gets regularly castigated with multiple stings in a kind of temporary and short-lived humiliation. All through the summer Andrea moves hives, replaces combs and processes the gigantic quantities of honey that the bees produce. Each hive may produce fifteen kilos of honey from one type of flower. Many kilos of honey, each a different colour and texture, come from these few valleys of northern Italy, which have a reputation for the sweetness of the honey and gentleness of the bees. Go to the more hostile environments of South America or Scotland and the bees are far more aggressive towards humans, stinging more easily and attacking more fiercely.

During the chilly winter when the bees do not leave the hive, they are kept warm and survive by constant movement – they circulate in a tumbling motion and are never still. Opening a hive in winter you will see a great ball of bees huddled together, moving in a swirl around a central point where the queen lies protected by her daughters.



Ferran was given a pot of honey from Meli Thun. Eduard Xatruch, Ferran's kitchen manager, arrived that autumn in Val di Non, in search of the source of this exceptional honey. Ferran does not cook the honey but takes it back to its origin. In an entirely individual experience each diner takes part in the ritual performance of sucking the honey that has been placed on the stamen of a new flower.

