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The £5 a bottle mineral water - from a cloud in the South Seas

By STEVE D'ANTAL - More by this author
Last updated at 21:57pm on 28th July 2007

Comments (8)

A plastic roof on a tiny windswept island off the Australian coast is the unlikely source of the most expensive bottled water ever to arrive in the UK.

Rainwater collected on King Island, near Tasmania, will be sold under the name Cloud Juice for more than £5 a bottle once it makes the 11,000-mile trip to Britain.

King Island water is claimed to be the purest in the world because the trade winds carrying the rain clouds travel 7,000 miles from South America without passing over any land, and therefore encounter little or no pollution, before arriving at the island.

Cloud Juice is the brainchild of Tasmanian-born Duncan McFie, 40, who noticed the quality of the water when he arrived on the island in 1991 to begin a teaching career.

He said: "I knew nothing about water but I saw people kept coming to the hostel where I lived to use the rainwater tank because the town water from bore holes tastes so bad.

"I knew we had the cleanest air in the world here, but what I didn't know was whether having clean air meant you would have clean water, so I began four years of research, working in school holidays.

"I didn't drink the water myself. All I saw was a business opportunity that would allow me to pay for more skiing."

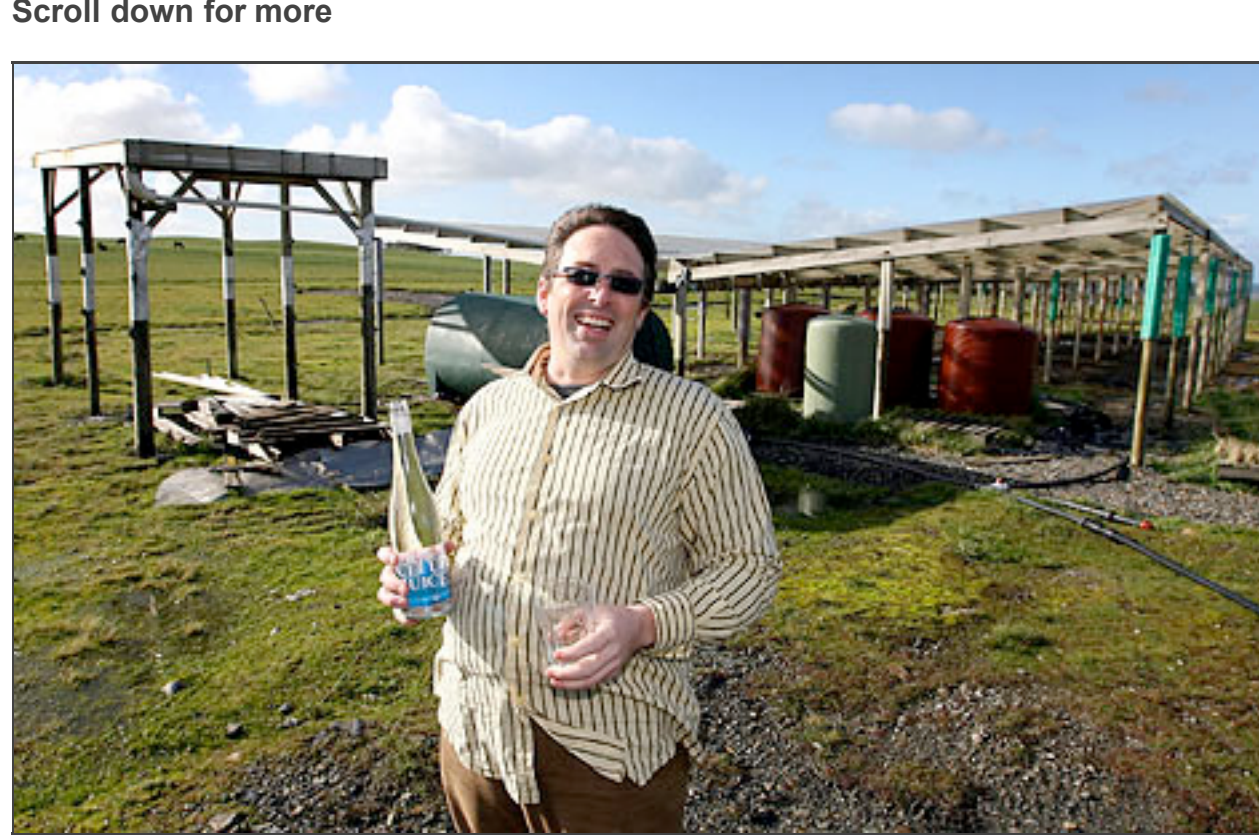
Helped by friends, Mr McFie launched Cloud Juice in 1997 after signing up 35 investors. He started with just a small roof to collect the water and has taken a decade to turn a profit.

His big break came in 1999 when ultra-trendy Parisian store Colette decided to stock the water.

That led to a place on the menu at legendary Spanish restaurant El Bulli, near Barcelona, which is consistently chosen as the world's top place to eat.

Now a tiny factory on the island produces 100,000 bottles a year but demand could soar further if it is selected by Claridge's hotel in London for a new "water menu", featuring 20 waters of the world, complete with tasting notes.

Scroll down for more



Pennies from heaven: Duncan McFie and the roof collecting the rain that could make him rich

At least one other British restaurant is already interested in the water, and if it proves a success in Claridge's, Mr McFie is expecting a surge of interest from other stockists.

The origins of Cloud Juice are far removed from the glitz of the Mayfair hotel.

It falls on a corrugated plastic roof on a remote corner of sparsely populated King Island, which lies in the Bass Strait between Melbourne and Tasmania.

At first glance, the rolling farmland might be mistaken for Devon or Somerset, but the gravel road to the site is littered with the corpses of dozens of wallabies.

The dents on his aged Land Rover are evidence that Mr McFie regularly adds to the toll as he pulls giant water butts back to his bottling plant.

Once there, the water is filtered to remove any traces of dust that may have got into it, and passed through ultraviolet light to kill any bacteria before being bottled and shipped around the world.

Scroll down for more



A tiny factory on Tasmania produces 100,000 bottles of 'cloud juice' a year

Until now, King Island has relied on the export of beef, blue cheese, shellfish and bull kelp, a giant seaweed that is sent to Scotland to be used in lipstick and ice cream.

But now water is the talk of the area and islanders describe Mr McFie as an "icon".

He employs six of his past and present high school students to work in his bottling plant, in a converted seafood warehouse.

Mr McFie said: "I don't want to sound pretentious, but water is becoming more like wine. Our product is designed to be served in a restaurant or dinner party - not to be put in the kids' lunchboxes.

"I think people need to get over the cost of it and there are plenty of people out there who don't look at price when they order a meal.

They'll spend £100 on a bottle of wine and if you put a decent bottle of water on the bill, then so what?

"I thought the UK would be a prime market because they'd understand the name and like it, and because the money is there. When I've walked around London it seems a ritzy place.

"People are getting fussier. Rainwater is a lot softer than ground water - mineral water - so it has a really smooth finish to the taste, and that's what people notice."

The water costs about £5 per 750ml in shops abroad, but is likely to go for substantially more if chosen by Claridge's, where it would be listed on a menu like wine, including details of its origin.

Waters already given the nod include MaHaLo, drawn from 3,000 feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean and 10 Thousand BC, from Canada, which comes in a corked glass bottle, like a fine wine.

Claridge's Renaud Gregoire said: "We created the water menu following demand from American customers, who are used to the choice.

"I treat it like tea or wine, as each tastes different depending on where it comes from. Different water can accompany different food, depending on its flavour.

"The water menu will have tasting notes like a wine list, including recommendations. But if people want tap water, they can have it."

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Here's a sample of the latest comments published. You can click view all to read all comments that readers have sent in.

Ridiculous-think of all the extra global warming and use of dwindling fuel resources in transporting it halfway across the world - I will not be buying it and will boycott any retailer that sells it.

- Dg, Cheltenham

You couldn't make it up!

- Mike P, London

Flying water round the world? Not very green, and you'd have to be stupid to pay for it.

- Nick, Adelaide

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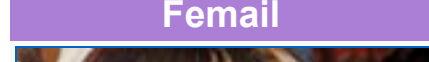
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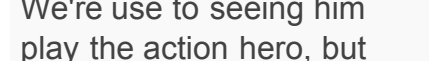
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Femal



Sweaty Tom Cruise's dirty dancing at Beckham party

We're use to seeing him play the action hero, but Tom was drenched in sweat as he danced erotically with his 28-year-old wife at the Beckham's 'Welcome to America' party



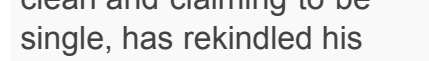
Kate Moss is devastated as Pete goes back to ex lover

Kate Moss's ex fiance Pete Doherty, who is in a rehab clinic attempting to get clean and claiming to be single, has rekindled his relationship with ex-girlfriend Nadine Ruddy



Seeing myself as a ladette on TV turned me into a lady

Two years ago I was a TV star and had achieved fame most people only dream about - the only problem was that I was famous throughout Britain for being loud, drunken and 'sluttish'



Blondie's beauty secrets.. it's all down to black sheep jabs

Blondie star Deborah Harry has admitted having injections of cells taken from black sheep embryos to maintain her looks. The 62-year-old says she had the jabs three decades ago



'Chilli-hot cleaner wrecked my life' - by female judge in sex video blackmail case

The woman judge at the centre of the sensational sex video blackmail case reveals she has lost her faith in Britain's courts and says Miss Chilli Hot Stuff ruined her life



Amy Winehouse struggles to put on weight despite junk food addiction

Amy Winehouse's diminishing physique has attracted as much attention as her music. But the singer, a chocoholic with a passion for crisps, says she can't put on weight



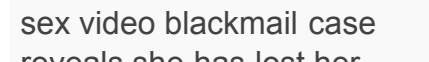
Kirsten Dunst kicks out her pop star boyfriend after two weeks for being too untidy

Rocker Johnny Borrell's untidiness has cost him his girlfriend, Spiderman actress Kirsten Dunst



A touch of Lady Penelope for Kate as she buys a classic '60s Roller

Her accent may be more Croydon than cut-glass class, but Kate Moss seems every bit a lady



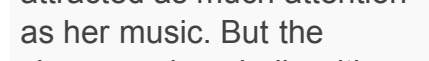
Who'd want the most sought-after dress of the year now Posh has worn it?

Mrs Beckham scored top marks when she wore Roland Mouret's Moon dress. But will it sell?



Return of the top Bananas

In the Eighties, they were the fantasy of every red-blooded schoolboy. Now aged in their 40s, Bananarama are back in the recording studio...



First 'halfway housemate' enters main Big Brother house

The first of five potential housemates spends time in the house trying to impress the contestants



Why Kate's raising the hemlines these days

When she was courting a prince, Kate Middleton dressed demurely. But since the split she's raised the hemlines



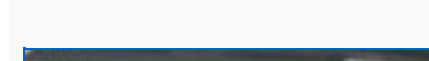
Katherine Jenkins set to star in The Phantom of the Opera sequel

Katherine Jenkins has caught the eye of impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber



All showbiz news

FANCY THAT...



And on the bongos, it's William, Prince of Woggles

The 25-year-old heir put dignity to one side as he joined in unalloyed fun and games at the World Scout Jamboree



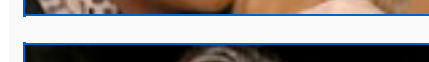
Jailhouse Rock: Prisoners dancing to Michael Jackson hit is internet sensation

Prisoners dance to 'Thriller' as part of their morning exercise routine and delight millions



The world's most upmarket beauty pageant - without a bikini in sight

Women from across the Arab world came together to compete in the Miss Arab World contest in Cairo



Sex for the motherland: Young Russians encouraged to procreate at camps

Youth camps use group weddings and rampant sex to raise the birth rate



The abandoned ducklings raised in a teacup

A pair of tiny abandoned ducklings found battling against waves after being washed out to sea are being cared for - in a teacup



Brave mongrel survives horrifying crossbow attack

A puppy was shot twice in the head by callous thugs - with a crossbow. Amazingly, the friendly mongrel, named Beau has survived