



MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

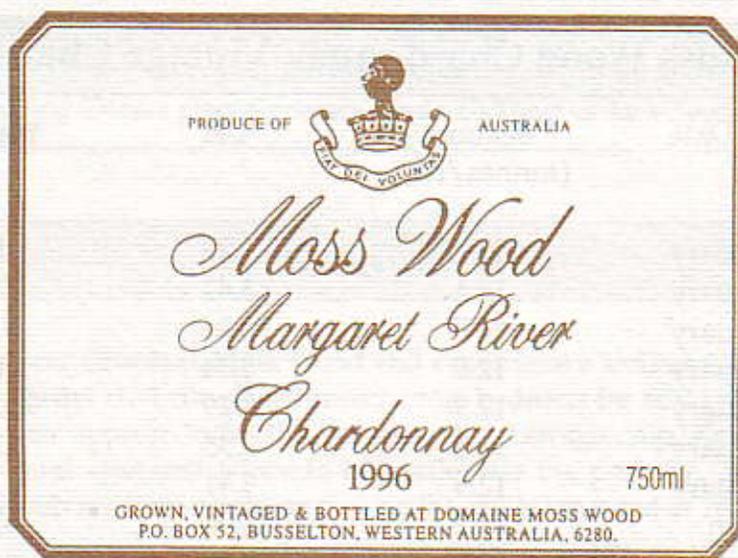
Nº 32

April, 1997

The 1996 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1996 vintage was an outstanding one at Moss Wood, one of the few which have been excellent for both white and red wines. Some areas of the vineyard suffered from heavy rainfall during the flowering of the vines but excellent conditions everywhere else compensated for this. After an ideal temperate spring with very good rainfall and no strong winds to cause damage to the grapes, the weather leading up to vintage was warm but without any hot spells and there was no rain at harvest. This enabled the grapes to ripen steadily and easily until two very warm weeks in February hastened the beginning of vintage. Keith Mugford regarded it as an exemplary harvest which produced fine chardonnay with delicate fragrances and impressive richness.

The grapes were crushed and immediately drained so that there was no skin contact. As usual, all pressings were included and the juices were cold settled for three days in stainless steel tanks, inoculated with a pure yeast culture and fermented at 18°C until half way. They were then racked into one hundred per cent new French barriques where they finished fermentation. Fifty per cent of the wine was allowed to go through a malolactic fermentation. The chardonnay was left on its gross lees for three months and spent a further ten months in barrel on its fine lees. An improvement in the quality of grapes coming from the vineyard is enabling Keith to give the chardonnay more time in oak than was possible beforehand.



Keith describes the 1996 Moss Wood Chardonnay as having a light to medium straw colour with some green tints; fruity aromas of lime, melon and peach with toasty oak with overtones of bread dough and butterscotch from the malolactic fermentation and yeast autolysis. The palate is rich and luscious with ripe peach characters, some citrus overtones and soft oak. The 1996 Chardonnay is tightly structured, intensely flavoured and has crisp acidity on a long, lingering finish. While fresh, clean and delicious young, it can be cellared with confidence for up to ten years.

The 1997 Vintage at Moss Wood

Although the 1997 vintage has produced more than its fair share of hiccups and heartaches for the Mugfords, Keith still believes that the quality of the fruit that comes off the vineyard will be good to very good. Mind you before the rain at vintage, he believed that it could have been exceptional.

Before that, unseasonal springtime weather had decimated the chardonnay crop with strong winds sweeping the vineyard during budburst. Further gusty winds continued from the last week in September until late October doing more damage to the chardonnay vines and also reducing the yield of semillon from the vineyard. The pinot noir was quite sheltered and only suffered minor damage. Then on December 11th, the worst hail storm in Keith's memory (hailstones like marbles) clobbered the pinot and significantly reduced production of that wine in 1997.

The weather has been much more topsy turvy than usual in the Margaret River region with cool to mild weather in December and two warm spells during January including the hottest day since 1985. February was quite mild with some unwelcome rain. There were brief wet spells in March which took the edge off the vintage's potential.

The chardonnay smelt sensational as it fermented, with the floral aromatics reminding Keith of the first Moss Wood vintage of chardonnay in 1980. With 13.5% of alcohol, first signs are that the wine will be rich, concentrated and complex with what Keith describes as 'pretty' fragrances.

The semillon juices show powerful granny smith apple aromas and pleasing ripeness and the wine appears as though it will have impressive mid-palate weight.

The pinot noir is a monster with the vintage reminding Keith of the earthy, spicy, sappy characters of the outstanding 1981. While he believes that the cabernet will promise a multitude of delights, he will make no bold predictions about that at this stage.

Moss Wood Chardonnay Vintage Chart

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beaume (tonnes/ha)	pH	Yield	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1983	18 February	12.6	3.28	8.7	7
1984	29 February	13.1	3.41	7.73	8
1985	22 February	12.5	3.24	8.44	7
1986	26 February	12.9	3.34	9.1	7
1987	24 February	12.9	3.29	10.13	8
1988	12 February	12.5	3.35	11.2	7
1989	20 February	12.9	3.41	7.82	7+
1990	6 March	12.9	3.24	6.85	10
1991	25 March	12.8	3.48	6.36	8
1992	27 February	13.5	3.35	7.3	8+
1993	4 March	13.6	3.35	10.29	10
1994	28 February	13.6	3.49	9.0	9
1995	17 February	13.7	3.30	7.0	10
1996	20 February	13.2	3.39	9.0	9+

Standing Orders for Moss Wood wines

Keith and Clare Mugford have been astounded at the dramatic increase in sales through mail order since they took over at Moss Wood in 1984. At that time, about 100 dozen cases of Cabernet Sauvignon were sold to the mailing list. Although they haven't canvassed any support during that time, mail order demand for the Moss Wood Cabernet has risen to more than 450 cases per year. This dramatic increase perhaps mirrors the changing perception of premium wines in Australia but, in association with staggering leaps in demand from one year to the next, it has meant that the allocation we have put aside for our mail order customers has sometimes been unable to satisfy all of their needs. This is particularly disappointing for us as many from the mailing list have been among our best and longest serving supporters.

We have introduced a Standing Order system for customers who simply do not want to miss out on particular wines. Moss Wood undertakes to inform its Standing Order list of the prices of the wines which will be available during the year. It will also provide information (including tasting notes) which will enable customers to make judgements about the quality of those wines. All wines will be available for tasting at the winery, by appointment.

In essence, the system requires those wishing to reserve stock of the Moss Wood wines to place an order (accompanied by a deposit of 30% of the value of the wine) by the 30th of March each year. Apart from stock needed for marketing and museum purposes, Standing Orders will be filled first. If there is insufficient wine produced to fill Standing Orders, wine will be allocated on a pro rata basis. Customers who do not proceed with the order will be entitled to a refund of 50% of the deposit.

Mail order prices for wines to be released this year are: 1996 Chardonnay \$30 per bottle; 1995 Cabernet \$32 per bottle; 1995 Cabernet (magnum) \$85; 1995 Pinot Noir \$25 per bottle.

The mail order will operate as usual. Customers will be able to order their wines on receipt of their newsletter being as prompt as possible to ensure supply. The Standing Order provides those who may be away for a particular release or who simply do not want to risk missing out on the wine a guarantee (barring natural disasters) of obtaining their wines. Keith and Clare will continue to work hard to satisfy all orders from their most valued supporters, the mail order customers. For more information about Standing Orders please contact Aileen Dickhart at the vineyard.

Shortfall

As a result of the springtime disasters, Moss Wood will experience a serious volume shortfall with the 1997 harvest. Keith confirms that the chardonnay crop is down by 60%; semillon is 40% below expectation; and pinot noir appears to be 25% less than the average crop. Keith has been looking at producing some individual vineyard wines to help alleviate the problem. Moss Wood wines will continue to be made exclusively from grapes grown on the estate vineyard at Willyabrup.

The individual vineyard wines will be clearly labelled to avoid confusion with them. There will be a chardonnay from the Palandri Vineyard at Metricup, another chardonnay and a pinot noir from Pat and Barbara Holt's Lefroy Brook Vineyard at Pemberton and a cabernet sauvignon from Vineyard Manager, Ian 'Tinker' Bell's property, Glenmore, at Yallingup. Mail order customers will be given full details of these wines when they come up for release.

Keith and Clare are at pains to point out that the decision to produce these wines is based purely on the winery's short term requirements (needs!!) and will not necessarily become long term arrangements. Wines from the Domaine remain the priority at Moss Wood.

Hooke on Moss Wood

Australian Gourmet Traveller's wine scribe, Huon Hooke, has written about changes to the Moss Wood Cabernet in the October edition of the magazine. Lovers of Moss Wood will find Huon's article of great interest.

Margaret River at Morans

Keith Mugford had the pleasure of representing the region at a wonderful Best of Margaret River dinner at Morans recently. Outstanding chef, Peter Sullivan offered gravalax of ocean trout with the 1996 Moss Wood Semillon; salad of duck with mache lettuce, roast tomatoes and baby beetroot with the magnificent new-look Pierro Cabernet; roast beef fillet with mash, braised lentils and salsa verde with the 1992 Leeuwin Art Series Cabernet and ash coated Kervella goat cheese with fig and honey bread with the 1994 Moss Wood Cabernet.

Picardy

We are always delighted to be able to report on what's happening in the life of Moss Wood founders, Bill and Sandra Pannell. Their wine maker son, Dan, and his wife, Jodie, are now living on the Pemberton property, Picardy while Bill and Sandra commute most weekends. Dan, who made a name for himself turning around the fortunes of Margaret River producer, Rosa Brook, has been delighted with the first crush in the Picardy winery. The immaculately trimmed vineyard is in good balance and the grapes are ripening beautifully. Dan believes that they have crushed some seriously good pinot in their second vintage. A minute quantity of their first Picardy pinot noir will be released mid year.

The Swiss Connection

Irene Mueller, who has completed a horticultural apprenticeship in Switzerland is working in the vinyard and winery and living at Moss Wood for much of 1997. Introduced to the Mugfords by their Swiss agent, Willie Frei of Barossa Weinhandels Ag, Irene will have many tales to tell: of trekking over the Nullabor, of touring the North and of the joys of being part of the team.

At Brown's Lane, Coventry

When Nick Scheele, chairman and chief executive of Jaguar Cars Limited, came to Perth to launch the new XK8 sports car with dealers from the Asia Pacific he had the good fortune to meet up Barry and Jude Lepley, lovers of Margaret River's finest wines. Nick is a serious wine lover with a particular fondness for chardonnay and so the Lepleys made sure that he sampled the best that the region had to offer. He was so taken with the unobtainable 1995 Moss Wood Chardonnay that Barry Lepley promised to bring him a dozen from his personal cellar on his next trip to England.

The Lepleys headed off for London shortly afterwards with Barry taking as cabin baggage the case of Moss Wood and a six pack of the fabulous 1994 Cullen Reserve Cabernet Merlot. Extreme caution was the by-word as the Lepleys disembarked at Heathrow, transferred the wine to a London cab, proceeded apace to Barry's sister's home in central London into which they made a final transfer of all their baggage. The cab had been gone but seconds when Barry realised that the case of Chardonnay was missing.

By a remarkable piece of luck, Barry had memorised the cab's number (he had been musing on the silliness of the London system which made numbers much harder to remember than in other cities) and he immediately contacted the cab company and the Chelsea police. In spite of the speed with which the taxi was traced, the wine had disappeared. (Some London cabby will be drinking better than usual for a while).

Barry contacted Nick Scheele at Brown's Lane Coventry. He laughed, then cried and dispatched a driver to London to pick up the Cullen Cab Merlot before anything happened to it.

Keith Mugford gets to be the hero in this story (well almost). When Barry and Jude Lepley told him the sorry tale, he asked his London distributors (Peter & Clare Rich and Mike Hall of Stones of Belgravia) to put aside a case for the Jaguar chairman. As they could find none, Keith has had to search further afield. Dion Gunson who worked at Moss Wood in 1992 and 1993 to broaden his knowledge of the wine industry, and is now part-owner of the excellent London wine shop, *La Vigneronne*, is working on the case.