

MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

ISSUE 46

NOVEMBER, 2001

Moss Wood 2001 Semillon

With the purchase of Ribbon Vale by Keith and Clare Mugford just before harvest, the 2000 vintage at Moss Wood and Ribbon Vale was incredibly hectic, with wine being made in two locations and equipment and people being ferried between them. There was also the steep learning curve associated with the team familiarising itself with the new vineyard and its ripening characteristics. All this meant that all at Moss Wood finished the 2000 vintage licking their wounds. Everyone agreed that things would be better next year and so, as the 2001 vintage approached, the Moss Wood team had never been better prepared. As Keith commented 'Just like the Australian cricket team touring the Sub-continent, 2001 was going to be our "No Excuses" harvest.'

While, of course, all vintages are hectic, since Bill and Sandra Pannell brought in the first crop in 1973, all at Moss Wood have worked hard at being organised and getting things right at harvest time.

The release of the 2001 Semillon provides the team at Moss Wood with an important first opportunity to show that they are able to handle the two vineyards with ease at the most stressful time of the year.

Certainly, the quality of the season was excellent, with mild conditions and just the

occasional odd hot burst along the way, over the Christmas break and on the first weekend in March. While limited rain fell through spring and summer, the vines did not suffer from lack of moisture and ripened without difficulty.

As a comparison, 2001 shared many features in common with the 1991 vintage. This year, the whites were of a higher quality because crop levels were lower and showed greater fruit freshness and concentration. The reds of course were outstanding in 1991 and it is probably too early to say how well the 2001s will compare. However, there is no doubt



that they have showed great early promise and, if they can continue to develop into something even partly resembling their older siblings, will be the cause of much delight at Moss Wood.

This year, the Semillon harvest began on 3rd March. With careful use of bird nets,

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damage was minimal and the fruit was in good condition when it was picked. The usual Moss Wood techniques were applied in the winery. The grapes were de-stemmed, pumped through the must chiller and loaded into the press. Free-run juice was drained and all pressings were blended back into the main batch. The juice was cold settled for 48 hours and the clear juice racked off to a fermentation tank and seeded with a pure yeast culture. A small amount of solids (2%) was also included. Temperature of fermentation was controlled at 18°C and the tanks were stirred once a day to keep the yeast in suspension. Once fermentation was completed, the stirring continued once per week for six weeks after which the wine was protein stabilised and cold stabilised and then bottled on 15th July.

The 2001 Semillon is typical of the Moss Wood style. On the nose, it has intense grapefruit, granny smith apple, figs and lemon sherbet aromas with some tobacco and rock melon notes. The palate has grapefruit, rock melon and fig flavours with some leesy characters, a cool, taut structure and fresh, crisp acidity. Its pristine concentrated fruit and creamy texture (enhanced by the lees stirring) support the wine's lingering, dry finish.

Certainly, it is fresh and lively at present and can be enjoyed over the next year or so as an aperitif on a warm afternoon or with food. However, as with all Moss Wood Semillon, it will be transformed by careful cellaring for up to 15 years.

Observant readers will have noted a change in the style of the Moss Wood newsletter. In fact, those with long memories will recall that this is the first new format for 14 years. We are nothing if not traditionalists in this organisation!

Sue Henderson, in her return to Moss Wood, has brought with her many new skills, not the least of which is the capability to produce a newsletter on our own computers. We hope you enjoy the new layout.

MOSS WOOD SEMILLON

| VINTAGE | HARVEST DATE | BEAUME (°) | YIELD (tonnes/ha) | VINTAGE RATING (out of 10) |
|---------|--------------|------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1983 | 5 March | 12.3 | 13.6 | 9 |
| 1984 | 5 March | 12.2 | 12.4 | 7 |
| 1985 | 28 February | 12.0 | 10.0 | 9 |
| 1986 | 28 February | 12.4 | 9.1 | 7 |
| 1987 | 9 March | 12.0 | 13.5 | 8 |
| 1988 | 18 February | 12.1 | 9.6 | 7 |
| 1989 | 15 March | 12.3 | 12.5 | 7 |
| 1990 | 21 March | 12.4 | 13.0 | 8 |
| 1991 | 26 March | 11.9 | 19.0 | 6 |
| 1992 | 3 March | 12.5 | 13.9 | 8 |
| 1993 | 5 March | 12.7 | 9.0 | 10 |
| 1994 | 10 March | 12.9 | 11.0 | 9 |
| 1995 | 23 February | 13.2 | 10.8 | 8+ |
| 1996 | 7 March | 12.9 | 14.9 | 9 |
| 1997 | 12 March | 13.9 | 9.6 | 9 |
| 1998 | 8 March | 13.7 | 12.7 | 9 |
| 1999 | 16 March | 13.1 | 11.2 | 9 |
| 2000 | 16 March | 13.5 | 10.3 | 9 |
| 2001 | 3 March | 12.9 | 12.8 | 9 |

Vintage Chart

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Moss Wood Margaret River 1999 Pinot Noir

Margaret River enjoyed one of its mildest seasons ever during the 1998 -1999 growing season and as the vintage approached expectations of good quality were high. Such seasons are well suited to a variety like pinot noir, which never struggles to achieve full ripeness but can suffer if the temperatures get too high. On the other hand, the Moss Wood team get very edgy about the cabernet sauvignon because the cooler conditions will delay the harvest to the point where autumn rain may threaten quality.

The harvest commenced on schedule on 22nd February when the grapes were registering 13.2° Beaume. The crop was smaller than average as a result of poor flowering during the spring although this is never a concern with pinot noir since we are always trying to encourage low yields. Although this is less profitable, the quality is invariably better.

In the winery, all but 10% of the grapes were crushed, de-stemmed and pumped into open fermentation tanks. The last 10% of the fruit was then added as whole bunches. Tanks were chilled down to 12°C and the juice pumped over once per day for the next three days. After that, the tanks were allowed to warm up and hand plunging, four times per day was commenced.

For the 1999 harvest, we began a series of experiments using wild yeast strains, rather



than following the tradition of using selected, pure culture species. The plan was to see if this technique could improve the complexity and texture of the wines. So, the Pinot Noir was left to start fermenting by itself and we watched and waited with interest.

Despite some trepidation, the wild ferment was largely uneventful and the wine went through this stage with a minimum of fuss. At the very end, one batch refused to finish and this required re-seeding with a selected strain. (This was a warning of things to come but more on that another time.)

When the fermentation reached dryness, the batches were tasted daily to monitor the changes in the tannin structure as this would decide the date on which it was pressed. The Pinot Noir was left on skins for an average of 15 days. After pressing, the wine spent



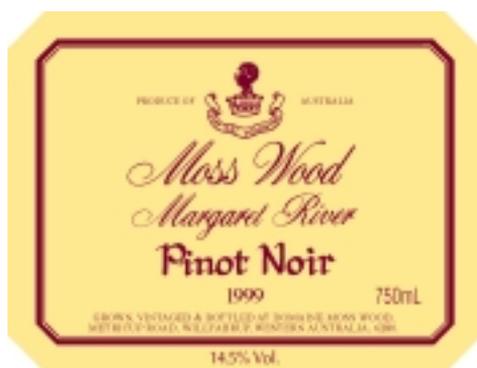
five days in a stainless steel tank and was then racked off its gross lees and put into barrel to undergo the malolactic fermentation. Once this process was finished, the wine was racked into stainless steel once more. After analyses were checked, it was returned to barrel as one homogeneous blend, for the first time. The oak treatment was standard for the Pinot Noir at Moss Wood - the wine was aged for twenty two months in 228 litre French barriques (33% of which were new). Finally, the wine was bottled in March 2001.

Since this wine was made with a wild yeast ferment, how has this affected its taste and our impressions of it? Apparently not by much because our descriptions seem to match those we have used in previous years. The nose shows fruit aromas of strawberry,

cherry and plum, with some spiciness from the whole bunches. There are also some interesting and complex characters - sappiness, beetroot and smoke, the last of which is enhanced by toasty oak. As is typical with Moss Wood Pinot Noir, the wine has begun to develop some earthy, mushroom notes, which we believe has been enhanced by the wild yeasts.'

Many people are of the view that this variety, at least when made in Australia, will not cellar well. While we acknowledge that it

does drink well as a young wine because it has such enjoyable fruit flavours and relatively soft structure, we enthusiastically encourage those people with cellars to give the Pinot Noir serious consideration for ageing. We have recently seen examples of the 1990, 1989, 1988 and 1983 vintages, all of which looked in terrific condition and provided great drinking but promised more still. Accordingly, we note that the 1999 vintage is fine for current drinking because it is really quite "yummy" but remind people that it will certainly repay patience and cellaring.



The 1999 Moss Wood Pinot Noir has attractive spicy, strawberry, raspberry and red cherry perfumes while the palate shows wild strawberry and plum characters with some savoury tones of beetroot, spice and salami. This is a rich, round and generous medium bodied red with dense, deep flavours, a velvety texture and firm acidity and toasty oak on a long satisfying finish.

MOSS WOOD PINOT NOIR

| VINTAGE | HARVEST DATE | BEAUME (°) | YIELD (tonnes/ha) | VINTAGE RATING (out of 10) |
|---------|--------------|------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1979 | 17 February | 12.3 | 6.6 | 4 |
| 1980 | 29 February | 14.2 | 3.5 | 4 |
| 1981 | 4 March | 13.1 | 3.8 | 10 |
| 1982 | 13 March | 12.95 | 8.2 | 5 |
| 1983 | 19 February | 12.85 | 6.0 | 6 |
| 1984 | 16 February | 12.9 | 5.7 | 6 |
| 1985 | 25 February | 13.3 | 6.4 | 10 |
| 1986 | 24 February | 13.3 | 5.8 | 10 |
| 1987 | 24 February | 12.9 | 5.8 | 8 |
| 1988 | 10 February | 13.1 | 6.0 | 8 |
| 1989 | 15 March | 12.9 | 6.5 | 6 |
| 1990 | 16 March | 13.4 | 8.5 | 9 |
| 1991 | 10 March | 13.3 | 10.0 | 9 |
| 1992 | 28 February | 13.5 | 8.8 | 8 |
| 1993 | 3 March | 13.3 | 8.2 | 8 |
| 1994 | 1 March | 13.5 | 11.0 | 9 |
| 1995 | 14 February | 13.6 | 9.2 | 9+ |
| 1996 | 15 February | 13.4 | 9.0 | 9 |
| 1997 | 2 March | 14.3 | 6.0 | 8+ |
| 1998 | 13 February | 13.6 | 8.1 | 9 |
| 1999 | 22 February | 13.8 | 8.0 | 9 |
| 2000 | 28 February | 14.0 | 11.4 | 8 |
| 2001 | 16 February | 13.7 | 10.0 | 9+ |

Vintage Chart

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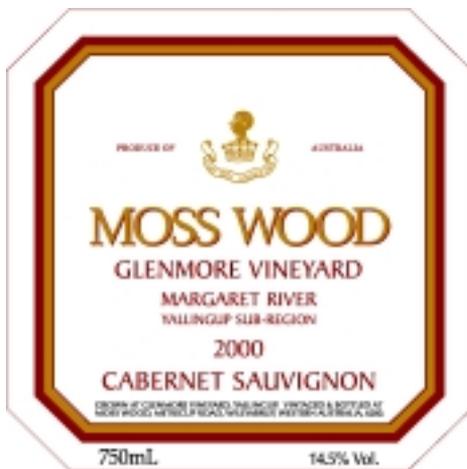
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Moss Wood 2000 Glenmore Cabernet Sauvignon



The 1999-2000 growing season was quite warm during the first half, culminating on the warmest day of the summer on the 31st December. However, after that, the warm weather abated somewhat and Margaret River had quite good rainfall. The timing of the rain was good because it fell during the third week of January, which was soon enough to avoid splitting and rot problems. The vines took up the additional water and it left them in good shape to ripen the crop, without moisture stress late in the season.

Another unexpected benefit was a yield increase. All the varieties produced bigger bunches, in some instances nearly 50% heavier than normal. It meant that vineyards that were carrying a sizeable crop before the rain were very heavily laden and struggled to ripen the grapes as the autumn weather came on. Vineyards in good balance had no such problems.



Glenmore, under the expert management of Ian Bell, is very much one of these, although friendly rivalry means there may be some dispute in the Moss Wood lunch-room if, in fact, this is really the case! Certainly Matt Bowden, the Moss Wood vineyard manager has expressed grave reservations about the quality standards at Glenmore and further has cast doubts about Keith's managerial skills, since Moss Wood pays such exorbitant prices for the grapes. Ian's retort is that if Moss Wood doesn't want them then there are plenty

of people in the queue to buy them! A friendly but competitive environment is encouraged at Moss Wood.

Returning once more to the wine, the harvest started on 31st March, about one week behind the average. Ripening was no problem as the grapes reached 14.1° Beaume.

Once in the winery, the fruit was de-stemmed and put into open fermenters. As part of our continuing experiment, fermentation was by wild yeast. Apart from that, things proceeded as normal. The tanks were plunged four times per day, temperatures were quite high (around 30°C) and pressing was carried out after 14 days on skins.

After pressing, the wine stayed in stainless steel tanks for one week and was then racked off gross lees into 228 litre French barriques - 25% of which were new. It underwent malolactic fermentation and once that was completed, the wine was racked to a stainless steel tank, analysed, adjusted for acidity and SO₂ and then returned to barrels as a homogeneous blend, where it stayed for twelve months. It was bottled in August this year.

Keith says 'We are still learning about the keeping potential of the Glenmore Vineyard wines, so our recommendations are conservative. However, the 1997 vintage is currently developing well and showing no signs of deteriorating. Consequently, we would expect a wine that has the fruit richness of the 2000 to perform at least as well and suggest that it be cellared for at least five years.'

The 2000 Moss Wood 'Glenmore Vineyard' Cabernet Sauvignon shows strong blueberry (a sub-regional characteristic of Yallingup wines) and spicy, leafy, redcurrant aromas. The palate has ripe plummy, blueberry flavours with earthy, spicy, toasty oak notes and is round, smooth and fleshy. There are substantial tannins and firm acidity on the finish but these are not aggressive or grippy. This is a classy red with bold perfumes, impressive depth and length of flavour, neat balance and excellent integration of fruit and oak.

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The 2001 Vintage Conditions

The growing season 2000-2001 was mild and dry. Temperatures were very moderate and there were only two serious bursts of warm weather – one on Boxing Day and the other on the last weekend in February. Rainfall was limited although the vines showed no evidence of moisture stress.

It was these dry conditions that caused the only major difficulty for the vintage because it reduced the native foods available for the birds. This meant that they turned their attention to the grapes and came into the vineyard much earlier than we have seen before. This caused some difficulties because we could not use our bird nets until the last spray had been applied and about a fortnight went by with the grapes unprotected. However, damage was minimal and once the nets were on the damage stopped.

All varieties produced higher than expected crops, about 5% above average and was probably the result of the good flowering conditions. This

is the sort of problem very few viticulturists will complain about!

Harvest started one week earlier than normal – the result of an early flowering and all varieties reached full ripeness. The mild conditions have produced wines with aromatics and flavours typical of cooler seasons. Both the whites and reds share similar style with the 1991 vintage, although the whites have better quality in 2001 because crop levels were smaller. It is too early to be certain about the reds but if their quality gets anywhere near that of 1991, we'll be delighted.



Is this Kings Park or Moss Wood ?

After Solange Moulia returned to France at the end of July, the Moss Wood team welcomed Michelle Croft to its ranks. Michelle, a qualified horticulturist, had completed her traineeship at Kings Park, overlooking Perth.

Michelle is now in charge of maintaining all the gardens around the Moss Wood and Ribbon Vale wineries. Readers must understand that this is no easy task. She is confronted with an attitude from the male staff that the best form of garden possible is concrete painted green. The fact that she is still in the job after three months is a testament to her commitment.



Gardens in front of old winery buildings

Her knowledge of the different plant species is impressive and any time spent discussing these matters with her is very informative. Indeed, any visitors to the property are encouraged to seek her out if they have any questions about what would be suitable to grow where.

Michelle is also in charge of our rehabilitation program and she continues the good work started by Solange. Our replanting in the creek lines has so far been successful and we hope to return the degraded areas to full health over the next five years and extend the program to other parts of the properties.

The other challenge for Michelle is what to do with all the compost. Keith estimates there is somewhere between 50 and 100 tonnes lying near our olive grove (another of Michelle's responsibilities), all a product of the new system for handling the winery waste. It is pleasing to see this being turned into something that's environmentally sound and useful. The problem is, if Michelle doesn't use it up soon, we are going to be disappearing because vintage is five months away and we'll be making the same amount again!

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