



MOSS WOOD
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Moss Wood 2006 Chardonnay

The 2006 vintage would have tried the patience of even the most saintly. The mild-mannered proprietor was close to using expletives to describe the weather, especially toward the end of January.

At this stage, it was so very cold - the average maximum was four degrees below normal and so the ripening process was ridiculously slow. The air temperature was low, so the vines looked yellow and couldn't grow properly - vigour was anything but vigorous. Cool of itself, is not a great concern for the quietly patient vigneron. Indeed, the cool seasons can produce some of the finest wines. However, as someone once noted, there is a fine line between pleasure and pain. If the season is too



cool the wine will be thin and green but one or two days of extra heat is enough to accrue the right flavours and balance. Then there is the additional worry that the longer ripening goes into autumn, the greater the threat of rain and 2006 was looking to be so very late that the somewhat less patient than usual vigneron was not just paranoid about the cabernet, he was even nervous about the chardonnay.

And so it was that in the end we finished with pleasure, not pain. Things warmed up in February and thanks to absurdly low yields, the fruit got to 13 Baume and full flavour ripeness. In a moment of calmness, Keith commented in passing that it was probably a blessing in disguise that the flowering was so poor and bunch weights (and therefore yields) so low, otherwise the grapes may never have ripened. Perhaps we had the best of both worlds for Chardonnay, with low yields for concentration of the flavours and a long, gentle season to accumulate the full range of flavours.

This was evident right from the start because although

it was a difficult year and a relief to get the grapes in, the fermenting wine gave immediate indication of the vintage quality, showing a clear stamp of freshness on the fruit character - bright lime citrus notes, fine, zingy, fresh, crisp acidity. Throughout the barrel fermentation and aging process the winemaking team did feel much the same way about the wine.

As usual, it was whole bunch pressed, cold settled and racked into barrel for fermentation. This year, there was less battonage than usual - once per week rather than daily to better retain the fruit freshness of the wine. About a third went through malolactic fermentation. After ten months in barrel, it was fined with bentonite for protein stability, cold stabilised, sterile filtered and bottled. A grand total of just under 500 cases were made.

Pre-blending, there were extensive tastings to check on the choice of barrels and to compare the effects of different levels of fruit exposure in the vineyard. The results have been fascinating. The oak trials



confirmed our preference for the Tonnellerie Remond barriques, with an interesting dimension added by Tonnellerie Rousseau. Other barrel trials will continue, even though we believe this combination suits the wine admirably. The vineyard trials consisted firstly, of the grapes fully exposed with no leaves around the bunches, and secondly, with no leaf removal. The wine with all leaves removed is a more complex style of chardonnay with accentuated malty and roasted nut characters while the wine with none removed tended to retain citrus, honeysuckle and peach blossom aromatics and looked prettier than the other.

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Chardonnay Vertical Tasting - 13th November 2006

The Moss Wood team decided to do a major review of their wine styles and got together a panel of stern judges to try each of the Moss Wood Vineyard wines from 1985 to 2006, inclusive.

Included on the panel were some very distinguished names:

Josh Bahen

Ian Bell

Peter Forrestal

John Gladstones

John Jens

Ray Jordan

Clare Mugford

Keith Mugford

Bill Pannell

Dan Pannell

Jodie Pannell

Amanda Shepherdson

Steve Waller

The purpose of the exercise was to establish a quality ranking for each vintage, which will then be included in research we are doing into possible changes in wine style that may result from the current projections for climate change. The project itself is a long way from completion and it will be some time before it makes its way into the public domain. However, one of the short term benefits is to be able to put together such an interesting tasting and it now provides readers, who have any of these vintages in their cellars, the chance to see how they are currently rated.

We acknowledge that making quality comparisons across vintages is a difficult task. Since 1985, there have been numerous improvements in the viticulture and winemaking at Moss Wood

and so there have been many factors influencing wine style and quality, not just simply the weather. So the instructions to the tasters were to assess the depth and quality of the fruit flavours in the wine as they are today, making some allowance for the wines age and score those with the best fruit characters the highest. All the scores are set out in the table below.

When looking through the results there are few surprises

and the vintages generally held in high regard stood out in the tasting. Also, from a winemaking point of view, it was good to see the spread of average scores was quite small, with the indication being that quality and style were consistent across the range. Those responsible for growing and making the wines can give themselves a pat on the back, although consistency is to be expected, given that the wines came from the same vineyard.

RANK	VINTAGE	TOTAL SCORE	AVERAGE SCORE	HARVEST DATE	° BEAUME	YIELD (TONNES /HA)	VINTAGE RATING (OUT OF 10)
1	2002	191.7	17.43	04 Mar	13.7	2.45	9+
2	1990	187.5	17.05	6 Mar	12.9	6.85	10
3	1985	186.5	16.95	22 Feb	12.5	8.44	7
4	2004	185.8	16.89	23 Feb	12.7	7.7	9+
5	1992	184.5	16.77	27 Feb	13.5	7.3	7
6	1995	184.4	16.76	17 Feb	13.7	7.0	9
7	2006	183	16.64	18 Mar	12.8	3.46	10
8	1996	181.1	16.46	20 Feb	13.2	9.0	7
9	2001	181	16.45	15 Feb	13.4	7.51	10
10	1999	180.7	16.43	3 Mar	13.4	6.89	10
11	2003	179.9	16.35	25 Feb	13.3	6.12	9
12	2005	178.4	16.22	22 Feb	13.0	5.35	9
13	1994	171.5	15.59	28 Feb	13.6	9.0	8
14	1986	170.25	15.48	26 Feb	12.9	9.1	7
15	1998	168.5	15.32	5 Mar	14.1	4.08	8
16	1993	166.5	15.14	4 Mar	13.6	6.36	9
17	1988	165.475	15.04	12 Feb	12.5	11.2	7
18	1987	165.3	15.03	24 Feb	12.9	10.13	8
19	1989	165.2	15.02	20 Feb	12.9	7.82	7+
20	1997	164	14.91	7 Mar	13.6	2.58	8
21	1991	163.5	14.86	25 Mar	12.8	10.29	9
22	2000	155.5	14.14	1 Mar	13.4	10.0	8

....cont from page 1 - Moss Wood Chardonnay 2006

While both components looked good, each member of the Moss Wood team preferred a blend of the two over each of the individual components. This experiment was continued with the 2007 vintage and the early indications are the result will be the same.

The Moss Wood 2006 Chardonnay is a beauty. It has intense cedary aromas, intense melon and grapefruit flavour, richness, concentration and power, superb, viscous texture, and

fine, crisp, dry acidity on a finish of considerable length. The wine is bright, vibrant and primal with plump, generous flavours. The oak is overt at present but will settle down in the short term. The structure, tightness, concentration and depth of the Moss Wood 2006 Chardonnay suggest that the wine will improve over the next two or three years and, with careful cellaring, can be enjoyed over the next decade. ■

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There were some surprises. The 1992 vintage finished higher in the rankings than may have been expected but Keith suspects that in the past this vintage has not had the recognition it deserved. The feeling is that because Cabernet Sauvignon from that year was affected by rain then all the varieties must have suffered.

In fact, the Chardonnay was harvested before the rain and its season was actually very good. Perhaps it is not such a surprise that the wine scored well. Another wine that scored better than expected was the 2006 which, at the time of the tasting, was still in barrels. Unfinished wines shown as barrel samples can often score poorly against properly finished wines that have been bottled, so the fact that the judges liked it is very encouraging.

Before the tasting, the suspicion was that the 1989 vintage, our most difficult ever because of heavy rain, would probably score the lowest. However, this was not the case and that honour fell to the 2000. This wine has always been controversial because it displays a significant wild yeast influence and Keith suspects that this probably caused the tasters to score it down. ■

The 2007 Vintage

The harvest this year was the earliest in Margaret River's viticultural history, so early in fact, the grapes beat the new wine barrels to the winery.

In Margaret River we generally have wet and windy conditions during spring, which means the vines have a protracted period of flowering lasting three to four weeks, or longer.

Spring 2006 produced little wind or rain and the result was that flowering finished in little more than a week. This affected all varieties and translated into even ripening and median harvest dates were brought forward by seven to 14 days.

Although winter rainfall was down slightly, good rains in spring and early summer meant that the vines had a good season with plenty of moisture as they approached maturity.

Flavour development and acid retention were excellent. Temperatures were generally mild until the Australia Day long weekend when we had the first of three heat spikes. Luckily these did not affect quality, with which we are very pleased.

Yields for Chardonnay were well up but Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc balanced this by being down and Cabernet Sauvignon was almost exactly average.

The Chardonnay yield of 8.64 tonnes/hectare gave a total production of 21 tonnes (including the School Fees Block), which beat the previous record crop of 17.9 tonnes, recorded in 1991. However, this latter wine is really the record holder because the School Fees had not been planted and there were very significant losses to birds. We can only imagine how high yields would have been with bird nets in place.

Across the board, grapes showed lively zesty aromatics and generous flavours with the sauvignon blanc capturing all its marvellous zippy green notes. The reds are sporting good flavours and tannin ripeness. Birds have been more of a problem than usual with voracious attacks causing the nets to go on earlier than usual. As the nets were put on the School Fees Block, the birds tried to dive through them. Once the red gums got into full bloom the pressure eased.

The red varieties provided a similar mixed bag of yields. Pinot Noir was excellent and had to be heavily crop thinned to ensure that quality was not diluted. Merlot, which is nearly as temperamental at flowering as Chardonnay, responded to the good conditions with well-filled bunches. Both have produced excellent wines.

Generally mild conditions meant that the cabernet slowly developed flavour ripeness until the third heat spike

brought things to a swift conclusion.

As is the way of nature, we moved from a state of inertia (well almost), waiting patiently for the cabernet harvest, to picking frantically to get all the fruit off at the optimum.

The situation with yield was variable, with the Old Block, Ribbon Vale and some of the new cabernet plantings yielding well while the Short Rows and Long Rows Blocks were very much down. The same situation occurred with the vineyards supplying the Amy's Cabernet Sauvignon. Yields on Ian Bell's Glenmore Vineyard were well down but Max Montgomery's were average. The good news is that Keith believes the cabernet sauvignon looks fantastic.

Finally, the Petit Verdot, the latest ripening of all the varieties, was probably the biggest winner from the early season and matured beautifully, producing deep and complex wines. ■

Vintage summary for recent years at Moss Wood

2006

Very mild year, notable for lively zesty whites with very fine texture. The cool made it more challenging for the reds, with fruit ripeness being good rather than great. However, they are better than 2002, with minimal leafiness and pleasing tannin ripeness.

Despite the cool season, the Moss Wood wines are very pleasing, especially the merlot and better than we could have imagined for the reds.

2005

Whites are good, all ripened nicely and have generous fruit flavours.

Reds - This is a 'cracker vintage' says Keith. It always promised to be very good. At this stage, it looks to be hovering between outstanding

and exceptional. The Cabernet is a rival for the 2001.

2004

Like 2005 but riper. Generous, "yummy" wines, for both whites and reds. The reds are notable for good ripeness of flavours and tannins and not dissimilar to 1994.

2003

Low yielding hence intense and concentrated wines. Great reds. It would have been great for the whites except for rain just before harvest: still it was pretty good.

2002

Similar to 2006 but amusingly, less ripe - a mild year with some of the best whites made at Moss Wood. The reds are ok with the Cabernet good but not great.



The new press arrives at Moss Wood

A New Press

Last September, the vineyard took delivery of a new Fendt tractor, made in Germany, something we have hankered after for years.

These machines are the BMW's of the vineyard, with comforts approaching those of a passenger car. Not like the old days, when tractors didn't even have cabs!

Then in February, literally just in time for the new vintage, the winery took delivery of its latest German toy. It now boasts a new 3,000 litre Willmes tank press - all stainless steel construction, with fully computerised operation.

If we continue to use the German automotive illustrations, this is the Mercedes Benz.

The main reason for the acquisition is to enable us to pick each of the white varieties in a maximum of two days and get them right on the correct ripeness. It is better for the reds, too, because the extra capacity allows us to get these pressings done on the right day for tannin balance.

We now have two Willmes 3,000 litre presses: the first purchased in 1995 was responsible for a significant improvement in the quality of the whites. ■



The 2005 Ribbon Vale Reds

The 2005 vintage was a dream harvest for the reds from both Ribbon Vale and Moss Wood, although not necessarily for all in Margaret River.

There was significant rain in the region just after we picked our reds and so those who had to wait may not be as enthusiastic about the season as we are. However, when reflecting on the great years that preceded this one, Keith is certain there are not too many that were better. The balance of the 1980 and 1990, the concentration and complexity of 1991, the generosity of 1996 and the complete power of 2001 – the 2005 gives them all a real shake.

In addition to the good season, the performance of the Ribbon Vale vineyard gets better each year as we had hoped it would, driven initially by the trellis improvements we made, and now by our greater experience. The vine yields and vigour are in better balance, giving a commensurate improvement in fruit exposure and this has improved the maturity and ripeness of the tannins. The wines have greater fruit depth and the seeds appear to be undergoing a more complete ripeness than in the past. Restraining and ripening the tannins has always been the key to success in this vineyard.

There have been some minor changes to the routine of wine production, with the

Ribbon Vale reds now being put through open fermenters. Both the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot were then hand plunged to extract softer tannins and making them much in the Moss Wood mould. Skin contact continued for about ten days, tasted every day to monitor tannin balance and once achieved, the wines were pressed and put into oak.

As usual, one-third of the French barriques were new. We continue to evaluate different barrel types for these wines, as we do for all the wines we make, but currently, our preference is for the characters produced by Tonnellerie Remond.

In all, the Ribbon Vale reds remained in oak from April 2005 to January 2007. After barrel storage, a full range of fining trials were conducted but we didn't believe they offered any improvements and so the wines remained unfinned. They were then sterile filtered and bottled.

After this introduction, readers may not be surprised that we feel this is the best vintage yet from the vineyard. Both the reds offer very serious quality.



The 2005 Ribbon Vale Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot

has voluminous vanilla bean and cedary oak characters on the nose and could be described as 'riotously fragrant'. There is amazing depth of blackcurrant and mulberry flavours, restrained power, sensuous velvety texture, and formidable tannins which are neither extractive nor assertive, rather in balance with the robust fruitiness of the wine. They will be less noticeable with even short-term cellaring although its concentration and depth will reward cellaring for at least another 10 years. If you choose to enjoy the wine now, it will be best with a deeply flavoured slow-cooked meat dish.

The 2005 Ribbon Vale Merlot

is restrained on the nose, supple, round and silky smooth with powerful ripe dark plum and blackberry flavours, tight structure and significant tannins on a firm finish. It will soften further with time without losing any of the brightness of fruit that are a feature of the wine at present. The tannins, too, will benefit from time in the bottle and we recommend at least 10 more years aging. Consumed now, this is a red that will be at its best when served with a robust beef or lamb dish. ■

Farewell & Welcome

Ed Bugden, who had been with us for 5 years, resigned from the winery in December, to go back on the tools as a carpenter and join the booming WA construction industry. If anyone needs a new timber floor, Ed's their man!

Once vintage finished,

Andrew Cook resigned and has moved to Merimbulah on the NSW south coast. "Bird" joined us in 2004 and we all enjoyed his good company and hard work. We thank him for his help and wish him all the best.

As the newsletter goes to print, **Angie Bussell** prepares

to take maternity leave. She and Jarod have a very exciting time ahead and we all wish them well. Angie started work at Moss Wood as a nanny with the Mugford family so Clare and Keith reckon after that baptism of fire she will find motherhood an absolute breeze!

Fiona Lake and **Rebecca Downie** both resigned from the office, with Fi heading off to the University of Adelaide to study wine. Both were with us only a short time but we appreciated their help and wish them well.

Alice Duzevich, a winemaking graduate with

honours from Adelaide University, has joined us as Assistant Winemaker. Alice previously did excellent work at Kangarilla Road winery in South Australia but was keen to return home to WA. Amongst her many interests, Alice is also a qualified cheesemaker.

The 2 new members of the office team are **Kristiina Saar** and **Jen Monteith**, who both joined us in February. Kristiina is originally from Estonia and has lived in Australia for the last two years and is now helping in Accounts and Administration. Jen was a Kiwi but has lived in Australia

for many years. She is helping with Reception and Administration. This gives our office something of a United Nations feel because these two join Aileen (true blue Aussie), Mike (originally from South Africa) and Amy (originally from Austria). ■

Production Team

Josh Bahen	Senior Winemaker
Amanda Shepherdson	Winemaker
Alice Duzevich	Assistant Winemaker
Steve Clarke	Vineyard Manager
Jarod Bawden	Assistant Vineyard Manager
Angie Bussell	Warehouse Manager, Visitors Co-ordinator
Lauren Pierson	Assistant Warehouse Manager

Readers may wonder why there are so many "winemakers" working in a small company like Moss Wood. The reason is simple. All of the people working in the cellar are fully qualified winemakers and Clare and Keith prefer to acknowledge this in their job titles.

Administration Team

Mike Bowles	Accountant
Aileen Dickhart	Accounts Manager
Amy Sobol	Administration Manager
Kristiina Saar	Accounts and Administration
Jen Monteith	Reception and Administration



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