

# Moss



# Wood

## Newsletter

Nº 10

Autumn, 1990

### The 1989 Moss Wood Chardonnay

1989 looked to be producing an average vintage in Margaret River until the rains fell in February. This delayed the harvest by three weeks and picking began in the middle of March. The unseasonal weather did not, however, affect the ripeness of the fruit with the Chardonnay having an alcoholic content of about 13%. One by-product of the wet vintage was some unwelcome rot in the form of botrytis on these grapes. This was carefully picked out so that no botrytised fruit was included in the finished wine.

The late vintage has produced a very generous wine with huge fruit characters. In Keith Mugford's opinion, it is one of the most mouth-filling young Chardonnays produced at the vineyard.

The decisions made about the handling of the wine were in line with the general practice for Chardonnay at Moss Wood: the wine was crushed, drained and settled to begin fermentation in stainless steel. After about two weeks, the wine was transferred to casks to complete its fermentation.



For the first time since 1983, the Moss Wood Chardonnay was prevented from undergoing a malolactic fermentation. Keith believed that the wine was already so soft that it might become a bit flabby if it were allowed to undergo a secondary fermentation. Not surprisingly the 1989 Moss Wood Chardonnay is similar to that produced at the vineyard in 1983.

As with the three previous vintages, the wine was aged entirely in new French oak - using barrels from Allier, Tronçais and Vosges. The 1989 Chardonnay was left in wood for nine months which experience has shown to be the optimum time for this premium Margaret River varietal.

The wine has a rich, melon and peaches fruit character, some spiciness from the charred oak and a hint of nuttiness and even marmalade from the lees character. It is soft, with a high acidity, has long, generous flavours and a quite stern underlying structure with a fair amount of tannin.

At present, the 1989 Chardonnay is fresh, crisp, clean and delicious with a lingering aftertaste. Like the best of the Moss Wood Chardonnays, this wine is a cellaring proposition. It will develop fuller, more complex characters with time and will age gracefully for at least seven to ten years.

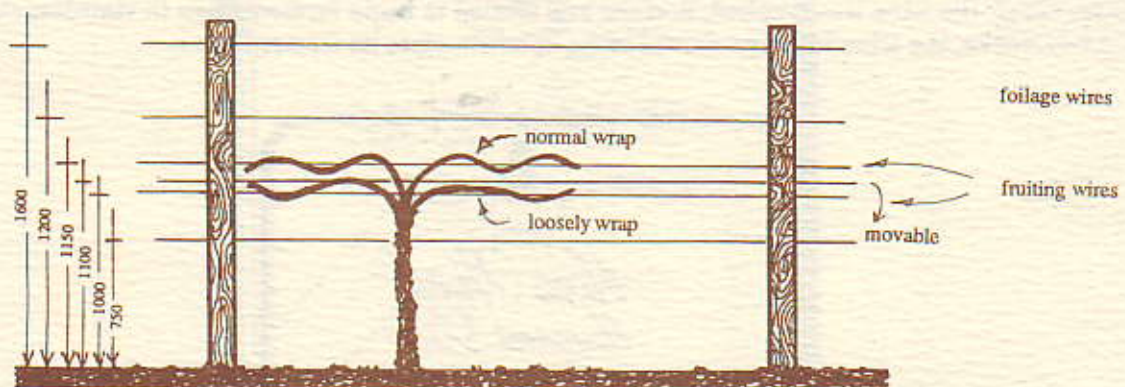
## New Trellising Systems at Moss Wood

During the last ten years, research in Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States has led to improved understandings about how the training and trellising of vines affect the quality and quantity of grapes produced. This research has gradually been accepted by the industry and improved techniques are now being introduced on a commercial scale. Virtually all growers in the Margaret River area have already introduced, or are contemplating a change to, new trellising systems.

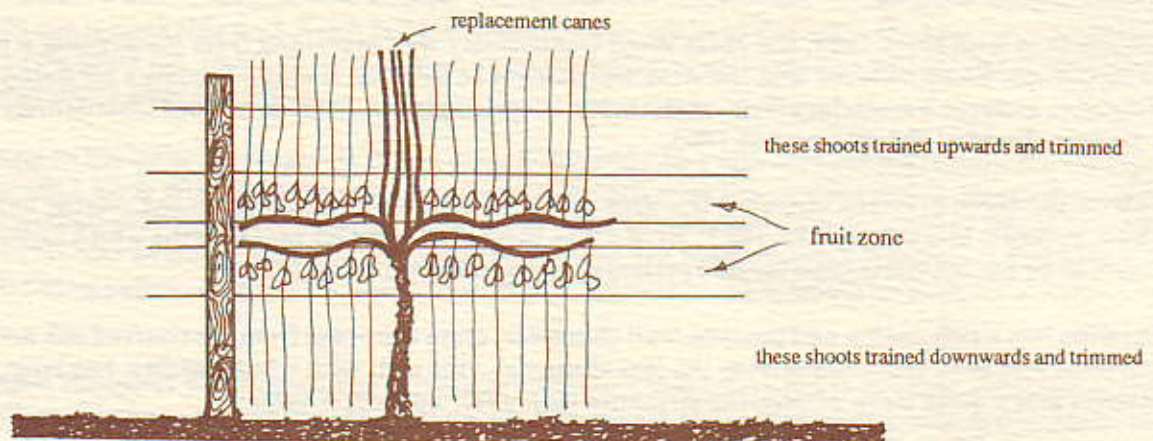
At Moss Wood, we are introducing two new systems. The first is the 'Scott Henry' Trellis, developed by the grapegrower of that name in Oregon, USA. The second is the Te Kauwhata Two Tier, which was developed by Dr Richard Smart at the Ruakura Soil and Plant Research Station in New Zealand.

Both systems reduce the density of foliage, ensuring better exposure of the bunches and the wood to the sun. This facilitates better and more consistent ripening and allows the vines to be harvested more easily either by hand or by machine.

Three years of experimentation at Moss Wood led to the introduction of the Scott Henry system with all of the Chardonnay and the Pinot Noir. These varieties which have a tendency to droop are particularly suited to the Scott Henry Trellis.



The 'Scott Henry' form of the Te Kauwhata Two Tier



## New Trellising Systems at Moss Wood

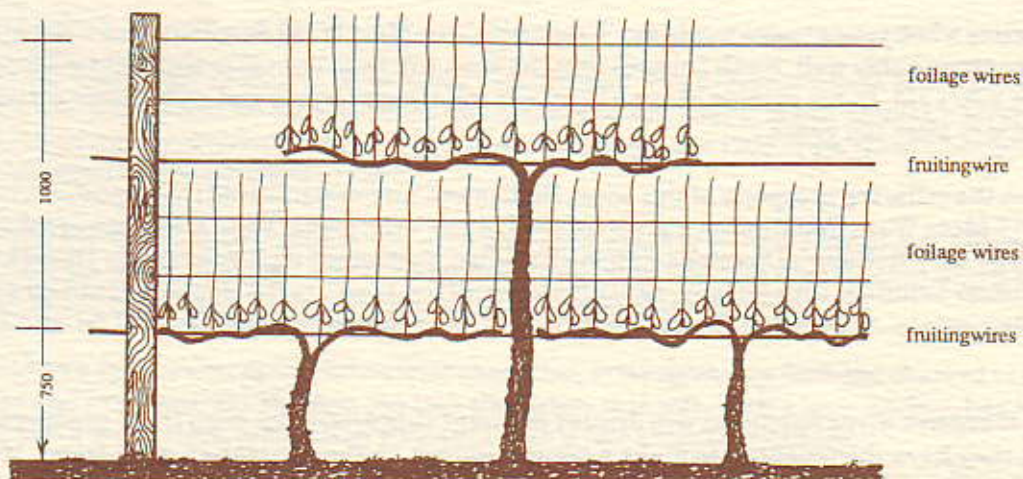
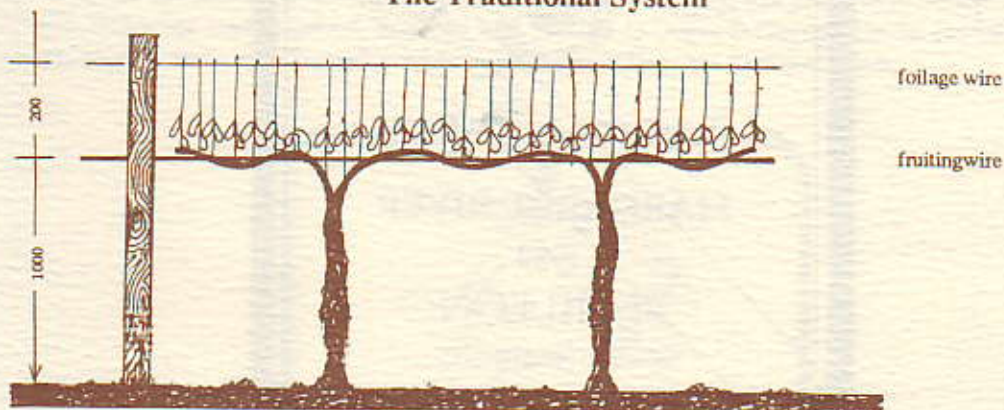
There are advantages and disadvantages with both systems. The Scott Henry places great demands on vineyard management during the spring, as time and care need to be spent on training some of the shoots downwards. Without this effort, the Scott Henry system will not produce excellent results. The Te Kauwhata Two Tier (TK Two T) requires about a quarter of the vineyard time in managing the vines and will produce good canopy exposure with less rigorous attention to detail.

The consistent TK Two T system results in the vineyard appearing more neat and tidy than when the Scott Henry system is used. On the other hand, the Scott Henry system produces greater variations in density - with some leaves and bunches open and exposed and others much more crowded. This leads to more diverse flavours and, therefore, greater complexity in the resulting wines.

As well as this, it is much easier to retrain old vines to the Scott Henry system and this has been done with the Chardonnay and the Pinot Noir. The TK Two T system has been used experimentally with the newly planted Cabernet Franc and Merlot. The difficulty of retraining old vines means that the team at Moss Wood are still trying to determine whether they can convert the Cabernet Sauvignon and Semillon to this system.

Whatever their relative merits, the two systems both have a place at Moss Wood. Most importantly for the consumer, the new trellising systems have produced significant improvements in the quality of grapes grown at the vineyard and this will be reflected in future vintages of Moss Wood wines.

### The Traditional System



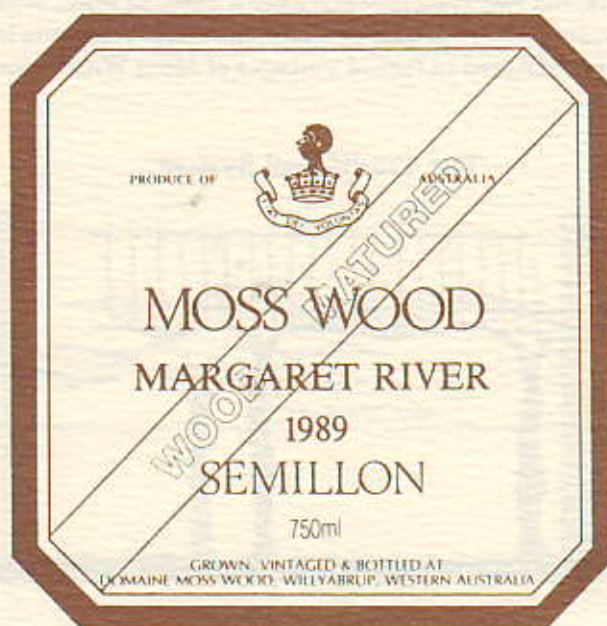
### Te Kauwhata Two Tier System

## The 1989 Moss Wood wood matured Semillon

The rain which delayed the 1989 vintage caused botrysis in the Semillon, as well as the Chardonnay grapes, with the dry weather just before harvest turning the botrysis into noble rot. Whereas the influence of botrysis grapes in the finished wine would have marred the Chardonnay, its impact (in small quantities) on the Semillon was beneficial - as it helped to concentrate some of the characters of the wine. In fact, only about two percent of the bunches used to produce the 1989 Moss Wood Semillon were affected by noble rot.

The wine was cold-fermented in stainless steel tanks, in what has become traditional practice. It was then fined and filtered before two-thirds of the blend was placed in new, French oak for a period of twelve weeks. The wine was then blended and bottled.

The resulting wine has a rich structure, an almost luxuriant fullness, lovely flavours and is surprisingly long on the palate. Its good acid means that the wine is well-balanced, in spite of its richness. When compared to other vintages of Moss Wood or other wines from Margaret River, it has less of the grassy, herbaceous character that is typical in young Semillons from this region.



Although attractive when young (some would say 'irresistible') the Moss Wood Semillons and wood-matured Semillons do age remarkably well. Keith believes that the wine will be at its best in the next twelve months or after it is five years old. In his opinion, it is an excellent cellaring prospect and will exhibit classic aged Semillon characters after ten years.

While musing on the cellaring prospects of this wine, Keith and Clare remembered the impact of a ten year old bottle of 1977 Moss Wood Semillon on a group of the British wine press. They also reminisced about a recently consumed 1979 Rothbury Director's Reserve Semillon, exchanged with winemaker David Lowe. It was a classic Hunter Semillon with lemony, citrus fruit character, toasty bottle development and a lovely, soft, mouth-filling palate. Although it drank beautifully, Keith thought it would be good for another ten years.

Although aged Margaret River Semillons will display different characteristics from those produced in the Hunter Valley, they have the potential to make a similar impact on the Australian wine scene. Make no mistake, cellaring a Moss Wood wood-matured Semillon will give you an impressive and distinctive wine of character. The 1989 vintage would be a good one to experiment with laying down at least a few bottles.