

Moss



Wood

Newsletter

Nº 13

Autumn, 1991

The 1990 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1990 Chardonnay was produced from the latest vintage so far recorded at Moss Wood with the harvest commencing two weeks behind schedule, on March 1st. The summer had been exceptionally mild and damp and consequently the grapes were well nourished with good composition in the juice. Fortunately, the dampness did not produce any botrysis problems nor was there any splitting of the grapes.

The grapes were picked, crushed, drained and pressed in the usual manner, with the free-run juice and all pressings being analysed immediately. This was allowed to settle for two days after which the clear juice was racked to another stainless steel tank where it was seeded with a pure, yeast culture for fermentation. The wine was kept in stainless steel until the fermentation was half completed at which point it was transferred to new French barriques to complete the fermentation there.

As usual, these 225 litres oak barrels had a medium toast on the inside surface and were fifty per cent Allier and fifty per cent Tronçais oak. The wine spent nine months in barrels in contact with its lees and during this time underwent a partial malolactic fermentation.



The 1990 Moss Wood Chardonnay is a wine of some complexity. Its colour is light gold with green tinges. The nose has hints of lime, peach and pineapple fruit aromas, with a suggestion of marmalade (Fortnum and Mason, in Keith's opinion). The oak character provides a toasty background with overtones of butter and dough from the lees aging. On the palate, the structure is fresh and crisp with good acidity. The fruit flavours are delicate but with good length, the tannins are obvious but not bitter and the oak provides a nice spicy finish.

It is a most approachable wine with great appeal as an early drinking style. However, those with the patience to cellar the wine for up to ten years will be rewarded with an outstanding example of Margaret River Chardonnay: a rich, complex and full-flavoured wine.

The 1991 Vintage at Moss Wood

The 1991 growing season has been reasonably typical for the Margaret River region, although it is somewhat drier than in some years. After two wet vintages, this has been slightly unusual although it fits into the long term weather pattern. Temperatures have been very mild, with only two or three hot days during summer. Unfortunately, those hot days did cause damage through sunburn, with a consequent minor loss in the Chardonnay.

Overall, the season has been similar in many ways to 1987 and 1979, both of which produced top quality wines. Quantities also look encouraging, in spite of some bird damage, with yields of all varieties being average or better.



"I appreciate that wine is medicine, Doctor, but are you sure I can get a whole case of Moss Wood Chardonnay on prescription?"

The impact of the new trellising

The 1990 Moss Wood Chardonnay was the first wine produced from grapes grown entirely using the Scott Henry system of trellising (described in Newsletter 10). Consequently, it has been analysed and tested more than any previous Chardonnays from the vineyard. Although it is too soon to make any definite judgements about the impact of the new trellises, initial results are encouraging from both a viticultural and vinicultural point of view.

We have shown conclusively that the new trellis is superior for harvesting with Keith reporting near rebellion among the pickers when they have to move on to a variety which is still trellised on the old system. Similarly, other vineyard operations such as pruning and spraying are both easier and quicker on the Scott Henry trellis.

The impact of the new trellis on the wines is more difficult to quantify, with no major differences being apparent. From casual observation, Keith believes that colour, especially in the Pinot Noir, is deeper and more consistent. As well as this, the concentration of the Potassium ion in the wine has apparently been reduced.

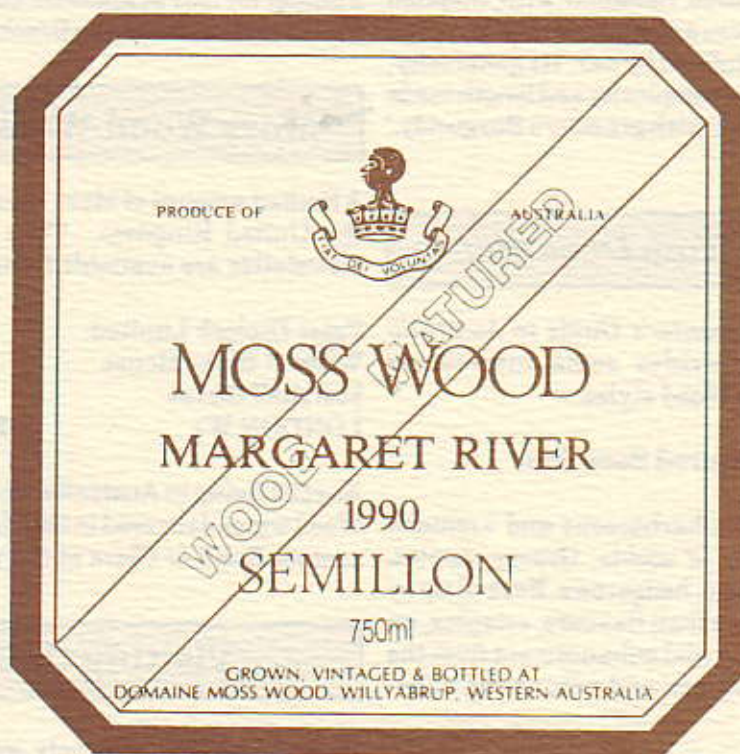
1990 Moss Wood wood-matured Semillon

As Chardonnay and Semillon now operate on different trellising systems, there have been many conversations in recent times at Moss Wood comparing the vineyard performance of the two grape varieties. Some have suggested that one variety is like a mongrel dog and the other like its pure bred cousin. Certainly, the Semillon is hardy, reliable, resistant to disease and produces large yields while the Chardonnay is susceptible to wind damage and most vine diseases and seems capable of aborting its crop on the flimsiest pretext.

While the Chardonnay at Moss Wood has been re-trellised and cosseted along, the Semillon continues to flourish on the old trellising, producing substantial quantities of consistently good quality wine - with a great deal less difficulty for the viticulturist.

The 1990 wood-matured Semillon was originally the same wine as the 1990 Moss Wood Semillon, released last year. A portion of the Semillon produced from last vintage was put aside for later release. Two-thirds of this was aged for four months in new French barriques made from Tronçais oak. After barrel aging, this was returned to stainless steel tanks where it was blended with the remainder of the Semillon which had been reserved to make this wine.

This technique is designed to ensure that the wood-matured Semillon develops some complexity from barrel ferment characters without being overwhelmed by oak. Good balance is crucial to the Moss Wood style.



The 1990 Moss Wood wood-matured Semillon has a medium straw colour with green tints. The nose displays typical fruit aromas of apples, grapefruit and figs as well as hints of soft, spicy oak. On the palate, the wine is quite rich and full-flavoured with crisp acidity and some oak and tannins on the finish. The wine is supple and flavoursome, has an elegant structure, excellent balance and good length.

Its fresh fruit flavours will appeal over the next eighteen months, while it will develop a delightful, toasty, aged character after two to three years cellaring. For those who love aged Semillon, the wine should cellar for at least ten to fifteen years.

Two of the Best

The December issue of *Decanter* has an annual feature in which wine writers describe the six best wines they tasted during the year. I'm never sure whether to be exhilarated or depressed reading about the great wines I didn't get to taste.

This year is no exception with the following being among those listed: 1929 Krug, 1947 Pol Roger, 1945 Grahams, 1899 Mouton Rothschild, 1929 Cheval Blanc, 1947 Canon, 1961 Palmer, 1961 Margaux, 1964 Domaine de la Pousse d'Or Volnay Clos des 60 Ouvrées and 1847 Y'Quem.

Australians should feel pleased with the coverage given to their wines with Moss Wood receiving accolades for their 1988 Chardonnay and the 1985 Wood Matured Semillon.

Pamela Vandyke Price says that the Moss Wood Chardonnay (is) a beautiful example of a wine from ungrafted vines, Michael Schuster tasted the 1985 Moss Wood wood-matured Semillon with Stephen Spurrier. He says 'This was a rich and deeply flavoured dry white, very nicely defined by oak. Its generosity, harmonious proportions, complexity and length made us both feel it was on a par with grand cru Burgundy.' High praise indeed!

Comments from *Decanter*

The third edition of *Decanter's Guide to Australia and New Zealand* provides some interesting comments on the Moss Wood styles.

Moss Wood wood-matured Semillon:

Marvellous uplifted rich herbaceous and aromatic aroma, the multiplicity of scents. Grassy, apples, honey, green pea, cabbage, hedgerows. Backed up by lovely oak. Beautiful ripe fruit flavours, complex, an almost fig-like character, and enhancement from the oak. Developing a sweetness, and a stunning, must-buy wine.

Moss Wood Chardonnay:

Beautifully structured aroma, sweet almost to the point of being honeyed, with excellently integrated oak. Similar characteristics come through on the palate, with ripe, almost creamy sweet fruit, wood, good acidity, and complexity. Again very fine.

We're not sure about the hedgerows - but the comments are very pleasing.

The Willyabrup Descent

Those dedicated wine lovers who have followed the behind-the-scenes life of the vineyards of Margaret River will remember our report on the 1989 Willyabrup Descent. Well, that fiercely competitive race in which teams representing wineries push a wine barrel from Ribbonvale to Pierro down the mighty Willyabrup has this year ended in triumph for the magnificent team from Moss Wood — Keith Mugford, 'Tinker' Bell, Nigel Chesterfield-Evans and John Jecks. They won the prize for the best dressed team with their cute, Iraqi Palace Guard outfits. 'Tinker' Bell received particular commendation for his carefully applied make-up.

True, the Moss Wood team didn't win the actual race — that went to Brookland Valley Vineyard after the traditional disagreement over the judge's decision. An undisclosed source claims to have overheard the senior judge and editor of the *West Australian*, Paul Murray, claim that the bribes weren't worth all the abuse he received.

Keith claimed a moral victory as his team's prize was a dinner for four at Malcolm and Dee Jones' excellent Flutes restaurant at the Brookland Valley Vineyard.

Moss Wood Wines In the UK

A limited amount of Moss Wood wines is exported to the United Kingdom. They and the Moss Wood Newsletter are available from:

Peter Diplock Limited
William Blake House
Marshall Street
LONDON W1

Fax: (071) 439 4386
Phone: (071) 734 2099

Anyone living in Australia who wishes to have Moss Wood wines delivered in the United Kingdom should contact Keith or Clare at the vineyard for details.

Visiting the Winery

Because of the relatively small volume of wine produced, there is no cellar door facility provided for the general public and visits to the winery are by appointment only.

However, people on the mailing list or those interested in wine who wish to see over the winery and/or to taste the current Moss Wood releases, are welcome.

Contact Keith or Clare beforehand to make arrangements if you wish to visit.