Nº 20 MOSS WOOD Winter, 1993

Moss Wood celebrates twenty precious years

Celebration plays a seminal role in all of our lives: highlighting our grand successes, enabling us to share the joys of achievement and to look back with affection on the past. This reflection enables us to better understand the past, gives us greater insight into the present and provides a vantage point for us to look forward with anticipation. Apart from this, celebration is great fun.

With twenty one vintages completed at Moss Wood, Keith and Clare Mugford decided that it was an appropriate time to celebrate the wines of this small (5,000 cases per year), family-owned Margaret River vineyard. And what a celebration it turned out to be.

The two days of activity for the press from throughout Australia and those who had been closely associated with Moss Wood began with a tasting on Monday morning of the semillons from 1993 to 1977, the wood matured semillons from 1993 to 1983 and the chardonnays from 1993 to 1980. This was followed on Tuesday by a tasting of the Moss Wood pinots from 1993 to 1977 and the cabernets from 1993 to 1973.

In between, was a splendid dinner at the Mugford's house catered for by one of the region's best chef, Stephen Reagan of Newtown House at Vasse. This featured some of Margaret River's best wines matched against bench-mark wines from every major region of Australia.

Twenty-five of Perth's top retailers and restauranteurs were flown down to join the media group for Tuesday's lunch at Willyabrup's idyllic *Flutes* Cafe. This sumptuous feast prepared by the very talented Helen Prideaux proved a fitting climax to the celebrations and featured the current release Moss Wood wine paired with a counterpart from about ten years before. A discussion of the wines should give some indication of the ways these styles have changed during the past decade.

The **1992 Moss Wood wood matured Semillon** has a lifted perfumed nose with some grassiness and hints of toasty oak. It is fresh and lively with an attractive mouthfeel, persistent flavours and a long, crisp, dry finish.

The **1983 Moss Wood wood matured Semillon** showed how well these wines age. It is still amazingly lively with some toastiness and honeyed characters, great depth of flavour and excellent length.

The **1992 Moss Wood Chardonnay** represents the epitome of the style for the vineyard. Although still quite subdued on the nose, it is an elegant wine which shows rich, ripe peach and citrus characters with hints of toasty oak and barrel ferment characters. This is a delicate wine with good depth of fruit, mid-palate weight and length. It is much more complex than its companion the **1983 Moss Wood Chardonnay**, a gorgeous, lively ten year old, with deep lemony flavours, a touch of toastiness and a hint of buttery oak on the long finish.

The **1981 Moss Wood Pinot** has a powerful bouquet of dark cherries with some gamey overtones, rich, ripe intense, almost porty fruit and a long, finish which is beginning to dry out a little. It is mellow, still lively and well balanced. In its day, it has been regarded as one of the greatest pinots ever produced in this country but it looks old fashioned, if still great, against the new style of pinot being produced at Moss Wood.

The **1991 Moss Wood Pinot Noir** has perfumed aromas of ripe cherries, raspberries and spicy oak while on the palate it has rich, concentrated berry fruit with hints of dusty oak and powerful fine grain tannins. This is a supple wine which has a pleasant mouthfeel, is well-balanced, and has the structure to ensure long life. It has clear varietal definition and is more complex and elegant than the 1981 Pinot.

The **1980 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon**, from one of the great vintages in the vineyard, has mellowed beautifully. It is supple with a velvety texture, has great concentration and depth of rich, ripe berry flavour, excellent integration of fruit and dusty oak, and a long, powerful finish.

The new release **1991 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon** is still a bit closed. The palate is supple and round with fresh, rich, ripe berry characters which are well integrated with charry oak. It has generous flavours and a tight structure which will enable it to improve over the next five years and to keep for much longer. The differences between the 1980 and the 1991 cabernets shows an evolution or a refinement of a style, with the latter having greater elegance and finesse.

from an article by Peter Forrestal
in the *West Australian*.

Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon vintage chart

The vintage chart has been completely updated following complete vertical tastings in Perth in July, 1992 and at the winery in June, 1993.

1973 Developed brick, red colour with slight tawniness, a subdued bouquet with hints of eucalypt, mint and berry and vanillan oak, still fresh and lively, soft on the palate with delicate cherry flavours and overtones of tobacco and spices and some tarriness.

1974 Has a complex bouquet with overtones of berries, chocolate,leather and cedar, soft and mellow, moderate weight, some tarriness on the finish, firm tannins which are reasonably well integrated. A simple wine, still ageing well, though variable.

1975 One of the best wines made at Moss Wood. Delightful, complex nose with delicate redcurrant fruit, charry oak and hints of cigar box and tobacco characters. Fine palate, velvety texture, long in flavour, multi-layered, finish shows superb balance of acid and tannin. Although probably at its peak, this wine will live for years.

1976 A big, amazingly rich wine with voluminous spicy, cassis and cinnamon aromas and some tarry characters. On the palate, the wine has ripe, full fruit showing hints of chocolate, coffee, malt and licorice and soft tannins with a slight sappiness on the finish. At its best now but seems ageless.

1977 Has an intense bouquet reminiscent of blackberries with nuances of grassiness and tarriness. Its palate is soft, round and generous with lingering berry and spicy oak flavours with a touch of sappiness on the finish. This is a supple Cabernet with considerable power and reasonable length which is beautifully developed now but may be enjoyed for many years.

1979 Has a scented bouquet with hints of cherries and leafy tobacco. On the palate, it has soft, rich fruit with a touch of herbaceousness and delicate mint characters. Has the acidity and soft tannin structure to age. Some bottles tasted recently seemed surprisingly fresh and youthful.

1980 A great vintage for Moss Wood Cabernet. This complex wine has intense ripe, berry aromas with hints of charry oak, and a depth of rich, blackcurrant flavour with overtones of camphor, cigar box and scented oak. It has a superb, velvety mouth-feel, a multi-layered structure and a long finish.
1980 (Special Reserve) The Montgomery Trophy winner has added complexity from two years in wood. It has extra intensity, greater depth of flavour on the mid-palate and an excellent, long lingering finish. This rich, powerful wine is drinking superbly and should continue to develop.

1981 Is becoming more approachable, especially when served with robust meat dishes. This tightly structured wine with a big, tannin backbone is still a bit closed but shows rich, redcurrant fruit, earthy characters and some complex tarriness in the background. Still needs time and may be the longest lived of them all.

1982 The 1982 Cabernet is an appealing, well-balanced wine showing ripe, herbaceous fruit with pleasant camphor and spicy oak characters. It has a supple mouth-feel, generous rounded flavours and soft tannins. Possibly the first wine to be fully mature.

1983 Although tightly structured this huge wine is beginning to open out and show its class. Has intense, ripe redcurrant and spicy oak characters on the nose while the palate is ripe, round and strong - rich berry and chocolate fruit with cedary oak and a touch of tarriness on the finish. Very impressive.
1983 (Special Reserve) Has attractive spicy characters from its oak aging which has added complexity to the remarkable, lifted blackcurrant fruit. It is an elegant wine which is supple and well-balanced, has finesse, excellent structure, great power and considerable length. A truly exciting prospect.

1984 A soft, elegant wine that is developing beautifully. It has a scented nose of cherries, tobacco and charry oak, a delicate palate with good cherry flavour, soft acid and tannins and cigar box overtones. The wine has good weight, balance and length and although drinking close to its peak, it will live for many years.

1985 An appealing wine which shows excellent integration of rich, ripe, spicy berry fruit and hints of chocolate, leather, camphor and charry oak characters. This powerful wine is supple, round and beautifully textured, has good weight, excellent balance, a tight structure and soft fine-grained tannins. Although attractive drinking now, it is still developing.

1986 A powerful, rich wine with huge tannins that is, at last, showing some signs of bottle age. It has rich, redcurrant and earthy characters with hints of cigar box, camphor and tobacco against a tarry background. While the palate shows developing flavours, it is still a very closed wine with tight structure and firm acid and tannin that will ensure long life.

1987 A classy young Cabernet with a lifted bouquet showing hints of eucalypt, peppermint, violets and mulberries against a backdrop of cedary, smokey oak. It is a very approachable wine: supple yet intense, well-rounded with excellent weight and structure and a lingering aftertaste.

1987 (Special Reserve) One of the greatest of the Moss Wood wines: a powerful, complete Cabernet which is supple, round and mouthfilling and shows attractive mulberry, mint and leafy fruit characters with a second layer of earthiness, tarry oak and tobacco. It is stylish, elegant and well-structured, has extraordinary depth of flavour and great length.

1988 Going through an awkward stage. Closed and unyielding at present. Underneath there are ripe mulberries with hints of violets and scented, cedary oak. This is a fresh, supple wine which has good acid, quite rich, berry fruit, a touch herbaceous but in balance with firm tannins, and a pleasant finish of moderate length. Will be very long lived.

1989 Quite closed but with underlying ripe berries and hints of violets and tobacco. On the palate, the wine has good weight, is well-balanced, soft and round and quite long. Given time it should open out to reveal a pleasing complexity.

1990 Deep, bright, brick red colour, very complex nose with ripe berries, spices, violets and tobacco while the palate shows rich, concentrated berry fruit, round and full flavoured. The wine has good weight and texture, balanced acidity and strong tannins which do not dominate. Excellent potential.

Cabernets still to be released

1990 Special Reserve Nose is closed at first but slowly reveals ripe berry, violets and tobacco. Palate shows rich redcurrant fruit with earthy, tarry overtones and a soft oak finish. A very long and complex wine.

1991 Special Reserve Deep crimson colour, an intense nose with ripe mulberries and redcurrants and hints of earthiness and cedary oak. The palate has long, complex flavours with excellent integration of fruit and oak.

1992 Fragrant nose with lifted violets and redcurrants and hints of earthiness and tarriness and a smokey oak background. The palate is ripe, round and full flavoured with attractive fine grain tannins on the finish. Promising.

1993 Fragrant with mulberry and redcurrant and lifted violet scent on the nose. The palate has long, berry flavours while the wine has good structure with its acid and tannin in balance. Simple now but powerful.

Vintage ratings: Cabernet Sauvignon

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beaume	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 7)
1983	7 March	13.0	9.0	7
1984	12 March	12.3	9.0	5
1985	13 March	12.5	7.5	7
1986	14 March	12.8	5.8	6
1987	26 March	12.7	8.5	7
1988	10 March	13.0	7.1	5
1989	30 March	13.2	7.9	6
1990	2 April	12.8	8.5	7
1991	3 April	13.3	9.8	7
1992	26 March	12.8	10.0	6
1993	22 March	13.2	8.5	6+

Newsletter not late

Seeing is not always believing. There are some who may have thought that this edition of the popular Moss Wood newsletter is indeed late. Some may have even suggested that this was a sign that Clare has been distracted by the imminent arrival of a third heir to the Moss Wood fortune, or that Keith is having a little rest or that the editor of this weighty tome is never home to do the writing. There is not a smidgeon of truth in any of these unworthy suggestions.

The newsletter has been deliberately delayed to provide a report on the vertical tasting of Cabernets and the trade function that took place in the Mugford home during the twentieth anniversary celebrations.

Although the 1991 Cabernet is available in retail outlets adequate stock has been held back to meet the requirements of mail order customers restricted however to 1 case per customer.

Tribute to Bill Pannell

When Bill Pannell labelled the first two bottles of Moss Wood wine back in 1974, he immediately took them around to close friend, Gil Thomas, to share the occasion and to ask him which of the two versions of the Cabernet label he preferred. His present of those first two bottles to Gil was returned with interest at the twentieth anniversary celebration lunch held recently at *Flutes Cafe.*

As a tribute to his achievement at Moss Wood, Gil Thomas gave back those first two bottles of Moss Wood to Bill in a beautifully crafted wood and glass presentation box. This moving gesture provided those involved with an opportunity to applaud Bill's contribution to Moss Wood and the Margaret River area.

Those all important corks

One thing that we were reminded of while tasting all the wines made at Moss Wood during the twentieth anniversary celebrations was the impact that corks can have, especially on old wines. Keith suggests that anyone with wines more than fifteen years old should monitor the corks fairly closely and, if any are found to be leaking, the bottles should be returned to Moss Wood for recorking.

Another point that emerged from the tastings was just how difficult corks that are more than ten years old are to pull without breaking. Gentle is the way.

What we want to hear

Ernest Tomlinson is just the kind of supporter Moss Wood needs. We were delighted to receive his note about the 1992 Semillon. While agreeing with our comments about the value of aging the wine, he explained that he was drinking it and enjoying it and not allowing it to age and added the rejoiner, 'So I need some more' – plus a cheque.

The 1978 Moss Wood Dry Red

The 1978 Moss Wood Dry Red is the most controversial product of the winery. Bill Pannell was unhappy with some aspects of the winemaking with the 1978 vintage and refused to release a cabernet in that year, chosing to declassify the wine and sell it off as a dry red. His friend, Gil Thomas, bottled some of it, released it under his own label and promptly won the Stewart van Raalte Trophy at the Perth Show.

When I last saw the wine in a vertical tasting, it was the only disappointment in an impressive line up. At the most recent tasting, the wine was in great form: its rich, sweet blackcurrant fruit showing great concentration and depth of flavour. The point always was that no matter how good it was, it wasn't up to Bill Pannell's very high standards. As an (unconscious) marketing exercise, it gave Moss Wood great credibility in the marketplace.

A sequel to this saga came in a letter received recently by Keith Mugford from a Canadian who wrote that he had purchased a case of the 1978 Moss Wood Dry Red for the bargain price of $2.50 a bottle in 1980. He had thoroughly enjoyed the wine, had just consumed the last of it and wondered if there was any left. If so, he mused, was the price the same?

Moss Wood Magnum

With the release of the 1991 Moss Wood Cabernet, a Moss Wood wine will appear in magnum for the first time. Only one hundred 1500ml bottles of this wine will be wax sealed, individually packed and numbered. The Cabernet is available in magnum as part of the twentieth anniversary celebration and in response to requests from customers. Keith and Clare are prepared to continue to make magnums available depending on the response to this release.

Orders, however, for this release will be restricted to one magnum bottle per customer.