



MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

Nº 25

Spring, 1994

The 1994 Moss Wood Chardonnay

While the fine, mild season leading up to the 1993 vintage in Margaret River produced great white wines, 1994 will be better remembered for its reds which are rich and concentrated and potentially among the best ever from the region. In 1994, the summer was dry with no excessive heat and helped produce huge, ripe, generous whites. These are not elegant or refined like the delicate, perfumed Chardonnay of 1993 which had fineness as its hallmark. Rather the 1994 Moss Wood Chardonnay is big, rich and round, a wine from enjoyment rather than considered thought.



Keith Mugford believes that dedicated followers of Moss Wood will love its massive full flavours even if some critics dwell on its richness and roundness and wonder whether it has gone over the top. He believes that it does not suffer from the afflictions of an excess of alcohol such as oiliness or blowsiness. Keith compares his 1994 to the 1989 Pierro Chardonnay which was similarly big, ripe and rich and was much loved by the punters but sometimes greeted coolly by the purists. In thinking about other Moss Wood wines, Keith compares it to the 1976 Cabernet which exacted similar comments when it was released. With the benefit of hindsight, the bold flavours of the 1976 have always provided a great drink and the wine has aged particularly well.

The 1994 Moss Wood Chardonnay was made according to the standard technique used at the winery since 1990. It is crushed and drained, then cold settled for 48 hours after which time the clear juice is racked off to stainless steel tanks where it is seeded with pure yeast culture and fermented at 18°C until it reaches 7° beaume. At that stage, it is racked to small oak casks where it finishes the fermentation process. The development of secondary characters in the wine, and hence its complexity, is encouraged by aging it on its lees in 100% new French oak (50% Allier and 50% Tronçais) for nine months and by allowing half the barrels to undergo a malolactic fermentation. The wine was fined, filtered, cold stabilised and then bottled on 12 December, 1994.

The 1994 Moss Wood Chardonnay shows dominant ripe fruit aromas and peach and melon flavours with overtones of lime, citrus and butterscotch. This strong fruity white is complexed by toasty oak, yeasty lees barrel ferment character but these are only subtle flavours. It has great generosity, a glycerolly texture, firm tannin structure as well as great richness, concentration and power. There is no question that cellared well, this is a Margaret River chardonnay that could be kept for ten years or more. It is, however, such delicious current drinking that most will be cheerfully consumed over the next few years.

The 1995 Vintage

The horrific run of poor vintages in Bordeaux from 1991 to 1994 which could be characterised as ranging from ordinary to terrible serves to emphasise how fortunate we are in Margaret River where difficult harvests are the exception rather than the rule. As this newsletter is being produced, Keith Mugford, Ian 'Tinker' Bell and the Moss Wood team are sweltering in the heat of the first few days of vintage.

This has been a good growing season: budburst was early and uneven, but flowering was good so that although there are fewer bunches on the vines they are a reasonable size. Despite the drought, leaf condition is good and the crop will be close to average. Quality indicators for the vintage are encouraging with samples showing good acidity and flavour.

Extreme heat just before and in the early days of harvest speeded up the ripening of the grapes and compressed vintage. Picking started on Tuesday 14 February: the pinot noir came off by the 16th; the chardonnay in one and a half days after that; followed by the semillon which was picked in three days. The harvesting of the cabernet will begin in the first week of March and Keith expects it will take three separate pickings to get through the vineyard. In all probability, vintage will be finished by mid-March in much the same way as happened in 1983. This year will not, however, produce wines that will be as tannic as those of 1983.

Unfortunately yields are down this year: perhaps half is due to poor budburst and half to bird damage caused by the dry season which prevented or delayed the flowering of the marri gums. When the marri gums bloom, they distract the birds from the ripe juicy grapes. As a rule, the isolated vineyards suffer most from bird damage and, at Moss Wood, the risk is spread among many neighbours. However, this season it has also been a significant problem for us. The chardonnay, for example, appears to be down by about 20%: partly, the result of birds and partly the result of poor bud burst.

Keith believes that the ten year rule is once more in operation and that the vintage may share some characteristics with 1985. Certainly, there is tremendous flavour in the semillon, the chardonnay is monstrous and the pinot has deep colour and tremendous concentration.

Also worth reporting is the success of the new Wilmes Press which Keith insists is a sensational piece of equipment which allows the winery team to get through the harvest days by the luxurious hour of seven pm. The bonus for consumers is that pressing yields are likely to be higher than previously as the press is already working more efficiently by reducing solids in the white juices from about 20% to 10%.

Moss Wood Chardonnay Vintage Chart

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beaume	pH	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1983	18 February	12.6	3.28	8.7	7
1984	29 February	13.1	3.41	7.73	8
1985	22 February	12.5	3.24	8.44	7
1986	26 February	12.9	3.34	9.10	7
1987	24 February	12.9	3.29	10.13	8
1988	12 February	12.5	3.35	11.20	7
1989	20 February	12.9	3.41	7.82	7+
1990	6 March	12.9	3.24	6.85	10
1991	25 March	12.8	3.48	6.36	8
1992	27 February	13.5	3.35	7.30	8+
1993	4 March	13.6	3.35	10.29	10
1994	28 February	13.6	3.49	9.00	9

Pick of the Bunch

We were delighted that the 1993 Moss Wood Semillon was chosen by Huon Hooke and Mark Shield as one of the eight Picks of the Bunch in the 1994-95 edition of the *Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide*. The accolade is as best Australian Semillon for 1994. The authors commented: 'Here's one to raise the eyebrows - a wonderful wine from the West that shows great varietal definition.'

We were also extremely pleased that our neighbours picked up two of the other gongs, making it three awards out of eight for the Margaret River. The chardonnay award went to the 1993 Evans and Tate Margaret River Chardonnay and the red blend or other variety gong went to the 1992 Cape Mentelle Zinfandel.

Three of our wines received reviews in the *Guide* with Hooke and Shield commenting on the 1993 Semillon: 'Delicious lemony and faintly straw-grassy flavours in a fresh, fruity style that drinks well young and has less of the trademark Margaret River herbaceousness than most of its peers.'

Of the 1993 Moss Wood Chardonnay, the authors said 'A deceptive wine that grows in the glass and blossoms with breathing. It's a class act with quality French oak and some buttery overtones. The palate is impressively arid with tight structure and a big finish that goes on and on.'

The Australian Wine Handbook

We've been impressed with Jeremy Oliver's *The Australian Wine Handbook* published by Portside Editions which rates the best wines of Australia's top wineries, vintage by vintage. Oliver gives a personal and independent assessment of each vintage of the wines he rates. Some of his vintage scores are at odds with our views. For example, Oliver gives the 1992 Moss Wood Chardonnay a higher rank than the 1993: a situation that we would reverse. He points the 1991 Cabernet the same as the 1992 while we believe the 1991 is clearly the better wine. However, we like the book and believes it provides a thoughtful and useful commentary on the wine industry. We are particularly pleased at Jeremy Oliver's comments about Moss Wood being 'one of the pick of all Australian wineries'. He ranks the Cabernet Sauvignon at 10: equal to the best few in the country; the Chardonnay and the Semillon at 9 among the very best; and the Pinot Noir at 8.

Corks

Corks are the bane of every winemaker's existence so Keith was pleased to see the *Advertiser's* wine writer, Philip White's call for the industry to look once again at the question of finding a new closure for wine bottles. He made the salient point that buyers of very expensive, premium single malt whiskey don't have any objection to buying that product in a bottle sealed by a screw top which doesn't leak or taint the liquor. It is a pity that winemakers are not afforded the same privilege. Perhaps it is time for the reappearance of the Stelvin cap.

Peter Diplock

After ten years of loyal and quality service as Moss Wood's wholesaler in Britain, Peter Diplock is retiring. When one remembers that Australian wines have only very recently achieved massive sales in the United Kingdom, Peter's efforts in establishing a niche in the British market for Moss Wood can be seen in perspective. Clare and Keith believe that the international reputation which Moss Wood has achieved owes much to the skills and dedication of Peter Diplock.

Keith is concerned that a major source of his pocket money may have dried up and wishes to thank Peter for the numerous tenners he has parted with following test cricket and rugby internationals between Australia and England.

In the UK

In the United Kingdom, Moss Wood wines and the Moss Wood Newsletter are available from our new distributors:

Stones of Belgravia
6 Pont Street
LONDON SW1X 9EL

Phone: (071) 235 1612 Fax: (071) 235 7246

Clare and Keith look forward to a prosperous relationship with Peter and Clare Rich and Michael Hall of Stones of Belgravia.

Moss Wood Mailing List

The Moss Wood Newsletter is produced three times each year to coincide with the release of the Chardonnay; the Cabernet Sauvignon; and the Pinot Noir and the Semillon. This year, there will be an extra newsletter to announce the release of the 1991 Cabernet Sauvignon Special Reserve. If you are not currently on the mailing list and wish to receive the newsletter, contact Clare and Keith.

Visitors by Appointment

We are always pleased to welcome our loyal mail order customers to Moss Wood and to show them our new wines. Of course, we are also delighted to meet other wine enthusiasts who have an interest in Moss Wood.

There are only a few of us who can show you the wines and the winery: Keith and Clare, our vineyard manager, Ian Bell and the part time office tyros, Aileen Dickart and Sue Henderson.

To enable us to manage the neverending task of running the winery and the vineyard, we need as much advance notice as possible so that we can arrange an appointment at a time that suits you. With enough notice, we are able to make appointments on most weekdays and Saturday mornings.

Like most people with a young family, Keith and Clare are preoccupied with sport on Saturday afternoons and they try hard to keep Sundays for the family. However, if they get enough notice, they may be able to arrange appointments for these times.

A New Regional Guide

A Taste of the Margaret River: a guide to the wines, wineries and food of the region

by Peter Forrestal Published by Ocean Glimpses
\$14.95 RRP 160 pages

This book is primarily a guide to the wineries and wines of Margaret River. Apart from providing detailed information about the wineries, it gives Peter Forrestal's comments about the wines of this important viticultural region. It contains reviews of 21 recommended restaurants and cafes and 6 fast food outlets, information about the other restaurants of the area as well as a useful summary of which restaurants are open for lunch and dinner each day of the week. There is a wealth of information about the produce of the region, the best art and craft galleries, the pick of a variety of types of accommodation, the most important annual wine events in the region and the ten best activities for keeping the kids occupied. Detailed maps are supplemented by explicit directions to each of the region's wineries and vineyards.

Peter Forrestal has written the Moss Wood Newsletter since its inception in 1987 and was wine columnist for the *West Australian* from late 1992 to early 1995. He contributes to *Australian Gourmet Traveller* for whom he writes the Western Australian section of their annual restaurant guide.

The book is available from:

Ocean Glimpses
1 Cobb Street, SCARBOROUGH WA 6019
Phone (09) 341 1107 Fax: (09) 245 1969
Cost \$14.95 plus \$3 postage.

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