

MOSS WOOD



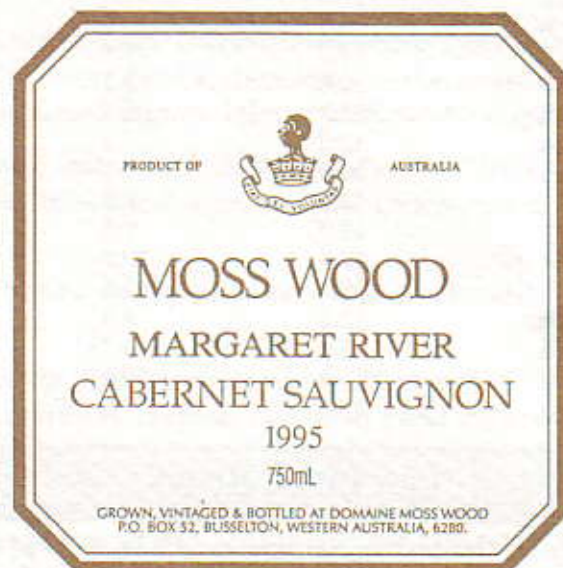
Newsletter

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The 1995 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1995 vintage at Moss Wood was basically a simple one for the vigneron and his team: especially, on reflection, after the tumultuous season experienced in the lead up to the 1997 harvest. In 1995, there were no interruptions from rain or extreme heat and so it was a case of just sitting back and waiting for the grapes to ripen. Certainly, February had some hot days but this did not cause any problems. Rather, with the good warm, ripening conditions that prevailed, the mid-February heat merely hastened the ripening of the early varieties. The March conditions were almost blissful with autumnal, warm, sunny days and no pressure to pick from either birds or rain. As often happens, just as the vines ripen ones gets the impression that the season might change at any moment. But there were no hiccups.



The fruit showed terrific, intense flavour in the grapes and in fermentation tanks. The fermentation of cabernet went absolutely according to Moss Wood tradition: the open tanks, which experienced warm temperatures up to 30° C, were hand plunged four times a day with one pump over towards the end to ensure that no hydrogen sulphide remained. Skin contact time averaged eight days before the wine was drained and pressed. As usual at Moss Wood, all pressings were included, the malolactic fermentation took place in stainless steel and the wine was put into barrels in July 1995 where it stayed until January 15th 1997. It was then racked, lightly egg white fined, (one egg white per 4000 litres), lightly filtered and bottled.

Keith has always been haunted by the similarity of the 1995 Cabernet to the 1975. He is worried because he doesn't much like the idea of a twenty year cycle. However, unquestionably there has not been a wine with the same intense fruit flavours and silky tannins since the 1975 and this is the reason that Keith gives the 1995 wine a rating of 10. He believes that it may, in the long term, supplant the 1991 at the head of the queue of Moss Wood Cabernets.

The 1995 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon (cont.)

The colour is medium to dark red with brick red hues; the nose is intensely fruity, showing a lifted fragrance of mulberries, raspberries, violets, redcurrants and some merlot malbec earthiness. It has been aged in 51% new oak (225 litres Allier medium-toasted barrels) and this gives a spicy oakiness which remains a background feature because of the wine's generosity of the fruit. The palate has generous red and dark fruit flavours, good acidity, (quite lifted for a Moss Wood Cabernet) and soft spicy oak, with delightful, integrated tannins. Already it has a quite silky texture.

There is no question about this red's ageing potential and Keith vigorously recommends a minimum of ten years cellaring in good conditions and would encourage fifteen to twenty years for those who wish to see the wine at its best.

The 1995 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon appears remarkably approachable at present with perfumed aromas of red berries while the palate shows lively spice, red cherry, mulberry and cedary oak flavours. The wine is rich and concentrated with a texture that is soft and silky. It has great depth and length, impressive intensity and powerful yet fine tannins on a long, lingering finish. It has all the hallmarks of a great Moss Wood Cabernet.

Vintage Ratings: Cabernet Sauvignon

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beaufort	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1983	7 March	13.0	9.0	9
1984	12 March	12.3	9.0	8+
1985	13 March	12.5	7.5	9
1986	14 March	12.8	5.8	9
1987	26 March	12.7	8.5	9
1988	10 March	13.0	7.1	7
1989	30 March	13.2	7.9	7+
1990	2 April	12.8	8.5	10
1991	3 April	13.3	9.8	10
1992	26 March	12.8	10.0	8+
1993	22 March	13.2	8.5	8+
1994	25 March	12.8	8.8	9
1995	14 March	13.6	9.75	10
1996	14 March	13.6	10.0	10
1997	19 March	13.4	7.0	9

The Long Rows

The retrellising to Scott Henry of the last remaining major section of the cabernet block (known affectionately as the long rows because they are long for Moss Wood, although maybe not for Penfolds). This block, which is on single wire trellising, will be pruned and then converted to Scott Henry.

We've been working with Bob Jeffery of the Soil Management Consultancy on a proper soil map of Moss Wood. It is now a mature vineyard and mature vines have different soil requirements from young vines. Soil management in the vineyard now needs to be appropriate to the needs of older vines. In addition to that, we are conscious that viticulture over twenty five years may have made some changes to soil conditions at Moss Wood. We are also keen to examine the vineyard closely to see if there are any patches that consistently operate below par.

Vineyard management has been a fairly imprecise science. What we've found so far is that the more you investigate scientifically, the clearer it becomes that the vineyard responds to carefully thought out fertiliser and soil management techniques. Keith's interest in this began ten years ago when he discovered that the vineyard had a potassium deficiency. This problem was tackled by adding acceptable levels of trace elements to the soil. However careful monitoring of this led Keith to believe that acceptable levels of potassium may be higher than the amount that the vines actually needed. In working to solve the problem, Keith became increasingly convinced that management of the soil needed to be treated scientifically. This has led to the current work on soil mapping at Moss Wood.

The Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon Vintage Chart

This chart has been completely revised on the basis of a vertical tasting of 15 wines conducted by John Jens of the outstanding Perth fine wine merchants, John Coppins. We are grateful for the opportunity to be involved in this major event.

1980 (Special Reserve) Has amazing intensity, great depth of flavour and an excellent, long lingering finish. This rich, powerful wine is drinking superbly and is in a class above the earlier wines from the vineyard because of the liveliness of its fruit. A monumental red showing the essence of Moss Wood.

1983 (Special Reserve) Soft, approachable, ripe, rich, concentrated mulberry and blackcurrants with some earthy overtones, complex, powerful, yet more elegant than the standard wine. Strong tannins linger but these are less obvious than before. Perhaps ready to drink.

1983 Dense, ripe, vibrant mulberry, plum and chocolate flavours with some underlying earthiness. Initially soft; rich and concentrated; still tight; big tannin structure. Needs time.

1984 Restrained on nose; soft, earthy, chocolate and smoky oak flavours with the primary fruit characters quite subdued. Lacking the intensity of most years, with only moderate ripeness but with good weight, balance, length and pleasing complexity. Matured.

1985 The outstanding wine at the John Coppins tasting. Soft, round and fleshy with a velvety texture; quite mellow; opulent, ripe cherry, blackcurrant flavours with overtones of coffee and earthiness; complex, incredibly dense; seamless integration of fruit and oak.

1986 Subdued on the nose; soft, round, concentrated, reasonably generous; an almost silky texture. Dense, rich, ripe redcurrant flavours earthy, chocolatey, coffee overtones. Powerful, tight. The tannins are still noticeable but have softened slightly. Hint of mellow, developed characters.

1987 Still youthful and vibrant; soft, round, fleshy, lovely sweet fruit, cherries, mulberries, cassis with overtones of cedary oak. Silky mouthfeel; ripe, opulent, concentrated yet fine; complex and powerful; quite soft tannins.

1988 Restrained nose, soft, minty, earthy, red berry and smoky oak flavours; ripe, medium weight, quite tannic.

1989 Restrained nose, sweet fruit of redcurrants and mulberries with hints of earthy, smoky characters; some softness and close to a velvety texture; rich with good concentration of flavour; fine yet firm tannins on the finish.

1990 (Special Reserve) Still remarkably closed, initially soft and round with a velvety texture; tight, restrained and quite unyielding; earthy, blackcurrant flavours; tremendous weight, densely concentrated. Tannic and needing lots of time. Very, very good.

1990 Very closed on the nose; soft, fleshy and round on the palate; opulent and concentrated with blackberry and cassis flavours. Silky, seamless integration of fruit and oak; impressive weight; complex. The tannins have begun to mellow though it has years ahead of it.

1991 Very impressive. Quite closed but with lively spice, cherry, mulberry and cedary oak flavours with chocolatey overtones; soft, extremely dense, intense, opulent tending towards lush, velvety texture. Big, powerful red with strong flavours, a tight structure and the weight to improve further with bottle development.

1992 Attractive blackberry, mulberry and charry oak characters, soft, round and quite generous; rich, intense, vibrant yet still quite restrained. The magnum was much less developed, with firmer tannins.

1993 Closed. Softer, rounder and more generous than the 1994 without the intensity of that wine. Spicy, mulberry flavours with balance between fruit and cedary oak. Tight, fine tannins linger on the finish.

1994 Still closed but soft with raspberry, plum and cassis flavours; vibrant, powerful, dense yet fine. This is a strong, ripe red with a tight structure and pronounced tannins.

More Travels with Ian Bell

Our popular Vineyard Manager, Ian 'Tinker' Bell was ready to slash his wrists after harvesting only 4.95 tonnes of cabernet (down from an expected minimum of 6 tonnes) on his own Glenmore property. As the vintage at Moss Wood ended much earlier than expected, Keith suggested that Ian go to South Australia to catch the end of the vintage there. The intrepid Tinker covered 3000 kilometres in nine days visiting Adelaide Hills, Coonawarra, McLaren Vale and the Clare Valley. He received great hospitality along the way from the likes of Doug Bowen, Ian Hollick, the team at Petaluma and Jeff Grosset.

Ian started in the Adelaide Hills, visited Petaluma and Chain of Ponds where he took part in a seminar with Scott Henry (after whom the trellising system was named). He then went to the South-East, looked at the area near Robe, Mount Benson, Cape Jaffa and Mt Compass and marvelled at the scale of the vineyard development there. The 500 acre trial vineyard at Robe seemed a world away from Moss Wood.

The sheer magnitude of the South Australian industry also gave our country boy pause for thoughts, not the least of which was the 500 semi-trailer loads of pine posts (3.2 million posts) for new trellising in McLaren Vale. This helped Tinker realise just how small is the contribution of the Margaret River region to national production. He was impressed by several small producers in the Adelaide Hills and Clare Valley who practised quality viticulture with care and attention to detail. Petaluma which he revisited was likewise impressive with its emphasis on quality viticulture and attention to detail on things like shoot placement.

The trip confirmed Ian's enthusiasm for quality grape growing in the Margaret River and he came home with many new ideas that will be put into the ring. Ian is now pondering the long term future of his Glenmore property. Keith commented that it was sad that no friendly South Australian maidens were found to comfort a wandering country boy from the West.

Viticultural Field Day

The Margaret River Wine Industry Association, in conjunction with the Cowaramup Agency held the first of what is likely to become its annual viticultural field days. Nearly 70 exhibitors attended and there were numerous working displays of trellising, spray equipment, tractors and the like. Significant numbers attended the day from all viticultural regions of the South-West.

Keith and Clare say congratulations to the organisers in encouraging the huge turn out. They believe that it is an indication of how the Margaret River region is developing, now that it is big enough to put on such an event and attract such a turn-out. With the maturing of the industry has come the recognition that it now has a significant impact on the Western Australian economy.

Margaret River Festival Auction

One feature of the Margaret River Wine and Food Festival, to be held on the weekend of 22nd and 23rd of November will be a major auction of Margaret River wines conducted by Australia's most prestigious auction house, Langton's. The auction will focus on the top (or grand cru) wines of the Margaret River and should provide winelovers with a unique opportunity to pick up otherwise unobtainable wines from the region. Moss Wood will release a small amount of their museum stock for the auction. Anyone who is interested in making available some of their well-cellared Moss Wood wines could contact Langton's Andrew Caillard in Sydney on (02) 9310 4231 or Keith and Clare at the winery.

A good letter

Every now and again, our spirits are lifted by letters from valued customers who write about the special occasions on which they enjoyed a bottle of Moss Wood. We recently received such a letter from a couple who were given a bottle of the 1987 Cabernet and told to keep it for the perfect occasion. They drank it on their 50th wedding anniversary and wrote to say that it was sublime and to thank us for making it.