

MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

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The 1997 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1997 vintage was one of the more difficult ones in Moss Wood's relatively short history. While the vines were flowering, strong windswept the vineyard significantly reducing the chardonnay crop. This situation was exacerbated by gusty winds which battered the vineyard for a month from late in September. The worst hail storm in memory on December 11th caused great damage to the pinot and the spirits of the vigneron. Rain in February and March took the edge off summer weather which had promised an exceptional vintage. In spite of all this, the 1997 Moss Wood Chardonnay is a wine that Keith is most pleased with and one which he believes is a serious cellaring prospect with the potential to improve over the next ten years. It has sufficient fruit depth and complexity to also offer attractive short term drinking.



The wine was made according to the usual practice at Moss Wood: the grapes were crushed and drained so that there was no skin contact. All pressings were included in the wine with the juices cold settled for three days in stainless steel tanks, inoculated with a pure yeast culture and fermented until half way at 18°C. They were then racked into one hundred per cent new French barriques where they finished fermentation. Seventy five per cent of the wine was allowed to go through a malolactic fermentation. The chardonnay was left on its gross lees for three months and spent a further ten months in barrel on its fine lees.

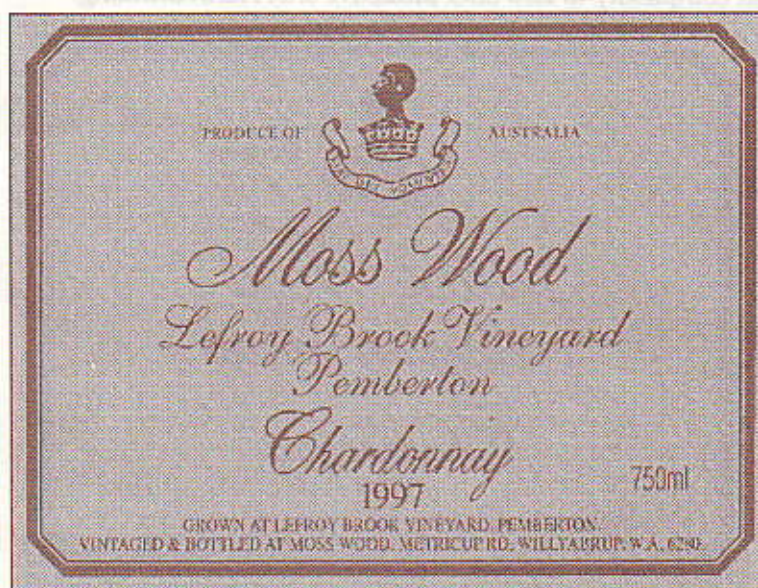
The wine has medium to deep straw colour, with some green tints. On the nose, it shows very interesting complexities: the traditional fruit aromas of peach, melon and citrus; sweet marmalade-like richness with toasty oak; and a smokey almond character from the malolactic fermentation. The palate has similar complexities. Its structure is quite fine, perhaps unusually so given the wine's 14% alcohol content. This gives the wine good acidity and freshness, and with well-balanced tannins on the finish, there is the right sort of make-up for good cellaring. Certainly we are very pleased with the peach and grapefruit flavours and the background characters of bacon, marmalade, bread dough and oak. The tannin structure of the Chardonnay is one of the paradoxes of the 1997 vintage. It has been our experience that in the very low-yielding years, the tannins can be too dominant. However, with the 1997 this is not the case and the reasons for this are not all that clear. It probably reflects the fact that the wine has long, lively and complex fruit flavours that balance the structure and smother it to a degree.

The 1997 Moss Wood 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay

This is the first time we have made chardonnay from this attractive vineyard which is set in an amphitheatre of karri trees along the Pemberton to Northcliffe train line, to the south-east of Pemberton. It has been established by two very serious wine lovers, Pat and Barbara Holt, driven by a collective passion for pinot noir and chardonnay. This is a pretty remarkable achievement considering that their real lives revolve around Pat's role as Senior Research Fellow with the National Health and Medical Research Council where he is one of the world's leading authorities on asthma.

The vineyard was planted by the Holts in 1982 and 1983 with their first wine being made from the 1986 vintage. Prior to that, the few berries that were harvested were made into jam (quite delicious, apparently). The first commercial vintage of chardonnay from Lefroy Brook took place in 1989, was made by Peter Fimmel and marketed under the Lefroy Brook label. The vineyard is now reaching maturity and so it is possible to forecast the wine's cellaring potential with some confidence.

Apart from its scenic location, the vineyard is unique for another reason. It is planted on the traditional French vine spacing of one metre by one metre and trained in to the single guyot head shape. The system delivers maximum quality yet there are very few hectares of vineyard trained in this way in Australia. The vineyard is unirrigated (like Moss Wood itself), something which the mainstream Australian wine industry finds difficult to accept. For these reasons, Keith is delighted to source grapes from Lefroy Brook.



The wine has medium straw colour with green tints. On the nose it shows fresh fruit aromas of citrus, crème brûlée, toffee and cashew nuts. There are also interesting background aromas of toasty oak and bread dough. On the palate, there are fresh citrus flavours of limes and grapefruit, as well as peach and marmalade while the finish has well-integrated oak, with a light toasty overtone. There is a good acid and tannin balance indicating that the wine should cellar for at least 5 years.

Australia's Top 20 Chardonnays

The premier issue of the new national publication, *The Wine Magazine*, was released last October. A major article on Australia's Top 20 Chardonnays reported on a tasting conducted by the magazine's panel of Peter Bourne, Andrew Caillard, Peter Forrestal, Huon Hooke, Lyndey Milan and Jeremy Oliver. Margaret River was rated Australia's best region for chardonnay with six labels rated in the country's top 20: Cape Mentelle, Cullen, Devil's Lair, Leeuwin Estate, Moss Wood and Pierro.

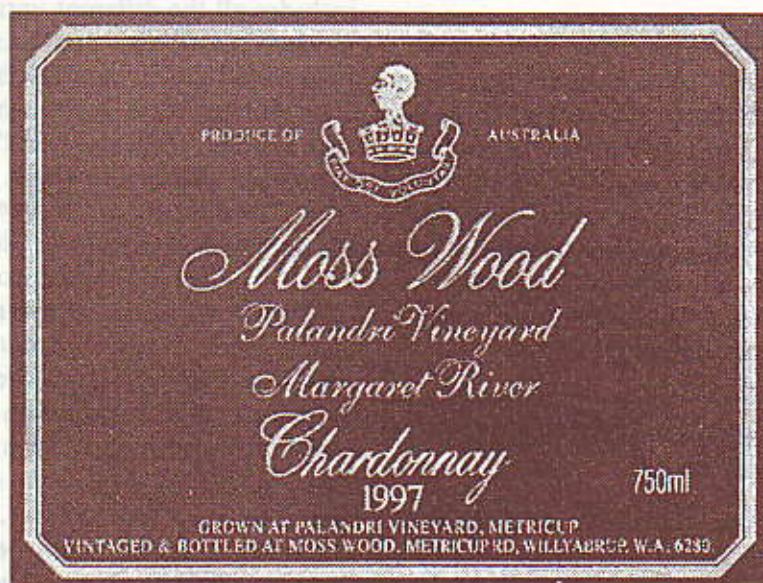
Panel member Jeremy Oliver commented, "Moss Wood was another automatic inclusion. Typically concentrated with melon and marmalade fruit and assertive, smokey oak, the 1996 vintage won over all the panel with the exception of Caillard, who suggested that its pristine fruit might have received better treatment in the cooperage department".

The 1997 Moss Wood 'Palandri Vineyard' Chardonnay

When Bill Pannell first established Moss Wood he was assisted by Giovanni Palandri, who had come to Australia from Italy after the Second World War. Giovanni had worked in the local timber mill at Cowaramup and purchased a farm at Metricup, where he ran cattle. After he retired from the mill, he took the opportunity to help out in the newly established Willyabrup vineyards as it gave him a chance to use some skills he had not utilised since he had left Italy. In fact, his basic understanding of vines was a significant help in those early days because skilled labour was virtually unobtainable. Giovanni worked at Moss Wood for many years, through two owners, until his death in 1985. A great friend, sadly missed.

After the industry began to flourish, Giovanni had planted some cabernet sauvignon vines on his own place. Later his sons added semillon, sauvignon blanc and chardonnay. The major customers for the Palandri grapes are Houghton and Plantagenet and it was courtesy of Gavin Berry (Senior Winemaker at the latter) that we got the opportunity to bolster our 1997 chardonnay stocks by buying from this vineyard. Given our historical association with the property, it was a privilege to do so.

Metricup is about 10 kilometres east of Willyabrup and, as a result, it experiences a more continental (less maritime) climate. Whilst 10 kilometres may not be considered a very great distance, it results in some major differences in grape ripening. The best way to highlight this is to note that the Palandri vineyard, which carries the same crop level as Moss Wood, ripened nearly 4 weeks later. Moss Wood is grown on Scott



Henry trellis, which maximises the vines' ability to ripen the crop but this does not account for a 4 week difference. This also lends some credence to the French concept of "terroir" because the technique of production for each of the chardonnays was virtually identical and yet the flavour and structure of each is quite different. Unlike the Lefroy Brook Chardonnay, this wine is the result of a one off purchase of grapes.

The wine has a medium straw colour, with green tints. The nose shows aromas of mandarin, peach and citrus, with medium intensity and depth and background characters of bread dough, bacon and toasty oak. This wine was given a significant amount of lees stirring to increase complexity on the nose but the yeast derived characters do not appear exaggerated. On the contrary, they provide a nice earthy background. The wine is made from a different clone than the other two and is probably from a lesser site and so it does lack some fruit intensity and complexity in comparison. It shows mandarin and citrus flavours, of medium weight and length, with some meat, bacon and bread dough characters from the malolactic fermentation and lees stirring. The wine was aged in 100% new French oak barriques (as were the other two) and despite its finer style, the oak is well integrated.

As this is also a wine from older vines, Keith believes it is possible to make a fair assessment of its cellaring potential. Given its finer fruit characters and structure, he would recommend it for short to medium term consumption.

New Arrival

As of January this year, we were joined by Matt Bowden, a graduate in Horticultural Science from the University of Western Australia. Matt has had quite a long association with Moss Wood, having originally come to visit us for work experience in December 1992. For reasons best known to him, this whetted his appetite for viticulture and he went on to UWA and is now the first West Australian-trained person to be employed here.

This is a slight exaggeration because Bill Pannell was a medical graduate from the newly established (at the time) Faculty of Medicine, also at UWA. Matthew's family come originally from the south eastern wheat belt town of Lake King, where they had a large wheat and sheep farm. It is proving a challenge for him to get used to operating a tractor that has only 75 horse power, not 500! We continue to reinforce the point that it is quality not quantity that counts!

This has led to some interesting changes in people's job descriptions. Keith has now become "The Chief", although he prefers "Sir" and is beginning to feel like a piece of antique furniture, since this is his 20th vintage at Moss Wood. Ian wanted to take the title of "Senior Technical Manager" although visiting English wine journalist Oz Clarke suggested "Vintage Stylist", which everybody else preferred because it seemed to have more in common with hair dressing!

Lack of Quantity this Year

Customers must please note that the volume of 1997 Chardonnay is well down and this means that its distribution will be very limited. There will be no wine available through the restaurants or liquor stores because the supply is so small, so if you would like to purchase some, please do so through the newsletter. Customers should also note that the release of the 1996 Cabernet Sauvignon is not until the 1st July, 1999. We will release our 1994 Special Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon in our July newsletter this year but only in an extremely small quantity and only available through the newsletter.

We will also release the 1997 Moss Wood 'Glenmore' Cabernet Sauvignon at the same time, in an effort to improve our limited volumes. This situation has meant that we have suspended the Standing Order system until 1999 because we believed that the only fair way to release the wines was to make them available to all customers at the same time.

One Small Vineyard

This current supply situation has led to some people drawing some rather unfair conclusions about the way Moss Wood is sold. In particular, there has been criticism of us for selling the wine overseas and complaining that the current shortage is the result of a lack of commitment to the domestic market. It would be interesting to print the views of the overseas buyers on this matter, which we could not do since the replies would be unacceptably crude for a publication of this quality. Suffice to say that they accuse us of exactly the opposite. More than 75% of our wine is sold in Australia and any perceived shortage is simply a product of an extraordinary increase in demand in this country (for our red wines in particular), or the unfairness of Mother Nature in devastating our white wine crop.

Please be mindful of the fact that, at present, Moss Wood is a vineyard of only 8.5 hectares (this includes all the different varieties), which is tiny by modern standards. Furthermore, customers may have noted that on our labels, the bottom two lines state that any Moss Wood wine is "Grown, Vintaged and Bottled at Moss Wood". Whenever we have purchased grapes elsewhere, as with the Pemberton wines, then the other vineyard is acknowledged. We are determined that the origin and style of the wine be absolutely clear and consistent and that no confusion will exist in the mind of the customer. After years of tremendous support by so many people, we are not prepared to damage our wine styles or our reputation by expanding and purchasing large quantities of grapes from lesser vineyards. If we were to do so the wines would no longer be truly "Moss Wood".

At the same time, we have felt the need to spread our risk a little further and hence the appearance of the Lefroy Brook and Glenmore wines. We are happy to make additional wines if we can source grapes of a reliable quality. We believe these will complement those which come from our vineyard. As Burgundian winemakers have shown for many years, it is possible to have a quality portfolio of wines drawn from a number of different vineyards.

Newsletter 'on-line'

Customers can now receive the Moss Wood newsletter and order form via e-mail. If you wish to have them delivered to your e-mail address instead of to your postal address please complete your details on the order form or contact the Moss Wood office on-line.

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