

MOSS WOOD

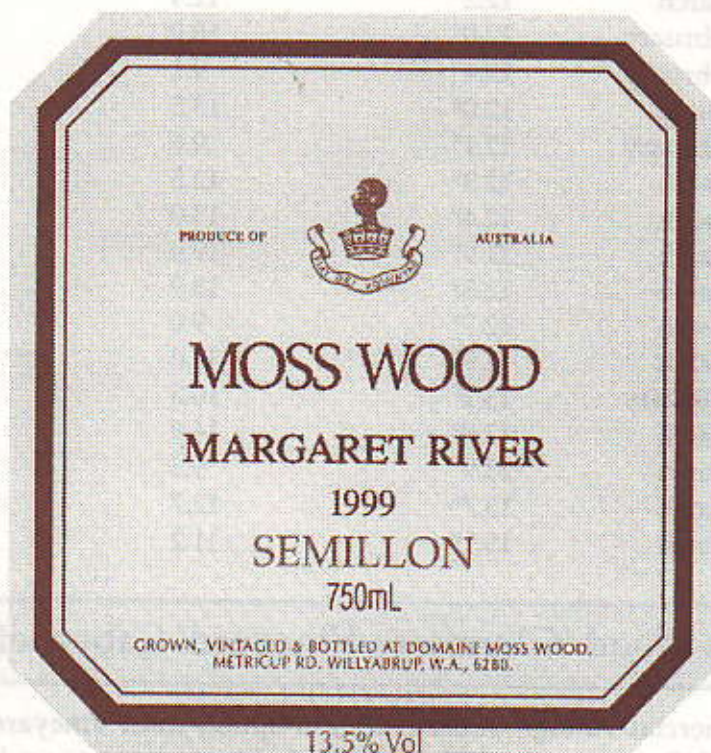
Newsletter

Nº 40

September, 1999

The 1999 Moss Wood Semillon

The 1999 harvest came at the end of a textbook growing season which featured good flowering conditions and consistently mild temperatures. Some vineyards in the region overcropped and consequently had problems ripening the semillon. This was not a concern at Moss Wood where reasonable yields allowed the finished wine to register 13.5% alcohol. The picking took place on lovely autumnal days and although rain threatened, none of consequence disrupted the harvest. The birds left Moss Wood alone so the grapes could ripen without the owner's equilibrium being affected.



The treatment in the winery was similar to that of the previous year: the grapes were crushed, drained, pressed, cold settled and the juice was taken off. Two per cent solids were added to the stainless steel tank and fermentation was allowed to commence with indigenous yeast strains. When fermentation was approximately one quarter finished, the tank was seeded with pure yeast culture. This sequential inoculation is designed to ensure that the nose and palate benefit from the interesting nuances derived from the wild yeast strains. A paper presented at the Technical Conference attended by the Moss Wood team last year, suggested that most serious problems which accompany the use of indigenous yeasts would be avoided by the later addition of pure yeast: aroma and flavour are not adversely affected and incomplete fermentation is avoided.

After being fermented to dryness, the wine was kept on its lees and stirred weekly for six weeks at which time it was protein stabilised, cold stabilised and bottled.

The 1999 Moss Wood Semillon [cont.]

The 1999 Moss Wood Semillon has quite restrained granny-smith apple and fig aromas with some minerally notes in the background. It is clean and lively, soft initially, mouthfilling, with granny-smith, fig and tobacco flavours and some earthy, minerally notes. The finish shows fresh acidity with firm, though not bitter, grape tannins lingering. Although attractive early drinking, this is a white wine of substance: impressive weight, tight structure and full bodied flavour.

Keith sees it as a refinement of the Moss Wood style with a touch more complexity probably from the use of wild yeast, although it appears that maturation on lees and battonage (lees stirring) are also factors. He would encourage those with the opportunity to cellar well, to do so for at least ten years.

Moss Wood Semillon Vintage Chart

Vintage	Harvest Date	Beaume	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1983	5 March	12.3°	3.6	9
1984	5 March	12.2°	12.4	7
1985	28 February	12.0°	10.0	9
1986	28 February	12.4°	9.1	7
1987	9 March	12.0°	13.5	8
1988	18 February	12.1°	9.6	7
1989	15 March	12.3°	12.5	7
1990	21 March	12.4°	13.0	8
1991	26 March	11.9°	19.0	6
1992	3 March	12.5°	13.9	8
1993	5 March	12.7°	9.0	10
1994	10 March	12.9°	11.0	9
1995	23 February	13.2°	10.8	8 +
1996	7 March	12.9°	14.9	9
1997	12 March	13.9°	9.6	9
1998	8 March	13.7°	12.7	9
1999	16 March	13.1°	11.2	9

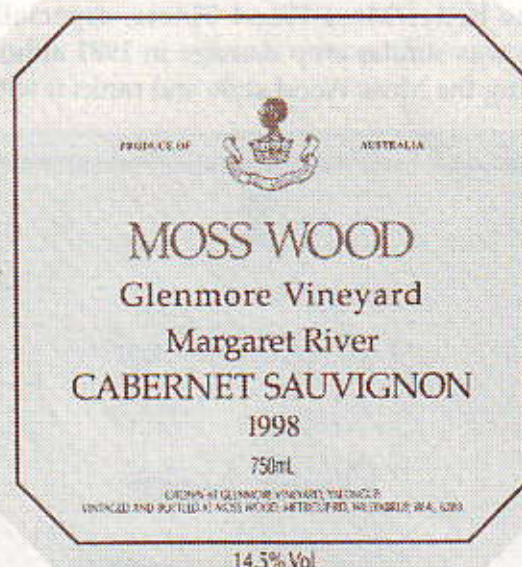
The 1998 Moss Wood 'Glenmore Vineyard' Cabernet Sauvignon

This is the second commercial vintage of cabernet sauvignon from Vineyard Manager, Ian Bell's Glenmore Vineyard. The 1997 vintage was difficult for the Yallingup property as it suffered significantly because of rain and the grapes didn't ripen as much as Ian had hoped. In 1998, the grapes had just ripened as the rains came and picking was finished in a gentle mist. To Ian's relief, these showers caused only minor inconvenience but had no influence on the quality of the grapes. At Glenmore, the aim is to get 13.5% alcohol, similar to Moss Wood. This ripeness is even more important to the Yallingup wine which tends to have a finer texture and more delicate fruit flavours on the palate.

The wine is made using the same method as for the Moss Wood Cabernet. It is crushed into open fermenters, seeded with pure yeast culture and fermented at warm temperatures. During fermentation, it is plunged four times a day. As you would expect, a wine like this was given deluxe treatment at Moss Wood. With the 1998 Glenmore almost every plunging was carried out by the grape grower and 'expectant father', Ian 'Tinker' Bell. After 12 days on skins, it was pressed, then settled in stainless steel for four days before being racked into barrels. The Glenmore Cabernet was given 12 months in French oak, a quarter of which was new. This takes into account the youth of the vines. Certainly Keith believes that until one gets the feel for the fruit characters of a new vineyard it is better to err on the side of

The 1998 Moss Wood 'Glenmore Vineyard' Cabernet Sauvignon [cont.]

using too little rather than too much new oak. The maturation period was finished in June and so the wine was fined with one egg white per barrel, went through a coarse filtration and was bottled. Remarkably, Tinker Bell entrusted the final stage of production to the remaining Moss Wood team so that his long service leave was uninterrupted.



The 1998 Moss Wood Glenmore Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon has a bright, brick red colour and delightful perfumes of blueberries and red cherries with hints of cinnamon and dusty oak. On the palate, the flavours are those of dark cherries, dark plums, blueberries and five spice while the texture is soft and smooth. The finish, however, is dominated by powerful and firm, though fine, tannins. This is a vibrant, fresh young wine that has good varietal definition and finesse. It will soften and become more approachable with two to three years bottle age.

Keith is happy with the wine and believes that it has the fruit definition and weight to be a good example of cabernet from the Yallingup area. Although reserving the right to be cautious, he is pleased with its balance and chemistry and expects it to cellar well for at least five years.

The 1997 Moss Wood 'Margaret River' Pinot Noir

The 1997 vintage was as difficult as that of 1999 was good: summer contained all four seasons; wet and dry; hot and cold. Moss Wood experienced the heartbreak of massive crop reductions because of wind and hail damage with more than half the pinot crop lost. As you would know, pinot noir enjoys ripening a small crop so the lack of quantity was made up for by a corresponding improvement in concentration of flavour. Keith thought that there might have been a serious problem with ripeness as it rained heavily three weeks before harvest. Fortunately, the grapes did not split and disease was not a problem so ripening continued uninterrupted. The pinot was picked in sound condition at normal levels of ripeness. The wine was produced in the traditional manner of Moss Wood: it was placed into fermenters with twenty per cent whole bunches added, then chilled to 12°C for three days for cold maceration and then allowed to warm to ambient temperature. The juice was inoculated with pure yeast and fermentation took place at about 30°C. Each ferment was hand plunged four times a day. At dryness, it was tasted so that the tannin structure could be monitored. Pressing took place after 14 days on skins. The wine was settled in stainless steel then racked to barrels where it stayed for 22 months. As usual, a third of the 225 litre French barriques were new. After its oak maturation, the wine was given no fining, only a very coarse filtration to remove any solids, and was then bottled through a delicate silk stocking.

The 1997 Moss Wood 'Margaret River' Pinot Noir [cont.]

The 1997 Moss Wood Margaret River Pinot Noir has attractive ripe strawberry, plum and spicy cinnamon perfumes; is soft, round and generous, with a silky texture; rich, concentrated sweet fruit of dark cherries and plums and some complex savoury characters that are earthy, gamey and mushroomy. The acid and tannin structure is firm giving the wine good length and the promise of long life.

Keith sees it as one of the better Moss Wood Pinots, especially as the crop reduction has concentrated its flavours. There was similar crop damage in 1981 although that wine had a character all of its own. He sees this as being the Moss Wood style and ranks it with the 1990 and 1991 wines.



Moss Wood Pinot Noir Vintage Chart

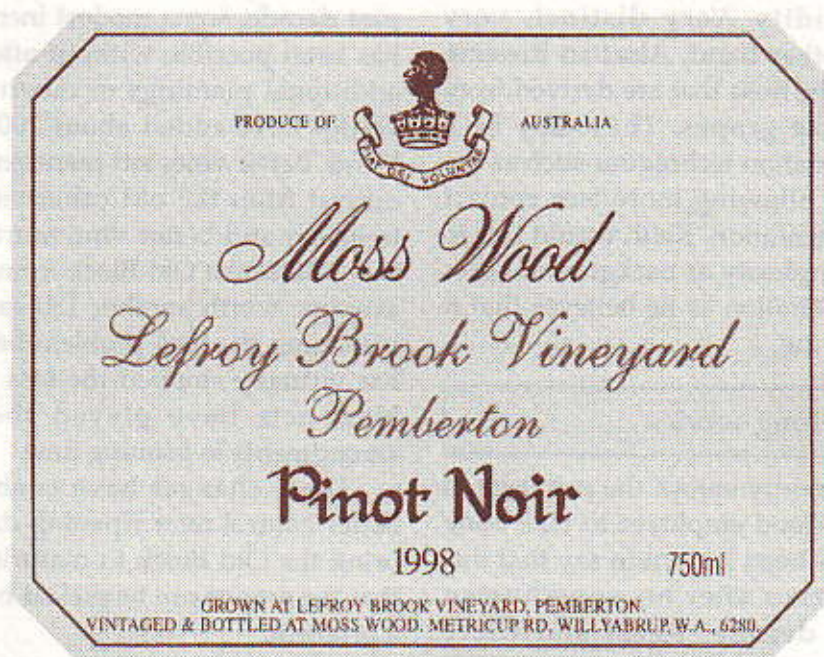
Vintage	Harvest Date	Beaume	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1979	17 February	12.3°	6.6	4
1980	29 February	14.2°	3.5	4
1981	4 March	13.1°	3.8	10
1982	13 March	12.95°	8.2	5
1983	19 February	12.85°	6.0	6
1984	16 February	12.9°	5.7	6
1985	25 February	13.3°	6.4	10
1986	24 February	13.3°	5.8	10
1987	24 February	12.9°	5.8	8
1988	10 February	13.1°	6.0	8
1989	15 March	12.9°	6.5	6
1990	16 March	13.4°	8.5	9
1991	10 March	13.3°	10.0	9
1992	28 February	13.5°	8.8	8
1993	3 March	13.3°	8.2	8
1994	1 March	13.5°	11.0	9
1995	14 February	13.6°	9.2	9 +
1996	15 February	13.4°	9.0	9
1997	2 March	14.3°	6.0	8 +
1998	13 February	13.6°	8.1	9
1999	22 February	13.8°	8.0	9

The 1998 Moss Wood 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Pinot Noir

The Cascades on Lefroy Brook is a popular tourist attraction not far off the highway to Northcliffe, a few kilometres outside Pemberton. The Lefroy Brook Vineyard of Perth couple Pat and Barbara Holt is nearby, as is a retirement vineyard planted by Leeuwin Estate viticulturist John Brocksopp and his wife, Dinah. The Holts originally made wine under their own label, but found that a busy professional life made that impossible and are therefore happy to sell their grapes to Moss Wood.

The two hectares of pinot noir and chardonnay vines are laid out in the classic Burgundian manner; vines one metre by one metre apart with vertical shoot positioning. While it may be a picture postcard block, set alongside a dam and surrounded by the dense karri forest of a national park, it does have a frighteningly friendly bird population and so is permanently netted. This is the third consecutive vintage where Moss Wood has produced a Lefroy Brook Pinot Noir. The 1998 harvest signalled a return to normal crop levels in Pemberton at the end of a much more favourable growing season: the area was less troubled by rain than Margaret River and the fruit was in tremendous condition. The grapes were picked to get 13.5% alcohol in the finished wine which was made in an identical way to the Margaret River Pinot. Twenty per cent whole bunches were added to the fermenters to get complexity from the small amount of stalk inclusion. The fermenters were chilled to 12°C for three days to allow for cold maceration. They were then returned to ambient temperature and the must was inoculated with pure yeast for fermentation to take place at about 30°C. Hand plunging took place four times a day and pressing came three to four days after 0°beaume (dryness) was reached, giving a total time on skins of about 12 days. The wine was allowed to settle on its gross lees for three to four days before being racked into French barriques where it remained for 12 months. After that, the wine was fined with one egg white per barrel, given a coarse filtration and bottled.

Keith believes that the Pemberton Pinot needs to highlight its up-front characters and fruit intensity and does not benefit from the same long term barrel ageing (in this case 22 months) that the Margaret River wine receives.



The 1998 Moss Wood Lefroy Brook Vineyard Pinot Noir is typical of that produced by Moss Wood from Pemberton. It has a complex nose with aromas of red berries and rhubarb while the palate emphasises these savoury characters: red cherries, beetroot, rhubarb flavours with some spicy, earthy, tarry notes and soft toasty oak in the background. The texture is fine and smooth; the wine has good weight; substantial, though fine tannins and high acidity.

Keith is hesitant to discuss ageing of a wine with no proven track record, but believes that this wine will improve over the next two to three years and can be cellared for at least five.

Australia's Top 20

The Wine Magazine included Moss Wood in its list of Top 20 Semillons in the January 1999 issue. In writing about the Moss Wood Semillon, the following comments were made:

"Another Margaret River maker whose Semillons are lovely young, but some vintages, such as 1986, have a herbal side which doesn't age well. Others, such as 1993, taste better with age, and this was lemony as well as faintly herbal, but deliciously fruity and alive in the mouth. Dry, lean, austere, good length."

— Huon Hooke.

"The 1998 was well liked: a lean, slightly herbal, more austere style, which would go well with oysters and should age well."

— Peter Bourne.

Wild Yeast and other follies

In attempting to explain what he wants to do with Moss Wood Semillon, Keith compares Australian Riesling to that produced in Alsace. He sees Australian Rieslings as exemplified by those of Grosset, Paulett and Plantagenet as having pure varietal definition; delicious floral lime and honeysuckle aromas; clean, very fine texture and fresh cleansing acidity. Very distinct, very Australian. On the other hand, Alsatian Riesling has complexities on the nose that are derived from things other than the grapes. They may be a product of the fermentation techniques such as the use of wild yeast or allowing more lees contact during and after fermentation. Keith would like to instil that kind of complexity as background notes for the Moss Wood Semillon as he believes that it would improve the wine.

Ian's long service

Ian "Tinker" Bell currently enjoys the privilege of being the first Moss Wood employee to take Long Service Leave. He has been known to say that this is the least he deserves after his superhuman efforts of the last decade! Keith and Clare demanded that they receive at least one postcard from an exotic and isolated location that does not have grapevines. Ian was last heard to be toughing it out on a yacht somewhere off Hamilton Island. In the meantime, Matt and Keith are happy to have a bit of freedom to practice some proper viticulture without Ian breathing down their necks!

Kangaroos

Kangaroos have become a much greater problem to the wine industry than ever before. Farmers have managed to control their numbers in the past but a significant reduction in those engaged in beef grazing and the dairy industry in the Margaret River region has led to a dramatic increase in the kangaroo population. This has been helped by the ready availability of permanent water supplies. Previously, kangaroos grazed on vineyard land but did little damage. However, in recent times, they seem to have developed a taste for grapes which they now treat as a food source. Where the occasional kangaroo would be spotted from Caves Road, flocks of twenty or thirty kangaroos can now be seen. Ian Bell's Glenmore Vineyard has seen the numbers reach plague proportions. At Moss Wood, kangaroo proof fencing has become necessary in order to secure the vineyard against this pest.

Meeting Demand

Although the demand for our flagship Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon has increased dramatically (Keith would say 'alarmingly') in the past decade, some modest increase in production has been possible without affecting quality. The additional plantings of cabernet franc and petit verdot have added about 200 cases each to the blend. Better vineyard management has increased output from the old cabernet vines. Improved trellising and better vine nutrition has increased the yield of the Old Block from 30 to 32 tonnes on average: worth another 130 cases. Moss Wood is managing the bird problem better than ever and has virtually stopped the loss of grapes to birds. New nets have played their part as have amendments to pruning time.

These changes have enabled Keith to gain better control over ripening dates and helped to bring the Old Block to maturity more quickly so that the grapes can be picked before birds become a problem.

Keith estimates that, on average, Moss Wood is producing about 600 cases more each year than it did ten years ago. Of course, demand has accelerated way beyond that. Current planting of the last remaining soils that are appropriate to cabernet on the Moss Wood property will come into production in 2005 and so be available to customers from 2008.