

MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

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The 1999 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1999 Moss Wood Chardonnay is one of the most complex white wines made at Moss Wood. It has medium deep straw colour with some green tints; and ripe peach, melon and tropical fruit characters on the nose with some nutty, roast cashew overtones. Keith also sees some green tinges, grapefruit and quince and some cinnamon and spicy vanillin aromas. It has initial fruit sweetness, great richness and concentration of flavour featuring a spicy, melony mid-palate, neat integration of fruit and oak and great length. This is a full-bodied white that is intense, powerful and complex and yet shows underlying finesse. Although immediately approachable and immensely appealing, Keith insists the wine will improve over the next three years and can be cellared with confidence for up to ten years.



The 1999 vintage was a remarkable one for Margaret River. Conditions during the ripening season were ideal with mild summer temperatures proving a great lead up to vintage. Hopes were high at the start of harvest which was a week later than expected. No rain was threatening, the marri gums were blossoming and so bird damage was unlikely to be a problem. Temperature continued to be perfect during vintage, fruit was in good condition and was picked at optimum ripeness. The mendoza clone (known as 'gingin') makes up about ninety per cent of Moss Wood's chardonnay grapes while the rest are Californian clones which appear a little neutral and lacking in complexity. Leeuwin Estate viticulturist, John Brocksopp, dismissively refers to them as 'the trebbiano clones'. For the first time at Moss Wood, these different clones were fermented separately. The more neutral clones were whole bunch pressed, racked into barrels without settling, and allowed to ferment with a full indigenous culture. Keith had decided not to use this batch unless he was happy with it. However, he was satisfied with the experiment and chose to use this portion in the final blend. The mendoza clone was made by the method that has become traditional at Moss Wood. The grapes were crushed and cold pressed immediately and were then allowed to settle for 72 hours before the clear juice (including 2% solids) was racked into the fermentation tank. Indigenous yeast strains started the process of fermentation and when the wine had reached 10° beaume, pure yeast culture was added.

The 1999 Moss Wood Chardonnay [cont.]

The chardonnay was then racked into barrels until after the fermentation had finished. In order to equalise all barrels, the wine (including the 'clonal batch') was racked into a blending tank. After blending, the wine was returned to barrels. Battonage, the practice of stirring the lees, is used to produce a wine that shows better integration of fruit and oak and greater finesse. It takes place every day during the primary fermentation. From that point until the wine begins to undergo malolactic fermentation, battonage takes place once a week. After this, the wine is left unstirred on its lees in barrel for 11 months. The wine is then protein stabilised, cold stabilised, lightly filtered and bottled.

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	9.1	7
1987	24 February	12.9	3.29	10.13	8
1988	12 February	12.5	3.35	11.2	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	7.3	8+
1993	4 March	13.6	3.35	10.29	10
1994	28 February	13.6	3.49	9.0	9
1995	17 February	13.7	3.30	7.0	10
1996	20 February	13.2	3.39	9.0	9+
1997	7 March	13.6	3.45	2.58	9
1998	5 March	14.1	3.53	4.08	9
1999	3 March	13.4	3.4	6.89	9+

Robert Parker on Moss Wood Chardonnay

American wine writer, Robert Parker described the latest Moss Wood Cabernet and Chardonnay as 'stunning'. He gives the Chardonnay 91 points and says:

The 1998 Chardonnay (14.7% alcohol) is an explosive wine, offering copious quantities of power, fruit and body. Huge in the mouth with a blockbuster finish, this multi-layered super concentrated wine is a dazzling example of what Australian Chardonnay can be. For its size, it possesses remarkable delineation and vibrancy. Drink it over the next 4-5 years.

Staff of life

Ian Bell has been back in the vineyard since early February clearly rejuvenated by a spell of long service leave; most of it spent, wouldn't you guess it, in his own Glenmore vineyard. Aileen Dickhart has also just returned from long service leave. During her absence Amy was assisted in the office by Renee Webse. With the changes at Moss Wood (see page 4), it looks as though Renee will stay on, in one role or another, now that Aileen has returned. Renee's marriage to Dave – at picturesque Basildene Manor, with the reception at Flutes – provided the social highlight for March 2000.

The 1999 Moss Wood 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay

The 1999 Moss Wood 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay is attractively scented with classical lime and grapefruit citrus aromas and a touch of peach and quince. In the background is a nuttiness and a character that Keith describes as 'honey toffee'. The palate is fine, of medium weight with grapefruit and citrus flavours, a tight structure and crisp fresh acidity on the finish. It is nicely integrated and has the concentration of flavour to soak up its classy oak. Keith believes that it is the best of the Moss Wood Chardonnays from Pemberton and believes it will improve with short to medium term cellaring.



Pat and Barbara Holt are passionate lovers of chardonnay and pinot noir. They maintain the Lefroy Brook Vineyard as part of a full life dominated by Pat's work. He is a Senior Research Fellow with the National Health and Medical Research Council, where he is a world authority on the treatment of asthma. Keith Mugford has now made six chardonnays from the Pemberton region. From 1990 to 1992 he made chardonnay from the Danti vineyard and this is his third white from Lefroy Brook. Planted by the Holts in 1982 and 1983, the vineyard is set in an amphitheatre of karri trees along the Pemberton to Northcliffe train line, situated a few miles south-east of Pemberton near the Cascades – a place of wondrous beauty and a popular tourist attraction. As it is surrounded by National Park, the entire vineyard must be netted to protect it from the birds. The Holts use the traditional French vine spacing of one metre by one metre and train the vines to the single guyot head shape which, although it delivers maximum quality, is rarely used in Australia. Keith describes Lefroy Brook as an unirrigated, low yielding, mature vineyard which produces grapes of exceptional quality. Pat Holt is excited with the vineyard and believes that it is in better shape than ever for the 2000 vintage. Keith has maintained his policy of making the Pemberton wine using identical techniques to the Margaret River Chardonnay and so the differences between the two wines reflect regional and vineyard characters.

Gourmet Retreat at Brookland Valley

The spirit of regional cooperation and friendship is alive and well in deepest Willyabrup. When Flutes Café owners, John and Pat Poynton and chef, Alfred Quintus decided to offer gourmet weekend retreats, Clare Mugford was one of their chosen guinea pigs. Focus of attention were cooking classes with Alfred which Clare described as 'inspirational'. Highlights included a magnificent self-smoked salmon, goats cheese dumplings and beef fillet with gruyère butter. After consuming this fine fare a vineyard walk made dinner a possibility. A cheese tasting with wholesalers, Nick and Pippin Bath of Blue Cow Cheese Co., added another learning dimension to a memorable weekend. Recommended. Contact Drew Bernhardt at Brookland Valley on (08) 9755 6250.

The Mugfords buy 'Ribbon Vale Estate'

Keith and Clare Mugford have just purchased their near neighbour, Ribbon Vale, from John James who established it in 1977. The winery takes its name from the shape of the block which is 185 metres wide by 1.3 kilometres long. It is situated on Caves Road between Pierro and Gralyn and has stunning views of the Willyabrup Valley. From a business point of view, the acquisition of Ribbon Vale Estate made a lot of sense. The demand for Moss Wood wines far exceeds what a single vineyard can produce. To satisfy the needs of customers and take advantage of Moss Wood's significant product strength, the Mugfords had explored ways of increasing the supply of wine without compromising their traditionalist views. They considered buying a greenfield site and establishing a new vineyard but decided against this because of the amount of time necessary to bring this into production and the impossibility, even with careful site selection, of guaranteeing quality outcomes. The option of buying an established vineyard of appropriate quality that offered old vines and a presence in the market had much greater appeal. Such an acquisition would enable Keith to bring his influence to bear in the vineyard and winery while, at the same time, giving them wines that could be sold immediately. Ribbon Vale was an attractive proposition for the Mugfords as it is an unirrigated vineyard with mature (twenty three year old) vines which has produced many interesting wines over the years. Its location was also ideal. Ribbon Vale is dress circle Willyabrup with access to Caves Road, and is situated within a stone's throw of many of the district's most notable vineyards. Importantly, it is only three minutes drive from Moss Wood.

The vineyard site is different from Moss Wood's as Ribbon Vale is predominantly south and west facing whereas Moss Wood faces predominantly north and east. The wines are quite distinct and will continue to reflect the vineyard from which they come. Ribbon Vale is 26 hectares (65 acres) in total and has 7 hectares (17.5 acres) of vines planted and so is smaller than Moss Wood with 11 hectares planted (27.5 acres). The varieties planted at Ribbon Vale are higher yielding ones, so individually they produce more than those at Moss Wood. Much of the property is dense woodland around the Willyabrup Creek and so is too steep, too rocky and (as Keith says) too pretty to be planted to vines. However, there is possibly another 3 hectares (7 acres) of suitable vineyard land at Ribbon Vale. The varietal mix is different from that at Moss Wood: sauvignon blanc, semillon and a tiny amount of chardonnay; merlot, cabernet sauvignon and a small amount of cabernet franc. Therefore, it offers an option that complements the home vineyard.

Much of Ribbon Vale's reputation has been established on the quality of two varietals, its Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot. The 1993 Ribbon Vale Sauvignon Blanc won three trophies at the Perth Show including an unprecedented trophy – for sauvignon blanc – as best WA wine of the Show. The Merlot is regarded as one of the best produced in Western Australia. Ribbon Vale sells at different price points than Moss Wood, in small quantities (about 3,500 to 4,000 cases). Keith and Clare see the wines coming from Ribbon Vale as individual vineyard wines in their own right rather than as a second label for Moss Wood. In some ways, this mirrors the situation that exists in Bordeaux where many owners of classed growths have other properties which are developed and marketed in their own right. Keith is keen to put his stamp on Ribbon Vale and produce interesting and distinctive wines. This will enable the Mugfords to maintain a traditional approach and yet expand without compromising quality. It gives the family (with four young children) more options for the future.

On the burning question that everyone is asking, the Mugfords are notably coy. Keith says that the price they paid was at the upper end of industry expectations and is subject to a confidentiality agreement between John James, Clare and himself. The cellar door will be open seven days a week and plans are already in place to upgrade facilities there. The Moss Wood team also plans to increase customer access via the Internet. Watch this space.

An explanation

Safety improvements have led to significant changes to Moss Wood's winery buildings. This led to delay in bottling of the 1999 Chardonnay, hence this later than usual newsletter. More details on these winery alterations will be in the Cabernet newsletter.