



MOSS WOOD

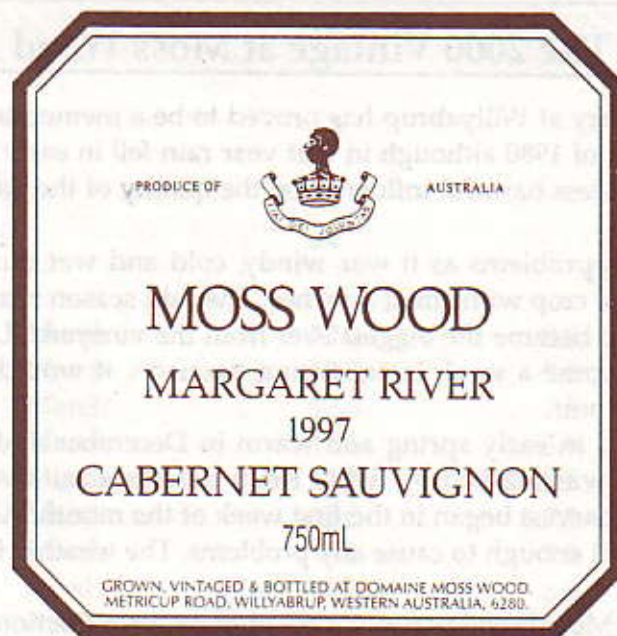
Newsletter

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The 1997 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon

After the difficulties of the vintage, the 1997 Moss Wood Cabernet is something of a surprise packet. The spring of 1996 was as severe a test of the Margaret River vigneron's patience and optimism as that of 1980 which preceded the 1981 vintage. The vines were subjected to terrible wind and hail damage during spring. This miserable cold, windy and rainy season saved its worst for the hail storm of December 11th which cleaned out the Moss Wood pinot and one third of the cabernet block. The change from cold to warm conditions came on overnight (on New Year's Eve) when the cold and windy December 30th (with its maximum of 22°C) was transformed into a sunny, windless 36°C day before a 40.5°C New Year's Day. On the following day, it was 34°C by 8.30am and only an early sea breeze kept the maximum temperature to 38°C. The warm spell continued until mid January at which time it eased a little. The weather had turned again by the end of January and it rained as the pinot was about to be picked in early February.



Alc. 14.0% Vol

After this topsy turvy growing season, the Margaret River area was blessed by lovely weather until mid April. Come picking time, however, it seemed that everyone was irritable. The pickers because it was harder to fill buckets with so small a crop: Keith Mugford because he didn't have as much fruit as he needed. The vineyard area that had produced 91 tonnes in 1991 only yielded 50 tonnes in 1997.

Despite all the vagaries of the season, quality was not an issue. The difficulties of spring reminded Keith of 1981 and 1986 with their reduced crops. However the wine is not as tannic as the 1981 (which still shows a powerful steely structure) nor the 1986 (which appears dense, full bodied and strongly tannic).

The 1997 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon [cont.]

The 1997 Cabernet was made according to what has become established practice at Moss Wood. The fruit was picked, crushed, de-stemmed and tipped into open tanks after which it was seeded with pure yeast culture. Fermentation took place over seven days at high temperatures (reaching a maximum of 30°C). During this time, the juice remained on its skins and was hand plunged four times a day. Towards the end of the fermentation process, each batch was pumped over once to improve colour and remove any hydrogen sulphide.

It was settled in stainless steel tanks and left on its gross lees so that it could complete its malolactic fermentation. After that it was transferred into barrels (50% new French oak and 50% two and three year old barrels) at the end of May. After a leisurely two years, it was raked from the barrels in June 1999, bottled in July to be released onto the market a year later.

This is the third year in which Moss Wood has made all of its Cabernet according to the style kept for its Reserve wines before 1995. It is now allowed two years in barrel (rather than 18 months) and 12 (rather than 6) months for bottle maturation. Keith is looking for complexity – some smokey, tarry, earthy secondary or developed characters from the longer oak ageing – and is not concerned if some of the wine's fresh, fruity primary characters are subdued by the process.

The 1997 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon has attractive mulberry and redcurrant perfumes with overtones of spicy, charry oak. Its palate is smooth, round and generous, with rich, sweet fruit, mulberry, plum and mint characters and some tarry earthiness. Although having the body and structure to age, it has the fruit weight and concentration of flavour which enables its tannins to appear soft and neatly balanced. Many will enjoy its early drinkability. Keith, however, is confident that it has the potential to benefit from up to fifteen years cellaring and is particularly pleased with the wine.

The 2000 Vintage at Moss Wood

The last harvest for the century at Willyabrup has proved to be a memorable one. In terms of seasonal conditions it reminded Keith of 1980 although in that year rain fell in early February. This year it came in mid January and so had a less harmful influence on the quality of the wines than in the comparable season twenty years ago.

There were some initial problems as it was windy, cold and wet during flowering so that first estimates were for an average crop with small bunches. The mid season rain in January, however, filled out the bunches and the crop became the biggest ever from the vineyard. Luck was also on the side of the vigneron: had the rain come a week later, during veraison, it would have caused problems by causing splitting of the pinot noir.

Temperatures were mild in early spring and warm in December and early January. The end of January and early February was marked by (what Keith describes as) lovely autumnal conditions. It warmed up in March as the harvest began in the first week of the month. After this hot spell, there was a small amount of rain but not enough to cause any problems. The weather in the lead up to the picking of the cabernet was ideal.

The largest crop ever at Moss Wood was not a result of over-production. Rather it can be attributed to the more effective use of bird netting and to the new semillon and chardonnay plantings coming on stream. Comparing the vintage to that of an excellent year like 1991 is revealing. In 2000, the 91 tonnes taken off the old part of the vineyard exactly compares with the amount harvested in 1991. However, the yield was higher in 1991 as 10 tonnes of bird damaged fruit was left on the vines in that year.

Robert Parker on the Moss Wood 1996 Cabernet Sauvignon

... Cabernet lovers looking for a competing example of this commonly encountered varietal should check out the expensive but profound 1996 Cabernet Sauvignon. Opaque purple in colour, with a striking bouquet of olives, cassis jam, beef blood, minerals, earth, and new wood, this massive, super concentrated Cabernet Sauvignon should prove to be a great classic from down under. It is oozing with flavour extraction, has high tannin and cuts a formidable path on the palate. Anticipated maturity: 2003 - 2020. Bravo! A Ted Schrauth Selection.

93+ points The Wine Advocate

Revised Ratings: Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon

The ratings which Keith Mugford has given each vintage of the Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon has remained static since the changeover from a rating out of 7 to one out of 10 in 1994.

The 1990s have been a great decade for these wines partly as a result of the good fortune that the region has enjoyed in a remarkable series of excellent harvests. However, additional vine age; improved viticulture, a product of better trellising; and the addition of cabernet franc (in 1990) and petit verdot (1996) to the blend have all contributed to a significant improvement in the quality of Moss Wood Cabernet during the past decade.

Keith is at pains to make it clear that he is not pushing the current wines, nor does he wish to denigrate earlier vintages. However, he believes that, with hindsight, these have generally not been as good as the more recent wines. While proud of them at the time, he believes that the quality bar has been raised in the 1990s.

This does, moreover, focus attention on the best of the earlier vintages at Moss Wood (1975, 1976 and 1980) and suggests, that in retrospect, these wines were even greater than was initially thought. The effect of this revision is also to differentiate the vintages of the 1990s more clearly than was possible at an earlier time. Not surprisingly, Keith is somewhat tentative in rating the three most recent (unreleased) wines and so these are indicated in brackets.

Vintage	Harvest Date		°Beaume	pH	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
1973						5
1974						6
1975						9
1976						9
1977						8
1978						*
1979						6
1980						9
1981						6
1982						6
1983	7	March	13.0		9.0	8
1984	12	March	12.3		9.0	6
1985	13	March	12.5		7.5	9
1986	14	March	12.8		5.8	6
1987	26	March	12.7		8.5	8
1988	10	March	13.0		7.1	6
1989	30	March	13.2		7.9	5
1990	2	April	12.8		8.5	9
1991	3	April	13.3		9.8	9
1992	26	March	12.8		10.0	7
1993	22	March	13.2		8.5	7
1994	25	March	12.8		8.89	8
1995	14	March	13.6		9.75	10
1996	14	March	13.7		10.0	10
1997	19	March	13.6		7.0	8
1998	30	March	13.5		10.0	(8)
1999	31	March	13.8		9.22	(10)
2000	28	March	14		9	(9)

* As Bill Pannell was not satisfied with the quality of the 1978 vintage, no Moss Wood Cabernet was released in that year.

The new Winery at Moss Wood

One suspects that, until recently, only the cast of Monty Python would have used the words 'luxury' and 'winemaking at Moss Wood' in the same sentence.

'How times have changed' moans Bill Pannell former owner of Moss Wood, 'all the fun, all the challenge, all the back-breaking, character-building hard work has gone out of making wine at Moss Wood.' Things certainly ain't what they used ter be.

At the heart of the changes has been a greater awareness of safety responsibilities, which led Moss Wood to undertake a complete review of its vineyard and winery activities. This has resulted in new procedures for all operations and in the realisation that updating the old buildings to meet new requirements would be too expensive.

The new facility (which is 20 x 20 metres and 5 metres high – at plate height, i.e. not including the gables) has been designed to house all the stainless steel tanks with catwalks allowing easy access. The luxury and safety of catwalks means that plunging of red fermenters is no longer done from a precarious wooden plunging board placed carefully across the fermenter.

'The thrill has gone from red wine making' groans Keith. 'Where is the sense of adventure, the devil-may-care daring of the winemaker as trapeze artist?

The re Fridgeration system which had not been updated since 1980 has been replaced by an awesomely efficient plant which provides air conditioning to the four buildings and gives Moss Wood unprecedented control over fermentation and storage of its wines. All tanks and red fermenters connected to the re Fridgeration system have their temperatures automatically logged every 15 minutes by the computer in the new winery. The one exception to this is that, at present, there are five general purpose storage tanks that do not need the same control over temperature. These eventually will be connected to the re Fridgeration system.

As part of the upgrading of equipment, Moss Wood has a new Delta crusher, an Eli Pompe Must Pump and Must Chiller. The latter gives the winemaker the capacity to reduce temperature from 25 to 10°C almost instantly. This control over temperature gives much greater protection to the whites produced at Moss Wood.

New machinery has meant gentler handling of red wines too. The grapes are de-stemmed on to an elevator which transfers them into the fermenter without the need to crush or pump them. After fermentation, the wine is pumped from the fermenter and the skins settle on the floor. These are then shovelled down a slope into the elevator which transfers them to the press without the back-breaking work of yesteryear. More moaning and groaning from the old timers.

The old cellar (built in 1973) is now used for museum stock and barrel storage for chardonnay and pinot noir (in its first year). The winery building (1978) is now the red fermentation cellar and houses stainless steel open fermenters. The cask cellar (1983) continues its storage role and houses cabernet sauvignon and pinot in their second year while the warehouse (1994) stores bottled wine before dispatch. The main building (2000) not only houses the stainless steel tanks but has room for barrel storage of the current vintage cabernet sauvignon.

That GST

At Moss Wood we have decided to list all our wine and freight charges as GST INCLUSIVE prices, so our customers will know the 'actual' costs to them at the time of ordering. However, to determine the amount of GST included, divide the prices by 11, which will give the GST value embedded in the prices. For those who cannot be bothered with the calculations, you may wish to note that the 1997 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon is priced at \$70.00 per bottle plus GST of \$7.00 and the magnum at \$165.00 plus GST of \$16.50.

If any further production cost benefits are identified in the future as a result of the introduction of the new tax system, we will of course pass these on to our loyal customers in the pricing of future wine releases or freight costs.