



MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

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Moss Wood Margaret River 2001 Chardonnay

As far as the weather was concerned, the 2001 vintage at Moss Wood could hardly have been better. Yields in the vineyard were average, rainfall was good and came at the right times and diseases were easily controlled. The birds tried to spoil the fun by arriving in the vineyard earlier than we had ever seen them but we got the nets on soon enough to prevent any significant losses.

Although we have paid a great deal of attention to canopy management for many years our plan, leading up to the 2001 vintage, was to maximise the exposure of fruit on the vines. This would lead to an improvement in the aroma and flavour ripeness of the chardonnay grapes but at lower sugar levels than we had been able to achieve beforehand. Consequently, the finished wine would have lower alcohol levels without losing flavour intensity.

Customers may have noted a general trend toward higher alcohol levels in the Moss Wood Chardonnay over the last ten years or so. This is not the product of harvesting our grapes at higher sugar levels but rather the efficiency of new yeast species in converting the sugar to alcohol. At present, there are no commercial low-alcohol producing yeasts to choose from. So we have realised that we need to address the problem in the vineyard.

Some warm weather at the end of February ripened the chardonnay a little faster than we had anticipated. However, Matt Bowden's grape sampling was typically accurate (the winery crew are lounging about laughing at the thought of this!) and we were ready to harvest when our grapes hit our required picking ripeness of 13° Beaume on the 15th February. This would have brought the finished wines in at a maximum of 14% alcohol.



Instead of all this happening, we picked at 13.4° Beaume and the wines finished with a whopping 14.5% alcohol which suggests that we missed our target by about two days. As a result, we have completely reviewed our sampling technique for the 2002 vintage. Customers will have to wait till next year to know the result!

The purpose of the detail here is to highlight the fact that we do not live in a perfect world and that we are determined to get things right but sometimes just miss the mark. From a wine point of view, it has made only a small difference but we believe that we should work at improving our wine styles wherever we can.

As usual, the processing was divided into two parts. The 'clonal chardonnay' was picked separately and whole bunch pressed; the juice was then put straight into barrel for fermentation, allowing for inoculation by wild yeast culture. This slightly aggressive technique is used because these clones, selected from the University of California at Davis, are very high yielding and tend to lack good fruit flavour. In fact, around Margaret River they are disparagingly referred to

as the 'trebbiano clones' because of their uncanny resemblance to this high yielding, neutral grape variety. To gain more complexity, the Moss Wood crew retain more solids than usual in the juice and carry out the entire fermentation in wood.

The main batch, made using the Mendosa clone, is much more flavoursome and is treated more carefully to retain and enhance its good fruit depth. In this instance, the bunches were destemmed, the grapes pumped through the must chiller (which is cooled to 8°C) and then added to the press. Two lots of juice result: the free-run (the juice which drains off before pressing takes place) and the pressings (that which is extracted by the pressing process). These are combined, settled for 48 hours at 12°C and then pumped to a fermentation tank.

At this point, the juice is allowed to warm up and fermentation commences. For the 2000 Chardonnay, wild yeasts were allowed to start the process and a pure yeast strain was added during fermentation to finish it off. Debate continues about the benefits this sequential inoculation technique brings. While there is no doubt in Keith's mind that the indigenous yeasts do add complexity to the wine, the risk associated with using a culture whose characteristics are not known in advance, is a worry for him. He believes that the loss of control over the process that this brings adds a commercial risk that is hard to justify, given the relatively small quality gains.

Once fermentation was underway, batonnage (lees stirring) was done once per day, both in tank and barrel. In the stainless steel tank the wine was held at 18°C and then moved to casks where it was kept at ambient temperature. From the 2001 vintage, there will be even greater control because all the barrel cellars are now air-conditioned.

After the primary fermentation finished, the lees stirring continued once a week until the malolactic fermentation was completed. Then the wine was left undisturbed on its lees in new 225 litre French oak barriques for a total of ten months. It was bottled at the beginning of February 2002.

How does the wine taste? A very typical Moss Wood Chardonnay, is the answer. The colour is deep straw, with green tints. On the nose it is strongly perfumed with a combination of grapefruit, peach, and rockmelon fruit aromas and rich notes like orange marmalade (Rose's traditional, of course!). Complexity is provided by caramel from malolactic fermentation, lees and roasted nuts and cedary oak.

The flavours are generous ripe melon and peach, with an attractive mouthfeel, good length and texture. The acidity is lively but not dominant and tannin completes a firm but balanced

structure. On the finish the wine shows spicy, toasty oak that provides linger.

This is a fine, elegant Chardonnay with impressive power and over the next two to three years can be enjoyed for its fruit generosity but will also repay long term cellaring. A recent tasting of the 1991 Moss Wood Chardonnay confirmed the ability of the wine to become even more complex and enjoyable after extended maturation.

John Farnham Drops In!

After two very successful concerts at Leeuwin Estate, John Farnham and Glen Wheatley and their families spent several days relaxing in the Margaret River region. Much to the excitement of everyone here, they called in one afternoon to have a look around and taste at Moss Wood. Great fun was had by all. However, the highlight for us came when John very graciously agreed to sign the winery cricket bat and shared some interesting anecdotes about the great contests between his band and the road crew. From what he heard, Keith suspects the road crew have better manners (and probably better skills) than the team at the winery!

MOSS WOOD CHARDONNAY

VINTAGE	HARVEST DATE	BEAUME (°)	YIELD (tonnes/ha)	VINTAGE RATING (out of 10)	OPTIMUM DRINKING YEAR
1983	18 Feb	12.6	8.7	7	Now
1984	18 Feb	13.1	7.73	8	Now
1985	22 Feb	12.5	8.44	7	Now
1986	26 Feb	12.9	9.1	7	Now
1987	24 Feb	12.9	10.13	8	Now
1988	12 Feb	12.5	11.2	7	Now
1989	20 Feb	12.9	7.82	7+	Now
1990	6 Mar	12.9	6.85	10	2002
1991	25 Mar	12.8	6.36	8	Now
1992	27 Feb	13.5	7.3	8+	2004
1993	4 Mar	13.6	10.29	10	2005
1994	28 Feb	13.6	9.0	9	2005
1995	17 Feb	13.7	7.0	10	2006
1996	20 Feb	13.2	9.0	9+	2006
1997	7 Mar	13.6	2.58	9	2007
1998	5 Mar	14.1	4.08	9	2008
1999	3 Mar	13.4	6.89	9+	2009
2000	1 Mar	13.4	5.2	9	2010
2001	15 Feb	13.4	7.51	9	2011

Vintage Chart

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Josh Bahen Joins The Team

At the beginning of January, Josh Bahen joined the Moss Wood team. Joshua graduated from Adelaide University in December 2001, with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Oen) and becomes our technical wiz kid.

Keith recalls once being a wiz kid but that was a time long ago when the dinosaurs had recently become extinct and South Australian-trained winemakers still studied at Roseworthy College (1978 for the curious among you)!

What is clear is that science and technology continue to advance and they play as important a role in viticulture and winemaking, as in any other part of life. It shows in the skills of the new graduates where the quality of their training is first class. Josh has already made his presence felt by upgrading our laboratory and tuning up all our wine analyses.



Ian Bell and Matt Bowden have taken it upon themselves to oversee his progress and bring him around to the Moss Wood way of thinking. Despite this, Josh has been able to cope and is now happy to sledge in the time-honoured fashion during the winery cricket matches while waiting for the press to finish its cycle. This is always a good sign!

Land Management at Moss Wood

A key tenet of the Moss Wood philosophy is treating the vineyard soil with respect. Practices such as minimum tillage and the restricted use of pest control are all designed to implement this principle. Ongoing efforts at revegetation of our land unsuitable for viticulture, are an extension of this philosophy.

There is a branch of Big Brook which runs through the centre of the property and becomes a winter creek. Since Moss Wood's first plantings, the banks of this watercourse and its surrounding paddocks have served as a grazing area for cattle which kept the perennial grass Kikuyu and Bracken under control. Early attempts to establish some trees by planting large Eucalypts had failed because the cattle either pushed them over or ringbarked them. Outside the paddock along the vineyard tracks, Melaleucas were planted as wind breaks to the chardonnay vines.

By 1999, it was decided that a more carefully thought out and sustained program was possible. A kilometre stretch of the creek from the southern

boundary of the property was assigned for rehabilitation. Solange Moulia, who worked in the vineyard, was interested in this project. While studying Landcare at TAFE one day a week, with our blessings, encouragement and support, she began the battle.

First of all the cattle were fenced from the area and a two year intensive spray program began (with frog-friendly glyphosate) to eliminate the Kikuyu and numerous other weed species. Bracken is a more resilient weed and required repeated spraying with "Gleen" and ploughing. Following this, planting took place with native species, yet marauding rabbits made it difficult for these native plants to become established, until rabbit numbers dramatically decreased. Rocks that had been unearthed during the ploughing of the bracken, were used to slow the flow of the creek during winter.

As Solange returned to France, her place was taken by Michelle Croft who now looks after all horticultural matters at Moss Wood. Michelle

The 2002 Vintage Conditions

The 2002 harvest is now well under way and we all agree that it has been an interesting and unusual season.

During May and June of 2001, the temperatures were warm and the vines, especially the early ripening varieties like chardonnay and pinot noir decided that it was time to start their new growing season. This is not completely unheard of here, because a feature of Margaret River's maritime climate is its mild, wet winters. The region has not seen the vines break out of their winter dormancy so early since 1994. On that occasion, this phenomenon was followed by the outstanding 1995 vintage, and so it is not necessarily a quality problem.



The problem for the vines moving from their dormant state early is that they find it difficult to grow when winter sets in, as it did during July last year. The soil is too wet and cold for the roots to grow properly and the air temperatures are too low as well. So the vines will produce fewer shoots and this means fewer bunches.

This does not necessarily mean lower yields at harvest because the vines can make up some of the lost crop if flowering conditions are good. Sadly, this was not the case in 2002 and the crop has remained small. There is a positive side to this as, with small crops, the vines are able to ripen the fruit quickly and without stress and produce grapes in very good condition. Just as importantly for the quality of this year's vintage, there have been no disease problems. The bird problem has also been non-existent in 2002 because of the prolific flowering of their favoured food supply, the Karri (or Redgum) blossom. Finally, summer has been quite mild and so aromas and flavours look very promising.

Yields may be down but quality should be very good or better. Like all things agricultural, there's just one proviso - at the time of printing, the semillon and cabernet sauvignon were still on the vines so anything could happen. Remember the rain of 1989? We do!

has undertaken the rehabilitation program, continuing to plant the area around the watercourse this winter with native plants and trees, including several species of Wattle, Red and Green Kangaroo Paw, Swamp Banksia and Flame Pea as well as Sheoaks and Eucalypts. To coincide with the planting, a rabbit control program has been initiated and weed control will continue.

While that work continues, there is much still to be done. Michelle is rehabilitating the spare block

on the corner of Metricup and Caves Roads, gradually replacing the Peppermint trees with other Eucalypt and understory species, as Peppermint trees were not the original dominant species on the property.

This is slow painstaking work which takes years to show results. However we, at Moss Wood, believe that restoring the land that is not suitable for viticulture to its original state will play a part in enabling us to preserve a balance with nature.

Moss Wood Lefroy Brook Vineyard Pemberton 2001 Chardonnay

The 2001 growing season was also excellent in Pemberton and Pat and Barbara Holt were pleased with their crop at the Lefroy Brook Vineyard. Readers, however, may be amused to learn how minute a crop the property has, even in a good year. Moss Wood received a total of 4.17 tonnes from Lefroy Brook, meaning that the yields had soared to the heady heights of 3.3 tonnes per hectare (1.3 tonnes/acre)! Not only does the vineyard look like a Burgundian one, it yields like one too! Needless to say, we are very appreciative of the Holt's absolute commitment to quality.

On the 12th March, the Lefroy Brook Chardonnay was picked at 13.5° Beaume, which is as close to perfect as we could have hoped for.

The same Moss Wood technique of production is used with the Pemberton wine. The fruit was de-stemmed, chilled and pressed and then the juice settled for 48 hours. This was then racked into a stainless steel tank where wild yeast commenced the fermentation. Following the process of sequential inoculation, a pure yeast strain was added during fermentation to finish the process. At 10° Beaume the juice was racked into new 225 litre French oak barrels where it finished fermentation and then remained for ten months. Batonnage was carried out once per day during primary ferment and then once per week

during the malolactic after which the wine was no longer stirred but left to sit on the lees.

After a good season, the expectation is that the wine will be good and the 2001 vintage fits the bill. The colour is medium straw with green tints and the condition is brilliant. The nose is a combination of fruit aromas like grapefruit and melon, with complex background notes of honey, cashew and toasty oak.



On the palate the wine shows a typically fine, tight, Pemberton structure, with fresh, almost taut acidity and firm tannins. There is also medium weight of melon and peach fruit and spicy oak on the finish.

With such good structure, the cellaring potential of the wine is considerable and we would recommend cellaring it for at least seven years.

A Belated Welcome to Vanessa Garland



In our last newsletter, lack of space prevented us from introducing our other new staff member Vanessa Garland, who joined us in July last year. Vanessa hails from Seaford, just south of Adelaide and went to Willunga High School, in the heart of the Southern Vales region and becomes yet another wandering South Australian working at Moss Wood. In a newsletter that has its fair share of historical anecdotes, readers may be interested to know that one Keith Mugford attended nearby McLaren Vale Primary School from 1964 to 1970.

Please rest assured that despite this amusing but distant connection, Vanessa was selected for her job purely on merit. She can be found anywhere about the place on any day, working in the office, as well as hosting visitor tastings. We all appreciate her commitment to the job and her happy demeanor but most of all her organisational skills. She single-handedly ran the last Moss Wood Christmas dinner at the local Newtown House restaurant. A truly great performance, bigger than "Ben Hur" and thoroughly enjoyed by all!