



MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

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Moss Wood Margaret River 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon

After two very challenging vintages in 1997 and 1998, the Moss Wood team were hoping for an easier time with the 1999 harvest. Fortunately, the gods were smiling on us because we had a nearly perfect season. There were no hail or disease problems, the winds remained calm and rain fell at all the right times. The birds were kept at bay by the nets and so with all these things in our favour yields were spot on average.

Temperatures during the growing season were generally mild and so all varieties ripened gradually and showed good fruit characters. Indeed, 1999 is one of those rare vintages where, across the range, we were happy with our wines and no one variety stood out as the highlight for the vintage.

The mild season began to cause us some concern by mid-March because the cabernet sauvignon was maturing very slowly and it seemed that it might not ripen fully before the end of April. As there is always a threat of rain by that time of the year, we began to look at the weather forecasts with increasing interest. The first cabernet grapes were picked during the last week of March although they had still not reached our preferred ripeness of 13° Beaume. We therefore stopped harvesting in the hope that

some of the forecast warm weather might help our cause. The first two weeks of April were delightful, with clear sunny days and daily maximums in the mid-twenties and the cabernet sauvignon charged through.

In the winery, the production technique was very much in our traditional mode. The fruit was crushed, de-stemmed and pumped into open fermenters. During fermentation, the tanks were hand plunged four times per day, the temperatures allowed to rise to 32°C and at the end, each ferment was pumped over once to reduce hydrogen sulphide.



At this point it is worth noting that, like all the other Moss Wood wines from the 1999 and 2000 vintages, the cabernet sauvignon was fermented with wild, not selected or pure, yeast

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strains. This is a departure from our traditional technique and one that was applied to enhance the texture and complexity of flavour of the wine. From a quality point of view, we were happy with the results and believe that the spontaneous fermentation did improve the wine. However, the improvement was only small and in our opinion, too small a trade off for the enormous associated risk. Accordingly, we discontinued the process after the 2000 vintage.

As each batch completed its fermentation, the wine was tasted on a daily basis to decide when to press. The time on skins varied from batch to batch but averaged out at around 12 days. After pressing, the wine is transferred to oak barrels for malolactic fermentation. It is then racked, analysed, adjusted and returned to oak. As usual, all barrels are 228 litre French Allier oak, with a medium toast - 50% were new.

The wine spent two years in barrel, after which it was racked to stainless steel tanks and prepared for bottling. The wine was not fined but it was

filtered. Since then, the wine has spent the best part of a year lying in the cellar recovering from the shocks and knocks of the bottling process. This ensures that it is properly settled at the time of release, and we hope, able to meet both producer and consumer expectations.

The wine has a deep brick red colour and its condition is brilliant. On the nose it is very complex. The primary fruit aromas are the typically Moss Wood redcurrants and mulberries but with additional pretty aromas like cherry and red jubes. These lively aromas seem to be the product of the mild growing season. There are also notes of coffee beans and chocolate and an earthy or olive-like note. The oak is soft and well balanced, giving a toasty background.

On the palate, there are ripe redcurrant fruit flavours which are sweet and mouth filling, as well as some complex cassis and dark plum characters. The texture is soft and silky but the structure is tight, with both acid and tannin providing balance and length. On the finish, the oak flavours add

MOSS WOOD CABERNET SAUVIGNON

VINTAGE	HARVEST DATE	BEAUME (°)	YIELD (tonnes/ha)	VINTAGE RATING (out of 10)	OPTIMUM DRINKING YEAR
2001	19 Mar	13.4	9.5	(9)	2016
2000	28 Mar	14.0	9.8	(9)	2015
1999	31 Mar	13.8	9.22	10	2014
1998	30 Mar	13.5	10.0	8	2013
1997	19 Mar	13.6	7.0	8	2012
1996	14 Mar	13.7	10.0	10	2011
1995	14 Mar	13.6	9.75	10	2010
1994	25 Mar	12.8	8.89	8	2009
1993	22 Mar	13.2	8.5	7	2008
1992	26 Mar	12.8	10.0	7	2007
1991	3 April	13.3	9.8	9	2006
1990	2 April	12.8	8.5	9	2005
1989	30 Mar	13.2	7.9	5	2004
1988	10 Mar	13.0	7.1	6	2003
1987	26 Mar	12.7	8.5	8	Now
1986	14 Mar	12.8	5.8	6	Now
1985	13 Mar	12.5	7.5	9	Now
1984	12 Mar	12.3	9.0	6	Now
1983	07 Mar	13.0	9.0	8	Now

Vintage Chart

length and the tannins are firm but not aggressive.

This is one of the best vintages of Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon and ranks alongside the great years from the property (1996, 1995, 1980, 1975). In terms of style, it shares many of the characteristics of the 1979, although the seasons were a little different - 1979 finished in the rain but 1999 did not. On the strength of this, we are happy to recommend this wine for long-term cellaring and would suggest a minimum of ten years. Having just recently tried a bottle of the 1979, Keith is happy to report that it survived to 23 years old without any problems so we expect the 1999 to show the same endurance!



Footnote: The Australian Gourmet Traveller WINE tasting panel - Peter Bourne, Nick Bulleid MW, Andrew Caillard MW, Peter Forrestral, Sally Harper and Huon Hooke - rated the 1999 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon third in a line up of 63 outstanding cabernet sauvignons which they tasted for their Top 20 Cabernet Sauvignons. The article was published in the June issue.

Huon Hooke wrote:

"Moss Wood deservedly occupies an exalted place in the hearts of cabernet lovers. The two vintages we sampled, 1999 and 1996, were excellent, the 1999 (due out in July) especially delighting us with its terrific power and supple, silky/fleshy plushness. Monumentally deep and concentrated, it had a sweetness of black-fruit flavours that was soft, fruit-sweet and tremendously long-lasting. Bulleid thought the tannins very well handled; Forrestral described it as warm, friendly and cuddly. The 1996 had a plump middle-palate with cassis, herb and hints of raisin. It had great density and a little less power than the 1999. These are sexy, textural wines of great character."

WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

2002 FINALIST

Keith has been nominated for the prestigious Qantas / AGT WINE Winemaker of the Year Awards. Opposite, AGT's Associate Editor, Peter Forrestral explains why Keith's wines have caught the judges' attention.

The Award, to be announced at a black tie dinner in Sydney on July 31st, will be attended by Keith and Clare Mugford, the other seven finalists and their spouses, and the wine industry glitterati.

The judges are freelance wine writers, Peter Forrestral (chairman), Peter Bourne, Nick Bulleid MW, Sophie Otton and Huon Hooke.

The finalists are:

Lita & Tony Brady - Wendouree Cellars
Don Lewis - Mitchelton
Charlie Melton - Charles Melton Wines
Keith Mugford - Moss Wood & Ribbon Vale
Chester Osborn - d'Arenberg
Andrew Pirie - Pipers Brook Vineyard
Wendy Stuckey - Beringer Blass Wine
Brian Walsh - Yalumba

The following article is reprinted with the permission of the Australian Gourmet Traveller WINE from the April 2002 issue.

“After finishing Roseworthy in 1978, McLaren Vale born Keith Mugford headed west to take up a job running the winery at Moss Wood for Bill Pannell. Two forces played a part in the move: Keith’s desire to experience Margaret River’s legendary surf and the impression that the 1977 Moss Wood Semillon made on him when he tasted it as a student at Roseworthy.

It would have been inconceivable to Mugford that he would have the opportunity to buy one of Margaret River’s leading wineries just six years later - at the age of 26. When Bill and Sandra Pannell decided to sell after 15 years at Moss Wood - the demands of a medical practice, establishing a winery and a growing family were beginning to tell - they chose to pass the property on to Keith and Clare Mugford. The Pannells did so in the belief that Keith was the right person for Moss Wood, the winemaker who would maintain and develop the wine styles and quality goals that they had established. They are more than satisfied with their choice.

At the time that the Mugfords took over (1985), Moss Wood was regarded by James Halliday as Margaret River’s premier winery - or at the very least in the top rank with Cullen and Vasse Felix. Even then, its Cabernets were considered as among Australia’s finest. Little has changed in terms of ranking over the years. Moss Wood and Cullen were placed in Australia’s top 5 cabernets in the AGT WINE’s Top 20 Tasting (in 1998) - and both were included in our Top 20 Benchmark Australian wines (in 1999).

Keith Mugford could be described as a forward thinking traditionalist. He continually refers back to the Moss Wood Cabernets from 1975 to 1977 as the benchmarks of the style, while at the same time considering subtle refinements to all stages of production. While the vines have remained unirrigated and low yielding, there has been a great deal of experimentation with soil conservation techniques such as mulching, the use of cover crops and minimum tillage. During the 1990s, most of the vineyard has been retrellised to improve quality.

Prior to 1990, the Cabernet was 100% cabernet sauvignon. In order to give the wine more complexity and greater finesse, cabernet franc (now about 4% of the blend), and merlot (0.02%) were added from 1990 and petit verdot (4%) from 1996. The Cabernet is now given longer contact time with skins post fermentation to give it better tannin balance. It is monitored daily until taste determines the optimum moment to take it off skins and press.

Prior to 1995, a Reserve Cabernet was released in outstanding vintages (1994, 1991, 1990, 1987, 1983 and 1980). The only difference between

the reserve and the standard was that the former was aged in oak for 24 rather than 18 months. As the reserve was considered the better wine, the Mugfords took the costly step of holding back the 1996 vintage and now release all their cabernet with 24 months oak maturation.

The vagaries of harvest - especially in 1997 when the chardonnay crop was halved - have made self-evident the difficulties of surviving with just an estate vineyard. In recent years, Moss Wood have released other varietals under their label but identified as coming from the Glenmore Vineyard of production manager, Ian Bell, and from Pat and Barbara Holt’s Lefroy Brook Vineyard at Pemberton. This pressure, and the



constant reminder that there are four Mugford children waiting to inherit, influenced Keith and Clare to purchase nearby Ribbon Vale just before vintage 2000.

There have been major viticultural changes at Ribbon Vale since its purchase and while it will be some time before these take full effect, there have already been signs of a quality lift in the wines. Keith’s work in the winery is most obvious in the 2001 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc which was one of the best wines in the AGT WINE recent Top 20 tasting of these blends. More gradually changes are evident in the 2000 reds - a Cabernet Merlot and Merlot - where the tannins are riper and softer than has previously been the case.”

Peter Forrestal

Moss Wood

In a Screw Top?

The debate about what is the best closure for wine is still raging in the wine industry and at Moss Wood we are continuing to review all options. One thing remains clear - when wine is sealed under cork, there is around a one in ten chance that each bottle will be either tainted, or will leak or both will happen. For the winemaker, this means that the quality outcomes of the production process can be guaranteed right up until the bottle is full. Once the cork is put in the top, there is a 10% chance the wine will be damaged.

In real terms, this means that there are many instances when our product will not meet the customer's quality expectations, not because of any inadequacy of the wine but because the closure has failed. This is a frustrating situation because the winemaker is rarely present to clarify this fact.

From a consumer's point of view, it raises an even more interesting question. Why is it that the customer is prepared to accept such a high failure rate for wine, when virtually all other products are expected to deliver quality 100% of the time? How many people, for example, will accept a carton of "off" milk in one in every ten purchases?

Part of the explanation must lie with the fact that cork is the traditional closure and "pulling the cork" has become part of the experience of serving wine. This is especially true in restaurants where an elaborate and often difficult ritual takes place, as the customer is presented with a tasting sample of the bottle of their choice to determine if it is suitable for pouring.

How many people are aware of the fact that they are supposed to be looking for cork taint? Indeed, how many people have the experience or expertise to recognise taint?

How many people have asked for a bottle to be

replaced and found it an embarrassing experience? Some restaurants are offended and will take serious issue with customers, not really understanding that the buyers are not criticising but simply exercising their right not to drink a tainted bottle. Is all this really a necessary part of the wine experience?

Many people believe that a cork is essential for wine to mature properly. At this point the argument gets interesting. Although you may find it difficult to believe, there is virtually no scientific evidence to support this point. The whole notion is based on anecdote and conjecture.

Progress is being made with alternative closures and if they offer more reliable outcomes, we are prepared to consider them. The new generation of screw caps fit this mould and consumers would have already seen them appearing on retail shelves, most notably on riesling from the Clare Valley where 20 producers now market their wines sealed with Stelvin.

This year we will offer our wines under these closures for the first time, starting with the 2002 Ribbon Vale Semillon Sauvignon Blanc and the 2002 Moss Wood Semillon, where 200 dozen bottles of each will be available. This is a small start as the majority of the wines will still be packaged under corks. However, we are determined to give customers a choice. We will also bottle some of our 2000 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon under the screw top and this will be released in July 2003.

As a company, we are determined that the wine the customer tries when they purchase a bottle of Moss Wood, no matter where they are in the world, tastes as we intended it to. It must surely be possible in the twenty first century to find a closure for wine bottles that doesn't taint and doesn't leak!





2002 Vintage at Moss Wood & Ribbon Vale

Now that the dust has settled, we can cast a critical eye over the latest vintage. What we see is very pleasing indeed.

There is a perennial debate about the abundance of yields versus quality. However, this year, we did have some concerns about quality because of an extended flowering period. At harvest, this led to quite large variations between bunches in both sugar levels and flavours. Our fears were that this may lead to a loss of fruit intensity. All of our white varieties are well down on yield, the worst being chardonnay, which was reduced by some 80%. Unusually, the semillon was also well down (60%) but sauvignon blanc had only small losses. The losses in quantity seem to have been balanced by a gain in quality as all the wines have quite intense fruit characters.

The yields were also down for our reds, but not to the same extent, with the exception of the pinot noir (50% down). This was a pleasant surprise because our original estimates put cabernet sauvignon at 30% below average whereas, in fact, it was down by less than 5%.

The quality of the reds is excellent, with colour, aroma and flavour all very good. Overall, the Cabernet Sauvignon seems to have been the standout wine for the year, although a special mention must also go to the Ribbon Vale Merlot which has really come on this year. Another interesting development was the first harvest of merlot from the Glenmore Vineyard, which has added an extra dimension to the 2002 Glenmore Cabernet Sauvignon.

Whilst all vintages have their own characteristics, it is interesting to provide a historical perspective and compare the current harvest with one from the past. The wine most like 2002 is the 1993, although the former has slightly deeper colour and is also slightly riper.

Our horticultural warrior, Michelle (alias Xena) Croft has been tidying up the bush area surrounding our driveway. She has been removing dead and unhealthy Peppy trees from the grove. We have also removed smaller self seeded Peppy trees to open up some areas for more light and allow us to plant some other native species, in particular some larger local trees. All the resulting timber has been recycled to provide much needed mulch.

As part of our waste water management program, Michelle has planted many Melaleuca and Eucalyptus species on the corner of Caves and Metricup Roads. These are thriving and are making good use of the waste water generated by the winery.

Readers may remember that we planted olive trees on a section of this block in early 2000. These are doing extremely well and no longer require watering. We are expecting a small crop from these next year and as 2/3 are oil varieties and 1/3 pickling, we look

forward to the fun and challenge of pressing and bottling.

Our neighbours, Evans & Tate, have been repositioning their driveway across the road from ours. This has necessitated some widening of Metricup Road and Michelle has been out on the road verge rescuing native species and potting them up for replanting. These are adding to her nursery in which she is raising numerous local and native species, to use in continued revegetation of the Moss Wood creek line and for wind break material in sensitive areas in the Ribbon Vale vineyard.

