

MOSS WOOD

Newsletter

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Moss Wood 2002 Margaret River Chardonnay

Margaret River had been fortunate to have several good growing seasons in a row with vineyard yields excellent in 1999, 2000 and 2001. This brings out the conservative farmer in the Moss Wood team because we know the law of averages is starting to work against us. History tells us that, in at least two years in five, we will lose a significant part of the crop, especially with chardonnay. A quick look at the numbers showed that the last wipe-out was in 1997 so we faced the 2002 harvest with a degree of trepidation.

Someone must have tempted the fates because warm conditions during the early part of winter confused the vines and an early budburst began in the chardonnay in mid-July. The relatively normal winter conditions that prevailed after that were not conducive to good shoot growth nor flowering. We were, therefore, confronted by the Margaret River chardonnay problem: very few bunches formed and those which did flowered very poorly and set very few grapes. The net result was a major crop loss of 60%.

Not all the news was bad. The cool and mild conditions prevailed right through the summer and this produced some particularly good white wines. Although we did not make much, at least what we did make was good. The intensity and freshness of the fruit characters is very good and the hallmark of the 2002 vintage.

The volume of Moss Wood Chardonnay dropped from 1090 cases in 2001 to 450 cases in 2002. This shortfall made the availability of chardonnay from other vineyards particularly appealing to the management team.

Each of the chardonnays made at Moss Wood in 2002 were made using the same traditional method. This means differences between the wines are entirely due to differences between the sites from which the grapes were sourced.

The bunches of grapes were destemmed, crushed and pressed: the must was chilled to 12°C, allowed to settle for 48 hours and then



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racked to stainless steel tanks (with 2% solids included) and inoculated with pure yeast culture to begin fermentation. Once the juice had come down to 11° beaume, it was transferred to 100% new French oak where it remained during fermentation and for ten months afterwards.

The barrels were lees stirred everyday until the onset of malolactic fermentation. On this occasion, 50% of each of the wines underwent malo. When the wines had finished oak maturation, they were fined, cold stabilised, filtered and then bottled.

The **Moss Wood 2002 Chardonnay** is quite restrained on the nose with honeysuckle,

honeydew melon, orange peel and grapefruit aromas and well-integrated cedary oak. Although the bouquet will open with time, the nose is not as immediately appealing as the palate. This shows peach, orange zest and grapefruit flavours, underlying power, richness and depth and soft oak on a lingering finish. The wine is intense, fine, well balanced and has excellent length.

With the experience of the vertical tasting of Moss Wood Chardonnays, Keith believes that the 2002 will improve in the short to medium term and, if well cellared, will be looking good at ten years of age.

Vintage Chart

MOSS WOOD CHARDONNAY

VINTAGE	HARVEST DATE	BEAUME (°)	YIELD (tonnes)	VINTAGE RATING	OPTIMUM DRINKING
2003	25 Feb	13.3	6.12	9	
2002	04 Mar	13.7	2.45	9+	2014
2001	15 Feb	13.4	7.51	10	2013
2000	01 Mar	13.4	10.0	8	2007
1999	03 Mar	13.4	6.89	10	2011
1998	05 Mar	14.1	4.08	8	2005
1997	07 Mar	13.6	2.58	8	2009
1996	20 Feb	13.2	9.0	7	2005
1995	17 Feb	13.7	7.0	9	2007
1994	28 Feb	13.6	9.0	8	2006
1993	04 Mar	13.6	6.36	9	2006
1992	27 Feb	13.5	7.3	7	TBC
1991	25 Mar	12.8	10.29	9	2005
1990	06 Mar	12.9	6.85	10	NOW
1989	20 Feb	12.9	7.82	7+	
1988	12 Feb	12.5	11.2	7	
1987	24 Feb	12.9	10.13	8	
1986	26 Feb	12.9	9.1	7	
1985	22 Feb	12.5	8.44	7	
1984	18 Feb	13.1	7.73	8	
1983	18 Feb	12.6	8.7	7	

Please note:

These comments are only accurate when the wine has been well cellared. In the interests of accuracy, only where we have reviewed a wine during the year, will we provide optimum drinking years.

2001 Moss Wood Lefroy Brook Chardonnay

A brilliant Pemberton chardonnay, but subtler and less oaky than the Margaret River model. Aromas are of passionfruit, honeydew melon and crushed nuts. A complex chardonnay with fruit-driven flavour that lingers. Now to 2006.

Drink with scallop en brochette.

Huon Hooke in *The Sydney Morning Herald*
page 18 good living Aug 27, 2002

vineyard so that the vines develop optimum flavours between 12° and 13° beaume. Hence, the grapes can be picked at lower levels of sugar

Moss Wood Chardonnay

Keith had promised to conduct a tasting of back vintages of Moss Wood Chardonnay to report on how the wine has been ageing and to update the vintage chart for the newsletter. A tasting of 1990-2002 vintages was held in Perth with Keith and Clare Mugford and local wine writers, Ray Jordan (*The West Australian*), John Jens (*Western Suburbs Weekly*) and Peter Forrestal (*Homes & Living*).

There are a number of issues which have influenced the style of Moss Wood Chardonnay over this 12 year period. Firstly, all the wines came from vines which had been trained on the Scott Henry trellis system and so they showed clear primary fruit. There were none of the signs of green, herbal or herbaceous characters that were occasionally found in difficult years pre 1990 at Moss Wood.

From 1992 onwards (excluding 1999 and 2000), freeze dried pure yeast cultures have been used to trigger fermentation. This has resulted in higher levels of alcohol - 14% to 14.5% - rather than the 13% to 13.5% which were found in the wines up to and including the 1991. Experience has shown that the best flavours at Moss Wood come from chardonnay grapes which are picked between 13° and 13.5° beaume. With the selected yeast strains used before 1992, picking at about 13° beaume translated into a finished wine with about 13% alcohol. The pure yeast cultures used from 1992 onwards are such efficient producers of alcohol that, after fermentation, grapes picked at 13° beaume will produce wines with at least 14% alcohol. The Moss Wood team are currently exploring two possibilities in order to lower the level of alcohol. They are looking at running the

ripeness with the resulting wine having alcohol levels between 13% and 13.5%. The other possibility being investigated is the sourcing of effective yeast strains which are less efficient producers of alcohol.

Keith wants his Chardonnays to go through full malolactic fermentation (or malo) as he believes that this contributes to the mouth feel and the complexity of the finished wine. However, he is not prepared to force the wine to undergo full malo when he thinks this may harm the wine. Consequently, the percentage of the wine that goes through malo varies from year to year: it's part of the serendipity of vintage variation.

Keith was in Burgundy for the 1997 vintage and picked up some interesting ideas from some of the top producers. These have resulted in a couple of refinements to chardonnay production at Moss Wood. Before then, there was a conservative approach to battonage (the stirring of yeast lees in barrels after fermentation): it was conducted once a week from the completion of fermentation until the onset of malo. As a result of the trip to Burgundy, Keith felt that he had been underestimating the additional complexity - seen in increased nuttiness in the finished wine - that the French were getting from using battonage more frequently. He also believed that the additional lees stirring was helping the French to improve the texture of their wines. Since 1997, Moss Wood has developed a more aggressive (and time consuming) regime with regard to battonage. Chardonnay barrels are now stirred daily after fermentation until the onset of malo.

On his visit to Burgundy, Keith also saw the Burgundian winemakers getting more zip and life in the palate of their wines as a result of adjusting the acidity to higher levels than was usual in Australia. He had previously been reluctant to adjust too high for fear of the finished wines being out of balance but believes that recent Chardonnays have benefited from higher acid levels.

Two of the wines in the vertical tasting line-up were made using spontaneous (or wild yeast) fermentation - as were all of the wines produced

ay 1990 - 2002

at Moss Wood in 1999 and 2000. At Moss Wood, the chardonnay grapes are crushed and pressed immediately and allowed to settle for 48 hours at 12°C. The clear juice is then racked off with 2% of solids into stainless steel tanks for fermentation. In the absence of sulphur dioxide and pure yeast culture, airborne wild yeast from the winery and vineyard trigger fermentation. There are problems associated with the use of wild or ambient yeast. The vigneron doesn't know the characteristics of the wild yeast; what off characters it will produce (such as volatile acidity); and if it will ferment the wine through to dryness. The latter will be influenced by the yeast's tolerance to alcohol and by the number of viable cells that are left growing so that they will finish off the fermentation process. In a year when there is a great deal of bird damage in the vineyard, the use of wild yeast will magnify the possibility for mistakes - even given the pre-sorting of grapes that takes place at Moss Wood.

In Keith's view, the 1999 and 2000 Chardonnays show the highs and lows of the use of wild yeast. Everything works with the 1999 Chardonnay - as it did with the 2000 Moss Wood Semillon. Interestingly, it appears likely from the way that the 1999 is developing that the benefits of using wild yeast may become more apparent with age. However, while the 2000 has the viscosity and the complexity that comes from spontaneous inoculation of yeast, it is marred by excessive levels of volatile acidity. In assessing the two year experiment, Keith believed that the slight benefits to the complexity and texture of the wine that may come from the use of wild yeast doesn't warrant it replacing the reliable technique of pure yeast inoculation.

This issue of random oxidation arose with the 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 Moss Wood Chardonnays. For no apparent reason, some bottles from these vintages appear to be prematurely developed: these are darker in colour and appear to have lost fruit flavour. In some cases, the wine will appear excessively

2003 vintage at Moss Wood

Although it is still too early to judge, Keith's initial response to the 2003 vintage is extremely positive. It looks like a very good, possibly even great year, for reds and a good, perhaps very good year, for whites. The growing season was drier than usual in winter although the reasonable spring rainfall compensated for this. Importantly, the spring rains came without any accompanying severe winds or hail. Consistently warm summer temperatures produced good vigour in the vines, ensured excellent leaf condition and very good flavours, which brought on vintage one to two weeks earlier than usual.

Yields for chardonnay are double the uneconomic previous vintage at 2.5 tonnes/acre; sauvignon blanc has been crop thinned and so the yields for it and semillon are average; the pinot noir has been crop thinned down to 1.9 tonnes/acre; merlot and cabernet sauvignon should be average or slightly below.

There was some rain on the last weekend of harvest but only a small amount of cabernet remained and it was already 14° beaume and unaffected.

The vintage reminds Keith of 1983, especially in the tannin structure of the Cabernet Sauvignon and the 1996 for the depth and concentration of the reds at this early stage.

Stellenbosch University graduate, Trizanne Pansegrouw, joined us for the 2003 vintage. Triz has accomplished more than the South African cricket and rugby teams put together! - but in all seriousness - she has been a valuable addition to the Moss Wood team.

toasty, and may even have a maderised, rancio character on the nose and palate, and perhaps a bitterness on the finish. One possibility is that inadequate sealing by the corks may have contributed to this. Since 1999, Moss Wood has increased the levels of sulphur dioxide and this appears to have eliminated the problem.

Moss Wood 2002 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay

Lefroy Brook is a tiny one hectare vineyard, owned by Pat and Barbara Holt, that is planted to chardonnay and pinot noir. It is an unirrigated, low yielding, mature vineyard which produces grapes of exceptional quality. As the yield is about two tonnes of fruit each year, it is enough to make approximately 150 cases of Moss Wood 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay.

It is situated a few kilometres south-east of the township of Pemberton, close to the retirement vineyard of former Leeuwin Estate viticulturist John Brocksopp. It is surrounded by National Park, so is permanently netted to protect the vines from local bird life.

Until now, Keith had regarded the 2001 Lefroy Brook Chardonnay as the best ever: so had Huon Hooke - see his review from *The Sydney Morning Herald* (page 2). The 2002 vintage in Pemberton was an excellent one with the smaller yielding cool season allowing the grapes to ripen slowly. Keith believes that the new release wine will give that from the previous vintage a nudge.



The Moss Wood 2002 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay has delicate aromas of lemon and grapefruit citrus, honeydew melon and roasted nuts with restrained cedary oak; while the palate has intense, cool, white peach, nectarine, grapefruit and lime flavours and refreshing, almost bracing, acidity. It is fresh and lively, fine, tightly structured and long.

Green Valley Vineyard is a small, six hectare property which was established in 1980 by Ed and Elenore Green. It is located on Sebbes Road, 16 km to the south of the township of Margaret River, close to Devil's Lair. It has an attractive, cool, north-facing location, shelter from prevailing winds, is frost free and has good soil.

Since the 2000 vintage, Moss Wood has been making wine for Green Valley on a contract basis. Keith is particularly impressed with their chardonnay which shows ripe fruit, fine texture and a fruit profile - more pear, citrus and melon - that is different from Wilyabrup - which tends towards peach, melon and some citrus. Ed and Elenore felt that it would be difficult for them to sell such a small volume so Moss Wood agreed to buy the wine. The result is 170 cases of chardonnay that provides a fascinating contrast to that coming from the Moss Wood vineyard.



Moss Wood 2002 'Green Valley Vineyard' Chardonnay

The Moss Wood 2002 'Green Valley Vineyard' Chardonnay is a sensational wine. In a couple of in-house blind tastings, it has outpointed the wine from the Moss Wood vineyard. To be fair to that wine, it is looking a little closed now and from past experience, can be expected to improve significantly over the next six months. The fact remains that the chardonnay from Green Valley is very impressive indeed.

It is fragrant, even floral, with peach, pear, grilled nuts and cedary oak on the nose; is lively, clean and vibrant, has cashew, nectarine and pear flavours with some leesy notes, and fresh, crisp acidity on the finish. The wine has minerally characters which enhance its complexity and gives it some savoury overtones. It is subtle but has underlying power and good weight, is delicate yet has richness and concentration. A very satisfying chardonnay.

MOSS WOOD

Chardonnay

Vertical Tasting Notes

2002 In the context of the vertical tasting, the 2002 looked very good indeed. It is extremely youthful and is more closed on the nose than is usual with Moss Wood Chardonnay at this stage. The palate is superb. (See the notes on the new release and Keith's rating of it.)

2001 This is one of the best ever Moss Wood Chardonnays. It has some fragrant toasty, earthy, nutty aromas, is fine and intense with peach, grapefruit and orange zest flavours, some minerally notes and refreshing, crisp acidity. This is a rich and concentrated wine which shows complexity thanks to some savoury characters.

2000 There are feral notes on the nose because the level of volatile acidity (va) in the wine is too high. Underneath, the wine has terrific peachy, melony, nutty, toasty fruit flavours. It has a soft palate, rich sweet fruit and soft tannins but there is some bitterness as a result of the va. Disappointing.

1999 This is an outstanding Moss Wood Chardonnay with grapefruit and orange peel citrus aromas and earthy, nutty notes. Dense, complex, butterscotch, cashew, grapefruit and cedary oak flavours with some minerally overtones. It has a soft, viscous texture, underlying power and impressive depth and length.

1998 We looked at two bottles of this wine and it does appear more forward at present than Keith would like. The first bottle was oxidised and the second, though developed, had a much better palate than the first. It showed ripe, melon, peach and citrus flavours with cashew and roast almonds and more pronounced toastiness than you would expect from a five year old chardonnay.

1997 Quite developed but in much better shape than the 1998 and 1996. Deep golden colour, toasty, melony aromas, soft, round, honeyed texture of ripe, sweet fruit with gentle melon and citrus flavours made more complex by roast cashew and toasty oak notes. Mellow yet still with good acidity.

1996 This had a slightly oxidative, bitter almond and marmalade character on the nose. The palate, however, was much better: dense,

ripe, toasty, melony flavours with honeyed notes, good richness and concentration and a soft, attractive finish. Coming from the 1996 vintage the wine should have been ranked much higher but its variability has led to a lower rating.

1995 This Moss Wood Chardonnay has a deep golden colour with developed, slightly oxidised notes on a bouquet that features roast almonds and toast. It is a big, rich, ripe wine with a much creamier, more honeyed texture than the others in the line-up. It is round and full-flavoured with soft, generous texture, ripe melon flavours and a long, mellow finish. Drinking beautifully.

1994 One of the surprise packets of the tasting, the 1994 showed remarkable liveliness on both the nose and palate; was bright, fresh and vibrant with distinctive butterscotch, toffee, toast and melon characters on the nose and ripe melon, peach and honey flavours on the palate. It still has fresh, youthful acidity and gentle soft oak on the finish.

1993 Similarly, the 1993 surprised with lively, youthful green fruit - lime and honeydew melon - characters on the nose. The palate shows evidence of the cooler year and is less impressive - having fresh, greenish citrus flavours and less richness and concentration than most wines in the line-up. Still, it is in excellent condition for a ten year old chardonnay.

1992 Two badly corked bottles, therefore Keith wants to look at this vintage again.

1991 Another mature white that is ageing gracefully. It is deep gold in colour but bright in condition with toasty oak, lime, peach and marmalade aromas; and lime citrus, orange peel, ripe melon and honey flavours. Although soft, gentle and even mellow, it still has good acidity, is relatively undeveloped and should remain in good condition for some time.

1990 The hit of the tasting - a lovely mature chardonnay at the height of its powers. This is a big, ripe, rich and concentrated white with toast, roast almonds, cashews, lime and butterscotch aromas, and honeyed melon and grapefruit flavours: still with zippy acidity to finish. It is mellow, fine, complex, deep and long and has a sweet viscous texture. Brilliant.