

# MOSS WOOD



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## MOSS WOOD 2003 CHARDONNAY

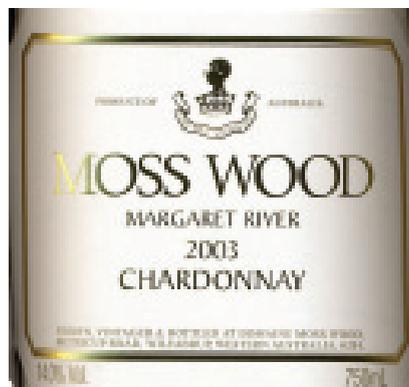
The consistency of the Margaret River region is underlined with another extremely good vintage for Moss Wood Chardonnay. While not achieving the stellar heights of the 2001 wine and falling a fraction short of the quality of the 2002, this is still a wonderful Chardonnay. Importantly, it marks another step along the road to reducing alcohol levels in this wine: a project which has been the focus of a great deal of attention in the Moss Wood vineyard.

The growing season leading up to the 2003 harvest had been uncharacteristically warm throughout. This warmth during the winter of 2002 caused an early and uneven budburst, which led to variable shoot numbers on vines and therefore reduced crop levels. Apart from that, it was a very good growing season - a week or two ahead of usual - with no significant disease problems. Thunderstorms in February and cool, dewy nights caused a small amount of botrytis infection but this was easily removed, with only a 5% reduction in crop as a result. The onslaught of birds was worse than usual with an earlier onset meaning that, atypically, birds were eating chardonnay grapes which were green or hard. Once the nets were on, this problem was reduced.

A perennial problem in the vineyard is striving to get the vines to ripen the grapes so that sugar, tannin and flavour ripeness correspond. When this occurs the finished wine will have flavour ripeness with the minimum amount of alcohol and so be better balanced.

Getting full ripeness at lower alcohol levels may also reduce the likelihood of random oxidisation in the finished wine.

To achieve a point that will give ripe flavour and tannins at lower sugar levels, the vines at Moss Wood are given maximum fruit exposure and every effort is made to encourage even ripening. The widespread use of Scott Henry trellising has sped up the ripening process. Although the herbal flavours now disappear at an earlier stage, the grapes do not appear to have



much fruit flavour until they reach between 12.5 and 13° beaume. The tendency has been to want to let the grapes continue ripening beyond 13° towards 13.5° to achieve maximum flavour. Experience has shown that the grapes will be fully ripe at 13° and so it is better to pick then in order to restrain the alcohol levels. In 2003, the Moss Wood chardonnay block was sampled every second day after the grapes had gone over 12° beaume and were picked at 12.7, 12.8 and 13.3° beaume. Keith was happy with the results although he is still keen to reduce the level at which the final batch is harvested.

The 2003 Chardonnay was made according to established procedure: it was destemmed before being pressed, then allowed to settle for a couple of days before fermentation began in stainless steel tanks (with 2% solids included). After 48 hours the must was racked into 100% new French barriques where it was stirred every day until the end of primary fermentation. It was then stirred once a week. In 2003, the wine only underwent a partial malolactic fermentation. After that, it was racked into tank, adjusted for acidity and sulphur dioxide, and returned to barrels with its lees. In January 2004, it was racked from barrel, checked, fined with bentonite for protein stability and then filtered and bottled. Seventy per cent was bottled under screw cap and thirty per cent under cork (mainly for the export market).

As you would expect, the Moss Wood 2003 Margaret River Chardonnay shows the influence of the harvest. It has more minerality and clearly defined acidity than (say) the 2002 which was more subtle, more creamy and more round with a glycerol-like texture and zesty acidity. There are typical fruit characters - lemon and grapefruit citrus, peach, nectarine and melons - very much at the mid-point of the flavour spectrum rather than at the tropical end. As well, there is a hint of butterscotch and some soft cedary oak in the background. The acidity gives structure and backbone to the wine which we expect to improve with short-term cellaring. For those interested in the mature characters of chardonnay, it is a vintage that will age well.

The **Moss Wood 2003 Margaret River Chardonnay** has classy cedary oak aromas with hints of lemony citrus, intense white peach, nectarine and grapefruit flavours with some mineral notes and quite strong, crisp, refreshing acidity on a finish that lingers. It is tighter, leaner and finer than usual, though it still has some generous viscosity and richness on the mid-palate. There is the same power and weight that lovers of the style have come to expect.

MOSS WOOD CHARDONNAY  
VINTAGE CHART

VINTAGE	HARVEST DATE	BEAUME (°)	YIELD (t/ha)	VINTAGE RATING	OPTIMUM DRINKING
2004	23 Feb	12.7	7.7	8 (but bit early to say)	2016
2003	25 Feb	13.3	6.12	9	2015
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	NOW
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.

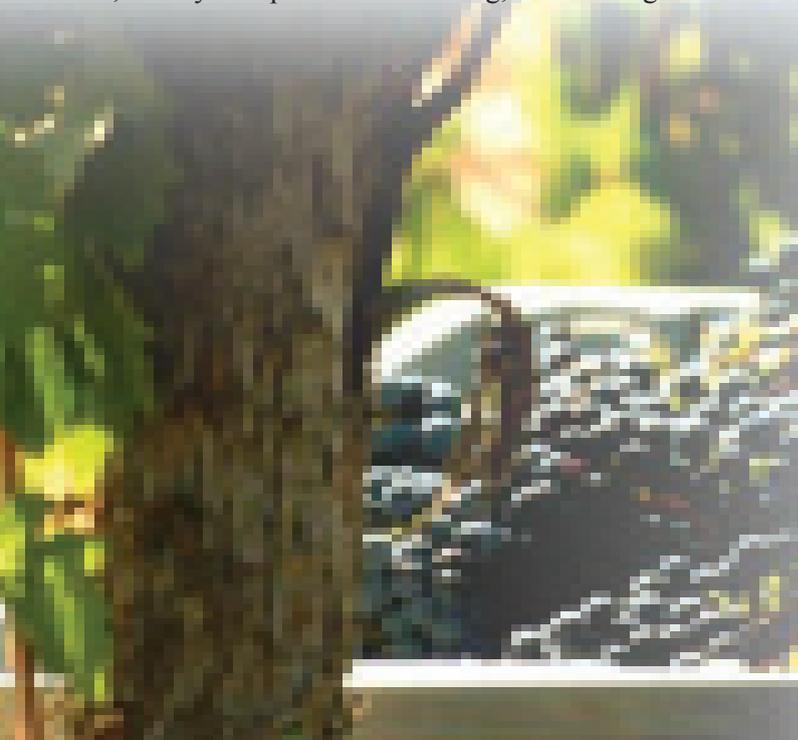
## MOSS WOOD 2002 "RIBBON VALE VINEYARD" REDS

There is a paradox involved in the 2002 reds from Moss Wood's Ribbon Vale vineyard. Although the mild 2002 vintage was not a great one for Margaret River reds, it did produce better red wines at Ribbon Vale than those which came from the, widely accepted as outstanding, 2001 vintage. This is

the third year that Moss Wood has harvested Ribbon Vale fruit (following the purchase of the vineyard in early 2000). For the two years leading up to the 2002 vintage, the Moss Wood team has had responsibility for the Ribbon Vale vineyard and they have learnt a great deal about managing this particular site. Trellising has been the key to improving the ripeness of the tannins in the Ribbon Vale reds and to finding better tannin balance. Merlot tends to overcrop easily and so identifying appropriate yields and making sure that these are not exceeded has been important in ensuring that the reds do not lack concentration.

The other key to improving the Ribbon Vale reds has been the knowledge gained in the winery about how to minimise the extraction of aggressive tannins. The fermentation process takes place in closed tanks, where it is usual (and easier) to pump over to extract colour and flavour including tannin. Most of the extraction occurs using the much gentler (but more demanding of time and labour) hand plunging.

Readers may be wondering about the 2001 Ribbon Vale reds. These can still be obtained at retail level. We have included the 2002 wines in this Moss Wood newsletter, because we believe that they have now reached an appropriate quality.



## CABERNET SAUVIGNON MERLOT

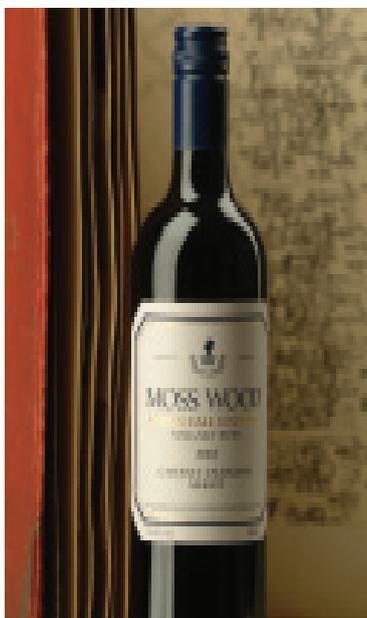
In 2002, this was a blend of cabernet sauvignon (59%), merlot (31%) and cabernet franc (10%). Each variety is fermented separately according to the traditional Moss Wood approach, although in closed rather than open tanks. The grapes were destemmed, transferred by conveyer belt into tanks where fermentation was triggered by pure yeast culture at warm temperatures - up to 32°C. Each batch was left on skins after fermentation for between ten and fourteen days, depending on taste. This stage was considered crucial for the Ribbon Vale reds in order that their tannins not be over-extracted. The wine was then pressed and racked into barrels.

Each grape variety was kept separate for the first nine months of barrel ageing: a third in new French oak, the remainder in one and two year old barriques (50:50). The wine was racked from barrel into tanks (still as separate varieties) and bench trials conducted to determine the composition of the blend. After that the wine was blended and then returned to oak for another year's maturation. Before bottling, bench trials determine whether the wine will be fined. In this case, it was not considered necessary.

Time line:

April 2002 into barrel  
Nov. 2002 blending trials, racked and assembled  
Nov. 2003 racked into tank  
Jan. 2004 bottled

Of the two wines, Keith's preference is for the Cabernet Merlot which he sees as having redcurrant, mulberry and cedary flavours with some toned-down minty eucalyptus notes. There is charry oak on the nose and the finish and the tannins are reasonably fine and firm. The wine is supple (something which he hasn't seen in previous vintages) and has good length. It's much more in the style of a Moss Wood wine than before but still retains its individual vineyard stamp.

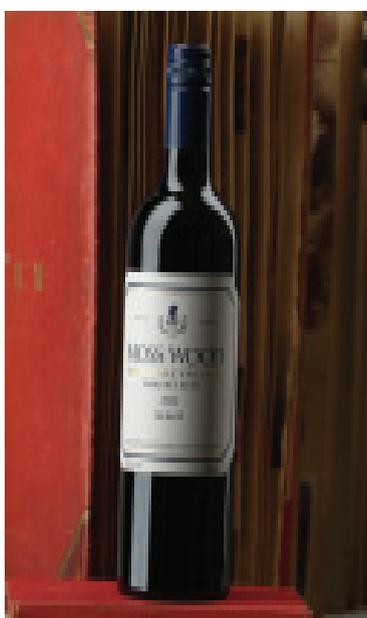


Seventy per cent of both reds were bottled under screw caps.

The **Moss Wood 2002 “Ribbon Vale Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot** is a big step up from the previous wines released under this label. It has voluminous red plummy aromas with hints of cedary oak, ripe cassis, plum and mulberry flavour with powerful dusty oak and some earthy characters and firm, fine, ripe tannins that linger.

This is a robust, full-flavoured red with impressive richness and concentration, a firm structure and a pleasing grip to finish. It will improve with short term cellaring and may well be at its best with hearty, slow-cooked casseroles.

The cellaring potential should be approximately seven to ten years.



## MERLOT

The team at Moss Wood make a single merlot from Ribbon Vale vineyard fruit which is released as a varietal as well as contributing to the cabernet blend. The merlot from the Ribbon Vale vineyard is fermented separately from the cabernet sauvignon and the cabernet franc. After pressing, it is matured in oak for nine months and is racked into tank. The amount required to flesh out the Cabernet Merlot is drawn off (about 30% of the blend) while the remaining merlot is racked back into barrels for another year's ageing, after which it is bottled as a varietal.

Keith sees the “Ribbon Vale Vineyard” Merlot as having red berry fruit flavours - redcurrant and mulberry with blackberry jubes and some toffee apple, confectionary notes. He also sees hints of Grenadine / preserved oranges / orange zest in the wine. Firm acid and ripe tannins give the Merlot length and a pleasing grip.

Merlot is frequently talked about as the component of the blend which softens cabernet sauvignon. What is less clearly understood in Keith's view is that tannin plays a big part in the impact of the merlot grape. The team at Moss Wood are looking to produce merlot with fine, ripe tannins rather than tannins which are too extractive and too grippy.

The **Moss Wood 2002 “Ribbon Vale Vineyard” Merlot** is fragrant, has ripe plummy flavour with cassis and licorice notes and supple, fine tannins on a moderately firm finish. It is tightly structured, yet is rich and powerful, with a fleshy texture.

At present, it needs a robust sirloin or veal rib eye with a dense, concentrated sauce to look its best.

As with the Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot, the cellaring potential for this wine should be approximately seven to ten years.

## MOSS WOOD 2003 "LEFROY BROOK VINEYARD" CHARDONNAY

Keith was so pleased with the quality of the Pemberton Chardonnay that Moss Wood made from the Danti vineyard from 1992 to 1994, that he was keen to take advantage of fruit from Pemberton's oldest vineyard (Lefroy Brook, planted in 1982), when it became available in 1997. The fact that Moss Wood Chardonnay production was halved in that year made the two tonnes (150 cases) of fruit most welcome.

This is the seventh chardonnay that Moss Wood has produced from Pat and Barbara Holt's vineyard which is situated close to the tourist landmark, the Cascades, and alongside the Pemberton to Northcliffe railway line. It is a few kilometres south-east of the township of Pemberton, seven kilometres off the road to Northcliffe. Being surrounded by National Forest, it is an easy target for the local bird population and so the entire one hectare vineyard is permanently netted. Not only does it boast mature vines, but the vineyard is close-planted and unirrigated and is therefore low-yielding.

The 2003 vintage for white wines in Pemberton was similar to that in Margaret River in terms of quality. There were similar problems also with uneven budburst and the

unseasonal warmth throughout the growing season meant that quality, flavours and yield were all good.

The wine was made in the same way as the Margaret River Chardonnay with the same percentage of new oak and time in barrel. It even underwent a partial malolactic fermentation. There are stylistic differences between the Margaret River and Pemberton wines, with the latter being picked at a slightly lower beaume. It is consequently leaner, has a complex nose and shows more citrus and leafiness along with some honey and confectionary characters and a lively, zesty finish with well-integrated acid and tannins.



The Moss Wood 2003 "Lefroy Brook Vineyard" Chardonnay shows some light cedary oak on

the nose, is cool and lively, lean and tightly structured. There are juicy lemon citrus, honeydew melon and grapefruit flavours, and mouth puckering acidity on a fresh, taut, clean finish.

The majority of this wine was bottled under screw caps, with only a small percentage under cork (primarily for the export market).

## WOOD FOR ALL OCCASIONS

### MAX ALLEN

*an extract from*

*THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE*

*JUNE 14 - 15, 2003*

"The vineyards sound similar, but the wines are original.

The latest offerings from Margaret River to have flowed across my tongue – coincidentally, from familiar-sounding wineries: Moss Wood, Woodlands and Woodside Valley Estate – reveal a lot about what's happening in Western Australia's highest profile region. Not the least of which is that you have to have deep pockets – but the best wines are well worth the money.

Moss Wood's story is one of *terroir* – how the unique environment of a vineyard site can produce equally unique wine characters. Keith Mugford has been making a couple of different chardonnays for a number of years, both from

his mature estate vineyard and from another very small vineyard, Lefroy Brook, at Pemberton, to the east of Margaret River. In 2002, with half the normal quantity of grapes harvested, Mugford also made a chardonnay from the 20-year-old Green Valley vineyard in the south of Margaret River region.

The three wines were made in exactly the same way – ferment finished in brand new, very smart French oak barriques, lots of lees stirring – but they taste deliciously different. The Lefroy Brook (about \$35) is minerally, fine, delicate; the Green Valley (\$35) is boisterously fruity, with candied lemon and melon flavours and a background of toasty oak; while the Moss Wood (\$50) is intense, tightly structured, lingering, balanced, a chardonnay with definite cellaring potential.

I found them really exciting, satisfying wines with clearly distinct personalities. Incidentally, the Lefroy Brook and half of the other two have been bottled under Stelvin screw top rather than cork."