



MOSS WOOD



Issue 54 >> July 2004

The 2001 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon

It's hard to imagine two more different Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignons than the 2000 and the 2001. The former, the most approachable of them all - supple, almost lush, deep cassis and mulberry flavours with ripe, substantial yet almost gentle tannins. Keith describes it as a "lake of flavour" while "yummy" is another descriptor that springs readily to mind. On the other hand, the 2001 is very much in the mould of the classic years of the greatest Moss Woods: 1975, 1976, 1980, 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996 and 1999.

One of the best vintages in Margaret River was not without its problems. Early flowering meant that Moss Wood was subjected to the earliest bird damage ever and harvest began about 10 days ahead of schedule. The summer was mild and drier than usual and it proved to be a copybook growing season. There was a hot spell in February - five consecutive days in the high 30's - which sent the grape sugars up. Light rains in the second week of March slowed down ripening to the benefit of the cabernet. Keith was reminded of 1991: there were no highlights during vintage and he had no great expectations at harvest, but once the wine was in the winery it looked very good indeed.

The production of the wine was routine for the team at Moss Wood. For the second vintage, the flash Delta E2 was used to destem the berries without crushing the

grapes - to keep tannin extraction to a minimum. After the end of a two year experiment with wild yeast, fermentation was activated by pure yeast culture and took place at the usual warm temperatures - up to 32°C. Each fermentation vat was hand plunged four times a day and the wine was left on skins for between 10 to 14 days after fermentation. As usual, the decision about how long to leave it on skins was made by tasting the wine daily.

After that, it was pressed and placed into barrel (50% new French oak, 50% two year old) for two years with all the pressings included in the finished wine. At the beginning of July 2003, it was racked into tank for assemblage and filtered (but not fined) before being bottled in August 2003 and then rested for a year before release.

Last year, Moss Wood bottled 200 cases of the 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon under screwcap to ensure that the wine is not affected by cork taint. In the newsletter, Keith commented that he expected that 1500 cases (or half the production) would be under screwcap with the 2001. In fact, 70% of that vintage has been sealed under the Stelvin closure.

The blend for the 2001 Moss Wood Cabernet was cabernet sauvignon (93%),

cabernet franc (3%) and petit verdot (4%), which has been standard since 1997. There are such small amounts of cabernet franc and petit verdot at Moss Wood that, if good enough (and they invariably are), go into the wine as they add some pleasing complexity.

Production Manager Ian Bell, is always pushing Keith to make a Cheval Blanc look-alike by putting aside some cabernet franc and the tiny fraction of merlot (0.3%), bunging it into new oak and selling it at an outrageous price. Keith has, thus far, resisted this temptation.



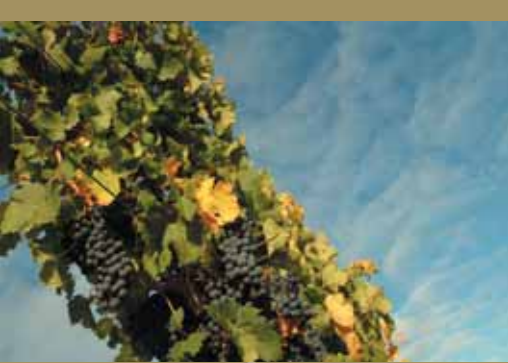
Although it's early days, the 2001 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon is arguably the greatest wine yet released from the vineyard. It has a fragrant nose of mulberries, blackberries and violets with a touch of earth and some spicy, cedary notes while the palate is deep, densely flavoured with ripe cassis and mulberry, complexed by chocolate and coffee bean characters. This is a profound, powerful red, opulent and concentrated with impressive weight

showing fine, ripe tannins on a long, lingering finish. The oak and densely packed fruit are seamlessly integrated even at this stage. It is built for the long haul and, if well cellared, will improve over the next ten years and remain at its peak long after that.

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reviews

Campbell Mattinson:

www.winefrontmonthly.com.au
April 2004

Moss Wood Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon 2001: Reserved, young, raw, primary, somewhat closed and yet still managing to drive a clear wedge of class between it and the bulk of its competition. Fruit of ultimate, coiled purity, yet suggestive of complexity even in its extreme youth. Taut through its centre, yet even so its ripe, velvety, blackcurranty fruit is obvious. In many ways, the perfect, varietal, young cabernet. Drink: 2010-2026. 97 points.

Ray Jordan:

The magnificent dozen - West Australia Fresh - 6 May 04

Which wines couldn't you live without? We choose our 'desert-island' survival pack.....

...I'd also have to have a Moss Wood cabernet sauvignon. No dozen would be complete without this quintessential small vineyard cabernet. Soft, generous and multi-layered, it continues to produce a style that is distinctly Moss Wood.

Jeremy Oliver:

www.onwine.com.au

Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon 2001- 17/12/2003

Alluringly deep, complex perfume of pristine small dark berries, mulberries and redcurrants, scented with violets, perfectly integrated cedar/mocha oak and a dusty suggestion of dark olives. Sumptuous, silky palate whose deep core of intense small dark berry flavour is lavishly coated with chocolate/vanilla/cedar oak and bound by supremely fine, satiny tannins. Suggestions of tar and prune reveal some slightly riper fruit, while its structure, power and integration stamp it as a significant wine, perhaps the finest Moss Wood ever. 19.3, drink 2013-2021+.

SEESAW'S HIGH FINISH: James Halliday in The Australian 7/12/03

Moss Wood is one of Australia's iconic red wines, largely pre-sold to a devoted band of followers who take their mailing-list allocation year in, year out, the remainder distributed by the Fine Wine Specialist to an equally loyal network of fine wine retailers and restaurants. Do not expect to find it discounted or to buy it cheap on the auction market: Langton's rates it as one of seven exceptional wines.

Bill and Sandra Pannell were part of the select group of doctors who established, respectively, Moss Wood, Cullen (Kevin and Di Cullen), and Vasse Felix (Tom Cullity) in the early 1970s, setting Margaret River on the way to fame, if not immediate fortune.

Each made Cabernet Sauvignon its principal wine; the arrival of merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot came much later, to add an extra touch of complexity as the winemakers and the public looked for more sophistication. The first vintage was 1974, of which none survives in the Moss Wood cellars, so the 1975 opened a vertical tasting of four decades organised by John Newton of Vintage Cellars in Melbourne.

It was a collaborative effort, bottles coming in part from those who attended and in part from Moss Wood's cellars.

Leaping forward for a moment, Keith Mugford (with wife Clare) joined Moss Wood as winemaker in 1979 and in 1984 purchased the business from the Pannells. It has resulted in a very consistent style, anchored on a very distinguished vineyard site.

The '75 was an outstanding bottle of a lovely old wine, still fragrant, with a gentle mix of mocha and blackcurrant, reflecting a mild vintage. The '76 is thinning but not drying; a hot vintage

produced a wine high in alcohol (14.3 per cent) with red berry fruit and vanilla oak. The '77 vintage conditions, says Mugford, were a cross between '75 and '76, and produced an imposing wine, penetrating and long, with redcurrant and mulberry running through an excellent finish.

No Moss Wood was released from the '78, although a wine was made; I have tasted it on previous occasions and it was surprisingly good. The mild '79 vintage, Mugford's first, produced a sturdy wine, faintly herbaceous, which took the '75 as its model but didn't quite get there.

Having (by pure chance) drunk several bottles of the 1980 from my own cellar in the month or so before the tasting, and having loved each one, the abundant dark and red fruits, soft, liling tannins and seductive aftertaste came as no surprise. By contrast the small crop in 1981 led to a tannic wine that, Mugford observes, has only started to soften and open up over the past three to four years.

A big crop was produced in 1982 in cool conditions and the wine is no better than it should be. The following year was hot and dry, the ripe black fruits overshadowed by the tannins, which will probably outlive the fruit. The year 1984 was akin to 1982 and Mugford's desire to produce an elegant, Bordeaux style succeeded all too well, the wine simply too light.

The '85 is an utterly delicious wine, sweet fruit expressing itself from the first whiff through to the lingering finish. A small crop in '86 resulted in a tannic wine, very like the '81; ironically, the following vintage produced a replay of '82. The seesaw continued in '88 with a small crop; despite concerns at the time about

tannin levels, the wine has abundant fruit and a lovely silky texture.

As in other parts of Australia, '89 was a year to forget but nature made up with two "dream vintages" (Mugford's description) in '90 and '91, the former making a super-stylish and elegant wine, the latter rich, voluptuous and lush - great wines both. The latter, incidentally, was the last year in which Moss Wood made a special reserve wine, kept longer in the barrel. Since then, all the cabernet has been given two years in barrel.

The '92 and '93 showed dreams don't last forever; the wines were unable to rise above the vicissitudes of the weather. Thereafter came a great run of vintages, only '97 breaking the line. Cabernet franc joined the picture in '90, petit verdot in '96, and these components no doubt helped build complexity. For me, the '90, '91, '95, '96 and '99 are the finest, with '94 and '98 not far behind.

Small crops and mild growing conditions meant 1995 was destined to be one of the great Margaret River years and the Moss Wood wine does not disappoint. Perfectly ripened, with great colour, it is densely packed with luscious blackcurrant and dark chocolate fruit, soft tannins and perfect oak.

It is the template for the succeeding vintages, varied only by a foray into wild yeast fermentation for the '99 and 2000 vintages, a move that Mugford says has not been, nor will be, repeated. When you taste the upcoming '01, you will understand why: the warm summer and average yield resulted in Moss Wood's best vintage, the fragrant and sublimely balanced wine a great example of Margaret River at its best.

Ratings: Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beaume	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Rating (out of 10)
2004	25 Mar	13.6	9.11	(8-9)
2003	20 Mar	13.6	7.59	(9)
2002	20 Mar	13.3	10.1	(8.5)
2001	19 Mar	13.4	9.5	9
2000	28 Mar	14.0	10.3	9
1999	31 Mar	13.8	9.22	10
1998	30 Mar	13.5	10.0	8
1997	19 Mar	13.6	7.0	8
1996	14 Mar	13.7	10.0	10
1995	14 Mar	13.6	9.75	10
1994	25 Mar	12.8	8.89	8
1993	22 Mar	13.2	8.5	7
1992	26 Mar	12.8	10.0	7
1991	3 April	13.3	9.8	9
1990	2 April	12.8	8.5	9
1989	30 Mar	13.2	7.9	5
1988	10 Mar	13.0	7.1	6
1987	26 Mar	12.7	8.5	8
1986	14 Mar	12.8	5.8	6
1985	13 Mar	12.5	7.5	9
1984	12 Mar	12.3	9.0	6
1983	07 Mar	13.0	9.0	8

The 2004 vintage at Moss Wood

The 2004 vintage was remarkable because every region in Western Australia experienced extremely favourable weather conditions. Atypically, the vintage is likely to produce wines that are very good or better throughout the vast state. At Moss Wood, Keith believes that although it has been a very good year, it is too early to call it a great vintage. At this stage, he is reminded of 1985 - not that the two vintages were exactly the same. Moss Wood's hottest ever day in viticultural history (41.5°C) came while the Moss Wood team were sampling the semillon in 1985, while the hot spell in 2004 came much later in the season with the temperature on the hottest day reaching 39.5°C.

Good spring rainfall meant that yields were slightly above average for cabernet sauvignon and sauvignon blanc while the merlot, semillon and pinot noir needed to be crop thinned. Even after that the pinot had to be drained off its juices to increase concentration. Chardonnay (at 3 tonnes to the acre) and semillon had average yields, while the small volume of cabernet franc and petit verdot was slightly up in quantity. With overall tonnage up by 5%, Keith described the yields as "good rather than bountiful".

The ripening period over summer was cool and mild. The birds made little impact thanks to the marri blossom and netting, while disease was not a problem because of the dry conditions. Temperatures rose while the cabernet was in the final stages of ripening. As Keith said "it ripened with a bang and the grapes ended up a touch riper than we wanted." By contrast, in 1985 at that stage of proceedings, rain came along to slow down the vintage and extend the ripening period. The 2004 Cabernet shows the benefits of the mild summer - it has good colour, attractive fruit flavour, ripe tannins and will be enjoyable. At present Keith thinks good, maybe not great.

No such reservations with the Ribbon Vale vineyard sauvignon blanc, which Keith believes is the best that the Moss Wood team has produced. The sauvignon blanc and the semillon have vibrant aromatics and show stylish, fine fruit characters.



French cellar rat

Guillaume Meaugais, a barrel maker by trade, was recommended by Burgundian Nicholas Potel to work as a cellar rat during vintage at Moss Wood.

His fellow staff members expressed some concerns for the floor, that it might crack should the large but friendly native of the Cognac region fall from the catwalk in the hurly burly of the winemaking process. Luckily for the floor Guillaume hasn't slipped! Guillaume has stayed on to do some pruning before travelling to South Australia and Victoria on his way back to France.



Staff News

It's hard to believe that anyone would forsake the idyllic working life at Moss Wood for the hardships of living in Melbourne. All at Moss Wood were stunned and disappointed when such a move was announced by Emma Amos, who has been taking a frontline position in the office as well as being involved in the development of the website and in preparing the newsletter. Emma's explanation that she needs to move to Melbourne to look after her 91 year old grandmother seems fair and reasonable and not a sign that she has taken leave of her senses. We will miss her and certainly wish her well.



End-of-vintage shoot out

The Moss Wood end-of-vintage function took on an added dimension this year as the staff enjoyed a morning of shooting - firstly, target shooting with rifles and then clay pigeon shooting with shot guns. An anonymous source commented on the frightening increase in confidence shown by the women staff members during the morning. Those who started as timid and terrified were transformed by the experience into a state that can only be described as 'bloodthirsty'. As it turned out, the women did better with the rifles than the shotguns. The guys, who had hailed the choice of activity as inspired were muttering a bit by the end of the morning.

First prize was won by cellar hand, Ed Bugden, in a hair's breadth from Steve Clarke, with Mick Middleton and Jane Beard tied for third. (As an unrelated aside, Jane is off to Athens for her second Olympics in support of her brother, David, who is in the Australian volleyball team.) An unconfirmed report suggested that more clay targets were missed than hit during the morning except by Keith Mugford and Ian Bell "who were on fire". (Where would a report like that have come from?).

After the shooting, the group repaired to Clairault for lunch and enjoyed several brackets of excellent wines. A grand cru White Burgundy was put alongside the 2002 Giaconda and 2002 Moss Wood Chardonnays, while a red Burgundy was sipped with Moss Wood and Au Bon Climat Pinots and a 1992 Stags Leap Cabernet was drunk alongside the same vintage of Moss Wood.

SQF Accreditation

On the 16th of October 2003 Moss Wood was certified with SQF accreditation which includes the hazard management system of the HACCP program. This means that the methods used from the vineyard to final wine making meet strict quality and chemical safety control standards. This accreditation is internationally recognized in the food and beverage industry and indeed is a mandatory requirement in some international markets. We have adopted these methods to ensure we maintain world class quality standards in our vineyards and winery and produce consistent, quality wines for consumers.



Updated Moss Wood Website

We've been working on the Moss Wood website www.mosswood.com.au and can now input material ourselves. As a result, it is possible to keep it much more up-to-date than before. At this stage, it's a work in progress but worth keeping in touch with.

