



MOSS WOOD



Issue 59 May 2006

Moss Wood 2005 Chardonnay

The 2005 vintage at Moss Wood for chardonnay was much the same as it was for semillon - with the rain during vintage coming well after the chardonnay had been picked. The substantial rainfall which Wilyabrup experienced during spring affected berry set, resulting in lower bunch weights than usual. Although reduced yield is disappointing, there is the bonus of increased concentration in the chardonnay. The other characteristic of the vintage was even temperatures during the growing season and therefore gradual accumulation of sugar and flavour development and the retention of bright fruit characters.

While Keith has a real affection for the concentration and generosity of the warm years like 2003, it is generally felt that the whites at Moss Wood are best in the cool to very cool years like 2002, when they can be delicate and show refreshing natural acidity. The 2005 vintage brought the double bonus of the delicious fruit characters of a cool year with a ripeness of flavour that came from the fine weather leading up to harvest. So the Chardonnay has good fruit depth, impressive weight and generosity without high alcohol. Above all, it was a year of great balance.

Over the past few years, the team at Moss Wood has worked very hard to refine the

style of the Moss Wood Chardonnay. It is one of the great challenges in winemaking, for all varieties really, to be able to produce table wines that have intensity and length of flavour, without being so heavy that they lose their appeal. For Chardonnay, this has meant earlier picking, achieved by improving fruit exposure to encourage maximum flavour and taking extreme care to see that the picking time optimises ripeness by being accurate to within one day. These objectives need very careful sampling - even twice a day - to ensure that we pick at the right moment. It's almost a matter of getting the time of harvest down to hours rather than days.

Obviously, in warm conditions the baume can rise dramatically - as much as 0.5° in two days. Each block is monitored separately and is considered in terms of the contribution it will make to the final blend. We've found that multiple sampling can enable us to better monitor the rate of ripening and the blocks are picked to minimise or smooth out any errors so that we finish with a balanced chardonnay.

Careful vine canopy management has been a part of the Moss Wood program for 20 years but we have established specific viticultural trials over the last four vintages to better understand the role

of fruit exposure in the finished wine. For example, in 2005 each block was picked in two halves - with different leaf plucking regimes. Half was leaf plucked by hand to give complete exposure of the grapes. The other half was plucked by machine, giving partial exposure and each trial was sampled and harvested

continued next page



Moss Wood Pty Ltd

PO Box 225 Cowaramup Western Australia 6284 Ph: +61 8 9755 6266 Fax: +61 8 9755 6303

www.mosswood.com.au mosswood@mosswood.com.au

separately. The fully exposed component contributed fruit aromas of melon, peach, nut and malt flavours to the wine, with richer texture and more substantial tannins. The partially exposed component provided characters that tended more towards grapefruit, citrus and honeysuckle blossom and vibrant citrus notes especially on the mid-palate. When seen as separate components, the Moss Wood team preferred the fully exposed portion but the blend of the two is significantly better than either batch alone.

Keith sees the recent Moss Wood Chardonnays more in the style of the 1980's which were consistently picked between 12.5 and 13° baume. The current Chardonnays are picked between 12.8 and 13° baume and so the amount of alcohol they contain varies between 13.8 and 14%. They have lower pH in 2004, 2005 and probably in 2006, making the wines appear more “minerally”. From the progress that the 2003 has made, we can already see that chardonnay with high acidity to begin with, fills out and softens even in the first few years after release.

The winemaking process for the Chardonnay remains the same, although the spirit of enquiry and rigour is evident in the winery as in the vineyard. Experiments have been carried out to satisfy the team’s curiosity by ageing a barrel of this wine in a one year old barrique. Blind tastings have shown a conclusive preference by the group for the wine aged in new oak. Over the last 20 years, we have revisited this issue on 3 occasions (1985, 1997 and 2005) and each time we have come to the same conclusion.

The procedure for the 2005 Chardonnay was pretty much the same as usual although the amount of lees stirring was reduced - to emphasise primary fruit characters. As was the case for the first time last year, the fruit was “whole bunch” pressed. The juice was settled for two days and then racked to stainless steel (with 2% solids included) for inoculation at the correct temperature. The must was then racked into 100% new French barriques where it underwent primary fermentation. It was then inoculated for malolactic fermentation and about 30% went through. After that

the wine was racked into tank, adjusted for acidity and sulphur dioxide, and returned to the barrels with its lees. In February this year, it was racked from barrel, checked, fined for protein stability and then filtered and bottled.

Keith describes the 2005 Chardonnay as having attractive fruit characters of nectarine, peach, quince and melons with hints of malt, nougat, lime and honeysuckle. He loves the zestiness and vibrant fruit flavours and is pleased with its firm structure and high acidity as this will enable the wine to age well. Well-cellared, Keith expects the 2005 Chardonnay to soften and develop toasty

nutty complexity over the next ten years at least.

The **Moss Wood 2005 Chardonnay** is quite restrained on the nose with attractive nectarine, grapefruit, lime and cedary oak perfumes. The palate is tight, lean and full yet with underlying opulence, depth and enormous length. It has white peach, nectarine and grapefruit citrus flavours with some savoury, mineral notes and refreshing zesty acidity. At present, it will be at its best if served with food, say gently grilled shellfish with a Vietnamese salad or stir-fried chicken with a mild spicy sauce.

RATINGS: Moss Wood Chardonnay

Vintage	Harvest Date	° Beume	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Vintage Rating (out of 10)
2005	22 Feb	13.0	5.35	9
2004	23 Feb	12.7	7.7	9+
2003	25 Feb	13.3	6.12	9
2002	04 Mar	13.7	2.45	9+
2001	15 Feb	13.4	7.51	10
2000	1 Mar	13.4	10.0	8
1999	3 Mar	13.4	6.89	10
1998	5 Mar	14.1	4.08	8
1997	7 Mar	13.6	2.58	8
1996	20 Feb	13.2	9.0	7
1995	17 Feb	13.7	7.0	9
1994	28 Feb	13.6	9.0	8
1993	4 Mar	13.6	6.36	9
1992	27 Feb	13.5	7.3	7
1991	25 Mar	12.8	10.29	9
1990	6 Mar	12.9	6.85	10
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



The 2004 Reds from the 'Ribbon Vale Vineyard'

Last year we commented that the Ribbon Vale vineyard had been revitalised in slightly less time than the five years that most commentators had expected, as evidenced by a significant leap in quality with the 2003 vintage. However, those same commentators will, no doubt, be chuckling with the improvement that is evident in the 2004 reds. Perhaps the vineyard really did need five years before it showed at its best!

The 2004 vintage was a delightfully average growing season until it was complicated by a heat spike in mid-March, with two days in a row over 40°C. As a consequence, the cabernet sauvignon grapes ripened very quickly at the end causing Keith to wonder if this might have been the vintage that got away. He is certainly convinced that if Margaret River had had its traditional Indian summer, it would have challenged for the best vintage ever. The worry at the time was that sugar ripening would occur without flavour ripeness. While elsewhere in the newsletter we have cautioned against excess ripeness, the possibility of slightly under-ripe cabernet sauvignon from Ribbon Vale is always a concern because of the harsh green tannins. Consequently, in 2004 we were sensitive about picking before the grapes were fully ripe.

The merlot was picked in the mild part of the season, before the heat spike, although

we were just as sensitive about a minimum level of ripeness with this variety as well. The Moss Wood team hate the muddy notes that can be found with green merlot, not to mention the impact of under-ripe merlot on the palate and on the finish, where it can be thin and tannic. We were determined to avoid these problems as well.

The merlot and cabernet sauvignon were fermented and then aged in barrel separately and blended after 12 months. A combination of open and closed fermenters were used because the winery can occasionally exhaust its open fermentation capacity. We believe the open tanks allow for cleaner fermentations and encourage softer tannin extraction. To emulate softer tannin extraction, hand plunging is still carried out on the closed tanks, although this can be quite challenging because the narrow lids were never designed for this type of work. It can often lead to very colourful language!

A key to the improvement of the Ribbon Vale reds is that we now have a better understanding of how the tannins develop during skin contact post-fermentation. With careful tasting, the team is now able to recognise the right balance between fruit flavours and tannin and the correct time to press is more clearly understood.

One other factor which will impact on the quality of the Ribbon Vale reds has been more specialised barrel purchases for the vineyard. At Ian Bell's instigation, barrel choice has become more focused so that the differences between the Moss Wood and Ribbon Vale vineyards are taken into account. Trials have begun to investigate the long term development of individual batches of wine matched to different barrel types.



Moss Wood 2004 'Ribbon Vale Vineyard' Cabernet Merlot

Keith describes the wine as having a deep brick red colour, an intriguing nose with a complex array of aromas - violets, blackberry and tar, with hints of mulberry, blackcurrant and charry oak. The palate shows rich ripe dark berry fruits - blackberry and mulberry - and is generous and long with a mouth-filling texture and a firm, though not aggressive, astringency.

This marks a huge leap forward for Ribbon Vale. The 2004 Cabernet Merlot is fragrant with gentle power and succulence; opulent cassis flavours with a hint of vanilla and coffee bean; deep velvety (almost lush) texture and fine ripe tannins that linger. We recommend cellaring this wine for a minimum of ten years.



Moss Wood 2004 'Ribbon Vale Vineyard' Merlot



Keith was pleasantly surprised by this wine. Right through its time in the barrel it seemed to develop by stealth - at every tasting it seemed to reveal just a little bit more depth. In fact, it developed to a point where he now describes it as a fruit bomb: vibrant mulberry, blackcurrant and marzipan with touches of earth and oak on the nose. The palate has attractive dark fruit flavours which fill the mid-palate and the finish has long, bituminous/tarry tannins.

The 2004 Merlot is once again a huge step above previous wines from the Ribbon Vale vineyard. It has lovely warm cedary oak with a touch of vanilla bean, is silky smooth, rich and concentrated with ripe cassis and mulberry flavours. While there's a gentle grip, the wine is immediately approachable although it can also be confidently cellared for at least five years.

The 2006 Vintage at Moss Wood

In a year that Eastern Australia had a remarkably early vintage, the West was quite contrary. It was a very mild and slow season and, until the end of January, our coldest growing season ever. February warmed up and ripening proceeded at a moderate pace but March saw things slow down again. In the end, it has turned out to be the latest harvest on record and caused much hand wringing and greying of hair, while vineyard managers and winemakers alike kept an eye on the weather. Not unexpectedly, yields have been below average because of poor flowering conditions, with Merlot and Chardonnay down by 50% and the others slightly better. The low yields were probably a bonus because all varieties reached full ripeness, despite all the worries. If crops had been any higher, this may not have been the case. Not surprisingly, aromas on the early varieties are delicate and pretty and the team are very pleased with quality. Looking back at our records, the most comparable vintage is 1990, although the yields were higher that year. If, as the early signs suggest, the final quality of 2006 matches that great year we will be delighted.

Apart from the stalwarts of Ian Bell, Josh Bahen, Amanda Shepherdson, Ed Bugden, Steve Clarke and Jarod Bawden, our winery crew this vintage included Jennifer Porter and Nick Brown.

Jennifer is a local girl, now studying winemaking part-time at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga. Her wine interest was stirred when her family developed a vineyard on North Jindong Road, about 10 kilometres east of Moss Wood and she hopes one day to make wine there. Having worked at Vasse Felix and Clairault before joining us, when asked about Moss Wood, Jennifer describes her time here as a “life changing experience”. We can but wonder why.

Nick hails from the famous Brown Brothers in Milawa, Victoria. Nick was unaware we are long standing admirers of the Brown family. He tried very politely to stay awake while Keith waxed lyrical, explaining that as a Roseworthy student, he made two visits to the winery at Milawa, where on the second occasion Nick’s grandfather and grandmother entertained the class of ‘77 on the winery lawns. The wines and winery tour were fantastic but Mrs. Brown’s scones went down a treat! Nick’s uncle Ross was one of the first visitors to Moss Wood during the 1970’s, and passed on valuable advice to Sandra and Bill Pannell. By the way, Nick is a final year winemaking student at Adelaide University.

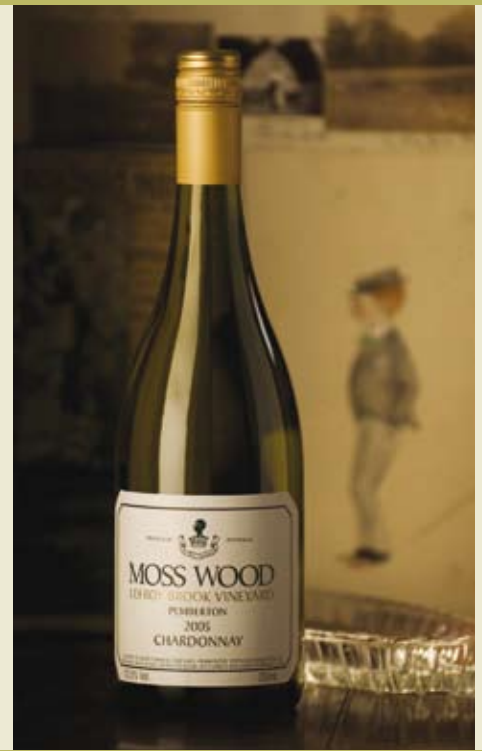
Special thanks also go to Andrew “Bird” Cook, Alex Coultas, Calum Foulner, Rob Gherardi, Pete Ikstrums, Taylor Keamy and Dave Pullin. Especially Taylor, without whose legs the vintage would have been much less fun.



Moss Wood 2005 'Lefroy Brook Vineyard' Chardonnay

This will be the ninth and final vintage of a Moss Wood Chardonnay from Pat and Barbara Holt's Lefroy Brook vineyard which is entirely covered by netting because of its situation surrounded by national forest near the Cascades about 10 kilometres from the townsite of Pemberton. When Lefroy Brook was planted in 1982, it was the first vineyard in what has become the Pemberton wine region. Its viticultural management has been carried on by the Holt's since then. The winemaking has once again been conducted along exactly the same lines as the Moss Wood Chardonnay from Wilyabrup.

The **Moss Wood 2005 "Lefroy Brook Vineyard" Chardonnay** is very much in the Pemberton style - fine, tight and elegant with pristine lemon and grapefruit citrus flavours, a touch of smokey oak, and powerful racy acidity. It will flesh out with time in the bottle while retaining its finesse and showing greater complexity. Can be cellared for at least five years with confidence.



Amanda Shepherdson Winemaker

We take this opportunity to introduce the newest member of the winemaking team, Amanda Shepherdson. Informed sources describe Amanda as enthusiastic and lively, comfortably able to hold her own in the relative (some would say 'very') blokey atmosphere of the winery at Moss Wood. Happily, she has showed commendable application to winery cricket. Amanda is variously described as a capable winemaker and a serious technician who enjoys that side of life in the winery.

"Yeah! A boffin," says an informant.

"Not quite a boffin. She's very practical," says another source.

There is agreement on the floor that Amanda has already put her stamp on the Moss Wood operation: she is technically strong, practical, has a good palate, and a lively imagination. If anyone is prepared to listen, Ian Bell is happy to describe in detail how Amanda mothers yeast cultures before fermentation.

Keith and Clare are delighted with how well Amanda has fitted in and describe a further and unexpected bonus - she is a great visitor host (she likes a chat!).

Amanda gives some background on her career before Moss Wood:

"I started in Provence, France at Chateau Vignelaure under David O'Brien and Peter Gherardi for the vintages from 1999 to 2001. It was an amazing introduction to many facets of the industry, highlighting my love of quality cabernet and fresh rosés and an eye-opener to French bureaucracy. I worked under Simon Keall at Rosabrook Estate for six months prior to and during the company's sale to Palandri. After this I did three vintage stints of six months each with Bruce Jack of Flagstone Winery in South Africa. This was my most dynamic, challenging and rewarding position and that's where I progressed to Assistant Winemaker, learning many different varieties and different techniques. I also did a vintage at Cain Vineyard on Spring Valley Mountain in Napa, working with amazing quality fruit for a Bordeaux blend and very different style of sauvignon blanc. I did a vintage with Voyager Estate before joining the Moss Wood team in October 2005."