

Moss



Wood

Newsletter

No: 6

Spring, 1988

New Release: The 1986 Moss Wood Pinot Noir

The 1986 growing season was consistently mild in Margaret River. Following the difficult summer of 1985, with its extremely hot February, this was good news for the vineyard and meant that the 1986 Pinot Noir crop was in particularly good shape. Thankfully, bird damage was at a minimum and so the crop level was average for Moss Wood - 5.8 tonnes to the hectare (or just under 3 tons to the acre).

The wine was made using the full Burgundian technique which has become common practice at Moss Wood. It was given two weeks skin contact and fifty per cent whole bunches were crushed. This increase from the thirty per cent whole bunches used in 1985 has become standard.

After fermentation, the wine received its usual twelve months in cask with twenty per cent being matured in new barrels.



Keith Mugford believes that the 1986 Pinot Noir is finer, more elegant and softer than the 1985 wine. It is similar to the 1984 Pinot but has more spine and more tannin as a result of skin contact and the crushing of whole bunches.

The 1986 Moss Wood Pinot Noir has a perfumed nose showing restrained strawberry character and some complex Burgundian features reminiscent of light oak, cherries and mushrooms. On the palate, it has good acid, a pleasing softness, excellent structure, clean, flavoursome Pinot fruit, powerful though not aggressive tannins, and a long finish.

This is a luscious, seductive wine of considerable complexity. It is not a wine for current drinking, needing time for the tannins to soften and so allow the bouquet to fill out and the depth of flavour on the mid palate to intensify.

The 1986 wine is well up to the best of the Moss Wood Pinot Noirs and will improve over the next ten to fifteen years.

Pinot Noir Vintage Chart

The following tasting notes are designed to give an indication of how the Moss Wood Pinot Noirs are drinking at present:

1979 The wine has developed classic Burgundian aromas reminiscent of mushroom and 'forest floor' characters which are counter balanced by lovely, surprisingly fresh, cherry characters. Good length. Although drinking beautifully now, it will develop further over the next four to five years.

1980 Clear, deep ruby, very intense on the nose with bouquet of crushed ants and ripe berries. On the palate, the wine has soft, sappy, rich raspberry-like fruit with pleasing length.

1981 This outstanding Pinot has a deep red colour, a superb nose with aromas of strawberries and cherries, an excellent structure and good balance, a depth of rich, ripe fruit flavour and good weight on the palate. It is a complex wine with considerable length which is drinking beautifully.

1982 A bottle of this consumed recently at the vineyard benefitted from four hours decanting as it opened out at the end of that time. The wine was rich, soft and has good length. It has developed old pinot characters which Keith says were reminiscent of corn beef and mushrooms but with an underlying cherry character.

1983 This is a soft, balanced wine which is full of flavour. It has ripe cherry fruit and dusty oak aromas on the nose, a tightly structured palate with pleasant Pinot fruit in harmony with the French oak and a finish of considerable length.

1984 The wine has a light ruby colour, lovely strawberry-like aromas with nuances of intense charred oak. On the palate, it has strong, rich, full fruit flavours reminiscent of cherries and strawberries but with hints of fresh field mushrooms. It is quite a light, delicate wine but has intense flavours, lovely balance and good length. Drinking well now.

1985 Deep ruby colour, spicy, perfumed aromas and intense, youthful, rich, round, cherry fruit on the palate and nuances of charr oak. It is a soft, well-balanced and stylish wine with a pleasing mouth-feel and good length.

Bouquets from Overseas

Which? Wine Monthly, an independent British newsletter produced for the Association for Consumer Research comments on the 1985 Moss Wood Pinot Noir:

This wine is much more delicate than the 1985 Montrose Pinot (from Mudgee): soft, with jammy fruit, lovely strawberry flavours, and without the bitterness of some New World Pinot Noirs. It works.

It's worth repeating *Decanter Magazine's* views on Moss Wood Pinot Noirs, especially in view of their comment on the 1986 wine:

A wine that has technically developed over recent vintages, and now ranks as one of the best of its kind in Australia. Big, ripe, strawberries aroma, lovely berry character, and can also show a touch of blackberries. Muted wood. Soft, ripe flavour, lightly sweet but firm. Attractive, balanced almost earthy finish, that also shows some wood spice and smokey characters. Back the 1986 to last at least fifteen years.

The Medical Observer claims poetic licence in reviewing Moss Wood as a doctor's vineyard because of its previous association with Bill Pannell and because Keith's father is a surgeon and Clare was a nurse. They do, however, praise the 1987 Moss Wood Semillon thus:

The colour is light straw, the bouquet is very forward with rich fruit-salad characters... the palate is clean and crisp, dry, and with a slight oiliness, but still with the underlying theme of fruit salad and a touch of vegetable spiciness.

The reviewer comments on the wine's herbaceous characters, praises its balance and, while recommending it for summer drinking, cautions that it should be drunk cool not stone cold.

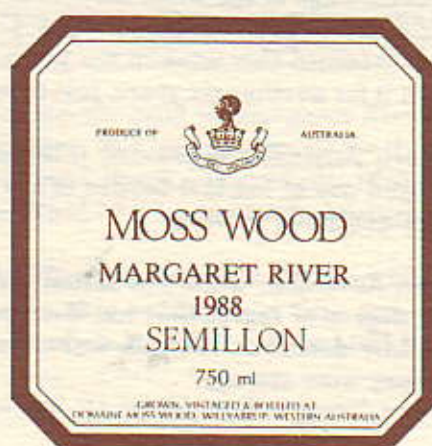
Robert Hughes, the ex-patriate Australian art critic and author of the monumental best-selling history of convicts in Australia, *The Fatal Shore*, was guest of the United Oxford and Cambridge University Club at a Bicentenary Celebration Dinner in March. The Australian white chosen for the occasion was the 1986 Moss Wood Semillon. History doesn't record the great man's reaction to the wine. Those of us who know would expect he suffered a twinge of nostalgia for or pride in his homeland.

New Release: The 1988 Moss Wood Semillon

A consistently wet spring which balanced the preceding dry winter of 1987 and boosted the soil moisture was followed by a mild growing season which saw the grapes ripen quickly and picking begin in the first week in February. Although down on the usual yield for Semillon, the vintage produced grapes of very good quality which were rich and ripe rather than herbaceous.

There were no problems with fermentation which proceeded cleanly and well. The result is a wine which is consistent with the Moss Wood style with its fruit characters having overtones of figs and honey. The herbaceous qualities, typical of this variety in the Margaret River region, are present but do not dominate the wine. Keith believes that the wine shows the the rich characters of the 1988 vintage on the palate. It has good fruit flavour, soft acid, a big structure, considerable length and the capacity to age well.

Keith sees it as similar to the 1986 wine and a typical Semillon for the vineyard. The only disappointment with the wine has been the low yield; down from 2,000 gallons for the 1987 bumper crop to 1250 gallons - or 20% below the normal yield for the Semillon crop.



The 1988 Moss Wood Semillon is a crisp, clean wine that is full of flavour. It has a fresh, aromatic bouquet, is soft and round on the palate, beautifully balanced, has rich, ripe, herbaceous fruit and considerable length. Although the wine will be delicious drinking now or over the summer months, it has the structure, fruit and track record to develop greater complexity over the next ten years.

Yet more Bouquets...

Several magazines have commented on the Moss Wood Semillon in recent months with *Decanter* publisher, Tony Lord, making the following comment in discussing his best wines of 1987:

Australia has a grape variety that is yielding some superb and, as yet, largely undiscovered wines: Semillon. The variety is best known in dry white Bordeaux wines and Sauternes. In Australia, it seems to have 'mutated' for it behaves more like a Loire wine becoming deeper and more honeyed with time in bottle while being full and fruity when young, with a distinctive uplifted herbaceous character, a sort of wild hedgerows aroma.

Two very fine examples come from Geoff Merrill, one of Australia's star young winemakers based in South Australia, and the unassuming, yet highly talented Keith Mugford at his Moss Wood vineyard in the Margaret River region of Western Australia.

Wine Magazine from the UK featured an article by Robert Joseph entitled 'White Magic' in their August 1988 edition. Joseph examines some of the best Australian white wines:

Moss Wood Semillon

Great wooded (and, to my mind, even better unwooded) dry Semillon from the cool vineyards of the Margaret River.

The May edition of the same magazine included two vintages of the Moss Wood Wood Matured Semillon in their Best Buys for the month, both with the top three star rating.

1986 Moss Wood Semillon

Vanilla nose followed by fat, buttery oaky flavours with lasting fruit.

1985 Moss Wood Semillon

Rice pudding scent; rich, soft, rather opulent - peachy fruit balances out oak.

Readers' Comments

Stephen Yates of Bundoora, Victoria writes to place Moss Wood (rightfully) with the Gods.

Earlier this year, some friends and I took part in a wine tasting dinner which included 1971 Mouton Rothschild, 1971 Haut Brion, 1981 Margaux, 1984 Latour, 1977 Grange, 1982 Mount Mary, 1980 Yarra Yering and 1982 Moss Wood.

The unanimous choice as wines of the night were the '71 Mouton and the '82 Moss Wood.

Paul Tumminello of Epping in New South Wales writes:

I have recently consumed the 1981 Cabernet and the 1979 Pinot. I found the '81 Cabernet to be rich in fruit, firm but with restrained tannins, a wine with a fine backbone and a long life ahead. On the night, I pointed it 18.2.

I found the 1979 Pinot to be magnificent, still retaining some primary Pinot characteristics. A guest when questioned on the possible age of the wine, thought it to be three to no more than five years old.

I have, over the years, steadily consumed this wine to the point where I am down to my last bottle but have vowed not to touch it for another six years, just to see what it will be like.

Ron Ellard of Booragoon in Western Australia expressed interest in the readers' comments and indicated that he had recently enjoyed one of his last bottles of the 1982 Moss Wood Pinot Noir. He was particularly impressed with the quality of its fruit.

Brian Ray of City Beach in Western Australia, while not actually recanting his comments published in the last newsletter, expressed a degree of regret that his 'first ever less than rave comment about Moss Wood' was placed in the public domain. He was warm in praise of Phil Bapty's 'positive reminder to address the task of proper wine storage.'



Become a Friend

Members of the public are invited to become friends of the Margaret River Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association.

Membership rewards you with a bi-monthly newsletter, organised tutored tastings, assisted visits to vineyards and wineries and a calendar of events throughout the year.

Contact the Executive Officer, Ricky Coates
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Visiting the Winery

Because of the relatively small volume of wine produced, there is no cellar door facility provided for the general public and visits to the winery are by appointment only.

However, people on the mailing list or those interested in wine who wish to see over the winery and/or to taste the current Moss Wood releases, are welcome.

Contact Keith or Clare beforehand to make arrangements if you wish to visit.