



MOSS WOOD
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Moss Wood 2007 Chardonnay



The 2007 vintage for chardonnay at Moss Wood was notable as the earliest on record – with the median harvest date of 10th February, ahead of 1988 which took place two days later.

In 2007, this was caused by an early budburst and a slightly shorter growing season than usual. Ripening normally takes place over a hundred days but only took 98 days leading up to the 2007 chardonnay harvest. Importantly, this took place evenly over all the chardonnay blocks. The vintage also produced a record 21 tonne crop. The previous largest was

18 tonnes in 1991 and which is probably the genuine record because this occurred without the inclusion of grapes from the School Fees Block (planted in 1995), which contributed nine tonnes to the 2007 total.

The quantity of chardonnay produced at Moss Wood varies enormously from year to year, as a glance at the Chardonnay Vintage Chart shows. The variety is sensitive to poor weather conditions at flowering and Moss Wood often experiences tricky conditions in spring with flowering being disrupted by rain, with wind damaging the vines and affecting photosynthesis and with hail. The cool, wet spring leading to the 2006 vintage had such a negative impact that the yield from the Moss Wood vineyard was reduced to 8.4 tonnes of chardonnay. Fortunately, the quality of the 2006 Chardonnay justified the agony of such skinny yields.

In 2007, the consistently warm ripening season saw a burst of heat around Australia Day which brought harvest forward with a rush. Fortunately, the vines were in

great shape with no disease or moisture stress so the fruit was in good condition.

The method by which the wine was made is that traditionally used at Moss Wood. The grapes are hand picked, destemmed and then pressed. The juice was then chilled and settled for a couple of days before fermentation was begun with pure yeast culture. After 48 hours, the fermenting must was racked into 100% new French barriques where it completed the primary fermentation. The usual coopers – Remond, Rousseau, Cadus and Seguin Moreau – were used. There was a continuation of the policy, introduced last year, of only stirring the lees once a week until the malolactic fermentation. As expected, Keith felt that this enhanced the wine's fruit freshness.

The wine was then inoculated and about 30% went through the malolactic fermentation. After that the wine was racked into tank, adjusted for acidity and sulphur dioxide, and returned to barrels on its lees until January this year. It was racked from

barrel, checked, fined with bentonite for protein stability and isinglass for tannins, cold stabilised, and then sterile filtered and bottled. This leads to our final point on the vagaries of chardonnay yields. Altogether, just 1315 dozen of the 2007 came down the bottling line: well up from the previous year's 380.

Keith loves its floral aromatics and cashew note, melon, peach and grapefruit flavours with honeysuckle lift and some nut, linseed oil, smoked oyster, malt and creme brulee complexities. He sees the wine as voluptuous with pretty aromas and flavours, vibrant on the palate, full-bodied and with good length and the tannins sitting well across the mid-palate and finish. It delivers intensity of flavour with the balanced natural acidity to cellar well. Keith feels that there is ten years plus in the bottles that are well-cellared (away from light at a constant temperature, preferably below 16°C).

Peter Forrestal likened the 2007 to that from the previous vintage in quality terms and believes that the new-look >

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Moss Wood Chardonnays are more appealing on release – at least in 2006 and 2007 – than they were in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Those vintages looked tight, lean and austere on release but have developed plumpness and complexity even with a short time in the bottle. The Moss Wood 2007 Chardonnay is aromatic – with a hint of florals, grapefruit and orange zest –

and intensely flavoured with grapefruit, melon characters and hints of cashew. It is opulent, deeply concentrated and powerful with a creamy, even fleshy, texture and persistent, pure flavours that linger on a placid, even finish. It's delicious drinking now but will improve with short-term cellaring and will still drink well at ten years of age. ■

Moss Wood Chardonnay Vintage Chart

VINTAGE	HARVEST DATE	° BEAUME	YIELD (TONNES /HA)	VINTAGE RATING
2007	10 Feb	13.0	9.88	9
2006	18 Mar	12.8	3.95	10
2005	22 Feb	13.0	6.12	9
2004	23 Feb	12.7	7.72	9
2003	25 Feb	13.3	5.85	8
2002	04 Mar	13.7	2.89	10
2001	15 Feb	13.4	8.01	8
2000	1 Mar	13.4	8.27	6
1999	3 Mar	13.4	7.99	8
1998	5 Mar	14.1	6.48	8
1997	7 Mar	13.6	4.06	7
1996	20 Feb	13.2	9.62	8
1995	17 Feb	13.7	8.15	9
1994	28 Feb	13.6	9.3	8
1993	4 Mar	13.6	10.59	8
1992	27 Feb	13.5	6.58	8
1991	25 Mar	12.8	13.33	7
1990	6 Mar	12.9	7.44	10
1989	20 Feb	12.9	5.32	6
1988	12 Feb	12.5	3.91	7
1987	24 Feb	12.9	3.69	7
1986	26 Feb	12.9	5.03	7
1985	22 Feb	12.5	5.5	8
1984	29 Feb	13.1	4.17	9
1983	18 Feb	12.6	6.42	7



Alex Coultas doing netting

The 2006 Ribbon Vale Reds

The 2006 vintage will be a surprise packet for those followers of Moss Wood who refuse to be distracted by the negative publicity the vintage has received and are prepared to take Keith's advice and try the wine.

'There are reasons to be cheerful' he says. The vintage was unusual for the region as it was long, cool and late. In fact, in 2006 there was 124 days between the flowering and the harvest of the cabernet grapes while a year later that interval was only 110 days. Consequently, the whole season started about two weeks late.

We have noted before that ripening of the grapes, in addition to the accumulation of sugar in the berries, involves changes to the fruit character. The most important change is the loss of the unwanted green notes of leaf and grass and their replacement by the dark fruit aromas of mulberry and redcurrant. This process is complex and driven by a number of things but one of the key drivers is high temperature. In summary, hours with the temperature above 32°C are crucial in driving out green flavours. The unwanted characters remain if there are insufficient hours above 32°C in a season. To give an example of how this can influence wine style, the great vintage of 2001 had

57 hours in that range, the warm year of 2003 had 67 hours, while the 2002 had only 22 hours.

Temperature data confirmed what the Moss Wood team believed that the 2006 vintage deserved to be ranked above 2002 for all its wines. The reds, in particular, are better because there was more hot weather (twice as many hours over 32°C) in the growing season leading to the 2006 harvest. In fact, the 45 hours above 32°C that 2006 experienced is just behind the 48 hours of the very highly regarded 1999. So while this was a challenging vintage, it presented no difficulties at Moss Wood.

Having looked at the temperature data in mid-January, the decision was made to leaf pluck aggressively in the Moss Wood and Ribbon Vale vineyards – to give the vines the best possible opportunity to ripen the grapes. It's worth noting that cool seasons do not affect cabernet franc at Ribbon Vale as it achieves full ripeness without any problems. Merlot, too, is at its best in cool vintages in Wilyabrup.

Production of the Ribbon Vale reds follows the traditional Moss Wood approach. The grapes were handpicked, destemmed into open tanks, hand-plunged three times a day for extraction with the time on skins set according to taste. In this case, the Cabernet



Sauvignon was left on skins for 17 days and the Merlot for only 12 days. After pressing, the components were racked to barrel for the malolactic fermentation. Upon completion they were racked into tank, blended and then returned to barrel until January 2008. Extensive trials suggested that the wines would not be improved by fining and so they were sterile-filtered and bottled at the end of January. They were aged in French oak - 35% of which was new (Remond for the Cabernet Merlot and Rousseau and Remond for the Merlot).

Keith describes the Moss Wood 2006 Ribbon Vale Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot as having ripe, red-currant, vanilla and smoky, tarry aromas with red berry flavours made more complex by leathery, earthy, tarry notes. He sees the palate as having generous sweet red fruits, filled out across the middle with blueberries and mulberries, pleasing richness and concentration, ripe tannin structure and smoky oak to finish.

Wine writer, Peter Forrestal describes the wine as fragrantly fruity with ripe redcurrant and blackberry

flavours, neatly integrated with restrained cedary oak and some Christmas cake complexity, before balanced yet firm, fine tannins to finish. It is fresh, clean, juicy and vibrant with pleasing generosity and a viscous, almost velvety texture. It will improve with short-term cellaring and age well over the next five to seven years.

Moss Wood 2006 Ribbon Vale Vineyard Merlot is described by Keith as having violets and dark fruits aromas, a depth of mulberry, blueberry, earthy beetroot and rhubarb flavours with smoky, cedary oak in the background, and ripe tannins to finish. He sees the sweet dark fruits as giving a supple, smooth texture and comments that the oak is more overt on the palate than on the nose - at this stage of the wine's development.

Like Keith, Peter Forrestal prefers the Cab Merlot to the Merlot but is still impressed by the latter's vanilla bean and mulberry aromas, ripe sweet fruit, depth and generosity of spicy plummy flavours, smooth texture and firm yet balanced finish. He comments that the wine is fully ripe and is deliciously drinkable. ■

The Katnook Merlot Mastery

As Moss Wood's Ribbon Vale Vineyard Merlot was included in the line-up for Katnook's International Merlot Mastery, Keith Mugford was happy to attend as a representative of the winery.

He is most appreciative of Katnook for organising the tasting and for their hospitality. Held in Melbourne, the tasting featured vertical lineups of Katnook and Vieux-Chateau-Certain and merlot or merlot blends from Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Chile, and the Bordeaux appellation of Pomerol.

Keith particularly liked the Craggy Range 'Sophia' from New Zealand which has a significant percentage of cabernet franc in the blend. He feels it was no surprise that the leading wines were blends, rather than varietals with significant percentages of cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon and suggests that this needs to be the way of the future in Australia - and at Moss Wood.

Keith also believes that there is a need to review urgently the clones grown at present in Australia and points to the ground-breaking work done by Yalumba on clonal selection of merlot. Viticulturally, there appears to be more careful treatment of merlot with growers needing

to avoid high yields and to allow for appropriate fruit exposure.

Wines in the tasting

- 1987 Katnook Coonawarra
- 1997 Katnook Coonawarra
- 2000 Katnook Coonawarra
- 2005 Katnook Coonawarra
- 1996 Vieux-Chateau-Certain (Pomerol)
- 1999 Vieux-Chateau-Certain (Pomerol)
- 2001 Vieux-Chateau-Certain (Pomerol)
- 2005 Chateau Gazin (Pomerol)
- 2005 Chateau La Conseillante (Pomerol)
- 2005 Chateau La Fleur de Gay (Pomerol)
- 2005 Concha Y Toro 'Marques de Casa Concha' (Chile)
- 2005 Concha Y Toro 'Casillero del Diablo' (Chile)
- 2006 Concha Y Toro 'Casa La Lapostelle' (Colchagua Valley, Chile)
- 2004 Duckhorn 'Three Palms' Merlot (Napa Valley)
- 2004 Long Shadows Pedestal (Colombia Valley, Oregon)
- 2005 Brands Merlot (Coonawarra)
- 2004 James Irvine Grand Merlot (Eden Valley)
- 2005 Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard Merlot (Margaret River)
- 2004 Craggy Range 'Sophia' (Hawkes Bay)

The 2008 Vintage at Moss Wood

Pinot noir and chardonnay are now both safely in the winery for 2008 and we have started to form some impressions of the quality of the vintage. The January and February weather has been just about perfect – sustained warm weather, with no rain and therefore no vine disease. Pests have not been a problem either, although the birds have been hungry and damaged some small areas before the nets were applied. Not unexpectedly yields in both varieties are down, a product of poor flowering conditions in October last year. Pinot noir cropped at 4.23 t/ha, which is below the average of 5.08 t/ha achieved since the strict crop thinning regime began in 2002. The amusing thing is that it cropped at this level without any effort on our part. Chardonnay

yielded 5.36 t/ha, down around 21% on the long term average of 6.81 t/ha. This goes to show that vines do not enjoy rain, wind and hail when they are flowering.

We picked the early varieties at slightly higher ripeness than average. This is the result of having to wait for full seed and flavour maturity and so it promises to be a rich year. The aromas may be more restrained than the lively fruit fragrances of 2007 but the 2008 wines will have long, generous palates.

When we went to print, all the other varieties are expected to be down in volume but should ripen in similar fashion to the pinot and chardonnay and all show promising flavours at this early stage. ■

Bulletin Board

Angie Bussell is finding that looking after Pia Violet is so easy that she's returned from maternity leave for two days a week. The team are delighted to have her back and she will be sharing the Host and Logistics Officer's job with Amanda Chellew, the new full-time incumbent. ■

Amanda Chellew

Speaking of Amanda Chellew – we have high hopes for her. Since the departure of Ian Bell, the newsletter has struggled to hit the high notes that the fleshing out of Ian's life gave us. We're hoping that Amanda will fill that void.

Amanda is a local (West Australian) who was educated in Perth where her parents still live. To say she has a rich and varied life-to-date would be an understatement. A swimming champ while she was growing up, Amanda became qualified in the areas of health and fitness and worked for four years as a personal trainer. She travelled for three years and worked in Brisbane and at Airlie Beach in Queensland. The time spent with a cruise boat operator gave her perks like helicopter rides and scuba diving opportunities. Never a dull moment.

She and her partner returned to WA to live in Margaret River where they are building their own place at Gracetown. She worked in cellar door sales at Vasse Felix before taking on more responsibility in her current job as Host and Logistics Officer. By the way, because it's that time of the year, we note that Amanda has done the Rottneest Channel Swim. Maybe there'll be a winery team entering next year, although Josh Bahen may not be a starter. He has done it so many times he's just about lost count. ■

The vintage lads

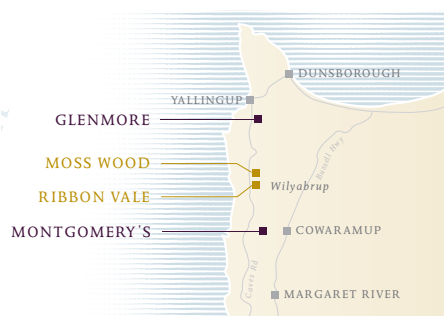
We welcome two new staff members to our team for vintage: both hail from the wilds of the Eastern States. Jacob Stein, from Mudgee in NSW, is a winemaking graduate of Charles Sturt University at Wagga and Duncan Lloyd, a final year winemaking student from Adelaide University. Here's an amusing twist. It turns out, Duncan and Keith share some things in common – both are McLaren Vale boys who completed their schooling at McLaren Vale Primary and then Westminster School in Adelaide, although they did this some 30 years apart! Hard to believe. ■



Amanda Chellew



Jacob Stein



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