

Moss



Wood

Newsletter

No. 7

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The 1988 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1988 vintage followed the dry winter of 1987, a cool and wet period during spring and summer and a warm February which brought the vines on quickly. Picking began for the Chardonnay on the 14th of February. The warm weather meant that the normal two week gap between picking Chardonnay and Semillon was reduced to one week. The cool, wet growing season had boosted the soil moisture so that the hot ripening weather in February did not cause any stress to the vines.

The vintage produced good quality grapes with crisp fruit characters and the liveliest white wines at Moss Wood since 1984.

The Chardonnay went through its primary and malolactic fermentation in oak and was bottled just before Christmas after nine months on its yeast lees. Keith regards the crisp 1988 wine as having greater freshness, being in better balance and hence more complete than any he has made since 1984.



The 1988 Moss Wood Chardonnay is an outstanding wine. It is huge, with perfumed fruit aromas reminiscent of apples and tropical fruit and nuances of nutty oak. The 1988 Chardonnay fills the palate with excellent rich, ripe peachy fruit, obvious lees character and huge buttery oak flavours. It has fresh, crisp acidity, a lovely mouth feel, a tight structure and considerable length.

This wine is so tantalisingly approachable that far too much of it will be consumed long before it reaches its peak. Keith sees it as a wine in two stages; the first, when it is young with its delicious, mouth-filling fruit given a lift by its oak characters; the second, after three years when it has had the benefit of bottle age to allow it to meld together and develop complexity and elegance.

In making the wine, Keith Mugford has attempted to highlight the depth of rich fruit. He sees the ability to achieve good fruit character as what the Margaret River region does best.

The 1988 Moss Wood wood matured Semillon

Many consumers have come to enjoy the influence of wood in their white wines as a result of the oak treatment of Chardonnay. In response to this demand, the Moss Wood wood matured Semillon has been produced since 1982.

The experience at Moss Wood has been that the oak influence has not detracted from the Semillon fruit, rather it has created a distinctive wine. The herbaceous characters so typical of this variety in the region are more subdued on the wood matured Semillon than on its unwooded twin while the wood matured wine tends to be sweeter with greater length on the palate.

The yield for Semillon was down by about 20% on the bumper crop of 1987, but the wine is quite herbaceous reminiscent of the 1985 Semillon. It was fermented in stainless steel and aged for fourteen weeks in barrel. Two-thirds of this Wood Matured Semillon was aged in new oak with the other one-third being kept in stainless steel as fresh material for back blending to give the wine lift.

Keith sees the 1988 Moss Wood wood matured Semillon as typical of the style which has evolved at the winery. It has lively, fruit characters, a touch of grassiness with the oak aromas dominating the nose at present. The palate has good acidity and fresh, rich flavours reminiscent of apples, lemons and other citrus fruits as well as traces of honey from the wood aged treatment. The wine is clean and, in Keith's view, less tannic than the 1986 or 1987 wood matured Semillons.



The 1989 Vintage at Moss Wood

The current vintage promises to be another good one for the Margaret River region. A wet winter saw the average rainfall recorded for the first time in the ten years which Keith and Clare have spent at Moss Wood. The average rainfall for Margaret River is 44 inches and yet the ten year average (1979 - 1988) is only 37 inches.

The soil and moisture were in excellent condition following the wet winter and a mild, wet spring. Effective summer rainfall settled the dust and gave promise of a substantial crop. Unfortunately, the rain-bearing weather patterns brought strong winds and significant losses resulted. The balance of the good growing conditions and the wind damage meant that an average crop has been recorded. The Pinot Noir and the Cabernet Sauvignon suffered least because the former is well sheltered and the latter is late flowering.

The warm weather held until the end of January and was replaced by cooler temperatures and four inches of rain in February. In any case, picking would not have begun until February 28th because of a late bud burst, but was further delayed by the rain and cool weather. Fortunately, minimal damage has been caused by the delaying weather and only the Semillon has been affected. In fact, the Cabernet which sometimes suffers from the dry summer conditions has benefited from the rain.

This looks like being a record late season for Moss Wood, being later than the 1981. Keith says that they've never been so prepared for vintage.

Encouraging the Malolactic Fermentation

Wines undergo two fermentations: the alcoholic fermentation which turns the sugar in grapes into alcohol and thus makes grape juice wine; and the malolactic fermentation which the bacteria in the wine turn the harsh malic acid into softer lactic acid. This second fermentation reduces the acid level of the wine making it less fruity yet softer and rounder.

The characters which result from the malolactic enhance the wine by giving it greater complexity and extra nuances of flavour. It is common to encourage the malolactic in red wines but it is often prevented or arrested in white wines because of the way in which it reduces the freshness of the fruit character on the nose and the palate. A noticeable exception to this practice occurs with the great white Burgundies where the malolactic is used to give the wines increased complexity.

The malolactic fermentation can cause substantial problems in wineries where it is not properly supervised. It can damage wines by imparting hydrogen sulfide or mousey characters to the wine and by reducing acidity and causing the wine to taste flabby. Consequently, winemakers disagree about whether to prevent, allow a partial or full malolactic.

The experience at Moss Wood has been that allowing the wines to undergo the complete malolactic fermentation gives complexities which improve the quality of the wine.

This was first done with the 1984 Moss Wood Chardonnay in an attempt to gain more complexity through lees contact. As the yeast lees are a good vehicle for the malolactic bacteria to get started, the malolactic begins during or shortly after the primary yeast fermentation.

Keith Mugford believes that Australian winemakers need to be careful in encouraging the malolactic fermentation in white wines as the levels of acidity here are not as great as those in Europe. There is not the same need to ameliorate the high levels of acid as there is in Europe and there are associated problems reducing the level of acid in wine.

For example, when there is an excessive reduction in the level of acidity, secondary spoilage organisms are able to grow. These would not survive in wine at normal acid levels. Every care is therefore taken at Moss Wood to see that the wines do not suffer from the potential hazards of undergoing a malolactic fermentation.

In an area as young as Margaret River, the winemakers still have much to learn about the ways of viticulture and viniculture which are best suited to the region. In seeking to enhance the complexity of the Moss Wood Chardonnay through allowing his wines to undergo the malolactic fermentation and to spend and to have an extended period of lees maturation, Keith Mugford is playing his part in expanding knowledge of viniculture in the Margaret River district and providing the market with a top quality Australian Chardonnay.

New Staff in the Vineyard

Keith and Clare have been delighted to welcome two full time members to the staff of Moss Wood for 1989. They are vineyard manager, Ian Bell, and cellarman, Tom Ranford.

Ian Bell, a qualified viticulturist, is a recent graduate of Roseworth College. He is from the local area and studied at Wesley College in Perth and the Harvey Agricultural High School before accepting a job pruning at Moss Wood in 1985. Following this, he was offered a full-time job working in the vineyard at Moss Wood in 1986 before deciding to study viticulture at Roseworthy in 1987 and 1988.

Tom Ranford, alias 'William the Concreter' because of his skills with the trowel and wet cement, will work as vineyard foreman and cellarman, comes from Bunnythorpe in New Zealand. He has worked in many parts of Australia for the past ten years, specialising in orchard work and running heavy machinery. Tom spent much of 1988 working at Moss Wood and the vineyard was in his capable hands while Keith and Clare were away in December.

In Brief

Ex-President Keith

Keith Mugford has just stepped down after two terms as President of Margaret River Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association. The position has been filled by Erl Happ, the talented potter and vigneron from Happ's Winery.

Keith is full of praise for the work of the Association's first Executive Officer, Ricky Coates, who has resigned after two years valuable service. She has been replaced by April Jenkins who takes up her duties in May. (The Association's Newsletter couldn't resist the obvious pun.)

Becoming a Friend

Members of the public are invited to become friends of the Margaret River Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association. Membership includes a bi-monthly newsletter, organised tutored tastings, assisted visits to vineyards and wineries and a calendar of events throughout the year.

To become a friend of the Margaret River Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association (annual subscription \$25), contact the Executive Officer:

April Jenkins
PO Box 204
MARGARET RIVER WA 6285

Office address: 135 Bussell Highway,
Margaret River.
Phone: (097) 572 866

A Moss Wood Dinner at the 1885

One of the activities promoted by the Association is a series of annual Winemaker's Dinners held at the outstanding local restaurant, 1885. These are held on Friday evenings just after vintage with each one focussing attention on a particular winery, providing the public with an opportunity to taste the current release wines accompanied by excellent food. While it would be too late for this year's Moss Wood dinner, you might like to contact the 1885 Restaurant on (097) 57 2302 or the Margaret River Grape Growers and Wine Producers Association so that you can be informed about next year's dinner.

The 1885 Restaurant is highly recommended for dinner if you are visiting the Margaret River area.

The 1984 Moss Wood Chardonnay

The 1984 Moss Wood Chardonnay was voted top wine in the annual Cullen's Chardonnay Tasting held last October at their Margaret River winery. This was a comparative tasting of twenty 1984 Chardonnays from around the world: six from California, five from Burgundy, five from other Australian states and four from Margaret River. The 1984 Moss Wood was ranked first by consumers and second by the industry panel in a tasting which saw Margaret River wines fill three of the top five places - with Cullens (second) and Chateau Xanadu (fifth).

Third in the tasting was the 1984 Tyrell's Vat 47 which subsequently won four trophies at the National Wine Show in Canberra.

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.

