



# MOSS WOOD

## MARGARET RIVER

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# SPRING NEWS

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 70 OCTOBER 2009

## Tales of the 2009 Vintage for Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc

We can look back at the 2008/09 growing season and feel very comfortable with the results. Mother Nature was generally kind to us, providing near perfect conditions for vine growth and grape ripening. A particular highlight were the warm but moderate temperatures, where we experienced more hours in the effective range for grapevines than in any season for the last 10 years. It allowed the fruit to ripen slowly but consistently and we avoided any of the quality threats associated with either extreme heat or cool.

The weather station data provides some interesting insights. During the period

from flowering to harvest, both the Semillon and the Sauvignon Blanc enjoyed almost exactly 1000 hours in the temperature range of 18 to 28 Celsius. In a cool season like 2006 they will receive between 600 and 700 hours and on average, they receive around 900, so this year they spent many hours in the right range to ripen grapes. Extreme temperatures were also avoided and both varieties experienced a total of only 20 hours above 30C during the same period. This compares with the average of around 47 hours, so the vines suffered no extreme heat stress.

During the last few days of February we had a rain event that delivered 24mm and was just enough to worry us. The vines pick up the freshly-available soil moisture, causing the grapes to swell, sometimes diluting the sugar and in the worst case, splitting, which permits the development of fungal diseases like Botrytis. Semillon has a soft skin and is prone to the latter so we monitored both Moss Wood

and Ribbon Vale blocks very closely. Fortunately both coped well with virtually no damage. Sauvignon Blanc also swells but its biggest concern is dilution, not disease. We feel the quality of the 2003 vintage was diminished by a similar event and have been wary ever since. In 2009 we didn't see the same problem and suspect this year's lower yield was the key.

In the end, the rain washed off the dust and generally freshened the vines up, so it was all good.

In terms of the actual length of the season, as usual, things varied between varieties.

The Old Block Semillon at Moss Wood ripened a little faster, taking 96 days to go from flowering to harvest, compared with its average of 110. However, it was harvested on 10th March, only three days earlier than the average harvest date of 13th March. It may come as no surprise to learn it flowered 12 days later than average.

At Ribbon Vale, the Sauvignon Blanc took 90 days to get from flowering to harvest which was virtually spot on the average of 92 days. Similarly, its harvest date was 7th March compared with its long term average of 6th March. The Semillon needed 114 days to get from flowering to harvest compared to the average of 115 days and its



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harvest date of 20th March was virtually identical to its average of 19th March.

On the down side, yields in 2009 were disappointing. Moss Wood Semillon cropped at 8.24 tonnes per hectare, down 25% from its long term average of 11.01. At Ribbon Vale the Sauvignon Blanc cropped at 7.15 tonnes per hectare, down 34% on its long

term average of 10.79 tonnes per hectare. Things weren't quite so grim in the Semillon. It cropped at 9.64 tonnes per hectare, down 15% from the average of 11.30. If we look at the days taken to go from flowering to harvest, it's possible to see a bright side to these low yields. Each variety was ready to pick earlier than average, despite the mild summer, the smaller crop load ensured we got the harvest in before the arrival of autumn rains.

There appear to be at least two reasons for the poor yields. The biggest impact appears to have been fewer bunches on the vines which were well down on previous years. The vines tried to compensate with slightly above average bunch weights but this did not fully compensate.

Of more interest was how the moist, cool conditions promoted a greater and later than usual hatching of the "Looper" caterpillars.

They are rarely seen in the vineyard but this year we had infestations in vines near native trees. It was fortunate they weren't widespread because they had a particular taste for the young flowers and happily chewed the ends off them. It's difficult to estimate what damage they caused but about 5% of vines were affected and on those, about a quarter of the bunches had been chewed, but not all the berries.

### Hand Harvesting

Given our commitment to tradition and quality, the grapes for all the Moss Wood wines are picked by hand. However, there are mixed views in the wine industry on this subject and it's interesting to consider both sides of the argument.

There is no question that machine harvesting is by far the cheapest method and the vast majority of grapes are picked in this way.

On the down side, there are compromises on quality because the juice can be oxidized or tainted and which will reduce the quality of the finished wine. To try and reduce this problem, most machine harvesting is carried out at night, when lower temperatures slow, if not completely stop, this problem. In addition to efficiency, when dealing with large vineyards, especially in isolated locations, the crop could not be picked without machines because there are not the people available to do the job.

The cost comparison makes interesting reading. The rate at which a machine can operate will depend on numerous factors – machine type, trellis type, yield and operator proficiency, to name but some. On balance, when picking a moderate crop such as we grow at Moss Wood, a machine would pick around 4000 kilograms per hour, using 5 people. Assuming that the machine is owned by a contractor, they will charge around \$500 to pick those 4000 kilograms. We would generally use 15 pickers plus 4 support staff to pick the same amount with a cost of around \$2000. It would also take between 3 and 4 hours to finish the job. It's easy to see how machines are faster and cheaper.

At Moss Wood the argument does not swing on the economics. We choose to harvest by hand because quality is the outcome we want. Hand-picking is the only way to minimise the







damage to the fruit and therefore ensure the best possible flavours in the finished wines. The first time the fruit begins to juice is when it goes through our equipment at the winery, where we can control the process. It may be more expensive but hand harvesting is the only alternative if quality is the main goal.

### **Moss Wood 2009 Semillon**

**Median Harvest Date –  
10th March 2009**

**Harvest Ripeness –  
12.8 Baume**

**Yield – 8.24 tonnes per  
hectare**

The production technique was as follows. The fruit was destemmed, crushed, passed through the must chiller for cooling to 8C then pumped into the press. The juice was gradually squeezed out with a gentle cycle and racked to stainless steel tanks. The final pressings were kept separate for additional fining before being blended back later in the process.

This is important in reducing the phenolics in the finished wine without stripping too much flavour. After this the juice was settled for 48 hours at 8C and then racked to another stainless steel vessel for fermentation.

This was carried out by a pure yeast culture (V1116) at 16C. Fermentation lasted for 19 days, after which the new wine was racked off its gross lees (fermentation sediment) ready for bottling preparations. Fining trials were carried out and eventually the Semillon was treated with bentonite for protein stability. It was then cold stabilised, sterile filtered and bottled on Monday 29th June, 2009.

### **Tasting notes**

#### ***Colour and condition:***

Medium straw colour;  
bright condition.

***Nose:*** Lively primary fruit aromas consisting of lemon, stewed apple and figs, as well as lifted floral notes like gardenia. Complex notes of mushroom and cheese also stand out.

***Palate:*** This is a full bodied wine, with fresh but well balanced acidity. It displays generous fig and lemon flavours of good weight and length and then a slight tannin finish.

This is a full flavoured white wine, with generous fruit flavours providing attractive early drinking but it is also a very good cellaring prospect. For those with the patience for cellaring, the wine will develop slowly

over the next 10 years, by which time it will show the beginning of a complex, toasty bottle bouquet.

### **Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2009 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc Sauvignon Blanc Harvest Details:**

**Median Harvest Date –  
7th March 2009**

**Harvest Ripeness –  
12.0 Baume**

**Yield – 7.15 tonnes per  
hectare**

The grapes were brought to the winery and destemmed,

crushed and the must was then pumped through the must chiller to bring the temperature down to around 8C and delivered into the press, where they were held for 2 hours. This skin contact helps increase the gooseberry fruit aromas. The must was then pressed and the pressings kept separate for additional fining. The juice was chilled to 8C and settled for 48 hours, after which the clear juice was racked to a stainless steel tank for fermentation. This was carried out by 2 different yeasts, X5 and Vin13, and the temperature was maintained at 14C.



The ferments took 14 days to complete, after which the three batches were racked off gross lees and combined and held in readiness for blending with the Semillon.

#### **Semillon Harvest Details:**

**Median Harvest Date –  
20th March 2009**

**Harvest Ripeness –  
13.5 Baume**

**Yield – 9.64 tonnes per  
hectare**

Handling of the Ribbon Vale Semillon is virtually identical to its Moss Wood counterpart. The fruit was destemmed and crushed and the must was pumped through the must chiller to bring the temperature down to 8C and then delivered into the press. Using low pressure cycles, the juice was slowly extracted and the pressings kept separate for additional fining. Fermentation took 17 days and was carried out with pure yeast culture 1116, with temperature maintained at 16C. Once this was completed, the wine was racked from gross lees and blended with the Sauvignon Blanc.

Once blending was completed, fining trials were carried out and the wine was fined with bentonite for protein stability and isinglass was used to reduce phenolics. The wine was then sterile filtered and bottled on 30th June 2009.

#### **Tasting notes**

**Colour and Condition:**  
Medium straw colour;  
bright condition.

**Nose:** Very fragrant with lifted gooseberry fruit aromas, accompanied by floral notes of apricot and peach blossoms and perfumes reminiscent of jasmine.

**Palate:** It continues the freshness and lift of the nose. The fruit flavours are intense gooseberry and passionfruit and which combine with crisp acidity to give lift and length. The finish is clean with no phenolics.

With its vibrant fruit characters this wine is perfectly suited to early drinking and can be enjoyed as an aperitif on its own or can accompany lightly flavoured dishes.

#### **Moss Wood Margaret River 2007 Pinot Noir**

**Median Harvest Date –  
4th February 2007**

**Harvest Ripeness –  
13.2 Baume**

**Yield – 5.55 tonnes per  
hectare**

In 2007 we had our earliest vintage on record. The Pinot Noir was 19 days earlier than its average harvest date of 23rd February. The curious thing is that the length of the season, measured as days elapsed between flowering and harvest suggest the season was cooler than these dates suggest. The “D4” clone took 93 days to ripen, only 4 less than its average of 97 days. The “D5” clone took 99 days, only one less than its average of 100. Unfortunately we can’t provide any temperature information



because our weather station wasn't working through this period. However, given the grape flavours all the varieties were able to retain and the quality of the resulting wines, we can assume things didn't get excessively hot. The exception, of course, was Australia Day, when the overnight minimum hovered around the low 20's. Not very comfortable for sleeping!

The yields were moderate, with the vineyard production 5.55 tonnes per hectare, slightly below the long term average of 6.42. However, since the 2002 vintage, we have used aggressive crop

thinning to try and maintain a ceiling of 5 tonnes per hectare, so we exceeded that ever so slightly.

For interest sake and to give a pat on the back to clever viticulturists, the average yield on the Pinot Noir vineyard since 2002 is 4.89 tonnes per hectare.

Overall, the season was very pleasing, if somewhat busy at the end when January's hot finish brought the fruit to ripeness fairly rapidly and we had to get things off as quickly as possible. There were no problems with disease and we managed to control the birds using nets, although

they had done some damage in the Old Block and which needed hand sorting.

Once in the winery the fruit was destemmed into small, open fermenters and the juice was pumped over and chilled down to 5C.

The cold soaking continued for 3 days and then each batch was inoculated with pure yeast culture. Fermentation was allowed to proceed at warm temperatures, with the maximum set at 32C and each tank was hand plunged up to 4 times per day. After the wines reached dryness, each batch was tasted daily until tannin balance was achieved and skin contact time varied between batches, from 14 to 17 days. They were pressed and racked to stainless steel tanks. The wine was allowed to settle and was then racked off gross lees into oak barrels, where it underwent malolactic fermentation. All the oak was French and 40% of the barrels were new.

After the secondary fermentation was completed each batch was combined into the finished blend which was then returned to barrel, where it stayed until October 2008, giving it a total of 20 months in cask. It was then racked from barrel and fining trails were carried out. This is done as a matter of routine with each vintage, regardless of whether we have concerns about the wine's taste. Sometimes the finings agents can produce positive, if unexpected, effects but with the 2007 there were no improvements so the wine remained unfinned. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on the 3rd November 2008.

## Tasting notes

**Colour and condition:** Deep ruby hue; bright condition.

**Nose:** A rich, concentrated nose. The fruit aromas are complex combination of strawberries, cherries, beetroot and quince jelly, combined with cinnamon and barbecue spices. In the background are light fragrances of charry, toasty oak.

**Palate:** The palate is an interesting combination of cherry-like dark fruits and plums, mixed with strawberry jam and charry, spicy oak. The mouthfeel is generous with full body and soft, round tannins.

With this structure and generosity of fruit it is a tremendous aging prospect and will develop interesting bottle complexity over the next 10 years and should continue to age well for at least 10 years after that.

## Moss Wood 2008 Amy's

### Montgomery Cabernet Sauvignon

**Median Harvest Date –**  
23rd March 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
13.4 Baume

### Montgomery Malbec

**Median Harvest Date –**  
6th March 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
12.7 Baume

### Montgomery Petit Verdot

**Median Harvest Date –**  
28th March 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
13.8 Baume

### Glenmore Cabernet Sauvignon

**Median Harvest Date –**  
28th March 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
13.9 Baume

### Glenmore Malbec

**Median Harvest Date –**  
29th February 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
13.5 Baume

### Glenmore Merlot

**Median Harvest Date –**  
8th March 2008

**Average Ripeness –**  
12.8 Baume

### Bantry Bay Petit Verdot

**Median Harvest Date –**  
29th March 2009

**Final Blend Average  
Ripeness –**  
13.6 Baume

**Final Blend Makeup –**  
71% Cabernet Sauvignon;  
11% Petit Verdot; 11%  
Malbec; 7% Merlot





We experienced something of an early onset of Autumn in February 2008. Mother Nature delivered cool nights and mild, warm days and the ripening rates for all the varieties slowed to a gentle pace. It is often the case that we are frantic during the harvest of Cabernet varieties, especially if the weather is warm. They represent a large portion of our production and we can be hard pressed to process them all on time. However, in 2008 these

delightful conditions meant we had the luxury of carefully sampling each block and then picking off each section as it ripened. Overall, it's probably the most controlled vintage we've produced, possibly since 1982. This is probably best illustrated by the fact that the overall ripeness came in at a near-perfect 13.6 Baume.

It is also possible to see the results of the mild conditions in the aromas and flavours of the finished wine.

In particular, 2008 is a vintage

of lifted fruit fragrances and beautifully balanced tannins.

Production technique for the Amy's is typical Moss Wood. All batches were destemmed into open fermenters and the juice was seeded with pure yeast culture. Once fermentation was underway, the tanks were hand plunged up to 4 times per day and the temperatures were controlled to a maximum of 30C, in the cap. Once each batch reached dryness it was tasted daily for tannin balance and pressed when the optimum had been reached. Skin contact varied from 10 to 15 days. After pressing the wine was racked to stainless steel tank and allowed to settle before being racked off gross lees and seeded for malolactic fermentation. Once this was completed all batches were racked and combined and then the final blend was returned to barrel.

We use a smaller percentage of new wood in Amy's because we prefer the wine to make a clean fruit statement, rather than showing the complexities of oak. With the 2008 we used 25% new barrels and all were French.

After a total of 15 months, the wine was racked from barrel and prepared for bottling including fining trials. In the end, the wine received a light treatment with skim milk. It was then racked, sterile filtered and bottled.

### Tasting notes

#### *Colour and condition:*

Youthful, deep brick red, in bright condition.

**Nose:** A vibrant nose, with primary fruit aromas of mulberry and red currant from the Cabernet Sauvignon and ripe plum from the Malbec and a jube-like confectionery from the Petit Verdot. In the background there is complexity from charry oak notes, plus touches of leaf, eucalypt and cedar.

**Palate:** Immediately noticeable are generous red and dark fruit flavours that give the palate a juicy feel. There is full body and good texture but tannins are firm and provide backbone and length. The wine then finishes with soft, charry oak flavours.

It is certainly a wine which can be enjoyed when young because the fruit notes are mouth-filling and so we recommend it for early drinking. However, it will also repay short-term cellaring and can be aged for a further five years.

### Moss Wood 2008 Chardonnay

**Median Harvest Date – 15th February 2008**

**Harvest Ripeness – 13.9 Baume**

**Yield – 5.36 tonnes per hectare**

If there is a grape variety in Margaret River that displays the viticultural equivalent of bi-polar disorder, it's probably Chardonnay. This is best illustrated by looking at its responses to our weather conditions and examining the different outcomes we get with yields and wine quality.



Very few consumers would dispute the point that Chardonnay quality in Margaret River has been consistently high, regardless of vintage, since the first wines were released in the early 1980's. However, those same weather conditions that have delivered such consistent quality have also delivered major variations in yield. So much so that it is not uncommon for it to go up or down from one vintage to the next, by 50%.

The culprit is of course our Springtime weather and it is very common to experience wet, windy conditions around Chardonnay flowering time. In the worst years we actually experience hail storms which can quickly turn the 50% reduction to 80%.

So 2008 was one of those years when the Chardonnay decided to have a down year and with a crop of 5.36 tonnes per hectare, it was 41% below its long term average of 9.13. Difficult flowering conditions in Spring 2007 took their toll and we had a significant reduction in bunch weight.

Production of the wine was very much in the Moss Wood tradition. The fruit was whole-bunch pressed and the juice was racked to stainless steel tanks, where it was settled at 12C for 48 hours. Pressings were kept separate, and for additional fining. After settling, the clear juice was then racked to barrel, with 2% solids included for additional complexity, and it was seeded with pure yeast culture 1116 for fermentation.



This was carried out at between 15 and 19 Celsius. All the barrels were new French oak primarily from the Remond, Seguin Moreau and Rousseau cooperages, plus some trial barrels from Damy, and Sylvain.

After ferment completed the wine was left on its fermentation lees and inoculated for the malolactic fermentation and 66% of barrels went through to completion. The wine stayed in oak for 17 months and was then racked to stainless steel tank and prepared for bottling. Fining trials were carried out and the wine was fined with bentonite for protein stability and isinglass to reduce phenolics. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on 24th August 2009.

### **Tasting notes**

#### ***Colour and condition:***

Medium to deep straw colour in bright condition.

***Nose:*** Initially the wine displays Moss Wood's typical fruit aromas of a predominance of melon and peach, with a lime and citrus lift, as well as orange marmalade.

In the background there are interesting complex notes of malt and spice and some butter, toffee and smoked meat from the malolactic fermentation. The oak notes add to the cinnamon-like spiciness and add charry, toasty characters.

***Palate:*** This is a full bodied wine, with lively acidity that gives a cleansing minerality to the palate. The fruit flavours are of limes and peach, and which combine with toffee, cinnamon and there is an almost mushroom or truffle-like earthiness on the finish. The tannins are firm but the texture is smooth and the charry, malt biscuit oak flavours round out the finish.

The fruit freshness and complexity make the wine quite suitable for early consumption. However, for those with patience it is an exciting cellaring prospect indeed. We recently tasted the Moss Wood 1993 Chardonnay and can confirm the aging potential of this wine style. There were two bottles tasted, one slightly more developed than the other but both had developed a classic, complex Chardonnay bottle bouquet of toast and roast nut but had retained good volumes of the primary fruits. The palate had developed generous softness and sweet fruit flavours but showed sufficient freshness and acidity to continue aging well for at another 5 years. This encourages us to recommend the 2008 Chardonnay for a minimum of 10 years cellaring, although it will need at least another 5 years beyond that to reach full complexity.



# Bulletin Board

## Mia Eve Silvestri

Moss Wood's first baby for 2009! Congratulations Kristiina and Mick on the birth of Mia Eve. She was born on the 18th of June, 2009 weighing 2910g and 50cm and at 8 weeks she was 4520g and 57cm. Kristiina says "we are doing fine, Mia is growing fast and she is a very good baby! She smiles a lot and only wakes up once a night." All you can ask for I think. We look forward to Kristiina returning from Maternity leave, if that is what she chooses.

## Farewell to Steve Clarke and Mike Bowles

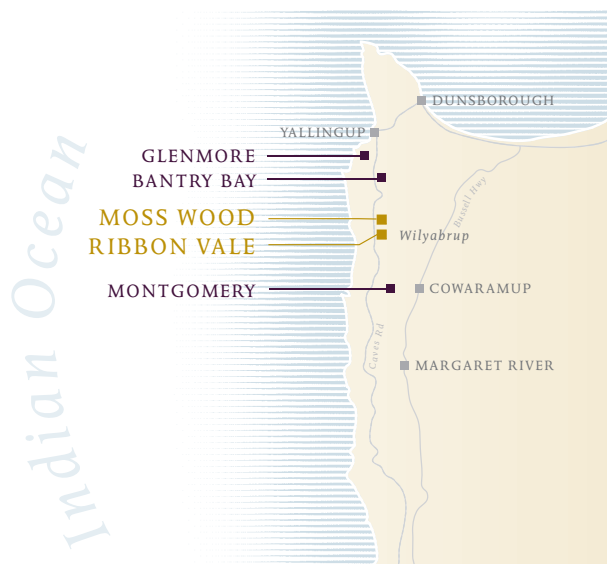
Steve Clarke our Vineyard Manager and Mike Bowles our Finance Manager are on the move. We wish them both well in their pursuits.

**All professional  
photography by  
Frances Andrijich**

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Mia Eve Silvestri



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