



**MOSS WOOD**  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# AUTUMN NEWS

ISSUE 72 MAY 2010

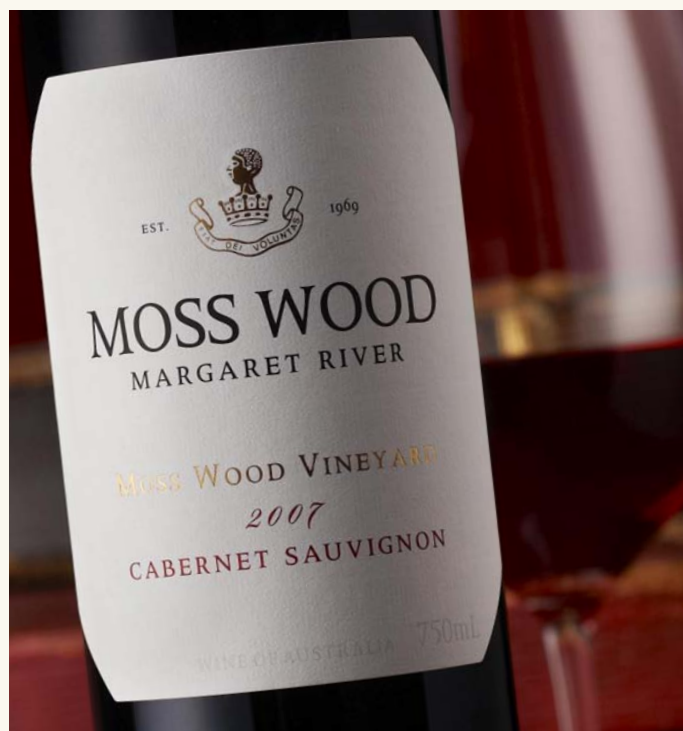
## Moss Wood 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon - is it 1976 Re-visited?

When Keith started at Moss Wood for the 1979 vintage, it was an exciting time in the Margaret River region. Although the wine industry was tiny and very much in its infancy, armed with the scientific backing of Dr. John Gladstones, the new vignerons were filled with optimism about the future. The sky was the limit as far as wine style and quality were concerned and the new producers had a blank canvas upon which to work. Of course, there were many wines from around the world that were seen as benchmarks but the youth of the local industry meant the boundaries were not limited by any historical bias.

This fertile environment fostered numerous discussions with the then owners, Bill and Sandra Pannell, about what style they should pursue for their fledgling wines. It was not uncommon for these to progress outside Moss Wood and there were many robust debates with the other new growers. The wine styles we

now know as typical Margaret River were forged in part by the splendidly argued cases (with thanks to Sir Humphrey Appleby) presented by our neighbours Tom Cullity, David Gregg, and Kevin and Di Cullen among many others. Each producer sought to make a wine of significant quality that could make its way on the world stage and at the same time would be an expression of their vineyards and the region.

At Moss Wood, we put significant effort into developing an appropriate style for each of our varieties but the Cabernet Sauvignon, being the first wine, was our primary focus at the time. Naturally, we looked to the great wines of Bordeaux for inspiration and carefully examined the style of numerous of that region's wines in the search for clues. No doubt you can imagine the sheer drudgery of having to spend hour after hour tasting top quality French wine. These are the



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sacrifices that winemakers have to make! All jokes aside, we were always very much aware that we were making wine in Margaret River and if we wanted to make wines like those of the Medoc, then that's where we should go. Margaret River's individual climate meant it would always be different.

As luck would have it, our initial vintages had seasonal variations that produced a series of quite distinct styles and this gave the opportunity to debate the benefits and drawbacks of each. It is now a

matter of Moss Wood folklore that the vineyard produced what turned out to be three great vintages in a row, 1975, 1976 and 1977 and which became our early benchmarks. The 1975 was admired for its finesse and complexity, the 1976 for its ripe generosity and the 1977 for sharing a bit in common with both its older siblings.

The middle wine produced a curious response. It was by far the ripest of the three and had a luxurious feel. The generosity of fruit, with ripe red currant aromas and flavours, was quite remarkable.

Certainly it was popular with both consumers and critics alike, who especially liked its seamless tannins. This feature caused much discussion about whether it had the right structure to age well. The wine was so supple and drinkable many doubted its cellaring prospects, including the new winemaker. Over the intervening years the doubters were proven wrong and the 1976 developed in the bottle to become one of the vineyard's finest.

It is interesting to consider the ripeness of the 1976. There has been a tendency in recent times, perhaps in response to the production in Australia of some very ripe wines, with alcohol often exceeding 15% alcohol, to look back fondly to earlier times, when good wines were made with lower alcohols. As is often the case, these generalisations are not really true. Despite being made over 30 years ago, the 1976 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon had 14.3% alcohol and was never considered "hot" or "flabby" and went on to develop excellent character after cellaring. Perhaps the key is balance of all features, rather than ripeness alone?

We have since made several vintages that have some commonality with the 1976, most recently the 2004 and 2000, although neither of those were quite of the same quality. However, with the 2007 we believe we have a serious rival.

After the very mild conditions that prevailed in the previous vintage, it was sheer pleasure

to enjoy some consistently warm conditions in 2007. The contrast is quite striking. After being 21 days behind the average harvest date in 2006, the median harvest date for Cabernet Sauvignon was 9th March or 19 days ahead of average. This means our coolest and warmest harvest dates are separated by a whopping 41 days, or effectively 6 weeks. From the winemaker's perspective, there's no doubt about which season we would prefer. So long as we don't get extreme heat, causing quality problems like sunburn, we'll take a warm year, like 2007, anytime.

In fact, when we look at the time taken for the grapes to go from flowering to harvest, it was not as warm a season as its dates suggest. For example, the block we call the "Short Rows" took 114 days to complete this period, only 4 days behind the average of 118, so this suggests the early harvest was as much a product of an early budburst as it was hot days during summer. We can speculate that this shows up in the quality of the wine because it is a finer wine than we would expect in a warm season.

Other aspects of the season were also favourable. There were no problems with disease, the birds were controlled by the application of nets and yields were good.

The warmth of the season meant the vines had ample opportunity to ripen the crop, regardless of yield. However, for the record, Cabernet Sauvignon, at Moss Wood, averages of 7.52 tonnes per hectare and in 2007 the yield was 7.4. Petit Verdot yielded 5.66 tonnes per hectare as compared with its average of 5.88 and Cabernet Franc produced 6.82 tonnes per hectare compared with its long term yield of 6.78.

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## Production Notes

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### Median Harvest Dates:

*Cabernet Sauvignon* –  
9th March, 2007

*Petit Verdot* –  
17th March, 2007

*Cabernet Franc* –  
6th March, 2007

### Harvest Ripeness:

*Cabernet Sauvignon* – 13.8 Be

*Petit Verdot* – 14.3 Be

*Cabernet Franc* – 13.5 Be

With these figures, it's easy to see that all the varieties were fully ripe when picked and this is a further pointer to the wine style. Each one produced its classic and distinct, dark berry notes. The Cabernet Sauvignon has rich red currant notes, the Petit Verdot has bright confectionery notes and the Cabernet Franc is all cherries and summer pudding.

The technique of production was typical for Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon and follows our traditional approach. With each batch the fruit is destemmed

into open, stainless steel fermenters, seeded with a pure yeast culture and allowed to ferment at temperatures up to 30C. Extraction of colour and flavour is by hand plunging up to 4 times per day for the first 72 hours, dropping to once per day by completion of fermentation. Skin contact time varied from 7 to 13 days and each batch was drained and pressed once the correct tannin balance had been achieved.

After pressing, the wine underwent malolactic fermentation in stainless steel tanks and was then racked into barrels. All the casks were 225 litre French oak and 55% were new. Apart from a racking at the end of the first year, the wine stayed in barrel until November 2009 after which it was blended and fining trials were carried out to review tannin balance. After looking at the effect of various agents we decided the wine could not be improved and no fining was carried out. The wine was then sterile filtered and bottled on 21st December 2009.

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## Tasting Notes

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*Colour and condition* – deep brick red hue, in bright condition.

*Nose* – very typical Cabernet Sauvignon fruit aromas. Red currant, mulberry, dark chocolate combine with a background of charry oak, cigar box and spice. It is worth noting the wine's concentration is such that it can take several minutes to unfold. We recommend allowing it to breathe.



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*Palate* – the immediate impression is one of full-bodied, mouth-filling red and blue fruit flavours, giving a luxurious feel. Although the phenolics are firm they are more than balanced by the juicy concentration, so texture is smooth. Length and persistence of the flavours are enhanced by charry oak notes that leave gentle, slightly bituminous tannins on the finish.

*Cellaring* – this is a very attractive and drinkable vintage and it will certainly provide enjoyable early drinking. However, using the 1976 vintage as our example, we strongly recommend that those who have the opportunity to cellar the wine should do so. It will take at least 10 years to develop some bottle age characters

and will probably reach its peak somewhere around 20 years old. However, it should continue to be drinkable up to 30 years old, at least and especially for those bottles under screw cap.

## Vintage 2010

As we go to print, the 2010 vintage is well under way and the conditions have been good this year. Rainfall during spring and early summer was excellent and at the crucial stages of flowering we had, in the main, fine weather. The rain-bearing systems spared us physical damage although some patches in the later ripening varieties were slightly affected by a day of spectacular thunderstorms. Although these did produce some hail storms, luckily for

us, none of them were near Moss Wood.

These conditions were, at times, favourable for the fungal diseases and there were some outbreaks around the region but our spray program was successful in controlling any problems. Most varieties flowered slightly later than average and their development continued that way until the third week of February, reflecting the fact that temperature through December, January and early February remained slightly below average. We did have the odd hot day, the hottest being Sunday 17th January, when the mercury peaked at 39.3C. There have been press reports of losses through sunburn but these were minimal at Moss Wood. However, February

ended with a bang, with a series of days in the mid-thirties, starting on the 23rd and lasting until the 3rd March. This brought the vintage on with a rush and we started with Pinot Noir on the 24th February and had almost reached halfway by the 10th March. At the time of writing, the temperatures have eased and ripening has slowed accordingly and we now expect to finish in early April.

There has been terrific flowering of the Marri trees and it's very interesting to see how much the birds prefer this blossom over the grapes. In a year like this, when the blooms are plentiful, the birds are hardly seen in the vineyard, even when the grapes are fully ripe and easily seen. Yet, as soon as the



# Vintage 2010, Moss Wood's own little UN



Nico Cueva



Moss Wood Cabernet



Vintage 2010



Heading out to pick Moss Wood Cabernet



Jerome (Fr), Clare and Louis



Romain (Fr)



Lida Feist – Gun Picker of 25 years



Louis, Jarod and Hugh



Keith and Clare, Moss Wood Cabernet



Tristan Mugford plunging



Kate Pestell



Frank Barker – Gun Picker (and Chopper)



# Vintage 2010, Moss Wood's own little UN



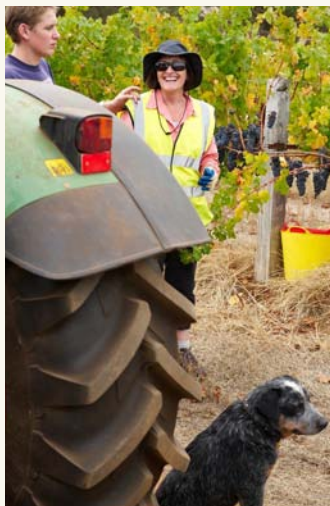
Francesca (Italy) picking Moss Wood Cabernet



Hugh Mugford



Elisa (Italy) picking Moss Wood Cabernet



Hugh, Clare and Chopper



Jerome (Fr), Hugh and Louis (USA)



Clare, Aki and Tomo (Jp)



Hugh and Keith Mugford



Visiting Moss Wood during Vintage



Imogen Mugford



Visiting Moss Wood during Vintage



Hacina (France)



flowering finishes, the birds appear in droves, as happened this year by mid-March.

Fortunately the late damage was minimal and all varieties have been in excellent condition.

The most exciting and worrying part of the season, in equal parts, occurred while we monitored the southward progress of the recent storm that did terrible damage in Perth. Once again, we were lucky and by the time it reached us, all it produced was 5 millimetres of rain and thankfully, no hail. The same cannot be said of Clare's car, which, being driven by our eldest daughter Eloise, got caught in the hail near the University of Western Australia. Very frightening for her and many, many other Perth residents.

These good conditions have led to average, or higher, yields for all varieties although the most crucial thing for us about any vintage is its quality. In 2010, all varieties exhibit excellent fruit aromas, with great intensity, and very well balanced tannins. We hold very high hopes for them.

## The United Nations

Maybe it's a sign that the economic downturn is driving people to look elsewhere for work but whatever the reason, our grape picking team this year is a lively combination of European nationals, such as we've never had before. Accordingly it has been nicknamed the United Nations. Walking around the vineyard, it's possible to hear animated discussion of kite surfing in French, singing of love songs in Italian, or just quiet chatting in German. In fact, there are so many internationals they complain that by travelling with their compatriots, they don't get enough practice speaking English.

The international theme continues in the winery, where we have two Americans helping us, Nicolas Cueva and Louis Dixon. "Nico" is from California, and has a degree in Environmental Science from UCLA. He became interested in wine quite literally by drinking and enjoying it. After working in a wine store

he decided making wine was more interesting than selling it and he began his new career. Most recently he worked at the famous Kosta Browne winery at Sebastopol, in Sonoma County. Having decided it was time to experience the world of wine outside the USA, he chose to come to Australia and in particular Margaret River. His reasons are simple – it's the best place to make wine and go surfing! Perhaps we shouldn't mention that there also seems to be a smorgasbord of girls here as well. Nico has added an incredible level of culinary quality to the lunchroom, where his food choices are well above the norm. His Mexican and family restaurant background means he comes in with all sorts of impeccably presented and exotic choices, all far more interesting than toasted sandwiches!

Louis, a recent convert to the wine industry, hails from Portland, Oregon and has a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering.

His interest in wine evolved through travelling and enjoying wine with friends who have good wine knowledge. Having worked in medical device industry, specialising in pacemakers, he was tempted by a career change. The hands-on work and the opportunity to experience and understand the process, lured him to the wine industry. He was attracted by the chance of being able to work overseas and was drawn to Margaret River by its reputation for high quality wine and the fact that it's coastal and isolated. As a keen snow skier, Louis is determined to master surfing while here and when he's not doing that, he's running several projects, including home brewing beer, very successfully. Dubbed "Ribbon Vale Ale", it is proving a popular choice for the after work beer.



## Temasek Polytechnic

Like most visitors to Singapore, Clare and Keith are always very impressed with that city's hospitality, in terms of both its quantity and quality. As an Asian hub, it's a cultural melting pot, and welcomes all visitors with enthusiasm. With a population nearly the size of Sydney located on a small island, it means a typical visit to Singapore always has a hectic schedule but no matter how busy things may be, the locals make sure their guests are comfortable and well fed. The range and quality of hotels and restaurants is exceptional.

Of course, this quality doesn't happen by chance and Singaporeans work very hard at getting these things right. Their hospitality professionals are very well trained and as a result it's quite likely that you'll find them running large hotels and restaurants right throughout the world. One of the key training institutions is the Temasek Polytechnic which is now aligned with the leading hospitality training campus in the United States of America, the University of Nevada in Las Vegas and the Culinary Institute of America.

In conjunction with our Singapore importer, Hai Choo



*Joel Lim and Amanda Han (Students) at Moses Rock*

Wines and Spirits, we provide a scholarship for students of the Business School at the Temasek Polytechnic. Each year, two students and a staff member from the Diploma in Culinary and Catering Management are selected to come to Moss Wood for a week's work experience during harvest. This year we have Amanda Han and Joel Lim, accompanied by lecturer Daniel Chia and each of them have entered into the Spirit of Vintage, providing willing assistance, from picking grapes to plunging tanks. Since Hospitality, rather than viticulture and winemaking, is their area of interest, they have also looked at the tourism offer in Margaret River as a whole. To that end they have visited other local wineries and restaurants, including Pierro, Cullen, Vasse Felix, Leeuwin Estate, Cape Lodge and Newtown House. Hopefully, when they return to Singapore, they'll be enthusiastic ambassadors for the Margaret River region.

A tradition that has evolved is for the visitors to produce a Singapore meal. This year the highlight was Ma Po Dou Fu, braised bean curd with a spicy sauce, originally from Sichuan in China.

Amanda's reasons for coming to Moss Wood were to see the winemaking process and if she was lucky, some kangaroos. Joel is very keen to get some depth in his understanding of wine. Daniel has visited Australia many times before and is familiar with just about all our major regions but this is his first visit to WA. They have enjoyed the hands-on work and we've really appreciated their efforts in the vineyard and winery. They have departed vowing to come back to work vintage next year, they would be most welcome.



*Daniel Chia (Lecturer) plunging a fermenter*



*The newly married Josh and Jacqui Bahen*

## Cork and Screw Cap Comparison

With all these international visitors working here, we've taken the opportunity to taste a variety of wines with them and perhaps the most interesting was a comparative tasting comparing our earliest bottling using screwcaps, with the same wine under cork. The wines were Moss Wood 2002 Semillon, screwcap and cork; Moss Wood 2002 Chardonnay under screwcap, paired with Moss Wood 2001 Chardonnay under cork (we have no '02 Chardonnay left under cork); Moss Wood 2001 Pinot Noir, screwcap and cork; Moss Wood 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon, screwcap and cork.

All the wines had been cellared under exactly the same conditions, side by side, here at the winery.

The results were as expected, if somewhat disappointing, because of the poor performance of cork. The 2002 Semillon was "corked" and the 2001 Chardonnay, while still nice to drink, was prematurely aged as a result of random oxidation. Although it was not part of a comparative tasting, we tried a bottle of the Moss Wood 1998 "Glenmore Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon, to demonstrate the aging potential of our Amy's wine.

Unfortunately, this was also corked.

We first moved away from corks in 2002 because we had become so frustrated with exactly these sorts of problems and we knew that properly applied screwcaps were a good solution. By that time, they had a track record of being able to successfully close wines for at least 20 years. However, we were not completely sure about how quickly the wines would age, although anecdotal evidence suggested that they would. Tasting these wines has yet again highlighted exactly why we chose to move away from the traditional closure. All of the examples under screw caps had retained good primary fruit aromas but had also begun to develop typical bottle bouquet.

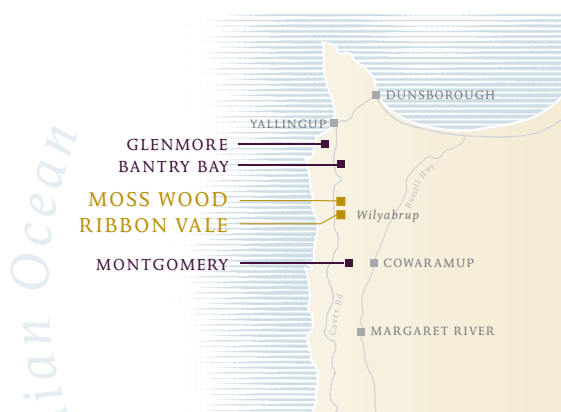
Despite our own concerns about cork, we hasten to add that we understand wine has a long-standing tradition of being sealed by corks and we continue to produce a small percentage of Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon for those customers who prefer this.

## The New Mr. and Mrs. Bahen

Over the years there have been a number of female visitors to Moss Wood who have been quite taken with winemaker Josh Bahen and he's built up something of a following. To our great amusement, he's also accumulated a variety of interesting nicknames, the best of which was the "Lab Spunk", coined by our visiting photographer. However, Josh is a very loyal guy and he finally convinced his girlfriend of many years, Jacqui Goodridge, that they should make things formal. Visitors to Moss Wood may remember the gorgeous Jacqui, who helped us with tastings for some time. The happy couple was married on the 23rd of January and we wish them all the best for their life together.

*Kind regards,*

*Clare and Keith Muggford*



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