



MOSS WOOD  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# SPRING NEWS

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## Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot and Merlot

### Vintage Notes

Looking back at any vintage, it's always interesting to speculate about why the quality and wine style turned out as they did. The first point of reference is, of course, to sit down and recall what the growing season was like, even if the memory can play tricks. At Moss Wood, we felt the summer was notable for good, perhaps

above average warmth during January and early February, followed by a quick change into cool, Autumnal conditions. At the time, the nights, in particular, began to feel quite cool and damp. So, the second thing was to attempt to verify this, when we looked at the record it showed the average temperatures for both February and March were

the lowest they had been for all but one year of the previous decade. It seems it wasn't just our collective imagination at work.

At the time, we had a hint this was happening because the ripening slowed in late February, which leads to an interesting point. Although it may seem curious to an outsider, the finer points of grape ripening can sometimes

be overlooked in the hurly burly of vintage. Since we can't change the weather, only react to it, our focus has been to concentrate on grape sampling and charge in and pick each block when it's ready. Never mind what the temperatures have been doing, let's just get the job done!

Although winemakers would love to have people believe otherwise, they are not God and wine is not made in a perfect world. Shock, horror! There have been times when our samples have not matched the ripeness of the harvested grapes and we have always put this down to errors in sampling. However, the events of 2008 led us to review and change our approach. These days, when a sample is taken, the average temperature for the intervening period is checked, which acts as confirmation of the sample result. Perhaps not surprisingly to some, what we've found is that if the rate of ripening has been slower than expected, it's almost certainly because temperatures have been lower. The samplers have been more accurate than we thought.



The result of all this is we still can't change the weather but we are now more considered in our response by being just that bit more accurate with our picking times. The overall incremental increase in wine quality may be small, but it will allow us to be more consistent.

Returning to 2008, the January weather meant we were expecting an early vintage, much the same as we had experienced the year before. The early varieties confirmed this, coming off slightly earlier than average and we were preparing to roll quickly from one to the other. However, the pressure eased and we had a positively leisurely completion to the season. We picked each section of the vineyard as it

ripened and then we waited for the next part to be ready.

This was all very well but it did mean we were exposed to some risks. The birds were frantically looking for food and moisture during the summer and they kept on attacking the bird nets. Fortunately we were able to keep them out and damage was effectively zero. We also kept an eye on the weather, in the hope that Mother Nature kept the rain away until we'd picked, and she also behaved herself.

Cabernet Franc was first to come in, and like the other early varieties, it was two weeks ahead of its average harvest date of 17th March. Some of its early ripening may be the result of a lighter

crop, which was down 35%, to 6.14 tonnes per hectare. This was followed soon after by the Merlot, on 7th March. Once again, this was early; being 13 days ahead and its yield was also down to 7.34 tonnes per hectare, a slightly less disappointing 14% reduction. Cabernet Sauvignon completed the process on 22nd March, some 9 days earlier than average. At 5.02 tonnes per hectare yield, it was 35% down.

Since warm weather speeds the ripening process, this all suggests the season must have been quite warm. However, when we looked at the time taken for the period from flowering to final ripeness, a different story emerges. Merlot was 4 days earlier than average; taking 113 days to go from flowering to harvest, but Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon were both exactly average. Each flowered between one and two weeks earlier than average, so part of the early season is explained by this.

Finally, when we go to the temperature data, the picture

becomes clear. Each variety enjoyed at least an average number of hours in the optimal temperature range for vines but only a limited amount of extreme heat. There were only 42 hours above 33C.

How do we summarise all this? In short, while the yields were disappointing, the vines experienced an even, moderate season, with enough warmth for steady ripening and just enough of the higher temperatures to ripen all the fruit aromas. However, the emphasis is on "just" because the lack of extreme heat is important. It has produced a vintage with fully ripened flavours and tannins, ensuring the palate has concentration and length. At the same time, the wines display delightful aromas, perhaps uncharacteristically fragrant for Cabernet Sauvignon, in particular. While showing classic, red currants, it has retained some really lifted rose and pomegranate notes which are rarely seen.





## Production Notes

Median Harvest Dates and Ripeness:

*Merlot* –

7th March, 2008; 13.0 Baume

*Cabernet Franc* –

3rd March, 2008; 13.5 Baume

*Cabernet Sauvignon* –

22nd March, 2008; 13.6 Baume

After hand harvesting, the fruit was delivered to the winery where it was destemmed into small open fermenters, which were seeded with pure yeast culture for primary fermentation. The tanks were then hand plunged up to four times per day and the temperatures were maintained at a maximum of 28°C.

Skin contact time varied between the varieties and each batch was pressed according to taste. We taste each one twice daily to monitor the balance of tannins and make the decision to press when we perceive this to be at its best. In 2008 the Cabernet Franc was pressed after 16 days, the Merlot after 11 days and the Cabernet Sauvignon after 15 days.

The different batches were then kept separate while they went through malolactic fermentation and they were then racked and blending trials were carried out. On 26th August the blends were put together – for the Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot, the combination was 56% and 44%, respectively. In the Merlot, the combination was 86% Merlot and 14% Cabernet Franc.

Each year we make up the final blend based on blind tastings in our laboratory and our aim is to make up the best combination for that year. The 2008 blends were slightly out of the ordinary, with the Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot having more Merlot and no Cabernet Franc. The Merlot included a significant percentage of Cabernet Franc and fulfills a long-time Moss Wood ambition to produce this wine in the style of the great “Right Bank” wines of Bordeaux.

The wines were then racked into French oak. For the Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot, 35% of the barrels were new and for the Merlot, 44% were new.

After nearly two years in oak, the wines were racked from barrel in May 2010. A wide range of fining trials were conducted but in the end, neither the Merlot nor the Cabernet Sauvignon were improved. So, the unfinned wines were sterile filtered and bottled on 1st July, 2010.

## Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot

### Tasting Notes

*Colour and condition:* Hues of deep brick red, with bright condition.

*Nose:* Ripe red and dark fruits of red currant, blackberry and mulberry, with lots of musk, smoke and earth in the back ground – very juicy and complex.



Tristan Mugford plunging

*Palate:* The same generosity of fruit follows on to the palate, where the wine has immediate appeal, with its plump mulberry and Turkish delight flavours, full body and good length. The texture is smooth, despite its relatively firm tannin finish and displays the balance we believe has been the hallmark of this wine over the last 3 vintages. There are soft, smoky and charry oak notes in the background.

### Cellaring Notes

Since this was such a good vintage, it will come as no surprise that we enthusiastically recommend this wine for cellaring. The generosity and balance make it delicious drinking now and we encourage consumers who prefer the plump young fruit flavours to enjoy the wine in its youth.

However, the vintage has delivered a combination of chemistry and style that will age successfully for many years. We recommend those who enjoy older wine to cellar it for at least 10 years.

## Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2008 Merlot

### Tasting Notes

*Colour and condition:* deep brick red, in bright condition

*Nose:* Generous nose, with ripe fruit aromas combined with Merlot's complex earthy notes.

*Palate:* The wine presents immediate fruit generosity, with plum and black currant flavours filling the mid-palate. In addition, the hallmark of this vintage is the balance of tannin, which can so often be a problem with this variety.

In 2008, the typically firm Merlot tannins sit neatly underneath, giving firm tannin all the way through but never being gritty or drying. At the very back, the toasty oak adds to the finish.

### Cellaring Notes

As a varietal wine, Merlot is often judged as being rather simple and perhaps this is true when compared with Pinot Noir. Consumers are tempted by its generous red fruit characters and early plumpness, to consider it a wine for current drinking, with little to be gained by cellaring. We would like to respectfully disagree. While we certainly acknowledge its innate drinkability, it is very much a wine that develops complex bottle bouquet. To illustrate this, we would like to point out that our first Merlot turns 10 this year and for those who may still have some in their cellar,

we enthusiastically suggest you try the wine. It has developed earthy, tarry complexity but still retains good fruit aromas and gives the appearance of needing at least 5 more years to reach full maturity.

This being the case, and with the significant improvements in our viticulture and winemaking we have achieved in the intervening years, we are very much of the view the 2008 vintage has the style and quality to at least match this result. Therefore, our recommendations are, for those who want to see at least some bottle age characters, the wine should be cellared for at least 10 years. For those who prefer to see it in full maturity, we recommend a further 10 years cellaring thereafter.



*Vintage 2010 – Kate Pestell and Imogen Mugford*

### Moss Wood 2010 Semillon

#### Vintage Notes

Our last two vintages have been notable for the very even weather conditions, where extreme heat has been avoided but the days have been sufficiently warm to promote even ripening. The vines responded accordingly, with good shoot growth early in the season, a good fruit set during flowering and then retention of excellent varietal aromas during ripening.

The even nature of the season can be seen in the production data. The median harvest date for the Semillon is 13th March but this year, it was slightly early, being the 7th. This is also confirmed by the time taken to go from flowering to harvest, where, at 97 days, the season was 8 days ahead of the average. The affect of the season was probably also enhanced by a slightly below average crop. The long term mean for the Semillon is 10.96 tonnes per hectare, whereas 2010 was down by a not insignificant 16%, at 9.21. As an aside, the

lower yield is something of a disappointment. Crop levels began trending down after 2004 bottoming out in 2006, so although we would have preferred a bigger crop at least 2010 is part of a trend of slowly increasing yields over the last 3 vintages. We are not certain why this happened but are pleased that measures we have taken appear to be working.

As readers might imagine, with so many things in our favour, the fruit intensity of the wine should be of a high order and indeed it is. All the typical Moss Wood Semillon characters are on display – apples, figs and honey etc but for those with an eye for the interesting detail of any vintage, we report something of a curiosity about this year's Semillon. It produced a significant number of pink berries. Although Semillon is obviously a white grape, readers may be amused to learn that rose-coloured berries are quite common and occur in most vintages. However, for reasons about which we can only speculate, 2010 conditions produced them in much greater numbers.





They have a distinctive musk, or muscat-like flavour that is almost confectionery in nature and this really adds to the complexity of the 2010.

### Production Notes

Median Harvest Date and Ripeness:

7th March, 2010; 12.8 Baume

We happily acknowledge that Moss Wood is a cautious organisation which focuses on maintaining consistency of style and quality in each of its wines. Yet despite this, we are proud of our record in trialing new techniques and exploring different ways of doing things that might enhance what we do. So as we describe our production process for 2010, it may, or may not, surprise to learn that we have just about come the full circle and this latest wine has more in common with 1976 than 2006.

By way of explanation, Australian Semillon varies somewhat between regions, as a comparison of Hunter Valley

and Margaret River would attest. However, regardless of origin, all the wines are famous for pristine fruit characters, which give drinkability and distinctiveness in the short term. Similarly, over the next decade, these same wines will develop complex bottle bouquet.

The crucial point is these styles all depend on good depth of primary fruit aromas in the young wine. Having tried a variety of methods to enhance fruit depth and complexity, over 30 years, we have returned to where we started.

So, our technique is quite simple and designed to achieve that end, much as the white wines were produced in the 1970's. The best ripeness for Semillon in our vineyard, depending on the warmth of the season, seems to be about 12.5°Bé. We aimed to match that this year but our sampling must have been slightly astray because the lab result said 12.8°Bé but the final alcohol of 14% says it was more like



*In the Moss Wood Vineyard, 2010, Keith (Winemaker and Viticulturist) in the background, Nicholas (French picker) slightly obscured*

13.2°Bé. As we noted earlier, not even winemakers are perfect.

The fruit was handpicked and delivered to the winery where it was destemmed, crushed, chilled and pressed. The free run juice was then settled at 12°C for 2 days before the clear juice was racked and seeded with pure yeast culture. The pressings fraction was fined to reduce tannin and then racked and added to the main blend. Fermentation was then maintained at 15°C and proceeded through to dryness where the batch was allowed to settle on gross lees for a week. The clear wine was then racked off and fining trials were carried out. The decision was made to fine with bentonite, for protein stability, and nothing

else. After fining, the wine was cold stabilised and then sterile filtered and bottled on 30th June, 2010.

### Tasting Notes

**Colour and condition:** Medium straw colour, with green tints. Bright condition.

**Nose:** Fresh fruit aromas of grapefruit, apple and fig. There are also strong notes of pear and musk which is unusual in Moss Wood Semillon and seems to be a feature of 2010. Although we are not completely certain, we believe this is the result of a predominance of distinctly pink berries, as described above. This is a feature of the variety and they occur every year but for reasons about which we are unsure, they were plentiful in 2010.



*Picking at Moss Wood's Ribbon Vale Vineyard – 2010*



This distinctiveness also applies to the flavours and these grapes have almost a muscat-like floral character. This complexity is further enhanced by background notes of caramel and lanolin.

*Palate:* This is classic Moss Wood Semillon, combining crisp acidity with full body and a slight firmness of tannin on the finish. The mid-palate has ripe apple, fig and pear flavours giving a generous, almost sweet feel, despite the fact the wine is completely dry.

### Cellaring Notes

The wine presents with enjoyable fruit aromas and flavours and can be consumed by itself as an aperitif or with food. However, its concentration and complexity will repay patience and we recommend it be cellared for at least 10 years.

It has a style that is reminiscent of the 1995 vintage which has aged beautifully over its 15 years and is now a wine of great complexity. We believe the 2010 is destined for similar things.

### Moss Wood 2009 Chardonnay

#### Vintage Notes

Once again we note the 2008/2009 growing season is one of the most even we have had. The summer temperatures gave us consistent warmth but no extreme heat and the vines found it very much to their liking. All varieties respond with correspondingly even ripening and the resulting wines have generous fruit characters and lots of interesting, background complex notes.

Although there were some differences in the growing conditions, we think 1995 is a comparable year, especially for the Chardonnay.

So, having seen this comparison, readers may find the following numbers quite interesting. In 1995, the median harvest date for Chardonnay was 19th February whereas in 2009, it was 8th March. So the more recent season was notably cooler, ripening some 17 days later and 7 days later than the long term average, across all vintages, of 1st March. This means there have only been two later vintages for Moss Wood Chardonnay, the 1989 and 2006, picked on the 19th and 15th March, respectively. Yet the style of wine made in those years was quite different. In 1989, we had very heavy rain in the first week of February when the vines were probably

within a fortnight of harvest. The resulting cool weather and dilution took them several more weeks to make up. In much discussed 2006, temperatures were very mild and the vines simply didn't get the heat they needed to maintain good ripening rates. In the end, of course, Chardonnay, an early variety, did not have the difficulties of Cabernet Sauvignon. However, despite reaching full maturity, it made very delicate wine, with a predominance of citrus and minerality not often seen in a Moss Wood.

Can we draw any conclusions from all this? Despite the relatively late harvest date, the 2009 doesn't share much in common with the 1989 or the 2006. So perhaps the key was the consistent, if slightly lower than usual temperatures, which, combined with no interruption from rain, were just right for



*Diesel (in foreground) with Chopper – Vintage 2010*



the vines to maintain slow and steady ripening. In addition, yields were moderate but not excessive. The 2009 crop was 6.89 tonnes per hectare, slightly above the long term average of 6.63. The lack of stress in this environment ensured they also kept a complex flavour profile, or so we think. Whatever the drivers, we are delighted with the result!

### Production Notes

Median Harvest Dates and Ripeness:

8th March, 2010; 13.2 Baume

The fruit was harvested by hand and delivered to the winery, where it was whole-bunch pressed. Free run juice and pressings were kept separate to fine the latter for tannin. The juice was then transferred to stainless steel tanks, where it was cold settled for 48 hours and the clear juice was then racked to barrels. A small percentage of solids was included, around 2% of the final volume, or as close as we can calculate.

Each batch was then seeded with a pure yeast culture for primary fermentation and this was controlled to a maximum temperature of 18°C.

Next, the wine underwent partial malolactic fermentation and once this was completed, the different batches were blended and the finished wine returned to barrel, for continued aging on lees.

Our choice of oak remains, as usual, 225 litre, French barrels, with the majority supplied by Tonnelleries Remond and Seguin Moreau. This year we were also pleased with the results from a trial of Latour barrels and we will include more of them in the future.

After spending 18 months in cask, the wine was then racked to stainless steel tanks and fining trials were carried out. In the end, the wine was fined with bentonite, to achieve protein stability, and isinglass, to improve tannin balance. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on 13th October 2010.



*Vintage 2010 - Father Son mentoring, Keith and Hugh Mugford in the Old Cabernet vines.*

### Tasting Notes

**Colour and condition:** Colour is medium to deep straw hue and condition is bright

**Nose:** There is considerable volume and the nose presents as a lifted combination of fruit aromas and blossom-like scents, reminiscent of honeysuckle or nasturtium. The aromas are typical Moss Wood, with yellow flesh nectarine, peach and passionfruit. There are also interesting complex notes of malt biscuit, caramel, mature cheese and charry oak and once again, the usual Moss Wood marmalade characters.

**Palate:** The wine initially fills the mid-palate with generous, ripe stone fruit flavours and these combine with full body and lively acidity to give lifted, juicy mouth feel. There are complex secondary flavours of citrus and oak and roast nut and malt that combine to give an almost lemon meringue

pie combination on the finish. Despite the presence of oak, the tannins are in good balance, so the wine has a clean finish, with a smooth texture.

### Cellaring Notes

Given the quality of the vintage in general, we have no hesitation in recommending this wine for cellaring, despite its youthful approachability. Certainly it can be enjoyed as a young wine but for those who have the space and the patience, and an enthusiasm for old wines, we strongly recommend it be kept till at least 10 years of age. By then it will have developed some complex bottle bouquet but will not be reaching its peak. We anticipate it will drink at its most complex between 15 and 20 years old and should hold that status for at least a further 5 years beyond that.



*Counting sample buckets – Vintage 2010 – Clockwise from 12 o'clock, Louis Dixon, Kate Pestell, Clare, Keith, Imogen, Chopper, Hugh, Jarod Bawden, Jerome Gueli*



Romain



Benoit

## The Two Musketeers

Having made mention of our United Nations grape picking team in our last newsletter, we should point out how valuable our overseas visitors were during pruning.

After the harvest finished, two fine soldiers from the Grande Armee Australien, Romain Saint-Juvin and Benoit Guyot headed off, in the tradition of Napoleon, to conquer the north. Unluckily for them but fortunate for us, work above the 26th Parallel was as hard to find as a victory in Moscow, so they made the long march in their old, white Falcon, back down the west coast, to face the southern cold. We gratefully accepted

them back and they settled in for a winter in the Wilyabrup horizontal rain, helping us with the pruning.

It is not normally the case for the working holiday visa crew to be further south than Carnarvon during June, July and August. Most visitors, especially Europeans, who have come to Australia to enjoy the warm weather, like to be up in Broome, Darwin or Cairns at that time of year, so it's rare for them to stay and we were pleased they did.

Once they settled back in, they got into the winter spirit of this region – make the most of the fine weather when it happens but bring a pleasant disposition when it's not. They got stuck in and did a great job.

The two musketeers became three, when the “pruning whirlwind”, Sai Kham Lu joined in to help. Romain and Benoit worked hard but Sai is a Cambodian pruning machine. To describe him as productive doesn't do him justice. In more than 30 years pruning experience, he is the only person we have seen who works with a miner's light. This is no exaggeration. He happily racked up 16 hour days and anyone who follows day length at that time of year will know he spent many hours working in the dark and still did an excellent job.

In the great Grande Armee tradition of the “maraud”, Romain and Benoit busied themselves around the southwest, looking for company and sustenance. This has taken them far afield, to exotic destinations like Manjimup, where they have brought some Gallic flair to driving, eating and romance. They've moved on to conquer Japan and we wish them all the best.

## Visiting Moss Wood

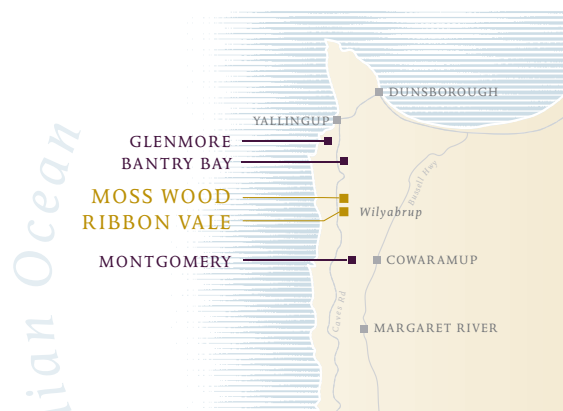
We love to have our mail order customers come and

visit but have always asked them to make an appointment in advance. Visiting wineries in the Margaret River region seems to have become so popular recently that it has taxed our most scarce resource, people. We would like to apologise to people who we may not have been able to see over the past few months and hope that we can see you in the future, either at Moss Wood or perhaps in your own home town or city.

We like to show people all our new wines out of barrel and tank when they do visit Moss Wood but our winery and vineyard operations must take priority. We can only continue to grow the best possible grapes and make the best possible wine, from our very special site, if we devote our undivided attention to them.

When time allows we would love to see you and the best way to arrange this is an email well in advance of your planned trip. Please understand if we can't see you, we will always be trying our best and even if we can't show you where the grapes are grown and wine made you can rest assured that we will be sending you the best possible product in the bottle.

*Kind regards,  
Clare and Keith Muggford*



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