



**MOSS WOOD**  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# SUMMER NEWS

ISSUE 77 DECEMBER 2011



## Moss Wood 2010 Chardonnay

### Vintage Notes

The consistency of our weather over the last 5 seasons has been remarkable. It could be said that Moss Wood is a relatively young vineyard, since our first vintage was only 1973 providing slightly less than four decades of

experience. Nevertheless, such a favourable run of vintage conditions is without precedent and 2010 joins the list of seasons that provided consistent warmth but no extreme heat, resulting in near-perfect ripening conditions.

A further advantage for this period is excellent crop levels, not something we are accustomed to with Chardonnay. It is our most inconsistent variety by far and regularly varies from its average yield by as much as 38%. Compare this with Cabernet Sauvignon, where

variation around the mean is less than half this, at 17%. Amusingly, the rules seem to have changed over the last 5 vintages and Mother Nature has allowed Chardonnay to average 8.05 tonnes per hectare, making its long term average of 6.74 look a bit meagre!

This confirms that we were able to look after the crop successfully. We had no disease problems and the usual threat of bird damage, which raised its ugly head in early January 2010, was negated by covering the vines with our nets.

The period from flowering to harvest was 111 days, which is almost exactly the same as the average of 110 and the median harvest date of 1st March was identical to the average. A further indicator as to the quality of the seasonal conditions and pointer to the higher yields was that bunch weights in each of the Chardonnay blocks were all around 10% above average, suggesting the flowering conditions and soil moisture were excellent.

With relatively mild temperatures, we were able to approach the picking of

the Chardonnay in much the same manner as we had with the 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon. We waited patiently with each block until the last of its green fruit characters disappeared and picked as it achieved full flavour ripeness, so the harvest ran from 26th February to 4th March. By way of comparison, in 2007 and 2008 the vintage was picked on 3 consecutive days. Just as with the '08 Cabernet Sauvignon, this means the 2010 Chardonnay has been able to retain vibrant and lifted aromas which can so often be lost in the rush of warm weather. The theme of maintaining the average continues with the sugar level because the 2010 was harvested at 13.1° Baumé, almost spot on the long term mean of 13.2.

### Production Notes

*Median Harvest Date:* 1st March, 2010

*Harvest Ripeness:* 13.1 Baumé

All the fruit was hand harvested and delivered to the winery for whole bunch pressing. The juice was drained and racked to stainless steel tanks, where it settled for 48 hours. Pressings were kept separate and racked to stainless steel, where they were fined and settled. The clear juice from each batch, including the pressings, was then seeded with pure yeast culture and racked into French barriques for fermentation which was controlled at 18°C. Once primary fermentation was completed, malolactic fermentation then proceeded to 30% completion.

After this, all batches were blended and the finished wine was returned to barrel, with its fermentation lees, in the end accruing 17 months in oak. At this point it was racked from barrels, fined with bentonite and isinglass and then sterile filtered and bottled on 27th September 2011.

### Tasting Notes

*Colour and condition:* deep straw colour with green tints; bright condition.

*Nose:* lifted primary aromas of stone fruits like peach and nectarine, mingling with orange zest, roast nuts and hard cheese. Although generous in fruit it's very complex.

*Palate:* rich, creamy flavours fill the palate, with combinations of peach, grapefruit, marmalade, malt biscuit and nut. The wine

is full bodied, but with lively acidity that ensures freshness and a firm but not drying tannin. On the finish there are soft, toasty, almost cinnamon-like oak flavours.

*Cellaring:* Chardonnay starts its life with significant complexity and so is a very interesting young wine to drink. However, this does not preclude it from improving further with cellaring. Over the next 10 years the aging process will introduce more complexity to the nose as the fruit aromas are enhanced by new toasty and nutty characters. At the same time, the palate will slowly soften, leaving it with a sweeter, longer feel. This is our minimum cellaring recommendation and we commend the wine for at least 20 years keeping to see it at full development.

## Moss Wood 2011 Semillon

### Vintage Notes

We are so very fortunate the story of the run of good vintages continues with the 2011 Semillon. The highlight of the last 4 years is the relative lack of high temperatures and how this has allowed all the white varieties to retain fresh, lifted fruit aromas and yet have the rich generosity that comes with full ripeness. Vintages from the past which provide the best comparison for this type of season are probably 1983, 1995 and 2003.

In 1983, all our varieties produced exciting wines and the Semillon was probably the finest we have made.



Harvested on 7th March, it produced a solid 12.35 tonnes per hectare of crop and ripened to 12.3 Baume. The 1995, noted for its generous, complex wines, was picked on 23rd of February, yielding a creditable 11.32 tonnes per hectare and a ripeness of 12.8 Baume. Finally, in 2003 the Semillon gave us a 8.74 tonnes per hectare crop, picked on 15th March at 12.9 Baume. The very low yield gave us a wine with great palate concentration but as is often the case, it was relatively restrained on the nose.

Compare these outcomes with the 2011. It was harvested on 24th February, producing a yield of 11.08 tonnes per hectare, at a ripeness of 12.8 Baume. According to the numbers, this latest vintage compares best with 1995 and certainly it does have that wines generous palate but interestingly, it also has the bright fruit notes of 1983 and so probably lies somewhere between the two. Either way, while we are very proud of the consistency of our Semillon wines, we think the 2011 offers a serious challenge to the '83 as our finest ever.

All other aspects of the growing season went well and we had no worries with disease and the bird nets helped keep the silvereyes and crows at bay.

### Production Notes

**Median Harvest Date:** 24th February, 2011;

**Harvest Ripeness:** 12.8 Baume  
The fruit was hand harvested and delivered to the winery,

where it was de-stemmed, crushed and pressed. The free run and pressings juice fractions were kept separate. The former was settled for 48 hours, the clear juice was racked to its fermentation tank and then some solids, equivalent to 2% of the volume, were blended back in. A pure yeast culture was then added and fermentation proceeded at 17C for 16 days. In the meantime, the pressings were fined and settled and the clear juice was racked and seeded for a separate, pure yeast fermentation.

After a week of settling on their gross lees, the two components were racked and blended to produce the final wine.

The next step was to conduct fining trials and a series of different agents were trialled. After tasting we concluded no treatments were required, other than a bentonite fining for protein stability.

After sterile filtration, the wine was bottled on 30th June, 2011.

### Tasting Notes

**Colour:** medium straw colour, with green tints; bright condition.

**Nose:** classic young Semillon – fresh but complex combination of lemon rind, apple and fig.

**Palate:** full bodied and generous, with apple, grapefruit and fig flavours across the middle and a honey-like sweetness at the back, sitting over just a touch of astringency at the back.

**Cellaring:** although this is a classic cellaring style, it still has sufficient fleshiness and generosity on the palate to be enjoyed now. However, the fruit depth, acidity and tannin give this vintage all the hallmarks of a classic, aging Semillon. Accordingly, for those who enjoy the mature flavours in wine, we recommend it be cellared for at least 5 years to allow these secondary notes to evolve. This is our minimum recommended cellaring time but for those who have the patience (and the space), we advocate at least 15 years, to ensure the wine is seen with full maturity.

## Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2011 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc

### Vintage Notes

Our much discussed exquisite summer weather of 2011 worked a treat on the Sauvignon Blanc. Although it had a relatively early flowering, the length of season from then to harvest was slightly longer than average, for reasons about which we





are not really sure. This suggests the temperatures were lower than average but this was not the case. We suspect it's more likely that our observations were not quite as accurate as they could have been.

Our window for harvesting Sauvignon Blanc is quite narrow so we need to be vigilant with our sampling. Its juicy, "green" characters can quickly disappear if the weather conditions are favourable for rapid ripening. Depending on the season, once the sugar goes beyond an equivalent alcohol level of about 12.5%, the leafy, grassy notes are quickly replaced by tropical and oily notes like papaya and guava. While these are not unpleasant, they are not really suitable in the style we prefer to make.

As we approached the start of vintage, our usual expectation is to commence with Pinot Noir, followed after about a week by Chardonnay and then Sauvignon Blanc. However, in 2011 we got a bit of a surprise when our early samples indicated the latter was likely to precede the Pinot Noir and sure enough, that's how things turned out.

The numbers are somewhat contradictory but things are not too difficult to explain. We had such glorious Spring weather that all varieties flowered earlier and faster than average. Sauvignon Blanc flowered on 12th November, some 16 days ahead of average and then it was harvested at 12.4 Baume, slightly riper than its 12.2



average on 16th February, some 14 days earlier than average. Here's an amusing twist. To have ripened in time to be picked on its average harvest date, the ripening period from flowering must have been slightly longer than the mean. Indeed it was, 98 days compared to the 10 year average of 92 days. Curious folk may wonder why this difference is 6 days, not the expected 14. The explanation may lie in the yield, which was down to 9.89 tonnes per hectare, from 11.30. The vines had a lot less work to do this year to ripen the smaller crop.

On the other hand, the impact of the yield can be seen in reverse with the Semillon. It flowered on 9th November, 2 weeks earlier than average, and was picked on 2nd March,

which is 16 days earlier than average and our earliest on record. All is as expected so far. However, its ripeness was 12.5 Baume, slightly lower than its 13 Baume average and its ripening season was 113 days, compared with its average of 113. Even with an average season length, it did not reach the long-term, mean ripeness but we suspect this is because unlike the Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon managed to beat its average yield of 11.3 tonne per hectare, producing a very respectable 15.91!

The average ripeness for Ribbon Vale Semillon provides an interesting insight into the difference in rates of ripening for sugar, as opposed to the flavour components, across all varieties. At harvest, we rely on a number of indicators when

assessing full ripeness and deciding on harvest dates but our favourite is the appearance of the mature fruit flavours. Amusingly, at least until the sensitivity of analytical machines improves, this is one of the artistic aspects of winemaking because we rely entirely on the human palate for these measurements. Not all wine flavours are perceivable in grape juice. In fact, a number are flavourless until released during the fermentation process. However, some significant ones are perceivable in juice and people are currently the best machines for the job.

Naturally enough, anything which is an expression of opinion rather than fact, leads to lively debate about what are the ideal flavours

in a particular wine style. We therefore happily acknowledge there is no right or wrong in these decisions, only differences in stylistic preferences.

The timing of the arrival of the flavours deemed suitable in the Moss Wood style is best illustrated by comparing our earliest and latest seasons, 2011 and 2006, respectively.

In 2011, a warm year, Semillon flavour ripeness was achieved on 2nd March at 12.5 Baume, after 113 days, maturing a crop of 15.91 tonnes per hectare. However, the very cool year of 2006 achieved flavour ripeness on 14th April at a higher 12.8 Baume, after 121 days. The impact of the lower temperatures can be seen by comparing ripening rates and yields. Although the 2006 vintage was picked roughly 2% riper, the 2011 crop was 85% heavier and yet, in that year, the daily rate of sugar accumulation was some 4% faster! If these comparisons seem confusing, that's because they are. None of the relationships that exist between the vine and its ripening mechanisms are linear and there is much we don't understand.

There is a point to this discussion, which is that we prefer, for all wines, to see our fruit ripen to optimum flavour. In the case of the SSB blend, the Semillon component needs to reach the point where most of the greener aromas have disappeared, leaving a predominance of fig, honey

and lanolin notes. At the same time, this ensures the palate has medium to full body and length.

The varietal percentages in the final blend are primarily driven by the vineyard area we have. Accordingly, the maximum percentage of Sauvignon Blanc in any given year, assuming both varieties yield around their average, will be around 40%. In 2011, it was in fact 62% Semillon and 38% Sauvignon Blanc. We have to admit that as long term Semillon producers, we have a cellar bias towards the influence of this variety in the style. The impact on the palate is very hard to resist and

we are perfectly happy with wine at these percentages. However, if we are being honest with ourselves, it is possible for the vineyard to produce a wine more classical in style with a blend closer to 50/50. At that level we would see the best of both varieties, with more of the green, juicy lift but still with sufficient concentration and length on the palate. Like all things in wine, the evolution continues.

The other seasonal influences were exactly the same as for Moss Wood Semillon, with no disease problems and minimal losses to the birds.

---

## Production Notes

---

*Median Harvest Date:*  
Sauvignon Blanc - 17th February, 2011;

*Harvest Ripeness:* 12.4 Baume

*Median Harvest Date:*  
Semillon - 2nd March, 2011;

*Harvest Ripeness:* 12.4 Baume

Each variety was handpicked then delivered to the winery, de-stemmed and pressed. The two components, the free run and pressings, were kept separate. The former was settled in stainless steel tanks for 48 hours and then the clear juice was racked off and seeded with a pure yeast culture. The pressings were fined and settled and then racked and seeded for fermentation.





At this point, the techniques for the two varieties diverge slightly. In order to retain the best aromatics, different yeast is used in the Sauvignon Blanc and it's also fermented at lower temperatures, usually around 14°C. Semillon, on the other hand, prefers things slightly warmer, usually 16 – 18°C. Both fermentations proceeded to dryness and were then assessed for quality and style. Neither presented any problems, so the blend was made up on 20th April, 2011.

Fining trials were then carried out but no treatments were necessary apart from the usual addition of the bentonite for protein stability. The wine was then sterile filtered and bottled on 29th June, 2011.

### Tasting Notes

*Colour and condition:* light straw colour, with green tints; bright condition.

*Nose:* lifted and zesty fruit aromas, showing the full array of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc – cut grass, lemon juice, passionfruit and fig.

*Palate:* the initial impression is crisp, fresh acidity that combines with medium body to give a refreshing lightness. The flavours are lime, green apple and fig, followed by a clean finish with no astringency.

*Cellaring:* the key feature of the wine is its freshness and drinkability, so we recommend it for early consumption.

However, with such good acidity and moderate alcohol level it has ideal composition for cellaring and will develop Semillon-like toasty notes on the nose and a softer, sweeter feel to the palate over the next 5 years.

## Spring Vineyard Update

Our current Spring season is looking very promising and surprisingly good, with regular rainfall but little damage. At this time of year, especially if we are experiencing wet conditions, we can have quite damaging storms, where strong winds and hail take a severe toll on the vines, especially the early varieties like Chardonnay. Fortunately, so far we have avoided wind and hail damage and the vines look to be in rude good health.

The timing of the rain has not been ideal for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, with quite a bit falling during the first week of November, when both varieties were flowering. We suspect their bunch weights may be

affected and so won't be surprised if their yields are down by perhaps 5 – 10%. The other varieties have so far been luckier.

These conditions make the life of a machinery operator something of a challenge because fungicide applications can't be made in the rain and so we have had to time our spray runs very carefully. So far we have been able to keep the program on track.

On balance, we have seen similar seasons before, especially in the early 1990's. According to Keith's slowly fading memory, there is commonality with 1990/91 and more particularly, 1991/92. If the 2012 turns out as well as either of those, there'll be no complaints.





*Zu and Cheryl, last years scholarship winners, in the vineyard*



*Temasek Polytechnic - Hugh, Zu, Cheryl, Clare and Keith*

## Tasmanian, Hong Kong and New Zealand trips

One of the really fun aspects of wine, for both consumers and producers alike, is the fact it provides all sorts of interesting opportunities for travel. Clare and Keith have been lucky enough to enjoy the hospitality of the kindest people, all round the world. This year saw them venture to locations that they had not often visited. This doesn't reflect badly on the places themselves but rather on the Mugfords for not making the effort to visit more often.

In September, they hosted two events in Tasmania, one in Hobart at Smolt Restaurant, and one in Launceston at Mud Restaurant. Don't be put off if the names seem slightly unusual because Kif Weber – Front of House and Scott (the dishwasher) McMurray – Chef and their staff do a fantastic

job and both locations are definitely worth trying. Also worth trying in Hobart is Me Wah at Sandy Bay, serving some of the best Cantonese-style food in Australia, with a wine list to please the sternest critic. Of course, every state has its rivalries and we think it adds to the experience but we still enjoy teasing the Taswegians about the competition between Launceston and Hobart. There's plenty of spirit in that relationship.

Equally impressive, albeit in a different way, were Hong Kong and Macau. Hong Kong is one of our favourite cities – incredibly beautiful and busy and always fun to visit. Moss Wood has been represented there for about 25 years and Clare and Keith were in town to work with

their agents, Summergate Fine Wines. They participated in a number of successful events and Clare and Keith pass on their thanks to the Summergate team for all their help. The highlight, quite literally, was to be lucky enough to host a wine dinner at the new Ritz Carlton in Kowloon. Wine dinners are something the Mugfords have done a few of over the years but this was the highest, at least in a man-made building. For those not familiar with this new hotel, reception is on the 101st floor and the restaurant is on the 108th. The Mugfords have never before done a tasting in a building high enough to have the view blocked by passing clouds. The food, by the way, was fabulous.

The end of September saw the Clare and Keith make their first visit to New Zealand. Moss Wood has employed more than its fair share of Kiwis over the years and so Clare and Keith have a great affection for the "cousies" across the Tasman. Not that Clare was too worried but Keith's concern was they may have been tempted to remind us of the less than impressive performance of the Wallabies at the recent Rugby World Cup. He needn't have worried because the New Zealanders were suitably humble and seemed more relieved than anything but also immensely proud.

The short trip meant the focus was on Auckland only, a city with a very impressive wine and food culture, something in the vein of Melbourne,

albeit somewhat smaller. Successful tastings and dinners were held at, a spectacular private home of car and wine fanatics, lovely people. A great dinner was eaten at Café Hanoi; special thanks go to Monsoon Poon (South East Asian Trading House Restaurant) for hosting a Moss Wood tasting and lunch for journalists, Bob Campbell, Jo Burzynska, John Saker and John Hawkesby, and to Ash for doing a great job on this day, as we are sure he does every day. An excellent Moss Wood consumer tasting was conducted at Village Winery, with owner Bill Vincent, his Wife and shop manager Jill. Special thanks to also go to Cameron Douglas, Master Sommelier and Senior Lecturer, in charge of the Wine and Beverage Programme at AUT University, for showing us his outstanding facility and tasting through the Moss Wood range.

During our trip we also visited and were very impressed with The Fine Wine Delivery Company, Sky City, The Grill, The Grove and Clooney. At the Northern Club, a classic and old establishment with incredible history, where we were pleased to meet Nigel DeVere Ellery and Glengarry, where we were privileged to meet Jak. We are hopeful we haven't missed anybody and must congratulate our agent Michael Jemison for an excellent and packed marketing trip.



## Visiting Moss Wood

Yes, we know, you still need an appointment but we should be able to see a few more visitors over this summer with the able assistance of Erika Lindstrom, another member of our United Nations.

Erika hails from the Sonoma Valley, in California, but she is a token Aussie, her Mum, sorry, Mom, is from Geelong in Victoria. Anyway Erika or may be Eloise, Tristan or Hugh Mugford will be delighted to host you to barrel tastings and tours of Moss Wood throughout Summer.

Please just email or ring to make an advance appointment and we will do our best, as usual, to see you. We apologise to any of our loyal mailorder customers, who we may not have been able to accommodate throughout the year and hope we may yet see you with our slightly extended Staff.

*With our best regards,*

*Clare and Keith Mugford.*



*Clare Mugford*



*Eloise Mugford*



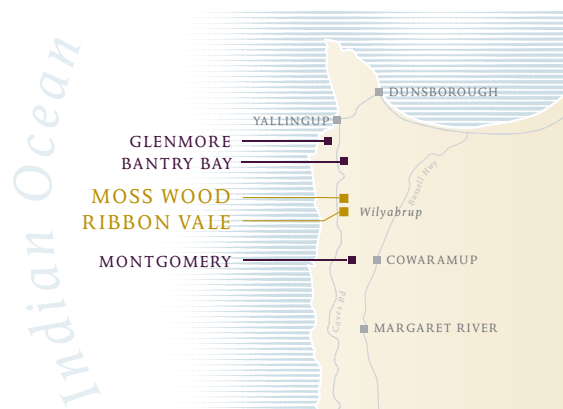
*Tristan Mugford*



*Erika and Valerie*



*Hugh Mugford*



**MOSS WOOD**  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

926 Metricup Road, Wilyabrup WA 6284 PO Box 225, Cowaramup WA 6284  
T +61 8 9755 6266 F +61 8 9755 6303 E [mosswood@mosswood.com.au](mailto:mosswood@mosswood.com.au)  
[www.mosswood.com.au](http://www.mosswood.com.au)