

Moss



Wood

Newsletter

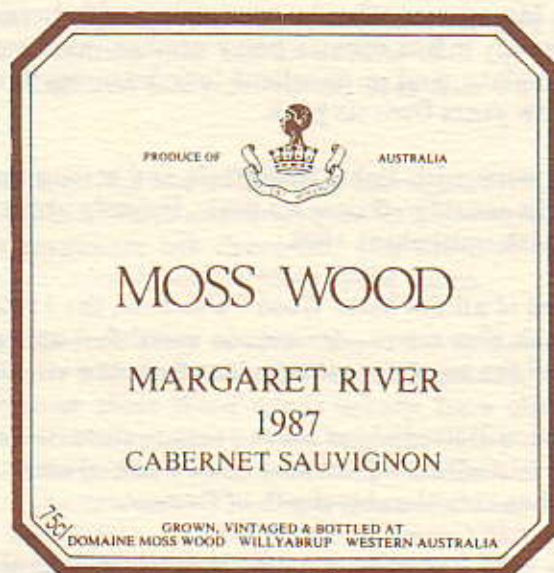
No. 8

Winter, 1989

New Release: The 1987 Moss Wood Cabernet

The growing season before the 1987 vintage was cool and dry following substantial winter rains that finished in early to mid October. The foliage and fruit showed no signs of stress at harvest following the mild, dry summer and a record Cabernet crop was produced.

The Cabernet Sauvignon was the highlight of the vintage at Moss Wood - a vivid and vibrant wine with attractive floral perfumes and elegant berry fruit. It is the most attractive young wine that Keith Mugford has seen in his eleven years at the vineyard. Keith's high opinion of the wine and its potential is shared by former proprietor, Bill Pannell, who sees it as having even greater depth of flavour than the other attractive young wines of the 1980s - the '81, '83 and '85 Cabernets.



The nose has aromas of violets, ripe raspberries and mulberries in balance with toasty French oak. The palate is supple and generous with rich, ripe fruit and fine tannins. It is a well-rounded wine with excellent structure and good length. With cellaring, it will develop even greater complexity and depth of flavour.

The wine reminds Keith of the huge fruit character of the 1976 and 1977 Moss Wood Cabernets although it has more finesse than those wines. He believes that it has a cellaring potential of at least ten years and will rank with the 1975, 1980 and 1983 wines as one of the great Moss Wood Cabernets.

Lovers of Moss Wood will be pleased to learn that, because of the more abundant harvest in 1987, there is a greater quantity of wine available than for the previous vintage. It is a must for all serious wine enthusiasts.

Vintage Chart for Moss Wood Cabernets

- 1973** The best bottles of this first vintage of Moss Wood Cabernet continue to show sound fruit in good condition. There continues to be some bottle variation.
- 1974** This is a lovely old wine with smokey, oak characters and ripe, blackcurrant fruit. Although still quite tannic, it has softened with age and shows good balance.
- 1975** The 1975 Cabernets continue to impress as one of the best wines made at Moss Wood. It has rich, ripe fruit, good balance, significant complexity and a finish that lingers. While probably drinking at its peak, the wine shows that it will continue to live for years.
- 1976** This is a big rich wine with lovely cassis fruit dominating its nose. On the palate, the wine is soft with developed, ripe fruit and smokey oak flavours in good balance. Probably at its best now and should be drunk over the next few years.
- 1977** The wine has an intense bouquet reminiscent of blackberries with nuances of charry oak. On the palate, it has rich, ripe fruit in balance with the charry oak characters. It is a supple wine with considerable power and reasonable length. Enjoy it over the next five years.
- 1979** This wine shows fresh berry fruit in balance with French oak on both the nose and the palate. It is flavoursome, supple and has good length. The 1979 Moss Wood has developed into a fine example of Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon, drinking at its best.
- 1980** One of the best vintages of the Moss Wood Cabernet. The wine has lovely berry aromas with nuances of charry oak and a depth of rich blackcurrant flavour which is enhanced by excellent oak handling.
- 1980 (Special Reserve)** This Montgomery Trophy winner has added complexity as a result of being aged in oak for two years. It has intense berry aromas, nuances of charry oak, a depth of flavour on the middle palate and an excellent long lingering finish. The wine is drinking superbly but is still a few years from its peak.
- 1981** This is still a youthful wine with tight, fresh fruit and strong tannins. At present it is too closed and too tannic to be considered near its best. It needs about three years more cellaring and may not reach its peak until about 1995.
- 1982** One of the best balanced of all the Moss Wood Cabernets, the 1982 is a rich, herbaceous wine with pleasant charry oak characters. Its supple mouthfeel and generous, rounded flavours make it currently one of the most appealing wines from the vineyard.
- 1983** Although this huge wine will need about seven years to show its best, it is currently attractive drinking. It has intense mulberry fruit and charry oak aromas on the nose and palate, is tightly structured and has considerable depth of flavour.
- 1983 (Special Reserve)** This wine has spicy, smokey characters from the long aging in oak which add complexity to the huge fruit from the vintage. Its soft acid, mouth-filling flavour and rich, round structure make it attractive drinking now, in spite of its big tannins. However, it is still a little closed and will be even more pleasing in three to five years time.
- 1984** A very fine, elegant wine that is developing beautifully. It has delicate fruit flavour, reminiscent of cherries, good structure and considerable length. Although it should be drinking quite well in a year or so, it is likely to be at its best in seven to ten years time.
- 1985** This generous vintage produced an appealing wine with a powerful bouquet, rich, berry fruit flavours and a tight structure. Although it is attractive drinking now, it will not be at its best for about five years and will keep for many years after that.
- 1986** This is a big rich wine with huge tannins that needs years to soften, fill out its excellent structure and show its ripe, berry fruit at its best.

Oak Maturation

French winemakers have used the excellent oak from that country to age their red wines for centuries and, consequently, many people have come to accept that the best red wines should show the character of French oak. For this reason and because he is impressed by their quality and beneficial effects, Keith Mugford is a firm believer in maturing his wines in French oak.

An understanding of the different types of barrels and their impact on Moss Wood wines has come with experience. Whereas in 1979 the vineyard's order would have been for one dozen French oak barrels, now it might include requests for barrels from different areas, from a variety of coopers, and with different levels of char. Over the years, Moss Wood has tried barrels from Nevers, Allier, Vosges, Tronçais, Jupilles and Limousin. Each area has its individual character as climatic factors influence the oak produced in each region; for example, Vosges in the cooler North-East produces fine, delicate oak whereas Limousin in the warmer South-West makes coarser barrels with more obvious charry characters.

As the wood needs to be heated in order to bend the staves, charring is a necessary part of the process of making barrels. The intensity of heat and the length of time for which it is applied determines the amount of char on the barrels. Maturation in lightly charred barrels produces different nuances in the bottled wine than aging in heavily charred barrels.

Moss Wood has tried many French coopers: Billon, Demptos, François Frères, Mercier, Nadalie, Radoux, Seguin Moreau and Taransaud, as well as the Adelaide manufacturer, C.A. Schahinger, who buys in bulk from France and assembles the barrels in Australia.

Determining what levels of char, which coopers and which areas produce barrels that most suit Moss Wood wines has been a long process and one in which experimentation will continue. One result of this experimentation has been to eliminate barrels from Jupilles and Limousin. Another significant decision has been to use barrels with a medium level of char for all wines. It became apparent quite quickly that a medium char had an affinity with the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir but took rather longer for the Mugfords to be convinced that this was also the case with Cabernet Sauvignon.

A constant at the winery has been the use of 225 litre barriques for oak maturation of wines. These have the greatest surface to volume ratio and consequently allow more oak exposure per litre of wine and thus give the wine the maximum oak character. Air dried rather than kiln seasoned barrels have also been found to be most suitable for the Moss Wood wines.

By maturing it in oak, the vigneron aims to allow the wine to develop in barrels and absorb oak characters which are in balance with and therefore do not dominate the fruit character of the wine. Experience has shown that most Moss Wood wines benefit from about twelve months in oak with about thirty percent of each wine being aged in new barrels. The development of wine in old barrels adds further complexity to the bottled wine as it helps soften the fruit and adds smokey, tarry characters to the perfumes of the new oak. The importance of old oak is emphasised in wines such as the Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon Special Reserve from 1980 and 1983 which have gained complexity and depth of flavour from extended time in old oak.

Once the oak maturation is completed, the wine aged in new and old oak is blended together so that the bottled wine shows the complexity which comes from the integration of the two. Excellent oak treatment is an important characteristic of all the wooded Moss Wood wines.

The 1988 and 1989 Moss Wood Cabernets

Keith is optimistic about the next two vintages of Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon. The 1988 is typical of the vineyard, with a spicy, perfumed bouquet and complex, ripe, smokey flavours on the palate. Although quite tarry for a young wine, it is already soft and generous.

The 1989 Cabernet has soft, ripe fruit with a pungent mulberry character. It is really drinkable and reminds Keith of the wine from the 1982 vintage.

In Brief

Making Haste, Slowly

Every now and again something happens which makes you wonder if you are still living in the twentieth century. Keith hasn't recovered from his attempts to get samples of Moss Wood freighted by air from Busselton to Melbourne recently. His faith in transport companies took somewhat of a battering when what he had expected to be an overnight operation took four weeks to complete.

The Stock Exchange Centenary

Keith and Clare are delighted that the 1987 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon was chosen by the Australian Stock Exchange (Perth) as the wine to celebrate the Exchange's centenary. A small parcel of the wine was specially labelled for the occasion. The Exchange's Public Relations Officer, Ron Bennetts, explained that the '87 Moss Wood Cabernet was chosen from a range of premium Western Australian wines to celebrate the occasion. A long time admirer of Moss Wood, Ron praised the wine as one of the best vintages of Moss Wood Cabernet that he has seen.

Renovation at Moss Wood

The old cellar at Moss Wood has recently been cleaned up and special racks built to house the older vintages of Moss Wood. The catalyst for this operation was the accidental smashing of a precious bottle of the 1974 Cabernet purchased by Keith from Grapevine Cellars in Rivervale. Little is spoken of the incident in the Mugford household although the person responsible claims that she was not anywhere near as careless as the American who broke the bottle of 1787 (Jefferson) Lafite recently. Those present managed to rescue about 100ml of the surprisingly soft 1974 wine which had lovely bottle developed characters.

Monitoring the Newsletter

Tom Gillespie reminded Keith and Clare that their 1985 newsletter had extolled the virtues of the 1983 Cabernet and declared it the best they had produced. He was happy to confirm that opinion when he and his wife opened their first bottle recently. (No doubt Tom's letter serves as a healthy reminder that consumers have long memories! And no doubt this item reassures consumers of the continued accuracy and reliability of the newsletter!!)

The Impact of the Tax File Numbers System on the Wine Industry

The Federal Government's tax file legislation has had a not unexpected impact on the wine industry. There are usually fifteen to twenty labourers on the waiting list to pick at Moss Wood but, for the first time ever, vignerons in the Margaret River district found grape pickers in short supply during harvest.

Keith believes that the industry needs to rethink its position and attract people to long term employment. Moss Wood has taken such a step with the employment this year of Ian 'Tinker' Bell (all 6'6" of him) and Tom Ranford.

There is even talk that the labour shortage in the district might lead to the introduction of machine harvesting, although this is highly unlikely at Moss Wood.

Visiting the Winery

Because of the relatively small volume of wine produced, there is no cellar door facility provided for the general public and visits to the winery are by appointment only.

However, people on the mailing list or those interested in wine who wish to see over the winery and/or to taste the current Moss Wood releases, are welcome.

Contact Keith or Clare beforehand to make arrangements if you wish to visit.

