



MOSS WOOD
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SUMMER NEWS

ISSUE 81 NOVEMBER 2012



Moss Wood 2011 Chardonnay

Vintage Notes

Any discussion about the 2011 vintage must begin with a simple observation – it's very unlikely we've had a better one. Somehow the planets aligned to give us that rare combination of warm, dry conditions when we needed them but regular rainfall to keep the soil moisture topped up. Flowering for most

varieties, but especially Chardonnay, took place in excellent conditions and virtually no rain fell during those 3 weeks. Then it seemed like someone flicked a switch and we received several days of good rainfall before fine conditions returned for the next variety to flower. As farmers, we'll happily take them again whenever Mother Nature feels inclined to do so.

A further advantage was we were able to run a consistent fungicide program because the weather tended not to interrupt the spraying cycle, meaning our disease control was better and cheaper. After all this good news, it's hard to imagine that things could have been any better, but they were, because at the same time, we also avoided any hail damage and the birds didn't bother us!

In spite of all this good news about quantity, we still have the most important issue to

consider – quality. We can report that after such a good build up, the 2011 sits at or near the top of our quality tree but it's worth considering this in the overall context of our 31 years of Chardonnay production.

Readers familiar with Moss Wood Chardonnay will know the style has varied during that time, as we experimented with variations in production techniques. It's interesting to examine the averages of some key wine components, namely harvest date, yield and ripeness, as they were in the decades that followed the first vintage in 1980.

From 1980 to 1989, the numbers were 26th February, 4.46 tonnes per hectare and 12.7⁰ Baume.

From 1990 to 1999, the numbers were 6th March, 8.35 tonnes per hectare and 13.4⁰ Baume.

From 2000 to 2009, the numbers were 27th February, 6.49 tonnes per hectare and 13.3⁰ Baume.

From 2010 to 2012, the numbers were 24th February, 9.81 tonnes per hectare and 13.1⁰ Baume.

This simple analysis shows some interesting things. In our first decade, we were making wines in a leaner

style, with less ripeness and correspondingly lower alcohol, and with fruit characters leaning towards the citrus notes of grapefruit and lime. At the same time, the vineyard was cropping at lower yield, due in part to young vines and also our inexperience with handling the early budburst associated with our maritime climate and the problems that arose from the damage caused by Wilyabrup's frequently stormy weather at that time of year.

The second decade the increase in yield suggests we learnt better management techniques to reduce the impact of the above. It also shows the harvest ripeness went up, as we began to prefer a wine style that displayed riper fruit characters. In real terms, this meant Moss Wood Chardonnay from the period showed a predominance of yellow-flesh stone fruits and marmalade. The third decade continued the theme, although towards the end of the period we started to pick at slightly lower ripeness to improve the freshness of the wine by retaining more of the greener notes, albeit only a small adjustment. Curious readers may have noted that our yields fell, especially during the middle years of the 2000's, so it seems we must have forgotten some of our lessons.

Into our fourth decade, we have continued the trend of lower ripeness and fortunately, turned the yield decline around. It seems we are finally beginning to understand the Moss Wood Chardonnay vineyard and what style it produces best. It didn't take long did it?

As an aside, those with an eye to wider issues may note that overall, our first decade appears to have been slightly cooler. The vines ripened smaller crops more slowly, although some of this change may be that in the decades since, ripening rates went up partly as a result of trellis improvements.

Our weather station only began collecting data in 1998, so we can't confirm the actual temperatures experienced during that decade.

In our view, the great vintages of Moss Wood Chardonnay released so far are: 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2009 and 2010. We will admit that our view of the four oldest wines is influenced by the fact they were made during very exciting times. The 1980 was perhaps the most exciting of all, being the first barrel fermented wine Moss Wood had produced. Every step in the process was an adventure and the quality was unexpectedly good. The next three were just as interesting as we worked hard to understand good Chardonnay techniques and especially those used by the Burgundians. This meant we tried steps like extended lees contact and malolactic fermentation for the first time and were intrigued by the possibilities these offered. However, all things considered, these wines deserve their place on the list and especially the 1984 which is a personal favourite of Keith's. Sadly it was such a tiny quantity that very few people had the chance to taste it.

What conclusions can we draw about the 2011 vintage? The yields and ripeness place it alongside some very fine years – 1996, 2005 and 2010. In our view, it has brighter fruit aromas than the '05 but still has that vintage's complexity. It is generally more concentrated than the '96 and has better balanced tannins. Finally, it was picked very slightly less ripe than the 2010 and so while it is very similar, a case can be made that the 2011 is more lifted with its primary fruit aromas.

On balance, it ranks with the best Chardonnay wines we have made.

Production Notes

Median Harvest Date:
18th February, 2011

Harvest Ripeness:
13.0° Baume

All the fruit was hand-picked and delivered to the winery for whole bunch pressing. The free run juice and pressings components were kept separate and both batches were cold settled in stainless steel tanks. The pressing were fined to remove excess phenolics. After cold settling the clear juice from both fractions was racked to stainless steel tanks and fermentation was initiated with pure yeast culture. After 24 hours, the process was properly under way and so the fermenting juice was racked to French oak barrels where it stayed until the ferment reached dryness. The barrels were all racked to stainless steel tank to equalise the blend and then it was racked back to oak.

Each barrel was seeded for malolactic fermentation and

this was allowed to proceed to 30% completion. After this, all the barrels were racked and combined in stainless steel; the final blend was adjusted and then returned to oak.

The barrel aging continued until July 2012, when all the barrels were again racked and blended in stainless steel. Fining trials were carried out and the wine was treated with bentonite for protein stability and isinglass, for tannin balance.

Finally, on 5th September 2012, the wine was sterile filtered and bottled.

Tasting Notes

Colour and condition:

Medium straw hue; bright condition.

Nose: A lifted and complex nose showing the full array of Chardonnay aromas – nectarine, blossoms, marmalade and limes. The complexity derived from long term barrel aging adds malt, roast nut, toast and cinnamon notes.

Palate: The initial impact is of generous ripe fruits, full body and smooth texture. There are generous peach, marmalade and roast almond flavours, sitting over a balanced astringency that builds the mouthfeel but doesn't impinge on the texture, so gives the wine a long, sweet, round feel.

Cellaring: In the mould of the best Moss Wood Chardonnays, we recommend this wine for long term cellaring. It will take around 10 years to develop the typical secondary notes of toast, caramel and butter and should reach a peak between 15 and 20 years of age.



Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2012 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc

Vintage Notes

With the release of the 2012 Ribbon Vale Vineyard Semillon Sauvignon Blanc, we are offering the first wine from the very high quality '12 vintage. Since we are happy to wax lyrical about how a good growing season produced high quality in the resulting wines, we thought readers might appreciate more detail of how this worked and in particular for the Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon.

There are some obvious things that we can control, like maintaining an effective fungicide program to control the threat of disease and applying nets to minimise damage from birds, to ensure that sound grapes arrive at the winery, free of fungal taints and the other odd characters. In 2012, we managed to get this right, so we covered our part of the bargain. This also meant that yields were above average for both varieties.

However, this really only underpins the result of the

serious quality driver – the weather. The timing and nature of weather events will either make or break a vintage and luckily for us, this year it worked in our favour, as we describe below.

While the weather is significant during the full 6 months of the growing season, in 2012 the crucial period was from the third week of January through to the first week of March. As we approached Australia Day, conditions began to warm up. Until that point we had the odd hot day with a maximum in the mid-thirties but from the 18th to the 27th, we had a series of days where the daily temperature range was roughly 20 – 35°C. In case anyone is interested, as is befitting, Australia Day was the warmest of the whole season, with a minimum of 23.5°C at 5.30am and rising to 40.8°C at 12.35pm. A nice hot day for an outdoor barbie!

After this, temperatures eased for the next 2 weeks, and so did the ripening. On the 10th

February, we had the start of another 3 days of warm weather, with maxima in the low to mid thirties and this brought the Sauvignon Blanc to nearly full ripeness. The next warm spell, albeit slightly cooler, starting on the 18th February, brought the ripening process to a conclusion and grapes were picked on 22nd February.

At this point, only half the battle was won because we were still waiting on the Semillon.

The temperatures eased again for the next two weeks, with maxima in the mid to high 20's, conditions which are just about perfect for vine photosynthesis. The Semillon cruised through to maturity just before the next hot day on 6th March.

Apart from the period around Australia Day, temperatures were warm enough to encourage steady ripening and we avoided damage from extreme heat – both varieties received 45 hours above 33°C but only 4 hours above 35°C. In addition, 8.5mm of rain fell during the same period, nowhere enough to cause splitting and disease.

Altogether, 2012 was a very good season, albeit one where the temperatures were on the warm side. This is best shown by the harvest dates where although both varieties were picked at almost exactly average ripeness and above average yields, Sauvignon Blanc was picked 8 days earlier than average and the Semillon 11 days. The only negative is this may have slightly reduced the final quality of the Sauvignon Blanc. It can be argued that some of the fresh, green notes, important in

giving juiciness and crispness, are diminished by the hours spent above 25°C. While that may be so, we would argue that these characters are not lost completely. Furthermore, in a wine style like a Semillon Sauvignon Blanc blend that needs full body as well as freshness, this is not necessarily to the wine's detriment because the warmer conditions promote the necessary ripeness.

Production Notes

Median Harvest Dates and Ripeness:

Sauvignon Blanc –
22nd February, 2012; 11.7°
Baume

Semillon –
6th March, 2012; 13.2° Baume

Both varieties were hand-picked and delivered to the winery where they were destemmed, drained and pressed. The free run and pressings fractions were kept separate and both were chilled and settled in stainless steel tanks. The pressings were fined to reduce phenolics.

After settling, both components were blended and seeded for fermentation with pure yeast culture. The Sauvignon Blanc juice was fermented with a yeast strain that promotes its lifted gooseberry character, while the Semillon yeast was chosen for its neutral characteristics. As a result, temperatures were different. The former was fermented at around 12°C while the latter was kept at 18°C.

Once fermentation was completed and both varieties had reached dryness, they were settled for two weeks then racked off gross lees.

The composition of both batches was checked and adjusted and then both were tasted before blending. In the end, we chose a combination of 51% Semillon and 49% Sauvignon Blanc.

The finished wine was then fined for protein stability and then sterile filtered and bottled on 4th September, 2012.

Tasting Notes

Colour and condition: Light to medium straw hue; bright condition.

Nose: Lifted fruit aromas of gooseberry, passionfruit, lycee, lemon sherbet and cheddar cheese – very bright and fresh.

Palate: Similar impact to the nose – crisp acidity, juicy lemon, passionfruit and gooseberry flavours with full body and very clean finish, with no astringency.

Cellaring: The combination of bright fruit aromas and fresh acidity make the wine delicious to drink now but its composition will ensure it repays cellaring. It will develop bottle bouquet over the next 5 years and can be enjoyed as a mature wine between 7 and 10 years of age.

Spring Vineyard Update

We are delighted to report the Spring weather has so far been very much to our liking. There have been moments of trepidation as some heavy storms have come through during September and October bringing very strong winds and the threat of hail. High winds did some significant damage around the region, including blowing down a number of trees and cutting power supplies but they didn't do much harm to the vineyard. We are hoping that at least part of the reason for this is the growth of our windbreak trees, planted a decade ago.

Most importantly, the hail storms were only brief and the hail size was small. Flowering on all the early varieties is under way and the timing suggests we are slightly ahead of the average. If these temperature conditions continue, that puts us on track for a commencement of vintage around the 15th to 20th February, 2013. However there is, as they say, plenty of water to pass under the bridge before then.

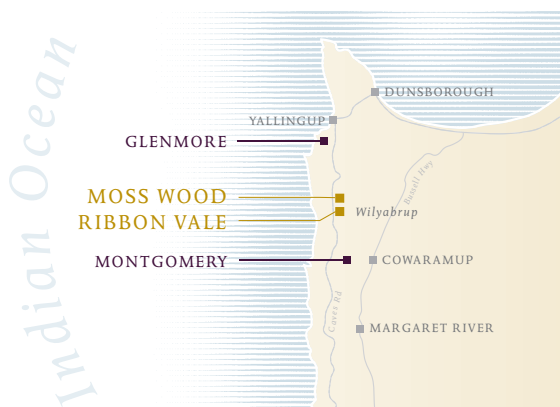
St. John of God Hospital, Lycra and the Bulls

It may be the first time readers have seen all of the above used in the one heading but as in many parts of Australia, cycling is becoming popular in our region. From humble beginnings with a peloton of 3 riders (Neil Earl, Max Montgomery and Keith Mugford) in 1996, there are now sufficient cyclists in Cowaramup to have formed the Cowaramup Cycle Club, aka the mighty Bulls. For the unsuspecting visitor this can lead to traumatic experiences. Like driving along local roads and suddenly encountering the bunch of supremely fit cyclists, thundering along at speeds sometimes exceeding 20kph. Like sitting next to them in a local coffee shop after they've finished the ride. Or, perhaps worst of all, it might just be the sight of old fat blokes in Lycra?

Please be assured this inconvenience, some might say suffering, is not in vain.

Through the untiring efforts of many but especially Brendon Morrison, the Bulls President and key organiser and his wife Kathryn, local cycling events are now raising funds for various charities. This year the Lighthouse to Lighthouse Ride from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin raised money for St John of God Hospital; the Tour de Gracetown raised funds for a new incubator for new born babies at Margaret River Hospital; and The Delirium 24 Hour Ride raised funds and awareness for the Lung Institute of WA. Any readers who are cyclists are welcome to participate in the events or any local rides and encouraged to check them out on the web or by emailing direct to the Tour of Margaret River email – tomr@hotmail.com.au. Who knows? It might provide just the right balance – some gentle exercise to wear off the effects of the wine and food experience of Margaret River?

*Kind regards,
Clare and Keith Mugford*



MOSS WOOD
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

926 Metcupp Road, Wilyabrup WA PO Box 225, Cowaramup WA 6284
T +61 8 9755 6266 F +61 8 9755 6303 E mosswood@mosswood.com.au
www.mosswood.com.au