



**MOSS WOOD**  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# AUTUMN NEWS

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## Moss Wood 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon

### Vintage Notes

At the risk of sounding boring, we begin our commentary on the Moss Wood 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon with the observation that we have yet again been blessed with another fantastic season. This run of very good years since 2007 is without precedent and not something we've come to expect in the risky business of agriculture. The key to the quality of these seasons appears to have been warm summers with minimal extreme heat, in conjunction with appropriate levels of rain, falling at the right times.

In 2010 things began well, as Spring 2009 proved consistently mild, with regular rainfall but no severe storms. Flowering conditions were good for all varieties except Cabernet Franc because it had just been going for about a week when we had a spectacular thunderstorm on 18th November that shook the windows of the Mugford house. We can count ourselves lucky because although it rained, any hail associated with the system went around us. Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot were only just beginning when all this took place,

so they missed the worst of it. The yield figures reflect what happened. Cabernet Sauvignon was up by 9% to 8.26 tonnes per hectare, Petit Verdot was up 8% at 6.62 tonnes per hectare but Cabernet Franc was down 17% at 5.36 tonnes per hectare.

We can see an interesting quality feature in the yield data. For example, although Cabernet Sauvignon was above average, the actual bunch weights were down by around 15%. This suggests the higher yield was driven by more but smaller bunches on the vines, with a commensurate increase in concentration of colour and flavour in the finished wine associated with small berries.

As we moved into summer, the temperatures gradually went up but we missed out on extremes. January 2010 was very comfortable with maxima consistently in the high 20's although we did experience our hottest day of the season on 17th January when the mercury topped out at 39°C. These mild to warm conditions continued into February, right up to the beginning of the harvest when on 24th we began a week of weather where the maxima were all around 36°C. This brought the Pinot Noir on quite quickly and the other early varieties followed suit when we had another run of warm days beginning on the 7th March where the maxima were all around 34°C. After this, the weather became increasingly mild, giving near ideal conditions for finishing, although we were determined

to get everything picked by the end of the first week of April as a large rain event loomed. This proved to be a wise strategy because this system eventually dumped 75mm rain, starting on 12th April.

The positive aspects of these seasonal conditions can be seen in the following way. In the period from flowering to harvest, Cabernet Sauvignon received 1025 daylight hours in the ideal range for photosynthesis (18-28°C). To successfully ripen an average crop, it needs around 850 hours. Furthermore, experience tells us that mature fruit flavours require at least 30 hours above 33°C but preferably 50 hours and in 2010, we received 55 hours.



Altogether we can conclude Cabernet Sauvignon had conditions very much in its favour. This is reinforced by the fact that on average it takes the variety 118 days from flowering to get to full ripeness but in 2010, it did so in 108 days, despite the crop being 9% above average. Interestingly, this is not clear from the median harvest dates for each of the varieties. Cabernet Sauvignon was picked on 28th March, one day later than its long term average of 27th March. Cabernet Franc was picked on 5th March, exactly on average and Petit Verdot was 6 days later than average on 11th April. All this shows that our cooler, damp conditions in Spring led to about a one week's delay with the flowering i.e. those dates were slightly later than average.

We think all this conjures up an image of the grapes as plump human beings, basking in plentiful sunshine but without getting burnt. Quite pleasant really! Each of the varieties achieved flavour ripeness at very close to long term averages. Cabernet Sauvignon came in at 13.4° Baume, compared to its long term average of 13.2°; Petit Verdot came in at 13.1°, slightly lower than its 13.3° average; Cabernet Franc was similar, picked at 12.5° and slightly below the average of 12.9°.

Of other issues affecting quality, we can report that despite the Spring rains mentioned earlier, our spray program controlled fungal diseases and the fruit was in sound condition. The only disappointing outcome for the year was a late attack by the birds on our "Old Block" Cabernet Sauvignon. Since the pressure from the silvereyes and parrots had been virtually non-existent, we chose not to

put nets out to cover the last of the fruit. As luck would have it, the redgum blossom finished about a week too soon and the birds turned their attention to the vines. We noted their appearance in the vineyard but felt they wouldn't have time to do much harm. How wrong we were. In the end, we lost about 1000 kilograms of fruit, which in itself is not a major problem but it was all out of our favourite part of the vineyard. We won't make that mistake again!

Regardless of all this, we put 2010 down as an absolute copybook season and there are no excuses for poor wine quality.

## Production Notes

### Median Harvest Dates:

Cabernet Sauvignon –  
28th March, 2010

Petit Verdot –  
11th April, 2010

Cabernet Franc –  
5th March, 2010

### Harvest Ripeness:

Cabernet Sauvignon –  
13.4° Baume

Petit Verdot –  
13.1° Baume

Cabernet Franc –  
12.5° Baume

All the fruit was hand-picked then delivered to the winery where it was destemmed into small, open fermenters. Each batch was seeded with pure yeast culture and fermentation was allowed to proceed at temperatures up to 28°C. Extraction of colour and flavour was by hand plunging at least 3 times per day. An interesting difference for the 2010 vintage was the Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot both benefited from longer than normal skin contact time. Both were on skins for 19 days, which is roughly 4 days

longer than normal and this is not easy to explain. We could indulge in wild speculation as to why they took longer to reach their best tannin balance but truth be known, we really can't be sure. Perhaps it's the sign of a great year, where the fruit depth and phenolic ripeness are such that the wines can take up lots more tannin and still be well balanced. Amusingly, Cabernet Franc was very normal at 10 days on skins. Given that it was picked less ripe than usual, it may be we harvested slightly too early. Who knows? Wine is definitely as much art as science.

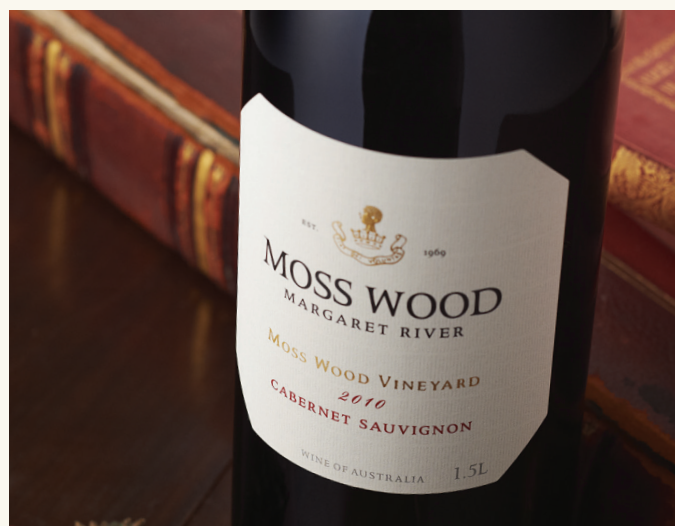
After pressing the batches underwent malolactic fermentation in stainless steel tanks and were then racked to barrels, the final batch going in, in the first week of May 2010. At the end of January 2011 all the batches were racked and blended to make up the final assemblage and this was returned to barrel. The wine was racked again in January 2012 then returned to barrel until the end of September 2012. All barrels were blended and fining trails were set up to assess tannin balance. No improvement was found using any of the fining agents, so the wine was then sterile filtered and bottled on 16th October 2012.

## Tasting Notes

**Colour and condition:** Deep brick red, in bright condition.

**Nose:** A complex and powerful combination. The nature of the vintage is such that the fruit aromas are clear and dominant, showing violets, blueberries and red currants. However, in these types of years the depth of the nose is enhanced by background complex notes like tar, leather and chocolate. The lengthy barrel aging has enhanced these but the actual oak characters are spicy and toasty and don't dominate.

**Palate:** In similar vein to the nose, this shows all the classic Moss Wood features associated with our very finest years. The fruit flavours of red currant and mulberry provide an initial rich, sweet front and mid-palate. The acidity provides good lift and makes the flavours bright. Tannin impact is very evident but not because the wine is firm. Rather, the phenolics are concentrated and build the mouthfeel without affecting the texture, such that the wine is smooth and long. On the finish the oak provides toasty and coffee bean flavours and some tannin for gentle grip.



**Cellaring:** This is a delicious wine drunk now and could prove very hard to resist. However, we strongly recommend it for cellaring and believe it will continue to improve with age for at least the next 25 years. For those who are concerned this is worryingly distant, please be reassured that it will soften and improve over the next 7 years, so by the age of 10 it will have developed a complex bottle bouquet. We compare this wine to the 2001 which is just going through this age and while it predominantly retains its youthful fruit characters, it is beginning to give glimpses of its mature characters.



## Vintage 2013 – more of the same, so far

At the time of writing, we are now roughly halfway through vintage 2013 and there is good and bad news to report. The bad news is really not so difficult because it is about yields, which have been down across most but not all varieties. We had indifferent weather through flowering, with regular windy and rainy conditions and low temperatures taking their toll. However, the really dramatic event occurred in the last week of November when a weather system produced a series of wet, windy days, culminating in a storm that dumped large dollops of hail over both the Moss Wood and Ribbon Vale vineyards. This was the same system that blew part of the roof off the newly re-developed Terrace Hotel in Perth.

Semillon is the biggest disappointment being 50% down, while Sauvignon Blanc is down 30%. Who would have thought that in these conditions we'd pick any Chardonnay? After all, this is the grape variety that can catch a cold. Well, we managed a 5% above average crop! We can only speculate how big it might have been if the hail hadn't come along.

In the reds, Pinot Noir was down 40% and Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon are both down around 20%. Merlot, the other grape variety that will catch a cold, produced a crop almost exactly on the average. As Erika, our resident American would say, go figure!

The good news is the quality looks very pleasing across the board. The whites have vibrant fruit characters, so aromas are lifted but there is good depth on the palate. For the reds, the situation is similar but the most exciting is the balance of the tannins. There is great fruit depth on the palate with density and concentration. Altogether, very encouraging.

## Moss Wood Ribbon Vale Vineyard 2011 Botrytis Semillon

It was probably inevitable this would happen – the increasing interest of the Mugford children would eventually force Clare and Keith to give in and do something exciting.

Keith blames the Mugford 2010 Christmas lunch where the pudding was accompanied by a bottle of 2003 Chateau d'Yquem and as usual with this great wine, people were reduced to using words like delicious, stunning and so on. This was a rare privilege and everyone was suitably impressed. As is so often the case, the experience of a truly great wine for the first time is something of a defining moment, likely to stay in the memory forever.

With the Yquem-driven inspiration, the end of the 2011 vintage saw considerable

pressure brought to bear by Tristan and Hugh, both of whom were working at Moss Wood, to attempt our first Moss Wood botrytis wine. Clare and Keith relented, three rows of Ribbon Vale Semillon were set aside and we waited to see what might happen. Although Moss Wood has never produced sweet wines, as wine consumers we've always been very fond of the best dessert styles from all round the world. We include in that category, by the way, DeBortoli Noble One, which is the benchmark in Australia and has been a consistent, stand-out wine since its first vintage in 1982. We felt if we could get the right sort of conditions, even with our lack of experience, we might be able to make a good fist of it.

The first lesson for the Moss Wood beginners was that in making a "noble rot" wine we were even more exposed to the whims of Mother Nature than usual. Unless the rain falls at the right time and the temperatures are in the correct range, Botrytis cinerea may not take hold at all, or if it does, it may turn to smelly, grey mould, with no chance of making anything decent. And there is absolutely nothing that can be done about it. We can accept some agricultural risk but this bordered on the ridiculous!

The second lesson was the value of patience. We had a bit of luck, the weather remained cool and not too damp and sure enough, we found a gradual emergence of the right fungi and most importantly of all, the berries actually tasted good. By the end of April, we had a significant level of infection, flavours were promising and so we turned our attention to the weather. Margaret River region is not known for light showers during the autumn



and heavy rain was now a threat to quality.

Significant showers came through during the first week of May and then the weather fined up. The fruit continued to taste good, although its appearance began to deteriorate. We felt that any more could seriously diminish the quality and decided to pick just before the next lot of showers. Rain loomed in the last week of May, so we "pulled the trigger" and picked on 26th. Our best estimate is that 60% of the berries were infected with *Botrytis cinerea* and this reduced the yield by 40%. The ripeness was 19.6° Baume.

### Production Notes

#### Harvest Date:

26th May 2011

#### Harvest Ripeness:

19.6° Baume

The next step for the beginners was to process this weird looking stuff in the winery and we have to admit that it was all a bit weird, getting the grape processing equipment out again some two months after we had cleaned it all up and put it away. Into the press went very shrivelled bunches, some of which made us wonder if any juice would come out at all.

Once the press built up pressure, we started to get some deep golden juice and a quick taste confirmed all was well. We settled out the solids for 2 days and then racked the clear juice into a tank to seed it for fermentation.

Just what the yeast thought when they were dumped into this treacle-like substance is anyone's guess but it was clear from the beginning that they didn't much enjoy it and were very slow to start. Once the fermentation got going, we racked the wine into barrels and waited to see what would happen. The rate of fermentation was never very high but as the alcohol level approached 7% it slowed even more. It continued to struggle along but eventually the combination of high sugar levels and alcohol were just too much for the organism and it was finally overwhelmed and stopped at 12% alcohol and 7° Baume sweetness. It is quite literally a natural sweet wine.

After fermentation ceased, we racked the barrels to make the blend consistent, adjusted sulphur dioxide, returned the wine to oak on 28th June 2011 and waited to see what would happen. Our plan was to leave it there for as long as it showed improvement. As things turned out, the improvement process went on

for longer than we thought and the wine stayed in barrel until 29th January 2013.

Once back in stainless steel we decided, yes, we did indeed have a wine good enough to carry the Moss Wood banner and carried out some fining trials to see if we could fine tune the flavours. In the end we gave the wine a light fining with skim milk to smooth the palate and then the wine was bottled on 8th February 2013.

### Tasting Notes

**Colour and condition:** Deep straw/light gold, in bright condition.

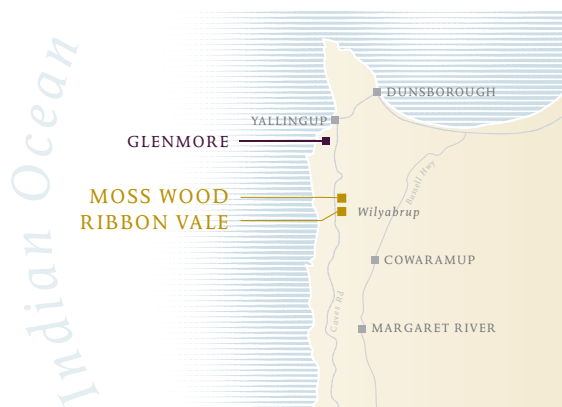
**Nose:** The first impression is of bright fruit aromas consisting of pear, nashi fruit and dried apricots and all are surprisingly fresh for a wine that has spent nearly two years ageing in barrel. The oak itself does not play a big role in the nose and the characters are restricted to delicate, toasty notes. However, there are all sorts of interesting background notes coming from the noble rot, not the least of which is a distinct Disprin character.

**Palate:** The palate is initially bright and fresh, with zesty acidity and citrus notes which quickly give way to full body and creamy texture. It is luscious and generous

but not cloying. It also has good length, with pear, fig and dried apricot flavours lining up along the palate and finishing with soft tannin.

**Cellaring:** Without wishing to overstate it, this combination of freshness and richness makes the wine very enjoyable now. There has probably not been a more drinkable Moss Wood wine at time of release, except perhaps for the 1985 vintage port. This is not to suggest the wine will not improve with age. On the contrary, its youthful colour and fruit characters and complexity will lend themselves to improvement through long term cellaring. However, this is our first attempt and we prefer be conservative about the wine's ageing potential. Therefore we recommend 5 to 7 years in the cellar, anticipating the nose will add caramel, toast and nutty notes to the bouquet while the palate will see a softening of acidity and tannin, improving the sweetness mouthfeel and therefore drinkability of the palate.

*Kind regards,  
Clare and Keith Mugford*



**MOSS WOOD**

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