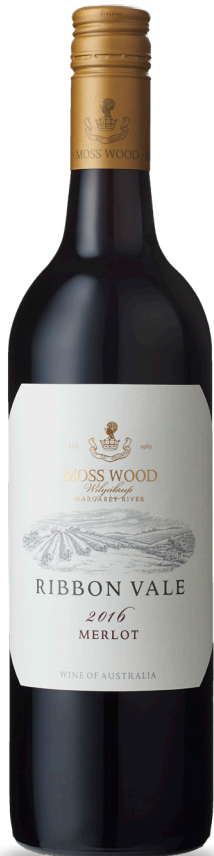




MOSS WOOD

Wilyabrup
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MOSS WOOD RIBBON VALE 2016 MERLOT



TASTING NOTES

Colour and condition: The hue is medium-to-deep brick red and condition is bright.

Nose: All good Merlot wines have a strong black fruit statement and the aromas on the 2016 Merlot are right in that mould. There is an array of rich blackberry, blueberry and cherry notes and as with its Cabernet Sauvignon sibling, they dominate. Sitting very much in the background at the moment are the beginnings of Merlot's earthy tones, with just a touch of leather and tar.

Palate: Here there is immediate impact from rich dark fruits, making the mouthfeel supple and generous. Given this variety can produce assertive tannins, we're really proud the structure of the wine is much better balanced, with firm phenolics that have good tarry concentration but none of the drying astringency that can be typical in Merlot. Rather, the dark fruit flavours flow across the palate and then the tannin and oak on the finish give just enough firmness and some pencil shavings notes.

VINTAGE NOTES

Readers who've been following the Moss Wood releases over the last year or so will have noted our enthusiastic commentary about the 2016 vintage so there will be no surprise we now report with similar excitement about the Ribbon Vale reds. There is much to like about them.

Initially the season behaved quite normally. Rainfall had been very close to average, so there was plenty of moisture in the soil and our dry grown vineyards had as good a start as we can hope for. Temperatures were warm enough during spring to encourage an early flowering with Merlot and Cabernet Franc being two weeks ahead of normal.

Of course, the Laws of Maximum Inconvenience were operating as normal because warmer conditions weren't available when we needed them during flowering and all 3 varieties suffered from the wet and cold conditions that moved through Wilyabrup in the last week of October.

As a consequence, yields were down for each – Cabernet Sauvignon by 40%, Cabernet Franc by 36% and Merlot by 45%.

Things settled down after this until the much-discussed big rain in mid-January threw a spanner in the works. As with the other varieties, the Ribbon Vale reds were all still green enough not to be affected by splitting and rot. After this, normal transmission resumed and we kept disease and birds at bay to have a healthy crop ready to harvest in early March.

There is one thing we can't quite explain. In the end, despite flowering 2 weeks early, Merlot ripened effectively one week later than average, on 24th March, meaning it had taken 139 days to go from flowering to harvest, 3 weeks longer than average. Not that we fuss too much about these things but statistically, this is extremely unusual and we're at a loss to come up with a clear explanation. The most obvious is Merlot reacted more than the other varieties to the January rain but this would normally manifest itself as a significant, upward yield fluctuation but as we can see above, the opposite happened and the bunches were around 10% lighter than average. Just when we think we've seen it all, Mother Nature throws a curve ball. We'll have to dig a little deeper to try and learn more.

Median Harvest Date

Merlot – 24/03/2016
Cabernet Franc – 12/03/2016

Bottled

09/08/2018

Median Harvest Ripeness

Merlot 12.9° Be
Cabernet Franc 13.5° Be

Yield

Merlot 4.40 t/ha
Cabernet Franc 5.30 t/ha

Alcohol

13.5%

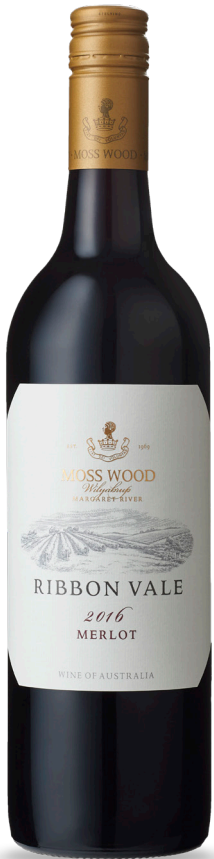
Ripening Time from Flowering to Harvest

Merlot – 139 days
Cabernet Franc – 129 days



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Returning to the point, each variety sailed comfortably through to full ripeness and fruit quality and flavour were excellent. A notable point for 2016 is flavour ripeness was achieved at slightly lower sugar levels, meaning the finished wines display good fruit intensity with more elegance on the palate, courtesy of the accompanying lower alcohols. Each variety was picked by hand, Merlot at 12.9° Baume on 24th March and Cabernet Franc at 13.5° Baume on 12th March.

PRODUCTION NOTES

All 2 varieties were destemmed and sorted to remove any contaminating leaves and stems and Cabernet Franc were then placed into small, open fermenters. Merlot was transferred into small, closed fermenters. The reason for the variation is we have greater success in extracting Merlot's colour and tannin in vessels that can be pumped over, not plunged. The reasons are not clear, other than to say if there's a variety that will be different, it's Merlot!

Fermentation for all was with multiple yeast strains, and each batch was hand-plunged, or pumped over, 3 times per day and tasted daily to monitor tannin balance.

Merlot was pressed after 14 days and Cabernet Franc after 9 days. It was another noticeable feature of 2016 that the two reached good tannin balance relatively quickly compared to previous years and spent less time on skins.

After pressing each batch underwent malolactic fermentation in stainless steel and once completed, they were adjusted for acidity and SO₂ and racked to barrel through March and April 2016. All barrels were 228 litre French oak of which 6% were new.

The final blends were tasted and prepared in January 2018. The Merlot looked best as a combination of 94% Merlot and 6% Cabernet Franc.

After blending in stainless steel, the finished wines were racked back to barrel where they stayed until the second week of June 2018. After blending for the final time, fining trials were carried out and the Merlot tannin balance was improved with a light egg white fining. Both wines were then sterile filtered and bottled on 9th August, 2018.

CELLARING NOTES

Without doubt, the 2016 Merlot has the sort of fruit depth and generosity that will make it very tempting to drink as a youngster. This is fine by us but we are very keen to assure those who like to cellar their wines and enjoy the more mature characters, it will repay their patience in spades. It will need to be at least 10 years old before the classic Merlot tarry notes have developed to the point where they'll be a strong feature in the wine and it will need to be at least 25 years old before they are in the ascendancy of full maturity.