

Moss Wood Ribbon Vale 2021 Chardonnay & Moss Wood Ribbon Vale 2021 Elsa



(Photo Frances Andrijich).

2021 Ribbon Vale Vintage

The 2021 vintage was like travelling some way back in time, to 1989 in fact. It's a long time since we've experienced the amount and timing of rain that '89 brought us but in 2021 Mother Nature gave us another of her subtle reminders that she calls the shots.

Through the early part of the season, conditions were benign with good spring rain, mild temperatures and no big storms to belt the vineyards with strong winds and hail. Flowering proceeded in excellent conditions and we were hopeful of good crops.

As we moved through summer, it was notable that temperatures were on the low side, making beach-going conditions a little bit cool. Apart from that First World problem the vines made steady progress and we planned for a slightly later vintage. On 4th February, a Tropical Low crossed the WA coast at Shark Bay and the remnant rain made its way down the coast to Margaret River, where it delivered just over 80mm.

Fortunately, the 2021 growing season was cooler than 1989 and so when the rain came, both Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay were still relatively green. The berries were quite firm and didn't split which in turn meant we had no disease problems and this allowed us to wait until temperatures warmed up and ripening got going again. That said, continuing mild conditions really tested our patience towards the end and we were relieved when Sauvignon Blanc was finally ready to harvest on 20th March, 3 weeks later than average. Chardonnay followed 5 days later.

Not surprisingly, given the regular rainfall, the season produced good crops. Sauvignon Blanc finally got moving after a succession of lighter years and gave us a solid 13 tonnes per hectare. Even for a variety with a propensity for high yields, we were pretty proud of that, especially given our vineyards are unirrigated. The Chardonnay, although a shy bearer, did well too, giving us just over 5 tonnes per hectare.

Moss Wood Ribbon Vale 2021 Chardonnay

Production Notes

Chardonnay has a complicated history at Ribbon Vale and is worth recounting. When we first purchased the property in 2000, there was a small planting but it had never been used for an individual wine. Instead, it was blended into the two key wines of the time, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc, for which the original owner, John James, had sound reasons. John was more interested in white Bordeaux than white Burgundy so Chardonnay wasn't his favourite. This, combined with his frustration with the inconsistent yields for which Margaret River Chardonnay is famous, meant he never bothered making a Chardonnay wine.

After the Mufords took over, we made varietal Chardonnay wines in both 2000 and 2001 but were never happy with the result and neither of them were released. We pulled the vines out and replaced them with the then darling of the market, Sauvignon Blanc.

At the time, as odd as this may seem now, demand for Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, in both varietal and blended forms, was much stronger. Ribbon Vale had developed a good reputation for both and we felt it was important to continue with the wines for which the vineyard was best known. In addition, after just 2 growing seasons, our knowledge of Ribbon Vale's terroir was fast evolving and we quickly learnt that

it's a very windy location and the negative impact on all the varieties but especially Chardonnay, was very significant.

The sea breezes that blow across the Margaret River region are an important contributor to our production of high quality wine. The resulting maritime climate avoids extremes of temperature and allows us to make the world-renowned products for which we are now known. However, high wind speeds cause serious problems for the vines, courtesy of the resulting physical damage to leaves and moisture stress. Chardonnay, which is a native of the relatively wind-free, continental climate of Burgundy, doesn't take kindly to all this trauma, especially during spring and so it sets inconsistent crops. Those

of us motivated by the style and quality of Margaret River Chardonnay just accept this reality and get on, but in the early days of the region it was a source of much debate.

To reduce the wind impact at Ribbon Vale, in 2001 we planted a large wind break along the southern boundary.

It took just over a decade for the trees to reach a height where we could see they were starting to have an effect and now, twenty years later, the health of the leaves and the general performance of the vineyard is much-improved. We believe we can see the results in the recent vintages of the Elsa, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, which all show a fruit depth and ripeness that we had previously struggled to achieve.

In the meantime, the wine market continues to evolve and consumers have developed a taste for Chardonnay, allowing it to supplant the Bordeaux

varieties at the top of the quality pecking order, if not at the top of the yield table, where it still falls dismally short. We only need to look at our results for 2021 to see how stark the difference – Sauvignon Blanc, 13 tonnes per hectare, Chardonnay, 5 tonnes per hectare.

Most importantly, our improvements to the environment at Ribbon Vale mean it's now a far more suitable vineyard for Chardonnay and as enthusiasts of this variety, we've re-established the plantings and are looking forward to what we can do with it. The 2021 we expect to be the first in a long line of these wines from the property.

Regular readers will know that at Moss Wood we're quite well versed in the viticulture and winemaking of Chardonnay. As a refresher, it was originally planted here in 1976 and its first vintage was 1980. Please don't read this as arrogant, but we're confident we know



Ribbon Vale Elsa 2021, Ribbon Vale East block. (Photo Frances Andrijich).



Ribbon Vale Chardonnay 2021. (Photo Frances Andrijich).

our way around the variety. What is really exciting for us is we can use our expertise in the vineyard and winery and then step back and see just what style of wine Ribbon Vale produces. One of the fascinating things about Burgundian winemaking is the various domains produce individual wines, using similar techniques, from their different vineyards across the region and when the sibling wines are lined up side by side, the stylistic nuances are there for all to see. We're looking forward to doing the same thing.

All this means the production techniques for Ribbon Vale Chardonnay are virtually identical to Moss Wood. There is a small difference in the choice of harvest date because the flavour profiles differ and ripeness at harvest may differ. Beyond that, it's much the same. The fruit is hand-picked, delivered to the

winery where the bunches are sorted and then put straight into the presses and the must is racked to stainless steel tanks, where it's settled for 24 hours. The clear juice is then racked to a second tank, seeded with multiple yeast strains and allowed to ferment at 18°C until the halfway point is reached and then it's racked to barrel to complete fermentation. All the barrels were 228 litre French oak and 25% were new. At the completion of primary fermentation, all barrels were racked and blended in stainless steel and the wine was then returned to wood for the malolactic fermentation. Once that was finished all barrels were blended again, adjusted for acidity and SO₂ and the finished wine was returned to barrel for further aging.

In the first week of January 2022, all barrels were racked

and blended in preparation for bottling. Fining trials were carried out to assess tannin balance but none improved the wine, so it remained unfinned, apart from the use of bentonite for protein stability. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on 14th January 2022.

Median Harvest Date:
25/03/2021

Harvest Ripeness: 12.8°Be

Yield: 5.38 t/ha

Days Elapsed between Flowering and Harvest:
128 days

Bottled: 14/01/2022

Alcohol: 13.5%

Tasting Notes

Colour and condition:
Medium straw hue, with green tints; bright condition.

Nose: Aromas of white flesh nectarines, rock melon, honey, golden syrup, ginger bread and peach blossom, with

caramel and roast nuts in the background and possibly freshly baked apple pie. Finishing with a light touch of toasty oak.

Palate: Medium to full bodied with a generous feel. There are nectarine, peach, lime and caramel or crème brulee flavours, as well as porridge and malt, sitting over a fresh acidity, which gives the wine real zip. There is some oak and tannin on the finish and some spicy oak and roast cashew notes.

Cellaring: Like all good Margaret River Chardonnays, the wine has the necessary features to allow it to age for at least 15 years. The trick will be having the patience and strength of will to resist its early attractiveness because it's an enjoyable young wine and can be consumed straight away.



(Photo Frances Andrijich).

Moss Wood Ribbon Vale 2021 Elsa

Production Notes

This is the third vintage of our Elsa wine and we feel we're making progress with the style. In the search for more complexity of aroma and flavour, we're now picking the Sauvignon Blanc riper. The original "Elsa" in 2019 contained 12.7% alcohol but in 2020 we upped this to 13.9% and felt that vintage had more depth and we continue this theme in 2021, with 13.5%.

With the higher level of ripeness comes a more interesting nose. Although Sauvignon Blanc has a terrific freshness, courtesy of the gooseberry and grassy notes, too much of this leaves the wine a bit one dimensional. By picking at higher sugar

levels, these are enhanced by lychee, pear and passionfruit. Perhaps more importantly, the higher alcohol brings much richer texture to the palate, something we see as important in balancing the variety's natural high acidity.

Apart from the changes to fruit ripeness, the production technique continues as before. The Sauvignon Blanc was hand-picked then sorted, destemmed, crushed and loaded into the presses. After 2 hours skin contact it was drained and pressed and settled in stainless steel tank. After 24 hours the clear juice was racked to a second tank and seeded with multiple yeast strains for primary fermentation, controlled to 18°C. At the halfway point the fermenting



Courtney Plowman, Tristan Mugford, Hugh Mugford and Tom Hansen.
(Photo Ben Delfs).

juice was racked to wood and temperatures were allowed to climb to ambient, typically around 22°C. The barrels were 228 litre French oak and 10% were new. Once primary fermentation was completed all barrels were racked and blended in stainless steel and the wine returned to barrel for malolactic fermentation. Once that was completed all barrels were racked and blended in stainless steel, the

wine adjusted for acidity and SO₂ and the finished wine was returned to barrel, where it stayed until the first week of January 2022. All barrels were then racked and blended and fining trials were carried out to assess tannin balance. None improved the wine, so it was fined only with bentonite for protein stability. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on 14th January, 2022.



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Matthew (Woody) Wood, Alex Coultas, Martin McQuonen, Ida Mosberg, Ana Hranilovic and Hugh Mugford. (Photo Ben Delfs).



Ribbon Vale Elsa 2021 Sauvignon Blanc. (Photo Frances Andrijich).

Median Harvest Date:

20/03/2021

Harvest Ripeness: 12.7°Be

Yield: 13.17 t/ha

Days Elapsed between Flowering and Harvest:

108 days

Bottled: 14/01/2022

Alcohol: 13.5%

Tasting Notes

Colour and condition:

Light to medium straw hue; green tints; bright condition.

Nose: Perfumed with lifted floral scents of lychees, limes, frangipani and lavender combined with guava, lemon curd and caramel and a background of toasty oak notes.

Palate: This is fresh and crisp with medium to full body and lifted acidity, giving a

Chablis-like flintiness; there are generous lime, lychee, honey dew melon, caramel and preserved lemon flavours filling the mid palate, making the wine relatively round and generous and there is a touch of oak and tannin on the finish.

Cellaring: The bright fruit notes are very attractive and certainly give the wine early drinking appeal. However, the fresh acidity and firm tannin will allow it to cellar for at least 10 years. This will see the palate soften and overall complexity will improve with the emergence of a bottle bouquet of toast and butter.

*Kind regards,
 Clare and Keith Mugford*

