

2020 Ribbon Vale Reds



Vintage Notes

At the risk of repeating ourselves, we can make a very simple summary of the 2019/20 growing season. We enjoyed moderate rainfall, all of which came at the right time so as not to disrupt flowering. Combined with mild to warm temperatures through the summer we had just the sort of conditions the vines enjoy. It's no surprise that Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Malbec were all picked at close to average sugar levels, albeit ever so slightly lower. All up, a very pleasing result.

The point about ripeness allows us to explore one of the quirks of the season and is highlighted in the spread of harvest dates. Autumn came upon us quite quickly and temperatures dropped off in March and so any variety that wasn't ripe by the second week slowed right down. As you can see, we picked Merlot on 9th March but then had to wait. Malbec didn't ripen until 31st March, Cabernet Franc on 5th April and Cabernet Sauvignon on the 8th. We experienced something similar in 2008 vintage.

How is this expressed in the 2020 wines? The early

onset of cooler temperatures means the fruit can retain more of the delicate, scented fragrances that can often be lost. To start with Merlot, it ripened early enough to miss most of this effect and it displays lots of blackcurrant and tarry characters, so full and generous. However, the later picked varieties show it quite clearly. Malbec kept more of its white pepper notes and less plum, Cabernet Franc displays summer pudding-type berries and less cherry and Cabernet Sauvignon is right in the ethereal roses and pomegranate spectrum.

There remains one aspect of 2020 that needs to be covered - the hailstorm on 24th October. All the varieties were affected, although Ribbon Vale vineyard received slightly less damage than Moss Wood. Yields were down between 18% and 25%, so frustrating but not too extreme. As often happens in lower-cropping years, tannin is more concentrated and both the Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon have the sort of structure that will ensuring they are serious cellaring prospects.



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Production Notes

The fruit for each variety was hand-picked and delivered to the winery where it was destemmed, sorted and then Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Malbec were placed in small open fermenters. Merlot was placed into closed fermenters and allowed to cold soak for 2 days. Each batch was seeded for primary fermentation with multiple yeast strains and temperatures were controlled to a maximum

of 32°C. Extraction of colour and flavour was by hand plunging 3 time per day in open tanks and by pump over 3 times per day in the closed tanks.

Time on skins varied from 13 days for Cabernet Franc to 18 days for Merlot.

After pressing, each batch underwent malolactic fermentation in stainless steel tank and once this was completed, were racked to barrel. All barrels were 228

litre French oak barriques and for both the Ribbon Vale 2020 Merlot and the Ribbon Vale 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% were new.

In November 2021, the two wines were racked and blended for the first time and the now-finished wines were returned to barrel for the second year of aging. They stayed in oak until July 2022, so 26 months in total.

After racking for the final time, fining trials were carried out

to assess tannin balance. No improvement was found and so both wines remain unfinned.

They were then sterile filtered and bottled on 4th and 5th August 2022.

Beyond the influence of the vintage, there are some vineyard and winemaking changes starting to impact both wines.

We continue to work hard on understanding and improving our Merlot and the evolution proceeds a little further with the 2020 vintage. The Right Bank wines of Bordeaux are the benchmark and although our historical preference was for the wines of Saint-Emilion, we learned that in fact, our vineyard produced its best wines when Merlot dominates strongly, as it does in Pomerol. Therefore, we have used a blend of typically 95% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Franc.

Readers may not be aware but of the 4 Premier Grand Cru (the highest quality classification) wines of Saint-Emilion, Chateau Cheval Blanc (a Moss Wood favourite although one rarely consumed, given its price point), Chateau Angelus and Chateau Pavie all contain a small percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon in their blends. Only Chateau Ausone does not. In Pomerol, another Moss Wood favourite, Vieux Chateau Certan, also contains some Cabernet Sauvignon.

From this we drew a simple hypothesis. If the limited use of Cabernet Sauvignon on the Right Bank is a result of its less than reliable ripening, it follows that in Margaret River, where it can comfortably achieve full ripeness, logic suggests it will be beneficial in the blend.

As purists, though, we wrestled with a dilemma. The most admired wine from Pomerol is Chateau Petrus, which retains a near God-like status and is 100% Merlot. If the wines of that region are indeed our benchmark, it is something of a bold step to change our blend even further and add Cabernet Sauvignon to the mix, Vieux Chateau Certan notwithstanding.

To resolve the dilemma, we conducted tasting trials of different blends using Cabernet Sauvignon. Yes, it may be we are biased but there was no doubting the additional palate weight that Cabernet brings and so in Ribbon Vale

2020 Merlot, we changed the blend to now include 6% each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc and anticipate this is now a long-term style for the wine.

Changes with the Cabernet Sauvignon style are somewhat more subtle.

We've noted before that Ribbon Vale vineyard produces wines with a more evident tannin than Moss Wood and this results in a palate that can be quite drying and grainy, if we fail to achieve full ripeness. In addition, the main 126 clone produces a more savoury style of Cabernet Sauvignon, with

obvious tar and cigar box notes. When we purchased the property in 2000, we set about updating the vineyard and our techniques to build a more complex but better-balanced style.

Improved trellising led to better fruit aromas and tannin ripeness and then the addition of the Houghton clone provided more blueberry and floral fruit aromas.

However, with its south and west-facing aspect, Ribbon Vale can be a cool place in the autumn and grape ripening can really slow down. Hence the important role of the blending varieties and while

we've always had Merlot and Cabernet Franc, we introduced Malbec with the 2018 vintage, to add dark fruit generosity on the nose and palate. Since then, it has been a regular inclusion at around 2% of the blend. In the same way as Petit Verdot, a little bit goes a long way and it doesn't take much Malbec to start seeing its white pepper and satsuma plum characteristics.

All this to say, we are approaching what we now believe is our preferred long-style. Some might argue we've been slow learners, given the 2020 vintage is the 21st one we've made from the property!



Clare Mugford



L to R: Tristan Mugford, Alex Coultas, Clare, Keith and Hugh Mugford



Moss Wood 2020 Ribbon Vale Cabernet Sauvignon

Tasting Notes

Colour and Condition:

Deep brick red hue; bright condition.

Nose: A smoldering combination of red currant, blueberry, violets, rum and raisin chocolate and tar, with a touch of white pepper. There are toasty oak notes and plenty of Cabernet cedar and tarriness.

Palate: The wine commences with bright sweet fruits of red currant and mulberry, almost fairyfloss-like, that run the full length of the palate. Even with this fruit sweetness, underneath there is good balance of acidity and tannin, so the wine is concentrated and relatively smooth, especially pleasing in this type of year. On the finish there are toasty oak notes and classical Cabernet Sauvignon tarriness.

Cellaring

The wine commences with bright sweet fruits of red currant and mulberry, almost fairyfloss-like, that run the full length of the palate. Even with this fruit sweetness, underneath there is good balance of acidity and tannin, so the wine is concentrated and relatively smooth, especially pleasing in this type of year. On the finish there are toasty oak notes and classical Cabernet Sauvignon tarriness.

Wine Facts

Median Harvest Date

Cabernet Sauvignon:
5th April, 2020

Cabernet Franc:
5th April, 2020

Merlot:
9th March, 2020

Malbec:
31st March, 2020

Mean Harvest Ripeness

Cabernet Sauvignon: 13.4^o Be

Cabernet Franc: 13.1^o Be

Merlot: 3.0^o Be

Malbec: 13.3^o Be

Yield

Cabernet Sauvignon: 5.06 t/ha

Cabernet Franc: 6.45 t/ha

Merlot: 5.62 t/ha

Malbec: 3.67 t/ha

Ripening Time from Flowering to Harvest

Cabernet Sauvignon: 137 days

Cabernet Franc: 118 days

Merlot: 114 days

Malbec: 136 days

Bottled

4th and 5th August 2022

Blend

91% Cabernet Sauvignon

5% Merlot

2% Cabernet Franc

2% Malbec

Alcohol

13.50%

Moss Wood 2020 Ribbon Vale Merlot

Tasting Notes

Colour and Condition:

Deep brick red hue; bright condition.

Nose: Dominated by bright aromas of cherry chocolate, blueberry, blackberry, marshmallows and rose. In the back ground there are tarry and cedar notes and toasted oak.

Palate: The dark fruit theme continues with bright blackberry and satsuma plum fruit flavours filling the front and mid palate and the confectionery notes appear like musk sticks. There is nice mouth feel, with the full body complementing the quite dense tannin, the product of the low crop and cool late season. The finish has light toasty oak and coffee beans.

Cellaring

The Ribbon Vale 2020 Merlot is certainly one for the cellar. If you can resist its early, rich young fruit flavours, it will need a minimum of 10 years aging to show some bottle development. However, we must point out that full maturity won't be reached until at least 25 years of age and by which time it

should have developed a rich chocolate and tar complexity.

Wine Facts

Median Harvest Date

Merlot: 9th March, 2020

Cabernet Franc:

5th April, 2020

Cabernet Sauvignon:

5th April, 2020

Mean Harvest Ripeness

Merlot: 13.0^o Be

Cabernet Franc: 13.1^o Be

Yield

Merlot: 5.62 t/ha

Cabernet Franc: 6.45 t/ha

Cabernet Sauvignon: 5.06 t/ha

Ripening Time from Flowering to Harvest

Merlot: 114 days

Cabernet Franc: 118 days

Cabernet Sauvignon: 137 days

Bottled

4th August, 2022

Blend

88% Merlot

6% Cabernet Sauvignon

6% Cabernet Franc

Alcohol

13.50%



Vineyard Update for Spring 2022

Being conservative farmers, it makes us a bit uncomfortable to say this but we're very pleased to report an excellent 2022/23 growing season. So far, so good. The budburst on Chardonnay is unusually consistent and so shoot and bunch numbers are excellent.

Semillon and Pinot Noir are also looking good and while it's a bit too early to judge the Cabernet varieties, they've also started well.

Rainfall during the winter was excellent and Moss Wood passed its annual average





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total of 1000mm in early September, so soil moisture shouldn't be a problem through the rest of the season.

Everything grows so quickly at this time of year and we struggle to keep up with both the vines and the weeds and we can feel a bit under siege. However, our weed mowing will be finished soon and the first fungicide treatments have gone on. We're keeping our noses in front.

To balance the ledger, we'll throw in one or two provisos because some risks remain. We're not counting our chickens just yet. History tells us hail storms are still possible until early January and as we write, flowering begins in Chardonnay in about 2 weeks, so cold and wet conditions for the 6 to 8 weeks that follow can change everything. We live in hope.

Moss Wood On Macquarie Island

Yes, you read that correctly and the photos are real. We are indebted to Thomas Wood, Plumbing and Mechanical Services Expeditioner with the Australian Antarctic Division on Macquarie Island. Tom took some Moss Wood with him in his bags and kindly shared a few photos with us. We're not exactly certain but are confident this is the most isolated location where our wine has been consumed. Bravo Tom!

We're really chuffed to think an Expeditioner would commit valuable luggage space to a few bottles of Moss Wood. No doubt it's an exciting job but we hope an occasional glass of Merlot makes the isolation less intimidating and reminds him of home.

*Kind regards,
 Clare and Keith Mugford*

