



MOSS WOOD
Wilyabrup
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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RIBBON VALE 2020 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

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.

MEDIAN HARVEST DATE

Cabernet Sauvignon – 05/04/2020
Cabernet Franc – 05/04/2020
Merlot – 09/03/2020
Malbec – 31/03/2020

HARVEST RIPENESS

Cabernet Sauvignon – 13.4° Be
Cabernet Franc – 13.1° Be
Merlot – 13.0° Be
Malbec – 13.3° Be

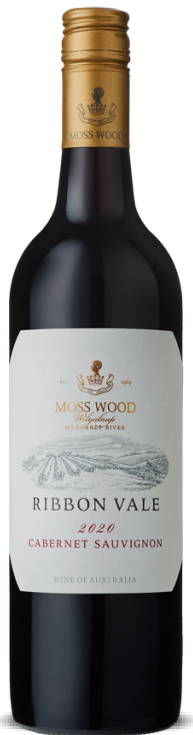
YIELD

Cabernet Sauvignon – 5.06 t/ha
Cabernet Franc – 6.45 t/ha
Merlot – 5.62 t/ha
Malbec – 3.67 t/ha



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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.

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.

BOTTLING

20th July, 2022

BLEND

91% Cabernet Sauvignon
5% Merlot
2% Cabernet Franc
2% Malbec

**RIPENING TIME FROM
FLOWERING TO HARVEST**

Cabernet Sauvignon – 137 days
Cabernet Franc – 118 days
Merlot – 114 days
Malbec – 136 days

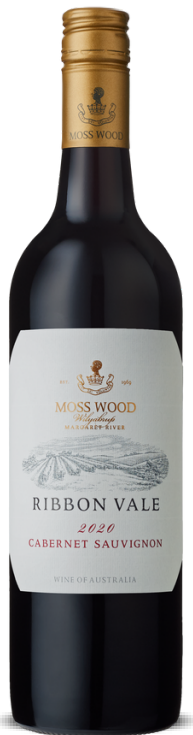
ALCOHOL

14%



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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.



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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.

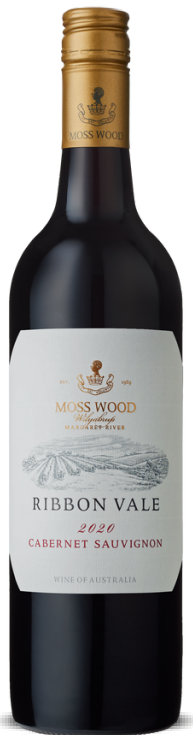
Changes with the Cabernet Sauvignon style are somewhat more subtle.

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.



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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.

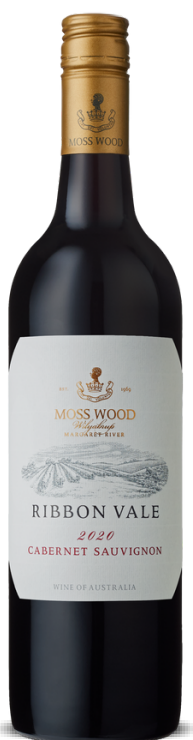
However, with its south and west-facing aspect, Ribbon Vale can be a cool place in the autumn and grape ripening can really slow down. Hence the important role of the blending varieties and while we've always had Merlot and Cabernet Franc, we introduced Malbec with the 2018 vintage, to add dark fruit 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!



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TASTING NOTES

Colour and Condition: Deep brick red; 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

We can say with confidence that the Ribbon Vale 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon can be aged for at least 25 years but our recommended cellaring time depends on individual taste. For those customers who enjoy a wine's richer, youthful fruit flavours, aging for up to 10 years is about right. During that time, it will be showing its best fruit. However, the customer who prefers a classic "Claret" style wine, with lots of cedar and tar complexity, will need to keep the wine for at least 15 years, to allow it to develop these secondary notes.