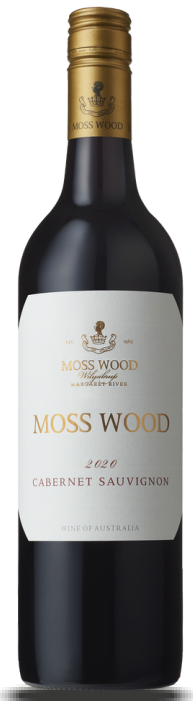




MOSS WOOD
Wilyabrup
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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2020 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

VINTAGE NOTES

A quick review of the weather we experienced during 2019-20 growing season suggests things were fairly comfortable. Calendar year 2019 was a little bit on the dry side and we recorded a total rainfall of 779mm, 24% below average but still plenty for growing unirrigated vines.

To explain our thinking on this point, Keith likes to make the comparison with McLaren Vale in South Australia, where he grew up. That region receives an annual rainfall of 658mm and back in the old days, when the vineyards there were unirrigated, the crop levels, on old-fashioned trellises were around 5 tonnes per hectare. In one of our driest years, we've had 18% more rain than that and so we could make the observation that if our vineyards aren't yielding well enough, lack of water may not be one of the causes. It also goes some way to explaining why our long-term Cabernet Sauvignon yield is just over 7 tonnes per hectare.

The drier weather meant that flowering conditions were very good. During this crucial period in November, the Cabernet varieties experienced only 5 wet days and we received a meagre 8 mm of rain in total. With the dry conditions came moderate temperatures and we only had 4 days when the temperature dropped below the crucial 8°C.

Yet, despite these favourable conditions, Cabernet Sauvignon yields, at 4.5 tonnes per hectare, were down around 40%. This begs the questions, where did we go wrong?

MEDIAN HARVEST DATES

Cabernet Sauvignon – 22nd March, 2020
Cabernet Franc – 5th March, 2020
Petit Verdot – 30th March, 2020

MEAN HARVEST RIPENESS

Cabernet Sauvignon – 13.0° Be
Cabernet Franc – 12.8° Be
Petit Verdot – 15.3° Be

YIELDS

Cabernet Sauvignon – 4.5 t/ha
Cabernet Franc – 4.00 t/ha
Petit Verdot – 5.81 t/ha

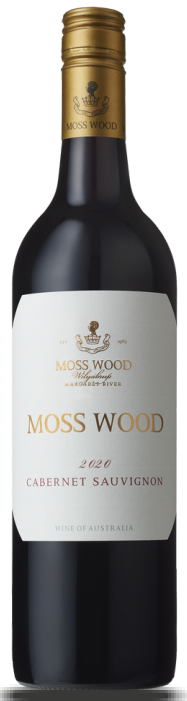
BLEND

90% Cabernet Sauvignon
3% Cabernet Franc
7% Petit Verdot



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To find the answer, we have to go back to 12.15am on Thursday 24th October, 2019. In the pre-Covid world, Clare and Keith had just returned from Singapore, having met their new baby grand daughter, Matilda. Arriving back home late in the evening on a rainy night and just settling into bed, there was a tremendous drumming on the roof that could only have been one thing – a hail storm. We have a rough rule of thumb about hail – if it lasts for 5 seconds, damage will be minimal but for every additional 5 seconds the damage goes up by 5%. As we lay there listening and counting, after 30 seconds it was becoming worrying and after 40 seconds, we pulled the covers over our heads and pretended we couldn't hear it. A walk through the vineyard confirmed the 5 second hail rule had definitely applied and there was significant damage to bunches and shoots. All that remained was to see exactly what the losses were, although this never really becomes clear until the fruit is harvested.

To discuss this a bit further, there are a few key points about hail damage. The vines are usually only at risk when they have soft green tissue and bunches, that is, during spring and summer. During the autumn and winter, when they are protected by their bark and only a very extreme storm will cause any harm. When we get growing season hail, there are essentially two parts to the process. The first is the actual physical battering the plant receives when hit by the stones, causing bruising and wounding on the soft green tissue. The second stage is when fungi then establish themselves in the resulting wounds and which exacerbates the yield loss.

WEATHER DATA

Growing Season Ave Temperature – 20.4°C

Number of hours accrued between 18° and 28°C – 1121

Number of hours above 33°C – 60

RIPENING TIME FROM FLOWERING TO HARVEST

Cabernet Sauvignon – 116

Cabernet Franc – 111

Petit Verdot – 126

BOTTLING

1st October, 2022

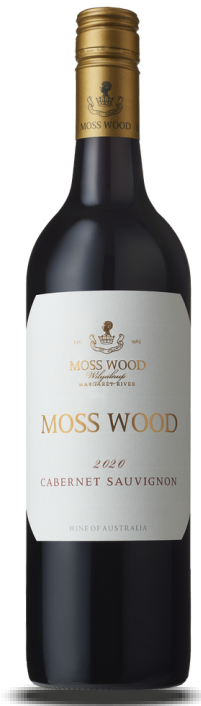
ALCOHOL

14%



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We can't do much about the first stage, unless we were to cover the entire vineyard in hail netting, an expensive and unrealistic option, given the probability of damage is relatively low. However, we can apply fungicides to treat the infections resulting from the second stage and hopefully limit the resulting losses. This means we move quickly after a hail event and get treatments on as fast as we can and in 2019, we had these applications on within 48 hours.

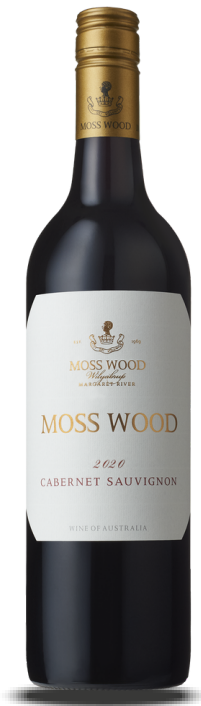
Once all this settled down, we went back to a normal, comfortable season and then just before we started vintage a new challenge raised its ugly head - Covid-19. The world was starting to deal with its emergence and we watched on with worry as governments around the world began applying increasingly strict measures, leading eventually to lockdowns. These coincided with the later stages of our harvest and in particular, the picking of our Cabernet Sauvignon. There was a brief period where we were concerned our picking team and winery crew would be forbidden from attending work, although fortunately, that didn't eventuate. As things turned out, agriculture was deemed an essential workplace (something with which we've always strongly agreed) and so our people were able to travel freely. For a day or so, it looked like we'd all have to stay at Moss Wood and simply not leave the property but fortunately it didn't come to that.

After all this it's nice to return to the most important thing, wine quality.



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In the background, the vines were doing their thing, ripening the grapes in excellent weather conditions. Temperatures were moderate, with virtually no extreme heat and our warmest day was 37 °C. The Cabernet varieties made their way steadily to full ripeness, very slightly ahead of average, no surprise given the significant crop loss. For the record, Cabernet Sauvignon took 116 days to go from flowering to harvest, compared with the average of 121. Cabernet Franc took 111 days, a week less than average.

We now arrive at another of the season's oddities, Petit Verdot. This variety is VERY sensitive to flowering conditions and will abort its berries at the slightest hint of inclement weather. Yet, in 2020, the year of the hailstorm, it managed to produce a yield of 5.81 tonnes per hectare, 12% above average. The obvious conclusion is this block was less exposed to hail damage, which how it appeared after the event. However, under normal circumstances we would still have expected nearly all the crop to have been aborted but being Petit Verdot, it chose to do the opposite. Probably because of the relatively bigger crop, it took 126 days to ripen, 4 days long than usual.

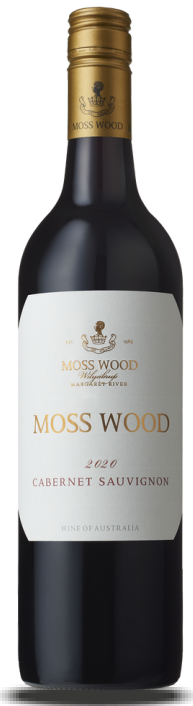
This also means the Moss Wood 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon brings to the discussion a slightly different blend, 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc and 7% Petit Verdot. The impact of the latter is visible in the wine, with more perfumed dark berries on the nose and a concentrated tannin on the palate.

Picking got under way on 13th March and with a median harvest date of 22nd March, the vintage was 8 days earlier than average.



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PRODUCTION NOTES

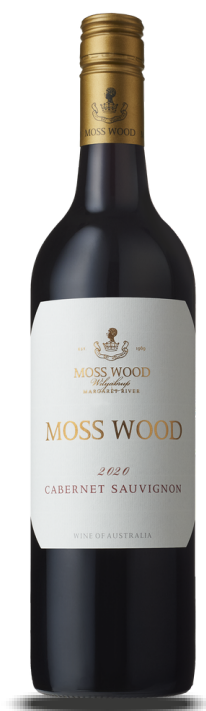
All the fruit was hand-picked into bins and delivered to the winery where it was destemmed and placed in small open fermenters. Each batch was seeded with multiple yeast strains and fermentation proceeded with temperatures controlled to a maximum of 30°C. Colour and flavour extraction was by hand plunging 3 times per day and skin contact time was typically 16 days. After pressing, malolactic fermentation was carried out in stainless steel tanks and then each batch was racked to oak. All barrels were 228 litre French oak and 17% were new.

On 17th October 2022, all barrels were racked to stainless steel and blended in preparation for bottling. Fining trials were carried out but none improved the tannin balance of the wine and so it remained unfinned. It was then bottled on 1st October 2022.



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TASTING NOTES

Colour and Condition: Deep, brick red hue; bright condition.

Nose: Dark and red berry aromas of blueberry, blackberry and redcurrant, plus some dark jube and musk, a sure indicator of the presence of Petit Verdot. The complex background is all about Cabernet Sauvignon, with lots of tar, dark chocolate and toasty oak.

Palate: There is a concentration of all features which make this a classic, low-crop Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon, which in many ways, takes us all the way back to 1981. A full-bodied wine, there are generous blueberry and blackberry flavours, as well as dark, chocolate, coffee and licorice that fill the mid-palate. They sit over a structure of fresh acidity and concentrated tannin, making the wine bright, long and, for Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon, quite taut.

CELLARING

When we arrive at our cellaring advice, we always come up with the same question. What are the comparable vintages from the past? The prior years with similar yields were 1981, 2009, 2015 and 2016 and of those, the first two were hail-affected. The 2020 definitely brings back memories of the tannins of the '81 but also some of the pretty aromas of the '15. The key for us, though, is the 2020 is very much the style of former and with that as our cellaring guide, this new vintage has a long life ahead and we anticipate relatively gradual development. As always, it has Moss Wood's typical early balance, with a youthful fruit depth that is enjoyable now. However, do not be fooled. Beneath the velvet glove is a clenched fist that will keep this wine going for many decades and it may well repeat the performance of its older sibling and take 2 decades to show significant development.

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