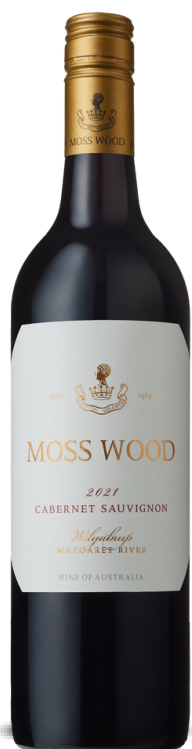




MOSS WOOD
Wilyabrup
MARGARET RIVER
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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MOSS WOOD 2021 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

VINTAGE & PRODUCTION NOTES

We begin the story of Moss Wood 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, another of our cooler vintages in the recent mould of 2017 and 2019. The first of the years in this style was 1975 and this has given us pause to reflect. Please forgive us while we indulge in a moment of whimsy. What were we doing nearly 50 years ago? Keith was a Matriculation student at Westminster School in Adelaide. Clare comments she was in Year 10 at North Lake High School in Perth, doing all the stupid things Year 10 girls do. Whatever that means? It was Moss Wood's third vintage and the style the vineyard would make was not yet clear, but it turned out to be one of our most famous and more on that later.

There's no doubt 2021 was a vintage when vineyard managers and winemakers earned their keep. Regular readers will know our stories of battling the elements and how we love to wax lyrical about the weather. As farmers first and foremost, it's a fact of life and not something we complain about, especially since we're very lucky to be working in a region like Margaret River, where Mother Nature is consistently kind to us. To highlight just how fortunate we are and at risk of tempting the fates, across Moss Wood's 52 vintages to date, we have only ever declassified one Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon, the 1978 "Dry Red", and that was the result of a winemaking problem, not the weather. Nevertheless, every now and then curve balls appear and so it was in 2021.

HARVEST DATE

Cabernet Sauvignon – 11th April, 2021
Cabernet Franc – 6th April, 2021
Petit Verdot – 31st March, 2021

HARVEST RIPENESS

Cabernet Sauvignon – 13.0° Be
Cabernet Franc – 13.2° Be
Petit Verdot – 14.0° Be

YIELD

Cabernet Sauvignon – 6.36 t/ha
Cabernet Franc – 4.84 t/ha
Petit Verdot – 0.99 t/ha

WEATHER DATA

Growing Season Ave Temperature – 18.8°C
Number of hours accrued between 18° and 28°C – 1180
Number of hours above 33°C – 21

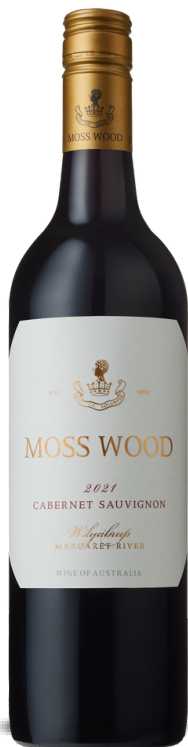
**DAYS ELAPSED BETWEEN
FLOWERING AND HARVEST**

Cabernet Sauvignon – 134
Cabernet Franc – 134
Petit Verdot – 132



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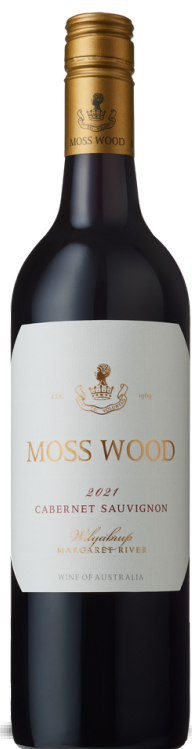
The first round of fun and games wasn't a product of Mother Nature but rather the restrictions introduced in Western Australia to manage Covid. Our state's borders were closed and it was extremely difficult to bring in people to help with the harvest. We were well covered for the picking because we have a team of Hazara refugees from Afghanistan, part of the community in the local town of Busselton, who have been working with us in the vineyard now for more than 10 years. However, we also need a vintage crew for the winery, typically made up of either students from Adelaide University or recently qualified winemakers from overseas. The 2-week Covid isolation period meant it was only the super-keen who made it in to WA. We gradually pieced together a good team, one of whom was Tom Hanson, recently graduated in Agricultural Science from the University of Western Australia, who proved very capable and is now a full-time member of the Moss Wood team. Being a local boy was a huge advantage because, of course, there was no isolation requirement, so we were fortunate to find him.

While we wrestled with these administrative issues, Mother Nature was in a relatively benign mood. Temperatures were mild but not too cold and flowering extended for 5 weeks, during which we received 12 days of rain, when a total of 89mm fell and only 6 days when the temperature dropped below 8°C. All quite conducive to good fruit set, although yields were down slightly. We had no damaging storms bringing strong wind or hail and no frost problems. It also meant the flowering dates for all the Cabernet varieties were just about spot on average.



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Mild conditions prevailed through the summer, so ripening progressed slowly and it became clear we were going to have a late season. This was of no great concern because we've had significant experience with those sorts of years and made some very good wines, as noted above. On 6th February, 2021, Mother Nature threw her first curve ball. A tropical low, not a full cyclone, given the fairly unimpressive moniker by the Bureau of Meteorology of "Tropical Low 12U", moved down the WA coast. Between 6th and 10th February, it deposited 83mm of rain onto Moss Wood. This was early enough for the Cabernet varieties to cope easily because they were mostly still green.

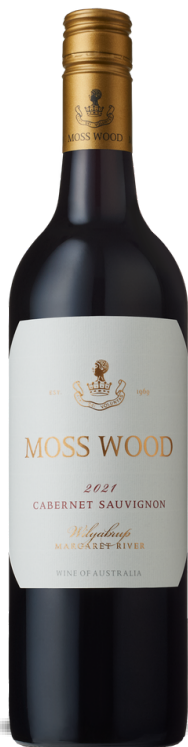
Ah, thought Mother Nature, time for another challenge. So, on 3rd March, a winter-style cold front arrived and delivered 49mm of rain. Having had the earlier drink, the vines were accustomed to rain and coped fine with this. The other point to note is all the Cabernet varieties are native to the Bordeaux region of France, so have been selected over many years in seasons very similar to this one. They have thick skins and resist splitting and disease and have a justifiable robust reputation which is reflected in the consistency of quality of wine from that region.

Her final curve ball came in the second week of April, when remnants of tropical cyclone Seroja, which had crossed the WA coast at Kalbarri, brought a further 80mm. Prior to this, we were watching its progress very closely and made the call that we needed to start picking Cabernet Sauvignon ahead of rain's arrival in Margaret River. We commenced on 6th April and all but the last 2 small parcels were off by the 9th April. The remainder was tidied up by 15th April, as soon as the rain was finished. In the end, the decision proved to be the right one.



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MOSS WOOD 2021 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

It's worth taking stock of what all this discussion means. The biggest issue with rain is not the threat of fungal disease, as noted above, but rather the low temperatures that accompany it and how this slows ripening. We can point to some useful statistics to highlight this point. The average growing season temperature for Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon is 20.1°C but in 2021 it was 18.8°C. When differences of 0.2°C can make a perceivable difference in wine style, it shows just what a cool season we were having. However, there is another number that is even more significant, the 134 days that lapsed between flowering and harvest, which is 13 days longer than average. What this means is despite the mild temperatures, Cabernet Sauvignon had sufficient time on the vines to achieve full ripeness. This is what separates it from years like 2002 and 2006. Both were warmer than 2021, with average temperatures of 19.6°C and 19.4°C, respectively. Their harvest dates of 2nd April and 19th April were not dissimilar but the crucial difference was the days from flowering to harvest, with 2002 having only 111 days and 2006 having 125 days. In 2021, we had sufficient time for Cabernet to achieve full ripeness, courtesy of earlier flowering.

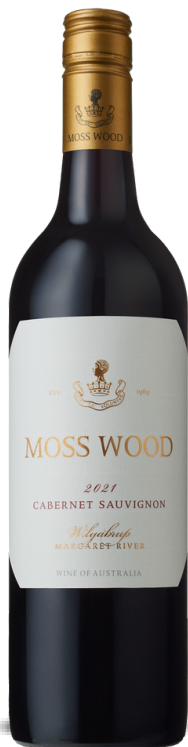
How does this nerdy stuff manifest itself in the finished wine? To make this clear, we return to 1975.

Moss Wood has two co-founders, Sandra and Bill Pannell and so much of what they did remains in our DNA. Neither were trained in winemaking but driven by sheer enthusiasm and their combined good instincts, plus a strong desire to learn, they were ultimately incredibly successful. Like all good teams, their roles were slightly different, and both brought their unique skills.



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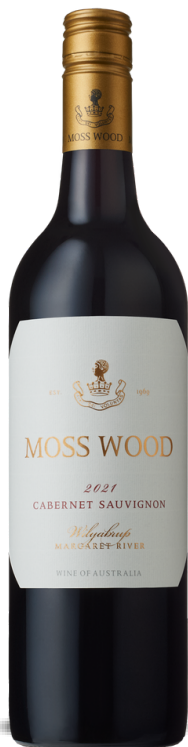
Sandra was a pioneer in an era when hard-working farmers wives were given little or no recognition. A doting mother of 4 children, all of whom can be described as “spirited” characters, she also made time and energy to tackle the relentless hands-on work and long days of viticulture and winemaking and to run a small wine business. Bill was a local GP, a scientist and technician who thrived on the physical challenges. Phew! There wasn’t much spare time and we can only admire their dedication.

Sandra has impeccable good taste and is an oracle of fashion, who adored the style and elegance of Audrey Hepburn. An extension of this was she brought an intuitive interpretation to wine tasting and which manifested itself in her descriptions of our original, famous “twin” wines, the 1975 and 1976 Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignons. The former, with its cool year classical complexity, elegance and restraint was, of course, an Audrey Hepburn. The latter, was a warm, ripe year, more “in your face” and, for Sandra, a Dolly Parton wine. This is not to belittle the remarkable career of the incredibly talented Dolly but quite simply, she had captured the essence of their differences. In comparing the ’75 and ’76 to two different women, Sandra was talking about their style and her comments captured their work as both were stars, in their own right.



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Another way to compare the wines is to use a musical metaphor. It could be said the wines we make in cooler vintages align best with classical music. Some may find this a bit pompous, comparing our mere wine with the greatest pieces. However, we certainly don't claim to be making something anywhere near the majesty of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Number 14, in C-sharp minor, more famously known as the Moonlight Sonatas. Nevertheless, across its 3 movements, the layers and melodies are many and this is something we aspire to in wine.

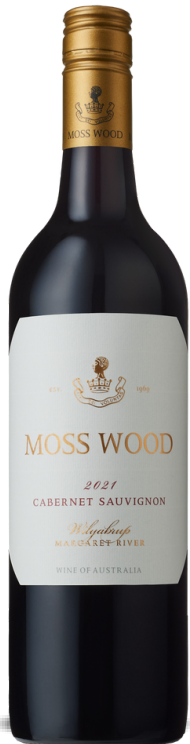
On the other hand, the warmer vintages have powerful, ripe fruit notes, typically simpler but yummier and easier to enjoy, more in the role of popular music. Just which songs we might use for comparison has caused debate among the Moss Wood team. Would it be too much to compare them to a classic like The Eagles singing "Take it Easy?" Or, in really ripe years, maybe Queen belting out "We Will Rock You?" There may be some who feel that's more appropriate for Barossa shiraz?

Returning to the point, from a winemaking perspective, we strive to make the Moonlight Sonatas. The complexity and depth in wines like the 1975 are what we love and bring the highest praise from the sternest critics but they are the product of cooler years and with those seasons come risks. The mild temperatures responsible for the wide range of fruit aromas that deliver this complexity mean we live on the edge while the grapes ripen slowly and the waiting for the harvest drags on. This is not for the faint-hearted but when Mother Nature smiles on us, it's always worth the effort.



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As farmers, we are unlikely to say this often but we were also assisted in 2021 by lower yields. The vines had a little bit less work to do to get to full ripeness. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc were down slightly, about 15%, although Petit Verdot had a completely nervy turn and was down 80%. It's a good thing we don't rely on it. In fact, Bordeaux legend, Peter Sichel, once commented that Petit Verdot can be a bit like a bank manager – never there when you need them. Apologies to any folks in that profession.

Having finally reached required ripeness, everything proceeded according to our Moss Wood recipe. All the fruit was hand-picked and delivered to the winery, where it was sorted, destemmed and placed into small, open fermenters for fermentation. Skin contact time varied a little between batches, with pressing done after 13 to 16 days. Malolactic fermentation was carried out in stainless steel and once completed all batches were racked to wood. The barrels were 228 litre French oak and 16% were new.

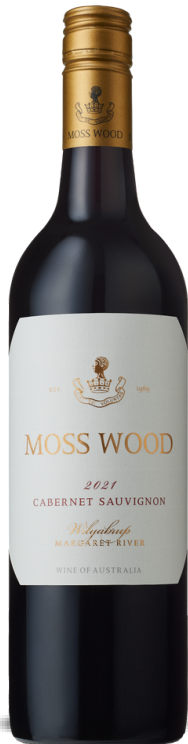
The various batches were blended for the first time in December 2022, and the finished wine was returned to barrel for the last period of aging.

The final racking took place at the beginning of October 2023 and fining trials were conducted on the finished wine. None improved the tannin balance and so it remains unfinned. It was then sterile filtered and bottled on 30th October, 2023.



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TASTING NOTES

Colour and condition:

Deep brick red hue; bright condition.

Nose:

An intense array of primary fruit notes, including blueberries, raspberries, red currant, mulberry, plum and musk, as well as a touch of nutmeg, cinnamon and clove spices. Cabernet Sauvignon's classic floral note of violets adds volume. The complexities in the background include cedar, tobacco and tar, the "cigar box" combination, plus some light toasty oak.

Palate:

The theme of the red and dark fruits continues, with black currant, cherry, blueberry, mulberry and dark jube flavours filling the mouth. They sit over a medium to full body, with bright acidity and soft, well integrated, svelte, almost chocolate-like, tannin. The wine is long and finishes with cedar and toasty oak, with perhaps a touch of star anise.

CELLARING

Our recommendations for cellaring the Moss Wood 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon are very simple and in the classic tradition of this wine. Given the nature of the season, it is very appealing now, with lifted fruit notes and soft round tannins and can certainly be enjoyed as a youngster. However, it will repay long term cellaring and we suggest a minimum of 10 years, to allow it to develop some bottle bouquet. For those who wish to see it at its peak, we recommend aging for at least 20 years.