

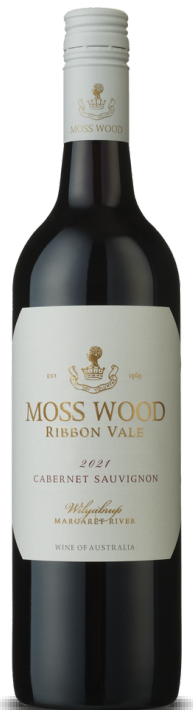


# MOSS WOOD

*Wilyabrup*  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*Est'd  
1969*

## RIBBON VALE 2021 CABERNET SAUVIGNON



### VINTAGE NOTES

Regular readers of the Moss Wood newsletter will know our best method for assessing the potential quality of our new releases is to look back at similar years from the past. It's also true that history never repeats but it does rhyme and we see this with different vintages. While the seasons may share similarities, they are never exactly the same. This is very much in our minds as we look back at the 2020-21 growing season.

The calendar year 2020 was very kind to us. The rainfall of 929mm, being 9% below average meant it was slightly dry but still plenty for growing grapes. During the spring, conditions were benign. The vines flowered from 5th November to 7th December and we had 10 days of rain, delivering 77mm. There were some reasonable showers but no heavy winds or hail and the temperatures were mild as well. There were only 6 days when it dropped below 8°C, with coolest minimum being 5.7°C, which occurred on 3rd December and by which time flowering was all but finished.

It almost goes without saying that yields were good. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot were all above average, with the latter the best performer at 10%. All varieties had close to average bunch numbers but the quality of the spring conditions shows in the bunch weights, all at least 10% above average.

The season remained largely uneventful until the beginning of February when Mother Nature decided it was time to have a bit of fun with us. Over the next 8 weeks she delivered 215mm of rain, as the remnants of various tropical lows came down the coast of WA.

#### MEDIAN HARVEST DATE

Cabernet Sauvignon – 04/04/2021  
Cabernet Franc – 17/04/2021  
Merlot – 13/03/2021  
Malbec – 06/03/2021

#### HARVEST RIPENESS

Cabernet Sauvignon – 12.8° Be  
Cabernet Franc – 14.1° Be  
Merlot – 12.8° Be  
Malbec – 13.0° Be

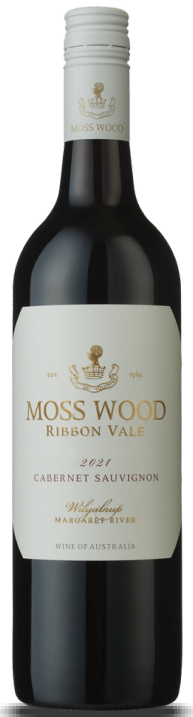
#### YIELD

Cabernet Sauvignon – 7.10 t/ha  
Cabernet Franc – 8.64 t/ha  
Merlot – 10.60 t/ha  
Malbec – 3.98 t/ha



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These events are not uncommon and during Keith's 45 vintages at Moss Wood, we experienced similar conditions in 1980, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2015 and 2017. Anyone familiar with our wines will note these vintages are all quite different because the timing and amounts have varied. Contained in the above list are some of our very best wines, so it's clear that rain isn't necessarily a quality threat and so it was in 2021.

Ribbon Vale has been part of the Moss Wood family since the 2000 vintage, so this new release has 3 similar siblings and given the cool temperatures, is most like 2017. For the record, this is the vintage that we think mirrors the great 1990, at Moss Wood. However, a notable difference, and improvement since 2017, has been the significant increase in the crop from the new block of the Houghton clone Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as the availability of some Malbec for blending. On the point of the clonal mix, the Houghton clone now provides 76% the blend and takes Ribbon Vale much more into the Moss Wood realm, which is 100%. In our view, this tips the quality balance in favour of 2021.

We don't live in fear of the rain with Cabernet Sauvignon and its blending varieties because they're natives of the maritime climate of Bordeaux and have been selected for their good performance in sometimes damp conditions. They all have thick skins which resist splitting and so if a vineyard is carefully managed and remains disease free, the fruit won't be adversely affected by rot. In addition, unless the rain is accompanied by very cold conditions, they will all achieve full sugar and flavour ripeness.

**BOTTLING**

1st and 2nd August, 2023

**BLEND**

94% Cabernet Sauvignon  
2% Merlot  
2% Cabernet Franc  
2% Malbec

**RIPENING TIME FROM  
FLOWERING TO HARVEST**

Cabernet Sauvignon – 142 days  
Cabernet Franc – 146 days  
Merlot – 143 days  
Malbec – 142 days

**ALCOHOL**

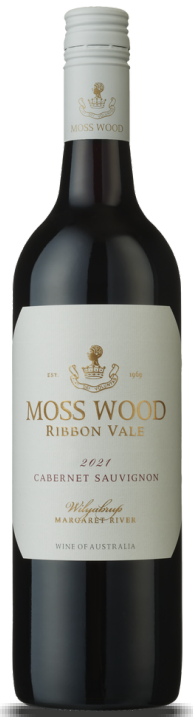
13.5%



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The 2021 was one of our coolest seasons on record and we still managed to get full ripeness in Cabernet Sauvignon, despite having to play a game of dodge the showers at the end. As each variety approached maturity, we kept an eye on the weather and jumped in to pick before or after the rain. The length of the season shows how patient we had to be. All the varieties needed slightly more than 140 days to get from flowering to harvest, roughly 3 weeks longer than average. We started with Malbec on 6th April and then picked Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc on 13th, 14th and 17th April, respectively. The important thing to note is that even though temperatures were mild, the length of season meant all varieties kept making progress and both the Cabernet Sauvignon and the Merlot have ripe, soft tannins.

To start the winemaking discussion, we point out that Moss Wood remains a completely hand-run vineyard. All vineyard operations are done by people – cane pruning, shoot positioning and then harvesting. This is something that is very rare in the Australian wine industry because the associated costs are so high. However, what is important is the quality outcomes and our aim, every year, is to deliver the best possible wine the vintage allows us. Modern viticultural and winemaking machinery is very efficient and does a reasonable quality job. However, so far, at least, hand management delivers the best finished wines.

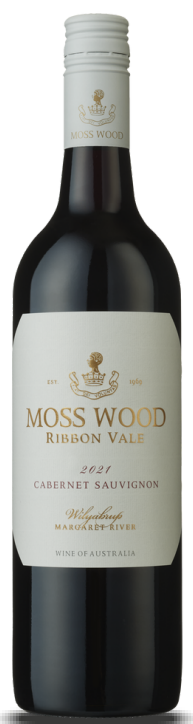


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### PRODUCTION NOTES

All the fruit was hand-picked and delivered to the winery, where it was sorted and destemmed. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Malbec were all transferred to small, open tanks, where they were seeded with multiple yeast strains for primary fermentation. Each batch was hand-plunged 3 times per day and temperatures were controlled to 30°C. Time on skins varied slightly but was typically 14 days, after which each batch was pressed and racked to stainless steel tanks.

The Merlot technique was slightly different. After destemming, the fruit was placed in closed, stainless steel tanks and then chilled to 8°C and allowed to soak for 48 hours. This enhances the colour depth. After this, it's allowed to warm and seeded for primary fermentation with multiple yeast strains. Extraction was by pump overs, 3 times per day and after 14 days on skins the wine was pressed and racked to stainless steel.

All batches underwent malolactic fermentation and once completed, each was racked to wood. All barrels were 228 litre French oak. For the Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% were new and in the Merlot, 30% were new.

After one year in oak, the individual batches were racked and blended in stainless steel, then returned to barrel. The Cabernet Sauvignon is made up of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Merlot and 2% Malbec. The Merlot blend is 86% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc and 7% Cabernet Sauvignon. Regular readers will note we are continuing with the change first introduced with the 2020 Merlot, bringing more Cabernet Sauvignon into the blend for greater aroma and flavour complexity, not to mention palate weight and tannin balance.

After just over 2 years in oak, both wines were racked and blended in stainless steel for the final time. Fining trials were carried out but neither the Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot were improved, so both remained unfinned. They were then sterile filtered and bottled on 1st August, 2023. <sup>4/5</sup>

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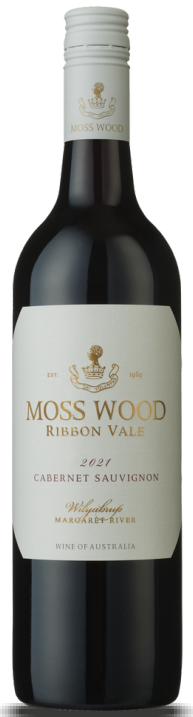
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**RIBBON VALE 2021 CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

**TASTING NOTES**

**Colour and Condition:** Deep brick red hue; brilliant condition.

**Nose:** We noted in our production comments the Ribbon Vale 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon is now dominated by the Houghton clone and this makes it quite different from previous vintages. This is immediately evident on the nose, which displays the classic Houghton fruit aromas of blueberries and violets and these combine with blackberry, raspberry and a bit of plum, courtesy of the Malbec. Sitting beneath the floral array are Cabernet's usual complex notes cedar, tobacco and tar and some light, toasty oak.

**Palate:** The theme of the vintage continues here and it is immediately obvious the addition of the Houghton clone has changed the style. The wine now presents generous flavours of red current, blueberry and boysenberry, which are bright and generous, making the wine long and round. The acidity is still fresh and the tannins firm but the balance is excellent. The wine finishes with some soft oak notes.

**CELLARING**

The first we note here is this wine sits very much in the "yummy" category and with its generous young fruit flavours, it is enjoyable now. However, the depth, complexity and structure are such that it will age in the classic Wilyabrup Cabernet Sauvignon fashion. It will take around 15 years to show reasonable development and a further 10 years after that to reach full maturity. Beyond that, it is somewhat difficult to predict but using our early Moss Wood wines as a guide, it should age comfortably for at least 40 years.