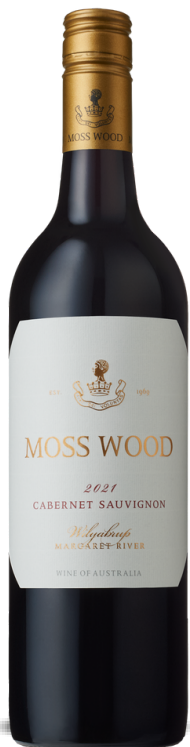




# MOSS WOOD

*Wilyabrup*  
MARGARET RIVER  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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## MOSS WOOD 2021 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

### VINTAGE 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. 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.

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. 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.

#### 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

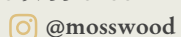
#### DAYS ELAPSED BETWEEN FLOWERING AND HARVEST

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

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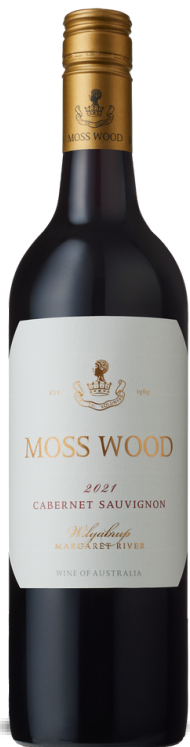
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Mild conditions prevailed through the summer, so ripening progressed slowly and it became clear we were going to have a late season. This was of no great concern because we've had significant experience with those sorts of years and made some very 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.

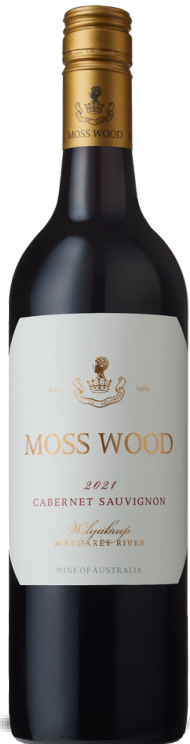
Ah, thought Mother Nature, time for another challenge. So, on 3rd March, a winter-style cold front arrived and delivered 49mm of rain. Having had the earlier drink, the vines were accustomed to rain and coped fine with this. The other point to note is all the Cabernet varieties are native to the Bordeaux 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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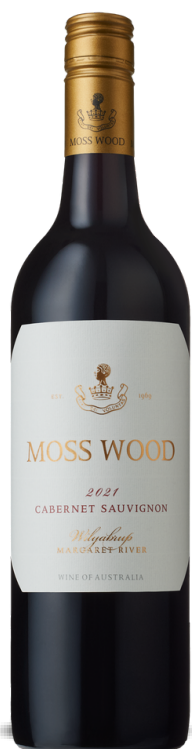
It's worth taking stock of what all this discussion means. The biggest issue with rain is not the threat of fungal disease, as noted above, but rather the low temperatures that accompany it and how this slows ripening. We can point to some useful statistics to highlight this point. The average growing 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.

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.



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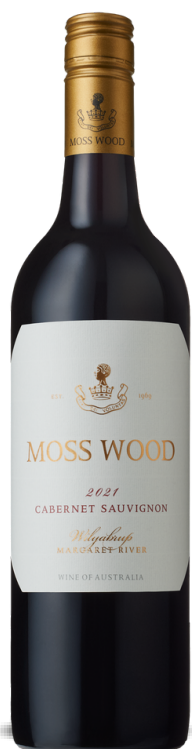
**PRODUCTION NOTES**

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.