

When is Reserve not a reserve? *when it's a Sub Regional Series.* After 15 vintages making wine in Margaret River you get a feel for the sub regions that are best suited to specific grape varieties. Rather than go down the traditional Reserve or Single Vineyard path we decided to pursue something a little different, hence the sub regional theme. Although there are no officially defined subregions in Margaret River, producers have adopted the John Gladstone proposal. In 1999 viticultural scientist Dr John Gladstone presented a paper suggesting there should be six sub regions based on climate and soil differences.

The aim with the Flametree Sub Regional Series is to showcase distinctive wine styles from vineyards renowned for growing ultra premium fruit. We've chosen to lead with Margaret River's strongest varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. The Sub Regional Series represents the very best varietal wines under the Flametree label, these wines will only be made in the best vintages, volumes will be small and availability very limited.

FLAMETREE S.R.S. WALLCLIFFE CHARDONNAY 2014



Season

2014 was a vintage that could only be classified as the perfect year for white wine production. The aromatic whites are the best we've seen for at least 4 years and the Chardonnays are some of the finest, tightest wines I've seen in my time in Margaret River. The vintage could certainly be classified as cool, with a longer ripening period compared to the previous few years (when sugars accumulated quickly due to hot conditions). Margaret River's greatest asset is its ability to produce high quality wines consistently; the 2014 SRS Chardonnay is no exception. Many Australian wine regions are facing the prospect of being severely affected by ongoing climate change with low or non-existent rainfall and increasingly warm temperatures. Margaret River, although seemingly getting warmer and drier, is still in the fortunate position of being directly influenced by its proximity to the ocean, cool southerly winds and almost a meter of rain per year.

Fruit/Vineyards

Fruit for the 2014 Flametree SRS Chardonnay was sourced from a single block on Rosa Glen Road; this area is in the southern part of the Wallcliffe sub-region situated south of the Margaret River townsite. Our clone of choice is the Gin Gin (or Mendoza) clone, picked early, as per many of the best examples of Margaret River Chardonnay. This fruit comes from old, low yielding vines grown from cuttings off the famous block 20 at Leeuwin Estate. Yields were moderate at around 6 tonnes per hectare. The vineyard is situated on a cooler south-west facing site; the soil is classic Margaret River gravel loam and clay. The fruit was handpicked during the second week of February at 12 beaume.

Winemaking

After overnight cold storage the fruit was whole bunch pressed and sent straight to French oak puncheons. We rotated the press more than usual in order to get higher turbidity (up around 800-1000 NTU), the juices were then left to ferment with wild yeasts. The key to successful wild fermentation is the use of high turbidity juices, minimal sulphur dioxide, low alcohols and juices with good nutrient content. MLF was again blocked. I'm a big believer that Margaret River Chardonnay generally has enough texture from fruit and lees; MLF often thickens the wines and interferes with fruit purity and overall minerality in the finished wine. The 2014 SRS Chardonnay was barrel fermented in French puncheons, 35% new, the remainder being second and third year seasoned wood. The wines were left on lees, the lees were not stirred.

Tasting Notes

The 2014 SRS Chardonnay is in my opinion the best Chardonnay made to date under this label and may even be the best Chardonnay made at Flametree Wines. The nose shows tight citrus and dried pear, complex sulphide notes and slight French oak aromas, the result of 12 months aging in barrel. The SRS Chardonnay also has some complex sulphides in the struck match/popcorn spectrum; this is a result of a wild ferment with high solids. These sulphides contribute a lovely savoury oyster shell or saline character, to give the wine greater complexity and complement modern food flavours. After 12 months in the finest French oak the wine was fined with milk, filtered and bottled in February 2015.

Analysis: Alc: 12.6% v/v pH: 3.22 Acidity: 7.2g/l

Winemaker: Cliff Royle