

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

2022 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

62% Grenache Blanc, 18% Roussanne, 14% Chenin Blanc, 6% Chardonnay

ALC: 14.4%

Cases 750 ml: 332

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: July 2024

Release Price: \$138

Drink: now - 2036

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

A little about the 2022 vintage. The defining feature was a heat wave that settled down over the west coast for an extended visit. Let's face it, this visitor overstayed their welcome by at least a week! It ended up splitting the season into three distinct harvests. The first brought in fruit that was ready before the real heat kicked in. This included our white varieties, usually the first grapes we pick at James Berry Vineyard, and our early ripening vineyards like Paderewski Vineyard. Then there was the middle harvest, when we brought in fruit knowing that after two weeks of hot weather, needed to come off. The flavors were finally there and if we left them much longer we would be picking raisins instead of grapes. So a chunk of fruit came in at this point, and thankfully we are well versed in co-fermentation, because varieties like Mataro, Carignan and Touriga Nacional that are immune to heat really helped to buffer the varieties like Syrah, Graciano and Grenache, that are a little more temperamental when it comes to adverse conditions. Co-ferm was the name of the game during this part of the harvest, almost every lot of Grenache was 40% Mataro from the get-go. A marriage made in heaven. The last part of harvest included blocks that despite the heat, weren't close, forcing us to let them ride. After the heat passed, we went out into the field with little manicuring scissors and actually dropped berry by berry the ones that had turned to raisins. A real PITA and we ended up losing 40% of that crop, but what we did eventually bring into the winery was sublime!

When it came time to blend up these 22s we were blown away. They had matured into gorgeous wines. Very aromatic in the red fruit spectrum, not much of that spicy pepper you get in the wet cool years, but real pleasers. If you've enjoyed our 2017s, you know exactly what you're getting with the 2022s. They will open for business early and stay open late. The tannins are soft, but one thing the heat does is concentrate everything, so they are a hedonistic mouthful.

REVIEWS:

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2024-2032

The nose is honeyed, weighty and lumbering, opening with commanding aromas of orange oil, ripe stone fruit, tangerine and nectarine with crushed rock and dried spice accents. The palate is refreshingly svelte, energetic and succulent, with linear precision and a subtle calcareous texture running through the long, tangy, structured finish. A beautiful combination of serious power and admirable focus, this should be a pleasure to watch develop over the coming decade.

While there is no shortage of Paso Robles producers who hang their hats on going for the biggest and boldest wines in the area, Saxum's ability to craft powerful wines that deliver opulence and complexity while remaining balanced and authentic is second to none. Proprietor and winemaker Justin Smith's influence in the region is inescapable, as many other premier winemakers in the area either grew up with him, have hired him as a consultant, worked stints at Saxum, or any combination thereof. The wines are a true reflection of the region and, as such, are unapologetically bold and intense. However, they consistently offer nuance and elegance that are fleetingly rare in wines of their size and stature.

2021 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

44% Grenache Blanc, 29% Roussanne, 20% Chenin Blanc, 7% Chardonnay

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 347

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2024

Release Price: \$135

Drink: now - 2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I like to think that we are getting better and better at making this wine, or maybe our Grenache Blanc vines are producing better and better fruit, or maybe its just that '21 was an exceptional year for whites. Whatever the reasons, I'm really enjoying our one and only white. (News flash, we have planted a couple small blocks of whites up at our new York Mountain planting, but that is 6 years away from any release.) If you have enjoyed our past whites I think you will like this one even better. Brought up in huge 600L demi-muid barrels, with 4 of the 6 being new, it spent a full 22 months on its lees before racking clean and bottling. It is full and rich, yet bright and lively. The magical combo I always look for in a white...actually in any wine really.

2021 was a relatively cool year for us. Not quite as cool as 2010 or 2011, but definitely the mildest season we had seen in awhile. What makes this vintage interesting is that it was a dry season which gave the wines a different profile than the wetter years like 2019 or 2017. So what I'm getting at is it's a pretty unique vintage. Probably one that comes fairly close to resembling the 2007 vintage. (I'm sure you all like hearing that!) It's fresh, lifted and focused like you would expect in a cooler year, but has great concentration and texture from the dry weather. I'm happy to say the tannins are really soft and supple so I think it is a vintage that is versatile. Enjoyable in its youth (2-3 years after release, let's not be hasty here!), but will age out very gracefully, with a long life ahead of it.

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

REVIEWS:

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 94+

Drink: 2024-2035

... the 2021 James Berry Vineyard White spent 22 months in predominately new 600-liter puncheons and a small amount in new 228-liter barrique. The nose is impressively powerful yet refreshingly precise and energetic, combining waxy, rich orchard fruit aromas with dried herbs and flower notes. The palate is creamy, broad and full-bodied in its attack, maintaining a thick, oily texture framed with upright acidity. The finish is equal parts decadent and vibrant, concluding on a structured, sturdy note with good length and increased depth and dimension with air.

2020 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

53% Grenache Blanc, 29% Roussanne, 15% Chenin Blanc, 3%

Chardonnay

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 304

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2023

Release Price: \$132

Drink: now - 2033

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I'm having a lot of fun making this white, and I think we are raising the bar on Paso whites. I'll let Jeb talk about this one because I think he's spot on....

I'm sure many of you have heard the woes of 2020. Fires devastated the entire West Coast of the U.S. Nobody was spared, but fortunately the vineyards of Paso were not hit too hard. The closest fire to us was up in Monterey County, which is about 90 miles north. Nonetheless, we approached the 2020 vintage very carefully in the cellar by running every possible type of analysis to detect damage from the smoke that was occasionally thick in the air that summer. Although a couple of the lots were suspect, everything else was clean. Phew!

REVIEWS:

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2023-2030

The nose is driven by rich, exotic, forward aromas of beeswax, baked stone fruits and sappy, oily intensity. The palate is dense and opulent, displaying a generously weighty texture balanced by the structure and poise that runs through the Saxum roster. The finish is rich and decadent, laden with ripe orchard fruit and dark spice flavors and braced with balancing acidity.

Jeb Dunnuck, August 2023

Rating: 96

Drink: na

I'd put the 2020 James Berry Vineyard White up with the top Rhône whites in California... it packs an incredible amount of richness and depth while staying balanced, silky, and light on its feet. Ripe orchard fruits, toasted spice, brioche, and chalky

mineral notes all define the aromatics, and it's full-bodied, with a focused, elegant, concentrated mouthfeel and a gorgeous finish.

The 2020s from Saxum are solid wines, although there are subtle signs of smoke in a few of the wines, and in general, the wines are narrower and more focused than normal, yet still nicely concentrated. At a high level, I think these are good to outstanding wines that will offer pleasure. Clearly the 2021s are a step up, and this is another brilliant vintage for winemaker Justin Smith.

Eric Guido, Vinous, March 2023

Rating: 95

Drink: 2025-2030

The 2020 White James Berry is spicy with a balance of sweet white florals and dried apricots that soothe the senses. This is nearly oily in feel, communicating opulence yet maintaining exceptional freshness through a core of zesty acidity. Almond paste, butterscotch and baked apple hints echo throughout as the James Berry White finishes with decent length. This is powerful and sustains a fabulous balance.

It is impossible to travel and taste in Paso Robles without hearing the name Saxum repeatedly. Simply stated, Saxum placed the region on the map and continues to turn out one of its top wine portfolios year after year. Many winemakers got their start working with Justin Smith, owner and winemaker, while many others source fruit from vineyards that he or his father designed and planted. The style is unapologetically ripe and rich, just as Smith likes it, as do countless loyal followers that keep this one of the most highly desired mail lists in town. I tasted a mix of 2020s and 2019s, two very different vintages. The 2019s are simply gorgeous, deep and powerful, with a long and bright future ahead. While the 2020s are more generous up front, they still show fantastic complexity but in a package that will be easier to understand in their early goings. Smith mentioned that while there were smoke issues, he felt they were minimal and that dialing back on co-ferments and using stems was very helpful. Ultimately, these are wines that no fan of the estate should be without. Smith's new project in Shadow Canyon on York Mountain is something to look forward to. The goal is to, one day, use only estate fruit. This cooler location is about ten miles from the ocean, with more annual rainfall and sandstone soils. A new 15-acre vineyard, primarily Grenache, will be planted shortly.

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

2019 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

46% Grenache Blanc, 31% Roussanne, 23% Chenin Blanc

ALC: 15%

Cases 750 ml: 399

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2022

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2033

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

For those that have tried our white and liked it, you'll love this version. The '19 vintage has been voted (by us here at the winery) the best white yet. Rich, yet with great natural acidity. There's a nice backbone of French oak, but it's not too heavy handed thanks to the use of 600 L vessels. We aged it on its lees for the entire 20 months, but we didn't stir it much to keep it on the fresh side. Let this one age for awhile. I think it will reveal more with time.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2021

Rating: (95-97)

Drink: na

Not yet bottled, the 2019 White is a blend of 46% Grenache Blanc, 31% Roussanne, and 23% Chenin Blanc that's still resting on its lees in a mix two-thirds new French oak. Straight-up sensational notes of white currants, honeyed toast, crushed stone, and subtle nutty nuances all emerge from this full-bodied, powerful, opulent, yet seamless, layered, and perfectly balanced white. It's a brilliant wine in the making.

One of California's unquestionably superstar estates is Heather and Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyards, and you won't find any finer examples of Rhône variety wines anywhere in the world. The proprietors of James Berry Vineyard, located in the cooler Willow Creek District of Paso Robles, the Smiths have seen incredible changes over the past decade, and they've traded their small, old-fashioned, yet perfectly adequate cellar for a brand-new cave and state of the art winemaking facility. And while changes of this magnitude can often result in hiccups in either the style or quality of the wines, that's certainly not the case here. I think the wines have never been better, and given the scores I've awarded in the past, that's saying something. Today, the Smiths release multiple cuvées, and while the focus in the past might have been the estate James Berry Vineyard, the portfolio includes numerous new vineyard sources and cuvées, most focusing on single vineyards and even specific blocks inside of a vineyard. This report looks at the 2018s and 2019s, and in a nutshell, these wines epitomize what I consider greatness in wine; the ability to offer both hedonistic and intellectual pleasure; intensity and richness without heaviness or any sensation of weight; singular profiles; and the ability to improve with bottle age. In addition, the purity and precision this estate can achieve are incredible, and certainly, many estates and winemakers in Paso Robles need to be tasting these wines to understand why they're great and what is possible from these incredible limestone soils. As a critic, it's always a challenge to try and understand why wines show differently and why one estate can produce brilliant wines and others struggle. Given the

prodigious wines the Smiths release year in and year out from different vineyards (and now even from different winemaking facilities), it's become increasingly apparent that the quality coming from Saxum is due to the genius of Justin Smith. After being lucky enough to taste these wines every year for well over a decade now, I can say that no one in California does Rhône varieties and blends better. I've written this many times in the past, but I'll say it again, this is one of the few mailing lists worth being on.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, July 2022

Rating: 95

Drink: 2024-2033

Limpid yellow-gold. Powerful, mineral-tinged aromas of fresh pear and white peach; hints of ginger, jasmine and fennel emerge with air. Sappy, concentrated and silky in texture, offering penetrating orchard and pit fruit flavors sharpened by a smoky mineral nuance. Finishes taut and impressively long, with echoes of citrus zest and dusty minerals adding bright back-end lift.

At the risk of sounding like a skipping record, Justin Smith has, again, produced the strongest set of releases this year from Paso Robles. Yes, there's plenty of competition out there, and the numbers grow every year, but the Saxum 2019s sit at the top of the vintage hierarchy yet again. Smith is constantly refining his winemaking techniques, with particular focus on how the wines are raised in his hillside tunnels. Concrete tanks and eggs as well as oak vessels of varying age, shape and size all come into play here, to consistently stunning results. This set of bottlings show the elegance of the vintage, combined with the depth and intensity of flavor that has long been the Saxum trademark. They should age effortlessly, like their outstanding 2018 siblings, a few of which were or are being released alongside the 2019s. A 222-acre property in the York Mountain AVA is now part of Saxum's holdings and planting is under way, so expect lots more activity here in the coming years.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, March 2022

Rating: 95+

Drink: 2022-2032

In its third iteration, the 2019 James Berry Vineyard White was matured in mostly new 600-liter demi-muids for 20 months on the lees. A blend of 46% Grenache Blanc, 31% Roussanne and 23% Chenin Blanc, it has lush quince paste and apple pie aromas with tones of jasmine and beeswax. The medium-bodied palate offers intense, ripe, savory fruits and bursts of fresh acidity, finishing with great length.

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

2018 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

66% Grenache Blanc, 28% Roussanne, 6% Chenin Blanc

ALC: 14.9%

Cases 750 ml: 317

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2021

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2030

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I'm really having fun making this wine. It was a long haul as I mentally prepared myself for the task of making a white... but I must say I am very happy with the outcome. We are producing a white that I am proud of. It is rich and textured, but not blowzy, because it has great acid. There is nice structure from the barrel fermentation, but because we utilize large 600L barrels with very light toast, it does not come across as oaky. I will let Josh and Jeb get into the descriptors for you, but I feel like a proud Papa when it comes to this wine.

The 2018s are some of the most complex and nuanced wines we have ever released (and will definitely benefit from 3-30 years of aging.) Structured and built like a brick, while at the same time the copious tannins are coming together nicely. I really dig them. To be honest, I was a little scared when I tasted them last. They were so tightly focused and intense. Now I'm seeing how quickly they have softened up, coming out of their proverbial shells. I know it's cliché, but iron fist in a velvet glove suits them well. I have previously compared the 2018s to the 2016s, but now that I've had some time to get to know both vintages I find them to be less similar than I first thought... I think '18 might be better. Yes, you heard it here first. Our '18s might be better than the much regaled '16s. (And I'm not just saying that because I'm slinging them today!) I think the '16s may be a bit more generous and forthcoming, but the '18s will outshine the '16s in their complexity. I'm looking forward to some side by side comparisons in 5 or 6 years. It shall be a momentous battle!

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2020

Rating: 97

Drink: na

The 2018 James Berry Vineyard White is straight-up stunning stuff and showed even better from bottle than barrel. Based on 66% Grenache Blanc, 28% Roussanne, and – wait for it – 6% Chenin Blanc, it boasts a medium gold hue as well as a rocking nose of caramelized citrus, apricots, honeyed flowers, and toasted bread. Rich, full-bodied, and concentrated, it has a terrific sense of freshness, flawless balance, and a great, great finish. It's up with the finest whites I've tasted from Paso Robles and will easily stand up to anything coming out of the Rhône Valley today!

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec. 2020

Rating: 96

Drink: 2022-2029

Light, slightly hazy yellow. Vibrant, mineral-accented pear, Meyer lemon and yellow plum scents take on anise and chamomile nuances with air. Taut and chewy in texture, offering

densely packed orchard and pit fruit flavors that are braced by a potent mineral undercurrent and a refreshingly bitter lemon pith accent. Finishes minerally, tight and extremely long, leaving citrus pith and floral notes behind.

Justin Smith's contribution to the success of Paso Robles and the status of its wines cannot be overstated. His Saxum wines are the most sought-after of the region, so expectations are always high when approaching a bottle, and it's always a pleasure to see results live up to or surpass reputation. That was emphatically the case this year, as this was one of the most successful lineups of wines that I have ever tasted, from anywhere. Longtime followers of these wines, lucky bastards that they are, know how uncanny they are for their ability to play depth and power off energy and finesse, and that's crystal-clear in 2018 and even the hot 2017 vintage. The extended growing season of 2018 helped the wines retain freshness while developing concentration, which any winegrower will tell you is the Holy Grail of their craft. In 2017 the heat of the growing season here on Paso Robles' limestone-soil-dominated west side was mitigated by the usual diurnal temperature shifts and, of course, skilled blending in the cellar helped immeasurably. While Saxum's wines command lofty prices on the secondary market, it should be noted that ex-cellar pricing remains extremely fair for such a sought-after producer.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, Jan 2021

Rating: 96

Drink: 2020-2030

The 2018 James Berry Vineyard White is made up of 66% Grenache Blanc, 28% Roussanne and 6% Chenin Blanc. The nose is warm and toasty, with loads of golden fruits accented by beeswax, dried chamomile and salted almonds. The palate is expertly structured, its weightless, silken texture belying its concentrated, savory fruits, and it finishes extraordinarily long, lifted and fresh. I love the energy and fullness of flavor this 2018 offers!

I've been eagerly anticipating the 2018 vintage in Paso Robles, where cooler temperatures resulted in some unusually elegant, lifted wines. The 2018s from Saxum did not disappoint—these latest releases offer incredible concentration of flavor with surprising elegance and freshness. While they took some time in bottle to unwind, I'm pleased with how they have blossomed over time. These layered, nuanced wines have the intense flavor, ripe tannins and freshness for long-term cellaring, and while they're stunning now, they'll offer more a few years down the road. Cheers!

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

2017 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD WHITE

55% Grenache Blanc, 32% Roussanne, 8% Chenin Blanc, 5% Petit Manseng
ALC: 15.1%
Cases 750 ml: 312
Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard
Released: January 2020
Release Price: \$98
Drink: now - 2030

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The James Berry White. This wine was a long time coming! I've been wanting to make a white for many years, but wanted to make it perfect, and I knew in the old Saxum facility we didn't have the space or right equipment to do our fruit justice. We have had Roussanne planted here since 1997, but I wanted to bring in some extra brightness that Roussanne can often lack, so I planted some Grenache Blanc on an East facing section of the Rocket Block hill. My hunch paid off, and the combo of the rich waxy Roussanne is cut and lifted with some bright citrusy Grenache Blanc. We wanted this wine to have some structure and age ability like a classic White Burgundy, but with a California twist. We pressed straight to barrels, a combination of 320L hogsheads and 600L demi-muids, all new French except one used 600L (from Dageuneau no less!). The juice was barrel fermented and left on its lees with occasional lees stirring for the entire 20 months. This wine did not see any SO2 until it was racked to tank for bottling, unfiltered and unfiltered of course. What emerged is a seriously structured yet complexly aromatic white. More flint and mineral on the nose than you might expect from a California white, but the mouthfeel is rich and focused at the same time. I'm quite happy with it. Like Saxum reds, it will greatly benefit a couple years of aging, more if you have the patience.

During the 2017 growing season California was served an impressive heat wave that arrived at the wrong time, when the fruit was getting close, but definitely not there yet. We were faced with two options. Our first option was to pick the fruit that was starting to shrivel from the heat. Fruit with numbers saying the sugars were getting too high, acids were too strong, and tannins were too green. The second option was to let it ride. However, you can't predict the weather and could potentially lose the whole crop. A huge gamble. Well, we rolled the dice and let everything hang. Then we proceeded to bite our nails and watch the weather. Eventually the heat stopped and we ended up losing a portion of our crop, maybe 15%, but the remaining 85% was awesome. We had to spend a lot of time on the sorting table removing the damaged portions of the clusters, but it was all worthwhile. The wines are delicious! The 2017s definitely have a riper aromatic than the 2016s, but I rather enjoy that. The tannins are incredibly soft and smooth, making them very open and approachable in their youth. I like to think that the 2016s will ultimately be the better wines, but for the first 5, maybe 8 years of their lives, the 2017s might bring more pleasure, and bringing pleasure is what this is all about!!!

REVIEWS:

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec. 2020

Rating: 94

Drink: 2022-2030

Glistening straw-yellow. Intensely perfumed pear, lemon pith, white flowers and succulent herb aromas pick up a chalky mineral element with air. Chewy and tightly focused on the palate, offering concentrated, mineral-laced citrus and orchard fruit and honeysuckle flavors that show superb clarity and spicy back-end cut. Finishes on a sappy pear nectar note, showing sharp delineation and superb, floral-driven tenacity.

Jeb Dunnuck, Oct 2019

Rating: 93

Drink: na

Starting with the white from one of the unquestionably great estates in wine today, the 2017 James Berry Vineyard White offers a concentrated, richer style as well as classy notes of caramelized tangerines, toasted spice, orange blossom, and brioche. I love its texture and richness, and it's beautifully balanced.

Saxum's Justin Smith has hit a home run with these recent vintages, and his 2015s, 2016s, 2017s, and 2018s all have singular styles, with the quality remaining sky-high. The 2018s show the slightly more pure, fresh, yet concentrated style of the vintage nicely. While not yet bottled, these will offer pleasure in their youth as well as benefit from short term cellaring. The 2017s are more pretty, perfumed wines that don't quite have the density of the 2016s yet certainly don't lack for fruit. Most are already drinking nicely today, yet as with all great wines, they're going to evolve gracefully. Lastly, the 2016s are some of the greatest wines I've tasted from this estate, and they offer massive, layered, yet impeccably balanced profiles that are a joy to drink today; they'll also be a joy to drink in 10-15 years as well. As I've written more than once, there are few mailing lists worth being on, but without a doubt, this is one of them.

Erin Books Wine Advocate Feb 2020

Rating: 91

Drink: 2020-2024

The 2017 James Berry Vineyard White, the first vintage of this wine, is made up of 55% Grenache Blanc, 32% Roussanne, 8% Chenin Blanc and 5% Petit Manseng aged 21 months in 80% new oak. The nose gives warm Golden Delicious apples, quince and poached pear with a hint of baker's yeast and honey-nut touches. Medium-bodied, it's fresh and pure in the mouth with a lifted, honeyed finish.