

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

2022 G2 VINEYARD

44% Grenache, 19% Mataro, 18% Graciano, 14% Syrah, 5% Carignan

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 930

Cases 1.5 L: 30

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Release: July 2024

Release Price: \$138

Drink: 2026 - 2040

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: 96

Drink: 2024-2037

The nose is deep, charred and brooding, clearly displaying this site's burly, unabashed power. The palate is a split personality that combines extreme, plush, opulent ripe fruits with a beautifully refined, elegant structure with impressive energy and clarity. The finish is coiled and long, ceaselessly expanding in its grip and dimension, which should carry this wine gracefully well past its 15th birthday.

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 G2 VINEYARD

64% Grenache, 14% Syrah, 10% Mataro, 6% Carignan, 6% Graciano

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 900

Cases 1.5 L: 60

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Release: July 2023

Release Price: \$135

Drink: 2024 - 2036

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

We have another awesome G2 wine on our hands here. This vineyard has really been hitting it out of the park for us. Gorgeous nose of raspberries and spice, with a great texture that caresses the palette, and a nice long finish that goes on and on. Stunner.

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.

REVIEWS:

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 96+

Drink: 2024-2039

It opens with the site's signature punchy, brawny power, with aromas of mixed bramble berries, grilled plums, sandalwood and juniper berries. The palate is immensely ripe and lavish, filled to the brim with ripe fruit flavors before transitioning to a wonderfully delineated and precise finish of sweet, juicy fruit flavors framed with ghostly, swelling tannins. This is an incredible mix of raw power and opulence within a beautiful,

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refined and intriguing frame, and I look forward to following its development in the cellar.

Jeb Dunnuck, July 2023 Sneak Peek

Rating: (97-99)

Drink: n/a

Not yet bottled but already incredibly impressive, the 2021 G2 will be Grenache-dominated but includes smaller amounts of Syrah and Graciano. It's loaded with red and black raspberry-like fruits as well as tons of floral, pepper, and spicy nuances, which carry to a full-bodied, pure, elegant red. It's remarkably complex for such a young wine and has incredible tannins and a gorgeous finish. Don't miss it.

2020 G2 VINEYARD

52% Grenache, 21% Mataro, 14% Graciano, 11% Syrah, 2% Carignan

ALC: 16.1%

Cases 750 ml: 807

Cases 1.5 L: 60

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Release: January 2022

Release Price: \$132

Drink: 2022 - 2032

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This vineyard keeps getting stronger and stronger as the vines mature and we get a handle on taming this rugged, mountainous fruit. It's definitely more black fruit focused than the JBV, and a little more dense and chewy, not quite as savory, but it still has a nice loamy earth side to it. I think it's a show stopper. The tannins are remarkable but will definitely benefit from a few years of aging (as will all of our wines). A real banger.

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: 91

Drink: 2023-2028

The 2020 G2 Vineyard displays less aromatic intensity than typical, although G2's burly, broad presence peers through the otherwise herbal, dark, spice-driven nose. The palate successfully exudes this site's signature, immense richness and svelte, elegant precision. The finish, however, is notably absent of its typically luscious fruit-driven core, instead driven by more rustic, attenuated flavors.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, July 2023 Insider

Rating: 94

Drink: now through 2032

Potent and packed with tension at the core, yet layered on top are rich, dramatic flavors of huckleberry, dark mocha espresso and savory herbes de Provence, which build intensity toward broad-shouldered tannins. Grenache, Mataro, Graciano, Syrah and Carignan. Drink now through 2032.

Eric Guido, Vinous, March 2023

Rating: 93

Drink: 2025-2035

The 2020 G2 is elegant and perfumed, showing a blend of wild strawberries and blueberries complicated by Violette Pastille. This is like pure silk, with depths of mineral-tinged red and black berries that saturate the palate in primary concentration. It finishes gently tannic and potent, leaving traces of molten chocolate and rum-soaked currants to linger.

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.

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2022

Rating: 93-95

Drink: n/a

The 2020 G2 Vineyard, which comes from a great vineyard on the west side of Paso Robles, is based largely on Grenache but includes 21% Mourvèdre, 14% Graciano, 11% Syrah, and 2% Carignan. It shows the denser, chewier style of the vintage but has rocking levels of black fruits, charcoal, peppery herbs, and leather. Full-bodied and concentrated on the palate, it offers good tannins and outstanding length.

I was able to taste three vintages from Saxum, the late release 2019s from bottle, the majority of the 2020 lineup from barrel, and a handful of 2021 barrel samples. As I wrote last year, the 2019s are just brilliant, ripe, hedonistic, magical wines, and these late releases only reinforce that opinion. Looking at the 2020s, this is clearly a challenging vintage, with many wines

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having subtle smoky nuances and firmer yet still ripe tannins. Justin commented that the lab numbers regarding smoke taint were very low, so I think these are safe wines that will offer plenty of pleasure, although this is not a vintage to hide in the cellar. The 2021s that I was able to taste were terrific, and this will clearly be another terrific vintage here. In addition, they've planted a new vineyard located just four miles off the Pacific, the Cayucos Ridge Vineyard, and I expect we'll see more releases from that site in the future.

2019 G2 VINEYARD

53% Grenache, 21% Mataro, 19% Graciano, 4% Carignan, 3% Syrah
ALC: 15.9%
Cases 750 ml: 1182
Cases 1.5 L: 50
AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek
Vineyard: G2 Vineyard
Release: January 2022
Release Price: \$98
Drink: now - 2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I'm not going to hype this wine up much because I think Jeb already said enough.

These 2019 wines have a little something for everyone, which is why I think I like them so much. Lifted, fresh aromatics of sage and spice and fruit. Along with lots of rich California fruit, deep textures, smooth tannins and lively acids that keep it all harmonizing so well. These days there are so many great wines out there that have one or the other. Rich, smooth tannins, or fresh, spice/fruit driven aromatics. I find it rare to have both, and frankly, that's my holy grail. What really piques my interest.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2021

Rating: 100

Drink: 2021-2036

Pure perfection in a glass, the 2019 G2 Vineyard ... An incredible array of blackberries, ground pepper, violets, and herbes de Provence all emerge from the glass, and it's full-bodied, deep, and concentrated, yet as weightless as they come. It shows more gamey, exotic notes with time in the glass, it's perfectly balanced, and it's just an incredible wine from this reference point estate. Drink bottles any time over the coming 10-15 years.

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: 97

Drink: 2025-2035

Saturated ruby. Powerful, spice-accented aromas of Chambord, blueberry, licorice and pungent flowers; a white pepper element adds energetic lift. Seamless and deeply concentrated, offering an array of alluringly sweet red and blue fruit, Moroccan spice, mocha and floral pastille flavors braced by a core of juicy acidity. Finishes impressively long, precise and sappy, with intensely spicy thrust and steadily building tannins.

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.

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Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, March 2022

Rating: 94+

Drink: 2023-2038

A blend of 53% Grenache, 21% Mataro, 19% Graciano, 4% Carignan and 3% Syrah, the 2019 G2 Vineyard has a medium ruby-purple color and scents of cherries and blueberries with touches of garrigue and mint chocolate. Although it's a touch aromatically shy, the medium-bodied palate's generous fruits are on full display, supported by fresh acidity and silty tannins, and its boldly flavored finish suggests it will offer more nuance after a few years' maturation in bottle.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, May 2022

Rating: 95

Drink: now through 2031

A dynamic red that's rich, deeply structured and plump with personality, offering accents of blackberry, licorice, rose petal and herbes de Provence that finish with plush tannins. Grenache, Mataro, Graciano and Carignan. Drink now through 2031. 1,230 cases made.

2018 G2 VINEYARD

55% Grenache, 28% Mataro, 9% Syrah, 8% Graciano

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 1007

Cases 1.5 L: 50

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Release: January 2021

Release Price \$98

Drink now - 2033

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Our new plantings at G2 have reached full production with the 2018 vintage and it clearly shows in the depth and nuance that comes through. The aromatics are on the dark end of the fruit scale, blackberries and cassis, along with plenty of chaparral, black pepper, and even violets! In the mouth there is a beautiful, full bodied texture with loads of fine tannins. Great focus brought forth by the Grenache, the Mataro adds a silky richness, and the Syrah and Graciano bring dark complexity and grip. This is not one to miss, and surprisingly, I think this wine is currently the most open out of the '18s.

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: 99

Drink: 2020-2039

Powerful notes of herbes de Provence, candied orange, violets, peppery spice, and both blue and black fruits dominate the bouquet of the 2018 G2 Vineyard. This full-bodied, deep, opulent 2018 has incredible purity of fruit, a seamless texture that's to die for, ultra-fine tannins, and a blockbuster of a finish. Based on 55% Grenache, 28% Mataro, 9% Syrah, and the rest Graciano, it's a borderline perfect wine that can be drunk today with incredible pleasure or cellared for a decade. This vineyard continues to produce some of the top wines in the vintage.

Josh Raynolds, Vinous, Dec 2020

Rating: 97

Drink: 2025-2035

Saturated ruby. Powerful, intensely perfumed black raspberry, cassis, cherry liqueur, incense and licorice aromas pick up hints of violet oil and vanilla with air. Sweet, penetrating and focused on the palate, offering deeply concentrated red and dark berry liqueur, floral pastille, licorice and succulent herb flavors that show superb power and fine definition. Adroitly plays richness off finesse and finishes extremely long and sweet, with polished tannins coming in late.

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: 97

Drink: 2022-2037

The 2018 G2 Vineyard is a blend of 55% Grenache, 28% Mataro, 9% Syrah and 8% Graciano. It explodes with layers of baked black and blue berries, coffee beans, aniseed and loads of floral aromas, chameleon-like as it sits in the glass and gains nuance. The medium-bodied palate offers fine, silty tannins and well-integrated freshness, with concentrated dark fruit flavors

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that gain amplitude in the mouth, singing on the very long finish. It's a tad wound at the moment and could use some time in the cellar, although it's stunning straight from bottle.

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!

2017 G2 VINEYARD

58% Grenache, 20% Mataro, 11% Tannat, 8% Graciano, 3% Syrah

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 868

Cases 1.5 L: 52

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: January 2020

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2032

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I feel this G2 Vineyard is the best to date, slightly edging out the classic 2016 version. Compared to the JBV it has a much darker brooding nose, in no small part due to the use of Tannat and Graciano as components. More black fruit, smoke, and a touch of a floral element, maybe rose? The palate just explodes with dark fruits and soft round tannins that go on forever. This wine saw a good amount of new French oak, 87%, but mostly large 500L puncheons, so the oak impact is barely noticeable. This wine rocks. Buy it, drink it.

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:

Jeb Dunnuck, Oct 2019

Rating: 99

Drink: 2019-2034

A Grenache-dominated blend that includes 11% Tannat, 9% Graciano and 3% Syrah, the 2017 G2 Vineyard reminds me of a great vintage of Raymond Usseglio's Chateauneuf du Pape Cuvée Imperiale. Flirting with perfection and one of the greatest Rhône blends I've tasted from California, it offers a smorgasbord of sweet black and blue fruits, crushed violets, flowery incense, and pepper. With full-bodied richness, no hard edges, perfectly integrated acidity, and silky tannins, drink this magical wine any time over the coming 10-15 years.

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 Brooks, Wine Advocate, Feb 2020

Rating: 94

Drink: 2020-2035

The 2017 G2 Vineyard is made up of 58% Grenache, 20% Mataro, 11% Tannat, 8% Graciano and 3% Syrah. It was made with 14% whole cluster and aged 21 months in 87% new oak. Medium to deep ruby, it has lovely scents of tar and roses to begin, with a core of ripe red and black cherries and berries and accents of turned earth, forest floor, underbrush, dried herbs and garrigue. The medium to full-bodied palate is intense, layered and earthy, with a firm, grainy frame and well-woven freshness, finishing long and layered. 944 cases were made.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator

Producer Spotlight, Dec. 18, 2019

Rating: 92

Drink: 2019 through 2030

Dark and brooding, this wine has muscle to spare, buoyed by zesty blackberry, crushed rock and bitter chocolate flavors that finish with dense tannins. Needs time. Grenache, Mataro, Tannat, Graciano and Syrah.

Since the brand's first vintage in 2000, Saxum has set the standard for Rhône-style reds in California, with numerous appearances on Wine Spectator's Top 100 list, including the No. 1 spot in 2010 with the Saxum James Berry Vineyard Paso Robles 2007. Owner-winemaker Justin Smith (pictured at right) grew up in Paso Robles, located halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and his father planted the 55-acre James Berry Vineyard in the early 1980s. The core of Saxum's

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production, James Berry Vineyard is about 10 miles from the Pacific, planted atop an ancient seabed scattered with fossilized shells and shark teeth. The latest James Berry Vineyard Willow Creek District 2017, a potent yet detailed blend, was previously featured in the Insider with a 95-point rating.

As you can see from this collection, Smith makes wine from a range of nearby vineyards, including Booker, Paderewski and Terry Hoage. Smith uses a variety of winemaking approaches, depending on the bottling and vintage, with fermentation vessels that range from concrete to large French oak puncheons, emphasizing the unique qualities of each grape and vineyard.

2016 G2 VINEYARD

42% Grenache, 35% Mataro, 20% Tannat, 3% Zinfandel
ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 642

Cases 1.5 L: 54

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2018

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2030

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2016 G2 is a real winner too. Perhaps even darker than the JBV (partially thanks to the addition of Tannat, what some call the Heart of Darkness). It is a truly exotic wine. Not far beneath the core of plum and blood orange there are scents of what I would imagine a Moroccan market would smell like, incense and spice and perhaps a touch of something illegal (at least in most of the US!). I think this wine will reward some patience in the cellar, more so than the other Grenache blends we made in 2016. Give her 3 years to really strut her stuff.

The 2016 vintage is one of the finest, if not THE finest vintage to come around in our 17 years of Saxum. (Isn't it always true that the current vintage is the best ever?) What happened to make the 2016 wines so nice you ask? Well, what stands out to me is how even keeled the whole season was. It was a drought busting rainy winter, followed by a nice warm spring. The spring had minimal frost which in turn provided a good set of fruit and gave us the option to thin the fruit down to just the perfect clusters. To top it all off, a moderately warm, but not too hot, summer season allowed the fruit to reach optimal ripeness and retain great natural acidities. The 2016s are definitely a tad darker and denser than the 2015s. I love the 2015s for their beauty, and I love the 2016s for their pleasure. They impress with their balance, walking that razor's edge of having density and richness while still possessing depth, complexity, and mystery. Yes, I really love how many hidden layers the wines have, and how the layers are slowly revealed as you get to know the wines better throughout an evening. Maybe like a well written book that takes you ever deeper into it's world, slowly revealing it's true heart.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Nov 2018

Rating: 99

Drink: 2020-2035

Checking in as a blend of 42% Grenache, 35% Mourvèdre, 20% Tannat, and the balance Zinfandel, the 2016 G2 is one of the standouts in this truly stacked lineup. It sports a vivid ruby/purple color as well as a rocking bouquet of black raspberries, new saddle leather, sweet garrigue, white pepper, and blood orange. Deep, rich, and layered, yet also light on its feet, incredibly complex, and perfectly balanced, it's an incredible wine from this up and coming vineyard that readers should snatch up. It will be even better with 2-4 years of bottle age and cruise in cold cellars for 10-15 years.

This report looks mostly at the 2016s from undeniable superstar winemaker, Justin Smith. Smith is one of the pioneers of the Paso Robles wine scene yet remains as humble and accessible as ever. Speaking about the 2016s, these are the strongest set of releases since the 2007s, and I suspect at maturity these wines will be even better. They have a rare sense of depth and richness paired with purity and precision, as well as singular characters, and these truly are special wines. The 2016 James Berry is quite possibly the greatest wine ever produced from the region and is a legendary wine in the making. Do whatever you can to latch onto a few bottles of this magical elixir. The majority of the 2016s will benefit from 2-4 years of bottle age, but good luck keeping your hands off of them. The 2017s are similarly styled, yet they have slightly more elegance and approachability compared to the denser, richer 2016s. I suspect these will continue to put on weight as well with additional time in barrel. As I've said in the past, there are few mailing lists worth staying on in today wine world; this is one of them.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, April 2019

Rating: 93

Drink: 2021-2027

Intense and muscular, with a potent brew of blackberry, crushed rock, bitter chocolate and licorice flavors that builds toward broad-shouldered tannins. Hands off for now. Grenache, Mataro, Tannat and Zinfandel.

William Kelley, Wine Advocate, May 2018

Rating: (94-96)

Drink: NA

I tasted a representative blend of the 2016 G2 Vineyard, a wine that's still youthfully primary, revealing spicy aromas of cherries, plums and wild berries. On the palate, it's full-bodied, bright and taut, with fine-grained but distinctly savory tannins that are already nicely integrated into its generous core of fruit. The blend contains 42% Grenache, 35% Mataro, fully 20% Tannat and 3% Zinfandel, and Smith observes that he was very careful in fermenting the Tannat to avoid extracting excessive structure.

Success sometimes breeds complacency, but that's emphatically not the case for Justin Smith, whose status as Paso Roble's most celebrated winemaker has done nothing to dim his urge to experiment, evolve and improve. Without sacrificing any of their power and authority, both of which come easily in this warm climate, Smith's Saxum wines continue to

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

gain in structural refinement, energy, integration and incipient complexity with every passing vintage. Since the end of the last decade, Smith has been experimenting with whole cluster, a technique he tends to employ in cooler sites and vintages, since extracting excessive stem tannins is a danger in riper, warmer years. Fermentations are cooler and slower, which helps to manage extraction. While new oak was once an important influence in the Saxum wines, its presence is more and more subtle: Smith now works with puncheons instead of smaller barrels, and they're complemented by amphorae and foudres. Since 2010, he has employed Roussanne for co-fermentations with Syrah in the place of Viognier, since it brings less additional power and alcohol. He also continues to refine and adapt his blends from year to year. Smith's new cellar now means he has the space necessary to mature wines for longer. Today's Saxum wines are accordingly better than ever. The only problem is finding them: I signed up for the mailing list in 2011, and Smith informs me that the current wait is around eight years. At Saxum, Smith characterizes the 2016 vintage as "easygoing and plentiful" after the challenges of the three preceding years of drought. The season's heat spikes weren't too serious, and fermentations went well. He employed less whole cluster than in 2015 but did very little crushing, emphasizing whole-berry fermentations. Having tasted most of these wines from barrel last summer, I was more than impressed by their positive evolution when I revisited them this April.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2018

Rating: 96

Drink: 2026-2036

Saturated ruby. Wild, spice- and mineral-accented cherry and dark berry aromas, along with a sexy floral top note and a subtle touch of earthiness. Broad and alluringly sweet, offering palate-staining black and blue fruit, candied violet, spicecake and cola flavors that deliver a compelling blend of richness and energy. Puts on weight with air while maintaining vivacity, and finishes extremely long and chewy, featuring youthful tannic grip and an emphatic echo of sweet blue fruit.

2015 G2 VINEYARD

56% Grenache, 44% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.4%

Cases 750 ml: 486

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2017

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2030

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

We switched things up a little from the 2014 vintage with Grenache taking the lead (and it will probably continue to be this way). It is an open book of bright, juicy, red fruits. Raspberry, and maybe a little strawberry, with a lovely briary dark side to it. Maybe some licorice and fennel coming from the Mourvèdre. What I really enjoy is that every time I have tasted this wine it has been different. Sometimes showing the darker Mourvèdre

side, sometimes the juicy Grenache side. In a word, it's a dynamic wine, a real treat to enjoy. Simply following it slowly throughout your meal is a joy. (I had it with some BBQ ribs last night, great pairing!) From one sip to the next it will develop new facets that you hadn't noticed in the previous sip. Give it a year or two in the cellar before popping. The best is definitely yet to come.

I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the 2015s. It was an anomaly of a vintage. First off, 2015 was the third consecutive drought year. The vineyards received abysmal rainfall and the vines were stressing. Due to the stress and unfavorable spring conditions, the vines set meager, and I mean MEAGER crop loads. Worst hit was the Syrah and Grenache, which unfortunately, is the bulk of what we produce. Anyways, enough belly aching over low yields....back to the wines! The type of wine that you would expect to make from tiny yields and extended drought conditions would be massively concentrated behemoths. Thick, dark wines that you would have to smack the bottom of the bottle to get them to pour out. Surprisingly, we found the opposite type of wine when we started to press the young 2015s into barrel. Everyone stopped and scratched their heads. They are beautiful, nuanced wines! They possess the awesome spice of a cold vintage, like 2011, along with the sweet tannins of a cool, long growing season, like 2007. Hmmmmmm, what is going on? Well, here's my theory, and if anybody else has one, let me know because I'm all ears. 2015 was an unusually humid summer, something we never see here in dry Paso Robles. A monsoonal weather pattern set up, possibly due to the warm El Niño waters off the Pacific, and it culminated in mid-July with a crazy lightning storm, dumping almost three inches of rain on us. Nobody had ever seen this. Even the old farmers who have been living here for close to 90 years! Now in the vineyard, it was too early to impact the fruit because the clusters hadn't begun to color up yet. But the storm seemed to rejuvenate the stressed out vines. They perked up and started to smile. Luckily, there weren't any more freak rain events for the rest of the season and harvest went super smooth. We were able to pick when we wanted to pick and ferment exactly the way we wanted to ferment. And oh, did I mention we had a brand stinking new winery to play with!? New fermentors, new equipment, and so much glorious space! (The new place is 6 times bigger than le garage of old.) We had the ability to put the fruit inside the precise fermentor size or type we thought best. (Wood, concrete, or stainless steel?) And, something new to us, we could leave it there as long as we wanted to because we now had enough fermentation space for every bit of fruit. No need to turn a tank like days of old! Anyways, I'm digressing again..... the wines! Downright beautiful (this is the word of the day). They are open and aromatic, the tannins are soft and supple, they are layered and nuanced beyond all belief. They are already enjoyable. You can drink them while waiting for the 14s to come around. Probably even the 13s and 12s for that matter! On the other hand, I believe they will age magnificently. The balance is perfect.

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com

Tasting Date: 08/10/2017

Rating: 96

Drink: n/a

The 2015 G2 Vineyard had just been bottled and is one of the lighter colored releases in the lineup. A blend of 56% Grenache and 44% Mourvèdre, it has an ethereal perfume of kirsch, blueberries, seaweed wrappers, herbes de Provence and hints of dried pepper. This flows to an elegant, silky, sweetly fruited red beauty that stays beautifully light and elegant on the palate, with fine, savory tannin, impeccable balance and a great finish.

Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate, Sept 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2017-2029

The newest vineyard in the Saxum lineup, the 2015 G2 Vineyard contains 56% Grenache and 44% Mourvèdre. Sporting a medium to deep garnet-purple color, it leaps from the glass with an exuberant red currant and Bing cherry nose, complemented by notes of dried Provence herbs, lavender, orange peel and black pepper. Full-bodied with a firm, grainy texture and tons of freshness, it has lovely spice and herbal layers on the very long finish.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Nov 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2022-2032

Deep, lurid violet color. Energetic, mineral-accented aromas of ripe red and blue fruits are complicated by suggestions of incense, Asian spices and pungent flowers. Broad and fleshy on entry, then more taut in the middle, offering sappy, densely packed black raspberry, boysenberry and floral pastille flavors and an exotic suggestion of five-spice powder. Finishes strikingly long and sweet, featuring slow-building, even tannins, a touch of smokiness and repeating red fruit and floral character.

2014 G2 VINEYARD

58% Mourvedre, 42% Grenache

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 525

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2028

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Beginning with the 2014 vintage, we brought a new vineyard into the fold. The G2 vineyard is only half a mile from our estate, directly to the South West. Our friend Bill Gibbs (of Heart Stone fame) purchased the property with 40 acres already planted to Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, and Zinfandel. We locked down our favorite blocks, an amazing 5 acre South slope planted to Mourvèdre 369 and Grenache 362, two of my favorite clones. These blocks are extremely rocky and steep, a twin of our Syrah block at Booker Vineyard, with a vertical rise of 200 feet in a

single row! Our hunches were right and the fruit off these blocks are mind blowing. Since 2014 we have planted 8 more blocks; 2 North facing Grenache blocks, 2 big south slopes with head trained Monastrell (the Spanish version of Mourvèdre), a North face Syrah block, and some blocks of Carignane and Cinsault. We plan to keep the blend Grenache and Mourvèdre dominant but want to bring in these supporting characters for a little extra complexity. We are super excited about this new planting.

The inaugural release of G2 is a blockbuster. We made two picks in 2014. First the top half of both the Grenache and Mourvèdre which were co-fermented after de-stemming. Then two weeks later we picked the bottom halves of the blocks and co-fermented, but this time we used 100% whole cluster. For the first year we kept it in puncheons, many of them new French oak. We then racked into Foudres (huge barrels) for the last 6 months. Each lot came out ridiculously good, but the combo of the two is insane. Ripe, rich and hedonistic, yet full of complexity and length. Red fruit, with some darker tar and spice notes lurking in the background. The finish is a day long, maybe even two.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate, Sept 2017

Rating: 97

Drink: 2019-2029

Tasted just after bottling and a final blend of 58% Mourvèdre and 42% Grenache, the 2014 G2 Vineyard comes from a site just to the southeast of James Berry (this was formerly known as Gravity Hills Vineyard) that was planted in the late 1990s. The first release from Justin from this site, this beauty sports a deep ruby/purple color as well as a gorgeous, layered bouquet of cured meats, spice, mulled dark fruits, graphite and loads of this chalky minerality that also emerges on the palate. Rich, full-bodied, ultra-pure and impeccably balanced, this seamless, full-bore beauty will need 2-3 years to really shine, and keep for a decade or more after that.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2016

Rating: 94

Drink: 2020-2026

Inky purple. Powerful, deep-pitched aromas of ripe dark fruits, violet, incense, Indian spices and smoky minerals. Stains the palate with intense blackberry, bitter cherry and floral pastille flavors that open up and become sweeter with aeration. Extremely young and highly promising; the strikingly long, youthfully tannic finish leaves sappy blue fruit and spicecake qualities behind.