

SAXUM SOMNUS

2019 SAXUM SOMNUS

33% Petite Sirah, 33% Syrah, 17% Graciano, 13% Touriga Nacional, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 450

Cases 1.5 L: 60

AVA: Paso Robles

Release: January 2024

Release Price: \$159

Drink: 2025 - 2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I finally get to introduce you to this new cuvée, Somnus, named after the Roman god of sleep, because this wine gets to sleep an extra year in barrel! 44 months it's been slumbering away. Back in 2019 we had a couple of amazing lots in our cellar that were so unique, and so incredible, I really wanted to showcase them. The problem was they were also extremely structured. The original plan was to give them the 33 month elevage like Bone Rock and Rocket block, but when it came time to bottle it last year it was still too beastly. Think velvet glove in a iron gauntlet. We tucked it back in and let it sleep another whole year, and when it woke up this time, it blew us all away. It is something unique for sure. Still a beast, but something very special. Something that I believe could only happen here on the Central Coast. It is another wine in this line up that has to be tasted to be believed, but understand, it's not for the faint of heart. It is Paso.

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:

Eric Guido, Vinous, July 2024

Rating: 98+

Drink: 2028-2040

The 2019 Somnus is exotic and impossible to ignore with its beguiling spice-box bouquet. White pepper and clove come together with dried roses and blackberries. It smooths over the palate with ripe red and black fruit yet quickly builds in tension as a liquid floral concentration and a bitter tinge of cedary spice and cocoa saturate toward the close. It finishes impossibly long and tannic, but the tannins are sweet and round. Violet inner florals and a saturation of salted licorice linger for ages. The Somnus underwent an extra year of barrel-aging (44 months, 87% new). It's a co-ferment of Syrah, Graciano, Touriga Nacional, and Petite Sarah, with 16% whole clusters. This is not to be missed.

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 97+

Drink: 2025-2040

The first release of this co-fermented, extended aging cuvée that collects the most spice-driven, tannic blocks of James Berry

Vineyard and Heart Stone, the 2019 Somnus is impressive in its ability to deliver monstrous size and refined intrigue in nearly equal proportions. ... it was aged a full 44 months in 87% new 225-liter barrels. The nose is seemingly endless in its dense opacity, showing off a plethora of sumptuous, dark fruit, black pepper and exotic spice aromas that continuously elevate and morph in the glass. The palate continues this lavish profile with a rich, extracted yet muscular texture that provides welcome vibrancy against the immense concentration of the palate. The finish is explosive and multidimensional and impressively continues to gain layer after layer of dark-fruited, chocolate-laden nuance with time in the glass.

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.

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2022

Rating: 96-98

Drink: n/a

The 2019 (Somnus) comes mostly from the James Berry Vineyard but includes some Cabernet Sauvignon from the Heart Stone Vineyard. There are roughly 600 cases of this full-bodied, powerful wine, which offers terrific cassis and darker berry fruits, some white pepper, graphite, and chalky minerality, ripe, fine, polished tannins, and a great finish. It's straight-up gorgeous at this point.

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 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.