

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

2021 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

82% Syrah, 11% Grenache, 5% Petite Sirah, 2% Roussanne
ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 365

Cases 1.5 L: 39

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Release: July 2024

Release Price: \$159

Drink: 2024-2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Our 2021 wines are a very classic vintage. A great balance of fruit, spice, tannin and fresh acidities. Nothing seems to be out of place, and I feel they will really benefit from 4 or 5 years of aging before they really show their stuff. Those tannins are powerful, but oh so nice. I really think the extra year these 21s saw in barrel polished them up quite well.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, August 2024

Rating: 98

Drink: 2025-2040

The 2021 Bone Rock ... spent 32 months in 84% new French oak. It's another thrilling 2021 that has everything you could want from a glass of wine. Ripe blackberries, cassis, graphite, ground pepper, leather, and savory flower notes all contribute to a captivating, layered bouquet, and this beauty is full-bodied, with a deep, unctuous mid-palate, ripe tannins, and a blockbuster finish. Give it a few years and enjoy over the following 15+.

Eric Guido, Vinous, July 2024

Rating: 98

Drink: 2027-2038

Dark and brooding in the glass, the 2021 Bone Rock tempts the imagination with a beguiling blend of crushed ashen stones, black raspberries and hints of olive and exotic spice. This is velvety in texture yet energetic, with crisp red and black fruits that take on a crunchy sensation. Tactile minerals and rosy inner florals emerge toward the close. Tannic and impossibly long, the 2021 leaves the mouth watering for more while but also begging for relief from its stern structure. There's epic potential here. The 2021 was raised in 84% new French oak.

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 98

Drink: 2024-2036

Polished but burly, flashy but nuanced, the 2021 Bone Rock is spectacular from the first pour, displaying incredibly dense, layered black fruit, dried herbs and charred meat aromas with ever-increasing intensity. The palate is saturated and staining but admirably walks the tightrope of balance despite its immense frame. The finish is absolutely explosive, yet it keeps an amazing amount of power in reserve, which slowly unfolds and swells with impressive length, tenacity and focus. A stunning highlight within an impressive lineup, this will be a fascinating wine to watch unfold over the next decade and beyond.

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.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, June 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2025 - 2035

Brooding and somewhat muscular, this blend offers dark blackberry, crushed stone, savory meat and pepper flavors that gather tension and richness on the finish.

2020 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

76% Syrah, 12% Grenache, 7% Mataro, 5% Graciano

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 323

Cases 1.5 L: 60

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2024

Release Price: \$159

Drink: 2024-2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

What a special wine Bone Rock is. Not only is it where Saxum started with the 2000 Bone Rock, but it's also the block our house sits next to, so I basically live in this block. It is so much more than a vineyard. But I'm here today to tell you about the 2020 Bone Rock.... It is rock star material. When we tasted through this line up, our son Colin thought this wine was showing the best out of all 5. High praises considering the company it was in! A classic showing from vines we planted with jackhammers over 30 years ago. Aged for 33 months in mainly barriques with a few hogsheads (300L) thrown in, this wine is still structured, and holds the promise of wonderful things to come with a couple years of aging. But really, I find it delicious right now.

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!

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, August 2024

Rating: 92

Drink: n/a

A later release 2020, the 2020 Bone Rock ... saw 32 months in a mix of new 300-liter barrels and concrete amphora. Its darker purple hue is followed by a meaty, exotic nose of mulled red and black fruits, chocolate, roasted meats, and graphite. It's full-bodied, concentrated, has firmer tannins, and the rather foursquare, angular style of the vintage. It appears to be free of smoke taints and has some classic Saxum opulence and richness, yet it's a fair click back from other vintages.

Eric Guido, Vinous, July 2024

Rating: 93

Drink: 2025-2031

Dried violets, mint leaf and dusty black currant notes waft from the 2020 Bone Rock. This is elegant in feel with soft textures and ripe red and black fruits that ooze across the palate. A bitter touch combined with edgy tannins and a hint of cedary spice accentuates the finale. This is an excellent effort from a difficult year.

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2024-2030

The 2020 Bone Rock is a beautiful wine made all the more impressive as the result of a challenging harvest. It opens with a lush, dark-fruited nose accented by savory, herbal and meaty touches, although with slightly less clarity and overall intensity than found in more forgiving vintages. The palate is dramatic, opulent and lavish, showcasing punchy ripeness harnessed with admirable delineation and focus. The finish is explosive, chock-full of potent, saturating dark fruits, umami-laden richness and tight, fine, precise tannins. At this stage, any smoke taint present is faint enough to be steamrolled by the sheer mass of this behemoth, which successfully delivers a complete drinking experience.

2019 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

73% Syrah, 14% Graciano, 9% Petite Sirah, 4% Roussanne

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 453

Cases 1.5 L: 50

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2023

Release Price: \$156

Drink: 2023-2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Jeb Dunnuck writes that this might be the best Bone Rock ever produced. I think only time will tell, but it's definitely top 3! Like all the '19s it has the magical combo of being rich with dark fruit, but also including tons of lifted spices. Mainly the Syrah classic, freshly cracked black pepper. The mouthfeel is unreal due to the soft but strong tannins and the finish goes on and on. It's a classic.

REVIEWS:

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, July 2023 Hot Wines

Rating: 97

Drink: now through 2033

This blend has verve and a bold, deep structure, yet retains finesse and detail, with tiers of blackberry, mocha espresso, crushed stone, smoked meat and tapenade flavors that slowly unfold toward broad-shouldered yet polished tannins. Syrah, Graciano, Petite Sirah and Roussanne. Drink now through 2033. From California.

Jeb Dunnuck, August 2023

Rating: 98+

Drink: 2025-2039

Leading off the 2019s, the 2019 Bone Rock ... it has a killer nose of black and blue fruits, game, iron, and spring flowers. This carries to a full-bodied, powerful Syrah with a stacked mid-palate, remarkable purity, and enough structure and tannins to warrant 2-4 years in the cellar. It's a heavenly expression of Syrah that will have two decades of longevity.

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.

2018 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

63% Syrah, 16% Mataro, 12% Grenache, 7% Graciano, 2%

Roussanne

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 563

Cases 1.5 L: 55

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2022

Release Price: \$148

Drink: 2022-2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Last, but definitely not least, we have the Bone Rock. This 2018 version is classic. Serious juice. There is so much going on and it will only get better with age. Complex yet hedonistic, just the right amount of oak, fruit, spice, tannin... everything is in its place. We planted these vines 30 years ago. They are wisened, but not wizened! In any case, this wine rocks.

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept. 2021

Rating: (97-99)

Drink: na

The 2018 Bone Rock ... is still resting in barrel, but it certainly looks to be in line, quality wise, with the other 2018s here. Concentrated, full-bodied, and just a massive wine, it has beautiful darker berry fruits as well as some spice and violet notes, a backward, inward, reserved style, ripe tannins, and a great finish.

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: 98

Drink: 2026-2036

Dark violet. An assertively perfumed bouquet evokes ripe cherry, dark berry preserves, incense and exotic spices, and a peony topnote builds as the wine opens up. Palate-staining, alluringly sweet Chambord, cherry liqueur, vanilla, floral pastille and spicecake flavors deliver a compelling blend of depth and energy. Smooth, even tannins add shape an extremely long, spicy finish that leaves sappy blue fruit, floral and smoky mineral notes behind.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, March 2022

Rating: 96+

Drink: 2022-2040

From the oldest block of Syrah at James Berry vineyard, the 2018 Bone Rock is primary Syrah, blended with 16% Mataro, 12% Grenache, 7% Graciano and 2% Roussanne. Its roasted plum and wild berry fruit is accented with tones of graphite, aniseed, bitters and potpourri. The full-bodied palate has an abundance of grainy tannins, rounded freshness and loads of floral perfume on the extended finish. It has the intensity and structure to have a long life in bottle.

2017 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

66% Syrah, 16% Graciano, 9% Mataro, 5% Roussanne, 2% Grenache, 2% Petite Sirah

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 384

Cases 1.5 L: 75

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2021

Release Price: \$148

Drink: 2020-2045

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This might be the best Bone Rock I have ever made. Do you really need me to say more? Because I could wax poetic about this wine all day long...

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, Sept. 2020

Rating: 99

Drink: 2020-2035

Based on two-thirds Syrah, 16% Graciano, 9% Mataro, 5% Roussanne, and the rest Grenache and Petite Sirah, the 2017

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Bone Rock is a powerhouse wine that does everything right. Deep purple-colored, with a rocking nose of chocolate, smoked meat, ground pepper, Asian spices, and spring flower, it hits the palate with full-bodied richness, a plush, sexy texture, good acidity, and a great, great finish. I'd be happy to drink bottles any time over the coming 10-15 years.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec. 2020

Rating: 98

Drink: 2026-2036

Inky purple. Deep-pitched aromas of cherry preserves, blackberry, fruitcake, exotic flowers and incense on the highly perfumed nose. Stains the palate with concentrated black/blue fruit liqueur, allspice, licorice and violet pastille flavors enlivened by a smoky mineral nuance that builds through the midpalate. Conveys a suave blend of richness and vivacity and betrays no rough edges. Appealingly sweet and expansive on the strikingly long, focused finish, which features resonating dark berry and floral notes and subtly chewy tannins.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, Oct. 2020

Rating: 95

Drink: 2020-2035

The 2017 Bone Rock is a blend of 66% Syrah, 16% Graciano, 9% Mataro, 5% Roussanne, 2% Grenache and 2% Petite Sirah aged in about 60% new oak. Deep ruby-purple, it opens to violets, cassis, vanilla, bay leaves and char aromas. Full-bodied, it floods the mouth with dark, spicy fruits with good juiciness and a youthfully firm but ripe frame, and it finishes long and floral.

2016 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

72% Syrah, 10% Mataro, 9% Graciano, 6% Grenache, 3% Roussanne

ALC: 16.1%

Cases 750 ml: 312

Cases 1.5 L: 80

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2020

Release Price: \$148

Drink: 2020-2045

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Ah, this brings us to the 2016 Bone Rock. Wow. I definitely like giving this wine the extra year in barrel it deserves. 33 months to be exact, and it is still really fresh and focused! But that finish, it's forever! Ok, sorry, I got caught up in the moment. Let me rewind and walk you through this wine. The nose is cedar and earth with blackberry and violets in the background and plenty of black pepper (that pepper is coming from the 27% stem inclusion). The mouth is round and polished with no hard edges and excellent fruit purity (thanks to the 34% concrete amphora I suspect). It is round and full, with a dense, tannic spine that needs some time to relax and strut its stuff. The finish is where the extended aging really shines through. It's very concentrated, yet flows on and on, without feeling heavy or burdensome. That's what makes Saxum Saxum. Weight and texture without heaviness. With a focus of purity. I know, that sounds like an oxymoron, but that's really the key. The cornerstone.

Like I mentioned in my previous letter, 2016 is quite possibly the best vintage we have made. The stars aligned, and everything is just right. The perfect amount of fruit richness, the right amount of ripe tannins, the perfect amount of acidity, and incredible balance, all wrapped up with some nice freshness and aromatic intensity. We knew we had some great material right from the get go, and used a little less new oak than normal to let the explosive fruit and earthiness show itself properly. I am very happy with these wines!

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Oct. 2019

Rating: 97+

Drink: 2022-2037

A blend of 72% Syrah, 19% Mourvèdre, and the rest Grenache and Roussanne, the 2016 James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock boasts a saturated purple color as well as beautiful black and blue fruits, ground pepper, chalky minerality, and hints of chocolate. These carry to a full-bodied Syrah that has nicely balanced acidity, ripe tannins, and a great finish. This cuvée saw a lot of stems in the ferments, yet they're incredibly well-integrated. I suspect it's going to merit a triple-digit rating in 3-4 years and it's another awesome wine from the genius of Justin Smith.

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.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Feb. 2020

Rating: 98

Drink: 2026-2036

Saturated violet color. Highly expressive black and blue fruit liqueur, cherry-cola, exotic spice and potpourri scents show excellent clarity and pick up vanilla and licorice accents with air. Deeply concentrated, mineral-driven blueberry, bitter cherry and fruitcake flavors are complemented by a hint of candied flowers that builds on the back half. Broad and velvety in texture, finishing with emphatic, floral- and spice-dominated persistence and polished tannins that lend subtle grip.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator

Producer Spotlight, Dec. 18, 2019

Rating: 93

Drink: 2019 through 2030

Richly structured and dynamic, with expressive black currant, crushed stone and smoky sweet anise elements that take on

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

depth and polish toward refined tannins. Syrah, Mataro, Graciano, Grenache and Roussanne.

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 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.

William Kelley, Wine Advocate, May 2018

Rating: 97-99

Drink: NA

The 2016 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock is quite different from the 2015 in composition, since it's a blend of 72% Syrah, 10% Mataro, 9% Graciano, 6% Grenache and 3% Roussanne; and while the 2015 was matured in 100% new puncheons, the 2016 is being raised in 59% new puncheons, 34% amphorae and the balance used wood. It will be another 12 months before this is bottled, but it was one of the high points of this exceptional tasting, wafting from the glass with a fragrant bouquet of wild berries, licorice, subtle grilled meat, lilac blossom and suggestions of crushed rocks (if that isn't too fanciful a description). On the palate, the wine is full-bodied, rich and layered, with deep, multidimensional core that's framed by fine-grained but youthfully firm, chewy tannins. There's a savory quality to this wine, despite its generous endowment of fruit, as well as a tension and energy that mark it out as especially promising.

2015 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

97% Syrah, 3% Roussanne

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 1.5 L: 129

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2019

Release Price: \$296 (magnums)

Drink: 2020-2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Speaking of come backs, the Bone Rock has finally returned!!! Sorry about the hiatus, but that's farming for you. I'm not going to waste much space telling you how amazing this baby is (it is), because unfortunately there isn't much to go around. Four

measly barrels is all that we were able to eek out of this rocky site. Thankfully the rains of '16 have brought production back up to regular levels. Since this is an extremely rocky site, these vines took the drought of '13-'15 seriously, and decided they didn't want to give us any fruit! It's OK, it needed a little rest, I get it, no worries. (I'm looking out my window at the Bone Rock Terraces right now. I find myself talking to them quite often. Maybe I'm going a little crazy?)

Like I mentioned in my previous letter, 2016 is quite possibly the best vintage we have made. The stars aligned, and everything is just right. The perfect amount of fruit richness, the right amount of ripe tannins, the perfect amount of acidity, and incredible balance, all wrapped up with some nice freshness and aromatic intensity. We knew we had some great material right from the get go, and used a little less new oak than normal to let the explosive fruit and earthiness show itself properly. I am very happy with these wines!

REVIEWS:

William Kelley, Wine Advocate, May 2018

Rating: 96+

Drink: 2020-2040

The soon-to-be-bottled 2015 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock (which was co-fermented with 3% Roussanne) was also showing beautifully, wafting from the glass with notes of creamy cassis, blackberries, bay leaf, rich soil and dried flowers. On the palate, it's full-bodied, layered and multidimensional, with immense concentration, ripe balancing acids and a fine-grained, stony chassis of tannin. In 2015, yields were less than one ton per acre, so there are a mere four barrels this year. Like the Rocket Block, it should enjoy two decades of longevity.

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 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

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

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: 96-97

Drink: NA

Youthful purple. Intensely perfumed dark berry liqueur, Moroccan spice, licorice and floral pastille aromas are complemented by hints of musky herbs and pipe tobacco. Palate-coating, youthfully primary black and blue fruit, mocha and spicecake flavors show impressive power as well as vivacity thanks to a spine of bracing acidity. The floral and spice qualities repeat emphatically on an extremely long, penetrating finish shaped by solid, mounting tannins.

2013 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

80% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, 5% Grenache, 5% Roussanne

ALC: 15.2%

Cases 750 ml: 370

Cases 1.5 L: 80

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2018-2028+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

You know how bullish I am on these 13s (I think about everyone is, actually), well, I haven't changed my tune since I wrote to you last. I am still really digging them. As always, these wines will need a few years of slumber, but they will reward you greatly. Juicy rich fruit, tons of sweet tannins, and incredible complexity. The depth is really what gets me going on them, ever changing layers that reveal new aspects of the wine with each sip. It definitely makes drinking them a joy.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226, Aug 2016

Rating: 99

Drink: 2020-2035

Flirting with perfection, the 2013 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock is one of the wines of the vintage. Made from 80% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre and 5% each of Grenache and Roussanne, which saw a big chunk of whole clusters, it offers sensational aromas and flavors of black raspberries, violets, pepper and crushed rock that literally come leaping out of the glass. Full-bodied, seamless, elegant, yet concentrated and incredibly pure, with a finish that won't quit, this beauty will stand beside some of the greatest Hermitages out there. Give bottles 3-4 years and enjoy over the following 10-15 years. Unfortunately, due to ridiculously low yields, there won't be a Bone Rock released in 2014 or 2015, so don't miss this beauty!

One of the superstars in California is undoubtedly the humble, soft spoken, yet incredibly talented Justin Smith, who has had

the reins at Saxum since 2000. And while a lot of winemakers would have been content to stick with the tried and true at this point, Smith continues to question, experiment and fine tune everything he does. Today, his wines are much more finesse oriented, pure and graceful than in the past, without sacrificing texture, concentration or richness. In short, these wines kick ass and shouldn't be missed by any serious wine lover out there!

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 31, 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2019 through 2029

An imposing wine, rich and powerfully built, revealing a sense of personality and place. Distinctive aromas of crushed stone and floral blackberry combine with densely structured and complex flavors of black raspberry, bitter chocolate and smoked pepper. Finishes with burly but ripe tannins. Needs time to fully bloom. Syrah, Mourvèdre, Grenache and Roussanne.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2015

Rating: 94

Drink: 2020-2028

Glass-staining violet. Expansive aromas of smoke-tinged dark fruits, potpourri, allspice and minerals, along with a hint of white pepper that builds in the glass. Sappy, sweet and densely packed, offering palate-staining boysenberry and bitter cherry flavors given lift and spine by juicy acidity. Unfolds slowly on the penetrating, mineral-driven and insistent finish, which features building tannins and a whiplash of intense blue fruit.

Justin Smith has just begun settling into his new, expansive cellar, a series of connected tunnels burrowed out of the hill beneath his old winery and home that is equipped with a variety of concrete and wooden vats and barrels of varying sizes. Smith told me that he's now able to adapt his winemaking to whatever conditions nature hands him. Unsurprisingly, this was one of the finest sets of wines that I tasted during my trip this summer. A look through barrels and tanks of Smith's soon-to-be bottled 2014s and infant 2015s indicates that Saxum's winning streak shows no sign of letting up. Too bad that there simply won't be much wine to go around. Incidentally, while these will never be inexpensive wines, I find that prices are extremely fair given the sheer quality of the wines and the fact that they are among California's most sought-after bottlings.

2012 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Syrah

ALC: 15.5%

Cases 750 ml: 360

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2015

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2018-2028+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2012 vintage was the only normal season we have had in quite awhile. Not chilly like '10 and '11, not dry like '13 was or

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

'14 will be. It was completely average. I don't mean that in a bad way either. I just mean we had an average amount of rainfall, an average temperature range, and an average crop-load. It was actually quite nice working with an average season. But what I have come to realize after farming here for, well, for a long time, is that average seasons are quite rare, and not normal at all! I always get a kick out of our European counterparts' misconception that California farming is so boring because every season is exactly the same. Au contraire!

As for our spring release, we are offering the second half of our 2012 wines which are opening up beautifully. I popped the corks on all of them to do a little research for you (I know, the sacrifices I make!) and was shocked at just how much they have softened since the last time I tried them. They are starting to blossom! What perplexed me about this vintage was the tannin structure. It started out massive, and made me think that these wines were going to need years in the cellar before they began showing their stuff. I still think 3-5 years will greatly benefit the wines, but they will give great pleasure to those who can't hold out. I would drink the Heart Stone and maybe the Booker Vineyard first while you let the Broken Stones and Bone Rock slumber.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #220, Aug 2015

Rating: 99

Drink: 2017-2032

The 2012 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock is the star of the show in 2012. Borderline perfection, it has straight up awesome notes of black and blue fruits, pepper, crushed violets and searing chalky minerality that shows on both the nose and palate. Full-bodied, seamless and elegant, it's a stacked, concentrated, layered Syrah that never puts a foot wrong. Give it 2-4 years and enjoy bottles through 2032.

Needing no introduction for anyone that's followed the Wine Advocate or the wine scene in Paso Robles for any time in the past decade, Heather and Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyards continues to fashion sensational, world-class wines from a number of top sites on the west side of Paso Robles. While I reviewed most of the 2012s last year, I was thrilled to see the late releases this year, and even more thrilled to see that the tannic grip they showed last year had integrated beautifully. These are great 2012s that will still benefit from short-term cellaring and age beautifully. Moving to the 2013s, this is a vintage Justin classified as a "classic" and I think it's safe to say he was thrilled with the wines. These have more density and richness than the 2012s, with more sweetness to the tannin, yet also the pretty, classy and lively profile that's the hallmark of the vintage. They'll be more approachable than the 2012s but still have 15-20 years of longevity. While Justin opted to not bottle any Rocket Block in 2012 (this is still a little up in the air), I think 2013 might be the year we actually see this tiny block of Grenache make it into a bottle. Smith is without a doubt one of the great winemakers of California.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2015

Rating: 94

Drink: 2021-2028

Vivid purple. Intensely perfumed cherry and blueberry aromas are complemented by suggestions of potpourri, licorice and smoky Indian spices. On the palate, dense, sweet dark berry liqueur and floral pastille flavors are sharpened by zesty mineral and white pepper notes. Elegant for such a rich wine, finishing with supple tannins and excellent floral persistence. This wine was made with 50% whole clusters.

2011 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Syrah

ALC: 15.3%

Cases 750 ml: 400

Cases 1.5 L: 50

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2014

Release Price: \$89

Drink: 2016-2026+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2011 growing season was an extremely cool year for us. Not a single day was over 100° the whole season, which we have never experienced before. Normally a cool season might be a disaster for the late ripening Rhone varieties we grow, but, and this is why I am so blessed to be a grape grower on the Central Coast of California, the weather was mild and without rain that Fall. When the end of October rolled around in 2011 and most of our fruit was still on the vine, I was more than a little worried to say the least! It is not uncommon to get some rain in late October, and since we hadn't even started to pick, I had reason to be fearful. Thankfully the mild weather held perfectly and we were able to harvest fully mature fruit throughout November. Yes, November! Most of our fruit came in between Halloween and Thanksgiving, very crazy. So what does this mean for the wine that resulted from the extremely cool, late season? Well, it is a little lighter in color, but still quite dark, and a little lower in alcohol, but still comparatively weighty. The aromatics are what I find magical on this set of wines, the cool temperatures kept them amazingly fresh and ethereal. Definitely on the spice side as opposed to the fruit aspect that we normally see more of in a warmer year. In the cellar I tried to respect this character of the 2011 vintage. We used a little more whole cluster fermentation to soften the tannins and increase the spiciness and we cut down on the amount of new oak we would normally use to let the spice shine through even more. We also increased the amount of concrete aging vessels we use to really bring it all home with an exclamation point! I really like them, and I think they will be fascinating wines to follow over the next 20 years.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #214, Aug 2014

Rating: 98+

Drink: 2018-2031

Decidedly cool climate in character, the 2011 James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock comes from steep, terraced plots of old

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

head trained Syrah vines that, in 2011, wasn't harvested until November. Co-fermented with a splash of Roussanne and Mourvedre, it's a spectacular effort that makes the most of the cool, long growing season. It's also the most long term prospect in the lineup. Offering up a tight, Cornas-like bouquet of black and blue fruits, white pepper, spring flowers and salty minerality, it is full-bodied, beautifully concentrated and seamless on the palate, with ultra-fine tannin and building richness that only starts to develop with a healthy decant. It's a gorgeous wine, yet needs to be forgotten for at least 4-5 years. It should drink nicely through 2031.

This was another great visit with Justin Smith, and he continues to tweak and experiment with varying degrees of whole cluster and concrete, puncheon and barrel aging regimes. Looking at his 2011s, I was able to taste all of these from bottles in Colorado, and they've closed down substantially since I reviewed them from barrel. In most cases, these took a day or more to fully unwind, and the style here is much more Rhone-like, with spice, pepper and meaty aromatics paired with focused, firm palate profiles. These are gorgeous wine that won't start to show their full potential for another 3-4 years. The 2012s are just as good, if not better, yet are surprisingly tannic and structured. Given the up-front nature of the vintage, I was surprised by the tannin profile and more reserved style in most of the wines. Nevertheless, the concentration level here is on par with, if not slightly greater than, the 2011s, and they show the fabulous purity and focus of the vintage. Both of these vintages will need short-term cellaring. My favorite of the three vintages reviewed here, the 2013s offer thrilling density of fruit, massive concentration, and sound underlying structure that keeps the wines focused and balanced. I think short-term cellaring will be helpful here as well, but I wouldn't be afraid to crack a bottle or two on release either. Despite these vintage differences, as I hope the reviews and scores show, these are incredible wines that make the most of this special terroir. Truthfully, there are few mailing lists out there worth being on, but without a doubt, this is one of them.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Feb 28, 2014

Rating: 93

Drink: now-2026

Classic notes of pepper and wild berry give this sturdy red plenty of backbone and tension. The tannins are more muscular and gripping than in recent vintages, giving the flavors traction and length. Drink now through 2026.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2013

Rating: 95

(Mostly syrah, with a bit of roussanne; made with 50% whole clusters and 15.6% alcohol): Inky purple. Heady, floral- and spice-accented scents of black and blue fruits, incense and licorice. Stains the palate with intense cassis and blueberry flavors that are lifted by vibrant spice and floral pastille nuances. Becomes sweeter and more energetic with air and finishes with superb clarity and length and smooth, fully absorbed tannins. This is on the short list of the best wines that I tasted from California this year.

Antonio Galloni, Vinous, July 2014

Rating: 97

Drink: 2015-2025

The 2011 Bone Rock is the wine where all of the Saxum signatures intersect with the personality of the year to the fullest. A healthy dollop of Roussanne gives the Bone Rock extraordinary aromatic lift and nuance to balance the intense varietal fruit. Layers of dark plums, sage, rose petal, tobacco, new leather and spice blossom in an extraordinary wine of precision, power and depth. Expressive floral notes are woven throughout, adding to the wine's beguiling, complex personality. This is a fabulous showing from Saxum made all the more notable by the challenges of the year.

Proprietor Justin Smith has done a magnificent job with his 2011s. Now that the wines are in bottle, they are every bit as impressive as they were from barrel. Readers who can still find the 2011s should not hesitate, as they are magnificent.

2010 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

89% Syrah, 11% Roussanne

ALC: 15.6%

Cases 750 ml: 200

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2013

Release Price: \$89

Drink: 2012-2024+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I am really enjoying the wines from the 2010 growing season. It was an incredibly cool season (the coolest we had ever experienced until 2011 came along!). This allowed for some great hang time, which leads to great flavor and tannin development. October and November were ideal, dry and not too chilly, amazingly, everything ripened beautifully. (I was very panicked we would get an October storm like we did in 2009.) In the end, we were able to bring in some incredibly complex but intense fruit that was a pleasure to work with in the cellar. Speaking of the cellar, in 2010 we purchased a whole slew of concrete fermentors and were extremely happy with how well they turned our fruit into wine. I am sold on concrete as a fermentation vessel. The concrete definitely helped in softening up the prodigious tannins of 2010 and allowed us to keep the wines fresher and more focused. It is a lovely combination.

REVIEWS:

Antonio Galloni, Wine Advocate #202, Aug 2012

Rating: 96-98

Drink: 2013-2020

I am thrilled to see that the 2010 Bone Rock is just as phenomenal today as it was last year. An exotic blend of 89% Syrah and 11% Roussanne (co-fermented), the Bone Rock boasts stunning aromatic and flavor intensity and remarkable overall balance. The Roussanne tempers the brute power of the Syrah, while allowing the fruit to be totally expressive and beautiful. Ripe, silky tannins frame dark red fruit, exotic spices and white flowers on the striking finish. Saxum lovers will not

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

want to miss this dazzling effort. The use of 40% whole clusters works beautifully here. Anticipated maturity: 2013-2020.

I have been looking forward to tasting the Saxum 2010s since I saw several component wines from barrel last year. Justin and Heather Smith, along with Eric Jensen at Booker, Matt Trevisan and Linne-Calodo, Cris Cherry at Villa Creek and a handful of other growers, represent the cutting edge of the adventurous, pioneering spirit that is the essence of Paso Robles, and also in many ways, the heart of what makes the United States a great country. Take it from someone who spends a lot of time in Europe every year, this level of ambition is rare in the world. Saxum fans will be thrilled to learn that with the 2010 vintage Justin and Heather Smith have introduced a new wine to their lineup, the Syrah-based Terry Hoage Vineyard. For the last few years, Hoage fruit has found its way into the Bone Rock, but 2010 is the first year the Smiths had enough fruit to warrant a separate bottling. Justin Smith describes 2010 as the coldest year he had ever seen, until 2011. Although 2010 was a cold year, Smith says he still got the ripeness levels he looks for, it just took a lot more time because the growing season turned out to be very long. In 2011, however, ripeness levels never reached the typical range here, and consequently the wines are all about 1% lower in alcohol. The 2010 vintage also signals a bit of a stylistic shift at Saxum. Concrete tanks were first introduced with the 2009 vintage, but in 2010 about 50% of the fruit was fermented in concrete, while the Grenache for the James Berry Vineyard bottling was vinified and aged partly in concrete. In 2011, Smith added one more concrete tank, for the Heart Stone, the first Saxum wine to be vinified and aged exclusively in concrete. The 2010 Terry Hoage, Paderewski and James Berry were bottled in late May 2012, while the remainder of the wines were scheduled to be bottled in August 2012.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Web Only 2012

Rating: 95

Drink: 2014-2026

Built to cellar, this is intensely peppery, rich and vibrant, with dark berry, roasted herb and espresso. Gains depth and persistence through to the finish, revealing subtle flavor nuances that touch on tobacco, road tar and licorice. Best from 2014 through 2026.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2012

Rating: 96

Opaque ruby. A heady, alluringly perfumed bouquet displays scents of cherry compote, black raspberry, potpourri and incense. Deep, sweet and pliant, showing remarkably intense, concentrated red and blue fruit preserve flavors and a sexy floral pastille nuance. Shows superb clarity and energy on the gently tannic finish, which leaves sappy red fruit and floral notes behind.

Jebb Dunnuck, The Rhone Report

Rating: 99

Drink: 2014-2026

Coming from a steep, terraced plot of head trained Syrah, the 2010 Saxum Bone Rock... is easily the most structured, intense wine in the lineup. Sporting absolutely off the hook aromas of

smoked meats, black fruits, liquid mineral, pepper, and cigar wrapper, it flows onto the palate with a thick, incredibly rich texture that somehow manages to stay light and fresh. A total behemoth, it needs time to fully flesh out, yet is up there with some of the most monumental young wines I've tasted. It should be forgotten for 3-4 years, and then consumed over the following two decades.

2009 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

57% Syrah, 31% Mourvèdre, 12% Grenache

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 450

Cases 1.5 L: 98

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2012

Release Price: \$85

Drink: 2012-2024

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2009 wines, are quite powerful. There are some very substantial tannins on these wines, they are muscular! I feel that these late releases of the 2009's are going to benefit from a few years of cellar age, even more so than any wines we have ever made, so be patient with them. Enjoy some now, but be sure to stash some in your cellar so you can see how they evolve after a few years. You will be well rewarded for waiting.

REVIEWS:

Antonio Galloni, Wine Advocate #196, Aug 2011

Rating: 94

Drink: 2012-2021

The 2009 Bone Rock is a round, enticing red laced with sweet, succulent dark cherries, plums, flowers and spices. It shows remarkable intensity and fabulous balance. Bone Rock is made from the first blocks planted in the James Berry vineyard and is predominantly Syrah, while the James Berry Vineyard (the wine) is Grenache focused. In 2009 the blend was 57% Syrah, 31% Mourvedre and 12% Grenache. The Syrah component was vinified with 100% stems and saw a maceration lasting 50 days. The wine was aged in 60% new oak. Smith bottled the 2009 in May 2011, earlier than the norm (around 30 months), as he wanted to preserve the freshness he had in the tannins. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2021.

This is a thrilling set of wines from Heather and Justin Smith. Everything starts and ends in the vineyards for Justin Smith. His family owns the James Berry Vineyard, one of the rare sites in Paso Robles on limestone. Smith has also planted several other top vineyards in Paso while mentoring a number of his colleagues. Smith describes 2009 as a long, cold growing season with a lot of rain. All of the Grenache and Syrah was in before the big storm on October 13, while the Mourvedre was picked a few weeks later. Smith credits dry-farming for keeping his vines robust and able to withstand the elements. Winemaking is stripped down to the core. Two sorting tables ensure only the finest fruit makes it to the crusher. The grapes

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

are gently destemmed, then undergo around 7 days of cold soak with a high amount of whole berries, and some whole clusters (as noted below). There is no sulfur added at crush. The wines undergo a total of approximately 30-40 days of maceration with indigenous yeasts and are then moved straight to barrel, with their gross lees, for approximately 19 months (longer for the Bone Rock) with no rackings until the wines are prepared for bottling. Smith favors 350 and 400-liter barrels over the more standard 225/228 liter barrique. Smith selects the barrels he thinks are most expressive to site for his single-vineyard wines, then uses the rest of the barrels, which he defines as the punchier, juicier wines, for the Broken Stones bottling, which is sourced from all of the vineyards in the Saxum lineup. My tasting ended with three barrel samples of the 2010s, another cold, late harvest. These aren't finished wines, but the quality of what I tasted was extraordinary. The first sample was a late-harvested Syrah from Bone Rock (60% whole clusters) co-fermented with 10% Roussanne that was mind-blowing. This may end up being bottled on its own. The second sample was 100% Grenache from concrete. It was full of character and dazzling. The last barrel sample was James Berry Mourvedre (from a hilltop parcel) co-fermented with a little bit of Syrah. It, too, was, full of character. If these 2010s are any indication, Justin and Heather Smith have another fabulous vintage on their hands. I will stop writing before I fill up an entire issue of *The Wine Advocate*, suffice it to say readers should do everything they can to taste these majestic wines.

2008 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

83% Syrah, 13% Mourvèdre, 4% Grenache
ALC: 15.5%
Cases 750 ml: 312
Cases 1.5 L: 48
Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard
Released: January 2011
Release Price: \$75
Drink: 2011-2024

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2008 Bone Rock is maybe the most structured version yet, I find myself being sucked into it while tasting, like it's a black hole, brooding is a fitting descriptor. Because of its density, tannin, and acidity, it really needs a few years to unfold, so be patient please!

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #190, Aug 2010

Rating: 96-98

Drink: N/A

Not yet bottled, the 2008 Bone Rock (84% Syrah, 13% Mourvedre, and the rest Grenache) exhibits a chalky minerality intermixed with floral blackberry and blueberry fruit. Some subtle spice is present in this wine, which is made with a high percentage of whole clusters, yet no stemminess is apparent. Unctuously textured, it is one of the thickest and most viscous of any of the 2008s. The wine has profound concentration yet impressive delineation and acidity in the background. This is a massive powerhouse that needs more time in barrel (which is

obviously why it hasn't been bottled yet), and should evolve for 15 or more years. This wine is likely to be aged for up to 32 months or more in a combination of wood barrels (very few new), before being bottled unfinned and unfiltered by Justin Smith. This wine has a great upside and should have tremendous longevity.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Web Only 2011

Rating: 95

Drink: now through 2024

Tight and muscular, with dense, chewy tar, blackberry, mineral, cedar, sage and roasted herb flavors. Full-blown and intense, yet for all its size and stature, this is very compelling and complete, sure to benefit from cellaring. Syrah (83 percent) with Mourvèdre and Grenache. Drink now through 2024.

2007 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

82% Syrah, 13% Mourvèdre, 5% Grenache
ALC: 15.7%
Cases 750 ml: 336
Cases 1.5 L: 56
Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard
Released: January 2010
Release Price: \$75
Drink: 2011-2023

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Our 2007s, are what I feel is the best vintage yet for Saxum. So yes, I think each of these wines is the best that we have done, they are more complex, layered, and concentrated than previous years. These wines have a long life ahead of them due to their great acidity and tannin structure, yet they are enjoyable now because they are so well balanced. The 2007's are chameleons too. When you first pour yourself a taste they quickly start changing in the glass. Every smell and taste produces a new element, the first second there are violets and the next is roasted meats, truly fascinating. It will be a joy to watch how they develop in bottle over the next decade or more.

The Bone Rock was bottled in January of 2010, after 26 months in oak. I felt that their tannins could use a little extra time in barrel to smooth out. Please let them rest for a few months after they arrive, they are still just babies.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 98-100

Drink: 2009 - 2024

With considerable power, depth, and intensity, this is sensational stuff, as is the 2007 Bone Rock James Berry Vineyard, another candidate for perfection. A blend of 82% Syrah, 13% Mourvedre, and 5% Grenache, it exhibits abundant aromas of blue and black fruits, acacia flowers, spice, pepper, and earth. The wine is full-bodied with a liqueur of minerals (as if wet rocks were liquified and added to the fermenting grapes), a dense texture, and the vintage's elegance, precision, freshness, and good

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

acids, which provide lift and enhance its flamboyant, opulent style.

One of California's super-star producers, Saxum owns one of the state's most remarkable vineyard sites, the James Berry Vineyard, which has been broken into a number of different blocks, all planted on rocky limestone hillsides. This estate's approach to winemaking is decidedly artisanal, with extraordinarily small yields as well as a minimalistic winemaking philosophy. Proprietors Justin and Heather Smith, who seem much too young to be producing such prodigious wines, fashion separate blends from the different blocks of the James Berry Vineyard. They also produce a cuvee from the 7-acre Heart Stone Vineyard (also planted on limestone soils) and one from the Booker Vineyard. Saxum's 2006s are all home runs, but the utterly prodigious 2007s should resonate for decades, and showcase the brilliant potential of these limestone hillside sites west of Highway 101. Kudos to everyone at Saxum. My visit began with two of Smith's experimental cuvees, which are only available to mailing list customers. As remarkable as the 2006s are, the 2007s are even more prodigious, showcasing just how brilliant certain Paso Robles terroirs can be. Even the most cynical observers of the Rhone Ranger scene will have to take notice of these wines. Even though some of the 2007s had just undergone bottling, I was blown away by how well they performed just a week after being bottled (often one of the worst times to taste a wine). In short, Saxum's prodigious 2007s are even more nuanced, complex, and concentrated than their brilliant 2006s.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Feb 28, 2011
Rating: 98

Drink: now through 2022

At points ultrarich, opulent and elegant, providing a broad range of dark berry, loamy earth, spice and cedar flavors, with touches of black licorice, sage and tobacco. Powerful yet restrained, gaining weight, depth and traction on the finish, where this ends with a peppery minerality that's fascinating. Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2010

Rating: 96

Inky purple. A sexy, intensely perfumed bouquet of blackberry, boysenberry, Moroccan spices and violet, with a seductive incense quality that gains strength with air. Lush and creamy on the palate, offering deep black and blue fruit flavors and exotic floral character. Reaches every corner of the palate and finishes with outstanding clarity and powerful floral nuances.

2006 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

76% Syrah, 18% Mourvèdre, 6% Grenache

ALC: 16.7%

Cases 750 ml: 350

Cases 1.5 L: 46

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2009

Release Price: \$75

Drink: now-2020

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Grenache was aged in all new French Oak barriques. It is a wine built for the ages. Dense, structured, meaty and spicy, with loads of red and black fruits. The higher than normal dose of Mourvedre in the blend really makes it all happen.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 96+

Drink: 2009 - 2024

No wimpy wine, the 2006 Bone Rock James Berry Vineyard (76% Syrah, 18% Mourvedre, and 6% Grenache) has over 16% alcohol. It possesses phenomenal texture, stunning purity, and remarkable freshness, which, again, is attributable to the limestone soils as well as the proprietor's brilliant hands-off winemaking philosophy. A complex perfume of roasted meats, black fruits, spring flowers, charcoal, and spice is followed by a wine of enormous richness (yet it is neither overweight nor heavy). Beautiful freshness permeates the wine's black fruit flavors and full-bodied power and length. The finish lasts for nearly a minute. This 2006 should evolve for 12-15+ years.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 31, 2009

Rating: 92

Drink: now through 2014

A tasty mouthful of Syrah, this is full-bodied and concentrated, rich and plush, with layers of ripe blackberry, wild berry, mineral and graphite, ending with a long, persistent finish that keeps repeating the dark berry themes. Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache. Drink now through 2014. 450 cases made.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2008

Rating: 95

Inky ruby. Exotically perfumed bouquet of red berries, fruitcake, Asian spices and white flowers. Impressively fresh, with vibrant raspberry, blackcurrant and floral pastille flavors. Zesty minerality adds urgency to the deep, almost sweet fruit, with fine-grained tannins adding grip. The endless finish strongly echoes the spice and minerality of this suave knock-out.

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

2005 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

93% Syrah, 7% Grenache
ALC: 16.1%
Cases 750 ml: 300
Cases 1.5 L: 30
Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard
Released: January 2008
Release Price: \$75
Drink: now-2020

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #177, Jun 2008

Rating: 96

Drink: 2010-2025

A sensational effort, the 2005 Bone Rock James Berry Vineyard is a combination of 93% Syrah and 7% Grenache. This decadently gorgeous, lavishly concentrated, stunningly pure wine was aged in demi-muids/pungeons. A terrific texture is accompanied by a sumptuous bouquet and equally prodigious flavors of kirsch, cassis, licorice, smoke, and crushed rocks. It still has some structure to resolve, but this fabulous effort should hit its stride in 2-3 years, and keep for 12-15 years. The bottled 2005s are all performing well.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 31, 2008

Rating: 93

Drink: now through 2012

Dark, dense, rich and concentrated, with a tight, firm band of blackberry, wild berry, dark chocolate and smoky oak, revealing wonderful depth, concentration and complexity. Syrah and Grenache. Drink now through 2012. 350 cases made.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2007

Rating: 95

Glass-staining purple. Exotic boysenberry, kirsch and candied violet aromas are positively intoxicating, expanding with air and picking up a wild, head shop-like character. Deep, chewy and sweet, offering palate-coating dark berry liqueur flavors and urgent mineral lift. It's remarkable for a wine to possess such weight and sweetness while maintaining focus-even elegance. Finishes with outstanding breadth and cling, leaving flowers and boysenberry in its wake. "This is the last one we'll release this year," owner/winemaker Justin Smith told me, also noting that he's not afraid to put syrah into a high percentage of new oak, depending on the vintage, since "it's a variety that can easily handle it"

2004 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

85% Syrah, 12% Grenache, 3% Mourvèdre
ALC: 15.8%
Cases 750 ml: 475
Cases 1.5 L: 25
Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard
Released: February 2007
Release Price: \$65
Drink: now-2014

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The '04 Bone Rock is the most subtle and restrained that we have ever produced, yet it is still a big juicy mouthful. It will reward patience and blossom with 3-5 years of cellaring.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #166, Aug 2006

Rating: 93

Drink: 2006-2018

Made from a blend of 85% Syrah, 12% Grenache, and 3% Mourvedre, there are 500 cases of the 2004 Bone Rock James Berry Vineyard. It possesses a saturated ruby/purple color along with tight, restrained aromatics of blackberries, blueberries, and flowers, good acidity, fleshy, full-bodied flavors, and fine elegance, delicacy, and finesse ... rare for a wine of this size and intensity. It will drink well for 10-12 years.

Stephen Tanzer, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Sept/Oct 2006

Rating: 94

Deep, bright ruby-red. Deeply pitched aromas of black raspberry, violet, gunflint, tobacco, tar and cola. Lush and sweet but firm and imploded; deeper and more concentrated than the "regular" James Berry bottling but less evolved. Finishes with superb breadth and viscosity, but has the ripe acids-not to mention the rocky minerality-to maintain its shape and balance. Wonderfully deep wine.

2003 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

88% Syrah, 8% Grenache, 4% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 250

Cases 1.5 L: 25

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: December 2005

Release Price: \$65

Drink: now-2015

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

For those unfamiliar with the Bone Rock Syrah, the majority of the fruit comes from the Bone Rock Block at our James Berry Vineyard. The vineyard is located within the Templeton Gap, a low point in the Santa Lucia Mountains that allows the cool maritime breezes to moderate the temperatures. The Bone Rock block is a steep hillside that in 1990 we used jackhammers to carve out a four acre, stepped terrace vineyard in the almost solid calcareous soil, unearthing fossilized whale bones in the process.

There are three main factors that make the Templeton Gap such a unique growing region. The deeply fractured shale limits the growth of the vines, and in turn produces miniscule amounts of extremely concentrated wine. The huge diurnal fluctuations coupled with the extremely high calcium content of the soils allow the fruit to retain its natural acidity, even when picked at full physiological ripeness. What you end up with is a wine that wears its weight well, remaining balanced despite its huge

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

concentration.

The 2003 Bone Rock, like its siblings the Rocket Block and Broken Stones, is a wine of great density and explosive fruit, yet also has a sense of elegance and balance that is rare among wines of such concentration. It is immensely pleasing to drink now, yet will continue to gain in complexity as it ages, if you can keep your hands off it.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #159, Jun 2005

Rating: 95

Drink: 2007-2020

A blend of 88% Syrah, 8% Grenache, and 4% Mourvedre, the 2003 Bone Rock James Berry Vineyard, which will not be released until the fall, is a structured and broodingly backward offering. It boasts an inky/purple color in addition to classic aromas of blackberry liqueur, camphor, pain grille, and subtle notions of Provencal herbs and pepper. Full-bodied, with tremendous richness, great balance, and sweet tannin, this stunning, marvelously concentrated wine should benefit from 2-3 years of bottle age, and last for 12-15. The 2003s were bottled about seven weeks before my visit, but I could hardly complain about the fact they weren't "showing." I highly recommend that wine enthusiasts who love Rhone Ranger wines pay a visit to the James Berry Vineyard, one of the true grand cru sites in the region.

Stephen Tanzer, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Jul/Aug 2005

Rating: 93

(15.7% alcohol; mostly from south-facing vines in the highest, rockiest part of the property; includes bits of grenache and mourvedre) Bright ruby-red. Musky, wild aromas of black cherry, gunflint and espresso. Hugely ripe but still youthfully closed following the March bottling. Today this conveys more of an impression of surmaturite than the other 2003 releases and a bit less inner-mouth energy. But this is compellingly rich wine. Interestingly, Smith told me that he blended in a bit of fruit from the lower, cooler parts of the property, from vines harvested as much as six weeks later, and that he intends to do more of this in the future.

2002 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

93% Syrah, 7% Grenache

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 300

Cases 1.5 L: 30

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2008

Release Price: \$48

Drink: now-2020

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #154, Aug 2004

Rating: 95

Drink: N/A

The 2002 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock, which had been bottled several weeks before my tasting, was not displaying any ill effects from its recent bottling. More primordial (of course, it's a year younger), it exhibits a saturated plum/purple color along with a spectacular nose of blackberries, licorice, kirsch, and flinty/crushed stones. Full-bodied, with a spectacular texture as well as a massive finish, it possesses a slightly later harvest sur-maturite character than its siblings. A blend of 88% Syrah and 12% Grenache, it spent 18 months in French oak, was never racked, and was bottled unfiltered. This is the best recent trilogy I've experienced since Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings!

An emerging superstar, Justin Smith, who "focuses exclusively on Syrah from the windswept hills of west Paso Robles," is undoubtedly a talented winemaker. These wines' richness, texture, and compelling aromatics have more in common with his southern neighbor, Sine Qua Non, than just about anything produced in the Paso Robles area. These wines rock ... and that's putting it mildly!

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Web Only 2005

Rating: 75

A curious concoction, with a syrupy, slightly balsamic flavor that veers to dry and leathery, ending with a touch of bitterness. Tasted three times, with two bottles showing off characteristics and one that was more impressive. 300 cases made.

2001 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

92% Syrah, 5% Grenache, 3% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.5%

Cases 750 ml: 325

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2007

Release Price: 48

Drink: now-2015

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #154, Aug 2004

Rating: 95

Drink: 2004-2014

The spectacular 2001 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock is a 300-case blend of 92% Syrah, 5% Mourvedre, and 3% Grenache aged 21 months in both French and Hungarian oak.

SAXUM BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Racked once, and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered, it takes its name from fossilized whale bones that were found imbedded in the vineyard's steep, rocky terraces. It boasts great power and richness, but is incredibly well balanced. Its dense ruby/purple color is accompanied by a huge perfume of blackberry liqueur, camphor, licorice, earth, and roasting meat juices. The fabulous complex aromatics are followed by a full-bodied Syrah with great purity, impeccable balance, and world-class richness, complexity, and stature. This amazing effort can be drunk now or cellared for a decade. This is the best recent trilogy I've experienced since Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings!

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Feb 29, 2004

Rating: 93

Drink: now through 2012

An impressive display of rich, zesty wild berry, raspberry jam and blackberry flavors, framed by firm acidity and integrated tannins and finishing with a long, concentrated aftertaste that keeps revealing new flavor facets. Ample tannins for short-term cellaring. Drink now through 2012. 325 cases made.

2000 BONE ROCK JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

92% Syrah, 5% Grenache, 3% Mourvèdre

ALC: 14.8%

Cases 750 ml: 350

Vineyard: Bone Rock Block of James Berry Vineyard

Released: Spring 2003

Release Price: \$48

Drink: now-2012

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #148, Aug 2003

Rating: 92

Drink: 2003-2011

The opulent, sexy, deep ruby/purple-colored 2000 Syrah James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock offers a gorgeous array of aromas including melted road tar, blackberry liqueur, damp earth, cassis, and white flowers. Voluptuous, fleshy, medium to full-bodied, and pure with supple tannin, this terrific Syrah will drink well for 7-8 years.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Oct 15, 2002

Rating: 93

Drink: now through 2010

Starts slowly but quickly gains momentum, with layers of ripe, rich, deeply concentrated black cherry, blackberry, anise, sage and coffee. Plush and spicy coffee, mocha and grapey watermelon and pomegranate persist on the aftertaste. Best from 2003 through 2010. 350 cases made.