

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

2009 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

57% Grenache, 31% Mourvèdre, 12% Syrah

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 720

Cases 1.5L: 98

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2011

Release Price: \$85

Drink: now - 2026

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Overall, 2009 was a very cool year. We had such a beautiful, dry Fall we were still able to get everything, even the very late ripening Mourvedre, fully ripe. Due to the long, cool season there is a beautiful freshness and brightness to the wines. They aren't as dense as the previous two vintages, but they have this beautiful purity that I find enthralling. I think they will have a long bottle life, not due to heavy tannins needing time to resolve, but because they are so well balanced they will keep evolving and improving in bottle.

First of all, this latest rendition of our James Berry Vineyard has a new twist. What am I thinking, you say? Why mess with perfection? Well, I think I have improved the JBV. We aged a portion (60%) of the Grenache in a concrete tank. It kept this portion of the blend incredibly pure and focused. When the final blend came together, the wine had all the great texture and soft tannins from the oak, but the concrete added a blast of pure unadulterated Grenache fruit. I believe this wine will age incredibly gracefully, so be sure and put some away for 10-15 years, maybe more.

REVIEWS:

Antonio Galloni, Wine Advocate #196, Aug 2011

Rating: 98

Drink: 2014-2021

Simply put, the 2009 James Berry Vineyard is one of the greatest young wines I have ever tasted from California, or anywhere for that matter. Bright, floral aromatics lead to expressive red fruit in this impossibly elegant, dazzling wine. A melange of rose petals, mint and licorice follows as the James Berry shows off its breathtaking clarity and finesse. Fine-grained, chalky tannins frame the exceptional finish. Frankly, I am surprised this is the first wine of the tasting. Where does one go from here? The 2009 James Berry is a bit of departure from previous vintages. This is the highest percentage of Grenache ever used in the blend, and a large portion of the Grenache was aged in concrete, an approach Smith has borrowed from producers in the Rhone. Originally Smith had intended to age less of the Grenache components in concrete, but the low yields of the vintage forced him to age about two-thirds of the Grenache in concrete. Call it a happy coincidence, but it certainly looks like things turned out well. Readers should do whatever they can to taste this fabulous wine. In 2009 the James Berry Vineyard is 57% Grenache, 31% Mourvedre and 12% Syrah. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2021.

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 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.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Web Only 2011

Rating: 97

Drink: now through 2024

Strikingly complex, openly rich and fruity, and beautifully proportioned, with an initial burst of red berry fruit that echoes red and black licorice. This quickly gains traction and depth, with firm, layered tannins that give the spicy berry flavors a perfect foundation. Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah. Drink now through 2024

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Oct 11

Rating: 96

Deep, bright violet. Intensely perfumed black raspberry and blueberry on the nose, with seductive Asian spice, lavender and incense qualities emerging with air. Sappy red and dark berry liqueur flavors are lifted by juicy acidity picking up suave spice and floral pastille notes on the back end. Velvety tannins provide shape but are absorbed by the lush fruit, which carries through an extremely long, sappy, incisive finish.

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

2008 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

52% Grenache, 31% Syrah, 17% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 580

Cases 1.5L: 70

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2010

Release Price: \$75

Drink: now - 2025

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2008 vintage..... I have to compare it to 2007, very little winter rainfall like '07, and a fairly moderate growing season. A little more fluctuation in temperature, with some small heat spells, but nothing like '03 or '04. Very little crop set, less even than 2007, so there was a lot of concentration like the '07s. We were able to dry farm our vines despite the drought, thanks to our great soils and deep rooted vines. I'd have to say the biggest difference is the tannins. In the '08s the tannins are chunkier, not quite as velvety as the '07s. Some have said the '08s will mature earlier than the '07s, but I'm not so sure, I think the tannin levels are similar, and I think they will have similarly long gorgeous lives.

The Grenache is all from our Rocket Block and as this block of our vineyard ages it is getting more and more complex and intense. More Grenache and less Syrah than previous vintages made for a very bright luscious red fruited wine. Highly aromatic, with framboise, figs, bacon and sage, with a palate that coats but is lifted by its great natural acidity. The finish is long yet there isn't any heaviness. I think it's a worthy successor to the 2007. Aged in a combination of larger used puncheons and smaller new Burgundy barrels, never racked except at bottling. Bottled after 19 months, unfiltered and unfiltered. Give this wine a year or so and drink it over the next 15, possibly more.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #190, Aug 2010

Rating: 98

Drink: N/A

The 2008 James Berry Vineyard (52% Grenache, 31% Syrah, and 17% Mourvèdre) saw some of its Grenache aged in the concrete eggs that are now catching on among some of the top producers on California's Central Coast. With strong minerality from the limestone soil, this exuberant, fleshy, full-bodied wine is already drinking well. (I believe it was actually bottled just a day or two before my visit, which makes its performance that much more remarkable.) Dense purple, with sweet notes of barbecue smoke and meats as well as roasted herbs, extravagant black cherry, black currant, and blackberry fruit are all present in this wine, but there is plenty of underlying structure that comes from both the minerality and the Mourvedre component. Pure, full-bodied, but again, impressively elegant and nuanced, this is a tour de force and another prodigious example of this extraordinary vineyard site.

James Berry Vineyard, which I have mentioned many times, remains one of the iconic grand cru sites of California, an

extraordinary block of limestone soil spread over a moderately steep hillside. The amazing thing is that there are probably many other sites in the area that are still cow pastures and would probably be just as suitable for the production of high quality grapes. The Smith family (in this case, Justin and his wife Heather) have continued to fine-tune their wines, having moved to proprietary Rhone Ranger blends. All of them are extraordinary in quality. Their 2007s were their greatest vintage to date, but as the following tasting notes evidence, 2008 (which produced another tiny crop from the 55-acre James Berry Estate Vineyards) is extremely impressive as well. I think most readers will find – and this is the case for many wines from California's Central Coast – that 2008 is a much more inconsistent vintage, but those who waited and waited have achieved impressive success. By and large (and there are always exceptions to the rule), the 2008s are more evolved than the 2007s were at the same time last year.

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

Rating: 97

Drink: now through 2024

Riveting aromas of fresh raspberry, mineral, wilted rose and wild berry turn firm and spicy, full-bodied and concentrated on the finish, yet the flavors dance with acidity. The purity of the crushed rock and snappy berry flavors is rivaled by the elegance and finesse evident in the texture, balance and length. Ends with a subtle touch of toasty oak and black licorice. Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Drink now through 2024.

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

Rating: 95

Glass-staining ruby. A drop-dead bouquet displays red and dark berry preserves, potpourri, incense and smoky minerals. Sweet, sappy and penetrating, with open-knit raspberry and blackberry flavors complemented by notes of candied rose and violet. The palate-staining finish is broad, spicy and extremely persistent. This wine is approachable now but really deserves a good five more years of age.

2007 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

41% Grenache, 31% Mourvèdre, and 28% Syrah

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 750

Cases 1.5 L: 150

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2009

Release Price: \$67

Drink: 2011 - 2020 or decant 4+ hrs

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

20 months in a mix of new and used puncheons and barriques, all French. What can I say? I really like this wine. It has it all without any one component overwhelming the others. It has great purity of fruit, layers of tannin, and a bright fresh acidity that holds it together. Because of its great balance, I think this wine is going to greatly improve over the next few years and

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

drink well for many years to come. I look forward to following its evolution in bottle.

2007 was an awesome year for a number of reasons, the biggest being that everything just went smoothly, crop-load was nice and light, the weather was mild and dry and we were able to pick the grapes when we wanted. What really excited me was that I finally had control of 4 acres of our Grenache block that we refer to as the "Rocket Block" (In 2005 we only had 1 acre.) With this increase in Grenache I was able to make our main wine, James Berry Vineyard, Grenache based. As our vines get some age on them, (the Rocket Block is turning 14 this year) they are showing a natural balance. The fruit that is coming off of the vines has a level of purity and concentration that I haven't experienced before.

2007 James Berry Vineyard doesn't carry the Rocket Block designation on it, but it is Rocket Block. We went back and forth about whether or not to put it on the label, but decided in the end to leave it off, not because we thought the quality lacked (I think it's the best wine I have yet to bottle), but because we felt that this wine is what James Berry Vineyard is all about.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 100

Drink: 2009 - 2024

Utter perfection, and one of the most profound Rhone Ranger wines I have ever tasted is the 2007 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red, a blend of 41% Grenache, 31% Mourvèdre, and 28% Syrah (15.8% alcohol). It would be an amazing wine to insert in a tasting of the most profound 2007 Chateauneuf du Papes. As with many prodigious wines, the extraordinary freshness, purity, equilibrium, and singularity of this effort is breathtaking. Its dense purple color is accompanied by an extraordinary, incredibly pure, all enveloping, intense, sweet nose of black raspberries, kirsch, spring flowers, spice box, and pepper. Full-bodied with not a hard edge to be found, it is stunningly concentrated with unreal purity, a voluptuous texture, and remarkable freshness for a wine of such power, depth, and concentration. This 2007 will be approachable young, although I would not be surprised to see it close down given the relatively elevated proportion of Mourvedre, and it should drink well for 12-15 years.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Feb 2010

Rating: 98

Drink: now through 2018

An amazing wine, dense, rich and layered, offering a mix of power and finesse, with concentrated dark berry fruit, mineral, sage, herb and cedar notes that are pure, intense, focused and persistent. Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah.

WINE OF THE YEAR

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Dec 2010

In 1998, when 28-year-old Justin Smith started making wine in Paso Robles, it was a sleepy Central Coast area. Now the wine region is one of California's fastest-growing. West Paso has a magical combination of rocky limestone soils, rolling hillsides and a not-too-cool climate that gives red Rhône varieties a firm

structure to frame their rich, dark berry flavors.

Smith, who owns the 3,000-case Saxum winery with his wife, Heather, creates wines of distinctive character, depth and personality. In 2007, a near-perfect vintage, Saxum's wines reached new heights. The 2007 James Berry Vineyard Paso Robles is a blend of Grenache, Mourvèdre and Syrah from a vineyard named after Smith's father. The three varieties are aged 20 months in new and used barriques and large puncheons, to emphasize fruit purity. With its classic quality and reasonable price, this wine is a testament that Paso Robles has earned its place on the world stage.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2009

Rating: 97

Inky purple color. Spectacular nose combines black and blue fruit preserves, cola, smoky Indian spices and potpourri, with a vibrant mineral underpinning. Juicy, vibrant and focused, offering sweet boysenberry and blueberry flavors and suave floral pastille and allspice qualities. Deeply concentrated but lithe, with superb finishing clarity and a spicy, endless finish. I also retasted the 2006 James Berry Vineyard and it is in a highly expressive, juicy phase right now, with strong, sweet red and dark berry flavors and excellent clarity. I suspect that my score of 94 last year was low by a point. And the 2008 version, tasted from barrel, looks at least as good as this 2007.

32 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD (2006)

43% Syrah, 38% Grenache, 19% Mourvèdre

ALC: 16.2%

Cases 750 ml: 80

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2009

Release Price: \$75

Drink: 2011 - 2016

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

32 months in barrique, 50% new. I was amazed at how well the Grenache came through, the time in barrel really seemed to brighten it up and bring it forward. To me, this wine seems much more Grenache dominated than the original 2006 James Berry. The tannins have really softened and the wood is amazingly well integrated.

In 2006 and 2005 we held back four barrels each year to evaluate how our wines did with extended barrel aging. In both years we held back 2 barrels of Bone Rock and 2 barrels of James Berry, they were blended together before bottling and were both bottled at the same time. You get to be our guinea pigs and tell us what differences you find, improvements or drawbacks, from the originals. It has convinced me that longer barrel aging can add a whole new element to the wines, polishing away some of the tannin and letting new secondary layers shine through that were hidden before. These special

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

bottlings were a one time only trial, but I have decided to start bottling all of the Bone Rock with extra barrel time.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 97

Drink: N/A

The other experimental cuvee is the 2006 "32" James Berry Vineyard. A blend of 43% Syrah, 38% Grenache, and 19% Mourvèdre aged 32 months in small barrels and demi-muids, it boasts loads of kirsch liqueur, lavender, pepper, spice box, and earth characteristics along with a voluptuous texture and stunning richness. Sadly, there are fewer than 100 cases of this gorgeous wine.

44 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD (2005)

81% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, 9% Grenache

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 80

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2009

Release Price: \$75

Drink: now through 2020

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

44 months in barrel (all new) without ever being racked made for an incredibly complex Saxum. It needs a little time to open up once you pull the cork, but the pomegranate fruit, along with earth and cedar is an intoxicating combination. It's definitely a fascinating wine.

In 2006 and 2005 we held back four barrels each year to evaluate how our wines did with extended barrel aging. In both years we held back 2 barrels of Bone Rock and 2 barrels of James Berry, they were blended together before bottling and were both bottled at the same time. You get to be our guinea pigs and tell us what differences you find, improvements or drawbacks, from the originals. It has convinced me that longer barrel aging can add a whole new element to the wines, polishing away some of the tannin and letting new secondary layers shine through that were hidden before. These special bottlings were a one time only trial, but I have decided to start bottling all of the Bone Rock with extra barrel time.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 96

Drink: N/A

The 2005 "44" James Berry Vineyard is a blend of 81% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, and 9% Grenache that was aged 44 months in a combination of small barrels and larger demi-muids. There are fewer than 100 cases of this inky/purple-tinged 2005, which represents the concentrated essence of blackberry, charcoal, and floral notes intermixed with smoke, grilled herbs, and meat. With superb concentration and a multi-textured mouthfeel, this splendid wine demonstrates how concentrated these wine can be with prolonged barrel aging, and how they tend to be less oaky with extended time in wood compared to those taken out

of oak at 16-18 months.

2006 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

45% Syrah, 38% Grenache, 17% Mourvèdre

ALC: 16.6%

Cases 750 ml: 880

Cases 1.5 L: 40

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2008

Release Price: \$55

Drink: 2011 - 2018

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2006 James Berry has also changed somewhat from the 2005 vintage. We like the Grenache element in it so much, we decided to keep all the Rocket Block Grenache part of the James Berry blend. Sorry Rocket Block fans, but we really want the James Berry to be the best wine we can make using fruit from all of our varied parcels at James Berry Vineyard.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 95

Drink: 2009-2019

An unfinned/unfiltered blend of 45% Syrah, 38% Grenache, and 17% Mourvèdre, aged 32 months in a combination of wood vessels, the prodigious 2006 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red exhibits beautiful sweet creme de cassis, black raspberry, blackberry, truffle, smoke, and herb notes. This spicy, rich, full-bodied effort should drink beautifully for a decade.

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.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 2009

Rating: 92

Drink: now through 2014

Pushes the pedal on ripeness, touching on jammy, full-blown and concentrated. Blackberry, graphite, plum jam and wild berry fruit is mouthcoating, as are the tannins. With air, gains a measure of finesse. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

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

Rating: 93

Bright ruby-red. Deeper dark berries and ripe cherry on the nose, complicated by dark chocolate and licorice. The cherry and chocolate qualities build with air and carry onto the palate, adding depth to the sweet blackberry and cassis flavors.

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Smoother and more dense than the Heart Stone, with a strong finishing jolt of candied licorice and black olive. Really showing its syrah today.

2005 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

71% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre, 10% Grenache,
ALC: 15.5%
Cases 750 ml: 500
Cases 1.5 L: 35
Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard
Released: July 2007
Release Price: \$55
Drink: now - 2018

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The second James Berry is very different from our first, the 2004. This version is deep and dark, very massive in its structure. Because of the long season we were able to co-ferment the Mourvedre and the Syrah, which integrates them seamlessly, producing a rich wine with a nose of dark fruits, smoke and forest, along with a wonderful mouthfeel, and a long persuasive finish. I think this wine will be with us for a very long time because the fruit, acid and tannin are so well balanced.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #177, Jul 2008

Rating: 95+

Drink: N/A

The 2005 James Berry Vineyard (70% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre, and 10% Grenache) exhibits the super precision, minerality, and clarity this site seems to provide. It is a dense, concentrated wine bursting with notes of creme de cassis, blackberries, smoke, earth, and jus de viande. This textured, French-styled 2005 can be drunk early or cellared for 10-12 years. The bottled 2005s are all performing well.

One of the superstar, artisanal winemaking operations in Paso Robles is Heather and Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyard. The Smiths are also the proprietors of the James Berry Vineyard, an exceptional hillside site planted in pure white limestone, a site that provides extraordinary richness, minerality, precision, and individuality. Like his colleague to the south, Manfred Krankl, Justin Smith has been moving from strength to strength, building more elegance and nuances into his wines without sacrificing their intrinsic intensity, purity, and richness. As for the 2006s, these wines are scheduled to be bottled slightly later than usual as Justin Smith is another producer who is instituting longer cask and pungeon agings. The 2007s tasted suggest this may be one of the finest vintages Saxum has yet produced. The wines are already spectacular, and will no doubt gain in weight, texture, and nuances over the next year.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 2008

Rating: 86

Drink: now

Spicy, talc like berry and fresh earth scents fold over to the palate. Medium-bodied, with good balance, leaving you hoping for a little more depth and flavor. Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache.

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

Rating: 93

Deep ruby. Intense raspberry and blackberry aromas are underscored by suave minerality and fresh violet, with a gentle tobacco quality adding depth. Medium in weight but packed with rich, sweet berry fruit and exotic floral pastille flavors. Seems to gain energy on the finish, which echoes the mineral and floral character. Very impressive and sure to reward at least four or five years of cellaring.

2005 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD, ROCKET BLOCK

93% Grenache, 7% Grenache,

ALC: 16.4%

Cases 750 ml: 200

Cases 1.5 L: 25

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2007

Release Price: \$75

Drink: now - 2020

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

After deciding not to make a Rocket Block in 2004, the 2005 is back in full form. Aged in mainly neutral puncheons, this is the most aromatically explosive wine I have ever made, it just comes after you with raspberries, lilacs and blueberries. In the mouth it is magically both huge and light at the same time, thanks to its incredible purity. Fans of the 2003 Rocket will not be disappointed! Unfortunately there were only 250 cases made, so I apologize to those who aren't offered an allocation.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #177, Jul 2008

Rating: 96

Drink: 2008 - 2023

The 2005 Rocket Block is another exceptional offering that represents Saxum's version of a Paso Robles Chateauneuf du Pape. As its name suggests, it explodes from the glass offering intense black raspberry and blacker fruit scents interwoven with notions of smoke, forest floor, and flowers. Full-bodied and unctuously-textured, with considerable tannin, acidity, and that exquisite minerality that comes from these soils, it is a super-rich, sensationally profound red that should drink beautifully for 12-15+ years. The bottled 2005s are all performing well.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: March 2008

Rating: 94

Drink: now through 2012

Has amazing fruit purity and range of flavor, with tiers of fleshy dark berry fruit built around plum, wild berry, pomegranate and boysenberry. Holds onto a tight focus, ending with waves of supple flavors that are remarkably complex and vibrant. Grenache and Syrah. Drink now through 2012. 250 cases made.

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

Rating: 92

SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Dark red. Graceful red berry and cherry aromas, with complicating floral and mineral qualities adding energy. Brisk but pliant redcurrant and strawberry on the palate, with silky tannins adding shape. Very fresh, elegant and precise, with the balance and suave acidity to reward cellaring. This is more understated than the other bottlings I tried at Saxum, but lacks nothing in flavor interest.

2004 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

38% Syrah, 36% Grenache, 26% Mourvèdre

ALC: 16%

Cases 750 ml: 250

Cases 1.5L: 40

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2006

Release Price: \$45

Drink: now - 2015

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This cuvee is a new release for us. It started out life as the intended 2004 Rocket Block, but after all was said and done we felt the best blend actually had a greater percentage of Syrah in it than Grenache, and the Rocket Block is all about Grenache, so a new wine was born, the James Berry Vineyard Cuvee. It is a wine built for pleasure, more delicate and refined than its other Syrah based siblings, but definitely a Saxum. The color is deep ruby/black with an explosive nose of raspberries and black cherries interwoven with licorice and sage. The mouth is full yet not too heavy and the finish is long, leaving you with more flavors of fennel and cherries.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #166, Aug 2006

Rating: 91

Drink: N/A

The deep ruby/purple-hued 2004 James Berry Vineyard (500 cases) is a blend of 38% Syrah, 36% Grenache, and 26% Mourvèdre. Sweet kirsch, licorice, cassis, and floral notes are found in this supple, round, tasty effort. Reminiscent of a 2003 Cotes de Nuits grand cru red Burgundy, it is complex as well as surprisingly forward. However, I suspect there is plenty in reserve. It will be interesting to follow this wine's evolution. I do not think it will be one of Proprietor Justin Smith's blockbusters, but it's a beauty.

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

Rating: 93

Deep ruby-red. Slightly high-toned aromas of cherry, truffle, cotton candy and smoked meat. Silky-sweet and seductive on entry, then sappy and spicy in the middle, with terrific acidity framing and lifting the blueberry and violet flavors. Wonderfully sweet wine, finishing with smooth tannins and lovely perfume. A superb example of the captivating blends being made in Paso Robles from Rhone Valley grapes.

2003 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD ROCKET BLOCK

50% Grenache, 40% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah

ALC: 16.6%

Cases 750 ml: 250

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2006

Release Price: \$45

Drink: now- 2020

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #159, Jun 2005

Rating: 98

Drink: 2005 - 2015

The 2003 Rocket Block James Berry Vineyard (50% Grenache, 40% Mourvèdre, and 10% Syrah) is truly great stuff. All of the Grenache is aged in larger demi-muids, with the Syrah and Mourvèdre kept in smaller barrels. A dense ruby/purple color is followed by a big, sweet, kirsch liqueur, creme de cassis, lavender, licorice, and pepper-scented bouquet. Reminiscent of a Chateaufort du Pape with a New World twist, it possesses a fabulous texture, beautiful purity, and a seamless, voluptuous personality. It should age beautifully for a decade, assuming purchasers can keep their hands off of it that long. 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: 94

Good bright ruby-red. Attractively high-toned aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, tar, smoked meat and leather. Thick, dense and sweet, with enticing, sappy dark berry flavors. At once layered and firm, finishing with very suave tannins and terrific length. Despite the elevated alcohol, this does not strike me as at all heavy. A warm October ripened the mourvedre well in 2003, notes Smith. (The equally promising 2004, tasted from barrel, features more grenache and less mourvedre, and showed liqueur-like sweetness and a briny, iodiney quality intensified by vibrant acidity.)
