

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

2015 G2 VINEYARD

56% Grenache, 44% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.4%

Cases 750 ml: 485

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2017

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2026

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

We switched things up a little from the 2014 vintage with Grenache taking the lead (and it will probably continue to be this way). It is an open book of bright, juicy, red fruits. Raspberry, and maybe a little strawberry, with a lovely briary dark side to it. Maybe some licorice and fennel coming from the Mourvèdre. What I really enjoy is that every time I have tasted this wine it has been different. Sometimes showing the darker Mourvèdre side, sometimes the juicy Grenache side. In a word, it's a dynamic wine, a real treat to enjoy. Simply following it slowly throughout your meal is a joy. (I had it with some BBQ ribs last night, great pairing!) From one sip to the next it will develop new facets that you hadn't noticed in the previous sip. Give it a year or two in the cellar before popping. The best is definitely yet to come.

I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the 2015s. It was an anomaly of a vintage. First off, 2015 was the third consecutive drought year. The vineyards received abysmal rainfall and the vines were stressing. Due to the stress and unfavorable spring conditions, the vines set meager, and I mean MEAGER crop loads. Worst hit was the Syrah and Grenache, which unfortunately, is the bulk of what we produce. Anyways, enough belly aching over low yields.....back to the wines! The type of wine that you would expect to make from tiny yields and extended drought conditions would be massively concentrated behemoths. Thick, dark wines that you would have to smack the bottom of the bottle to get them to pour out. Surprisingly, we found the opposite type of wine when we started to press the young 2015s into barrel. Everyone stopped and scratched their heads. They are beautiful, nuanced wines! They possess the awesome spice of a cold vintage, like 2011, along with the sweet tannins of a cool, long growing season, like 2007. Hmmmmmm, what is going on? Well, here's my theory, and if anybody else has one, let me know because I'm all ears. 2015 was an unusually humid summer, something we never see here in dry Paso Robles. A monsoonal weather pattern set up, possibly due to the warm El Niño waters off the Pacific, and it culminated in mid-July with a crazy lightning storm, dumping almost three inches of rain on us. Nobody had ever seen this. Even the old farmers who have been living here for close to 90 years! Now in the vineyard, it was too early to impact the fruit because the clusters hadn't begun to color up yet. But the storm seemed to rejuvenate the stressed out vines. They perked up and started to smile. Luckily, there weren't any more freak rain events for the rest of the season and harvest went super smooth. We were able to pick when we wanted to pick and ferment exactly the way we wanted to ferment. And oh, did I mention we had a brand stinking new winery to play with!?

New fermentors, new equipment, and so much glorious space! (The new place is 6 times bigger than the garage of old.) We had the ability to put the fruit inside the precise fermentor size or type we thought best. (Wood, concrete, or stainless steel?) And, something new to us, we could leave it there as long as we wanted to because we now had enough fermentation space for every bit of fruit. No need to turn a tank like days of old! Anyways, I'm digressing again..... the wines! Downright beautiful (this is the word of the day). They are open and aromatic, the tannins are soft and supple, they are layered and nuanced beyond all belief. They are already enjoyable. You can drink them while waiting for the 14s to come around. Probably even the 13s and 12s for that matter! On the other hand, I believe they will age magnificently. The balance is perfect.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com

Tasting Date: 8/10/2017

Rating: 96

Drink: n/a

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

I've raved so much about the wines from Saxum's Justin Smith, I feel like a broken record every new vintage. Nevertheless, these latest vintages are all stellar, and certainly the move to the new cellar hasn't affect or changed the quality here. The 2014s show the richer, more fleshy style of the vintage, yet still carry the slightly more streamlined/elegant style that Smith has chosen over the past few years. The 2015s play even more in that realm, which is very much the vintage, and are lively and elegant, with pretty, perfumed characters – and plenty of fruit. The 2015s share a lot of similarities to the 2011s (which shined for their aromatics), yet have more fruit and power. It's worth noting that the majority had just been recently bottled, which makes these showings even more impressive. A vintage that really excites me is the 2016s, which appear to be a return to a more bombastic style, with beautiful fruit and texture.

Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate, Sept 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2017-2029

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

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Nov 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2022-2032

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

2014 G2 VINEYARD

58% Mourvèdre, 42% Grenache

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 500

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2026

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Beginning with the 2014 vintage, we brought a new vineyard into the fold. The G2 vineyard is only half a mile from our estate, directly to the South West. Our friend Bill Gibbs (of Heart Stone fame) purchased the property with 40 acres already planted to Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, and Zinfandel. We locked down our favorite blocks, an amazing 5 acre South slope planted to Mourvèdre 369 and Grenache 362, two of my favorite clones. These blocks are extremely rocky and steep, a twin of our Syrah block at Booker Vineyard, with a vertical rise of 200 feet in a single row! Our hunches were right and the fruit off these blocks are mind blowing. Since 2014 we have planted 8 more blocks; 2 North facing Grenache blocks, 2 big south slopes with head trained Monastrell (the Spanish version of Mourvèdre), a North face Syrah block, and some blocks of Carignane and Cinsault. We plan to keep the blend Grenache and Mourvèdre dominant but want to bring in these supporting characters for a little extra complexity. We are super excited about this new planting.

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

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226, Aug 2016

Rating: 97

Drink: 2019-2029

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

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: 94

Drink: now through 2028

Distinctive, combining polish with appealing earthiness. Aromas of raspberry, mineral and smoky meat lead to structured and focused flavors of dried cherry, licorice and ground ginger. Finishes with refined tannins. Mourvèdre and Grenache.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2016

Rating: 94

Drink: 2020-2026

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

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.