

SAXUM G2 VINEYARD

2016 G2 VINEYARD

42% Grenache, 35% Mataro, 20% Tannat, 3% Zinfandel

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 642

Cases 1.5 L: 54

Vineyard: G2 Vineyard

Released: July 2018

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2030

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

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

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

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com

Tasting Date: 11/29/2018

Rating: 99

Drink: 2020-2035

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

This report looks mostly at the 2016s from undeniable superstar winemaker, Justin Smith. Smith is one of the pioneers of the

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

William Kelley, Wine Advocate, May 2018

Rating: (94-96)

Drink: NA

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

Success sometimes breeds complacency, but that's emphatically not the case for Justin Smith, whose status as Paso Roble's most celebrated winemaker has done nothing to dim his urge to experiment, evolve and improve. Without sacrificing any of their power and authority, both of which come easily in this warm climate, Smith's Saxum wines continue to gain in structural refinement, energy, integration and incipient complexity with every passing vintage. Since the end of the last decade, Smith has been experimenting with whole cluster, a technique he tends to employ in cooler sites and vintages, since extracting excessive stem tannins is a danger in riper, warmer years. Fermentations are cooler and slower, which helps to manage extraction. While new oak was once an important influence in the Saxum wines, its presence is more and more subtle: Smith now works with puncheons instead of smaller barrels, and they're complemented by amphorae and foudres. Since 2010, he has employed Roussanne for co-fermentations with Syrah in the place of Viognier, since it brings less additional power and alcohol. He also continues to refine and adapt his blends from year to year. Smith's new cellar now means he has the space necessary to mature wines for longer. Today's Saxum wines are accordingly better than ever. The only problem is finding them: I signed up for the mailing list in 2011, and Smith informs me that the current wait is around eight years. At Saxum, Smith characterizes the 2016 vintage as "easygoing and plentiful" after the challenges of the three preceding years of drought. The season's heat spikes weren't too serious, and fermentations went well. He employed less whole cluster than in 2015 but did very little crushing, emphasizing whole-berry fermentations. Having tasted most of these wines from barrel

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last summer, I was more than impressed by their positive evolution when I revisited them this April.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Sept 2018

Rating: 96

Drink: 2026-2036

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

2015 G2 VINEYARD

56% Grenache, 44% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.4%

Cases 750 ml: 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

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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.

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.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, Issue: April 30, 2018

Rating: 93

Drink: 2019 through 2027

This has torque to spare, but there's also richness and polish, plus black licorice, smoky pepper beef, currant and crushed stone accents that build power and depth toward bold tannins. Grenache and Mourvèdre.

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

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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.