

# SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

## 2018 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

64% Grenache, 16% Mataro, 14% Syrah, 6% Carignan  
ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 1318

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Release: January 2021

### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This iteration of the James Berry Vineyard has got to be the most complex one we have ever made. The nose is not as lifted as the '17s were (I really love how forward the '17s are), but the upside potential of this '18 boggles the senses. It will only continue to evolve and surprise you in the glass... one minute it's all black licorice and fresh loam and then the next it's back to strawberries and shortbread! But wait, violets too?? Yes, so much violets. The mouthfeel is big, focused, and rich, but a little more structured than the G2. Silky seamless tannins. This JBV is one for the ages. Lay it low for a few year if you can. Many more if you can do that too! Either way, don't miss this one.

The 2018s are some of the most complex and nuanced wines we have ever released (and will definitely benefit from 3-30 years of aging.) Structured and built like a brick, while at the same time the copious tannins are coming together nicely. I really dig them. To be honest, I was a little scared when I tasted them last. They were so tightly focused and intense. Now I'm seeing how quickly they have softened up, coming out of their proverbial shells. I know it's cliché, but iron fist in a velvet glove suits them well. I have previously compared the 2018s to the 2016s, but now that I've had some time to get to know both vintages I find them to be less similar than I first thought... I think '18 might be better. Yes, you heard it here first. Our '18s might be better than the much regaled '16s. (And I'm not just saying that because I'm slinging them today!) I think the '16s may be a bit more generous and forthcoming, but the '18s will outshine the '16s in their complexity. I'm looking forward to some side by side comparisons in 5 or 6 years. It shall be a momentous battle!

### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2020**

**Rating: 99**

**Drink: 2022-2038**

*Showing better from bottle than barrel (always a good sign), the 2018 James Berry Vineyard is another stunning wine in a long line of stunning wines from this estate. Based on 64% Grenache, 16% Mataro, 14% Syrah, and the rest Carignan, incredible notes of blueberries, wild strawberries, licorice, new leather, herbes de Provence, and candied violets all emerge from the glass, and it's full-bodied, with an incredible sense of purity and elegance, flawless balance, and a huge finish. It has some early appeal yet is going to be best with 2-4 years of bottle age and will still be drinking beautifully at age 20.*

**Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec 2020**

**Rating: 98**

**Drink: 2026-2036**

*Saturated purple. A heady, expansive bouquet evokes ripe blueberry, cherry compote, potpourri, candied licorice and exotic*

*spices, and a smoky mineral nuance builds in the glass. Sweet, palate-staining red/blue fruit liqueur, lavender pastille, cola and spice-cake flavors show outstanding depth as well as energy thanks to an undercurrent of juicy acidity. Plays power off finesse with a sure hand and finishes extremely long, sappy and precise, with polished, well-knit tannins emerging slowly.*

**Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, Jan 2021**

**Rating: 97**

**Drink: 2020-2032**

*The 2018 James Berry Vineyard is a blend of 64% Grenache, 16% Mataro, 14% Syrah and 6% Carignan. It has an intense, alluring perfume with loads of layers, its warm tricolored fruits laced with notes of aniseed, coffee, earth and blue flowers. The palate offers explosive flavors with surprising lift and freshness, silky in texture and finishing very long, layered and spiced. It's a lovely rendition of James Berry that presents its layered flavors in an unusually elegant frame.*

*I've been eagerly anticipating the 2018 vintage in Paso Robles, where cooler temperatures resulted in some unusually elegant, lifted wines. The 2018s from Saxum did not disappoint—these latest releases offer incredible concentration of flavor with surprising elegance and freshness. While they took some time in bottle to unwind, I'm pleased with how they have blossomed over time. These layered, nuanced wines have the intense flavor, ripe tannins and freshness for long-term cellaring, and while they're stunning now, they'll offer more a few years down the road. Cheers!*

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## 2017 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

55% Grenache, 29% Mataro, 13% Syrah, 3% Carignan  
ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 1102

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: January 2020

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2040

### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Leading the charge is the 2017 James Berry Vineyard. For those of you lucky enough to have experienced the JBV over the years, I'd say this one ranks right up there in the top echelon, and it may be the most open of any vintage yet. Of course it will improve with some age, let's not get hasty here! But I do think this one is generous in its youth. Like all of our 2017 wines, the tannins are very smooth and fine, no hard edges to be found. Though it's the aromatics that really draw you in. Red fruit centered, really lifted and bright, yet there's a background of chaparral and sagebrush providing some low notes too... I could smell this wine all day. There's a kiss of French oak, 48% spent 21 months in new puncheons and the remaining rested in used foudres or puncheons. The real fun is opening this wine next to the 2016 JBV or the 2017 G2V and choosing a favorite. Please do and let me know!

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

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, Nov. 2019**

**Rating: 99**

**Drink: 2021-2036**

*I was able to taste the 2017 James Berry Vineyard beside the perfect 2016 and there's not much difference between these two sensational wines. The 2017 reveals a deep ruby color as well as more straight, focused, yet beautifully concentrated style that reveals gorgeous black raspberry and blackberry fruits interwoven with pepper, spring flowers, earth, and incense. Pure, full-bodied, flawlessly balanced, and an incredible wine any way you look at it, give bottles 2-3 years and it's going to evolve effortlessly for 15-20 years.*

*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.*

**Erin Books, Wine Advocate Feb 2020**

**Rating: 96**

**Drink: 2020-2035**

*The 2017 James Berry Vineyard Red is made up of 55% Grenache, 29% Mataro, 13% Syrah and 3% Carignan. It was made with 13% whole cluster and aged 21 months in various vessels including 48% new oak and 28% foudres. Medium to deep ruby, it has bombastic raspberry, cranberry, strawberry and*

*pomegranate candy aromas with pure notes of garrigue, dried roses, orange oil, potpourri and an undercurrent of amaro character. The intense, medium to full-bodied palate explodes with nuanced flavor layers in a finely grained frame, with seamless freshness on the long, super perfumed finish. Wow! It's hard to choose a favorite between the 2016 and 2017 vintages—they're both spectacular.*

**Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, Web Only 2019**

**Rating: 95**

**"Hot Wine of the Day - December 2019"**

**Drink: now-2030**

*A deep, detailed wine, with a potent personality. This is stylishly structured, offering rich, full-bodied blackberry, dark mocha and smoky mineral notes that build tension toward supple tannins. Grenache, Syrah, Mataro and Carignane.*

*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.*

**Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Feb 2020**

**Rating: (97-98)**

**Drink: N/A**

*Shimmering violet color. A complex, explosively perfumed bouquet evokes ripe, spice-accented red and blue fruits, incense and floral oils, which are enlivened by a vibrant mineral quality that builds as the wine opens up. Sweet, seamless and energetic on the palate, offering densely packed black raspberry, boysenberry, candied lavender and spicecake flavors that show outstanding clarity and building power. The mineral and floral components drive an extremely long, sappy finish that's given shape by smooth, deftly woven tannins.*

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

### 2016 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

55% Grenache, 24% Mataro, 13% Syrah, 8% Counoise

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 947

Cases 1.5L: 60

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2018

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2035

#### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2016 James Berry Vineyard is insane. I kind of feel like that is all I need to say, but I'll go on. Whenever I pulled a sample from the barrel and gave it to someone to taste, I would see their eyes light up and they would always ask, what's THIS?? Yes, it's that type of wine. Soaring aromatics of cherries and California sage, a beautiful, lush mouthfeel of red and black fruits, and a finish that is perhaps 3 miles long consisting of baking spice and fennel (maybe even 4 miles, it's hard to say for sure). Fresh and lively, yet rich and pleasurable, it's the ultimate combo.

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 its true heart.

#### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Nov 2018**

**Rating: 100**

**Drink: 2020-2035**

*One of the greatest GSM blends to ever come out of California is the 2016 James Berry Vineyard, which is 55% Grenache, 24% Mourvèdre, 13% Syrah, and 8% Counoise. This sensational wine reminds me of the 2016 Mon Aïeul from Pierre Usseglio with its awesome perfume of sweet blackberry and cassis fruits, smoke meats, exotic spice, licorice, and garrigue-like aromas and flavors. Deep, rich and layered on the palate, with a massive core of sweet fruit, this beauty builds with time in the glass and has incredible purity of fruit, a mix of richness and elegance that's hard to describe, sweet tannins, and a huge finish. It's every bit as impressive as the 2007 was on release. It needs a decant if drinking any time soon and should be at its best from 2020-2035. Hats off to Justin Smith for this incredible*

*wine! I finished my note with "the greatest GSM blend from California, ever."*

*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's wine world; this is one of them.*

#### **William Kelley, Wine Advocate May 2018**

**Rating: (95-97)**

**Drink: NA**

*The 2016 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red is beautiful, reflecting this vintage's synergy with Grenache, wafting from the glass with notes of wild cherries, kirsch, spring flowers and licorice. On the palate, it's full-bodied, rich and firm, with a deep core and chewy, stony structure that is going to demand some patience. The finish is juicy and mouthwatering. The 2016 is a blend of 55% Grenache, 24% Mataro, 13% Syrah and 8% Counoise, and it's maturing in 61% new puncheons, 26% amphorae and the balance in used wood.*

*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.*

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

*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 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: 2024-2034**

*Brilliant ruby. An intensely perfumed, sharply delineated bouquet evokes ripe raspberry, blueberry, allspice, candied lavender and incense, and a zesty mineral overtone gains strength as the wine stretches out. Stains the palate with appealingly sweet red and blue fruit flavors that show impressive depth as well as vivacity, thanks to a spine of juicy acidity. The extremely long, floral-driven finish is given shape by fine-grained tannins that are quickly absorbed by the intense, concentrated fruit.*

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### 2015 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

33% Grenache, 32% Mourvèdre, 24% Syrah, 11% Counoise

ALC: 15.5%

Cases 750 ml: 1095

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2017

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2028

#### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Can I start by saying this wine is beautiful? Have I used that word too much? Screw it, it's BEAUTIFUL! Aged 75% in puncheons (a good deal new French oak) and 25% concrete amphora. The 2015 version has the lowest level of Grenache any JBV has seen since, well, maybe ever, due to the poor set of our old Grenache vines. It is an aromatic beast, with chocolate dipped cherries dominating, but following closely on its heels are the notes of what the French call garrigue and us Californians call sagebrush, black sage to pinpoint it. The mouthfeel is soft and supple, inviting in its open structure, with this great core of pure freshness, and the finish just doesn't stop.

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:

**Josh Reynolds, Vinous Nov 2017**

**Rating: 97**

**Drink: 2022-2034**

*Glass-staining ruby. Heady aromas of mineral-tinged dark berry liqueur, incense and roasted coffee, with a suave floral nuance adding brightness. Smoky, appealingly sweet and focused, offering palate-staining black and blue fruit and candied licorice flavors that are braced by juicy acidity and a late flourish of five-spice powder. Closes with outstanding clarity and floral-dominated persistence, leaving suave floral pastille and spicecake notes behind, eventually.*

**Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate Sept 2017**

**Rating: 97**

**Drink: 2017-2030**

*Made from 33% Grenache, 32% Mourvèdre, 24% Syrah and 11% Counoise, the 2015 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red reveals a deep garnet-purple color and expressive nose of black currants, black cherries and mulberries with hints of baking spices, chocolate box, violets and Sichuan pepper. The palate is surprisingly elegant, with great intensity of flavors framed by soft, sensuous tannins and a lively line carrying the fruit and spices to a long, long finish.*

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

Jeb Dunnuck, [JebDunnuck.com](http://JebDunnuck.com)

**Tasting Date:** 8/10/2017

**Rating:** 96

**Drink:** n/a

*Checking in as a blend of 33% Grenache, 32% Mourvèdre, 24% Syrah and 11% Counoise, the 2015 James Berry Vineyard had just been bottled, but certainly wasn't showing the worse for it. It's deep ruby/purple tinged color is followed by an incredible bouquet of black raspberries, garrigue-like herbs, white pepper and spring flowers. Ethereally textured, silk, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, it has substantial tannin, yet they're ripe, polished and fine, and it has a terrific finish. Like all great wines, it stays light and weightless on the palate, and will evolve for another decade or more.*

*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.*

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

**Rating:** 95

**Drink:** 2018 through 2028

*A dynamic combination of power and refinement, with a penetrating but balanced core of polished tannins and expressive blackberry, stony mineral and dark licorice flavors that finish with verve. Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah and Counoise.*

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### 2014 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

42% Grenache, 24% Mourvèdre, 21% Syrah, 8% Counoise, 5% Roussanne

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 1300

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2028

#### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

James Berry 2014 is going to be awesome. Many different lots picked throughout our estate vineyard made the cut. Half were aged for their first year in large foudres (the Grenache heavy lots) and the Syrah and Mourvèdre portions were brought up in 300 and 400 Liter puncheons, about 75% new. We then blended

them all together and let them get to know each other in our new concrete amphoras for their last 6 months of aging. It is a wine that has a ton of richness along with an amazing spine to hold it all together. There's an abundance of ripe red and black fruit, but it's balanced by notes of leather and cardamon, maybe a pinch of cinnamon and sassafras. It's definitely a wine that harkens back to James Berry of 2007-2009, with maybe a pinch of the aromatic notes of 2010 and 2011. Not for the weak of heart. Also note that the Bone Rock Syrah block gave us such meager yields that we ended up throwing it into this JBV blend, it really brings an added component, although for the first time ever, there will be no Bone Rock produced.

Let's talk about this vintage. It was the second year in a row with very little rain, so the vines responded like you would think, they produced very little fruit. What little fruit they had became extremely concentrated because there just wasn't much moisture available for the vines. No water = concentration.

That could have been a problem if it wasn't for our cool nights and calcareous soils which preserve the natural acidity. So we ended up with ripe, rich, concentrated wines that have great spine and a focused juiciness that holds them together. Something that really is a rarity in the world of wine. They are wines that speak of Paso Robles and I'm proud of them, just as I am proud to call Paso Robles my home. It's an awesome community to be part of.

#### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226 Issue: Aug 2016**

**Rating:** 98

**Drink:** 2017-2027

*The sensationally pure and seamless 2014 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red (42% Grenache, 24% Mourvèdre, 21% Syrah, 8% Counoise and 5% Roussanne) was brought up in a mix of barrels and foudre, followed by six months in concrete tanks. The wine offers incredibly rich and layered notes of black raspberries, creme de cassis, crushed flowers, melted licorice and peppery herbs in its full-bodied, impeccably balanced profile. Showing the more upfront, hedonistic style of the vintage, this full-bodied beauty still has ample underlying tannin, beautiful mid-palate depth and a killer finish that keeps you coming back for more.*

*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:** 97

**Drink:** 2018 through 2028

*A dramatic wine that weds power and opulence, maintaining impeccable balance along the way. Brooding dark berry and loamy mineral aromas lead to rich flavors of currant, licorice, dried sage and smoky pepper. Ripe tannins frame the finish. Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Counoise and Roussanne.*

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

**Josh Reynolds. Vinous, Sept 2016**

**Rating: 96**

**Drink: 2022 - 2030**

*(made with 30 percent whole clusters) Dark purple. Vibrant and sharply focused on the highly perfumed nose, displaying an array of ripe black and blue fruit and floral aromas enlivened by a vibrant mineral quality that gains strength as the wine opens up. The mineral and floral components dominate the extremely long, incisive finish. The balance between power and finesse here is really something.*

*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.*

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### 2013 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

45% Grenache, 29% Mourvèdre, 18% Syrah, 8% Counoise

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 1400

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2015

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2027

#### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I think this is one of the, if not THE best vintage we have ever had. There are some vintages that are more of this or more of that, but the '13s have a bit of everything. Concentration, but not super rich (hello '14s!), soft tannins but still some grip, great fresh acids but nothing searing or flabby, depth, depth, and more depth, they are as a whole wines that continue to evolve in the glass for days, every sip revealing something new, something that was hidden the previous sip. They will definitely reward a few years of cellaring but will be very enjoyable in the short term.

This is the 10th release of our James Berry Vineyard bottling. Of those, the last 7 have found their groove with being Grenache based but still having good doses of Mourvèdre and Syrah and lately even some Counoise. To me, this '13 vintage is what I would call "classic JBV." It speaks of what James Berry Vineyard is all about. Power and structure balanced by soft rich tannins and juicy freshness along with a beautiful spine of red fruits and black licorice. No doubt aging part of the blend in large oak casks has kept it focused and fresh, but we used about 60% new French oak barrels to add some richness and

spice. It's yummy now but please let some bottles rest a few years to really get the most out of it.

#### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226 Issue: Aug 2016**

**Rating: 97**

**Drink: 2018-2028**

*The 2013 James Berry Vineyard Proprietary Red is made from 45% Grenache, 29% Mourvedre, 18% Syrah and 8% Counoise (which Justin commented was a blend that was put together relatively late). It saw a big chunk of whole cluster (the Grenache was mostly destemmed though) and was brought up all in puncheons and foudre (the normal concrete component went to the Rocket Block). It offers up gorgeous notes of black raspberries, cherries, cassis, ground herbs and flowers. This beauty hits the palate with incredible purity, fine tannin and an overriding sense of elegance and finesse, backed up by full-bodied richness and depth. It needs to be forgotten for 3-4 years and it will drink beautifully through 2028.*

*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!*

**Josh Reynolds. Vinous, Sept 2016**

**Rating: 96**

**Drink: 2021-2029**

*Brilliant purple. An explosively perfumed bouquet evokes an array of ripe red and blue fruits, candied flowers and exotic spices, backed by a vibrant mineral overtone and a hint of smokiness. Utterly stains the palate with concentrated boysenberry, black raspberry, lavender pastille and fruitcake flavors that are enlivened by an intense jolt of juicy acidity. Shows an uncanny blend of richness and vivacity, with no rough edges and an endless, floral-driven finish framed by polished, harmonious tannins. I'd hold on to this wine for at least another seven or eight years but wouldn't fault anyone for checking it out sooner than later for its youthful exuberance.*

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### 2012 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

43% Grenache, 29% Mourvèdre, 18% Syrah, 10% Counoise

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 1480

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: July 2014

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2026

#### NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

2012 was the only normal season we have had in quite awhile. Not chilly like '10 and '11, not dry like '13 was or '14 will be. It

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

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!

The wines from 2012 are really growing on me. I have to admit that initially, right after putting them into barrel, I was a little perplexed with what I tasted. They didn't have the sweet flesh that I was expecting from the warmer season. What I tasted was more akin to a cross of '10s and '09s. Great dark chalky tannins, like the '10s, but definitely more ripe aromatics like the '09s. However now, as I taste them, they keep gaining more and more flesh. They just took their sweet time showing off the fruit driven side to them. It is quite peculiar, which leads me to believe these wines will only keep getting better and better as they evolve in the bottle and will reward some patience.

When tasting the James Berry Vineyard this spring dark cherries and red fruits lead the way thanks to the Grenache, but with the addition of a new block of Monastrell (Spanish clone of Mourvèdre) there is this core of spice that is new to this wine. I love it. Of course it is wild and fruit driven with great chalky tannins, but this is a JBV more akin to the '10, it will greatly reward those of you with patience who will allow this wine to bloom.

### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #214 Issue: Aug 2014**

**Rating: 97+**

**Drink: 2016-2036**

*There are 1,580 cases of the 2012 James Berry Vineyard and it reminds me of the 2009 Janasse Chaupin (which is one of Justin's favorite wines). Incorporating more Mourvedre than normal, it's made from 43% Grenache, 29% Mourvedre, 18% Syrah and 10% Counoise that's aged in a combination of concrete and barrel. Rock star stuff, with fabulous black raspberry, cassis, spring flowers and charred meat aromas and flavors, this beauty hits the palate with full-bodied richness and depth, yet stays lively, incredibly pure and elegant, with lots of fine tannin emerging on the finish. It will benefit from 2-3 years in the cellar and have 15-20 years of ultimate longevity.*

*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 Mar 31, 2015**

**Rating: 92**

**Drink: 2016 through 2028**

*Fresh and snappy, with a gritty tannic edge to the currant, raspberry, black licorice and fresh-turned earth notes, lending this a perfumed aroma. Presents a tough-edged tannic side that needs cellaring. Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah and Counoise. Best from 2016 through 2028. 1,587 cases made.*

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## 2011 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

69% Grenache, 15% Mourvèdre, 13% Syrah, 2% Counoise, 1% Roussanne

ALC: 15.5%

Cases 750 ml: 1200

Cases 1.5L: 100

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2013

Release Price: \$89

Drink: now - 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

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

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.

Our estate vineyard is in the coolest area of all our vineyard sources and the resulting wines in 2011 were relatively delicate and floral. To really let the prettier side of this wine shine through we chose to use a larger percentage of Grenache than normal. We also used a splash of Cunoise from a new planting which really helped to open up the blend, and just a pinch of Roussanne to bring in some floral elements. We also decided to bring in a new, larger, concrete vessel to age the Grenache in. The concrete kept the Grenache really focused and pure and the resulting wine is a real beaut. Aromatically complex, with spices and dried herbs taking the forefront but red fruits are right behind. Think of eating strawberry rhubarb pie with a dried thyme crust while sitting next to a fresh cut bouquet of lavender and roses, that's the nose on it. The flavors follow suit, not extremely weighty on the pallet, it more dances around on your tongue, with a long clean focused finish that echoes strawberry and thyme. Graceful, if I was to summarize this wine with one word.

### REVIEWS:

**Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #214 Issue: Aug 2014**

**Rating: 96+**

**Drink: 2016-2026**

*Reminding me of a top 2010 Chateauneuf du Pape (the 2010 Raymond Usseglio Cuvee Imperiale to be exact), the 2011 James Berry Vineyard is a blend of 69% Grenache, 13% Mourvedre, 13% Syrah, 2% Cunoise, and a splash of Roussanne, that was aged in a combination of concrete (Grenache) and larger oak puncheons. A fresh, detailed and more elegant example of the cuvee, it offers gorgeous notes of ripe berry fruit, loads of exotic spice, violets, pepper and lavender to go with a full-bodied, beautifully pure and layered profile on the palate. It's no blockbuster, but has loads of energy and tension, as well as class and refinement. Give it 2-3 years in the cellar and enjoy it over the following decade or longer.*

*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: 2015 through 2026**

*The intense, vivid blackberry, blueberry, pepper and spice notes Pure, rich and deeply flavored, this muscular effort centers around penetrating blackberry, black licorice, charcoal and loamy earth notes. Ends with rustic, chewy tannins that will need a few years of cellaring to subside. Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, Cunoise and Roussanne.*

**Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Oct 13**

**Rating: 94**

*Inky ruby. Sexy, highly perfumed aromas of red fruit liqueur, lavender and Asian spices, with a bright mineral overtone. Rich and fleshy but lively, offering intense raspberry and cherry-cola flavors and exotic star anise and floral pastille accents. Silky tannins sneak in late and add shape to a long, smooth and alluringly sweet finish. The grenache in this blend was raised in a large concrete vat.*

**Antonio Galloni, Vinuous, Aug 2014**

**Rating: 96**

**Drink: 2015-2025**

*Dark red plums, exotic spices, crushed flowers, menthol and new leather are some of the nuances that blossom as the 2011 James Berry Vineyard opens up in the glass. The use of 33% whole clusters adds texture and aromatic complexity in a wine that impresses for its purity. Some of the Grenache was done in concrete, which allows the true personality of the fruit to shine. Hints of tar, game and licorice meld into the expressive finish.*

*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.*

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## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

### 2010 JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

52% Grenache, 26% Mourvedre, 22% Syrah

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 980

Cases 1.5L: 120

Vineyard: James Berry Vineyard

Released: August 2012

Release Price: \$89

Drink: now - 2026

#### 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.

The 2010 James Berry Vineyard is my personal favorite since the 2007 vintage. It has great concentration and intensity, with tons of red and black fruits jumping from the glass. Because of the cool year and our refined winery techniques, it contains great focus, purity of fruit, and freshness. I think that's my favorite part. The freshness we captured. In no small part this vibrancy comes from the fact that most of the Grenache was aged in concrete tank, along with the large puncheons. The Mourvedre and Syrah saw time in tight grained French oak, adding some nice layers and richness to the wine.

#### REVIEWS:

**Antonio Galloni, Wine Advocate #202, Aug 2012**

**Rating: 96+**

**Drink: 2013-2020**

*Saxum-s 2010 James Berry Vineyard is endowed with serious energy and tension, dark red fruit, flowers and spices. Rose petals and a hint of sweet spices add lift on an energetic, intense finish layered with huge dark red fruit. The 2010 is 52% Grenache (done in concrete), 26% Mourvedre and 22% Syrah. 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 2013**

**Rating: 94**

**Drink: 2014 through 2026**

*The intense, vivid blackberry, blueberry, pepper and spice notes are tightly focused and persistent in this red, ending with a long finish and tannins that give the flavors traction. Very pure and rambunctious, and should only get better with time. Grenache, Mourvedre and Syrah. Best from 2014 through 2026.*

**Jeb Dunnuck, Rhone Report, Issue 12, June 2012**

**Rating: 98-100**

*A thrill ride of a wine, the profound 2010 Saxum James Berry Vineyard, tasted out of barrel, looks to be every bit as good as the '09 and the '07. Exotic, perfumed, and intense, it delivers riveting aromas of blackberry liqueur, lilac, violet, licorice, and mineral like qualities that flow to a seamless, perfectly proportioned wine that is beautifully concentrated, layered, and incredibly long. It's hard to find fault here, and this has a rich, supple texture that somehow stays light, elegant, and focused. While this will be hard to resist on release, it should ideally be given 4-7 years of bottle age, with a total drink window of 20-25 years not being out of the question. If this note is not clear enough for you, let me be as direct as possible - don't miss this wine!*

**Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Oct 12**

**Rating: 94**

*Glass-staining ruby. Ripe blackberry and cherry on the intensely perfumed nose and in the mouth. Dense but surprisingly energetic, offering sweet black raspberry and candied lavender flavors and a hint of cola. Supple tannins give shape to a long, sweet, strikingly lively finish, which echoes the floral note.*

## 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.*

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### 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.*

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

## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

### 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.*

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### 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.*

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

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## SAXUM JAMES BERRY VINEYARD

### 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.*

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### 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.*