

SAXUM 4HEARTS VINEYARD

2018 4HEARTS VINEYARD

52% Petite Sirah, 21% Tempranillo, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Zinfandel

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 327

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard

Release: January 2022

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The curve ball in the Saxum lineup (besides the white). This wine spent 30 months in a mix of French and American oak. (Gasp, American?) Yes, and it's frickin awesome. This is what you serve your friend that only likes "old world wine" when they come over. They'll say they hate it, but secretly they'll be loving every sip you "force" them to drink!

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com, Sept. 2021

Rating: 96

Drink: 2023-2036

The Petite Sirah-heavy 2018 Four Hearts Vineyard ... reminds me of a great vintage of Ridge's Monte Bello Cabernet (I wouldn't be surprised if there was some American oak in here as well) with its blackberry, blueberry, cigar, and sappy flower aromas and flavors. It's full-bodied and offers a big, mouth-filling texture, beautiful balance, and a great finish. Give it a few years.

One of California's unquestionably superstar estates is Heather and Justin Smith's Saxum Vineyards, and you won't find any finer examples of Rhône variety wines anywhere in the world. The proprietors of James Berry Vineyard, located in the cooler Willow Creek District of Paso Robles, the Smiths have seen incredible changes over the past decade, and they've traded their small, old-fashioned, yet perfectly adequate cellar for a brand-new cave and state of the art winemaking facility. And while changes of this magnitude can often result in hiccups in either the style or quality of the wines, that's certainly not the case here. I think the wines have never been better, and given the scores I've awarded in the past, that's saying something. Today, the Smiths release multiple cuvées, and while the focus in the past might have been the estate James Berry Vineyard, the portfolio includes numerous new vineyard sources and cuvées, most focusing on single vineyards and even specific blocks inside of a vineyard. This report looks at the 2018s and 2019s, and in a nutshell, these wines epitomize what I consider greatness in wine; the ability to offer both hedonistic and intellectual pleasure; intensity and richness without heaviness or any sensation of weight; singular profiles; and the ability to improve with bottle age. In addition, the purity and precision this estate can achieve are incredible, and certainly, many estates and winemakers in Paso Robles need to be tasting these wines to understand why they're great and what is possible from these incredible limestone soils. As a critic, it's always a challenge to try and understand why wines show differently and why one estate can produce brilliant wines and others struggle. Given the prodigious wines the Smiths release year in and year out from different vineyards (and now even from different winemaking facilities), it's become increasingly apparent that the quality coming from Saxum is due to the genius of Justin Smith. After

being lucky enough to taste these wines every year for well over a decade now, I can say that no one in California does Rhône varieties and blends better. I've written this many times in the past, but I'll say it again, this is one of the few mailing lists worth being on.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Nov. 2021

Rating: 95

Drink: 2026-2036

Inky violet. Deep kirsch, blackberry, floral oil and baking spice qualities on the nose, along with hints of vanilla and woodsmoke. Coats the palate with alluringly sweet, dark berry preserve, vanilla, cola and baking spice flavors that show fine clarity and back-end thrust. Velvety tannins add grip to a very long, smoky finish that features suggestions of dark chocolate, cherry preserves and candied flowers. Raised in a combination of French and used American oak.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, March 2022

Rating: 94

Drink: 2022-2037

The 2018 4hearts Vineyard is a blend of 52% Petite Sirah, 21% Tempranillo, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Zinfandel, matured again this vintage in a portion of four-year-old air-dried American oak (around 32 months). Deep ruby-purple, it has gregarious scents of cassis and roasted plums, with layers of mint, soy sauce, licorice and violet. The medium-bodied palate has a grainy, seamless texture, savory fruits, and a long, uplifted finish.

2017 4HEARTS VINEYARD

43% Petite Sirah, 19% Tempranillo, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Zinfandel

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 322

Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard

Release: January 2021

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Here is the outlier. I mean, it is still a Saxum through and through, but let's look at the factors involved here.... Petite Sirah as the lead, with Tempranillo, (gasp!) Cabernet Sauvignon, and Zinfandel as the bandmates, and aged in a bit of American Oak? WTH is going on around here you might ask. I'm not quite sure, but I like the outcome. We tip our hat to old school California wine. This might not be for the faint of heart, but it is not nearly as beastly as the 2016 version. This wine comes across as civilized, if you can imagine that. I guess what I am trying to say is we had a bit of fun with this wine, and I am really enjoying the outcome.

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.

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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, JebDunnuck.com, Sept. 2020

Rating: 97

Drink: 2020-2035

The 2017 Four Hearts Vineyard is based on 43% Petite Sirah and 19% each of Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Zinfandel, brought up 40% new American oak and the balance in French oak. It has a ripe, sexy, (almost Ridge-like) bouquet of blueberries, vanilla spice, exotic flowers, and candied orange blossom. Juicy, medium to full-bodied, beautifully textured, and elegant on the palate, this juicy, complex, and elegant red brings lots of Paso deliciousness. It's capable of keeping for 10-15 years.

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec. 2020

Rating: 96

Drink: 2026-2036

Dark purple. Intense, smoke-accented dark berry liqueur, exotic spice, incense, violet and licorice aromas show outstanding clarity and pick up hints of espresso and cola with air. Deeply concentrated, mineral-accented black/blue fruit, floral pastille and bitter chocolate flavors become livelier and take on black cardamom and mocha nuances on the back half. Broad and youthfully chewy in texture, showing strong tension and finishing with impressive floral- and mineral-dominated persistence and dusty tannins that lend solid closing grip.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, Oct 2020

Rating: 92

Drink: 2020-2035

The 2017 4hearts Vineyard is made up of 43% Petite Sirah, 19% Tempranillo, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon and 19% Zinfandel. Winemaker Justin Smith says this is the first vintage he decided to use some four-year-old air-dried American oak. Medium to deep ruby-purple, it has a very spicy, layered nose with aromas of nutmeg, warm red and black cherries, floral potpourri, aniseed and a fruitcake note. The palate is full-bodied with a very firm frame and just enough freshness, finishing a touch warm.

2016 4HEARTS VINEYARD

66% Petite Sirah, 34% Tempranillo

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 264

Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard

Released: January 2020

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2022 - 2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 4hearts Vineyard is an old school, dry farmed, steep slope in the heart of the Willow Creek District. We have primarily Petite Sirah planted at this extreme sight, and I wanted to craft a uniquely Californian wine from it. We aged this muscular black beauty in a combination of French and American oak for a stout 31 months, trust me, it needed it! It is dense and chewy, with black licorice and sage on the nose with a huge core of dark ripe fruits in the mouth. The kiss of American oak gives extra length on the back end, where it finishes with vanilla and blackberry. This wine is not for the faint of heart. It is a wine that will benefit from a little more bottle age, like 3 or 30 years if you have the patience!

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

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com, Oct. 2019

Rating: 97

Drink: 2019-2034

Lots of crème de cassis, vanilla bean, smoke, and meaty notes emerge from the 2016 Four Hearts Vineyard, a California beauty offering powerful, full-bodied, sexy aromas and flavors, gorgeous tannins, no hard edges, and a finish that won't quit. Based on 66% Petite Sirah and 34% Tempranillo that's sourced from dry-farmed, old head-trained vines, if this doesn't put a smile on your face, you might be dead. Drink bottles over the coming 15 years or more.

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

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well. As I've written more than once, there are few mailing lists worth being one, but without a doubt, this is one of them.