

SAXUM HEART STONE VINEYARD

2022 HEART STONE VINEYARD

31% Syrah, 29% Grenache, 22% Graciano, 18% Mataro
ALC: 16%
Cases 750 mL: 610
AVA: Adelaida District
Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard
Release: January 2025
Release Price: \$138
Drink: now - 2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Round and rich, with great depth and harmony. Showing great lift and complexity.

Jeb Dunnuck, August 2024

Rating: 96

Drink: 2024-2039

... the 2022 Heartstone is a ripe, round, velvety textured 2022 that has darker fruits as well as some savory flower, herbes de Provence, and peppery nuances. I love its overall balance, it has tons of character, ripe tannins, and a gorgeous finish. It's relatively approachable even today yet will evolve for 15 years with ease.

2021 HEART STONE VINEYARD

31% Grenache, 28% Syrah, 21% Graciano, 17% Mataro, 3% Petite Sirah
ALC: 15.4%
Cases 750 ml: 751
AVA: Adelaida District
Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard
Release: July 2023
Release Price: \$135
Drink: now - 2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Aged in used foudre, this bottling of Heart Stone seems much more bright and fresh than normal, which I think is the character of the vintage really coming through. It's both lifted and fresh, but has a dark undertone of black sage and fennel. I really dig it. The Grenache, Syrah, and Graciano really mesh well together.

2021 was a relatively cool year for us. Not quite as cool as 2010 or 2011, but definitely the mildest season we had seen in awhile. What makes this vintage interesting is that it was a dry season which gave the wines a different profile than the wetter years like 2019 or 2017. So what I'm getting at is it's a pretty unique vintage. Probably one that comes fairly close to resembling the 2007 vintage. (I'm sure you all like hearing that!) It's fresh, lifted and focused like you would expect in a cooler year, but has great concentration and texture from the dry weather. I'm happy to say the tannins are really soft and supple so I think it is a vintage that is versatile. Enjoyable in its youth (2-3 years after release, let's not be hasty here!), but will age out very gracefully, with a long life ahead of it.

REVIEWS:

Eric Guido, Vinous, July 2024

Rating: 97

Drink: 2028-2038

The 2021 Heart Stone Vineyard is an understated beauty, lifting from the glass with a burst of crushed rocks, wilted violets and citrus-laced blackberries. Cool-toned and racy in style, it sweeps across the palate with zesty wild berry fruits, complicated by a twist of tangerine and an air of sage. It leaves the palate drenched in primary concentration and crisp tannins, while a bump of residual acidity leaves the mouth watering for more. There's gorgeous harmony here, which should promote a long standing evolution.

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2024-2034

The 2021 Heart Stone Vineyard underwent a 22-month élevage in a mixture of new 300-l barrels, used foudre and concrete amphora. It opens with the most savory nose in the Saxum roster, showing aromas of black pepper, exotic spices, new leather and burning incense. The palate is suave and forward but also restrained, framed with mouth-watering acidity and concluding with powdery, grippy and persistent tannins. A beautiful, understated showing within a lineup of fairly massive wines, this should be a pleasure to drink over the coming decade and then some.

While there is no shortage of Paso Robles producers who hang their hats on going for the biggest and boldest wines in the area, Saxum's ability to craft powerful wines that deliver opulence and complexity while remaining balanced and authentic is second to none. Proprietor and winemaker Justin Smith's influence in the region is inescapable, as many other premier winemakers in the area either grew up with him, have hired him as a consultant, worked stints at Saxum, or any combination thereof. The wines are a true reflection of the region and, as such, are unapologetically bold and intense. However, they consistently offer nuance and elegance that are fleetingly rare in wines of their size and stature.

Jeb Dunnuck, July 2023 Sneak Peek

Rating: (95-97)

Drink: n/a

A lush, sexy, forward beauty... As with all of the '21s here, it has a vivid purple hue as well as a great perfume of sweet red and blue fruits, spring flowers, ground pepper, and underbrush, but it's on the palate where this beauty really shines. Layered, silky, and opulent, it's not yet bottled, but my money is on this drinking nicely right out of the gate.

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2020 HEART STONE VINEYARD

33% Graciano, 31% Grenache, 19% Syrah, 9% Mataro, 5% Touriga Nacional, 3% Petite Sirah

ALC: 15.6%

Cases 750 ml: 687

AVA: Adelaida District

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Release: July 2022

Release Price: \$132

Drink: now - 2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Bright red fruit really lifted by the use of Graciano as the lead here. Exotic aromatics.... Think Moroccan spices. Very focused. Long finish with dusty tannins.

I'm sure many of you have heard the woes of 2020. Fires devastated the entire West Coast of the U.S. Nobody was spared, but fortunately the vineyards of Paso were not hit too hard. The closest fire to us was up in Monterey County, which is about 90 miles north. Nonetheless, we approached the 2020 vintage very carefully in the cellar by running every possible type of analysis to detect damage from the smoke that was occasionally thick in the air that summer. Although a couple of the lots were suspect, everything else was clean. Phew!

REVIEWS:

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 94

Drink: 2024-2030

Aged 20 months in a combination of used 300-liter barrels and foudre, the 2020 Heart Stone Vineyard is a clear highlight within the 2020 Saxum roster. It opens with a fragrant nose of muddled berries, Angostura bitters, lifted citrus peel notes and an underlying savory character. The palate is ripe, plush and decadent yet bound with admirable energy, leading to a broad, meaty and powerful finish of massively staining dark fruits, drying, fine tannins and bracing structural acidity.

Eric Guido, Vinous, March 2023

Rating: 94

Drink: 2026-2038

The 2020 Heart Stone Vineyard is seductive in the glass, with a blend of crushed raspberries, dried citrus peels, sweet spice and lavender. This is elegant and graceful on the palate, with a wonderful lift to its depths of tart wild berry fruit. Sour citrus and balsamic tones add further tension toward the close. The 2020 finishes structured and long with a resonance of violette candies that linger.

It is impossible to travel and taste in Paso Robles without hearing the name Saxum repeatedly. Simply stated, Saxum placed the region on the map and continues to turn out one of its top wine portfolios year after year. Many winemakers got their start working with Justin Smith, owner and winemaker, while many others source fruit from vineyards that he or his father designed and planted. The style is unapologetically ripe and rich, just as Smith likes it, as do countless loyal followers that keep this one of the most highly desired mail lists in town. I tasted a mix of 2020s and 2019s, two very different vintages.

The 2019s are simply gorgeous, deep and powerful, with a long and bright future ahead. While the 2020s are more generous up front, they still show fantastic complexity but in a package that will be easier to understand in their early goings. Smith mentioned that while there were smoke issues, he felt they were minimal and that dialing back on co-ferments and using stems was very helpful. Ultimately, these are wines that no fan of the estate should be without. Smith's new project in Shadow Canyon on York Mountain is something to look forward to. The goal is to, one day, use only estate fruit. This cooler location is about ten miles from the ocean, with more annual rainfall and sandstone soils. A new 15-acre vineyard, primarily Grenache, will be planted shortly.

Jeb Dunnuck, Sept 2022

Rating: 93-95

Drink: n/a

Graciano is the leading variety in the 2020 Heart Stone Vineyard (33% Graciano, 31% Grenache, 19% Syrah, and the rest Mourvedre, Touriga Nacional, and Petite Sirah), and it's another full-bodied, mouth-filling substantial wine offering plenty of dark, chocolaty fruit, some smoked herb and graphite nuances, a big mid-palate, and some chewy tannins.

I was able to taste three vintages from Saxum, the late release 2019s from bottle, the majority of the 2020 lineup from barrel, and a handful of 2021 barrel samples. As I wrote last year, the 2019s are just brilliant, ripe, hedonistic, magical wines, and these late releases only reinforce that opinion. Looking at the 2020s, this is clearly a challenging vintage, with many wines having subtle smoky nuances and firmer yet still ripe tannins. Justin commented that the lab numbers regarding smoke taint were very low, so I think these are safe wines that will offer plenty of pleasure, although this is not a vintage to hide in the cellar. The 2021s that I was able to taste were terrific, and this will clearly be another terrific vintage here. In addition, they've planted a new vineyard located just four miles off the Pacific, the Cayucos Ridge Vineyard, and I expect we'll see more releases from that site in the future.

2019 HEART STONE VINEYARD

32% Graciano, 30% Grenache, 24% Syrah, 8% Mataro, 4% Petite Sirah, 1% Viognier, 1% Touriga Nacional

ALC: 15.8%

Cases 750 ml: 585

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Release: July 2021

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Simple is not an adjective you'd use to describe this wine. It has Graciano as the lead varietal, but it's really an ensemble cast. Grenache and Syrah also vie for your attention. Heart Stone is probably the spiciest wine in the line up, but also the most layered. I always like how this vineyard really makes you think. It's tasty. It's intellectual. Oooh la la.

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We have finally bottled up some of our amazing 2019s. I say finally because this year it was quite an ordeal to import the glass from Italy due to ports that are completely jammed up. After waiting a few extra weeks we received our fancy new embossed bottles. They look pretty sweet, if I do say so myself, but worth the hassle? Yes it was. They are SEXY. Speaking of sexy, have we talked about the 2019s yet? This vintage has really taken me by surprise. I admit that early on I was not overly excited by the 19s. I thought they were over shadowed by the showy, dark, intense 2018s. But these 19s are like a slow burn that just keeps building and building. Every time I tasted them as they aged in barrel they have become better and better. At this point I would rank this vintage right up there in the top 3 vintages. What I love about them is that they have a bit of everything. Spice? Check! Rich fruit? Check! Smooth, mouth coating tannins? Check, check and check! Not only does this vintage have a lot going on, it is also approachable in its youth. Like the 2017s were/are. Here's the 19s.... approachable tannins like the 17s, spice like the 11s, intensity like the 07s and 09s, and beautiful aromatics like the 15s. Best of all the worlds? Maybe!?!

REVIEWS:

Josh Reynolds, Vinous, July 2022

Rating: 97

Drink: 2025-2035

Deep, bright-rimmed ruby. Vibrant raspberry, cherry, blueberry and floral scents are complicated by suggestions of botanical herbs and exotic spices. Juicy and energetic on the palate, offering intense, finely detailed red and blue fruit liqueur and spicecake flavors and a subtle lavender nuance. Fine-grained tannins lend gentle grip to a wonderfully long, focused finish that leaves suave floral pastille, vanilla and Moroccan spice notes behind.

At the risk of sounding like a skipping record, Justin Smith has, again, produced the strongest set of releases this year from Paso Robles. Yes, there's plenty of competition out there, and the numbers grow every year, but the Saxum 2019s sit at the top of the vintage hierarchy yet again. Smith is constantly refining his winemaking techniques, with particular focus on how the wines are raised in his hillside tunnels. Concrete tanks and eggs as well as oak vessels of varying age, shape and size all come into play here, to consistently stunning results. This set of bottlings show the elegance of the vintage, combined with the depth and intensity of flavor that has long been the Saxum trademark. They should age effortlessly, like their outstanding 2018 siblings, a few of which were or are being released alongside the 2019s. A 222-acre property in the York Mountain AVA is now part of Saxum's holdings and planting is under way, so expect lots more activity here in the coming years.

2018 HEART STONE VINEYARD

59% Syrah, 14% Grenache, 14% Touriga Nacional, 13% Graciano

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 533

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Release: January 2021

Release Price: \$98

Drink: now - 2035

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

OK, I'm going to lead off this descriptor by saying this 2018 version is way more structured than the '17. It is a phenomenal wine, but it is going to need some time to chill. This wine, like the G2 and James Berry, was brought up in partial foudre (3000 Liter neutral oak cask), but because the Heart Stone is considerably smaller, it sees a higher proportion of foudre. So there are some tradeoffs going on. With less barrel influence the vineyard and its fruit get to be front and center. I love it, but prepare yourself for less oak influence. As for the wine descriptors, my wife Heather described it best, saying it was like a perfectly cooked steak, char, black pepper and blood. 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: 98

Drink: 2020-2035

A rich, powerful wine based on 59% Syrah, 14% Grenache, 14% Touriga Nacional, and the rest Graciano, brought up mostly in foudre, the 2018 Heart Stone Vineyard's deep purple color is followed by killer notes of red and black currants, peppery herbs, loamy soil, and assorted meaty, spice notes. It has a Rhône-like spicy, meaty, savory character yet packs gorgeous purity of fruit, full-bodied richness, and sweet, polished tannins that are pure Paso Robles. Enjoy this brilliant blend any time over the coming 10-15 years. Along with the 2007, this is the finest example of this cuvée I've tasted.

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Josh Reynolds, Vinous, Dec 2020

Rating: 97

Drink: 2027-2037

Glass-staining purple. Powerfully scented ripe dark fruit, potpourri, incense and olive paste qualities on the nose, along with a smoky mineral flourish that builds as the wine opens up. Boasts superb depth as well as energy and displays sharp definition to the sweet blackberry, cherry liqueur, fruitcake and candied violet flavors, which are sharpened by a jolt of spicy black pepper. Shows distinctly rich yet nervy character, delivering sharp focus, youthfully chewy tannins and a wonderfully long, dark fruit-dominated finish.

Justin Smith's contribution to the success of Paso Robles and the status of its wines cannot be overstated. His Saxum wines are the most sought-after of the region, so expectations are always high when approaching a bottle, and it's always a pleasure to see results live up to or surpass reputation. That was emphatically the case this year, as this was one of the most successful lineups of wines that I have ever tasted, from anywhere. Longtime followers of these wines, lucky bastards that they are, know how uncanny they are for their ability to play depth and power off energy and finesse, and that's crystal-clear in 2018 and even the hot 2017 vintage. The extended growing season of 2018 helped the wines retain freshness while developing concentration, which any winegrower will tell you is the Holy Grail of their craft. In 2017 the heat of the growing season here on Paso Robles' limestone-soil-dominated west side was mitigated by the usual diurnal temperature shifts and, of course, skilled blending in the cellar helped immeasurably. While Saxum's wines command lofty prices on the secondary market, it should be noted that ex-cellar pricing remains extremely fair for such a sought-after producer.

Erin Brooks, Wine Advocate, Jan 2021

Rating: 98

Drink: 2022-2037

The 2018 Heart Stone Vineyard is big and flavorful but tremendously elegant this vintage. A blend of 59% Syrah, 14% Grenache, 14% Touriga Nacional and 13% Graciano, it has a deep, alluring perfume, loaded with purple flowers, licorice, earth, charcuterie and blackberry pie scents. The palate is full-bodied and structured by wonderfully ripe tannins, exploding with spiced dark fruits that expand effortlessly into a very long, lifted finish. It's stunning now but will offer more with time in the cellar.

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!

2017 HEART STONE VINEYARD

50% Syrah, 22% Grenache, 14% Graciano, 8% Petite Sirah, 6% Touriga Nacional

ALC: 15.6%

Cases 750 ml: 423

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2020

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2022-2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I just adore the 2017 Heart Stone Vineyard. As many of you veterans will know, I like to have fun with this cuvée and often use it as a guinea pig if you will. The 2006 saw zero new oak and all stems. The 2011 was all aged in concrete. Well, the 2017 vintage was all aged in 1 used 3200L foudre. The absence of new oak really lets the fruit shine through, and the large vessel really kept the aromatics on the pure vineyard driven side of things... I'd say camphor, cherries, and a damp pine forest. The purity of fruit flavors that come through in the mouth are remarkably intriguing. Of all the 2017 wines, this is the one I'm drinking right now (besides the Graciano). In spite of all the big bruiser varieties in this blend, Syrah, Touriga Nacional, Petite Sirah, Graciano, it is a surprisingly very open, elegant wine. Go figure!

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, Oct 2019

Rating: 97

Drink: 2021-2036

There was a single foudre of the 2017 Heart Stone Vineyard, which checks in as a blend of 50% Syrah, 22% Grenache, 14% Graciano, and the rest Petite Sirah and Touriga Nacional that was mostly destemmed. Showing even better from bottle than barrel, it offers a stunning nose of ripe blueberries, black raspberries, ground pepper, and violets. Full-bodied, rounded, and seamless on the palate, it has a beautiful sense of complexity and purity paired with serious depth of fruit and opulence on the palate.

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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 Brooks, Wine Advocate, Feb 2020

Rating: 93

Drink: 2020-2030

The 2017 Heart Stone Vineyard is made up of 50% Syrah, 22% Grenache, 14% Graciano, 8% Petite Sirah and 6% Touriga Nacional. Medium to deep ruby, it's scented of dried sour cherries, black cherries and currants with nuances of violet, orange peel, black tea leaves, underbrush and warm earth. Medium to full-bodied, it has a good balance of earth and fruit, with a grainy frame and long, layered finish.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator

Producer Spotlight, Dec. 18, 2019

Rating: 93

Drink: 2019 through 2029

Potent yet polished, with deeply layered black raspberry, dried cherry, orange zest and smoky pepper flavors that build tension toward fine-grained tannins. Syrah, Petite Sirah, Touriga Nacional, Grenache and Graciano.

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.

2016 HEART STONE VINEYARD

51% Grenache, 27% Syrah, 13% Mataro, 6% Petite Sirah, 3% Touriga Nacional

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 236

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2019

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2021-2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2016 Heart Stone Vineyard is our only Grenache based wine in this line up. It also sees the addition of some new plantings there. A block of Petite Sirah and a block of Touriga Nacional. Both planted at a very high density on steep hillsides that have to be hand farmed. There wasn't enough to make much of a difference in this vintage, but 2017 and 2018 provided enough to add another dimension to the wines, and we are super stoked. Not to get off subject, but sometimes we get asked why are we bringing in more new strange varieties, and it's like this, it's just another flavor or ingredient when you're cooking a dish, or another color in your palette when you are painting a picture. With more options, I am able to create something more delicious!

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, Nov 2018

Rating: 97

Drink: n/a

The 2016 Heartstone is another sensational wine from this vintage, and it's also one of the more upfront and approachable in the lineup from Smith. Based on 51% Grenache, 27% Syrah, 13% Mataro, and the rest Petite Sirah and Touriga Nacional, it offers a complex bouquet of black raspberries, Christmas spice, herbes de Provence, and blood orange. Beautifully textured, seamless, and silky, this beauty doesn't put a foot wrong, has no hard edges, and is just a glorious drink. While it's already showing beautifully, it's going to evolve nicely 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

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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: 95-97

Drink: NA

Scheduled for bottling in June, the 2016 Heart Stone Vineyard offers up a pretty bouquet of dried flowers and wild berries, framed by incipient savory bass notes. On the palate, it's full-bodied, fine-grained and elegant, with bright, crunchy fruit flavors, excellent concentration and a long, perfumed finish. This is the only wine in the Saxum cellar that comes from the Adelaida District on the western side of Paso Robles. The 2016 is a blend of 51% Grenache, 27% Syrah, 13% Mataro, 6% Petite Sirah and 3% Touriga Nacional. It's being matured in 37% new puncheons, 53% large 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.

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: 2025-2035

Deep ruby. Mineral-tinged dark berry, star anise, cola, licorice and floral oil qualities on the explosively perfumed nose. Deeply concentrated, expansive flavors of black currant, cherry liqueur, spicecake, smoked meat and candied flowers are complicated by licorice candy and bitter chocolate notes that build on the back half. Sweet, sappy and focused on the floral-driven finish, which shows outstanding delineation and youthfully chewy tannins that build steadily and harmoniously.

Tim Fish, Wine Spectator, April 2019

Rating: 93

Drink: now-2026

A distinctive, eclectic style, offering a potpourri of aromas and flavors, from potent blackberry and licorice to fruitcake spices, black olive and crushed stone. Builds tension toward broad-shouldered tannins. Syrah, Grenache, Mataro, Petite Sirah and Touriga Nacional.

2015 HEART STONE VINEYARD

38% Syrah, 38% Grenache, 24% Mourvèdre

ALC: 14.7%

Cases 750 ml: 350

Cases 1.5 L: 60

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2018

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2019-2029+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

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

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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! Anyway, 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:

Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Wine Advocate Sept 2017

Rating: 96+

Drink: 2017-2030

Composed of 38% Syrah, 38% Grenache and 24% Mourvèdre, the 2015 Heart Stone Vineyard has a medium to deep garnet-purple color and beautiful scents of roses and kirsch plus nuances of salami, spice cake, tar, new leather and earth. Full-bodied, concentrated and full-on seductive, it has lovely rich fruit and spice layers, framed by rounded tannins and finishing with a lovely herbal lift.

Josh Reynolds. Vinous, Nov 2017

Rating: 96

Drink: 2023-2035

Brilliant purple. Exotically perfumed aromas of black and blue fruit preserves, potpourri and licorice, along with woodsmoke, vanilla and pipe tobacco overtones. Silky, seamless and expansive on the palate, offering energetic black raspberry, boysenberry and fruitcake flavors that put on weight with aeration while retaining urgency. Rich yet lively and incisive, finishing bright and sweet, with supple tannins, lingering sweetness and superb persistence. This wine's interplay of power and elegance is quite something.

Jeb Dunnuck, JebDunnuck.com

Tasting Date: 8/10/2017

Rating: 95

Drink: n/a

Another perfumed, ethereally textured 2015, the 2015 Heartstone Vineyard checks in as 38% Syrah, 38% Grenache and 24% Mourvèdre. It offers lots of cranberry, kirsch, dried herbs and even a hint of dried flowers to go with a full-bodied, lightly textured, elegant style on the palate. I suspect it will gain a touch of weight over the coming 2-3 years and drink nicely through 2027.

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: 93

Drink: 2019 through 2027

A spirited blend, with distinctive dark berry, crushed rock and smoked pepper aromas that open to concentrated yet polished plum, black olive and licorice flavors that finish with big but refined tannins. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

2014 HEART STONE VINEYARD

57% Syrah, 24% Grenache, 19% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.9%

Cases 750 ml: 400

Cases 1.5 L: 60

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: July 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2018-2028+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2014 is classic Heart Stone, probably the most elegant and feminine of the line up. We made two picks at HSV. Like usual, the first pick was mainly Syrah along with a little Grenache and Mourvèdre co-fermented from the upper blocks. The second pick comprised the bulk of the Grenache and Mourvèdre and the remaining Syrah, which was left whole cluster. Aged in mainly new puncheons, it shows a beautiful nose of violets with undertones of cranberry and raspberries. Lots of focus and a long finish with hints of cola berry.

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.

SAXUM HEART STONE VINEYARD

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226, Aug 2016

Rating: 97

Drink: 2017-2027

A classic Paso Robles Syrah (57% Syrah, 24% Grenache and the rest Mourvèdre) that delivers on all accounts, the 2014 Heart Stone Vineyard is a big, rich, decadently styled beauty that offers tons of upfront spice, dark fruits, licorice and smoked earth aromatics, with more floral, violets and sappy underbrush notes coming through with air that keep it far for simple or straightforward. Utterly seamless on the palate, with full-bodied richness, a big, rich mid-palate and the chalky tannin that's the hallmark of these limestone hills on the west side of Paso Robles, this riveting, powerful, yet weightless beauty just begs to be drunk today, yet it will evolve easily for a decade or 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: 94

Drink: 2018 through 2028

Potent and powerfully built, with a distinctive backbone of crushed stone minerality, plus complex flavors of licorice, black olive, dark berry and bittersweet chocolate. The tannins are big but polished. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

Josh Reynolds. Vinous, Sept 2016

Rating: 94

Drink: 2020-2027

(raised entirely in French oak puncheons, 60 percent of them new) Brilliant violet. Bright, intensely perfumed aromas of red and blue preserves, Asian spices and potpourri are given vivacity by a smoky mineral nuance. Juicy and pure, displaying deeply concentrated boysenberry and cherry liqueur flavors along with hints of candied violet and star anise. Strongly echoes the floral and spicy notes on the strikingly long, penetrating finish, which features velvety tannins and a hint of candied licorice.

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.

2013 HEART STONE VINEYARD

54% Syrah, 35% Grenache, 11% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 550

Cases 1.5 L: 100

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2016

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2018-2028+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

You know how bullish I am on these 13s (I think about everyone is, actually), well, I haven't changed my tune since I wrote to you last. I am still really digging them. As always, these wines will need a few years of slumber, but they will reward you greatly. Juicy rich fruit, tons of sweet tannins, and incredible complexity. The depth is really what gets me going on them, ever changing layers that reveal new aspects of the wine with each sip. It definitely makes drinking them a joy.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #226, Aug 2016

Rating: 95

Drink: 2017 - 2027

Checking in as a final blend of 54% Syrah, 35% Grenache and 11% Mourvèdre, the 2013 Heart Stone Vineyard shows the class and purity of the vintage in its complex, floral-laced aromas of dark fruits, spice and minerality. Full-bodied, seamless and silky, with no hard edges and terrific purity, it's another 2013 from Smith that will open up with another year in bottle.

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!

Wine Spectator, Issue: Web 2015

Rating: 92

Drink: 2018 through 2027

Distinctive and densely constructed, with aromas of blackberry, black tea and olive leading to tightly focused, personality-filled flavors of wild berry, licorice and smoky peppered sage. Offers a firm, loamy structure and a tannic frame on the finish. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

Josh Reynolds. Vinous, Sept 2016

Rating: 95

Drink: 2020-2027

Vibrant purple. Intensely perfumed scents of ripe black and blue fruits, incense and cola gain vivacity from a smoky mineral nuance. Deeply concentrated, palate-staining blueberry, spicecake and floral pastille flavors are accompanied by suggestions of licorice and Indian spices that emerge on the back half. Finishes with a suave echo of candied violet,

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displaying slowly building tannins, outstanding energy and dark-fruit-driven persistence.

2012 HEART STONE VINEYARD

43% Syrah, 41% Grenache, 16% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.1%

Cases 750 ml: 410

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2015

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2018-2028+

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The 2012 vintage 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 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!

As for our spring release, we are offering the second half of our 2012 wines which are opening up beautifully. I popped the corks on all of them to do a little research for you (I know, the sacrifices I make!) and was shocked at just how much they have softened since the last time I tried them. They are starting to blossom! What perplexed me about this vintage was the tannin structure. It started out massive, and made me think that these wines were going to need years in the cellar before they began showing their stuff. I still think 3-5 years will greatly benefit the wines, but they will give great pleasure to those who can't hold out. I would drink the Heart Stone and maybe the Booker Vineyard first while you let the Broken Stones and Bone Rock slumber.

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #214, Aug 2014

Rating: 96

Drink: NA

The 2012 Heart Stone Vineyard is 43% Syrah, 41% Grenache and 16% Mourvèdre that was aged mostly in concrete (the '11 was aged 100% in concrete) yet also saw some new and neutral puncheons. Fermented with 40% whole clusters, it's a big, burly effort that has beautiful creme de cassis, black raspberry, crushed violets, vanilla bean and exotic flower-like qualities all emerging from the glass. It too has a structured feel, with high, yet ripe tannin, so short-term cellaring is also advised here.

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.

Josh Raynolds, Vinous, Sept 2015

Rating: 92 +

Drink: 2021-2028

Opaque purple. Smoky, deeply pitched black raspberry, gingerbread and floral pastille scents show excellent clarity. Sweet and palate-staining, with intense red and dark berry liqueur flavors stretching out slowly. Finishes with outstanding thrust and length, chewy tannins coming up quickly to add grip.

2011 HEART STONE VINEYARD

58% Syrah, 37% Grenache, 5% Mourvèdre

ALC: 14.8%

Cases 750 ml: 250

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: August 2013

Release Price: \$89

Drink: 2013-2021

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This wine is crazy! We picked the whole vineyard at once, all three varieties, and threw them all in the fermentor together. We left the Syrah whole cluster, but de-stemmed half the Grenache and all the Mourvèdre. The ferments from the Heart Stone Vineyard were so incredibly spicy that I wanted to capture it in the bottle that way, so I did something we haven't done before... Upon completion of fermentation we pressed the entire lot into a single concrete vessel, where it aged for a year before being racked into some large neutral puncheons where it remained until bottling. So no new wood, and the bulk of its life in concrete, made for a fascinating wine! I love it. Very, very, spicy, but still a great rich focused palette. I am very curious as to how this wine will evolve in bottle. I hope it keeps its spice. The Heart Stone Vineyard will be fascinating to follow.

SAXUM HEART STONE VINEYARD

REVIEWS:

Jeb Dunnuck, Wine Advocate #214, Aug 2014

Rating: 95

Drink: 2015-2025

The 2011 Heart Stone Vineyard is a blend of 58% Syrah, 37% Grenache and 5% Mourvedre that was brought up in mostly concrete, with 20% in puncheons. Showing beautifully from barrel, it didn't disappoint from bottle and has a perfumed, elegant feel to its purple fruits, lavender, violets, white pepper and underbrush-like aromas and flavors. The whole cluster inclusion shows here, yet it has fantastic purity, fine tannin and integrated acidity. Give it another year in the cellar and enjoy bottles through 2025.

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: Web 2014

Rating: 88

Drink: 2015 through 2024

A rustic, chewy version that puts tobacco, dried herb, dark berry and black licorice notes on display, The tannins cling and hang on, driving the flavors. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2013

Rating: 93

(58% syrah, 37% grenache and 5% mourvedre; no new oak and 14.8% alcohol, which is quite low by Saxum standards): Opaque purple. Highly perfumed aromas of dark fruit preserves, violet, olive tapenade and cracked pepper, with an exotic blood orange nuance emerging with aeration. Weighty but surprisingly lithe on the palate, offering sweet blueberry and mulberry flavors and strong floral and spicecake accents. Closes spicy and long, with supple tannins making a late appearance and adding gentle grip.

2010 HEART STONE VINEYARD

51% Syrah, 49% Grenache

ALC: 15.7%

Cases 750 ml: 400

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2013

Release Price: \$89

Drink: 2012-2020

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.

REVIEWS:

Antonio Galloni, Wine Advocate #202, Aug 2012

Rating: 95-97

Drink: 2014-2020

The 2010 Heart Stone Vineyard opens with a dark, brooding nose redolent of smoke, tar, incense and licorice. Elements of dark, inward fruit continue to build in the glass. There is an exotic element in the Heart Stone that is undeniably appealing. Layers of fruit crescendo to the huge, towering finish. The 2010 is 51% Syrah and 49% Grenache aged in small new French oak barrels, an approach that works extremely well here. Justin Smith seems to know exactly what each of his wines needs. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2020.

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

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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, Web-Only 2012

Rating: 94

Drink: now through 2024

Offers a broad range of dense, earth- and mineral-laced cranberry, raspberry and wild berry, touching on berry pie and black licorice. Ends chewy. Syrah and Grenache. Drink now through 2024.

Josh Reynolds, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar, Nov/Dec 2012

Rating: 94

Inky ruby. Powerful aromas of cherry-cola, blackberry, smoky minerals and violet, with a sexy oak spice nuance in the background. Lush and creamy on the palate, offering sweet, deeply concentrated dark berry flavors and a refreshing jolt of smoky minerals. Finishes bright and delineated, with lingering notes of cinnamon and candied flowers.

Jeb Dunnuck, The Rhone Report

Rating: 95

More dense and rich, the 2010 Heart Stone Vineyard is a co-fermented blend of 51% Syrah and 49% Grenache that comes from a small 7-acre, south facing vineyard located on the western side of Paso Robles. Aged mostly in large oak puncheons for 20-28 months, it offers up a savory, complex bouquet of kirsch and blackberry-like fruit, meat juice, Provencal herbs, dried licorice, and dusty minerality. Gorgeous on the palate as well, with a deft, elegant texture, building richness, and layers of chewy tannin, this beauty is reasonably approachable now, yet will be even better in 2-3 years. It will drink well for 12-15 years.

2008 HEART STONE VINEYARD

47% Syrah, 39% Grenache, 14% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.3%

Cases 750 ml: 370

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2011

Release Price: \$75

Drink: 2012-2024

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The Heart Stone Vineyard is all about elegance and finesse, great texture, I may get some flack for this upcoming comparison, but it reminds me of a grand cru Burgundy!

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #190, Aug 2010

Rating: 93

Drink: 2010-2020

The 2008 Heart Stone, a blend of 47% Syrah, 39% Grenache, and 14% Mourvèdre, is very elegant but evolved and supple, with beautiful kirsch and black currant fruit intermixed with licorice, camphor, pepper, and a hint of lavender. More evolved than the 2007 was at a similar stage, but with slightly lower alcohols, its velvety tannins stand out in this rich, plush, opulent, voluptuously textured wine. Drink it over the next 7-10 years.

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

Rating: 95

Drink: now through 2017

Impresses with its finesse, serving up a supple, generous mix of up-front plum, huckleberry and blueberry fruit that's elegant, delicate and polished. Full-bodied, seamless and refined, ending with a long, detailed finish. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

2007 HEART STONE VINEYARD

65% Syrah, 21% Grenache, 14% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.3%

Cases 750 ml: 475

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2010

Release Price: \$75

Drink: 2011-2023

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Our 2007s, are what I feel is the best vintage yet for Saxum. So yes, I think each of these wines is the best that we have done, they are more complex, layered, and concentrated than previous years. These wines have a long life ahead of them due to their great acidity and tannin structure, yet they are enjoyable now because they are so well balanced. The 2007's are chameleons too. When you first pour yourself a taste they quickly start changing in the glass. Every smell and taste produces a new element, the first second there are violets and the next is roasted meats, truly fascinating. It will be a joy to watch how they develop in bottle over the next decade or more.

The Heart Stone went into bottle in January 2010, after 26 months in oak. I felt that their tannins could use a little extra time in barrel to smooth out. Please let them rest for a few months after they arrive, they are still just babies.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: (96-98+)

Drink: N/A

A blend of 65% Syrah, 21% Grenache, and 14% Mourvèdre, the 2007 Heart Stone Vineyard was still in barrel when I tasted it. About 30% stems were used during the fermentation, and the wine appears to have enormous potential. A phenomenal nose

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of roasted Provencal herbs, meat juices, blackberries, spice box, pepper, earth, and a hint of truffles is followed by a layered, multidimensional wine displaying this vintage's tell-tale purity and freshness.

One of California's super-star producers, Saxum owns one of the state's most remarkable vineyard sites, the James Berry Vineyard, which has been broken into a number of different blocks, all planted on rocky limestone hillsides. This estate's approach to winemaking is decidedly artisanal, with extraordinarily small yields as well as a minimalistic winemaking philosophy. Proprietors Justin and Heather Smith, who seem much too young to be producing such prodigious wines, fashion separate blends from the different blocks of the James Berry Vineyard. They also produce a cuvee from the 7-acre Heart Stone Vineyard (also planted on limestone soils) and one from the Booker Vineyard. Saxum's 2006s are all home runs, but the utterly prodigious 2007s should resonate for decades, and showcase the brilliant potential of these limestone hillside sites west of Highway 101. Kudos to everyone at Saxum. My visit began with two of Smith's experimental cuvees, which are only available to mailing list customers. As remarkable as the 2006s are, the 2007s are even more prodigious, showcasing just how brilliant certain Paso Robles terroirs can be. Even the most cynical observers of the Rhone Ranger scene will have to take notice of these wines. Even though some of the 2007s had just undergone bottling, I was blown away by how well they performed just a week after being bottled (often one of the worst times to taste a wine). In short, Saxum's prodigious 2007s are even more nuanced, complex, and concentrated than their brilliant 2006s.

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

Rating: 97

There's amazing harmony and range of flavor in this red, which offers richness, elegance and finesse, with blackberry, wild berry, plum and cherry fruit that's full-bodied, smooth-textured and layered, opening doors of flavor on an amazingly long, intricate finish. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre.

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

Rating: 93

Opaque purple. Explosive aromas of black raspberry, cherry pit, pomegranate molasses and Asian spices. Densely packed red and dark fruit flavors show intense spiciness and unfurl slowly to offer sexy floral character. Dense but with unlikely energy and finesse; this is just hinting at its potential.

2006 HEART STONE VINEYARD

38% Syrah, 36% Grenache, 26% Mourvèdre

ALC: 15.6%

Cases 750 ml: 300

Cases 1.5L: 36

Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard

Released: January 2009

Release Price: \$55

Drink: 2012-2023

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Stylistically, the Heart Stone Vineyard bottling is typically done with more wholecluster fermentations and aged in neutral oak, showing more spice and sap with less polish than it's siblings.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #184, Aug 2009

Rating: 93

Drink: 2010-2025

A blend of 38% Syrah, 36% Grenache, and 26% Mourvèdre, the 2006 Heart Stone Vineyard offers up scents of flowers, lavender, black cherries, raspberries, blackberries, underbrush, and forest floor. Justin Smith uses a lot of whole clusters in his fermentation, which seems to give his wines structure as well as nuance. This is the most French-like of Saxum's 2006s, and it comes across like a restrained, northern Rhone-like effort that is only hinting at its ultimate potential. It will benefit from 1-3 years of cellaring, and should evolve for 10-15 years.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Mar 31, 2009

Rating: 93

Drink: now through 2014

Intense and powerful, with ripe, focused plum, blackberry and wild berry fruit that's shaded by pepper and nutmeg flavors. Full-bodied, dense and chewy, with pleasantly earthy tannins. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2014. 390 cases made.

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

Rating: 92

Bright red. Sexy, strongly floral aromas of strawberry, black raspberry and candied flowers, with a suave Christmas spice quality. Sappy and sweet, with vivid red fruit and floral pastille flavors and a seductive overlay of cinnamon and mace. Bright minerals add lift and cut to the sappy finish. This was fermented with about 35% whole clusters.

SAXUM HEART STONE VINEYARD

2005 HEART STONE VINEYARD

44% Syrah, 33% Grenache, 23% Mourvèdre
ALC: 15.7%
Cases 750 ml: 400
Cases 1.5L: 36
Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard
Released: August 2007
Release Price: \$55
Drink: now - 2018

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I am really happy with this wine. It strikes a great balance between big fruit and delicacy. The Grenache really comes through on the nose with tons of kirsch, the Syrah gives it great texture, and the Mourvedre adds some spice to the finish. Thanks to the great acidity the purity of the wine shines through, yet like all of Saxums' wines, it's got some weight, with a long life ahead of it.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #177, Jun 2008

Rating: 94

Drink: 2009-2019

The northern Rhone-like 2005 Heart Stone Vineyard is a blend of 44% Syrah, 33% Grenache, and 23% Mourvèdre. A meaty nose with roasted Provencal herbs, cassis, blackberry, licorice, and smoke emerges from this Hermitage-styled effort. Structured and firm, it will benefit from 1-2 years of bottle age, and should evolve effortlessly for a decade or more. The bottled 2005s are all performing well.

James Laube, Wine Spectator, Issue: Mar 31, 2008

Rating: 90

Drink: now through 2011

Offers subtlety and finesse. A charming style, with rich layers of dried currant, sage, fresh earth, mineral and light cedary oak. Holds its focus and ends with a complex aftertaste. Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2011. 500 cases made.

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

Rating: 92

Deep ruby. Room-filling bouquet of red and black fruits, Asian spices, fresh violet and lavender and suave vanillin oak. Vibrant, palate-staining raspberry and blackberry flavors deliver sweet depth, with zesty minerality adding energy. Silky tannins slowly build on the long, spicy finish. Seamless and elegant; this is more open than the Broken Stones today.

2004 HEART STONE VINEYARD

60% Syrah, 30% Mourvèdre, 20% Grenache
ALC: 15.9%
Cases 750 ml: 100
Cases 1.5L: 20
Vineyard: Heart Stone Vineyard
Released: August 2006
Release Price: \$45
Drink: now - 2012

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

The Heart Stone Vineyard has always made up about 50% of our Broken Stones Cuvee. In 2004 we felt it was time to showcase the vineyard by pulling aside 9 of our favorite barrels and doing a vineyard designate with them. We are very happy with the results from this fantastic little vineyard. It shows tremendous depth and weight, but I feel it needs at least a couple of years to really show its stuff.

REVIEWS:

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate #166, Aug 2006

Rating: 92

Drink: 2006-2018

The dark ruby-hued 2004 Heart Stone Vineyard (a 200-case blend of 60% Syrah, 30% Mourvèdre, and 10% Grenache) boasts a stunning perfume of flowers, blueberries, and briery, wild berry fruit. The distinctive aromatics are followed by a wine with soft tannins, medium to full body, and well-integrated acidity, tannin, and wood. It should evolve for 12 or more years.

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

Rating: 90

Medium ruby. Expressive aromas of licorice, smoked meat, spicecake, tree bark and tar, with plenty of dark fruits in the background. Then sweet, creamy and expansive, with juicy dark berry flavors nicely framed by peppery spices and ripe acidity. The long finish features sweet, dusty tannins and lingering blackberry and boysenberry fruit.