

SAXUM 4HEARTS VINEYARD

2023 4HEARTS VINEYARD

48% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Petite Sirah, 25% Zinfandel
ALC: 15.3%
Cases 750 ml: 340
AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek
Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard
Release: July 2025
Release Price: \$138
Drink: 2026 - 2046

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

Wow, what a freaking wine. I love it. And it makes me sad because this is going to be our last vintage from this vineyard. Bittersweet! I have really loved working with this spot over the years, but we are transitioning to being 100% estate, which will ultimately lead to an increase in quality, but damn I enjoy this wine. This version, the best one yet I believe, has that perfect balance brought about by the unlikely trifecta of Cab Sauv, Petite Sirah, and Zinfandel. Each playing a vital role in the finished product; herbal (Cab), spicy (PS), fruity (Zin), and then sprinkle in that special sauce which is a little American oak and you got yourself something that could come from nowhere else on earth besides right here in the Willow Creek District of Paso Robles.

Such an ideal vintage. Everything lined up perfectly. Great rainfall in the winter and spring, and then a long, gentle growing season with no heat spikes to make us fret. The only challenge with '23 occurred when all the fruit from our vineyards were ripe and ready to go at the same time! That was a bit chaotic. Alas, the wines all shine. They are similar to the 2019 vintage, with the great spice and savory notes you get from a cooler season with a long hang time—along with perfect ripeness, which is what happens when you grow grapes in a perfect place like California's Central Coast.

REVIEWS:

Eric Guido, Vinous, June 2025

Rating: 96

Drink: 2028-2038

Spicy to the core, the 2023 4hearts Vineyard wafts up with a perfumed blend of cedar box, clove, dusty blackcurrant and a hint of rosemary. Deeply textural and cool toned, it reveals its Cabernet component through a tinge of graphite minerals while ripe red and black fruit drench the palate in primary concentration. Fine-grained tannins frame the palate as the 2023 tapers off classically dry and long, with a resonance of allspice that lingers. Classic in feel and beautifully balanced.

... To finish our tasting, we delved into some of the just-bottled 2023s, where the vintage imparted a savory edginess to the wines that beautifully offsets their inherent richness. The 2023 vintage will be the last release of the FourHearts and Heart Stone wines, as Saxum has moved to using only 100% estate fruit. It's a good time to be a Saxum fan.

2022 4HEARTS VINEYARD

39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Petite Sirah, 25% Zinfandel
ALC: 15.7%
Cases 750 ml: 508
AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek
Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard
Release: January 2025
Release Price: \$138
Drink: 2026 - 2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I love this combo. Cab, Petite Sirah and Zin? Who would have thought they'd all play so well together. I think this is the most fun wine we make. The kiss of American Oak is the cherry on top.

Jeb Dunnuck, [JebDunnuck.com](https://www.jebdunnuck.com), August 2024

Rating: 95

Drink: 2024-2039

Always one of the more exotic wines in the lineup, the 2022 Four Hearts is ... aged in a touch of American oak. Rocking levels of darker, currant-like fruit as well as spicy, vanilla, and cigar notes all shine on the nose, and this puppy hits the palate with medium to full-bodied richness, a layered, rounded mouthfeel, ripe tannins, and a great finish. This singular Paso beauty will evolve for 15 years in cold cellars.

2021 4HEARTS VINEYARD

46% Petite Sirah, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Zinfandel
ALC: 15.5%
Cases 750 ml: 333
AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek
Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard
Release: July 2023
Release Price: \$135
Drink: 2026 - 2040

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

I'm really digging this wine. It is coming at you from left field with its crazy blend of Petite Sirah and Cab, and then you throw in this kiss of American oak? Crazy stuff. I absolutely love it. Black licorice, some cab spice (you know what I'm talking about) and nice dense tannins that promise to pair perfectly with some summer BBQ. Open this wine after grilling up a mess of meats and veggies and tell me that they aren't made for each other.

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

SAXUM 4HEARTS VINEYARD

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: 94

Drink: 2026-2036

Rich and perfumed, the 2021 Four Hearts Vineyard shows peppery rose coming together with plum sauce, grilled herbs and a hint of sweet spice in the glass. This is seamlessly silk and serene displaying admirable length yet also freshness, as tart wild berry fruits swirl across the palate offset by hints of sour citrus and savory herbs. A touch of dark chocolate lingers on as this finishes structured and long, leaving the mouth watering for more. Frankly speaking, this is a lot of fun.

Matthew Luczy, Wine Advocate, June 2024

Rating: 94

Drink: 2024-2036

A unique cuvée in the Saxum lineup inspired by classic California Cabernets... underwent a 22-month élevage in 59% new 225-liter French oak barrels and a small portion of American oak. The nose is beautiful and singular, displaying aromas of black fruit, wet soil, new leather, hoisin and integrated but noticeable accents of toasted coconut. The texture is ripe, plush and forward while retaining a graceful, nuanced core before transitioning to a juicy yet grippy finish with an herbal eucalyptus-driven accent at the conclusion—a lovely nod to old-school California winemaking while remaining true to Saxum's identity.

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, [JebDunnuck.com](https://www.jebdunnuck.com), July 2023 Sneak Peek

Rating: 98

Drink: 2024-2036

The 2021 Four Hearts Vineyard is another flat-out awesome 2021 that readers will love... it sports a saturated purple hue to go with exotic notes of cassis, green tobacco, sandalwood, baking spices, and incense. It's clearly the finest vintage of this cuvée to date, and this full-bodied, incredibly pure, layered, flawlessly balanced red can be drunk today with incredible pleasure or cellared for upwards of 10-15 years, depending on your preferences. The tannin quality here is off the charts.

2019 4HEARTS VINEYARD

38% Petite Sirah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Tempranillo, 3% Zinfandel

ALC: 15.4%

Cases 750 ml: 500

AVA: Paso Robles Willow Creek

Vineyard: 4hearts Vineyard

Release: January 2023

Release Price: \$132

Drink: 2025 - 2038

NOTES FROM JUSTIN:

This is the most accessible version of 4hearts we have ever produced. The tannins are still there, but not as gnarly as the last few vintages. The Cab Sauv plays really nicely with the Petite Sirah. I believe the Tempranillo is what holds them together so well. Think blackberries and leather but with some great spices like nutmeg and vanilla wrapping it all up. It's a fun wine. Not meant for typical Bordeaux snobs..... The use of American oak would be considered scandalous!

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!?!

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

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2024 - 2037

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

SAXUM 4HEARTS VINEYARD

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

Release Price: \$98

Drink: 2023 - 2036

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. However, you can't predict the weather and could potentially loose 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

SAXUM 4HEARTS VINEYARD

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 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.