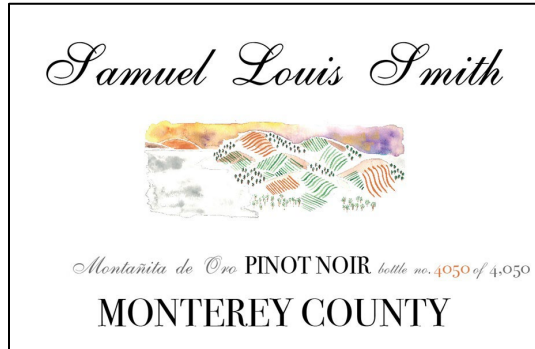


Samuel Louis Smith Wines

California Central Coast



Sam grew up in Bakersfield and landed in UC Santa Barbara to major in French and economics (with minors in Spanish and surfing). Considering a future in international business and wanting to hone his French, he signed up for a semester of study in France. He had the choice between Lyon and Bordeaux, and Bordeaux clinched it by virtue of the fact that it has killer surfing. Who knew? Sam did.

In Bordeaux he stayed with a family who opened his eyes to wine and to pairing it with food. This planted such a seed that upon his return to Santa Barbara he got a job in a winery tasting room, which in turn led to a cellar job with the Brander Vineyard. If the homestay family in Bordeaux introduced him to the pleasures of wine, the intimate Brander Vineyard showed him the possibilities of making it. He realized not only that he could make the stuff, but that doing so fascinated him, especially when you got down to the granular level of interpreting a site and its vines. With that revelation, the career in international business was put on the back burner.

Site, travel, culture; therein lay a thread. Every subsequent year, he worked harvests, taking production jobs in Australia, Oregon, and the Central Coast. Stylistically, his tastes gravitated early on toward the elegance of the northern Rhône and Burgundy. In 2015 he signed on with Domaine François Villard. For two months he worked side by side with Villard, and what most impressed Sam was seeing how the man guided fermentations to give finesse the edge over power in what was a warm, dramatic, and quintessential “media” vintage.

After the gig with Villard, he traveled around until he returned to the States in 2016, having run out of money in Morocco (surfing!). Fortune and serendipity found him a job with the Morgan Winery up in Monterey, a place where he’d never considered living before. Just prior to Villard, he had wrapped up three years as a winemaker at the Margerum Wine Company, and the Santa Rita Hills had become his home turf. But Dan (Morgan) Lee was a pioneering organic farmer focused on the Central Coast with a view toward cool-climate viticulture, all of which synced with Sam’s values. Moreover, Lee was okay with Sam making his own wines on the side. For eight good years he oversaw production at the Morgan Winery, then in April of 2024 stepped down to go full time with his own wines.

Sam had started SLS in 2014, bottling a couple hundred cases of Syrah and Pinot Noir from the Santa Rita Hills. Now he's up to around 1,000 cases, concentrating on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, along with a little Gamay from three Central Coast zones: The Santa Cruz Mountains, Monterey County and the Santa Rita Hills. That's a wide geographical spread, and what ties them together are an intuitive mix of mostly high-elevation sites that resonate for him, farmed carefully by folks he trusts.

He favors cooler sites and early picks, and he hauls the vast majority of the harvest picks for SLS himself back to the town of Santa Cruz, where he makes wine in the same space as the Madson Winery. All ferments for both colors are native, started by a *pie'd de cuve* from the vineyard (to enable the vineyard yeasts to have as much of a head start as possible). He likes to use a good portion of whole cluster for the red ferments. Normally, reds are never fined nor filtered; whites see a light filtration.

In the summer of 2023 Sam spent two months in Champagne working with Jean-Marc Sélèque and Flavien Nowack, and now he's making a bit of sparkling wine.

The watercolors on Sam's labels are his own artwork.

<https://samuellouiswines.com/>