

Daniel-Étienne Defaix

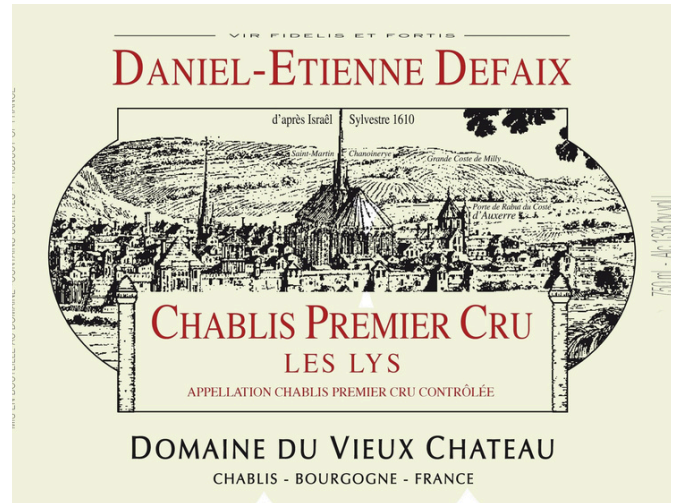
Chablis 1er Cru Les Lys

We are fortunate to work with the exuberant Daniel-Etienne Defaix, whose family has been plying their trade in and around Chablis since the 17th century. In generations past, long aging in Chablis was more the rule than the exception, but today Daniel is virtually alone in that practice. The Defaix family—one of the oldest winegrowing families in the region—owns thirty hectares of vines, the vast majority of which are in premier and grand cru vineyards, but Daniel designates only his best lots each vintage as cru-level, declassifying the remainder as villages. Astonishingly, he bottles these cru-level wines only after eight to ten years of aging in tanks, therein undergoing a slow natural settling which prevents the need for filtration.

Long aging is not the only way in which Defaix distinguishes himself. He relies exclusively on naturally occurring yeasts—a rare practice in Chablis—and his fermentations routinely last between three and six weeks (inoculating gets it done in four-to-six days), with malolactic fermentation sometimes requiring two years to finish in his frigid cellar. He favors extraordinarily long lees contact, but employs stirring only for the first two years, and then only seldom; this extended period of yeast autolysis guards a wine's color and promotes a generosity of texture, according to Daniel. Furthermore, it takes a significant amount of time for the lees to settle, and Defaix relies on patience rather than fining or filtration—two practices which are par for the course in the region.

Wine

Les Lys is a tiny five-hectare cru of which Defaix owns three and a half hectares, all in a southeast-facing section called Clos du Roi—effectively a monopole of the domaine. Its poor soils of pure Kimmeridgian limestone produce perhaps the most complete and distinctive wine in Defaix's cellar. Combining some of the power of the “Vaillon” with the chalky intensity of the “Côte de Lechet,” “Les Lys” ratchets up the aromatic complexity of the previous two, yet comes across as pure and harmonious. The palate offers ample richness, yet a sense of tension keeps it from feeling opulent, and the chiseled finish offers a strong sensation of dry extract.



Vineyards

Country: France

Region: Chablis

Appellation: AOC Chablis 1er Cru

Soil: Kimmeridgian limestone-clay marls

Vine Age: 45 years

Farming Practices: Lutte raisonnée

Winemaking

Fermentation: Following total destemming, wine ferments spontaneously in stainless-steel tanks for 3-4 weeks.

Varieties: 100% Chardonnay

Aging: 8.5 years sur lie