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A First! Tasting the Newly Born Vintage of Daniel-Etienne Defaix

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I've been visiting Domaine Daniel-Etienne Defaix for over half a decade. I always taste older vintages that charm and delight...but I am always in the area to taste the most recent vintage. When tasting the 2015 vintage in the region, I got a naughty pour off a tank of that vintage chez Etienne. It was PUMPED! So, when I arrived in 2017 to taste the 2016s, I was astonished to be presented (at last) a full line-up of the 2016s.

Daniel-Etienne commercializes his wines in an unusual way. He works about 15 years behind the vintage date in release. The determined dedication to continue this stance is impressive. *Chapeau!* When other winemakers are releasing their 2016s, Daniel-Etienne will be releasing his 2004s and 2005s.

Just imagine the conversation with your accountant!

But, wow, those long-aged Chablis – all old vine village or Premier Cru – are magnificent. As far as I know, no other producer is doing us the favor of aging the wines for us, not to mention selling them to us at very fair prices. I don't understand how these wines aren't lauded like those of Rioja's Lopez de Heredia, especially in New York City sommelier circles.

I often think sommeliers don't dig too deep and just follow the fads. From my standpoint, that's pretty clear on many Manhattan and hip Brooklyn wine lists. Daniel-Etienne's wines are the perfect examples of this. I predict that someone will soon tout these wines, and they'll be ludicrously pricey and hard to get. Daniel-Etienne and his philosophy deserve that.

P.S. The son of Daniel-Etienne is now at the family domaine for about two years, after working a stint chez Jean-Louis Trappet in Gevery-Chambertin.

91

Chablis Vieilles Vignes 2016

With plantations dating between 35 and 90 years, the average age of the vines of this wine is 50 years old. It was made in enamel tanks and will never see wood. Already dark and golden in color, the wine smells of cut red apples doused with sweet Meyer lemons. The malolactic fermentation was underway, so the wine was a bit pithy, but it was utterly delightful nonetheless. I will be curious to come back to these notes in 10-15 years to see how this Vieilles Vignes is behaving.

Drink:.....2026+?

92

Chablis Côte de Lechet Premier Cru 2016

This is impressively fresh, more so than the Vieilles Vignes. It is packed with just-sliced apples and minerality. It's impossible to know where this wine will go, but with its impressive refreshment and long finish, it will surely be a solid wine.

Drink: 2026-29

93

Chablis Vaillons Premier Cru 2016

This is a combined cuvée of fruit from Vaillons (proper) and Sécher. It's not super fruity now, and that certainly won't matter much when this wine has aged for a decade before bottling. The very long finish witnesses to the expectation that this wine will age beautifully, in tank then in bottle. I delighted in this wine's oodles of floral freshness and will be a bit sad to see that beautifully youthful side of the wine disappear once it is bottled.

Drink: 2026-30

93

Chablis Les Lys Premier Cru 2016

Lemony and limey, this wine shows perky but well-placed acidity with mouth-filling aromatics. There's a wee bit of spice on the lingering finish. In between, I love the pluot, Poire Williams and fresh jasmine! This baby has some zip on the palate, so it will be a tantalizing wait to see what develops!

Drink: 2016-31

92

Chablis Vieilles Vignes 2012

Savory and juicy, this wine has boisterous fruit and fabulous concentration yet moderate body and a savory finish. It's a juxtaposition for Chablis, and it adds dynamism in the glass. I love the sea salted apple slice finish!

Drink: 2018-25

93

Chablis Les Lys Premier Cru 2004

Hello, cheese course wine! I adore this wine's saline, bouillon and chicken broth flavors from the start. Then, there is the gorge-like depth of flavor to accompany the relatively full-bodied feel for a Chablis. Fruit purity emphasis isn't always obvious in older wines, but it is here. Gorgeous stuff!

Drink: 2018-24

92

Chablis Les Lys Premier Cru 2003

Bottle variation is starting to creep in here. That is what it is, but it's soul-crushing when you know how impressive this wine can be. This particularly delightful bottling showed golden raisins, sunbaked hay and dashes of sherry vinegar. Round and a bit chunky, it was brilliant in Chablis, but a bottle brought home in my luggage did not weather well when tasted three months post-return.

Drink: 2018-20