

# Orion Chablis



As a young woman, Léa Schaller left Chablis for university in Strasbourg. This led to a job in the music business in Paris, putting even more distance between herself and her parents and their life of farming cereals and vines. Music influenced her enough to name her domaine Orion, after a song by the band Metallica, but long before that came to pass she had come to question her life in Paris. Coinciding with the end of her employment contract, her mother broke a leg, which put the dissonance into perspective: her father was nearing retirement, her mother was on crutches, and she was their only child. Moreover, she was thinking about starting a family herself, and the countryside beckoned as far more hospitable to raising a child than the streets of the capital city. She went home to Préhy.

Préhy is a small village in the southwest corner of the Chablis appellation, often photographed for its church, which stands as an icon on the ridge just outside of the village proper. Léa spent a year helping her mother while taking various odd jobs in the town of Chablis. Then she made the decision to take over the family business, making her the third generation to run the farm. That was fundamental enough, given its implicit life-long commitment, but she went one step further by deciding to build a winery to bottle wine instead of selling the entire crop of grapes to the co-op. This required a return to school to get a degree in viticulture and winemaking (along with the prerequisite internships, hers done at the family domaine and at the Chablisienne cooperative).

Thereafter, she got a loan to build a small winery, equipped it with stainless steel tanks, and penciled out a five-year plan. Her first vintage was 2019, which saw a production of 1,000 bottles. Every year thereafter she pulled more vines from the co-op so that by vintage 2023 she was able to market 20,000 bottles (1,650 cases). She quit all herbicides in 2022 and minimized other treatments. She's in a viticulture group with Pascal Picq, Didier's brother who heads up the vineyards for the Picq domaine. Like the Picq brothers for much of their vines, Léa harvests by machine. She farms 10 hectares (25 acres) of vines on her domaine, 6.6 of which are contracted to the co-op. The 3.4 hectares of vines she has for herself break down as follows:

- 1.9 in appellation Chablis (4.7 acres)
- 1 in appellation Petit Chablis (2.5 acres)
- 0.5 in Bourgogne (1.25 acres)

The crop from the Bourgogne parcel is all sold to the co-op for cash flow, as is a part of the two Chablis appellations; the rest, she makes into wine and bottles it. She has one full-time employee and a seasonal worker.

A word on Léa's nifty label: Schallers came to Chablis from the German part of Switzerland via Alsace in the 19th century and settled as farmers in the area (Léa's cousin Camille Schaller has his own domaine in Préhy, which he started with his father in 2014 by pulling a portion of their vines from the co-op). In old German, their name referred to the village bell ringer who rang in the close of the day and the coming of owls.