

ROCK SOLID VISION

*Coenie Snyman's "Rock of Eye" Shapes
South African Cabernet's Future*

From the vineyards of Stellenbosch to the top of the 2025 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year podium, veteran winemaker Coenie Snyman proves that instinct, precision, and a deep respect for terroir can still create magic in a bottle.

When you've spent the last three decades working to perfect your craft among the vines and barrels of Stellenbosch, you learn to trust your intuition - or, as Coenie Snyman might put it, your "rock of eye." It's a term borrowed from the world of traditional craftsmanship, where the artisan's skill is measured not by rulers or formulas, but by an instinctive sense of balance and proportion. In 2025, that very instinct has earned Snyman the coveted Diners Club Winemaker of the Year title for his Rock of Eye Cabernet Sauvignon 2022, a wine that marks not only a professional triumph but also a deeply personal milestone.

For Snyman, this isn't his first brush with the spotlight. He first won the same award back in 2009, yet this time feels different. The Rock of







Eye Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 is the first wine released under his own label, his first opportunity to express a philosophy that's been quietly maturing alongside his wines – one rooted in place, people, and patience. It's a Cabernet that embodies the power and sophistication of Stellenbosch while capturing the quiet confidence of a winemaker who knows precisely what he's doing.

A LIFE AMONG THE VINES

Coenie Snyman's story begins, fittingly, in Stellenbosch. His father worked closely with labourers on the surrounding wine farms, meaning that vineyards and cellars were the backdrop of his childhood. It wasn't an unusual upbringing for someone in the region, but what set Snyman apart was his fascination with how the industry worked.

"I grew up in the wine industry when it was still very traditional," he recalls. "I wanted to reform the industry through cellar design."

That spirit of innovation led him to Stellenbosch University, where he earned his BSc in Viticulture and Oenology in 1994, followed by an Honours degree in Oenology in 2000. During those formative years, Snyman discovered that winemaking wasn't just for vineyard owners – it could be a calling, a craft to be mastered by those who had the vision and skill to bring it to life.

Armed with both academic grounding and hands-on experience, Snyman began to make a name for himself in the Stellenbosch wine scene. Over the past 30 years, he's worked with some of the region's most respected



estates, guiding teams, designing cellars, and crafting wines that reflect not only technical mastery but also a deep connection to the land.

THE TURNING POINT

Every winemaker dreams of creating something that feels entirely their own – a wine that isn't shaped by the expectations of a brand or the limitations of a particular estate. For Snyman, that dream took shape in 2022 with the release of Rock of Eye, his debut under his own label.

It's fitting that his first vintage would go on to win the country's most prestigious winemaking award. But beyond the accolades, Rock of Eye

Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 represents something far more personal: an unfiltered reflection of his winemaking philosophy.

"This wine is my interpretation of the vineyards of Stellenbosch," he explains. "It reflects the region's power and sophistication by bringing together vineyards from Simonsberg, Polkadraai Hills, and the Helderberg."

That combination is something special. Simonsberg contributes structure and depth, Polkadraai brings perfume and lift, and Helderberg adds minerality and finesse. The result is a Cabernet that doesn't lean too far into muscularity or showmanship – instead, it's a lesson in balance.



THE CRAFT BEHIND THE CABERNET

The Rock of Eye Cabernet Sauvignon is a wine crafted with meticulous attention to detail. Grapes are handpicked and fermented in open-top fermenters, where manual punch-downs ensure gentle extraction of colour and tannin. It then spends around 18 months in French oak barrels, of which only about 20% are new, allowing the fruit's character to shine rather than be overshadowed by wood.

In the glass, it's unmistakably Stellenbosch: aromas of blackcurrant and graphite leap out first, followed by cedar, pencil shavings, and a whiff of wild fynbos. The palate is full and confident, showing layers of mulberry, cherry, and cassis, all stitched together by fine-grained tannins and a dry, savoury finish. It's a wine of tension and texture – one that balances generosity with restraint.

Snyman's approach is refreshingly

pragmatic. "A wine is the culmination of multiple factors that come together," he says. "It's the people involved, the vineyard and the environment, the transformation that happens in the cellar, and finally, the moment it's opened on someone's table. All of that is facilitated by the winemaker."

It's a statement that captures his entire ethos. For Snyman, wine isn't a solo act; it's a collaboration between nature and human touch, experience and instinct. The winemaker, in his view, isn't the star of the show but rather the conductor, guiding all the elements into harmony.

REWARDING MOMENTS AND HARD LESSONS

Snyman's winemaking journey hasn't been without its challenges, but he's the sort of person who measures success differently. His proudest moments aren't necessarily trophies or ratings, but the satisfaction of seeing a wine sell out, knowing it has found its audience.

"Every time a wine is sold out, it's a proud moment," he admits. "That means it resonated with people."

Still, the 2025 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year title holds special meaning. Having won it once before, this second award is a bookend to a story that began decades ago, when a young man from Stellenbosch set out to modernise a traditional industry. This time, however, he's done it entirely on his own terms.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Even as accolades roll in, Snyman's attention is firmly on the future. His goal now is to build sustainability, not just in the environmental sense, but within his team and among the growers he collaborates with.

"Building a sustainable future through my team and the growers I work with is the most important thing to me," he says. "It's about making wines that reflect the vineyards of Stellenbosch and its people."



This emphasis on community and continuity is what makes Snyman's work stand out. He understands that great wine is rooted in relationships – with the land, with the growers, and with the people who ultimately uncork it.


As South Africa's wine industry evolves, his approach feels like a bridge between old-world craftsmanship and modern sensibility. His wines carry the gravitas of tradition, but they also speak a contemporary language of precision, sustainability, and authenticity.

A WINEMAKER'S SIGNATURE

If you've ever tasted a wine that feels effortless – not because it's simple, but because every element seems to fall perfectly into place – you'll understand what Snyman means by "rock of eye." It's that almost invisible craftsmanship that comes only from experience, where intuition takes over from measurement, and confidence replaces calculation.

There's no flash or gimmickry in the 2022 Rock of Eye Cabernet Sauvignon. Instead, it's a masterclass in proportion – a wine that delivers depth without heaviness, power without aggression. It's the sort of Cabernet that reminds you why Stellenbosch remains one of the world's great red wine regions.

And perhaps that's the ultimate lesson from Coenie Snyman's latest triumph: that true craftsmanship is measured quietly, glass by glass, vineyard by vineyard, vintage after vintage.

The Rock of Eye Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 is both a product of technical skill, and a wine born of trust. Trust in the land, trust in the process, and above all, trust in the "eye" of the winemaker who shaped it. 

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