

SPARKLE UP!

It's almost Christmas and this time around it can't come quickly enough, as I feel like we all need to celebrate making it through this year. Getting together with the closest friends and family around a festive table is a large part of most people's seasonal traditions, and what better way to add to the jovial mood than a pop of a bottle of sparkling!



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SPARKLE UP! literally becomes a tag line around this time of the year, and this goes for wine also, as the sales of bubbles rocket. It's not surprising, as the experience of popping the bottle, pouring the fizzing delicious liquid and clinking glasses creates a festive feeling before you even take a sip.

This is the time I most often get asked about which sparkling is the best and how to tell the difference. Unfortunately the answer is not as straightforward as some might think, as there are a few different ways of making sparkling wine. The main difference is actually where the bubbles come from.

The simplest way to achieve sparkling wine is a method called inline carbonation, something often associated with cheaper bubbles because it basically involves injecting still wine with carbon dioxide during bottling – sort of like a giant SodaStream. It is the cheapest option; however, this doesn't automatically mean it's a bad way of making sparkling or that the wine is not good. The quality of a carbonated wine will largely depend on the quality of the original still stock, and here, the normal winemaking principles apply – the better the grapes, the more delicate the winemaking processes, the better the result. And yes, there are plenty of premium quality sparkling wines made using the inline carbonation method.

Another way of producing bubbles is through secondary fermentation. This happens in a sealed vessel, where carbon dioxide – a byproduct of fermentation – can't escape, so gets disbursed in the wine, creating bubbles. This is the difference from inline carbonation as all other methods have secondary fermentation take place.

In the traditional champagne method secondary fermentation happens in the bottle, which the wine is then sold in, so it requires individual bottle handling and therefore is

the most labour-intensive and expensive way of producing bubbles. Liqueur de tirage, a solution of yeast, wine and sugar is added to kick start the fermentation process and the bottle is temporarily capped. Once the fermentation is complete, the dead yeast, or lees, fall to the bottom and the wine is aged on lees for a period of time. This gives it a round and creamy texture.

Once lees ageing is complete, each bottle is inverted, so the lees are trapped in the neck of the bottle, which gets frozen to create a solid plug. The temporary bottle cap is removed and the pressure inside the bottle forces the sediment plug to pop out, at which point the bottle gets topped up with a solution of wine and sugar, called dosage, to compensate for lost volume and the bottle is capped with a final cork.

Wines produced by this method outside of the French Champagne region are called sparkling traditional method or in French 'méthode traditionnelle', while the ones from Champagne wine region are simply referred to as champagne.

Other things you'll see on a bottle refer to the grape varieties that are used to make the wine, for example traditional champagne is generally a blend of pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay, 'blanc de blanc' is made from chardonnay grapes only and 'blanc de noir' is made from pinot noir and pinot meunier.

The second most popular method of making bubbles through secondary fermentation is called charmat. Here, the liqueur de tirage is added to a pressurised stainless-steel tank and the fermentation happens in large volumes. Once the fermentation is complete, the wine is filtered to remove sediment and bottled. Due to minimal lees contact in most charmat method cases, the wines often retain their original freshness and fruitfulness. One of the best-known examples of this method execution is Prosecco.

There are a couple of other methods of sparkling wine production, but they are quite rare and generally a combination of practices from the traditional method and charmat, so understanding those two and also inline carbonation gives you a good picture to make an educated choice next time you're looking to sparkle it up at your dinner table!

Up To Taste!

Pirie Tasmania Traditional Method 2013 — \$40

The balance between youthfulness and complexity is the hallmark of a good méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine and this wine achieves that perfectly. With pear and citrus on the nose, it is fresh and lively at the start, developing a soft mid palate with notes of roasted hazelnuts and a refreshing finish.

Bird in Hand Sparkling 2020 — \$25

This is one of my favourite sparkling's of all times and it never misses a Christmas table at my house. Made in charmat method from pinot noir grapes, it is an easy-drinking sparkling rosé with a classic strawberries and cream profile. It is well balanced, and the bubbles make it feel crisp and refreshing — perfect on a warm and sunny day!

Oxenberry NV Farmgate Sparkling Red — \$18

Us Australians are a stubborn bunch — we still want to drink red wine on a scorching summer day. I think it's to accommodate this desire that we came up with one of Australian wine industry's proudest inventions — the sparkling shiraz. NV Farmgate Sparkling Red is a great example of a premium quality wine made using inline carbonation method. A blend of McLaren Vale Shiraz vintages are used to create complexity that comes from the more aged parcels, blended with younger ones before bottling to give the wine a youthful kick. The result is a great tasting palate, rich in plum and blackberry. This wine is best served slightly chilled, giving it a delicate and refreshing start, while retaining some of the bold characteristics of the true-spirited Australian shiraz. [@](#)