Introduction:
Sparkling wine represents a small but significant proportion (~10%, 37 million litres) of the Australian wine industry’s total production (Wine Australia, 2012). However, despite Australian winemakers producing sparkling wines that rival those from Champagne houses in France, they have not fully capitalised on increasing demand. This study examined Australian consumers’ preferences for different styles of sparkling wine, including Champagne, Australian sparkling white (made via Méthode Traditionelle), Prosecco, sparkling Moscato, sparkling rose and sparkling red.

Materials and Methods:
The sensory profiles of nine commercial sparkling wines (chosen by an industry reference group) were characterised by descriptive analysis with a trained sensory panel. At the same time, Australian wine consumers’ attitudes towards different styles of sparkling wine were determined via an online survey. Consumers subsequently rated their liking of each wine style at a blind tasting, with wines presented in a random order. The Fine Wine Instrument (Johnson & Bastian 2015) was used to segment consumers into “No Frills”, “Aspirant” and “Enthusiast” clusters, with each cluster profiled by gender, age, level of education and household income (Table 1). Compositional analysis of sparkling wines was also performed, with pH, titratable acidity (TA), residual sugar, alcohol and phenolic content determined for each wine style.

References:

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Results and Discussion:
The words sparkling wine consumers (n = 203) associated with a range of sparkling wine styles is visually represented in Figure 1 (with the size of the font indicative of the number of times each word (or a synonym) was listed). As expected, ‘celebration’ and ‘expensive’ were used to describe Champagne, whereas Australian sparkling white wine was described as ‘bubbly’ and ‘refreshing’. Interestingly, consumers considered both Prosecco and Moscato to be ‘sweet’.
Hierarchical clustering based on responses to questions from the Fine Wine Instrument (Johnson & Bastian 2015) identified three distinct groups of wine consumers (Table 1). ‘No Frills’ consumers (n = 31) demonstrated little connoisseur-type behaviour, knowledge about wine or interest in the provenance of their wine purchases; whereas ‘Enthusiasts’ (n = 68) exhibited connoisseur-like behaviour by keeping records of their wine purchases, having a special wine storage space and ritually checking their wines for faults prior to consumption. ‘Aspirants’ (n = 104) showed similarities with Enthusiasts, but their wine knowledge and involvement were significantly lower.

The regular sparkling wine consumers were invited to blindly taste randomised samples of the wines. The preference data was analysed using Descriptive Statistics (Table 3) and Wilcoxon two-sample paired signed rank test in XLSTAT®. When tasting Champagne, statistically significant differences (alpha=0.05) between the online survey and wine tasting preference scores were observed within the paired data of the Aspirant and Enthusiast groups (p<0.0001 for both). The paired difference test showed significantly different results for all segments when tasting the Měthode Traditionelle wine (No Frills p<0.0001, Aspirant p<0.000, Enthusiast p=0.004). When the No Frills online survey result was compared to the wine tasting preference scores for sparkling Moscato, the results were also significantly different (p=0.028).

Conclusion:
Three consumer clusters, with different pre-conceived perceptions and preferences for different styles of sparkling wine, were identified. All consumer segments showed significant differences between their online survey results and wine tasting preference scores for various sparkling wine styles. The outcomes of this study can be used by wine producers to better tailor marketing strategies to the specific needs and expectations of consumers within different segments of the Australian market.