

Natural Aromatic Materials: Odours & Origins. Second Edition. 2 Vol. by Tony Burfield

The Atlantic Institute of Aromatherapy, Tampa, Florida

A review Introduction.

I got my copy of the First Edition of this textbook around 2000, and it accompanied me all through these years of learning and teaching about essential oils. Together with the example given me by Tony as a professional author, this book convinced me to go through with the adventure of writing my own book. To be quite open, this wasn't a book I expected to use much when I bought it. I bought it because I knew Tony and I love books, and because you never know what will be useful, but I was into therapy and I thought the text would have been more interesting for a natural perfumer, or for someone sourcing essential oils. In fact the book collated more than 40 years of data compilation, and was at the time THE comprehensive account of natural aromatic materials from natural sources, used in perfumery, aromatherapy and in flavourings. Well, I was totally wrong. As I said, it has been one of the book I went back to most often when in doubt about the origin or the existence of an obscure essential oil, or when I had some doubts about the chemistry of another one, or the characterizing compounds in terms of smell. I learned the importance of knowing the geography of the essential oil production, and I grew more and more interested in the education and use of our nose as a primary Quality Control tool. As I moved from therapy to consultancy I used the book even more, because of the sheer amount of knowledge about aromatic material you could find in there, and also just because it was fun to learn new things about a subject you think you already master. Thanks to this textbook I also learned about its predecessors, I bought my Arctander, Odorographia, etc., thereby enlarging my aromatic culture beyond what was immediately useful. The new edition Thus, I was just thrilled to hear that Burfield had produced a second edition of his text, especially since I became a producer, and now that I have it in my hand I am really happy to present it to you, because it really is a gem.

So, here are the details:

The text spans 793 pages, divided in 7 sections. Although of course the 5th section (Materials Index) is the most important one, the heart of the book, covering some 600 different materials in depth and with some juicy obscure details, I'd suggest eager readers not to skip the other sections, since they are in themselves small textbooks on their subject matter.

The first section (Perfumery Raw Materials, pp. 15-38) is the perfect introductory chapter, in my opinion, because it gives all the necessary definitions of what all the aromatic materials are and how they are produced (plus lots of historical details), so that the reader has all the tool necessary to navigate the remainder of the book, and more generally the treacherous sea of the world of aromatics. The second, third and fourth sections are somehow linked one to the other, because they form a sort of crash course in perfumery, training in odour analysis, and methods of odour assessment.

The second section (Categories and Definitions in Odour Assessment, pp. 39-76) goes through the problems linked to the description of odours, all the different schemes proposed by various authors through the ages, and it then goes into the description of the various theories of olfaction with pitfalls and strengths, at the same time with exactitude but without being overly technical.

The third section (Training for Odour Analysts and Perfumers, pp. 77-125) kind of flows out of the 2nd, because it shows how practically all the schemes about smell are put into practice in the description of

smells and in the production of perfumes or fragrances. It then goes into aromatic chemistry, always linking it to the practical need of a perfumer.

The fourth section (Methods of Odour Assessment of Raw Materials) goes into Quality Assessment and Control, but instead of starting as usual with the chemical tests, Gas Chromatography and Mass Spectrometry, it begins with the proper use of our sensory systems, eyes and nose.

The treasure of the book lies of course in the fifth section (Materials Index: A-Z of Individual Aroma Materials, pp. 143-741) that comprises an enormous number of materials from the A of *Abelmoschus* spp. to the Z of *Zingiber officinale*: 600 essential oils, absolutes, CO₂s, and other aromatic extracts. Each monograph identifies a botanical entity (apart from the few animal materials) with taxonomical details, together with its geographic origin and production status, and specifies all the aromatic materials that can be obtained from it. For every and each material it gives a complete and elaborate odour profile with top-note and dry-down descriptions, plus chemical composition details, all thoroughly referenced. At the end of the text the useful glossary and abbreviations index, plus a conversion table of common name to (Latin) botanical name. All in all, a must-have book if you're into perfumery and flavouring, and a very important addition to the library for any aromatherapist.