Book Review

The Chemistry of Essential Oils
An introduction for Aromatherapists, Beauticians, Retailers and Students
David G. Williams
Micelle Press; 346 pages hardback; £29.00; ISBN: 1-87022812-X

As to be expected from David Williams with his long experience of lecturing on various aspects of the fragrance industry, this excellent book comprehensive covers its principles in an extremely readable and novel way.

The first three chapters provide a painless and extensive introduction to organic chemistry within the context of fragrance chemicals. They would be of great value to cosmetic science students and perfumers with limited chemical background. These chapters are followed by an account of the main methods used to extract essential oils, together with useful tables giving their sources and geographical distribution. Guidance is given on the smelling of essential oils with an introduction to their odour profiles, a table containing about 70 profiles is provided as a basis for one’s own assessment.

Quality control is covered extensively, with easy to understand explanations of the principles used in the physicochemical tests commonly used in the fragrance industry. A good description of GLC analysis is included with ten illustrative chromatograms, nine of which are accompanied with scratch and sniff panels.

The isolation and subsequent synthesis of some of the more important components of essential oils is described together with their impact on the development of commercial fragrances. The chapter ends with a brief description of headspace analysis.

Practical guidance for creatively producing balanced blends would be of particular interest to aromatherapists although there has been no attempt to link them with mood as presumably this is beyond the scope of the book. For the student it should lead to a greater understanding of the perfumer’s art. To take this further, over 70 classical skin fragrances have been classified and listed giving year of introduction, House and odour description.

Although the book is primarily aimed at aromatherapists, beauty therapists, retailers and students there is plenty to interest anyone associated with fragrance.

Dennis Kellond