

## Book Reviews

**Named Organic Reactions.** By T. Laue and A. Plagens (Technical University, Braunschweig). John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY. 1998. x + 288 pp. 15 × 23 cm. \$69.95. ISBN 0-471-97142-1.

This book deals with “134 of the most important reactions in organic chemistry” arranged in alphabetical order. There are 114 main entries and the other 20 seem to be cited within these (e.g., the (Evans) Anionic Oxy-Cope Rearrangement is cited under the Cope Rearrangement). Entries range from the venerable Beckmann, Hofmann, and Claisen Rearrangements to the modern Mitsunobu, McMurry, Sakurai, Bergman, and Sharpless Reactions. Most of the important reactions are covered along with what might be considered relatively uncelebrated reactions (e.g., Corey–Winter Fragmentation, Weiss Reaction, Hey Reaction). In addition, names are given for a few common reactions that normally go unnamed, such as alkene epoxidation (Prilezhaev Reaction) and the synthesis of nitriles from alkyl halides (Kolbe Nitrile Synthesis). Some reactions are missing (e.g., Ullmann Biaryl Synthesis, Suzuki Coupling, Borch Reductive Amination, Ritter Reaction).

Each entry depicts the overall reaction, the original reference(s) (which are very nice to have), a brief description of the reaction and its scope, and a detailed mechanism, only the latter of which is the real strength of this book. For example, the mechanism of the Clemmensen Reduction, which is rarely seen in print, is illustrated. No experimental details or representative procedures are provided—this is a teaching book not a “how to” book nor is it a comprehensive reference source. Thus, the Aldol Reaction, which occupies six pages, has only eight references. References are given to the literature up to and including 1996. The presentation is generally good although the drawings seem overly large and the use of electron pairs is occasionally confusing and clumsy. Only a few errors were noted (“malenic” on p 49, “Heterocyclic” on p 144; incorrect charge in structure **6** on p 60).

My only question is “Who is the audience?” This book is too advanced for most undergraduates, and, with its limited number of references and no experimental procedures, it would seem not to be of much use to the practicing chemist. This leaves only the graduate student, but he or she can use the library volume rather than pay \$70 for a personal copy.

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**Flavonoids in the Living System. Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology, Vol. 439.** Edited by John Manthey and Bela Buslig (USDA, Lake Alfred, FL). Plenum Press, New York. 1998. viii + 278 pp. 16.5 × 25 cm. \$95.00. ISBN 0-306-45905-1.

Flavonoids are a diverse group of plant secondary metabolites, present almost ubiquitously in higher plants, often at relatively high concentrations. They have a wide range of biological activities that largely stem from their ability to bind to proteins. There is particular interest in the roles they may play in the physiology of the plant and in their effect on human cells following digestion of flavonoid-rich foods, with its potential implications for human health. The present volume reports the proceedings of a symposium sponsored by the American Chemical Society in August 1996 in which 18 papers were presented on current flavonoid research in these two areas. These studies concentrate on the flavanones and flavonols, particularly on such compounds found in citrus fruits.

In both the plant and dietary situations, the most biologically active form of flavonols and flavanones is the aglycone. In the plant and in the diet, however, even after processing of the food, the predominant flavonoids present are in the less biologically active conjugated form (typically as a glycoside in the plant, sometimes with additional acylation of the sugar, or as a glucuronide or sulfate in the human).

Within the topics considered in relation to flavonoids and plant physiology, their roles as signal compounds in the Rhizobium–legume symbiosis are highlighted where plant-derived flavonols such as kaempferol can trigger expression of genes within Rhizobium and promote nodulation. Similarly a more speculative role for flavonoids in stimulating the formation of arbuscular mycorrhiza is discussed. The role of flavonol aglycones in regulating pollen germination in maize and Petunia is considered in an interesting article focusing on the enzymological aspects of glycoside/aglycone inter-relationships.

In the context of their role in the human diet, there are a number of papers discussing the biological activity of flavonoids in *in vitro* assays demonstrating their potential anti-oxidant, anti-tumor, anti-thrombogenic, and anti-viral activities as well as their potential as hormone-mimics and as modulators of the immune system. The central problem in relating this information to the potential of flavonoids to influence human health is the question of the bioavailability of these compounds, the degree to which they are absorbed across the gut, and the chemical form and local concentration to which target cells in the body are exposed. These aspects are dealt with in the book, particularly in relation to isoflavones, but they are not given the prominence one might expect.

There are two very interesting articles, one describing the potential of flavonoids as hormone-mimics based on the homologies between the DNA sequences of proteins which metabolize (hence bind) flavonoids and those of animal and human proteins which metabolize human hormones or act as hormone receptors. The second article reviews the opportunities to genetically manipulate the pathway of flavonoid metabolism and so to effect changes in plant physiology and to enhance beneficial components in the diet.

Although one may quibble over the range of research areas covered, the general reader will find much of interest in this volume. The information is generally well presented

and will make a useful contribution to the literature in this exciting area of research.

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**Medicinal and Aromatic Plants—Industrial Profiles. Vol. 2. Perilla—The Genus *Perilla*.** Edited by He-Ci Yu (Hankintatukku Natural Products Company, Helsinki, Finland); Kenichi Kosuna and Megumi Haga (Amino Up Chemical Company, Sapporo, Japan). Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. 1997. xi + 191 pp. 17 × 24.5 cm. \$89.0. ISBN 90-5702-171-4.

This is the second volume of a series of books each devoted to a particular plant species or a genus. The aim of the series according to Roland Hardman, its editor-in-chief, is to give an in-depth look at one plant genus, about which an area specialist has assembled information ranging from the production of the plant to market trends and quality control.

*Perilla* is a plant with a very long history in Chinese traditional medicine and is used in most Asian countries as a medicine, garnish, food, and food pigment. The plant is relatively unknown in Europe and in the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that 12 of the 14 chapters of the present book have been written by Asian scientists, mainly from Japan but also from Korea and Taiwan. The short introductory chapter by He-Ci Yu is well-written and is a stimulant to discover more about *Perilla* and an incitement to read the other chapters. Two of them deal with cultivation and cell and tissue cultures of *Perilla*. More interesting, at least for the author of the present review, are chapters 4–8 which describe the use of the plant in ancient times until the development of modern drugs. These descriptions range from *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies of extracts for their anti-inflammatory and anti-allergic activities to serious clinical studies in the treatment of allergy and atopic dermatitis. The other chapters of the book deal mainly with phytochemical investigations of the plant, ranging from the composition of its essential oil to the chemistry of flavonoids and anthocyanins. The excellent chapter by Kumi Yoshida et al. is of great interest for all scientists involved in anthocyanin chemistry and illustrates the use of modern NMR techniques for the structure elucidation of these plant pigments.

So far, most publications on *Perilla* have been in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Since this Asian plant is receiving increasing attention all over the world due to its potential for the treatment of allergy, one of the most widespread immunological disorders in humans, the present book has the merit of making this important plant comprehensible to a wide scientific community. *Perilla* will certainly become in the near future a plant of interest for pharmaceutical companies and academia in the West. Thus, this well-referenced book has a place in the library of any institutions involved in the manufacturing of drugs of plant origin

and in academic institutions interested in plants used in traditional medicine.

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**Organic Synthesis: The Science Behind the Art.** By W. A. Smit (Zelinsky Institute of Organic Chemistry, Moscow, Russia), A. F. Bochkov (Institute of Biochemical Physics, Moscow, Russia), and R. Caple (University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN) The Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, UK. 1998. xix + 477 pp. 15.5 × 23 cm. \$52.95. ISBN: 0-85404-544-9.

*Organic Synthesis* is presented in five chapters: 1, Goals of an Organic Synthesis; 2, Tactics of Synthesis; 3, Strategy of Synthesis; 4, Molecular Design; and 5, Instead of Conclusion.

Chapter one is an introduction as to why synthesis is important and essentially presents a target-oriented vs an exploration-based rationale. Chapter two is the largest chapter, roughly half of the book, and it is presented in seven parts. In order, the chapter discusses general physical organic concepts vital to synthesis. General methods of making C–C bonds are discussed, followed by functional group exchange reactions. Controlling selectivity is presented next, followed by a very short account of reagents, equivalents, and synthons. Methods for constructing cyclic molecules are presented next, and the chapter concludes with bond cleavage and rearrangement reactions.

In chapter two, several named reactions are incorporated but many are only mentioned in passing. Many very important reactions are mentioned in several places but are not discussed in depth, such as the aldol condensation, whereas others, such as the Diels–Alder reaction, are discussed at great length. Modern reactions, such as the Heck reaction, other important reactions involving organopalladium chemistry, and modern methods of catalysis are either ignored altogether or mentioned only briefly. The important roles of diastereoselective and enantioselective reactions are also given little mention in terms of strategy. The important Sharpless asymmetric epoxidation is mentioned in chapter two (Part III) under functional group exchanges, but not at all in Part IV, which deals with selectivity. Other asymmetric epoxidation reactions are not even mentioned, and asymmetric dihydroxylation is also not mentioned.

The goal of chapter two seems to be an introduction to construction methodology, but the organization is difficult to follow. Part V, for example, deals with synthons and reagents, but it is presented *after* a discussion of making C–C bonds and functional group transformations. Since most methods for making C–C bonds rely on functional group transformations to “set them up,” and synthons are an integral part of planning C–C bond-forming reactions, this order of presentation is peculiar.

Chapter three is focused on a retrosynthetic analysis strategy. Chapter four discusses target selection based on structural peculiarities as well as target function. Strategies for preparing crown ethers, enzyme mimics, and ligands for various reactions are presented in this context. Chapter five is a very brief summary of the role of synthesis in general organic chemistry.