

Book review

Silicon and Silicones; by E.G. Rochow, Springer-Verlag, Berlin etc., 1987, xi + 181 pages; DM 24.80. ISBN 3-540-17565-2.

This small soft-cover book is not intended for organometallic chemists but, in the author's words, for "the general public, or at least that part of it which is curious about things old and new". It is largely about silicones, what they are, how they emerged, and what special properties and applications they have, but there is also a 32 page section on silica, silicates, and elemental silicon and its application in transistors; the book is, in fact, subtitled "About Stone Age Tools, Antique Pottery, Modern Ceramics, Computers, Space Materials and How They All Got That Way". The author has not hesitated to use chemical equations and structural formulae (there are 45 figures), which he explains as simply as is possible, but the text can be read with enjoyment even without understanding of them; he has done a fine piece of work in making the account pleasant reading for interested and informed non-chemists.

Although the book is not meant for them, organometallic chemists will enjoy it, and in doing so will all learn something of interest. I, for example, did not know, though I should have done, that Alfred Stock was initially responsible for the system of inorganic nomenclature that was later adopted and developed by IUPAC, and I have seized with enthusiasm on some of the simple but impressive lecture demonstrations described. There is material to enliven the lectures of anyone teaching organosilicon chemistry, and the book should certainly be available to undergraduate students of chemistry generally.

It is appropriate that this pleasant and useful little book should be by the chemist whose work did more than that of any other single person to make silicones widely available, and hence to initiate the growth of the now vast field of organosilicon chemistry. Its style reflects the wise, calm, and gentlemanly manner of its author, who is regarded with much respect and affection by all those who know him. It deserves to sell to the general public widely and in large numbers, and we can even hope (against hope?) that it will remove once and for all the inability of the media to distinguish between *silicon* and *silicone*.