



Essence and Alchemy: A Natural History of Perfume

By Mandy Aftel

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Publishers Weekly called this unique title an "extraordinary treatise on the history and making of perfume" and hails author Mandy Aftel's ability to "bring sheer delight in the bouquet of aromas in the natural world" and her "irreverent sensibility that embraces 'little-acknowledged' aphrodisiacs like the smell of sweat."

Renowned perfumer Mandy Aftel explores the primal nature and fundamental importance of aroma in everyday life, teaching people about the nature of smell and the idea of "olfactory consciousness" in *Essence and Alchemy: A Natural History of Perfume*. With gorgeous illustrations, the book also serves as a practical guide to making custom scents for a variety of uses, and explains the process of selecting "base notes", "heart notes" and "head notes" to create truly personal aromas and perfumes.

Writer and perfumer Mandy Aftel was a founder and chief perfumer of all-natural perfume company Grandiflorum, and went on to create Aftelier, a company that concentrates exclusively on creating custom perfumes for men and women. As an authority on natural essences and custom perfumes, she has participated in panels for the perfume industry, and demonstrated and taught the art of natural perfumery across the nation. Her work has been featured in publications including *In Style*, *Vogue*, *W Magazine*, *Self*, *O (Oprah) Magazine*, *Allure*, *Health* and *Elle*.

"Smelling her extraordinary collection of oils took me to beautiful places I have never been before. The fragrance that Mandy Aftel blended exclusively for me is full of citrus and herbal fragrances that complement my culinary life." --Alice Waters, Executive Chef and Owner celebrated restaurant Chez Panisse

"Reading Mandy Aftel on perfume is like listening to Mozart on original instruments-it's a revelation of tone and technique. She captures the sensuous pleasure of working with fragrance oils and the intellectual delight of composing in scent. Her book combines a perfumer's sensibility with the authority of a historian and the passion of an enthusiast." --Avery Gilbert, President of the Sense of Smell Institute

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

To this most extraordinary treatise on the history and making of perfume, Aftel, a writer and aroma designer, brings sheer delight in the bouquet of aromas in the natural world, as well as a "love for arcana" and an irreverent sensibility that embraces "little-acknowledged" aphrodisiacs like the smell of sweat. Smell is one of the most primal senses: even newborns orient first toward the smell of their mothers' milk. And world history is full of the manipulation of smell, she reveals, starting with the palace perfumers of ancient Egypt; the Israelite women who concocted essences for temple sacrifices; the Romans, who anointed nearly everything; the alchemists, who searched for the Divine Essence; all the way up to modern pheromone researchers who hope, finally, "to snare the sex drive." Aftel traces this history with witty anecdotes (Ben Franklin's plea for a drug to make sweet-smelling farts, Petrus Castellus's advice to rub civet directly on the penis) and well-chosen alchemical and botanical illustrations. After this seductive introduction, she shifts into the how-to mode, discussing the actual making of a scent, a process of selecting certain "base notes," adding "heart notes" and finally the "top chords." Her emphasis is on experimenting, and developing an "olfactory consciousness." Since organically based perfumes interact with the wearer, they must be designed for a particular user, not vice versa, as with commercial, synthetically based products. Aftel provides some sample formulas and concludes with a roundup of romantic, bathing and spiritual uses of perfumes. Agent, Peter Matson.

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Review

This is by Mandy Aftel, who is an all-natural perfumer in Berkeley. She comes out of the same movement for the best natural ingredients that created Chez Panisse [restaurant], also in Berkeley, which started the foodie revolution. This is a wonderful, swoony, sensual book. She gives you the history of perfume through the ages, from the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians. She talks about how people have moved away from the idea of perfume as a ritualistic, meditative, aesthetic creation. The mass marketing of perfume, which includes a lot of synthetics and chemicals, has taken away a lot from the original idea of what perfume was and should be.

Aftel started her own atelier to make perfumes. She uses natural ingredients, so no synthetics, no chemicals, no fixatives. The downside is that all-natural perfumes don't last that long, maybe two hours maximum. But she has striven to show that you can make elegant, complex, interesting, beautiful perfumes using all natural ingredients. She holds workshops where you can make your own perfume. The book is really a primer to go back to the roots and the ancient ideas of what perfume is all about. She talks about the meditative nature of certain essences, and notes their healing properties and the transcendental element of perfumery. It's also gorgeously written.

People have read this book and developed their own interest in making perfume. It's a seminal, inspirational book that many people cite. Earlier I mentioned the Swiss perfumer Andy Tauer. He trained as a chemist. He told me he read Mandy's book, and after that he decided he wanted to make perfume. He started experimenting in a home laboratory, just mixing ingredients, and his first perfume was called "L'Air du Desert Marocain". It was a huge hit. Luca Turin gave it five stars and called it a masterpiece. Tauer is now a

highly recognised niche perfumer. He's not a completely natural perfumer, but he uses up to 50% natural ingredients which is huge these days. There are many perfumes that use just a few percentage points of real ingredients and the rest is synthetic. That's not to say you can't make perfumes using all or mainly synthetics. There are some wonderful perfumers out there with very modern takes on perfumery – such as Comme des Garçons – and they have no problem using synthetics.

This book has inspired a generation of perfumers, and it brought people back to the original idea of what perfume was supposed to be. Mandy Aftel is a very spiritual person, who is able to meld the spiritual and ritualistic elements of perfumery with the pure, hedonistic, sensual beauty of it.

(Denise Hamilton *The Browser* 2011-10-04)

From the Inside Flap

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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