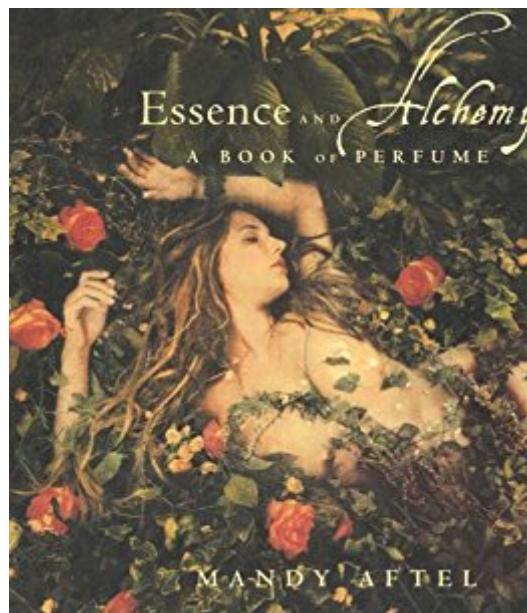


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# Essence And Alchemy: A Book Of Perfume



## **Synopsis**

An artisan perfumer reveals a lost art and its mysterious, sensual history. For centuries, people have taken what seems to be an instinctive pleasure in rubbing scents into their skin. Perfume has helped them to pray, to heal, and to make love. And as long as there has been perfume, there have been perfumers, or rather the priests, shamans, and apothecaries who were their predecessors. Yet, in many ways, perfumery is a lost art, its creative and sensual possibilities eclipsed by the synthetic ingredients of which contemporary perfumes are composed, which have none of the subtlety and complexity of essences derived from natural substances, nor their lush histories. *Essence and Alchemy* resurrects the social and metaphysical legacy that is entwined with the evolution of perfumery, from the dramas of the spice trade to the quests of the alchemists to whom today's perfumers owe a philosophical as well as a practical debt. Mandy Aftel tracks scent through the boudoir and the bath and into the sanctums of worship, offering insights on the relationship of scent to sex, solitude, and the soul. Along the way, she imparts instruction in the art of perfume compositions, complete with recipes, guiding the reader in a process of transformation of materials that continues to follow the alchemical dictum *solve et coagula* (dissolve and combine) and is itself aesthetically and spiritually transforming.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

It is worth purchasing and reading for the beginning natural, artistry perfumer or kitchen witch but probably not going to be an easy read for empirically minded chemistry types. This is a book by Mandy Aftel, the artist and professional perfumer. It is about her personal "alchemy" as it relates to the art of perfumery as she sees it. This is not an alchemy or science based perfumery text. It's one artisan's personal and practical philosophy on the artistry of perfume making with some perfume history and practical information to be gleaned by the eager or tolerant and patient reader. Despite the author's extensive use of hyperbole and lack of clear organization of some of the material there is a lot to be gleaned from this book for beginners who aren't ready to dive head first into expensive or hard to find archaic perfumery texts or chemistry tomes. There are some tables of useful information that clearly outline which oil combinations are historically harmonious or that she finds harmonious and offers some simple formulas, harmonies and accords for the beginning perfumer to start with - although you will need at least \$200-\$300 worth of materials which you might already mostly have. This book is about perfumery and how to blend perfumes from traditional "natural" materials (essential oils, absolutes, concretes, natural fixatives and animal products predominantly) for beginning perfumers. It seems like most of the material in this book is aggregated from other historical sources but then again I don't think one can write about how to make perfumes without going into the historical blending of perfumery; it seems like every book I've read so far on the subject does the same thing including the more science based books. If you are wanting to learn more about the science of perfumery from a modern or more empirical perspective filled with technical information then this is definitely NOT the right book for you. If you are wanting an "inspirational", emotive filled how-to from the perspective of a professional artisan in order to get your feet wet then you will be able to glean useful information, it all depends on your leanings and/or tenacity - I didn't find it that inspiring personally. As an artist I got a lot out of it on a materials based and intuitive process kind of way. As an empirical leaning, science based beginning perfumer I was frustrated by the meanderings, hyperbole & lack of organization. The author comes from her personal experience and philosophy as a professional perfumer and relates her experience in a way that makes it sound like her religion. She writes some philosophically based opinions into the text as though they are fact so be aware of guru-ism. It is clear that the writer feels a strong connection with perfumery's historical alchemical, guild based and apothecary roots and her insight comes from her

practical knowledge and experience as both a professional and artist. Some might find her writing style inspirational due to her frequent use of metaphor and grandiosity. Despite what I found to be mostly fluff I think the author does a pretty good job of bringing the material down to a human level and makes perfumery approachable enough to start blending for most people. In case you can't tell I'm not fond of her writing style and am of the opinion that her writing style (or lack thereof) tends to cloud some of the value this book offers in the way of practical information. I'm sure she is a wonderful perfumer but a writer she is not. The alchemical aspect is not readily apparent besides the authors use of some "alchemical" terminology, exaggerations and hyping up the mysterious aspects of historical processes of perfumery, life and biology for effect. My wife reads archaic alchemy texts and couldn't get half way through this book. It seems that the alchemical reference is more for effect and marketing chaff in the same way jazz bands like to over use it. I'm sure she is well meaning and I'm sure she knows quite a bit about the history and contemplative process of alchemy, especially as it applies to her craft but it doesn't really come across in a way that is specifically related to alchemy in general for you practical or laboratory alchemy types. Instead it comes across as another marketing piece for the Aftel franchise way of doing things.

There is no doubting Mandy Aftel's nose. Its her writing that's open to question. Sorry.

This is such an amazing book. If you have interest in aromatherapy & creating beautiful scents then this is the book. Mandy is a great writer. This book has it all: history, objective information and interesting facts on the topic. I found it very helpful. The recipes she gives are wonderful. The scents that she creates are divine.

Loving this book! Purchased on download and needed the paperback for a better reference. So glad I purchased this. cant wait for her next book.

Informative and fun to read. For beginners, this book has all one needs to get started. The list of suppliers is useful too.

Very interesting book. Great resource for aromatherapy practitioners

This book was an entertaining read, but it was hardly a good historical account of perfumery. It did have a brief overview at the beginning of the book, but it quickly goes into a collection of quotes and

historical quirks about perfume. I think that the "alchemy" part of the book where the author repeatedly ties perfume making to the thought processes of alchemists gets old fast. While alchemical processes did play a part in perfume's beginning the parallels she draws seem to be more of her own making. I think this book also didn't quite live up to my expectations of a book to help a beginner start making their own perfume. It did list items a beginner needs and go into a discussion of the different notes and the ratios they need to be in, and it also described the characteristics of a sampling of fragrances as well. However, a majority of these passages seemed to drift into (and worse yet start out as) lengthy paragraphs on the "spiritual" aspects of perfume, while others simply dwell on the intangible and almost go as far to qualify as "purple prose". The author also has a preference of natural scents over synthetics which I don't have a problem with especially since she explained why, but she does mention that synthetics can cheaply extend natural scents for perfumers on a budget but at no time during the book does she discuss the use of synthetics for scents that cannot be naturally derived such as with the "ozone" smells. This book did have a few recipes for scents (only about four I think), and it did have a list of beginning supplies as well some website retailers of these items, but no where did it go into a lot of detail as to why someone would want to do this on their own (given the large starting cost) outside of creating personalized scents. I think I would have liked the book better if there was more information or at least if the information contained was more easily accessible. As is, the useful parts of the book are often hidden between the author's comparison of perfumery to alchemy and while I may find the imagery of combining the sun and moon interesting it isn't incredibly relevant to what people who want to start making perfume need to know.

I found the book well-written, informative and very enjoyable.

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