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Book Review

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Asymmetric Synthesis - The Essentials

Wiley-VCH, 2007

355 pp; price 89 Euro

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With the plethora of text books on the subject of asymmetric synthesis, it is difficult to see how a new one could contribute in a novel and original way to the subject. However, Christmann and Bräse have managed to do so by editing a book which contains excellent short contributions from the 'Who's who' of asymmetric synthesis, and have in the process created a very interesting and absorbing read. The author list is impressive and the diversity of subjects they cover will be particularly useful to new postgraduates pursuing research in the area. Academics entering or already involved in this field will also like the content and format of this book, particularly as it is one which can be dipped in and out of thanks to the concise chapter contributions. The style of this book is also particularly attractive with each chapter containing a brief but extremely useful background to the area being presented, along with the group's strategy for research within the area and finally conclusions about the significance of their work and the results obtained. Since each chapter is written by the inventors themselves, this book has much more of an intellectual edge than other books about the subject as the thought processes behind the inventions themselves are so clearly presented.

However, one of the difficulties in writing a book on this subject is that there is so much material that *could* be covered. Although the editors have done an admirable job in collecting so many experts,

there are some notable absentees, particularly for a book that not only claims to be a "Who's who" of asymmetric synthesis but also one which has the subtitle – "The Essentials" – these absentees have indeed contributed essential processes to the field. There is for example no dedicated chapter to rhodium catalysed chiral carbenoid chemistry as developed by Huw Davies and others. Nor is there a contribution from David MacMillan one of the pioneers of organocatalytic iminium ion chemistry. Most astonishingly there is no real detail about Sharpless' asymmetric epoxidation, nor indeed any author contribution from this winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his work in asymmetric synthesis. Although the details and perhaps even the story behind all these discoveries could be found in other text books, their absence makes it difficult to assess what this book is trying to achieve. Is it intended as a 'Who's who' of asymmetric synthesis where only the latest state of the art research is presented by the giants of the field, or is it as its title suggests about the *essential* aspects of asymmetric synthesis – i.e. the most important and fundamental ideas?

In spite of these really quite small criticisms, there is no doubt that the material that is present is deeply absorbing and thoroughly interesting. This book would perhaps be of most benefit to someone entering the field of asymmetric synthesis for the first time and requires a brief 'taster' of the kind of work being conducted and to those people this book is highly recommended.

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