

ESSENCE AND ALCHEMY: A BOOK OF PERFUME



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As long as there has been passion, there has been perfume. Wealthy Romans used to scent their doves while in Shakespeare's time, a woman in love would place a peeled apple into her armpit to saturate it with her scent and then present it to her lover. "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. Aftel tracks scent through the boudoir and the bath and into the sanctums of worship, and along the way teaches us the art of perfume-making, including many of her own recipes, offering insights on the relationship of scent to solitude, sex, and soul.