

COMBINATORIAL CHEMISTRY

Synthesis and Application

Edited by

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IRORI Quantum Microchemistry



A Wiley-Interscience Publication

JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

New York • Chichester • Weinheim • Brisbane • Singapore • Toronto

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Combinatorial chemistry : synthesis and application / edited by
Stephen R. Wilson and Anthony W. Czarnik.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-471-12687-X (cloth : alk. paper)

I. Combinatorial chemistry. I. Wilson, Stephen R. (Stephen
Ross), 1946- . II. Czarnik, Anthony W., 1957- .

RS419.C666 1997

615'.19—dc20

96-44718

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

CONTENTS

List of Contributors	vii
Preface	ix
1 Introduction to Combinatorial Libraries: Concepts and Terms <i>Stephen R. Wilson</i>	1
2 Parallel Organic Synthesis Using Parke-Davis Diversomer Technology <i>Sheila Hobbs DeWitt and Anthony W. Czarnik</i>	25
3 Polymer-Supported Synthesis of Organic Compounds and Libraries <i>Mark J. Kurth</i>	39
4 Macro Beads as Microreactors: New Solid-Phase Synthesis Methodology <i>Wolfgang E. Rapp</i>	65
5 Combinatorial Libraries in Solution: Polyfunctionalized Core Molecules <i>Edward A. Wintner and Julius Rebek, Jr.</i>	95
6 Solid-Phase Methods in Combinatorial Chemistry <i>Irving Sucholeiki</i>	119

7	Radiofrequency Encoding and Additional Techniques for the Structure Elucidation of Synthetic Combinatorial Libraries <i>Xiao-yi Xiao and Michael P. Nova</i>	135
8	Combinatorial Synthesis Exploiting Multiple-Component Condensations, Microchip Encoding, and Resin Capture <i>Robert W. Armstrong, S. David Brown, Thomas A. Keating, and Paul A. Tempest</i>	153
9	Indexed Combinatorial Libraries: Nonoligomeric Chemical Diversity for the Discovery of Novel Enzyme Inhibitors <i>Michael C Pirrung, Joseph H.-L. Chau, and Jrlung Chen</i>	191
10	Strategies for Combinatorial Libraries of Oligosaccharides <i>Carol M. Taylor</i>	207
11	Soluble Combinatorial Libraries of Peptides, Peptidomimetics, and Organics: Fundamental Tools for Basic Research and Drug Discovery <i>John M. Ostresh, Barbara Dörner, Sylvie E. Blondelle, and Richard A. Houghten</i>	225
12	Combinatorial Libraries of Peptides, Proteins, and Antibodies Using Biological Systems <i>Stephen Benkovic, Grove P. Miller, Wenyan Zong, and Jeff Smiley</i>	241
	Index	261

1

INTRODUCTION TO COMBINATORIAL LIBRARIES: CONCEPTS AND TERMS

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In the past few years, combinatorial chemistry has become the popular and often misunderstood “new wave” in drug discovery. In some cases, combinatorial chemistry is presented as being in direct competition with rational, or computer-aided, drug design. Nothing could be further from the truth. Combinatorial chemistry encompasses many strategies and processes for the rapid synthesis of large, organized collections of compounds called libraries. When planned intelligently, combinatorial methods produce collections of molecularly diverse compounds that can be used for rapidly screening for biological activity. Without planning, the GIGO (garbage in–garbage out) principle applies. Whether or not a library has in some way been designed or made more or less at random depends on the reasons for preparing the compounds. Combinatorial chemistry as a laboratory practice cannot replace computer modeling as an exercise in refining our basic understanding of molecular interactions. It is likely that both rational drug design and combinatorial chemistry will be used, in concert when appropriate, or directly applied to the problems best suited to each method.

Combinatorial chemistry includes many research areas—new analytical methods, new computer modeling and database-related challenges, new synthetic approaches, new types of reagents, and new types of assays. Although this chapter will provide current leads into all these fields, the basic groundwork for combinatorial chemistry is still being laid. Many new research areas have yet to be explored.

Combinatorial chemistry has its conceptual roots in the immune system. In the body, when a new antigen comes in contact with the preexisting large collection of antibodies, the antibody that binds best is selected and reproduced in large numbers

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