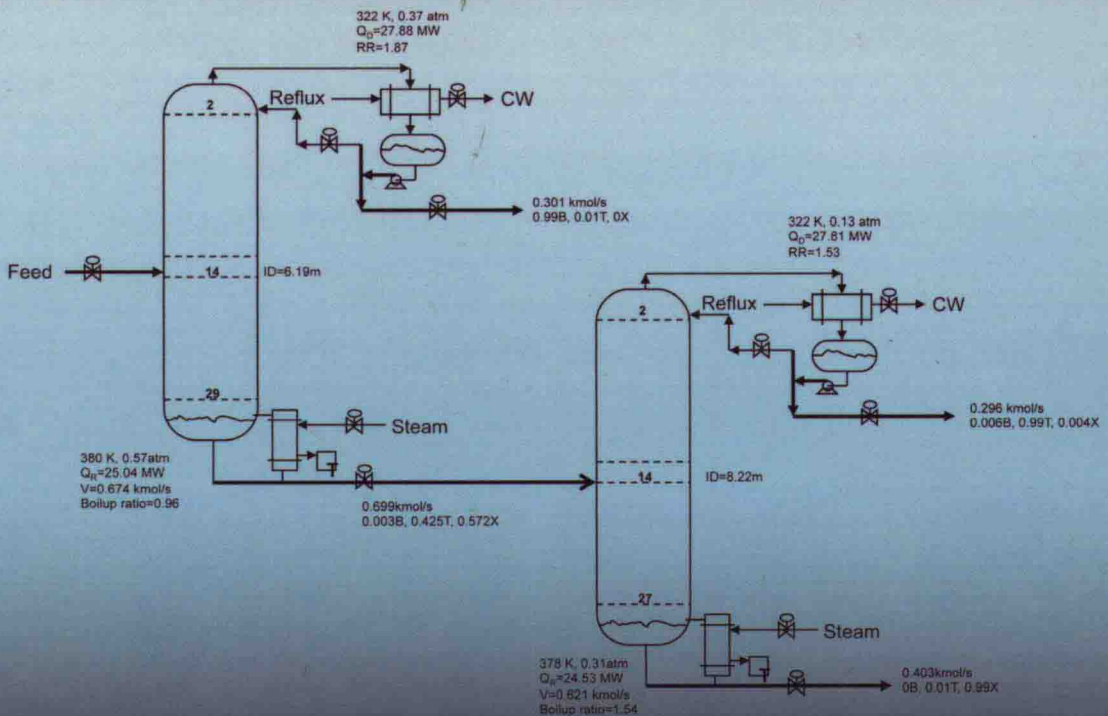


Second Edition

# Distillation Design and Control Using Aspen<sup>TM</sup> Simulation

William L. Luyben



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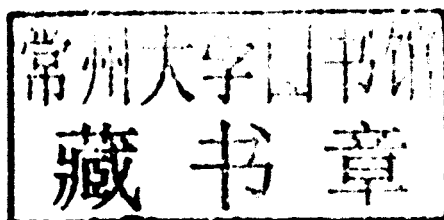
# DISTILLATION DESIGN AND CONTROL USING ASPEN<sup>TM</sup> SIMULATION

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Second Edition

**WILLIAM L. LUYBEN**

Lehigh University  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania



AICHE<sup>®</sup>

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# DISTILLATION DESIGN AND CONTROL USING ASPEN<sup>TM</sup> SIMULATION

This book is dedicated to farmers all over the world.  
*No Farmers, No Food!*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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Distillation fundamentals do not change, nor does the importance of distillation in our energy-intensive society. What does change is the range of applications and methods of analysis that provide more insight and offer improvements in steady-state design and dynamic control. In the seven years since the first edition was published, a number of new concepts and applications have been developed and published in the literature.

Industrial applications of the divided-wall (Petlyuk) column have expanded, so a new chapter has been added that covers both the design and the control of these more complex coupled columns. The use of dynamic simulations to quantitatively explore the safety issues of rapid transient responses to major process upsets and failures is discussed in a new chapter. A more structured approach for selecting an appropriate control structure is outlined to help sort through the overwhelmingly large number of alternative structures. A simple distillation column has five factorial (120) alternative structures that need to be trimmed down to a workable number, so that their steady-state and dynamic performances can be compared.

Interest in carbon dioxide capture has become more widespread, so a chapter studying the design and control of the low-pressure amine absorber/stripper system and the high-pressure physical-absorption absorber/stripper system has been added. The capabilities and features in Aspen software have been updated. The importance of being able to operate columns over a wide ranges of throughputs has increased with the development of chemical plants that are coupled with power-generation processes or inherently intermittent “green” energy sources (solar and wind). A new chapter deals with column control structures that can effectively deal with these turndown issues.

I hope you find the new edition useful and understandable. The coverage is unapologetically simple and practical. Therefore, the material should have a good chance of actually being applied to real and important problems. Good luck in your distillation design and control careers. I think you will find it challenging but fun.

WILLIAM L. LUYBEN

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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The rapid run up in the price of crude oil in recent years and the resulting “sticker shock” at the gas pump have caused the scientific and engineering communities to finally understand that it is time for some reality checks on our priorities. Energy is the real problem that the world faces, and it will not be solved by the recent fads of biotechnology or nanotechnology. Energy consumption is the main producer of carbon dioxide, so it is directly linked with the problem of global warming.

A complete reassessment of our energy supply and consumption systems is required. Our terribly inefficient use of energy in all aspects of our modern society must be halted. We waste energy in our *transportation* system with poor-mileage SUVs and inadequate railroad systems. We waste energy in our *water* systems by using energy to produce potable water, and then flush most of it down the toilet. This loads up our *waste disposal* plants, which consume more energy. We waste energy in our *food* supply system by consuming large amounts of energy for fertilizer, tillage, transporting, and packaging our food for consumer convenience. The old farmer markets provided better food at lower cost and required much less energy.

One of the most important technologies in our energy-supply system is distillation. Essentially, all our transportation fuel goes through at least one distillation column on its way from crude oil to the gasoline pump. Large distillation columns called pipestills separate the crude into various petroleum fractions based on boiling points. Intermediate fractions go directly to gasoline. Heavy fractions are catalytically or thermally “cracked” to form more gasoline. Light fractions are combined to form more gasoline. Distillation is used in all of these operations.

Even when we begin to switch to renewable sources of energy, such as biomass, the most likely transportation fuel will be methanol. The most likely process is the partial oxidation of biomass to produce synthesis gas (a mixture of hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide), and the subsequent reaction of these components to produce methanol and water. Distillation to separate methanol from water is an important part of this process. Distillation is also used to produce the oxygen used in the partial oxidation reactor.

Therefore, distillation is, and will remain in the twenty-first century, the premier separation method in the chemical and petroleum industries. Its importance is unquestionable in helping to provide food, heat, shelter, clothing, and transportation in our modern society. It is involved in supplying much of our energy needs. The distillation columns in operation around the world number in the tens of thousands.

The analysis, design, operation, control, and optimization of distillation columns have been extensively studied for almost a century. Until the advent of computers, hand calculations and graphical methods were developed and widely applied in these studies. Starting from about 1950, analog and digital computer simulations began to be used for solving many engineering problems. Distillation analysis involves iterative vapor–liquid phase equilibrium calculations and tray-to-tray component balances that are ideal for digital computation.

Initially, most engineers wrote their own programs to solve both the nonlinear algebraic equations that describe the steady-state operation of a distillation column and to numerically integrate the nonlinear ordinary differential equations that describe its dynamic behavior. Many chemical and petroleum companies developed their own in-house steady-state process-simulation programs in which distillation was an important unit operation. Commercial *steady-state* simulators took over about two decades ago and now dominate the field.

Commercial *dynamic* simulators were developed quite a bit later. They had to wait for advancements in computer technology to provide the very fast computers required. The current state-of-the-art is that both steady-state and dynamic simulations of distillation columns are widely used in industry and in universities.

My own technical experience has pretty much followed this history of distillation simulation. My practical experience started back in a high-school chemistry class in which we performed batch distillations. Next came an exposure to some distillation theory and running a pilot-scale batch distillation column as an undergraduate at Penn State, learning from Arthur Rose and “Black” Mike Cannon. Then, there were five years of industrial experience in Exxon refineries as a technical service engineer on pipestills, vacuum columns, light-ends units, and alkylation units, all of which used distillation extensively.

During this period, the only use of computers that I was aware of was for solving linear programming problems associated with refinery planning and scheduling. It was not until returning to graduate school in 1960 that I personally started to use analog and digital computers. Bob Pigford taught us how to program a Bendix G12 digital computer, which used paper tape and had such limited memory that programs were severely restricted in length and memory requirements. Dave Lamb taught us analog simulation. Jack Gerster taught us distillation practice.

Next, there were four years working in the Engineering Department of DuPont on process-control problems, many of which involved distillation columns. Both analog and digital simulations were heavily used. A wealth of knowledge was available from a stable of outstanding engineers: Page Buckley, Joe Coughlin, J. B. Jones, Neal O’Brien, and Tom Keane, to mention only a few.

Finally, there have been over 35 years of teaching and research at Lehigh in which many undergraduate and graduate students have used simulations of distillation columns in isolation and in plantwide environments to learn basic distillation principles and to develop effective control structures for a variety of distillation column configurations. Both home-grown and commercial simulators have been used in graduate research and in the undergraduate senior design course.



The purpose of this book is to try to capture some of this extensive experience with distillation design and control, so that it is available to students and young engineers when they face problems with distillation columns. This book covers much more than just the mechanics of using a simulator. It uses simulation to guide in developing the optimum economic steady-state design of distillation systems, using simple and practical approaches. Then, it uses simulation to develop effective control structures for dynamic control. Questions are addressed of whether to use single-end control or dual-composition control, where to locate temperature control trays, and how excess degrees of freedom should be fixed.

There is no claim that the material is all new. The steady-state methods are discussed in most design textbooks. Most of the dynamic material is scattered around in a number of papers and books. What is claimed is that this book pulls this material together in a coordinated easily accessible way. Another unique feature is the combination of design and control of distillation columns in a single book.

There are three steps in developing a process design. The first is conceptual design in which simple approximate methods are used to develop a preliminary flowsheet. This step for distillation systems is covered very thoroughly by Doherty and Malone (*Conceptual Design of Distillation Systems*, 2001, McGraw-Hill). The next step is preliminary design in which rigorous simulation methods are used to evaluate both steady-state and dynamic performance of the proposed flowsheet. The final step is detailed design in which the hardware is specified in great detail: types of trays, number of sieve tray holes, feed and reflux piping, pumps, heat-exchanger areas, valve sizes and so on. This book deals with the second stage, preliminary design.

The subject of distillation simulation is a very broad one, which would require many volumes to cover comprehensively. The resulting encyclopedic-like books would be too formidable for a beginning engineer to try to tackle. Therefore, this book is restricted in its scope to only those aspects that I have found to be the most fundamental and the most useful. Only continuous distillation columns are considered. The area of batch distillation is very extensive and should be dealt with in another book. Only staged columns are considered. They have been successfully applied for many years. Rate-based models are fundamentally more rigorous, but they require that more parameters be known or estimated.

Only rigorous simulations are used in this book. The book by Doherty and Malone is highly recommended for a detailed coverage of approximate methods for conceptual steady-state design of distillation systems.

I hope that the reader finds this book useful and readable. It is a labor of love that is aimed at taking some of the mystery and magic out of design and operating a distillation column.

W. L. L.

# CONTENTS

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<b>PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>1 FUNDAMENTALS OF VAPOR–LIQUID–EQUILIBRIUM (VLE)</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Vapor Pressure / 1	
1.2 Binary VLE Phase Diagrams / 3	
1.3 Physical Property Methods / 7	
1.4 Relative Volatility / 7	
1.5 Bubble Point Calculations / 8	
1.6 Ternary Diagrams / 9	
1.7 VLE Nonideality / 11	
1.8 Residue Curves for Ternary Systems / 15	
1.9 Distillation Boundaries / 22	
1.10 Conclusions / 25	
Reference / 27	
<b>2 ANALYSIS OF DISTILLATION COLUMNS</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1 Design Degrees of Freedom / 29	
2.2 Binary McCabe–Thiele Method / 30	
2.2.1 Operating Lines / 32	
2.2.2 $q$ -Line / 33	
2.2.3 Stepping Off Trays / 35	
2.2.4 Effect of Parameters / 35	
2.2.5 Limiting Conditions / 36	

2.3	Approximate Multicomponent Methods / 36	
2.3.1	Fenske Equation for Minimum Number of Trays / 37	
2.3.2	Underwood Equations for Minimum Reflux Ratio / 37	
2.4	Conclusions / 38	
<b>3</b>	<b>SETTING UP A STEADY-STATE SIMULATION</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1	Configuring a New Simulation / 39	
3.2	Specifying Chemical Components and Physical Properties / 46	
3.3	Specifying Stream Properties / 51	
3.4	Specifying Parameters of Equipment / 52	
3.4.1	Column C1 / 52	
3.4.2	Valves and Pumps / 55	
3.5	Running the Simulation / 57	
3.6	Using Design Spec/Vary Function / 58	
3.7	Finding the Optimum Feed Tray and Minimum Conditions / 70	
3.7.1	Optimum Feed Tray / 70	
3.7.2	Minimum Reflux Ratio / 71	
3.7.3	Minimum Number of Trays / 71	
3.8	Column Sizing / 72	
3.8.1	Length / 72	
3.8.2	Diameter / 72	
3.9	Conceptual Design / 74	
3.10	Conclusions / 80	
<b>4</b>	<b>DISTILLATION ECONOMIC OPTIMIZATION</b>	<b>81</b>
4.1	Heuristic Optimization / 81	
4.1.1	Set Total Trays to Twice Minimum Number of Trays / 81	
4.1.2	Set Reflux Ratio to 1.2 Times Minimum Reflux Ratio / 83	
4.2	Economic Basis / 83	
4.3	Results / 85	
4.4	Operating Optimization / 87	
4.5	Optimum Pressure for Vacuum Columns / 92	
4.6	Conclusions / 94	
<b>5</b>	<b>MORE COMPLEX DISTILLATION SYSTEMS</b>	<b>95</b>
5.1	Extractive Distillation / 95	
5.1.1	Design / 99	
5.1.2	Simulation Issues / 101	
5.2	Ethanol Dehydration / 105	
5.2.1	VLLE Behavior / 106	

- 5.2.2 Process Flowsheet Simulation / 109
- 5.2.3 Converging the Flowsheet / 112
- 5.3 Pressure-Swing Azeotropic Distillation / 115
- 5.4 Heat-Integrated Columns / 121
  - 5.4.1 Flowsheet / 121
  - 5.4.2 Converging for Neat Operation / 122
- 5.5 Conclusions / 126

## **6 STEADY-STATE CALCULATIONS FOR CONTROL STRUCTURE SELECTION**

127

- 6.1 Control Structure Alternatives / 127
  - 6.1.1 Dual-Composition Control / 127
  - 6.1.2 Single-End Control / 128
- 6.2 Feed Composition Sensitivity Analysis (ZSA) / 128
- 6.3 Temperature Control Tray Selection / 129
  - 6.3.1 Summary of Methods / 130
  - 6.3.2 Binary Propane/Isobutane System / 131
  - 6.3.3 Ternary BTX System / 135
  - 6.3.4 Ternary Azeotropic System / 139
- 6.4 Conclusions / 144
- Reference / 144

## **7 CONVERTING FROM STEADY-STATE TO DYNAMIC SIMULATION**

145

- 7.1 Equipment Sizing / 146
- 7.2 Exporting to Aspen Dynamics / 148
- 7.3 Opening the Dynamic Simulation in Aspen Dynamics / 150
- 7.4 Installing Basic Controllers / 152
  - 7.4.1 Reflux / 156
  - 7.4.2 Issues / 157
- 7.5 Installing Temperature and Composition Controllers / 161
  - 7.5.1 Tray Temperature Control / 162
  - 7.5.2 Composition Control / 170
  - 7.5.3 Composition/Temperature Cascade Control / 170
- 7.6 Performance Evaluation / 172
  - 7.6.1 Installing a Plot / 172
  - 7.6.2 Importing Dynamic Results into Matlab / 174
  - 7.6.3 Reboiler Heat Input to Feed Ratio / 176
  - 7.6.4 Comparison of Temperature Control with Cascade CC/TC / 181
- 7.7 Conclusions / 184

## **8 CONTROL OF MORE COMPLEX COLUMNS**

**185**

- 8.1 Extractive Distillation Process / 185
  - 8.1.1 Design / 185
  - 8.1.2 Control Structure / 188
  - 8.1.3 Dynamic Performance / 191
- 8.2 Columns with Partial Condensers / 191
  - 8.2.1 Total Vapor Distillate / 192
  - 8.2.2 Both Vapor and Liquid Distillate Streams / 209
- 8.3 Control of Heat-Integrated Distillation Columns / 217
  - 8.3.1 Process Studied / 217
  - 8.3.2 Heat Integration Relationships / 218
  - 8.3.3 Control Structure / 222
  - 8.3.4 Dynamic Performance / 223
- 8.4 Control of Azeotropic Columns/Decanter System / 226
  - 8.4.1 Converting to Dynamics and Closing Recycle Loop / 227
  - 8.4.2 Installing the Control Structure / 228
  - 8.4.3 Performance / 233
  - 8.4.4 Numerical Integration Issues / 237
- 8.5 Unusual Control Structure / 238
  - 8.5.1 Process Studied / 239
  - 8.5.2 Economic Optimum Steady-State Design / 242
  - 8.5.3 Control Structure Selection / 243
  - 8.5.4 Dynamic Simulation Results / 248
  - 8.5.5 Alternative Control Structures / 248
  - 8.5.6 Conclusions / 254
- 8.6 Conclusions / 255
- References / 255

## **9 REACTIVE DISTILLATION**

**257**

- 9.1 Introduction / 257
- 9.2 Types of Reactive Distillation Systems / 258
  - 9.2.1 Single-Feed Reactions / 259
  - 9.2.2 Irreversible Reaction with Heavy Product / 259
  - 9.2.3 Neat Operation Versus Use of Excess Reactant / 260
- 9.3 TAME Process Basics / 263
  - 9.3.1 Prereactor / 263
  - 9.3.2 Reactive Column C1 / 263
- 9.4 TAME Reaction Kinetics and VLE / 266
- 9.5 Plantwide Control Structure / 270
- 9.6 Conclusions / 274
- References / 274

**10 CONTROL OF SIDESTREAM COLUMNS 275**

- 10.1 Liquid Sidestream Column / 276
  - 10.1.1 Steady-State Design / 276
  - 10.1.2 Dynamic Control / 277
- 10.2 Vapor Sidestream Column / 281
  - 10.2.1 Steady-State Design / 282
  - 10.2.2 Dynamic Control / 282
- 10.3 Liquid Sidestream Column with Stripper / 286
  - 10.3.1 Steady-State Design / 286
  - 10.3.2 Dynamic Control / 288
- 10.4 Vapor Sidestream Column with Rectifier / 292
  - 10.4.1 Steady-State Design / 292
  - 10.4.2 Dynamic Control / 293
- 10.5 Sidestream Purge Column / 300
  - 10.5.1 Steady-State Design / 300
  - 10.5.2 Dynamic Control / 302
- 10.6 Conclusions / 307

**11 CONTROL OF PETROLEUM FRACTIONATORS 309**

- 11.1 Petroleum Fractions / 310
- 11.2 Characterization Crude Oil / 314
- 11.3 Steady-State Design of Preflash Column / 321
- 11.4 Control of Preflash Column / 328
- 11.5 Steady-State Design of Pipestill / 332
  - 11.5.1 Overview of Steady-State Design / 333
  - 11.5.2 Configuring the Pipestill in Aspen Plus / 335
  - 11.5.3 Effects of Design Parameters / 344
- 11.6 Control of Pipestill / 346
- 11.7 Conclusions / 354
- References / 354

**12 DIVIDED-WALL (PETLYUK) COLUMNS 355**

- 12.1 Introduction / 355
- 12.2 Steady-State Design / 357
  - 12.2.1 *MultiFrac* Model / 357
  - 12.2.2 *RadFrac* Model / 366
- 12.3 Control of the Divided-Wall Column / 369
  - 12.3.1 Control Structure / 369
  - 12.3.2 Implementation in Aspen Dynamics / 373
  - 12.3.3 Dynamic Results / 375

12.4	Control of the Conventional Column Process /	380
12.4.1	Control Structure /	380
12.4.2	Dynamic Results and Comparisons /	381
12.5	Conclusions and Discussion /	383
	References /	384

## 13 DYNAMIC SAFETY ANALYSIS

385

13.1	Introduction /	385
13.2	Safety Scenarios /	385
13.3	Process Studied /	387
13.4	Basic <i>RadFrac</i> Models /	387
13.4.1	Constant Duty Model /	387
13.4.2	Constant Temperature Model /	388
13.4.3	LMTD Model /	388
13.4.4	Condensing or Evaporating Medium Models /	388
13.4.5	Dynamic Model for Reboiler /	388
13.5	<i>RadFrac</i> Model with Explicit Heat-Exchanger Dynamics /	389
13.5.1	Column /	389
13.5.2	Condenser /	390
13.5.3	Reflux Drum /	391
13.5.4	Liquid Split /	391
13.5.5	Reboiler /	391
13.6	Dynamic Simulations /	392
13.6.1	Base Case Control Structure /	392
13.6.2	Rigorous Case Control Structure /	393
13.7	Comparison of Dynamic Responses /	394
13.7.1	Condenser Cooling Failure /	394
13.7.2	Heat-Input Surge /	395
13.8	Other Issues /	397
13.9	Conclusions /	398
	Reference /	398

## 14 CARBON DIOXIDE CAPTURE

399

14.1	Carbon Dioxide Removal in Low-Pressure Air Combustion Power Plants /	400
14.1.1	Process Design /	400
14.1.2	Simulation Issues /	401
14.1.3	Plantwide Control Structure /	404
14.1.4	Dynamic Performance /	408
14.2	Carbon Dioxide Removal in High-Pressure IGCC Power Plants /	412

- 14.2.1 Design / 414
- 14.2.2 Plantwide Control Structure / 414
- 14.2.3 Dynamic Performance / 418
- 14.3 Conclusions / 420
- References / 421

## **15 DISTILLATION TURNDOWN**

**423**

- 15.1 Introduction / 423
- 15.2 Control Problem / 424
  - 15.2.1 Two-Temperature Control / 425
  - 15.2.2 Valve-Position Control / 426
  - 15.2.3 Recycle Control / 427
- 15.3 Process Studied / 428
- 15.4 Dynamic Performance for Ramp Disturbances / 431
  - 15.4.1 Two-Temperature Control / 431
  - 15.4.2 VPC Control / 432
  - 15.4.3 Recycle Control / 433
  - 15.4.4 Comparison / 434
- 15.5 Dynamic Performance for Step Disturbances / 435
  - 15.5.1 Two-Temperature Control / 435
  - 15.5.2 VPC Control / 436
  - 15.5.3 Recycle Control / 436
- 15.6 Other Control Structures / 439
  - 15.6.1 No Temperature Control / 439
  - 15.6.2 Dual Temperature Control / 440
- 15.7 Conclusions / 442
- References / 442

## **16 PRESSURE-COMPENSATED TEMPERATURE CONTROL IN DISTILLATION COLUMNS**

**443**

- 16.1 Introduction / 443
- 16.2 Numerical Example Studied / 445
- 16.3 Conventional Control Structure Selection / 446
- 16.4 Temperature/Pressure/Composition Relationships / 450
- 16.5 Implementation in Aspen Dynamics / 451
- 16.6 Comparison of Dynamic Results / 452
  - 16.6.1 Feed Flow Rate Disturbances / 452
  - 16.6.2 Pressure Disturbances / 453
- 16.7 Conclusions / 455
- References / 456



<b>17</b>	<b>ETHANOL DEHYDRATION</b>	<b>457</b>
17.1	Introduction / 457	
17.2	Optimization of the Beer Still (Preconcentrator) / 459	
17.3	Optimization of the Azeotropic and Recovery Columns / 460	
17.3.1	Optimum Feed Locations / 461	
17.3.2	Optimum Number of Stages / 462	
17.4	Optimization of the Entire Process / 462	
17.5	Cyclohexane Entrainer / 466	
17.6	Flowsheet Recycle Convergence / 466	
17.7	Conclusions / 467	
	References / 467	
<b>18</b>	<b>EXTERNAL RESET FEEDBACK TO PREVENT RESET WINDUP</b>	<b>469</b>
18.1	Introduction / 469	
18.2	External Reset Feedback Circuit Implementation / 471	
18.2.1	Generate the Error Signal / 472	
18.2.2	Multiply by Controller Gain / 472	
18.2.3	Add the Output of Lag / 472	
18.2.4	Select Lower Signal / 472	
18.2.5	Setting up the <i>Lag</i> Block / 472	
18.3	Flash Tank Example / 473	
18.3.1	Process and Normal Control Structure / 473	
18.3.2	Override Control Structure Without External Reset Feedback / 474	
18.3.3	Override Control Structure with External Reset Feedback / 476	
18.4	Distillation Column Example / 479	
18.4.1	Normal Control Structure / 479	
18.4.2	Normal and Override Controllers Without External Reset / 481	
18.4.3	Normal and Override Controllers with External Reset Feedback / 483	
18.5	Conclusions / 486	
	References / 486	
	<b>INDEX</b>	<b>487</b>