**Significance:** (±)-Reserpine was isolated from *Rauvolfia serpentina*, a flower from the Apocynaceae family. Today it is used as a drug for the treatment of high blood pressure. The configuration was elucidated in 1955 by the Ciba group. In 1956, Woodward and co-workers disclosed the first total synthesis, which completed (±)-reserpine in 21 steps.

**Comment:** Lactone D is obtained through a Diels–Alder reaction of quinone A with diene B and subsequent reduction. Functional group interconversions lead to aldehyde I bearing five stereocenters. Reductive amination of I and indole derivative J, followed by lactamization forms K. Subsequent Bischler–Napieralski reaction completes the carbon skeleton of (±)-reserpine.