



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Williams et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2005/0140184 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jun. 30, 2005**

(54) **FURNITURE SYSTEM FACILITATING
INFORMAL COLLABORATION AND
PRESENTATIONS**

(52) **U.S. Cl. 297/135**

(76) **Inventors: Otto N. Williams, San Francisco, CA
(US); Jess A. Sorel, Oakland, CA (US);
Joe A. Nobles, San Francisco, CA
(US); Todd J. Sorel, Hayward, CA
(US)**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A furniture system particularly adapted for informal collaboration and presentations includes lounge seating units for team members and a podium seating unit for a seated presenter. An information display panel is attached to a rear of the podium seating unit and extends vertically with its front surface being reachable over a back of the podium seating unit. The back terminates below a presenter's lumbar, but is deep enough to discourage the presenter from leaning rearwardly against the screen. By this arrangement, the seated presenter maintains level eye contact with group members in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information. Accessories are provided to enhance use of the system, such as a paper-and-drink tray for resting on the seat cushion, an erasable board attachable to the screen, bridge tables positionable between seating units, and table-attached screens for promoting privacy.

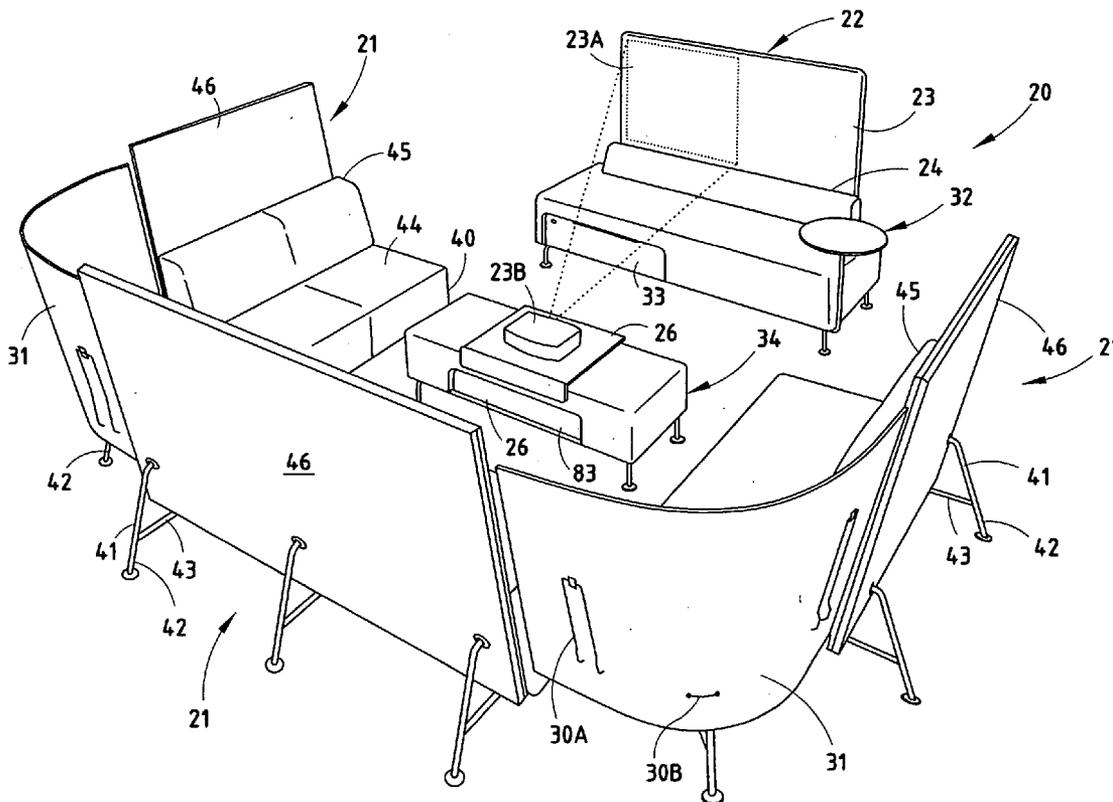
Correspondence Address:
**PRICE HENEVELD COOPER DEWITT &
LITTON, LLP**
695 KENMOOR, S.E.
P O BOX 2567
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49501 (US)

(21) **Appl. No.: 10/732,114**

(22) **Filed: Dec. 10, 2003**

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷ A47B 39/00**



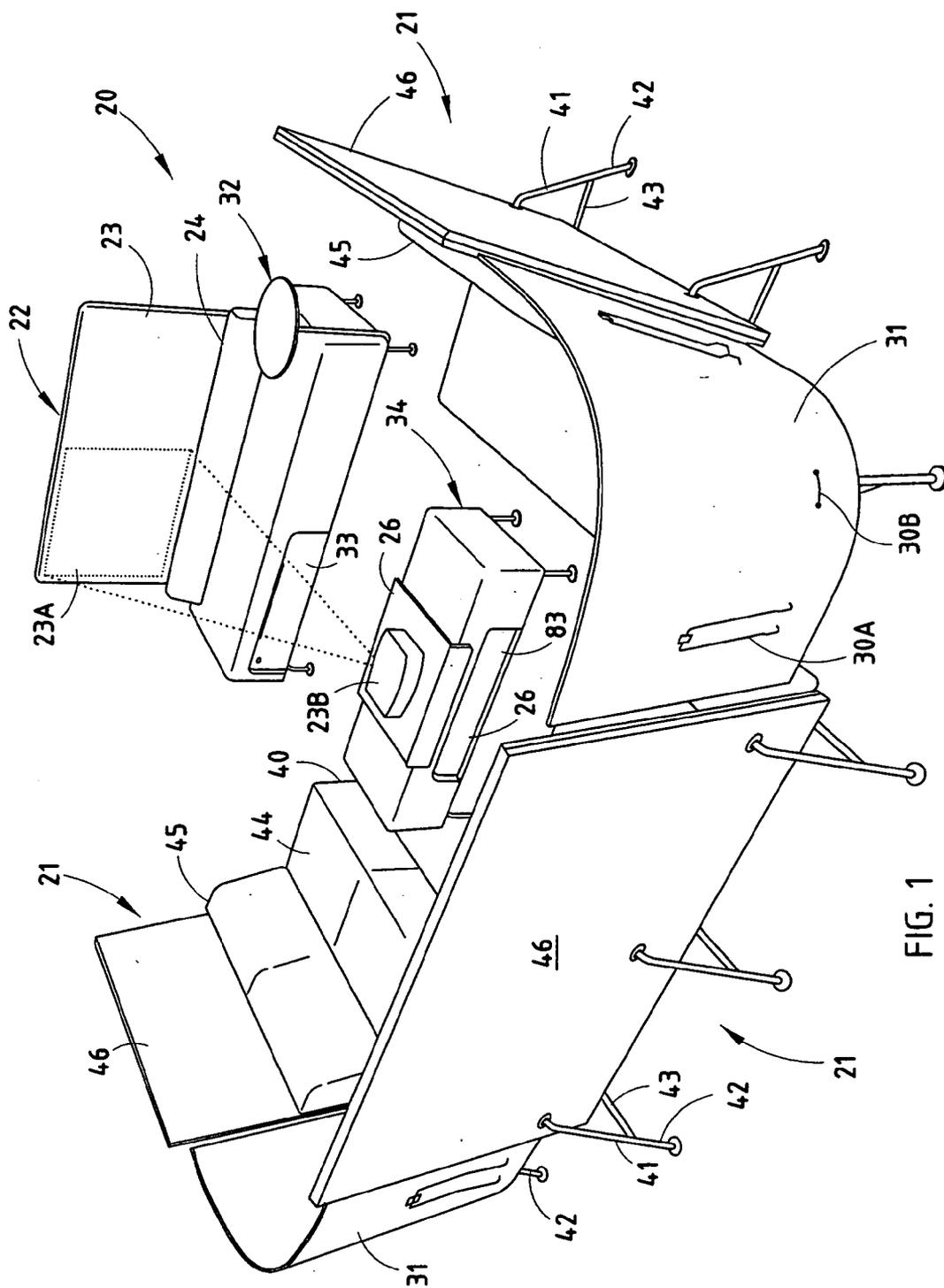


FIG. 1

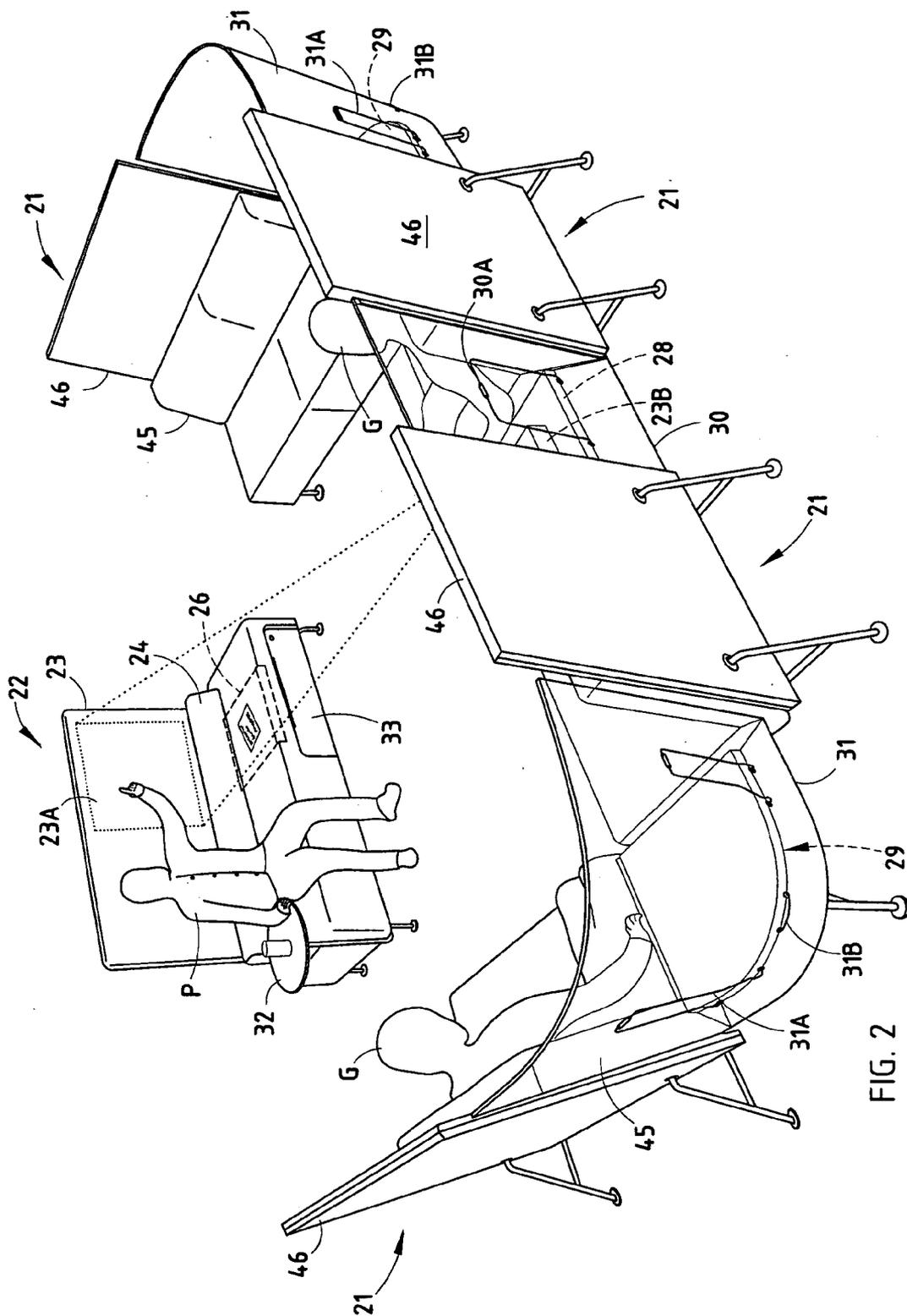


FIG. 2

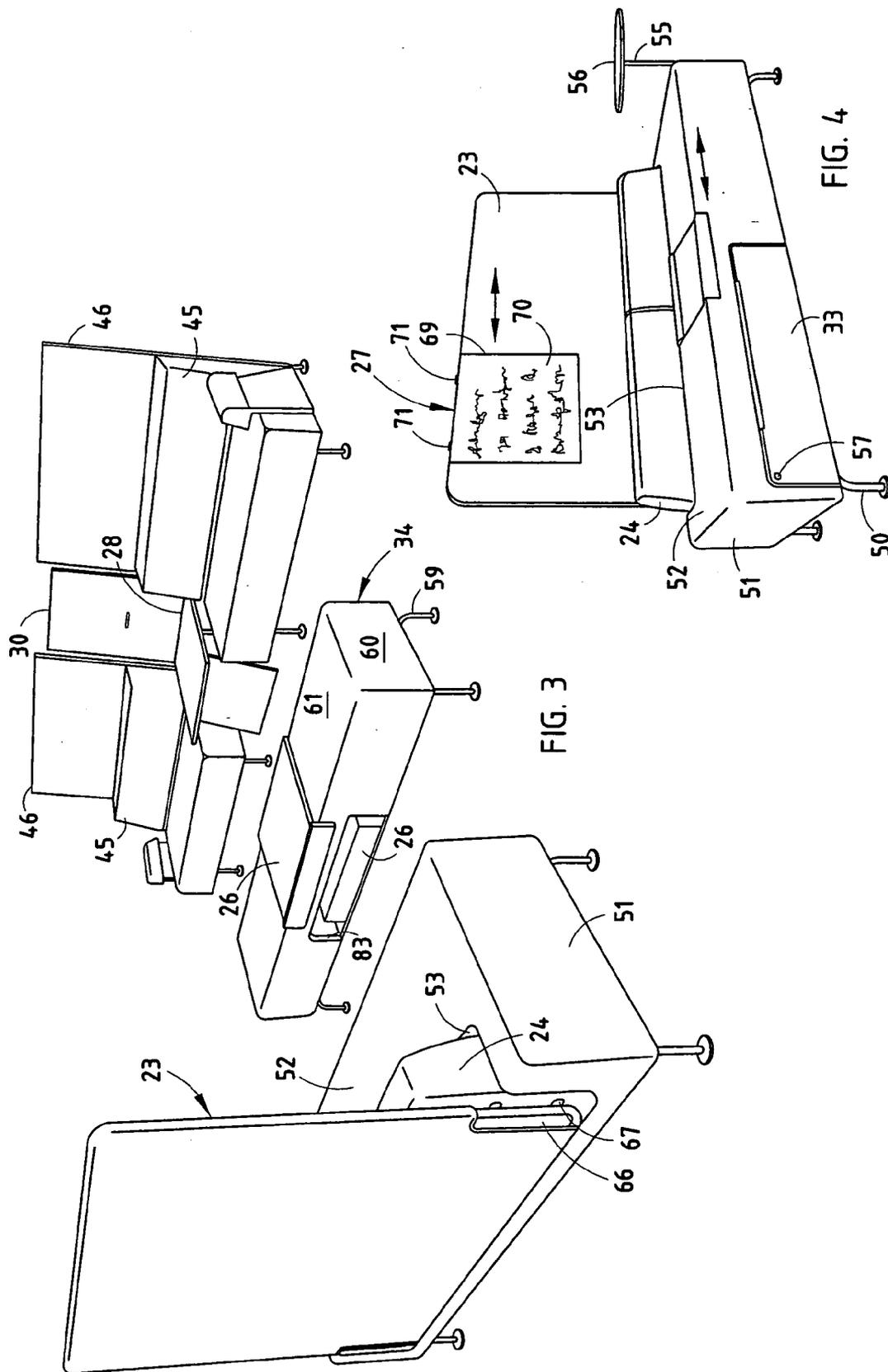


FIG. 3

FIG. 4

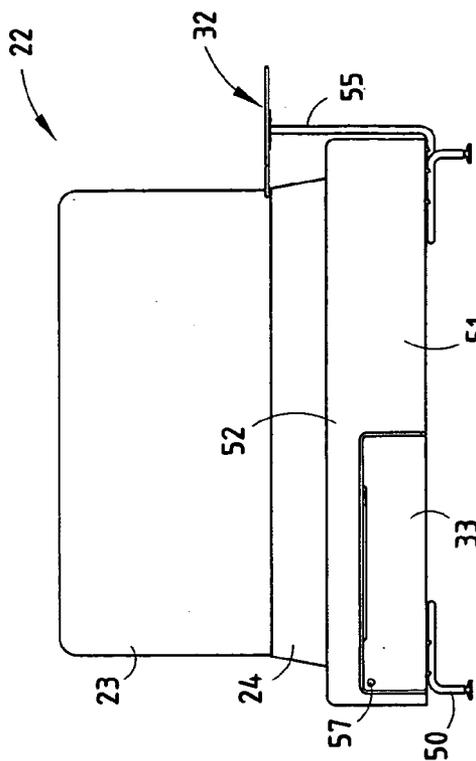


FIG. 6

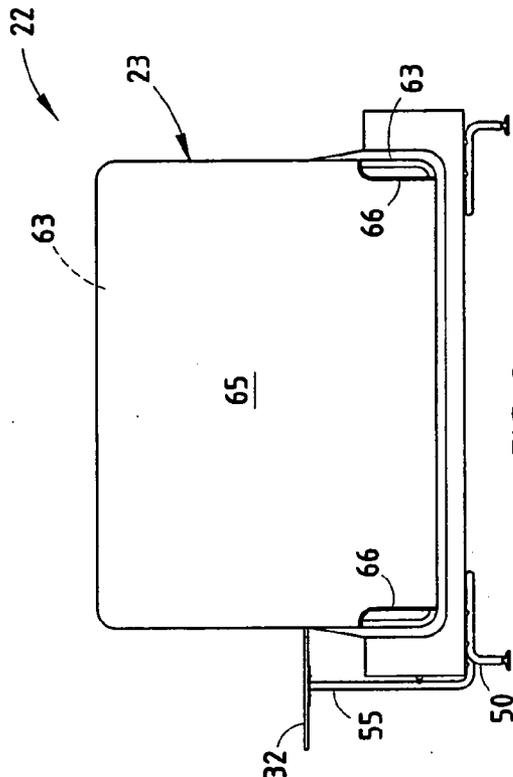


FIG. 8

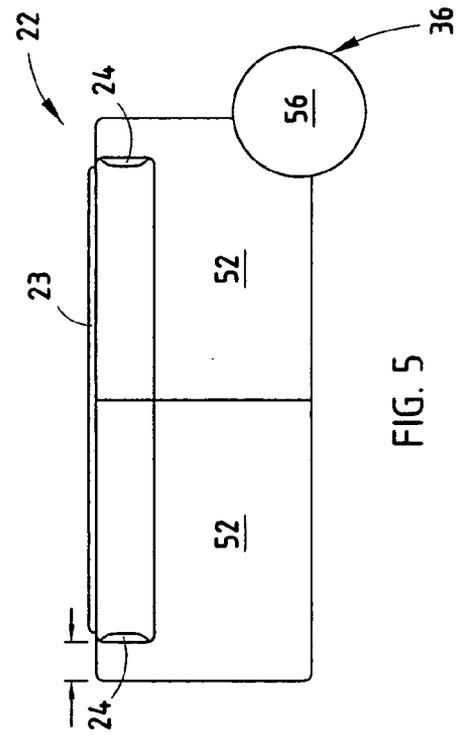


FIG. 5

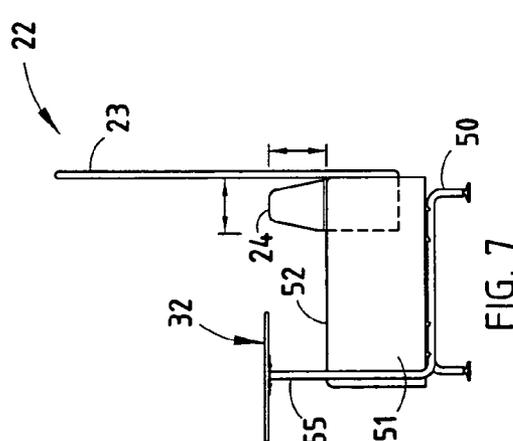


FIG. 7

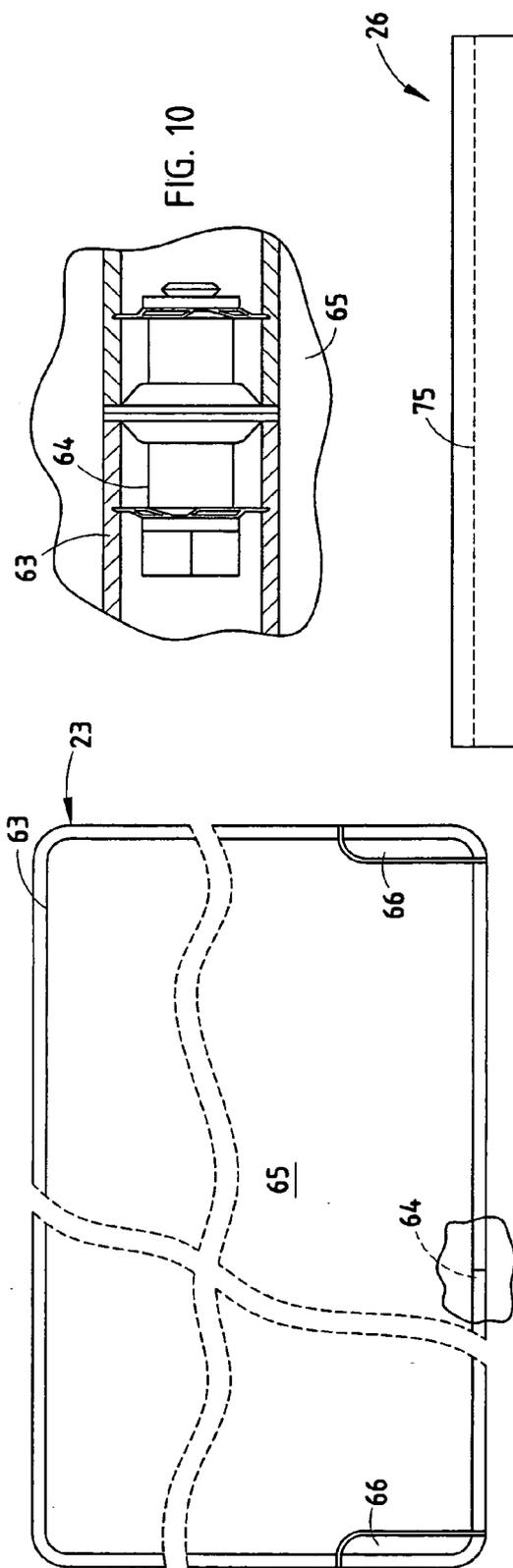


FIG. 9

FIG. 10

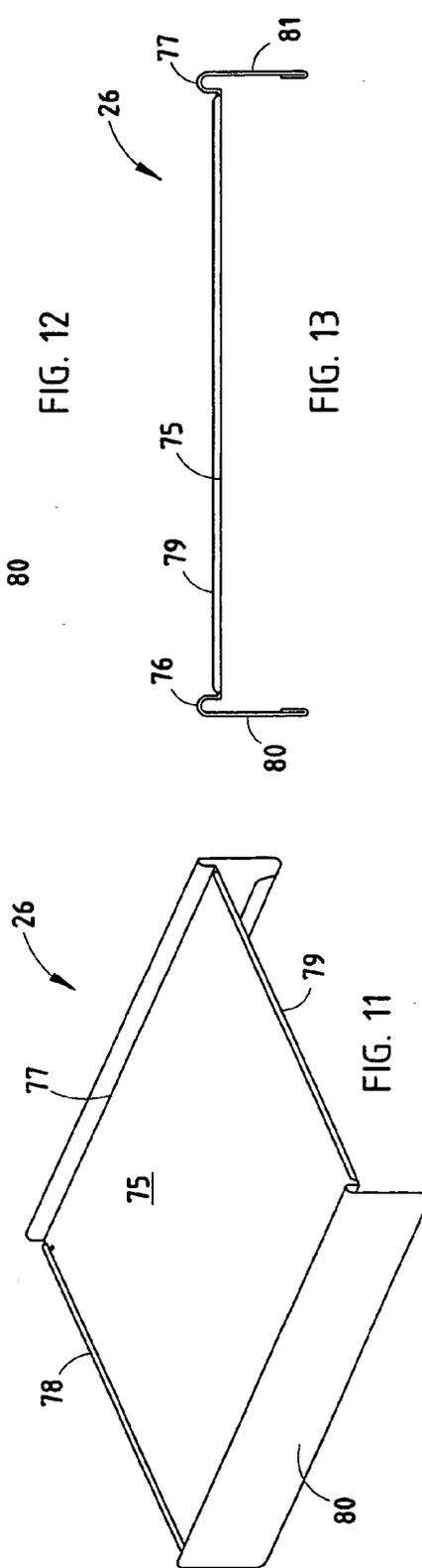


FIG. 12

FIG. 13

FIG. 11

FURNITURE SYSTEM FACILITATING INFORMAL COLLABORATION AND PRESENTATIONS

BACKGROUND

[0001] The present invention relates to furniture systems that facilitate informal group discussions, and more particularly relates to a furniture system including lounge seating units and a presenter-specific seating unit, where the presenter-specific seating unit is particularly adapted for supporting the activity of a presenter, and for helping the presenter maintain eye contact with his group and also to maintain control, while still keeping the informality of the situation.

[0002] Lounge seating is known to promote an informal setting and discussion, and is often used in lobbies and similar public places where it is desirable to encourage people to relax and have conversations. This contrasts to other furniture, such as task chairs, which are intended to support and promote task-oriented activity and movement, but in a more formal task-oriented way. The differences are subtle but significant, since people act differently in informal situations versus more formalized task-oriented situations. Lounge seating tends to have thicker, softer, deeper cushions, and tends to be more comfortable in function and “warmer” in appearance. Lounge seating will often include pillows, or pillow-like components, and often is not adjustable. Historically, lounge seating is not used for doing tasks, but instead is intended primarily for promoting informal discussion, reading, or relaxation while doing little else. Contrastingly, task chairs are intended to support the seated user primarily in an upright position, and to facilitate reaching and active movement while doing tasks. It is desirable to provide a furniture system that includes features promoting an informal setting and interactive discussion, so as to reduce the “cultural guards and barriers” to good communication such as during sales presentations, while at the same time supporting a presenter in a manner helping him (or her) show information that the presenter needs to present and also while supporting listeners in a manner promoting active listening, active exchange and interaction, and productive informal discussion and collaboration.

[0003] More specifically, it is desirable to provide furniture that promotes informal collaboration during presentations, so that a group of listeners feel more relaxed and more inclined to react and interact positively and participatively to presentations (rather than rigidly and stoically). At the same time, it is desirable to provide furniture that is specific to the presenter and sufficiently flexible in use to support the presenter’s activities and meet speaker and leader needs. Furniture is needed that does not “remove” the presenter from the group, nor that unnecessarily separates the presenter from the group, nor that places the presenter in an “authoritative” domineering position that discourages participation and interaction. The furniture must help prevent clutter and circumstances where the presenter becomes disheveled and disorganized. The furniture must hold and support information, such as charts, graphs, projected images and the like, at locations where the presenter can easily point to them, without the presenter having to constantly move back and forth to “get out of the way” so that listeners can see the information. The furniture must provide places to hold water or beverages, markers and pencils, papers and sheets of information, while at the same time

providing the “deep” soft cushions and aesthetic “look” that are characteristic of lounge seating units.

[0004] Thus, a furniture system having the aforementioned advantages and solving the aforementioned problems is desired.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0005] In one aspect of the present invention, a furniture system adapted for informal collaboration and presentations includes at least one lounge seating unit adapted to support seated group members in an informal setting, and a podium seating unit having a seat for a seated presenter. An information display panel is coupled to the podium seating unit and located adjacent a rear of the podium seating unit. The display panel extends above the seating unit with its front surface being reachable over a back of the podium seating unit. By this arrangement, the seated presenter can maintain level eye contact with group members in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information on the display panel.

[0006] In another aspect of the present invention, a podium seating unit adapted for informal collaboration and presentations includes a podium seating unit having a seat for a seated presenter, and an information display panel attached to the podium seating unit and located adjacent a rear of the podium seating unit. The display panel extends above the seating unit with its front surface being reachable over a back of the podium seating unit. By this arrangement, the seated presenter can maintain level eye contact with group members in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information on the display panel.

[0007] In yet another aspect of the present invention, a seating unit includes a base, and a seat and a back supported on the base. A projector screen is attached to one of the base, back and seat. The screen extends above the back, and the back has a low height allowing a user sitting on the seat to reach over the back and point to projected images on the screen.

[0008] The present furniture system serves as an excellent focal point for a lounge-based meeting, where informal communication and collaboration is desired. The podium lounge seating unit provides comfortable seating for the presenter along with a handy tablet arm, secured storage, and a projection surface. A lockable storage drawer is available to secure projection equipment or presentation tools. The fixed tablet arm provides a surface for presenter’s notes, laptop computer, or wireless mouse. Also, a cushion-engaging service tray accessory nests securely on the benches and podium seating units for food service and to support projection equipment in a lounge-based meeting space, and is movable along the cushions for optimal positioning. The podium seating unit includes an integrated projection screen attached to its rear area and which extends up above its low-height back. The projection screen is a fine white mesh, and provides a cleanable surface that allows light to filter through when the screen is used to divide space. The projection screen also accommodates Steelcase’s Huddleboard™ marker board, which is an erasable board that can be hung on the screen and easily written on by a presenter sitting on the podium seating unit. The Huddleboard™ marker board is removable, and also is slidable along the screen for optimal positioning relative to the

seated presenter. The back of the podium seating is particularly constructed to reduce a tendency to recline against the back screen, such as by its low height (which does not fully support a seated user's lumbar, and hence tends to cause a seated user to sit upright and/or forwardly) and also by its fore-to-aft thickness (which is sufficient to space a seated user away from the screen while still permitting full access for pointing or writing thereon).

[0009] The present furniture system further includes "bench" lounge seating units, which are more conventional in nature. Bridge tables are provided that extend between and interconnect adjacent bench lounge seating units, and which provide a place for users to rest food, writing supplies, and materials. Also, privacy screens are provided that attach to rear edges of the bridge tables, and that extend along linear tables or around corners defined by corner tables.

[0010] These and other aspects, objects, and features of the present invention will be understood and appreciated by those skilled in the art upon studying the following specification, claims, and appended drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0011] FIGS. 1-3 are three perspective views showing three different collaborative environments formed by the present furniture system;

[0012] FIG. 4 is a front perspective view of the podium lounge seating unit shown in FIGS. 1-3;

[0013] FIGS. 5-8 are top, front, right side, and rear views of the podium lounge seating unit of FIG. 4;

[0014] FIG. 9 is a rear view of the rear-mounted screen shown in FIGS. 4-8;

[0015] FIG. 10 is an enlarged sectional view of a connector joining abutting ends of the tubular frame for the screen; and

[0016] FIGS. 11-13 are perspective, end and side views of the accessory tray shown in FIGS. 1-4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0017] A furniture system 20 (FIG. 1) particularly adapted for informal collaboration and presentations includes "bench" lounge seating units 21 for team members and a podium lounge seating unit 22 for a seated presenter. An information display panel (i.e. screen 23) is attached to a rear of the podium lounge seating unit 22 and extends vertically with its front surface being easily reachable over a low-height back 24 of the podium lounge seating unit 22. By this arrangement, the seated presenter "P" (FIG. 2) maintains level eye contact with group members "G" in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information 23A projected by projector 23B on the screen 23. Additional accessories are provided to enhance use of the system, such as a paper-and-drink-and-projector tray 26 for resting on the seat cushion, an erasable board 27 (called a Huddleboard™ marker board) (FIGS. 3-4) attachable to and hangable on the screen 23, bridge tables 28 and 29 (FIG. 2) positionable between bench lounge seating units 21 to interconnect the seating units 21, and table-attached screens 30 and 31 (linear and corner-attached) for promoting privacy. Also, the podium lounge seating unit 22 can include additional fea-

tures and options, such as an end tablet 32 (FIG. 1) or a lockable drawer 33 (FIG. 4), as described below. Also, an end table or coffee table 34 is configured to match the decor of the seating units 21 and 22, and also is constructed to receive the tray 26. As shown in FIGS. 1-4, these seating units and accessories can be arranged in a variety of different configurations.

[0018] The back 24 is low in height (such as only about 6" to 8" above a top surface of the seat, or more preferably about 7" to 7-½") and terminates at or below a presenter's lumbar. The back 24 is further deep enough (such as about 6" to 8", or more preferably about 6-½") such that it acts as a "curb" to discourage the presenter from leaning rearwardly against the screen 23. The back 24 has a rearwardly angled front surface, making it look somewhat like a curb, and is positioned at a height usable as an armrest by the presenter. The back (also called a "bolster") exists as a stop or barrier or curb positioned in front of the screen 23. Ergonomically speaking, its height was determined, in part, to fit the small of a person's back to enhance a "perching" posture, and to serve as an arm rest. It also makes a clear distinction from traditional sofa backs which welcome a "lounging" posture. Surprisingly, the back height of less than 8 inches achieves a surprising, unexpected and beneficial result in that the lumbar of a seated user is not fully supported, yet the result is a more upright (yet comfortable and informed) seating posture of the seated presenter.

[0019] Briefly, the bench lounge seating units 21 (FIG. 1) include a box-like base frame 40 supported on two or more leg frames 41, each having a front leg and a rear leg 42 connected by a horizontal tube section 43 supporting the base frame 40. (See FIG. 1.) A generously deep seat cushion 44 is placed on the base frame 40, and a mid-level back 45 is positioned on the base frame 40 behind the seat cushion 44. The seat cushion 44 and back 45 are generously cushioned, but crisp clean lines are maintained along corners of the cushions to help provide a hint of a structured activity-based working environment. A visual screen 46 is attached to a rear of the back 45, and extends considerably above the back, for providing a visual screen for creating a semi-private area and informal discussion. A more detailed discussion of a lounge seating unit similar to the bench lounge seating unit 21 can be found in U.S. Pat. No. 6,447,067 and Des No. 476,819, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein in their entirety.

[0020] The podium lounge seating unit 22 (FIG. 4) includes a tubular frame 50 with legs supporting a couch-like base 51, and includes seating cushion 52 supported on the base 51. The back 24 is cushioned and upholstered, but is sufficiently stiff so that it functions to hold seated presenters away from the screen 23, in a manner that tends to prevent presenters from leaning on the screen 23. The back 24 is attached to the base 51, and defines a vertical crevice 53 between itself and the seat cushion 52. This allows flanges on the tray 26 to fit securely into the crevice 53 for stability, yet allows the tray 26 to slide along the seat (including the crevice) to an optimal position of use. As noted above the back is about 6-8 inches high, and more preferable is 7½ inches high, and is about 6-8 inches deep, and more preferably is about 6½ inches deep. The back 24 has an angled front surface, giving it a "curb" shape not unlike the shape of a curb on a street. The illustrated back 24 terminates about 5 inches short of ends of the seat cushion

52. The base **51** and seating cushion **52** are relatively squared off with flat surfaces and clean, crisp corners.

[0021] The tablet **32** (FIGS. 5-8) is supported on a tubular post-like upright **55** that extends from the tubular frame **50** at a front corner of the seating cushion **52**. A tablet top **56** is attached to a top of the upright **55**. The illustrated tablet top **56** is round and includes a durable finish, but it is noted that different shapes, sizes, and materials can be used. The lockable drawer **33** (FIG. 6) is positioned in a pocket located at a left front of the base **51**. Drawers are well known in the art for releasably securing the drawer in its closed position. The illustrated drawer **33** has a flat front that matches the shape of the opening in the base **51**, and that lines up flush with the front of the base **51**. A lock **57** is shown in the upper left corner of the drawer **33**.

[0022] An end table **34** (FIG. 3) is provided that is similar in shape and appearance to the base **51** and seat cushion **52**. The end table **34** includes a tubular frame **59** similar to the seating unit frame **50**, and further includes a base **60** that is similar to the base **51** on the seating unit **22**. The size and shape of a top surface **61** of the end table **34** is similar to the top surface of the seat cushion **52**, so that the tray **26** can fit securely on the table **34**. The table **34** could include a cushioned top surface if desired. A pocket **83** is formed in the base **60** for receiving magazines. The pocket can also be used to store the tray **26**.

[0023] The screen **23** includes a tubular perimeter frame **63** (FIGS. 8-9) attached to a rear of the base **51**. The tubular frame **63** includes a tube section bent into a rectangular shape with radiused corners, with ends of the tube joined with an internal coupler **64** (FIG. 10). A flexible sheet **65** of light-colored material, such as fine white mesh material suitable for use to receive a projected image, is stretched across and attached to the tubular frame. The attachment can be by any means known, including by wrapping and sewing an edge flap of material to the tubular frame, or by adhering the sheet to the frame, or both, or by other fastening means. The two lower outer corners **66** of the sheet **65** are cut-away, to leave the lower outer corners of the frame **63** exposed. As illustrated, threaded fasteners **67** (FIG. 3) extend through the exposed corners of the tubular frame **63** and interconnect the screen **23** to the base **51** of the podium lounge seating unit **22**. It is contemplated that panels or boards can also be used in place of the frame **63** and sheet **65**.

[0024] A marker board **27** (FIG. 4) is provided with a stiff panel **69** having an erasable front surface **70**, and two spaced-apart hooks **71** shaped to releasably engage a top edge **72** of the screen **23**. The marker board **27** can be slid along the top edge **72** for optimal positioning of the board **27**.

[0025] One (or more) linear bridge tables **28** (FIG. 2) and corner bridge tables **29** are provided for interconnecting adjacent in-line and corner-forming seating units **21**, respectively. The tables **28** and **29** each include a tubular frame **73** (FIG. 3) with legs (not unlike the frames of seating units **21** and **22**), and include a table top conforming to the shape needed to interconnect the seating units. Specifically, the linear table **28** includes front and rear edges that are spaced about equal to or slightly above the seats to continue the front and rear visual lines formed by the seat cushions of the seating units **21**. The table **28** is positioned in-line. The corner-forming table **29** includes a pointed front corner

(where the visual front edge of adjacent seat cushions **44** meet) and a rounded rear edge (which leads from the rear edge of one seating unit to the rear edge of the adjacent seating unit).

[0026] Table-attached linear screens **30** and table-attached corner screens **31** are attached to the rear edge of respective tables **28** and **29** and supported thereon by screen supports **30A**, **31A**, and **31B** (FIG. 2). The screens **30** and **31** are given a curved shaped by table-attached screen-supporting brackets having a curved rear edge and inverted U-shaped bent-wire supports. The structure and function of these screen, supports, brackets, and tables are disclosed more fully in a patent application entitled, "TABLE-MOUNTED SCREEN AND SCREEN SUPPORT", filed on even date herewith, commonly assigned and co-invented, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein in its entirety. A downwardly-extending angled shelf (FIG. 3) can be attached along a front bottom edge of the table top of table **28**. the angled shelf provides both a useful function by supporting magazines and the like, but also provides an aesthetic function as a front visual shield prevented one from seeing under the table **28** where the tubular support frames **73** are and where utilities (such as data, voice, power) may be.

[0027] The tray **26** (FIGS. 11-13) is bent from sheet metal, and includes radiused corners and deburred and treated edges to reduce sharpness. The tray **26** includes a large flat panel **75**, up flanges **76-79** at each edge, and down flanges **80-81** at the front and rear edges **76** and **77**. The down flanges **80-81** extend below the flat panel **75**, and are spaced apart the same distance as the front-to-rear dimension of the seat cushion **52** (and of the end table **34**). By this arrangement, the tray **26** will rest on the seat cushion **52**, with its front and rear flanges **80-81** fitting into the crevice **53** and against the front surface of the seat cushion **52** (see FIGS. 1 and 4). The tray **26** will also fit on the end table **34**, and will fit into the pocket **83** (FIG. 3) formed under a center of the end table's top surface.

[0028] It is to be understood that variations and modifications can be made on the aforementioned structure without departing from the concepts of the present invention, and further it is to be understood that such concepts are intended to be covered by the following claims unless these claims by their language expressly state otherwise.

I claim:

1. A furniture system adapted for informal collaboration and presentations, comprising

at least one lounge seating unit adapted to supported seated group members in an informal setting;

a podium seating unit having a seat and a back for a seated presenter; and

an information display panel coupled to the podium seating unit and located adjacent a rear of the podium seating unit, the display panel extending above the seating unit with its front surface being reachable over the back of the podium seating unit, whereby the seated presenter can maintain level eye contact with group members in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information on the display panel.

2. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the display panel includes a front surface suitable for use as a projector screen for receiving a projected image.

3. The furniture system defined in claim 2, wherein the display panel is attached to the podium seating unit.

4. The furniture system defined in claim 3, wherein the display panel is attached to the back of the podium seating unit and supported at least in part by the podium seating unit.

5. The furniture system defined in claim 4, wherein the display panel includes a frame and a sheet covering the frame, and including fasteners attaching the frame abuttingly against a rear of the back.

6. The furniture system defined in claim 4, wherein the display panel extends vertically and does not extend at a rearward angle to the seat, so that the display panel is adapted to reduce distortion of projected images from a projector supported user a height of the seat and at a location in front of the podium seating unit.

7. The furniture system defined in claim 4, wherein the podium seating unit includes a back that extends above the seat less than a height of a seated presenter's underarm, such that the presenter can comfortably rest their forearm on the back while pointing to a spot on the display panel.

8. The furniture system defined in claim 4, wherein the display panel includes an erasable surface.

9. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the display panel is attached to a rear of the podium seating unit, and including a board releasably attached to the display panel that includes a writable/erasable surface adapted to receive erasable markings thereon.

10. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the podium seating unit includes a seat cushion on the seat, and a back cushion on the back, the seat and back cushions defining a crevice at their adjacent surfaces.

11. The furniture system defined in claim 10, wherein the podium seating unit includes legs defining a height dimension not greater than a height dimension of the seat cushion.

12. The furniture system defined in claim 10, wherein the back cushion has a horizontal thickness dimension about equal to the seat cushion.

13. The furniture system defined in claim 10, including a table tray with a body shaped to rest on the seat cushion, and with a rear flange configured to fit into the crevice.

14. The furniture system defined in claim 13, wherein the crevice extends vertically, and the rear flange extends vertically into engagement with the crevice.

15. The furniture system defined in claim 1, including a table tray with a front flange configured to fit against a front surface of the seat.

16. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the at least one lounge seating unit includes two spaced-apart lounge seating units, and further including a bridge table attached between and interconnecting the two lounge seating units.

17. The furniture system defined in claim 16, including a privacy screen attached to a rearward edge of the bridge table and screening an area between the two lounge seating units, the two lounge seating units having backs extending to a height of the privacy screen.

18. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the seat of the podium seating unit includes a lockable drawer for storing items therein.

19. The furniture system defined in claim 1, wherein the back of the podium seating unit is at most about 8 inches above a top surface of the seat.

20. A podium seating unit adapted for informal collaboration and presentations, comprising

a podium seating unit having a seat and a back for a seated presenter; and

an information display panel attached to the podium seating unit and located adjacent a rear of the podium seating unit, the display panel extending above the seating unit with its front surface being reachable over the back of the podium seating unit, whereby the seated presenter can maintain level eye contact with group members in an informal setting while discussing and pointing to information on the display panel.

21. The podium seating unit defined in claim 20, wherein the display panel includes a front surface suitable for use as a projector screen for receiving a projected image.

22. The podium seating unit defined in claim 21, wherein the display panel includes a frame and a sheet covering the frame, and including fasteners attaching the frame abuttingly against a rear of the back.

23. The podium seating unit defined in claim 22, wherein the display panel extends vertically or at a forward angle toward the podium seating unit, and does not extend at a rearward angle to the seat, so that the display panel is adapted to reduce distortion of projected images from a projector setting at a height of the seat and at a location in front of the podium seating unit.

24. The podium seating unit defined in claim 22, wherein the podium seating unit includes a back that extends above the seat less than a height of a seated presenter's underarm, such that the presenter can comfortably rest their forearm on the back while turning and pointing to a spot on the display panel.

25. The podium seating unit defined in claim 22, wherein the display panel includes an erasable surface.

26. The podium seating unit defined in claim 20, wherein the display panel is attached to a rear of the podium seating unit, and including a board releasably attached to the display panel that includes a writable/erasable surface.

27. The podium seating unit defined in claim 20, wherein the podium seating unit includes a seat cushion on the seat, and a back cushion on the back, the seat and back cushions defining a vertical crevice at their adjacent surfaces.

28. The podium seating unit defined in claim 27, wherein the podium seating unit includes legs defining a height dimension not greater than a height dimension of the cushion.

29. The podium seating unit defined in claim 28, wherein the back cushion has a horizontal thickness dimension about equal to the seat cushion.

30. The podium seating unit defined in claim 27, including a table tray with a body shaped to rest on the seat cushion, and with a rear flange configured to fit into the crevice.

31. The podium seating unit defined in claim 27, wherein the crevice extends vertically, and the rear flange extends vertically into engagement with the crevice.

32. The podium seating unit defined in claim 26, wherein the table tray includes a front flange configured to fit against a front surface of the seat cushion.

33. The podium seating unit defined in claim 20, wherein the back of the podium seating unit is about 8 inches above the top of the seat.

34. A seating unit comprising:

a base;

a seat and a back supported on the base; and

a projector screen attached to one of the base, back and seat; the screen extending above the back and the back having a height allowing a user sitting on the seat to reach over the back and point to projected images on the screen.

35. The seating unit defined in claim 34, including a board releasably attached to the display panel that includes a writable/erasable surface.

36. The seating unit defined in claim 34, wherein the back has a front spaced away from the projector screen and a low height below a lumbar height of the seated user which discourages the seated user from leaning rearwardly against the projector screen.

37. The seating unit defined in claim 34, wherein the back of the podium seating unit is at most about 8 inches above a top surface of the seat.

* * * * *