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(54) Title: PROCESS FOR RECOVERING ETHANOL IN A SIDE DRAW DISTILLATION COLUMN

(57) Abstract: Recovery of an alcohol such as ethanol from a crude alcohol product, preferably obtained from the hydrogenation of acetic acid using a low energy process. The crude ethanol product is separated in a column to produce a distillate stream comprising ethyl acetate and a residue stream comprising ethanol, acetic acid, and water. The ethanol product is recovered in a second column as an ethanol side stream.



PROCESS FOR RECOVERING ETHANOL IN A SIDE DRAW DISTILLATION COLUMN

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to processes for producing alcohol and, in particular, to a process for recovering ethanol from a crude ethanol product comprising ethanol, ethyl acetate, acetic acid and water.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Ethanol for industrial use is conventionally produced from petrochemical feed stocks, such as oil, natural gas, or coal, from feed stock intermediates, such as syngas, or from starchy materials or cellulose materials, such as corn or sugar cane. Conventional methods for producing ethanol from petrochemical feed stocks, as well as from cellulose materials, include the acid-catalyzed hydration of ethylene, methanol homologation, direct alcohol synthesis, and Fischer-Tropsch synthesis. Instability in petrochemical feed stock prices contributes to fluctuations in the cost of conventionally produced ethanol, making the need for alternative sources of ethanol production all the greater when feed stock prices rise. Starchy materials, as well as cellulose material, are converted to ethanol by fermentation. However, fermentation is typically used for consumer production of ethanol, which is suitable for fuels or human consumption. In addition, fermentation of starchy or cellulose materials competes with food sources and places restraints on the amount of ethanol that can be produced for industrial use.

[0003] Ethanol production via the reduction of alkanolic acids and/or other carbonyl group-containing compounds has been widely studied, and a variety of combinations of catalysts, supports, and operating conditions have been mentioned in the literature. During the reduction of alkanolic acids, e.g., acetic acid, other compounds are formed with ethanol or are formed in side reactions. These impurities limit the production and recovery of ethanol from such reaction mixtures. For example, during hydrogenation, esters are produced that together with ethanol and/or water form azeotropes, which are difficult to separate. In addition, when conversion is incomplete, acid remains in the crude ethanol product, which must be removed to recover ethanol.

[0004] EP02060553 describes a process for converting hydrocarbons to ethanol involving converting the hydrocarbons to ethanoic acid and hydrogenating the ethanoic acid to ethanol. The stream from the hydrogenation reactor is separated to obtain an ethanol stream and a stream of acetic acid and ethyl acetate, which is recycled to the hydrogenation reactor.

[0005] The need remains for improved processes for recovering ethanol from a crude product obtained by reducing alkanolic acids, such as acetic acid, and/or other carbonyl group-containing compounds.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The present invention relates to low energy processes for recovering an alcohol such as ethanol from a crude alcohol product. In one embodiment, the invention is a process for producing ethanol comprising hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product. At least a portion of the crude ethanol product is separated in a first distillation column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water. A majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the first column is removed in the first residue. At least a portion of first residue is separated in a second column to yield a side stream comprising ethanol and a second residue comprising residual acetic acid and/or water. Preferably, the second column also forms a second distillate for separating residual ethyl acetate from the first residue.

[0007] Thus, in one embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising: (a) hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product; (b) separating at least a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol; and (c) recovering an ethanol side stream from at least a portion of the first residue in a second column. The second column also preferably forms a second distillate comprising at least 1 wt. % ethyl acetate or at least 5 wt. % ethyl acetate, and the process optionally further comprises the step of recycling at least a portion of the second distillate to the reactor. The ethanol side stream preferably comprises at least 50 wt.% ethanol, or at least 88 wt.% ethanol. At least a portion of the first distillate optionally is returned to the reactor.

[0008] In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising: (a) providing a crude ethanol product comprising ethanol and ethyl acetate (b) separating at least a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol; and (c) recovering an ethanol side stream from at least a portion of the first residue in a second column.

[0009] In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product; separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the first column is removed in the first residue; and separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a side stream comprising ethanol and a second residue comprising water and residual acetic acid. Preferably, at least 70% of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product is removed in the first residue stream. The first residue optionally exits the first distillation column at a temperature from 70 to 155°C.

[0010] In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising: (a) providing a crude ethanol product; (b) separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the first column is removed in the first residue; and (c) separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a side stream comprising ethanol and a second residue comprising water and residual acetic acid.

[0011] In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising: (a) hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product; (b) separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the column is removed in the first residue; and (c) separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a second distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate and a side stream comprising ethanol.

[0012] In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing ethanol, comprising providing a crude ethanol product comprising ethanol, ethyl acetate, water, and acetic acid; separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the column is removed in the first residue; and separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a second distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate and a side stream comprising ethanol.

[0013] In one aspect, the process further comprises the step of hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid, and optionally directing at least a portion of the hydrolysis product to the reactor. The water for the optional hydrolysis step may be derived, for example, from at least in part from the second residue.

[0014] Preferably, at least 70% of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product is removed in the first residue stream. The resulting first residue may comprise from 10 to 75 wt.% ethanol, from 0.01 to 35 wt.% acetic acid, and from 25 to 70 wt.% water. The first distillate optionally comprises from 10 to 85 wt.% ethyl acetate, from 0.1 to 70 wt.% acetaldehyde, less than 55 wt.% ethanol, and less than 20 wt.% water.

[0015] The process optionally further comprises reducing the water content of the side stream to yield an ethanol product stream with reduced water content. Thus, in one aspect, the process further comprises separating at least a portion of the side stream with a membrane into a permeate stream comprising water and a retentate stream comprising ethanol and less water than the at least a portion of the side stream. In an alternative embodiment, the process optionally further comprises extracting at least a portion of the side stream with one or more extractive agents to yield an ethanol product stream with a reduced water content. The resulting side stream may comprise 75 to 96 wt.% ethanol, less than 12 wt.% water, less than 1 wt.% acetic acid, and less than 5 wt.% ethyl acetate. Preferably, the side stream comprises less than 1 wt.% ethyl acetate and less than 3 wt.% water.

[0016] In one aspect, the acetic acid is formed from methanol and carbon monoxide, and each of the methanol, the carbon monoxide, and hydrogen for the hydrogenating step is derived from

syngas, and the syngas is derived from a carbon source selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0017] The invention may be more completely understood in consideration of the following detailed description of various embodiments of the invention in connection with the accompanying drawing.

[0018] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of an ethanol production system with two separation columns to recover ethanol according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Introduction

[0019] The present invention relates to processes for recovering ethanol produced by hydrogenating acetic acid in the presence of a catalyst. The hydrogenation reaction produces a crude ethanol product that comprises ethanol, water, ethyl acetate, acetic acid, and other impurities. The processes of the present invention involve separating the crude ethanol product in a first column into a first residue stream comprising ethanol, water, and acetic acid and a distillate stream comprising ethyl acetate. At least a portion of the first residue stream is separated in a second distillation column to yield a first distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate, an ethanol side stream and a second residue comprising water and residual acetic acid. The ethanol side stream may constitute a salable ethanol composition suitable for many applications, or may be further processed, for example to remove residual water. Advantageously, this separation approach results in reducing energy requirements to recover ethanol from the crude ethanol product.

[0020] In recovering ethanol, the processes of the present invention use columns, preferably distillation columns. In preferred embodiments, the first residue stream comprises a substantial portion of the ethanol, water, and the acetic acid from the crude ethanol product. The first residue stream, for example, may comprise at least 50% of the ethanol from the crude ethanol product, and more preferably at least 70%. In terms of ranges, the residue stream may comprise from 50% to 97.5% of the ethanol from the crude ethanol product, and more preferably from

70% to 99.9%. The amount of ethanol from the crude ethanol recovered in the first residue may be greater than 97.5%, e.g., up to 99.9%, when the ethyl acetate concentration in the crude ethanol product is less than 2 wt.%. In some embodiments, depending on the ethyl acetate concentration, taking too much ethanol in the first residue may cause undesirable leakage of ethyl acetate in the residue, although the second column, discussed below, may be able to remove residual ethyl acetate that leaks into the first residue. It is preferred that only a minor amount of ethyl acetate, if any, is withdrawn in the first residue. In some embodiments, the first residue comprises ethyl acetate in an amount less than 1000 wppm, less than 100 wppm, less than 50 wppm. In other aspects, the first residue may comprise greater amounts of ethyl acetate since the second column has the ability to remove residual ethyl acetate. For example, the first residue may comprise up to 0.1 wt.% ethyl acetate, up to 0.5 wt.% ethyl acetate or up to 1 wt.% ethyl acetate.

[0021] In preferred embodiments, the first residue comprises a substantial portion of the water and the acetic acid from the crude ethanol product. The first residue may comprise, for example, at least 80% of the water from the crude ethanol product, and more preferably at least 90%. In terms of ranges, the first residue preferably comprises from 80% to 99.4% of the water from the crude ethanol product, and more preferably from 90% to 99.4%. The residue stream may comprise at least 85% of the acetic acid from the crude ethanol product, e.g., at least 90% and more preferably about 100%. In terms of ranges, the residue stream preferably comprises from 85% to 100% of the acetic acid from the crude ethanol product, and more preferably from 90% to 100%. In one embodiment, substantially all of the acetic acid is recovered in the residue stream.

[0022] The first residue, which comprise ethanol, water, and acetic acid, may be further separated to recover ethanol. In one preferred embodiment, the water and acetic acid may be removed in a second residue in a second column.

[0023] In an exemplary embodiment, the energy requirements by the initial column in the process according to the present invention may be less than 5.5 MMBtu per ton of refined ethanol, e.g., less than 4.5 MMBtu per ton of refined ethanol or less than 3.5 MMBtu per ton of refined ethanol.

[0024] The distillate from the first column may comprise light organics, such as ethyl acetate and acetaldehyde. Removing these components from the crude ethanol product in the first column provides an efficient means for removing light organics. In addition, the light organics are not carried over with the ethanol when multiple columns are used, thus reducing the formation of byproducts that may be formed from the light organics. In one embodiment, the light organics are returned to the reactor, where the acetaldehyde and the ethyl acetate may be converted to additional ethanol. Thus, all or a portion of the first distillate may be recycled to the hydrogenation reactor. In some embodiments, the light organics may be separated so that one stream comprising primarily acetaldehyde and/or ethyl acetate is returned to the reactor. In another embodiment, the light organics may be purged from the system.

Hydrogenation of Acetic Acid

[0025] The process of the present invention may be used with any hydrogenation process for producing ethanol. The materials, catalysts, reaction conditions, and separation processes that may be used in the hydrogenation of acetic acid are described further below.

[0026] The raw materials, acetic acid and hydrogen, used in connection with the process of this invention may be derived from any suitable source including natural gas, petroleum, coal, biomass, and so forth. As examples, acetic acid may be produced via methanol carbonylation, acetaldehyde oxidation, ethylene oxidation, oxidative fermentation, and anaerobic fermentation. Methanol carbonylation processes suitable for production of acetic acid are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 7,208,624; 7,115,772; 7,005,541; 6,657,078; 6,627,770; 6,143,930; 5,599,976; 5,144,068; 5,026,908; 5,001,259; and 4,994,608, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference. Optionally, the production of ethanol may be integrated with such methanol carbonylation processes.

[0027] As petroleum and natural gas prices fluctuate becoming either more or less expensive, methods for producing acetic acid and intermediates such as methanol and carbon monoxide from alternate carbon sources have drawn increasing interest. In particular, when petroleum is relatively expensive, it may become advantageous to produce acetic acid from synthesis gas (“syngas”) that is derived from other available carbon source. U.S. Pat. No. 6,232,352, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, for example, teaches a method of retrofitting a methanol plant for the manufacture of acetic acid. By retrofitting a methanol plant,

the large capital costs associated with CO generation for a new acetic acid plant are significantly reduced or largely eliminated. All or part of the syngas is diverted from the methanol synthesis loop and supplied to a separator unit to recover CO, which is then used to produce acetic acid. In a similar manner, hydrogen for the hydrogenation step may be supplied from syngas.

[0028] In some embodiments, some or all of the raw materials for the above-described acetic acid hydrogenation process may be derived partially or entirely from syngas. For example, the acetic acid may be formed from methanol and carbon monoxide, both of which may be derived from syngas. The syngas may be formed by partial oxidation reforming or steam reforming, and the carbon monoxide may be separated from syngas. Similarly, hydrogen that is used in the step of hydrogenating the acetic acid to form the crude ethanol product may be separated from syngas. The syngas, in turn, may be derived from variety of carbon sources. The carbon source, for example, may be selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof. Syngas or hydrogen may also be obtained from bio-derived methane gas, such as bio-derived methane gas produced by landfills or agricultural waste.

[0029] In another embodiment, the acetic acid used in the hydrogenation step may be formed from the fermentation of biomass. The fermentation process preferably utilizes an acetogenic process or a homoacetogenic microorganism to ferment sugars to acetic acid producing little, if any, carbon dioxide as a by-product. The carbon efficiency for the fermentation process preferably is greater than 70%, greater than 80% or greater than 90% as compared to conventional yeast processing, which typically has a carbon efficiency of about 67%.

Optionally, the microorganism employed in the fermentation process is of a genus selected from the group consisting of *Clostridium*, *Lactobacillus*, *Moorella*, *Thermoanaerobacter*, *Propionibacterium*, *Propionispora*, *Anaerobiospirillum*, and *Bacteriodes*, and in particular, species selected from the group consisting of *Clostridium formicoaceticum*, *Clostridium butyricum*, *Moorella thermoacetica*, *Thermoanaerobacter kivui*, *Lactobacillus delbrukii*, *Propionibacterium acidipropionici*, *Propionispora arboris*, *Anaerobiospirillum succinicproduens*, *Bacteriodes amylophilus* and *Bacteriodes ruminicola*. Optionally in this process, all or a portion of the unfermented residue from the biomass, e.g., lignans, may be gasified to form hydrogen that may be used in the hydrogenation step of the present invention. Exemplary fermentation processes for forming acetic acid are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos.

6,509,180; 6,927,048; 7,074,603; 7,507,562; 7,351,559; 7,601,865; 7,682,812; and 7,888,082, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference. See also US Publ. Nos. 2008/0193989 and 2009/0281354, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0030] Examples of biomass include, but are not limited to, agricultural wastes, forest products, grasses, and other cellulosic material, timber harvesting residues, softwood chips, hardwood chips, tree branches, tree stumps, leaves, bark, sawdust, off-spec paper pulp, corn, corn stover, wheat straw, rice straw, sugarcane bagasse, switchgrass, miscanthus, animal manure, municipal garbage, municipal sewage, commercial waste, grape pumice, almond shells, pecan shells, coconut shells, coffee grounds, grass pellets, hay pellets, wood pellets, cardboard, paper, plastic, and cloth. See, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 7,884,253, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference. Another biomass source is black liquor, a thick, dark liquid that is a byproduct of the Kraft process for transforming wood into pulp, which is then dried to make paper. Black liquor is an aqueous solution of lignin residues, hemicellulose, and inorganic chemicals.

[0031] U.S. Pat. No. RE 35,377, also incorporated herein by reference, provides a method for the production of methanol by converting carbonaceous materials such as oil, coal, natural gas and biomass materials. The process includes hydrogasification of solid and/or liquid carbonaceous materials to obtain a process gas which is steam pyrolyzed with additional natural gas to form synthesis gas. The syngas is converted to methanol which may be carbonylated to acetic acid. The method likewise produces hydrogen which may be used in connection with this invention as noted above. U.S. Pat. No. 5,821,111, which discloses a process for converting waste biomass through gasification into synthesis gas, and U.S. Pat. No. 6,685,754, which discloses a method for the production of a hydrogen-containing gas composition, such as a synthesis gas including hydrogen and carbon monoxide, are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

[0032] The acetic acid fed to the hydrogenation reaction may also comprise other carboxylic acids and anhydrides, as well as acetaldehyde and acetone. Preferably, a suitable acetic acid feed stream comprises one or more of the compounds selected from the group consisting of acetic acid, acetic anhydride, acetaldehyde, ethyl acetate, and mixtures thereof. These other compounds may also be hydrogenated in the processes of the present invention. In some

embodiments, the presence of carboxylic acids, such as propanoic acid or its anhydride, may be beneficial in producing propanol. Water may also be present in the acetic acid feed.

[0033] Alternatively, acetic acid in vapor form may be taken directly as crude product from the flash vessel of a methanol carbonylation unit of the class described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,657,078, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference. The crude vapor product, for example, may be fed directly to the ethanol synthesis reaction zones of the present invention without the need for condensing the acetic acid and light ends or removing water, saving overall processing costs.

[0034] The acetic acid may be vaporized at the reaction temperature, following which the vaporized acetic acid may be fed along with hydrogen in an undiluted state or diluted with a relatively inert carrier gas, such as nitrogen, argon, helium, carbon dioxide and the like. For reactions run in the vapor phase, the temperature should be controlled in the system such that it does not fall below the dew point of acetic acid. In one embodiment, the acetic acid may be vaporized at the boiling point of acetic acid at the particular pressure, and then the vaporized acetic acid may be further heated to the reactor inlet temperature. In another embodiment, the acetic acid is mixed with other gases before vaporizing, followed by heating the mixed vapors up to the reactor inlet temperature. Preferably, the acetic acid is transferred to the vapor state by passing hydrogen and/or recycle gas through the acetic acid at a temperature at or below 125°C, followed by heating of the combined gaseous stream to the reactor inlet temperature.

[0035] Some embodiments of the process of hydrogenating acetic acid to form ethanol may include a variety of configurations using a fixed bed reactor or a fluidized bed reactor. In many embodiments of the present invention, an “adiabatic” reactor can be used; that is, there is little or no need for internal plumbing through the reaction zone to add or remove heat. In other embodiments, a radial flow reactor or reactors may be employed, or a series of reactors may be employed with or without heat exchange, quenching, or introduction of additional feed material. Alternatively, a shell and tube reactor provided with a heat transfer medium may be used. In many cases, the reaction zone may be housed in a single vessel or in a series of vessels with heat exchangers therebetween.

[0036] In preferred embodiments, the catalyst is employed in a fixed bed reactor, e.g., in the shape of a pipe or tube, where the reactants, typically in the vapor form, are passed over or

through the catalyst. Other reactors, such as fluid or ebullient bed reactors, can be employed. In some instances, the hydrogenation catalysts may be used in conjunction with an inert material to regulate the pressure drop of the reactant stream through the catalyst bed and the contact time of the reactant compounds with the catalyst particles.

[0037] The hydrogenation reaction may be carried out in either the liquid phase or vapor phase. Preferably, the reaction is carried out in the vapor phase under the following conditions. The reaction temperature may range from 125°C to 350°C, e.g., from 200°C to 325°C, from 225°C to 300°C, or from 250°C to 300°C. The pressure may range from 10 kPa to 3000 kPa, e.g., from 50 kPa to 2300 kPa, or from 100 kPa to 1500 kPa. The reactants may be fed to the reactor at a gas hourly space velocity (GHSV) of greater than 500 hr⁻¹, e.g., greater than 1000 hr⁻¹, greater than 2500 hr⁻¹ or even greater than 5000 hr⁻¹. In terms of ranges the GHSV may range from 50 hr⁻¹ to 50,000 hr⁻¹, e.g., from 500 hr⁻¹ to 30,000 hr⁻¹, from 1000 hr⁻¹ to 10,000 hr⁻¹, or from 1000 hr⁻¹ to 6500 hr⁻¹.

[0038] The hydrogenation optionally is carried out at a pressure just sufficient to overcome the pressure drop across the catalytic bed at the GHSV selected, although there is no bar to the use of higher pressures, it being understood that considerable pressure drop through the reactor bed may be experienced at high space velocities, e.g., 5000 hr⁻¹ or 6,500 hr⁻¹.

[0039] Although the reaction consumes two moles of hydrogen per mole of acetic acid to produce one mole of ethanol, the actual molar ratio of hydrogen to acetic acid in the feed stream may vary from about 100:1 to 1:100, e.g., from 50:1 to 1:50, from 20:1 to 1:2, or from 12:1 to 1:1. Most preferably, the molar ratio of hydrogen to acetic acid is greater than 2:1, e.g., greater than 4:1 or greater than 8:1.

[0040] Contact or residence time can also vary widely, depending upon such variables as amount of acetic acid, catalyst, reactor, temperature, and pressure. Typical contact times range from a fraction of a second to more than several hours when a catalyst system other than a fixed bed is used, with preferred contact times, at least for vapor phase reactions, of from 0.1 to 100 seconds, e.g., from 0.3 to 80 seconds or from 0.4 to 30 seconds.

[0041] The hydrogenation of acetic acid to form ethanol is preferably conducted in the presence of a hydrogenation catalyst. Suitable hydrogenation catalysts include catalysts comprising a first metal and optionally one or more of a second metal, a third metal or any

number of additional metals, optionally on a catalyst support. The first and optional second and third metals may be selected from Group IB, IIB, IIIB, IVB, VB, VIB, VIIB, VIII transition metals, a lanthanide metal, an actinide metal or a metal selected from any of Groups IIIA, IVA, VA, and VIA. Preferred metal combinations for some exemplary catalyst compositions include platinum/tin, platinum/ruthenium, platinum/rhenium, palladium/ruthenium, palladium/rhenium, cobalt/palladium, cobalt/platinum, cobalt/chromium, cobalt/ruthenium, cobalt/tin, silver/palladium, copper/palladium, copper/zinc, nickel/palladium, gold/palladium, ruthenium/rhenium, and ruthenium/iron. Exemplary catalysts are further described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,608,744 and U.S. Pub. No. 2010/0029995, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference. In another embodiment, the catalyst comprises a Co/Mo/S catalyst of the type described in U.S. Pub. No. 2009/0069609, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0042] In one embodiment, the catalyst comprises a first metal selected from the group consisting of copper, iron, cobalt, nickel, ruthenium, rhodium, palladium, osmium, iridium, platinum, titanium, zinc, chromium, rhenium, molybdenum, and tungsten. Preferably, the first metal is selected from the group consisting of platinum, palladium, cobalt, nickel, and ruthenium. More preferably, the first metal is selected from platinum and palladium. In embodiments of the invention where the first metal comprises platinum, it is preferred that the catalyst comprises platinum in an amount less than 5 wt.%, e.g., less than 3 wt.% or less than 1 wt.%, due to the high commercial demand for platinum.

[0043] As indicated above, in some embodiments, the catalyst further comprises a second metal, which typically would function as a promoter. If present, the second metal preferably is selected from the group consisting of copper, molybdenum, tin, chromium, iron, cobalt, vanadium, tungsten, palladium, platinum, lanthanum, cerium, manganese, ruthenium, rhenium, gold, and nickel. More preferably, the second metal is selected from the group consisting of copper, tin, cobalt, rhenium, and nickel. More preferably, the second metal is selected from tin and rhenium.

[0044] In certain embodiments where the catalyst includes two or more metals, e.g., a first metal and a second metal, the first metal is present in the catalyst in an amount from 0.1 to 10 wt.%, e.g., from 0.1 to 5 wt.%, or from 0.1 to 3 wt.%. The second metal preferably is present in

an amount from 0.1 to 20 wt.%, e.g., from 0.1 to 10 wt.%, or from 0.1 to 5 wt.%. For catalysts comprising two or more metals, the two or more metals may be alloyed with one another or may comprise a non-alloyed metal solution or mixture.

[0045] The preferred metal ratios may vary depending on the metals used in the catalyst. In some exemplary embodiments, the mole ratio of the first metal to the second metal is from 10:1 to 1:10, e.g., from 4:1 to 1:4, from 2:1 to 1:2, from 1.5:1 to 1:1.5 or from 1.1:1 to 1:1.1.

[0046] The catalyst may also comprise a third metal selected from any of the metals listed above in connection with the first or second metal, so long as the third metal is different from the first and second metals. In preferred aspects, the third metal is selected from the group consisting of cobalt, palladium, ruthenium, copper, zinc, platinum, tin, and rhenium. More preferably, the third metal is selected from cobalt, palladium, and ruthenium. When present, the total weight of the third metal preferably is from 0.05 to 4 wt.%, e.g., from 0.1 to 3 wt.%, or from 0.1 to 2 wt.%.

[0047] In addition to one or more metals, in some embodiments of the present invention the catalysts further comprise a support or a modified support. As used herein, the term “modified support” refers to a support that includes a support material and a support modifier, which adjusts the acidity of the support material.

[0048] The total weight of the support or modified support, based on the total weight of the catalyst, preferably is from 75 to 99.9 wt.%, e.g., from 78 to 97 wt.%, or from 80 to 95 wt.%. In preferred embodiments that utilize a modified support, the support modifier is present in an amount from 0.1 to 50 wt.%, e.g., from 0.2 to 25 wt.%, from 0.5 to 15 wt.%, or from 1 to 8 wt.%, based on the total weight of the catalyst. The metals of the catalysts may be dispersed throughout the support, layered throughout the support, coated on the outer surface of the support (i.e., egg shell), or decorated on the surface of the support.

[0049] As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, support materials are selected such that the catalyst system is suitably active, selective and robust under the process conditions employed for the formation of ethanol.

[0050] Suitable support materials may include, for example, stable metal oxide-based supports or ceramic-based supports. Preferred supports include siliceous supports, such as silica, silica/alumina, a Group IIA silicate such as calcium metasilicate, pyrogenic silica, high purity

silica, and mixtures thereof. Other supports may include, but are not limited to, iron oxide, alumina, titania, zirconia, magnesium oxide, carbon, graphite, high surface area graphitized carbon, activated carbons, and mixtures thereof.

[0051] As indicated, the catalyst support may be modified with a support modifier. In some embodiments, the support modifier may be an acidic modifier that increases the acidity of the catalyst. Suitable acidic support modifiers may be selected from the group consisting of: oxides of Group IVB metals, oxides of Group VB metals, oxides of Group VIB metals, oxides of Group VIIB metals, oxides of Group VIIIB metals, aluminum oxides, and mixtures thereof. Acidic support modifiers include those selected from the group consisting of TiO_2 , ZrO_2 , Nb_2O_5 , Ta_2O_5 , Al_2O_3 , B_2O_3 , P_2O_5 , and Sb_2O_3 . Preferred acidic support modifiers include those selected from the group consisting of TiO_2 , ZrO_2 , Nb_2O_5 , Ta_2O_5 , and Al_2O_3 . The acidic modifier may also include WO_3 , MoO_3 , Fe_2O_3 , Cr_2O_3 , V_2O_5 , MnO_2 , CuO , Co_2O_3 , and Bi_2O_3 .

[0052] In another embodiment, the support modifier may be a basic modifier that has a low volatility or no volatility. Such basic modifiers, for example, may be selected from the group consisting of: (i) alkaline earth oxides, (ii) alkali metal oxides, (iii) alkaline earth metal metasilicates, (iv) alkali metal metasilicates, (v) Group IIB metal oxides, (vi) Group IIB metal metasilicates, (vii) Group IIIB metal oxides, (viii) Group IIIB metal metasilicates, and mixtures thereof. In addition to oxides and metasilicates, other types of modifiers including nitrates, nitrites, acetates, and lactates may be used. Preferably, the support modifier is selected from the group consisting of oxides and metasilicates of any of sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium, scandium, yttrium, and zinc, as well as mixtures of any of the foregoing. More preferably, the basic support modifier is a calcium silicate, and even more preferably calcium metasilicate (CaSiO_3). If the basic support modifier comprises calcium metasilicate, it is preferred that at least a portion of the calcium metasilicate is in crystalline form.

[0053] A preferred silica support material is SS61138 High Surface Area (HSA) Silica Catalyst Carrier from Saint Gobain NorPro. The Saint-Gobain NorPro SS61138 silica exhibits the following properties: contains approximately 95 wt.% high surface area silica; surface area of about $250 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$; median pore diameter of about 12 nm; average pore volume of about $1.0 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ as measured by mercury intrusion porosimetry and a packing density of about 0.352 g/cm^3 (22 lb/ft^3).

[0054] A preferred silica/alumina support material is KA-160 silica spheres from Sud Chemie having a nominal diameter of about 5 mm, a density of about 0.562 g/ml, an absorptivity of about 0.583 g H₂O/g support, a surface area of about 160 to 175 m²/g, and a pore volume of about 0.68 ml/g.

[0055] The catalyst compositions suitable for use with the present invention preferably are formed through metal impregnation of the modified support, although other processes such as chemical vapor deposition may also be employed. Such impregnation techniques are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 7,608,744 and 7,863,489 and U.S. Pub. No. 2010/0197485 referred to above, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0056] In particular, the hydrogenation of acetic acid may achieve favorable conversion of acetic acid and favorable selectivity and productivity to ethanol. For purposes of the present invention, the term “conversion” refers to the amount of acetic acid in the feed that is converted to a compound other than acetic acid. Conversion is expressed as a mole percentage based on acetic acid in the feed. The conversion may be at least 10%, e.g., at least 20%, at least 40%, at least 50%, at least 60%, at least 70% or at least 80%. Although catalysts that have high conversions are desirable, such as at least 80% or at least 90%, in some embodiments a low conversion may be acceptable at high selectivity for ethanol. It is, of course, well understood that in many cases, it is possible to compensate for conversion by appropriate recycle streams or use of larger reactors, but it is more difficult to compensate for poor selectivity.

[0057] Selectivity is expressed as a mole percent based on converted acetic acid. It should be understood that each compound converted from acetic acid has an independent selectivity and that selectivity is independent from conversion. For example, if 60 mole % of the converted acetic acid is converted to ethanol, we refer to the ethanol selectivity as 60%. Preferably, the catalyst selectivity to ethoxylates is at least 60%, e.g., at least 70%, or at least 80%. As used herein, the term “ethoxylates” refers specifically to the compounds ethanol, acetaldehyde, and ethyl acetate. Preferably, the selectivity to ethanol is at least 80%, e.g., at least 85% or at least 88%. Preferred embodiments of the hydrogenation process also have low selectivity to undesirable products, such as methane, ethane, and carbon dioxide. The selectivity to these undesirable products preferably is less than 4%, e.g., less than 2% or less than 1%. More preferably, these undesirable products are present in undetectable amounts. Formation of

alkanes may be low, and ideally less than 2%, less than 1%, or less than 0.5% of the acetic acid passed over the catalyst is converted to alkanes, which have little value other than as fuel.

[0058] The term “productivity,” as used herein, refers to the grams of a specified product, e.g., ethanol, formed during the hydrogenation based on the kilograms of catalyst used per hour. A productivity of at least 100 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour, e.g., at least 400 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour or at least 600 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour, is preferred. In terms of ranges, the productivity preferably is from 100 to 3,000 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour, e.g., from 400 to 2,500 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour or from 600 to 2,000 grams of ethanol per kilogram of catalyst per hour.

[0059] Operating under the conditions of the present invention may result in ethanol production on the order of at least 0.1 tons of ethanol per hour, e.g., at least 1 ton of ethanol per hour, at least 5 tons of ethanol per hour, or at least 10 tons of ethanol per hour. Larger scale industrial production of ethanol, depending on the scale, generally should be at least 1 ton of ethanol per hour, e.g., at least 15 tons of ethanol per hour or at least 30 tons of ethanol per hour. In terms of ranges, for large scale industrial production of ethanol, the process of the present invention may produce from 0.1 to 160 tons of ethanol per hour, e.g., from 15 to 160 tons of ethanol per hour or from 30 to 80 tons of ethanol per hour. Ethanol production from fermentation, due the economies of scale, typically does not permit the single facility ethanol production that may be achievable by employing embodiments of the present invention.

[0060] In various embodiments of the present invention, the crude ethanol product produced by the hydrogenation process, before any subsequent processing, such as purification and separation, will typically comprise acetic acid, ethanol and water. As used herein, the term “crude ethanol product” refers to any composition comprising from 5 to 70 wt.% ethanol and from 5 to 40 wt.% water. Exemplary compositional ranges for the crude ethanol product are provided in Table 1. The “others” identified in Table 1 may include, for example, esters, ethers, aldehydes, ketones, alkanes, and carbon dioxide.

TABLE 1
CRUDE ETHANOL PRODUCT COMPOSITIONS

Component	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)
Ethanol	5 to 70	15 to 70	15 to 50	25 to 50
Acetic Acid	0 to 90	0 to 50	15 to 70	20 to 70
Water	5 to 40	5 to 30	10 to 30	10 to 26
Ethyl Acetate	0 to 30	0 to 20	1 to 12	3 to 10
Acetaldehyde	0 to 10	0 to 3	0.1 to 3	0.2 to 2
Others	0.1 to 10	0.1 to 6	0.1 to 4	--

[0061] In one embodiment, the crude ethanol product comprises acetic acid in an amount less than 20 wt.%, e.g., less than 15 wt. %, less than 10 wt.% or less than 5 wt.%. In embodiments having lower amounts of acetic acid, the conversion of acetic acid is preferably greater than 75%, e.g., greater than 85% or greater than 90%. In addition, the selectivity to ethanol may also be preferably high, and is preferably greater than 75%, e.g., greater than 85% or greater than 90%.

Ethanol Recovery

[0062] An exemplary ethanol recovery system according to one embodiment of the present invention is shown in FIG. 1. Hydrogenation system 100 provides a suitable hydrogenation reactor and a process for separating ethanol from the crude reaction mixture according to an embodiment of the invention. System 100 comprises reaction zone 101 and separation zone 102. Reaction zone 101 comprises reactor 103, hydrogen feed line 104 and acetic acid feed line 105. Separation zone 102 comprises a separator 106, e.g., a flash vessel, and distillation columns.

[0063] Hydrogen and an akanoic acid, preferably acetic acid, are fed to a vaporizer 109 via lines 104 and 105, respectively, to create a vapor feed stream in line 110 that is directed to reactor 103. In one embodiment, lines 104 and 105 may be combined and jointly fed to the vaporizer 109. The temperature of the vapor feed stream in line 110 is preferably from 100°C to 350°C, e.g., from 120°C to 310°C or from 150°C to 300°C. Any feed that is not vaporized is removed from vaporizer 109, and may be recycled or discarded. In addition, although line 110 is shown as being directed to the top of reactor 103, line 110 may be directed to the side, upper portion, or bottom of reactor 103. Further modifications and additional components to reaction zone 101 and separation zone 102 are described below.

[0064] Reactor 103 contains the catalyst that is used in the hydrogenation of the alkanoic acid, preferably acetic acid. In one embodiment, one or more guard beds (not shown) may be used upstream of the reactor, optionally upstream of vaporizer 109, to protect the catalyst from poisons or undesirable impurities contained in the feed or return/recycle streams. Such guard beds may be employed in the vapor or liquid streams. Suitable guard bed materials may include, for example, carbon, silica, alumina, ceramic, or resins. In one aspect, the guard bed media is functionalized, e.g., silver functionalized, to trap particular species such as sulfur or halogens. During the hydrogenation process, a crude ethanol product stream is withdrawn, preferably continuously, from reactor 103 via line 111.

[0065] The crude ethanol product stream may be condensed and fed to a separator 106, which, in turn, forms a vapor stream 112 and a liquid stream 113. In some embodiments, separator 106 may comprise a flasher or a knockout pot. The separator 106 may operate at a temperature of from 20°C to 250°C, e.g., from 30°C to 225°C or from 60°C to 200°C. The pressure of separator 106 may be from 50 kPa to 2000 kPa, e.g., from 75 kPa to 1500 kPa or from 100 kPa to 1000 kPa. Optionally, the crude ethanol product in line 111 may pass through one or more membranes to separate hydrogen and/or other non-condensable gases.

[0066] The vapor stream 112 exiting separator 106 may comprise hydrogen and hydrocarbons, and may be purged and/or returned to reaction zone 101. As shown, vapor stream 112 is combined with the hydrogen feed 104 and co-fed to vaporizer 109. In some embodiments, the returned vapor stream 112 may be compressed before being combined with hydrogen feed 104.

[0067] The liquid stream 113 from separator 106 is withdrawn and directed as a feed composition to the side of first distillation column 107, also referred to as a “light ends column.” In one embodiment, the contents of liquid stream 113 are substantially similar to the crude ethanol product obtained from the reactor, except that the composition has been depleted of hydrogen, carbon dioxide, methane or ethane, which have been removed by separator 106. Accordingly, liquid stream 113 may also be referred to as a crude ethanol product. Exemplary components of liquid stream 113 are provided in Table 2. It should be understood that liquid stream 113 may contain other components, not listed in Table 2, such as components derived from the feed.

TABLE 2
COLUMN FEED COMPOSITION
(Liquid Stream 113)

	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)
Ethanol	5 to 70	10 to 60	15 to 50
Acetic Acid	< 90	5 to 80	15 to 70
Water	5 to 45	5 to 30	10 to 30
Ethyl Acetate	< 35	0.001 to 15	1 to 12
Acetaldehyde	< 10	0.001 to 3	0.1 to 3
Acetal	< 5	0.001 to 2	0.005 to 1
Acetone	< 5	0.0005 to 0.05	0.001 to 0.03
Other Esters	< 5	< 0.005	< 0.001
Other Ethers	< 5	< 0.005	< 0.001
Other Alcohols	< 5	< 0.005	< 0.001

[0068] The amounts indicated as less than (<) in the tables throughout the present specification are preferably not present and if present may be present in trace amounts or in amounts greater than 0.0001 wt.%.

[0069] The “other esters” in Table 2 may include, but are not limited to, ethyl propionate, methyl acetate, isopropyl acetate, n-propyl acetate, n-butyl acetate or mixtures thereof. The “other ethers” in Table 2 may include, but are not limited to, diethyl ether, methyl ethyl ether, isobutyl ethyl ether or mixtures thereof. The “other alcohols” in Table 2 may include, but are not limited to, methanol, isopropanol, n-propanol, n-butanol or mixtures thereof. In one embodiment, liquid stream 113 may comprise propanol, e.g., isopropanol and/or n-propanol, in an amount from 0.001 to 0.1 wt.%, from 0.001 to 0.05 wt.% or from 0.001 to 0.03 wt.%. It should be understood that these other components may be carried through in any of the distillate or residue streams described herein and will not be further described herein, unless indicated otherwise.

[0070] Optionally, crude ethanol product in line 111 or in liquid stream 113 may be further fed to an esterification reactor, hydrogenolysis reactor, or combination thereof. An esterification reactor may be used to consume acetic acid present in the crude ethanol product to further reduce the amount of acetic acid to be removed. Hydrogenolysis may be used to convert ethyl acetate in the crude ethanol product to ethanol.

[0071] In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, liquid stream 113 is introduced in the upper part of first column 107, e.g., upper half or upper third. In one embodiment, no entrainers are added to first column 107. In first column 107, a weight majority of the ethanol, water, acetic acid, and other heavy components, if present, are removed from liquid stream 113 and are withdrawn, preferably continuously, as residue in line 114. First column 107 also forms an overhead distillate, which is withdrawn in line 115, and which may be condensed and refluxed, for example, at a ratio of from 30:1 to 1:30, e.g., from 10:1 to 1:10 or from 1:5 to 5:1. The overhead distillate in stream 115 preferably comprises a weight majority of the ethyl acetate and acetaldehyde from liquid stream 113. Beneficially, a small amount, e.g., at least 0.1 wppm, at least 1 wppm, at least 10 wppm, at least 100 wppm or at least 1000 wppm, of ethyl acetate and/or acetaldehyde, separately or collectively, may be permitted to pass into the first residue since the second column, discussed below, provides a means for effectively removing residual amounts of these compounds from the product alcohol composition.

[0072] When column 107 is operated under about 170 kPa, the temperature of the residue exiting in line 114 preferably is from 70°C to 155°C, e.g., from 90°C to 130°C or from 100°C to 110°C. The base of column 107 may be maintained at a relatively low temperature by withdrawing a residue stream comprising ethanol, water, and acetic acid, thereby providing an energy efficiency advantage. The temperature of the distillate exiting in line 115 from column 107 preferably at 170 kPa is from 75°C to 100°C, e.g., from 75°C to 83°C or from 81°C to 84°C. In some embodiments, the pressure of first column 107 may range from 0.1 kPa to 510 kPa, e.g., from 1 kPa to 475 kPa or from 1 kPa to 375 kPa. Exemplary components of the distillate and residue compositions for first column 107 are provided in Table 3 below. It should also be understood that the distillate and residue may also contain other components, not listed in Table 3. For convenience, the distillate and residue of the first column may also be referred to as the “first distillate” or “first residue.” The distillates or residues of the other columns may also be referred to with similar numeric modifiers (second, third, etc.) in order to distinguish them from one another, but such modifiers should not be construed as requiring any particular separation order.

TABLE 3
FIRST COLUMN 107

	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)
<u>Distillate</u>			
Ethyl Acetate	10 to 85	15 to 80	20 to 75
Acetaldehyde	0.1 to 70	0.2 to 65	0.5 to 65
Acetal	< 0.1	< 0.1	< 0.05
Acetone	< 0.05	0.001 to 0.03	0.01 to 0.025
Ethanol	3 to 55	4 to 50	5 to 45
Water	0.1 to 20	1 to 15	2 to 10
Acetic Acid	<2	<0.1	<0.05
<u>Residue</u>			
Acetic Acid	0.01 to 35	0.1 to 30	0.2 to 25
Water	25 to 70	30 to 65	35 to 60
Ethanol	10 to 75	15 to 70	20 to 65
Ethyl Acetate	< 1	< 0.5	< 0.1

[0073] In an embodiment of the present invention, column 107 may be operated at a temperature where most of the water, ethanol, and acetic acid are removed from the residue stream and only a small amount of ethanol and water is collected in the distillate stream due to the formation of binary and tertiary azeotropes. The weight ratio of water in the residue in line 114 to water in the distillate in line 115 may be greater than 1:1, e.g., greater than 2:1. The weight ratio of ethanol in the residue to ethanol in the distillate may be greater than 1:1, e.g., greater than 2:1. The weight ratio of ethyl acetate in the first distillate in line 115 to ethyl acetate in the first residue in line 114 may be greater than 1:1, e.g., greater than 2:1. The weight ratio of acetaldehyde in the first distillate in line 115 to acetaldehyde in the first residue in line 114 may be greater than 1:1, e.g., greater than 2:1.

[0074] The amount of acetic acid in the first residue 114 may vary depending primarily on the conversion in reactor 103. In one embodiment, when the conversion is high, e.g., greater than 90%, the amount of acetic acid in the first residue may be less than 10 wt.%, e.g., less than 5 wt.% or less than 2 wt.%. In other embodiments, when the conversion is lower, e.g., less than 90%, the amount of acetic acid in the first residue may be greater than 10 wt.%.

[0075] The separation in first column 107 may be conducted with or without the addition of an azeotrope or extractive agent.

[0076] The first distillate preferably is substantially free of acetic acid, e.g., comprising less than 1000 ppm, less than 500 ppm or less than 100 ppm acetic acid. The distillate may be purged from the system or recycled in whole or part to reactor 103. In some embodiments, the distillate may be further separated, e.g., in a distillation column (not shown), into an acetaldehyde stream and an ethyl acetate stream. Either of these streams may be returned to the reactor 103 or separated from system 100 as a separate product.

[0077] In one embodiment, not shown, all or a portion of the first distillate is directed to a hydrolysis unit in which the ethyl acetate contained therein is reacted with water to form ethanol and acetic acid, both of which may be recycled to the reactor or sent to the separation system for recovery. Thus, in one embodiment, the process includes the step of hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid and directing at least a portion of the hydrolysis product to the reactor or separation system, e.g., to the first column or the second column. In another aspect, all or a portion of the first distillate is recycled to the reactor without hydrolysis.

[0078] Some species, such as acetals, may decompose in first column 107 such that very low amounts, or even no detectable amounts, of acetals remain in the distillate or residue.

[0079] In addition, an equilibrium reaction between acetic acid/ethanol and ethyl acetate may occur in the crude ethanol product after it exits reactor 103. Depending on the concentration of acetic acid in the crude ethanol product, this equilibrium may be driven toward formation of ethyl acetate. This reaction may be regulated through the residence time and/or temperature of the crude ethanol product.

[0080] The columns shown in FIG. 1 may comprise any distillation column capable of performing the desired separation and/or purification. Each column preferably comprises a tray column having from 1 to 150 trays, e.g., from 10 to 100 trays, from 20 to 95 trays or from 30 to 75 trays. The trays may be sieve trays, fixed valve trays, movable valve trays, or any other suitable design known in the art. In other embodiments, a packed column may be used. For packed columns, structured packing or random packing may be employed. The trays or packing may be arranged in one continuous column or they may be arranged in two or more columns such that the vapor from the first section enters the second section while the liquid from the second section enters the first section, etc.

[0081] The associated condensers and liquid separation vessels that may be employed with each of the distillation columns may be of any conventional design and are simplified in the figures. Heat may be supplied to the base of each column or to a circulating bottom stream through a heat exchanger or reboiler. Other types of reboilers, such as internal reboilers, may also be used. The heat that is provided to the reboilers may be derived from any heat generated during the process that is integrated with the reboilers or from an external source such as another heat generating chemical process or a boiler. Although one reactor and one flasher are shown in the figures, additional reactors, flashers, condensers, heating elements, and other components may be used in various embodiments of the present invention. As will be recognized by those skilled in the art, various condensers, pumps, compressors, reboilers, drums, valves, connectors, separation vessels, etc., normally employed in carrying out chemical processes may also be combined and employed in the processes of the present invention.

[0082] The temperatures and pressures employed in the columns may vary. As a practical matter, pressures from 10 kPa to 3000 kPa will generally be employed in these zones although in some embodiments subatmospheric pressures or superatmospheric pressures may be employed. Temperatures within the various zones will normally range between the boiling points of the composition removed as the distillate and the composition removed as the residue. As will be recognized by those skilled in the art, the temperature at a given location in an operating distillation column is dependent on the composition of the material at that location and the pressure of column. In addition, feed rates may vary depending on the size of the production process and, if described, may be generically referred to in terms of feed weight ratios.

[0083] To recover ethanol, the residue in line 114 may be further separated depending on the concentration of acetic acid, water and/or ethyl acetate. In most embodiments of the present invention, residue in line 114 is further separated in a second column 119. In FIG. 1, the second column 119 is referred to as an “acid separation column,” because the second residue 122 comprises acetic acid and water. An acid separation column may be used, for example, when the acetic acid concentration in the first residue is greater than 1 wt.%, e.g., greater than 5 wt.%.

[0084] In FIG. 1, the first residue in line 114 is introduced to second column 119, e.g., acid separation column, preferably in the top part of column 108, e.g., top half or top third. Second column 119 yields a second residue in line 122 comprising acetic acid and water, a second

distillate in line 120 comprising residual ethyl acetate and/or residual acetaldehyde, and an ethanol side stream 121 comprising ethanol. By yielding product ethanol in a side stream, while separating water, acetic acid and residual ethyl acetate, the present invention provides a low energy solution, optionally having only two columns, for recovering ethanol from a crude ethanol product. Second column 108 may be a tray column or packed column. In one embodiment, second column 108 is a tray column having from 5 to 150 trays, e.g., from 15 to 50 trays or from 20 to 45 trays. Although the temperature and pressure of second column 119 may vary, when at atmospheric pressure the temperature of the second residue exiting in line 122 from second column 119 preferably is from 95°C to 130°C, e.g., from 100°C to 125°C or from 110°C to 120°C. The temperature of the second distillate exiting in line 120 from second column 119 preferably is from 60°C to 105°C, e.g., from 75°C to 100°C or from 80°C to 100°C. The temperature of the ethanol side stream exiting in line 121 preferably is from 60°C to 105°C, e.g., from 75°C to 100°C or from 80°C to 100°C. The pressure of second column 119 may range from 0.1 kPa to 510 kPa, e.g., from 1 kPa to 475 kPa or from 1 kPa to 375 kPa. Exemplary components for the distillate and residue compositions for second column 119 are provided in Table 4 below. It should be understood that the distillate and residue may also contain other components, not listed in Table 4, such as components derived from the feed.

TABLE 4
SECOND COLUMN 119

	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)
<u>Second Distillate</u>			
Ethyl Acetate	5 to 90	10 to 80	15 to 75
Acetaldehyde	< 60	1 to 40	1 to 35
Ethanol	< 45	0.001 to 40	0.01 to 35
Water	< 20	0.01 to 10	0.1 to 5
<u>Side Stream</u>			
Ethanol	50 to 99	60 to 99	70 to 99
Water	< 15	0.01 to 10	0.1 to 8
Ethyl Acetate	0.01 to 1	0.05 to 0.75	0.1 to 0.5
Acetic Acid	< 0.5	< 0.01	0.001 to 0.01
<u>Second Residue</u>			
Ethanol	50 to 99	60 to 90	65 to 85
Water	< 20	0.001 to 15	0.01 to 10
Ethyl Acetate	< 1	0.001 to 2	0.001 to 0.5
Acetic Acid	< 15	< 10	0.1 to 5

[0085] The ratio of ethanol in the side stream in line 121 to ethanol in the second residue in line 122 preferably is at least 2:1, at least 10:1 or at least 35:1. In one embodiment, the ratio of water in the second residue 122 to water in the second distillate 120 is greater than 2:1, e.g., greater than 4:1 or greater than 6:1. In addition, the ratio of acetic acid in the second residue 122 to acetic acid in the second distillate 120 preferably is greater than 10:1, e.g., greater than 15:1 or greater than 20:1. Preferably, the second distillate in line 120 and the side stream 121 are substantially free of acetic acid and may only contain, if any, trace amounts of acetic acid. A reduced concentration of acetic acid in lines 120, 121 advantageously provides an ethanol product that also has no amount or a trace amount of acetic acid. In addition, as discussed above, an advantage of the present separation scheme is the ability to effectively remove ethyl acetate from product ethanol in a two column system. In one embodiment, the ratio of ethyl acetate in the second distillate in line 120 to ethyl acetate in the side stream in line 121 is greater than 2:1, greater than 5:1 or greater than 10:1.

[0086] The second distillate in line 118 may be purged from system or recycled in whole or part to reactor 103, along with first distillate in line 115.

[0087] The second residue in line 122 comprises acetic acid and water. Depending on the amount of water and acetic acid contained in the second residue, the residue may be treated in one or more of the following processes. The following are exemplary processes for further treating the residue and it should be understood that any (or none) of the following may be used regardless of acid concentration. When the residue comprises in large part acetic acid, e.g., greater than 70 wt.%, the residue may be recycled to the reactor without any separation of the water. In one embodiment, the residue may be separated into an acetic acid stream and a water stream when the residue comprises a majority of acetic acid, e.g., greater than 50 wt.%. Acetic acid may also be recovered in some embodiments from the residue having a lower acid concentration. The residue may be separated into the acetic acid and water streams by a distillation column or one or more membranes. If a membrane or an array of membranes is employed to separate the acetic acid from the water, the membrane or array of membranes may be selected from any suitable acid resistant membrane that is capable of removing a permeate water stream. The resulting acetic acid stream comprising acetic acid optionally is returned to the reaction zone. The resulting water stream may be used as an extractive agent or to hydrolyze an ester-containing stream in a hydrolysis unit, e.g., to hydrolyze all or a portion of first distillate 115, as discussed above.

[0088] In other embodiments, for example, where the second residue comprises less than 50 wt.% acid, possible options include one or more of: (i) returning a portion of the residue to reactor 103, (ii) neutralizing the acid, (iii) reacting the acid with an alcohol, or (iv) disposing of the residue in a waste water treatment facility. It also may be possible to separate a residue comprising less than 50 wt.% acetic acid using a weak acid recovery distillation column to which a solvent (optionally acting as an azeotroping agent) may be added. Exemplary solvents that may be suitable for this purpose include ethyl acetate, propyl acetate, isopropyl acetate, butyl acetate, vinyl acetate, diisopropyl ether, carbon disulfide, tetrahydrofuran, isopropanol, ethanol, and C₃-C₁₂ alkanes. When neutralizing the acid, it is preferred that the residue comprises less than 10 wt.% acetic acid. The acetic acid may be neutralized with any suitable alkali or alkaline earth metal base, such as sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide. When reacting acetic acid with an alcohol, it is preferred that the residue comprises less than 50 wt.% acid. The alcohol may be any suitable alcohol, such as methanol, ethanol, propanol, butanol, or mixtures thereof.

The reaction forms an ester that may be integrated with other systems, such as carbonylation production or an ester production process. Preferably, the alcohol comprises ethanol and the resulting ester comprises ethyl acetate. Optionally, the resulting ester may be fed to the hydrogenation reactor.

[0089] In some embodiments, when the second residue comprises very minor amounts of acetic acid, e.g., less than 5 wt.%, the second residue may be disposed of to a waste water treatment facility without further processing. The organic content, e.g., acetic acid content, of the residue beneficially may be suitable to feed microorganisms used in a waste water treatment facility.

[0090] Depending on the water concentration, the ethanol product may be derived from the side stream in line 121. In one aspect, the side stream in line 121 comprises at least 88 wt.% ethanol, at least 90 wt.% ethanol, at least 95 wt.% ethanol or at least 97 wt.% ethanol. In one embodiment, the side stream in line 121 may comprise from 75 to 96 wt.% ethanol and less than 12 wt.% water. Some applications, such as industrial ethanol applications, may tolerate water in the ethanol product, while other applications, such as fuel applications, may require an anhydrous ethanol. The amount of water in the side stream of line 121 may be closer to the azeotropic amount of water, e.g., at least 4 wt.%, preferably less than 20 wt.%, e.g., less than 12 wt.% or less than 7.5 wt.%. Water optionally may be removed from the side stream in line 121 using several different separation techniques. Residual water removal may be accomplished, for example, using one or more adsorption units, membranes, molecular sieves, extractive distillation units, or a combination thereof. Suitable adsorption units include pressure swing adsorption systems and thermal swing adsorption units. Particularly preferred techniques include the use of distillation column, membranes, adsorption units and combinations thereof. For example, the side stream from the second column may be distilled in an additional distillation column to form an additional distillate comprising ethanol and an additional residue comprising water.

[0091] As shown in FIG. 1, an adsorption unit 123 may be provided to remove water in water stream 125 from the side stream in line 121 thus producing an anhydrous ethanol stream 124, preferably comprising 97 wt.% or more ethanol, e.g., at least 98 wt.% ethanol or at least 99.5 wt.% ethanol. The adsorption unit 123 may employ a suitable adsorption agent such as a zeolite.

In one preferred embodiment, adsorption unit 123 is a pressure swing adsorption (PSA) unit that is operated at a temperature from 30°C to 160°C, e.g., from 80°C to 140°C, and a pressure of from 0.01 kPa to 550 kPa, e.g., from 1 to 150 kPa. The PSA unit may comprise two to five beds. Adsorption unit 123 may remove at least 95% of the water from the side stream in line 121, and more preferably from 95% to 99.9% of the water from the side stream in line 121. Water stream 125 may be combined with any other water stream from system 100 and may be removed from the system or used elsewhere in the system, for example, as a hydrolyzing agent for the hydrolysis of ethyl acetate in the first distillate. The water stream may also comprise ethanol, in which case it may be desirable to feed all or a portion of the water stream back to first column 107 or other separation device for further ethanol recovery.

[0092] The ethanol product produced by the process of the present invention may be an industrial grade ethanol comprising from 75 to 96 wt.% ethanol, e.g., from 80 to 96 wt.% or from 85 to 96 wt.% ethanol, based on the total weight of the ethanol product. Exemplary finished ethanol compositional ranges are provided below in Table 5.

TABLE 5
FINISHED ETHANOL COMPOSITIONS

Component	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)	Conc. (wt.%)
Ethanol	75 to 96	80 to 96	85 to 96
Water	< 12	1 to 9	3 to 8
Acetic Acid	< 1	< 0.1	< 0.01
Ethyl Acetate	< 2	< 0.5	< 0.05
Acetal	< 0.05	< 0.01	< 0.005
Acetone	< 0.05	< 0.01	< 0.005
Isopropanol	< 0.5	< 0.1	< 0.05
n-propanol	< 0.5	< 0.1	< 0.05

[0093] The finished ethanol composition of the present invention preferably contains very low amounts, e.g., less than 0.5 wt.%, of other alcohols, such as methanol, butanol, isobutanol, isoamyl alcohol and other C₄-C₂₀ alcohols. In one embodiment, the amount of isopropanol in the finished ethanol composition is from 80 to 1,000 wppm, e.g., from 95 to 1,000 wppm, from 100 to 700 wppm, or from 150 to 500 wppm. In one embodiment, the finished ethanol composition is substantially free of acetaldehyde, optionally comprising less than 8 wppm acetaldehyde, e.g., less than 5 wppm or less than 1 wppm.

[0094] The finished ethanol composition produced by the embodiments of the present invention may be used in a variety of applications including applications as fuels, solvents, chemical feedstocks, pharmaceutical products, cleansers, sanitizers, hydrogenation transport or consumption. In fuel applications, the finished ethanol composition may be blended with gasoline for motor vehicles such as automobiles, boats and small piston engine aircraft. In non-fuel applications, the finished ethanol composition may be used as a solvent for toiletry and cosmetic preparations, detergents, disinfectants, coatings, inks, and pharmaceuticals. The finished ethanol composition may also be used as a processing solvent in manufacturing processes for medicinal products, food preparations, dyes, photochemicals and latex processing.

[0095] The finished ethanol composition may also be used as a chemical feedstock to make other chemicals such as vinegar, ethyl acrylate, ethyl acetate, ethylene, glycol ethers, ethylamines, aldehydes, and higher alcohols, especially butanol. In the production of ethyl acetate, the finished ethanol composition may be esterified with acetic acid. In another application, the finished ethanol composition may be dehydrated to produce ethylene. Any known dehydration catalyst can be employed to dehydrate ethanol, such as those described in copending U.S. Pub. Nos. 2010/0030002 and 2010/0030001, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference. A zeolite catalyst, for example, may be employed as the dehydration catalyst. Preferably, the zeolite has a pore diameter of at least about 0.6 nm, and preferred zeolites include dehydration catalysts selected from the group consisting of mordenites, ZSM-5, a zeolite X and a zeolite Y. Zeolite X is described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 2,882,244 and zeolite Y in U.S. Pat. No. 3,130,007, the entireties of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

[0096] While the invention has been described in detail, modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will be readily apparent to those of skill in the art. In addition, it should be understood that aspects of the invention and portions of various embodiments and various features recited herein and/or in the appended claims may be combined or interchanged either in whole or in part. In the foregoing descriptions of the various embodiments, those embodiments which refer to another embodiment may be appropriately combined with one or more other embodiments, as will be appreciated by one of skill in the art. Furthermore, those of ordinary

skill in the art will appreciate that the foregoing description is by way of example only, and is not intended to limit the invention.

We claim:

1. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:
 - (a) hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product;
 - (b) separating at least a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol; and
 - (c) recovering an ethanol side stream from at least a portion of the first residue in a second column.
2. The process of claim 1, wherein the ethanol side stream comprises at least 50 wt.% ethanol.
3. The process of claim 1, wherein the ethanol side stream comprises at least 88 wt.% ethanol.
4. The process of claim 1, wherein the second column also forms a second distillate comprising at least 1 wt. % ethyl acetate.
5. The process of claim 1, wherein the second column also forms a second distillate comprising at least 5 wt. % ethyl acetate
6. The process of claim 1, wherein the second column also forms a second distillate comprising at least 5 wt. % ethyl acetate, the process further comprising recycling at least a portion of the second distillate to the reactor.
7. The process of claim 1, further comprising returning at least a portion of the first distillate to the reactor.
8. The process of claim 1, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid.

9. The process of claim 1, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid and directing at least a portion of the hydrolysis product to the reactor.
10. The process of claim 1, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate with water derived at least in part from the second residue in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid.
11. The process of claim 1, further comprising recycling at least a portion of the first distillate to the reactor.
12. The process of claim 1, wherein the second column also forms a second residue comprising water and acetic acid.
13. The process of claim 1, wherein the second column also forms a second distillate comprising at least 1 wt.% ethyl acetate and a second residue comprising water and acetic acid.
14. The process of claim 1, wherein at least 70% of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product is removed in the first residue stream.
15. The process of claim 1, wherein the first residue comprises 10 to 75 wt.% ethanol, 0.01 to 35 wt.% acetic acid, and 25 to 70 wt.% water.
16. The process of claim 1, wherein the first distillate comprises 10 to 85 wt.% ethyl acetate, 0.1 to 70 wt.% acetaldehyde, less than 55 wt.% ethanol, and less than 20 wt.% water.
17. The process of claim 1, further comprising reducing the water content of the side stream to yield an ethanol product stream with reduced water content.

18. The process of claim 1, wherein the side stream comprises 75 to 96 wt.% ethanol, less than 12 wt.% water, less than 1 wt.% acetic acid, and less than 5 wt.% ethyl acetate.
19. The process of claim 1, wherein the side stream comprises less than 1 wt.% ethyl acetate.
20. The process of claim 1, wherein the side stream comprises less than 3 wt.% water.
21. The process of claim 1, further comprising separating at least a portion of the side stream with a membrane into a permeate stream comprising water and a retentate stream comprising ethanol and less water than the at least a portion of the side stream.
22. The process of claim 1, further comprising extracting at least a portion of the side stream with one or more extractive agents to yield an ethanol product stream with a reduced water content.
23. The process of claim 1, wherein the acetic acid is formed from methanol and carbon monoxide, wherein each of the methanol, the carbon monoxide, and hydrogen for the hydrogenating step is derived from syngas, and wherein the syngas is derived from a carbon source selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof.
24. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:
 - (a) providing a crude ethanol product comprising ethanol and ethyl acetate;
 - (b) separating at least a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol; and
 - (c) recovering an ethanol side stream from at least a portion of the first residue in a second column.
25. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:

hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product;

separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the first column is removed in the first residue; and

separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a side stream comprising ethanol and a second residue comprising water and residual acetic acid.

26. The process of claim 25, wherein at least 70% of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product is removed in the first residue stream.

27. The process of claim 25, wherein the first residue exits the first distillation column at a temperature from 70 to 155°C.

28. The process of claim 25, wherein the first residue comprises 10 to 75 wt.% ethanol, 0.01 to 35 wt.% acetic acid, and 25 to 70 wt.% water.

29. The process of claim 25, wherein the first distillate comprises 10 to 85 wt.% ethyl acetate, 0.1 to 70 wt.% acetaldehyde, less than 55 wt.% ethanol, and less than 20 wt.% water.

30. The process of claim 25, further comprising returning at least a portion of the first distillate to the reactor.

31. The process of claim 25, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid.

32. The process of claim 25, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid and directing at least a portion of the hydrolysis product to the reactor.

33. The process of claim 25, further comprising hydrolyzing at least a portion of the first distillate with water derived at least in part from the second residue in a hydrolysis unit to form a hydrolysis product comprising ethanol and acetic acid.
34. The process of claim 25, further comprising recycling at least a portion of the first distillate to the reactor.
35. The process of claim 25, wherein the weight ratio of ethanol in the first residue to ethanol in the first distillate is at least 1:1.
36. The process of claim 25, wherein the second column forms a second distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate.
37. The process of claim 25, wherein the side stream comprises 75 to 96 wt.% ethanol, less than 12 wt.% water, less than 1 wt.% acetic acid, and less than 5 wt.% ethyl acetate.
38. The process of claim 25, further comprising reducing the water content of the side stream to yield an ethanol product stream with reduced water content.
39. The process of claim 38, wherein the ethanol product stream comprises less than 1 wt.% ethyl acetate.
40. The process of claim 38, wherein the ethanol product stream comprises less than 3 wt.% water.
41. The process of claim 25, further comprising separating at least a portion of the side stream with a membrane into a permeate stream comprising water and a retentate stream comprising ethanol and less water than the at least a portion of the side stream.

42. The process of claim 25, further comprising extracting at least a portion of the side stream with one or more extractive agents to yield an ethanol product stream with a reduced water content.
43. The process of claim 25, wherein the acetic acid is formed from methanol and carbon monoxide, wherein each of the methanol, the carbon monoxide, and hydrogen for the hydrogenating step is derived from syngas, and wherein the syngas is derived from a carbon source selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof.
44. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:
- (a) providing a crude ethanol product;
 - (b) separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the first column is removed in the first residue; and
 - (c) separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a side stream comprising ethanol and a second residue comprising water and residual acetic acid.
45. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:
- (a) hydrogenating acetic acid in a reactor in the presence of a catalyst to form a crude ethanol product;
 - (b) separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the column is removed in the first residue; and
 - (c) separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a second distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate and a side stream comprising ethanol.

46. A process for producing ethanol, comprising:
- providing a crude ethanol product comprising ethanol, ethyl acetate, water, and acetic acid;
 - separating a portion of the crude ethanol product in a first column to yield a first distillate comprising ethyl acetate and a first residue comprising ethanol, acetic acid and water, wherein a majority of the ethanol in the crude ethanol product that is fed to the column is removed in the first residue; and
 - separating at least a portion of first residue in a second column to yield a second distillate comprising residual ethyl acetate and a side stream comprising ethanol.

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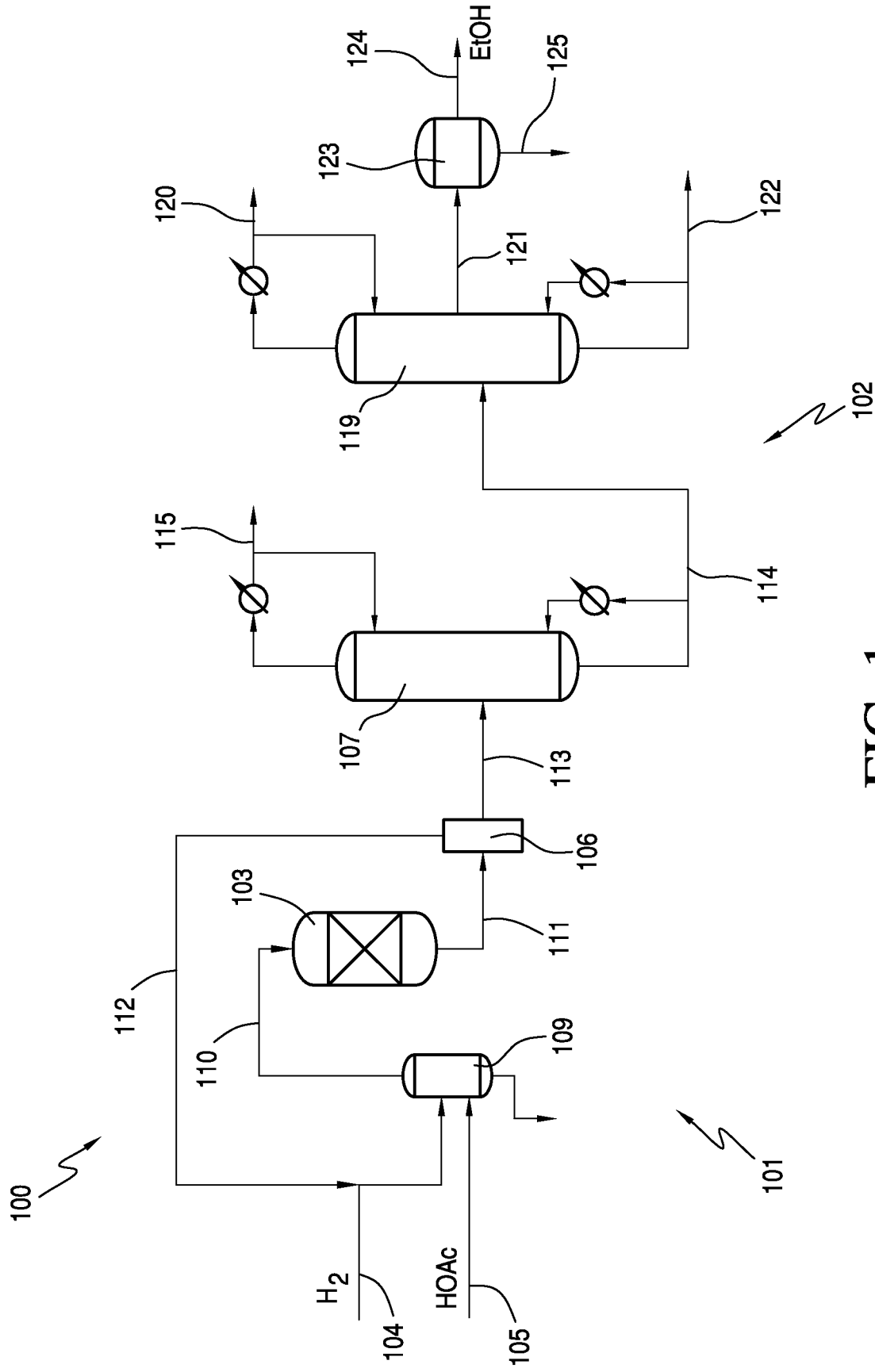


FIG. 1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2011/046503

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 INV. C07C29/149 C07C29/76 C07C29/80
 ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 C07C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Y	US 2 801 209 A (NATIONAL PETRO CHEMICAL CORPORATION) 30 July 1957 (1957-07-30) the whole document	1-46
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

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"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

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"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2011/046503

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
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