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(54) Title: PIZZA CARTON

(57) Abstract: A carton for holding a food product. The carton has a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel to form a tray for receiving the food product. At least one retention panel is foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels. The retention panel is in generally spaced apart relationship with the central panel to form a receiving space for at least partially receiving the food product.



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PIZZA CARTON

Cross-Reference to Related Application

- [0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/773,085, which was filed on February 13, 2006. The entire content of the above-referenced provisional application is hereby incorporated by reference as if presented herein in its entirety.

Background of the Invention

- [0002] The present invention relates generally to a carton for holding a food product. More specifically, the present invention relates to a carton for holding and displaying a frozen pizza.
- [0003] Paperboard cartons for holding food products such as frozen pizzas are known. The cartons typically are square-shaped and are closed at the top, bottom, sides, front, and back to form a six-sided, fully enclosed carton that contains the pizza and provides front and back surfaces for printing graphics such as advertisements or nutritional information. It is desired to minimize the material required for existing cartons while still providing a display panel for presenting graphics. Also, it is desired to provide a carton that can be used for serving the pizza after removal of the pizza from the carton and completion of the cooking process.

Summary of the Invention

- [0004] In general, one aspect of the invention is directed to a carton for holding a food product. The carton comprises a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel to form a tray for receiving the food product. At least one retention panel is foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels. The retention panel is in generally spaced apart relationship with the central panel to form a receiving space for at least partially receiving the food product.

[0005] In another aspect, the invention is generally directed to a blank for forming a carton for holding a food product. The blank comprises a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel for being formed into a tray. At least one retention panel is foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels. The retention panel is for being positioned in generally spaced apart relationship with the central panel to form a receiving space in the carton formed from the tray.

[0006] In another aspect, the invention is generally directed to a method of forming a carton. The method comprises providing a blank having a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel. The plurality of panels comprises a first side panel, a second side panel, a bottom panel, and a top panel, and at least one retention panel foldably connected at least one of the plurality of panels. The method further comprises upwardly folding the side panels, top panel, and bottom panel relative to the central panel to form a tray. The method comprises folding the retention panel relative to at least one panel selected from the group consisting of the side panels, the bottom panel, and the top panel so that the retention panel is spaced apart from the central panel to form a receiving space for retaining the food product in the carton.

[0007] In another aspect, the invention is generally directed to a blank for forming a carton for holding a food product. The blank comprises a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel. At least two retention panels are foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels. The retention panels are spaced apart by a gap.

[0008] In another aspect, the invention is generally directed to a carton for holding a food product. The carton comprises a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel. At least one retention panel is foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels. The retention panel forms a receiving space for at least partially receiving the food product.

[0009] In another aspect, the invention is generally directed to a method of forming a carton. The method comprises providing a blank having a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel and at least one retention panel foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels. The method further

comprises upwardly folding the plurality of panels relative to the central panel to form a tray and folding the retention panel relative to at least one of the plurality of panels to form a receiving space for receiving a food product in the carton.

[0010] Those skilled in the art will appreciate the above stated advantages and other advantages and benefits of various additional embodiments reading the following detailed description of the embodiments with reference to the below-listed drawing figures.

[0011] According to common practice, the various features of the drawings discussed below are not necessarily drawn to scale. Dimensions of various features and elements in the drawings may be expanded or reduced to more clearly illustrate the embodiments of the invention.

Brief Description of the Drawing Figures

[0012] Fig. 1 is a plan view of a blank used to form a carton according to a first embodiment.

[0013] Fig. 2 is a front perspective of the assembled carton of the first embodiment.

[0014] Fig. 3 is a back perspective of the carton.

[0015] Figs. 4-6 are enlarged partial views showing the carton of the first embodiment in various stages of assembly.

[0016] Fig. 7 is a plan view of a blank used to form a carton according to a second embodiment.

[0017] Fig. 8 is a bottom plan view of the assembled carton of the second embodiment.

[0018] Corresponding parts are designated by corresponding reference numbers throughout the drawings.

Detailed Description of the Illustrated Embodiments

[0019] Fig. 1 is a plan view of an exterior, front side 3 of a blank, generally indicated at 8, used to form a carton, generally indicated at 150 (Figs. 2 and 3), according to a first embodiment of the invention. The carton 150 of the present invention is particularly useful in containing a food product such as a frozen pizza P (Fig. 3) and providing surfaces on which graphics including advertising or other information may be displayed to convey information to a consumer. It is understood that food products other than pizza may be contained in the carton 150 without departing from the scope of this invention. Further, food products contained in the carton 150 may be generally round, square, rectangular, or any other shape without departing from the scope of this invention.

[0020] The blank 8 has a longitudinal axis L1 and a lateral axis L2. The blank 8 comprises a central panel 12 foldably connected to a top panel 16 at a first longitudinal fold line 18, a bottom panel 22 foldably connected to the central panel 12 along a second longitudinal fold line 24, a first side panel 28 foldably connected to the central panel along a first transverse fold line 30, and a second side panel 34 foldably connected to the central panel along a second transverse fold line 36. Each side panel 28, 34 includes a respective top reinforcement tab 40, 42 foldably connected to the side panel along a respective top longitudinal fold line 48, 50, and a respective bottom reinforcement tab 44, 46 foldably connected to the side panel along a respective bottom longitudinal fold line 54, 56. Each reinforcement tab 40, 42, 44, 46 is separated from a top or bottom panel 16, 22 by a respective cut line 60, 62, 66, 68 defining a respective longitudinal end of the top and bottom panel.

[0021] The blank 8 comprises two top retention panels 70, 72 and two bottom retention panels 74, 76. The top retention panel 70 and bottom retention panel 74 are foldably connected to the first side panel 28 along a respective transverse fold line 82, 84. In the illustrated embodiment, the fold lines 82, 84 are spaced apart and generally parallel to the lateral fold line 30 connecting the side panel 28 to the central panel 12. The top retention panel 72 and bottom retention panel 76 are foldably connected to the other side panel 34 along a respective transverse fold line 86, 88. Each of the fold lines 86, 88 are spaced apart and generally parallel to the lateral fold line 36 connecting the side panel 34 to the central panel 12. Each retention panel 70, 72, 74,

76 is foldably connected to a respective reinforcement flap 92, 94, 96, 98 along a respective longitudinal fold line 102, 104, 106, 108. The reinforcement flaps 92, 94, 96, 98 are generally adjacent a respective reinforcement tab 40, 42, 44, 46 of the blank 8 and are separated from each of the tabs by a respective cut line 112, 114, 116, 118 generally parallel to the cut line 60, 62, 66, 68 separating the tab from the top and bottom panels 16, 22. In the illustrated embodiment, each retention panel 70, 72, 74, 76 has three edges including a lateral edge 122, 124, 126, 128 at least generally parallel to the lateral axis L2, a longitudinal edge 132, 134, 136, 138 at least generally parallel to the longitudinal axis L1, and an oblique edge 142, 144, 146, 148 interconnecting the lateral edge and longitudinal edge. As discussed below in more detail, the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 cooperate with the side panels 28, 34 and top and bottom panels 16, 22 of the carton 150 to restrain the frozen pizza in the carton.

[0022] In the illustrated embodiment, the two retention panels 72, 76 foldably connected to the side panel 34 are separated by a gap G1 between respective edges 134, 138 of the panels. The two retention panels 70, 74 foldably connected to the side panel 28 are separated by a gap G2 between respective edges 132, 136 of the panels. In the illustrated embodiment the gaps G1 and G2 are approximately equal, but the gaps may be different dimension without departing from the invention. In one embodiment, the gaps G1 and G2 are at least approximately 5.5 inches, but the gaps may be more or less than this distance without departing from the invention.

[0023] Adhesive may be applied to longitudinal end portions of the top panel 16 and bottom panel 22 and at least a portion of the reinforcement tabs 40, 42, 44, 46 for securing the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 in the erected configuration of the carton 150. The adhesive can be formed from, for example, liquid glue, glue strips, or other materials. The blank 8 is folded so that the top panel 16, bottom panel 22, and side panels 28, 34 are upwardly folded relative to the central panel 12 to form a tray for receiving the pizza. The upwardly folded top and bottom panels 16, 22 and side panels 28, 34 form barriers extending upwardly from the central panel 12 to form the side walls of the tray that restrain the lateral and longitudinal movement of the pizza when the pizza is placed against the surface of the central panel. In the illustrated embodiment, the central panel 12 is generally square-shaped with the panels 16, 22,

28, 34 having approximately equal lengths along a respective side of the central panel. It is understood that the central panel 12 may have other shapes (e.g., rectangular) without departing from the scope of this invention. The pizza is placed on the tray against the central panel 12 prior to assembly of the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 of the carton 150.

[0024] An example of assembly of the carton 150 is further described herein with respect to one of the retention panels 74 but it is understood that the other retention panels 70, 72 and 76 may be assembled in substantially the same manner. With the top and bottom panels 16, 22 and side panels 28, 34 folded to form the tray, the retention panel 74, reinforcement flap 96 and reinforcement tab 44 are positioned as shown in Fig. 4 to be generally coplanar with the side panel 28. As shown in Fig. 5, the reinforcement tab 44 is folded along the fold line 54 relative to the side panel 28 such that the reinforcement tab is generally parallel to the bottom panel 22. As shown in Fig. 6, the reinforcement tab 44 is placed generally adjacent the inner surface of the bottom panel 22. The reinforcement flap 96 is folded along fold line 106 relative to the retention panel 74 such that the reinforcement flap is in a generally parallel and coplanar relationship with the reinforcement tab 44. As seen in Fig. 6, the bottom panel 22 is folded outward along fold line 24 (in the direction of arrow A1) and the reinforcement tab 44 is folded inward along fold line 54 (in the direction of arrow A2) to create a space to receive the reinforcement flap 96. The retention panel 74 is folded downward along fold line 84 (in the direction of arrow A3) to the assembled position in which the reinforcement flap 96 is received between the reinforcement tab 44 and the bottom panel 22. In the assembled position of one embodiment, the reinforcement flap 96 is wedged between the reinforcement tab 44 on one side and the bottom panel 22 on the other side such that the reinforcement flap is in face-to-face contact with the bottom panel and the reinforcement flap. Adhesive applied to the reinforcement tab 44 and bottom panel 22 bonds the reinforcement flap 96 to both the reinforcement tab and the bottom panel to secure the retention panel 74 in the assembled position. The retention panel 74 is at least generally parallel to and spaced apart from the central panel 12 to form a receiving space 152 (Fig. 3) of the carton 150. In the illustrated embodiment, the retention panel 74 at least partially encloses a corner of the tray such that the receiving space 152 is formed in a corner of

the tray. In the illustrated embodiment four receiving spaces 152 are respectively formed by the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 to enclose each corner of the tray. However, more or less than four receiving spaces 152 may be included or the receiving spaces may be otherwise shaped and/or located without departing from the invention.

[0025] In one alternative method of assembly of the retention panel 74, the reinforcement flap 96 is positioned to the outside of the bottom panel 22. In this embodiment, the bottom panel 22 is wedged between the reinforcement flap 96 on the outside of the carton 150 and the reinforcement tab 44 on the inside of the carton. Adhesive may be applied to any or all three of the reinforcement flap 96, bottom panel 22, and reinforcement tab 44 to hold the retention panel 74 in the assembled position. It is understood that the reinforcement flap 96, bottom panel 22, and reinforcement tab 44 may be arranged and/or assembled other than is shown in the illustrated embodiments and described herein without departing from the scope of this invention.

[0026] The upwardly folded side panels 28, 34 and top and bottom panels 16, 22 of the assembled carton 150 cooperate to restrict the longitudinal and lateral movement of the pizza in the carton. Further, the receiving spaces 152 formed by the spacing of the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 from the central panel 12 receive a portion of the circumferential edge and margin of the pizza P to restrain the movement of the pizza away from the central panel 12 and to maintain the pizza in an at least generally parallel plane with the central panel. Accordingly, the side panels 28, 34, and top and bottom panels 16, 22 cooperate with the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 to contain the pizza in the carton 150.

[0027] The carton 150 may also be used for serving a cooked food product after the food product has been removed from the carton and cooked in an oven or other cooking apparatus. In accordance with the exemplary embodiment, the carton 150 is opened by at least partially tearing off the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 so that the side panels 28, 34 and bottom panels 16, 22 remain attached to the central panel 12 so the carton is transformed into a tray. The tray advantageously can receive and removably contain the entire cooked pizza. It is contemplated that the cooked food

product such as pizza may be placed on the inner surface of the central panel 12 of the carton 150 and cut in suitable size pieces for serving.

[0028] It is understood that various sizes of pizzas P or other food products may be housed in the carton 150 and that graphics including advertising or other information may be printed on the outer surface of the central panel 12, the inner surface of the central panel, and/or the outer surfaces of the retention panels 70, 72, 74, 76 to convey information to the consumer. The pizza P may be mounted (e.g., by way of an outer wrap of polymeric film) to a backing board that generally conforms to the size of the pizza so that the pizza and backing board are contained in the carton 150. The carton 150 uses less material than conventional six-sided cartons that fully enclose the pizza in that the carton of the present invention forms a tray including the central panel 12 on one side that cooperates with the retention panels on the other side to contain the pizza in the carton. The surface of the pizza P (or the external surface of the backing board) opposite the central panel 12 is typically substantially exposed in that the retention panels extend over only a portion of the pizza to contain the pizza in the carton 150. That is, and as shown in Fig. 3, an opening for viewing the pizza P, or the like, is defined by respected edges of the top, bottom, side, and retention panels 16, 22, 28, 34, 70, 72, 74, 76. The exposed surface of the pizza P or the backing board can include label information, advertising, or other information visible to the consumer from the back of the carton 150.

[0029] Fig. 7 shows a second embodiment of a blank, generally indicated 200, for forming a carton 210 (Fig. 8) of the second embodiment. The blank 200 is substantially similar to the blank 8 of the first embodiment in that the carton 210 has a generally square-shaped central panel 212 and retention panels 220, 222, 224, 226 that are sized to cooperate with the side panels 230, 232 and top and bottom panels 236, 238 to hold a food product such as a frozen pizza P. In the embodiment of Figs. 10 and 11, the retention panels have oblique surfaces 240, 242, 244, 246 that are longer than the oblique surfaces of the first embodiment, and lateral surfaces 250, 252, 254, 256 and longitudinal surfaces 260, 262, 264, 266 that are shorter than the respective lateral and longitudinal surfaces of the first embodiment.

[0030] In general, the blank may be constructed from paperboard having a caliper of at least about 18, for example, so that it is heavier and more rigid than ordinary paper. The blank can also be constructed of other materials, such as cardboard, or any other material having properties suitable for enabling the carton to function at least generally as described above.

[0031] The blank can be coated with, for example, a clay coating. The clay coating may then be printed over with product, advertising, and other information or images. The blank may then be coated with a varnish to protect information printed on the blanks. The blank may also be coated with, for example, a moisture barrier layer, on either or both sides of the blanks. The blank can also be laminated to or coated with one or more sheet-like materials at selected panels or panel sections.

[0032] The above embodiments may be described as having one or panels, flaps, etc., adhered together by glue. The term "glue" is intended to encompass all manner of adhesives commonly used to secure paperboard carton panels in place.

[0033] The term "line" as used herein includes not only straight lines, but also other types of lines such as curved, curvilinear or angularly displaced lines.

[0034] In accordance with the exemplary embodiments, a fold line can be any substantially linear, although not necessarily straight, form of weakening that facilitates folding therealong. More specifically, but not for the purpose of narrowing the scope of the present invention, fold lines include: a score line, such as lines formed with a blunt scoring knife, or the like, which creates a crushed or depressed portion in the material along the desired line of weakness; a cut that extends partially into a material along the desired line of weakness, and/or a series of cuts that extend partially into and/or completely through the material along the desired line of weakness; and various combinations of these features. In situations where cutting is used to create a fold line, typically the cutting will not be overly extensive in a manner that might cause a reasonable user to incorrectly consider the fold line to be a tear line.

[0035] The foregoing description of the invention illustrates and describes various embodiments of the present invention. As various changes could be made in the above construction without departing from the scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the

accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense. Furthermore, the scope of the present invention covers various modifications, combinations, alterations, etc., of the above-described embodiments that are within the scope of the claims. Additionally, the disclosure shows and describes only selected embodiments of the invention, but the invention is capable of use in various other combinations, modifications, and environments and is capable of changes or modifications within the scope of the inventive concept as expressed herein, commensurate with the above teachings, and/or within the skill or knowledge of the relevant art. Furthermore, certain features and characteristics of each embodiment may be selectively interchanged and applied to other illustrated and non-illustrated embodiments of the invention without departing from the scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A carton for holding a food product, the carton comprising:
a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel to form a tray for receiving the food product;
at least one retention panel foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels, the retention panel being in generally spaced apart relationship with the central panel to form a receiving space for at least partially receiving the food product.
2. The carton of claim 1 wherein the plurality of panels comprises a top panel, a bottom panel, a first side panel, and a second side panel.
3. The carton of claim 1 wherein the retention panel at least partially encloses a corner of the tray.
4. The carton of claim 3 wherein the central panel is generally square-shaped and the carton comprises four retention panels, respectively partially enclosing corners of the tray.
5. The carton of claim 2 wherein the retention panel comprises a reinforcement flap foldably connected to the retention panel for interlocking engagement with at least one of the plurality of panels.
6. The carton of claim 5 further comprising a reinforcement tab foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels for securing the reinforcement panel in an assembled position.
7. The carton of claim 6 wherein the reinforcement tab, reinforcement flap, and one of the plurality of panels are in generally face-to-face relationship.

8. The carton of claim 7 wherein adhesive is applied to at least one of the reinforcement tab, the reinforcement flap, and one of the plurality of panels to secure the retention panel in the assembled position spaced apart from the central panel.

9. The carton of claim 2 wherein the retention panel has three edges comprising a lateral edge, a longitudinal edge, and an oblique edge.

10. The carton of claim 9 wherein the retention panel is spaced apart from the central panel by at least one panel selected from the group consisting of the side panels, the top panel, and the bottom panel.

11. The carton of claim 10 wherein the retention panel is generally parallel to the central panel.

12. A blank for forming a carton for holding a food product, the blank comprising:

a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel for being formed into a tray; and

at least one retention panel foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels, the retention panel is for being positioned in generally spaced apart relationship with the central panel to form a receiving space in the carton formed from the tray.

13. The blank of claim 12 wherein the plurality of panels comprise a top panel, a bottom panel, a first side panel, and a second side panel.

14. The blank of claim 13 wherein the central panel is generally square-shaped and the blank comprises four retention panels respectively foldably connected to one of plurality of panels at a location adjacent to a corner of the central panel.

15. The blank of claim 12 wherein the retention panel comprises a reinforcement flap foldably connected to the retention panel for interlocking engagement with at least one of the plurality of panels.

16. The blank of claim 15 further comprising a reinforcement tab foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels for securing the reinforcement panel in an assembled position in the carton formed from the blank.

17. The blank of claim 12 wherein the retention panel has three edges comprising a lateral edge, a longitudinal edge, and an oblique edge.

18. The blank of claim 13 wherein the retention panel is spaced apart from the central panel by at least one of the plurality of panels in the carton formed from the blank.

19. The blank of claim 18 wherein the retention panel is generally parallel to the central panel in the carton formed from the blank.

20. A method of forming a carton, the method comprising:

providing a blank having a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel, the plurality of panels comprising a first side panel, a second side panel, a bottom panel, and a top panel, and at least one retention panel foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels;

upwardly folding the side panels, top panel, and bottom panel relative to the central panel to form a tray;

folding the retention panel relative to at least one panel selected from the group consisting of the side panels, the bottom panel, and the top panel so that the retention panel is spaced apart from the central panel to form a receiving space for receiving a food product in the carton.

21. The method of claim 20 further comprising securing the retention panel in position to form the receiving space.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the blank comprises a reinforcement flap foldably connected to the retention panel and a reinforcement tab foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels, and wherein securing the retention panel comprises folding the reinforcement tab and reinforcement flap and securing the reinforcement tab, reinforcement flap, and one of the plurality of panels in generally face-to-face relationship.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein securing the retention panel comprises applying adhesive to at least one panel selected from the group consisting of the reinforcement flap, the reinforcement tab, and the one of the plurality of panels.

24. The method of claim 20 wherein the central panel is generally square-shaped and folding the retention panel comprises at least partially enclosing a corner of the tray.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein the blank comprises four retention panels and the method comprises folding each of the retention panels to respectively enclose four corners of the tray.

26. A blank for forming a carton for holding a food product, the blank comprising:

a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel;

at least two retention panels foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels, the retention panels being spaced apart by a gap.

27. The blank of claim 26 wherein said gap is in a lateral direction of the blank.

28. The blank of claim 27 wherein the gap comprises a space between longitudinal edges of the retention panels.

29. The blank of claim 26 wherein the plurality of panels comprises a first side panel and a second side panel, the at least two retention panels comprise a first pair of retention panels foldably connected to the first side panel and a second pair of retention panels foldably connected to the second side panel, and the gap comprises a first gap between the first pair of retention panels and a second gap between the second pair of retention panels.

30. A carton for holding a food product, the carton comprising:
a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel;

at least one retention panel foldably connected to one of the plurality of panels, the retention panel forming a receiving space for at least partially receiving the food product.

31. A method of forming a carton, the method comprising:

providing a blank having a central panel and a plurality of panels foldably connected to the central panel and at least one retention panel foldably connected to at least one of the plurality of panels;

upwardly folding the plurality of panels relative to the central panel to form a tray;

folding the retention panel relative to at least one of the plurality of panels to form a receiving space for receiving a food product in the carton..

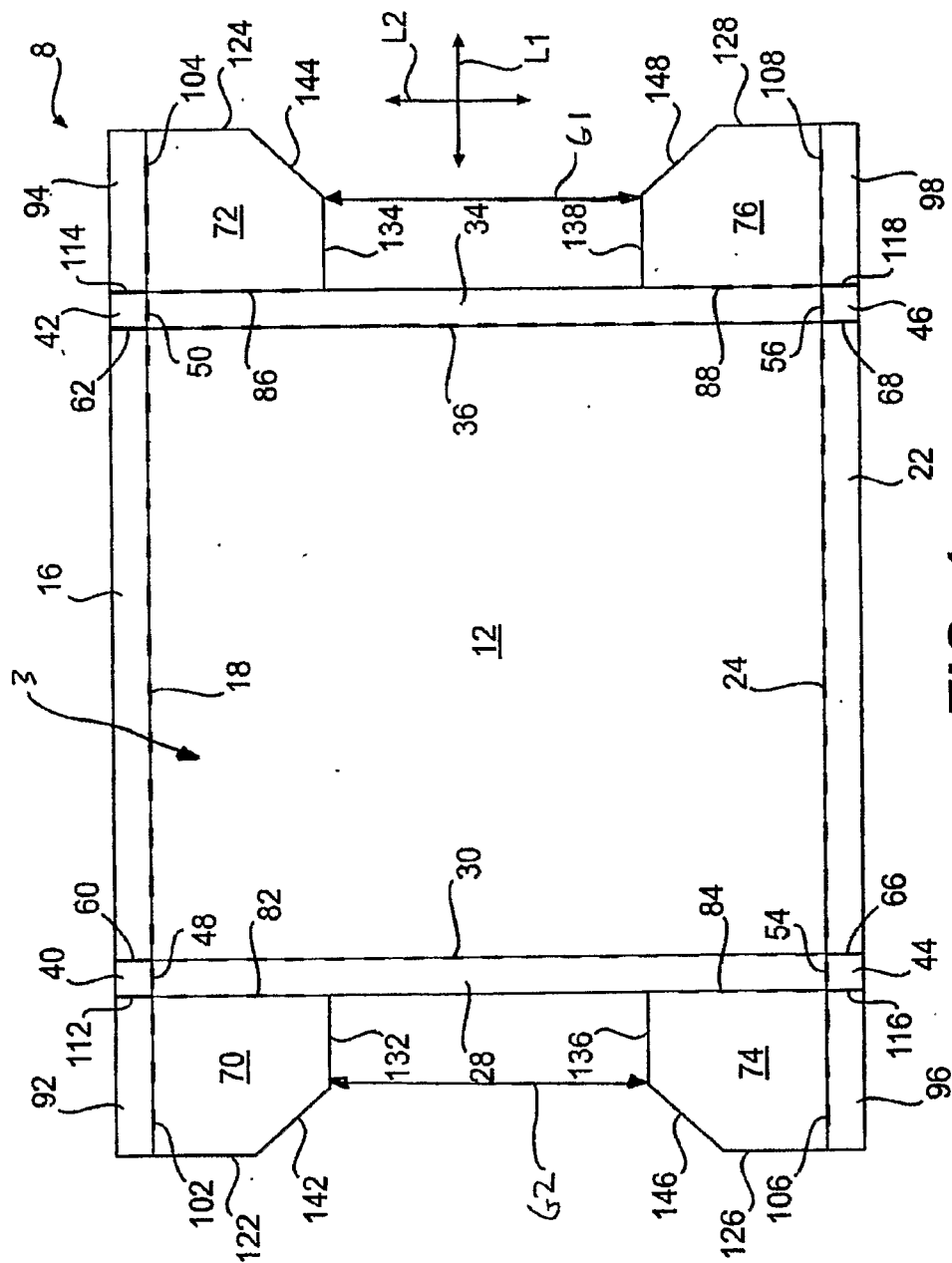


FIG. 1

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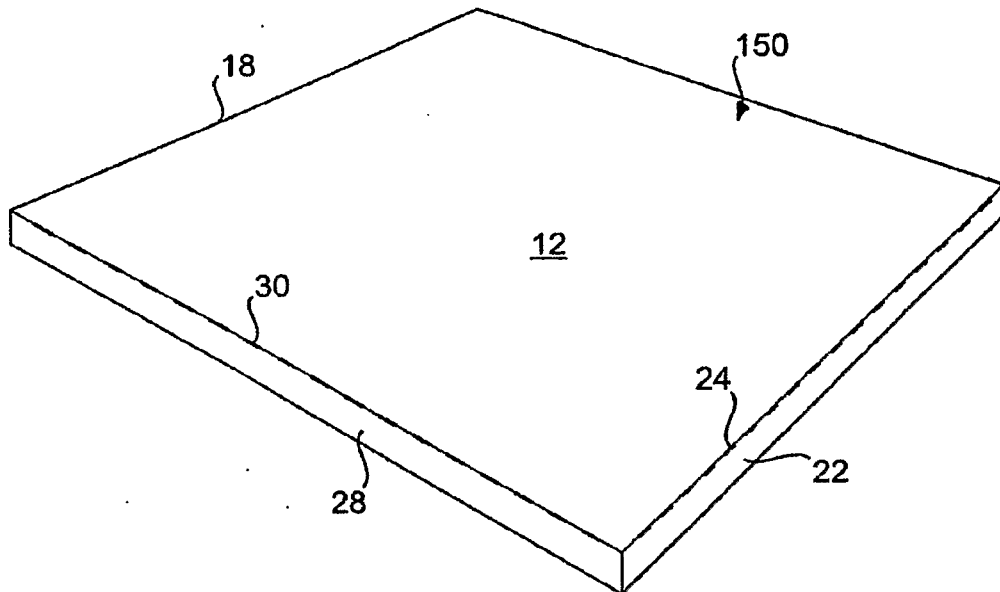


FIG. 2

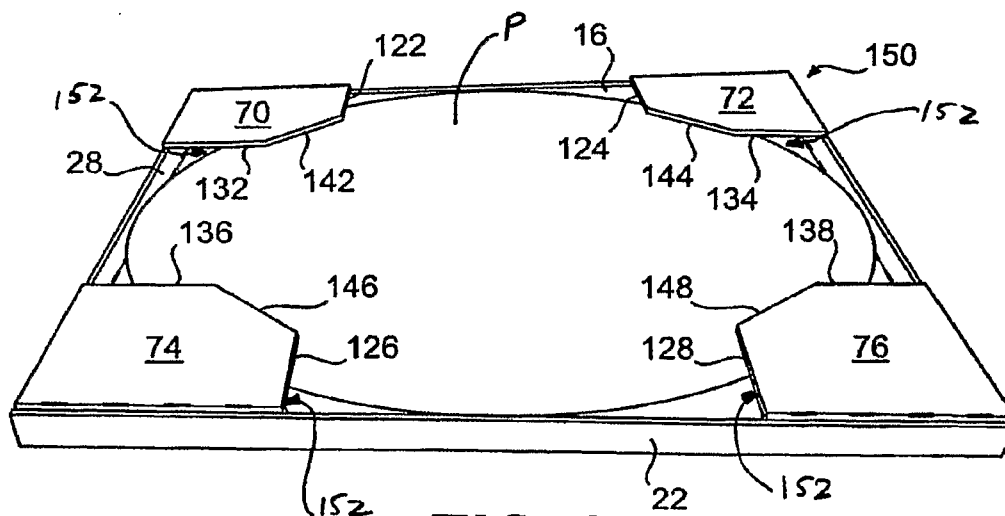


FIG. 3

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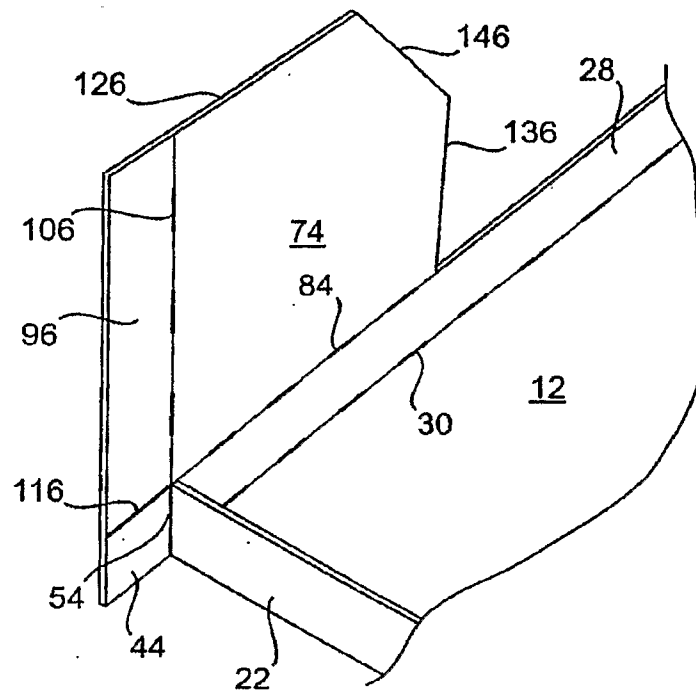


FIG. 4

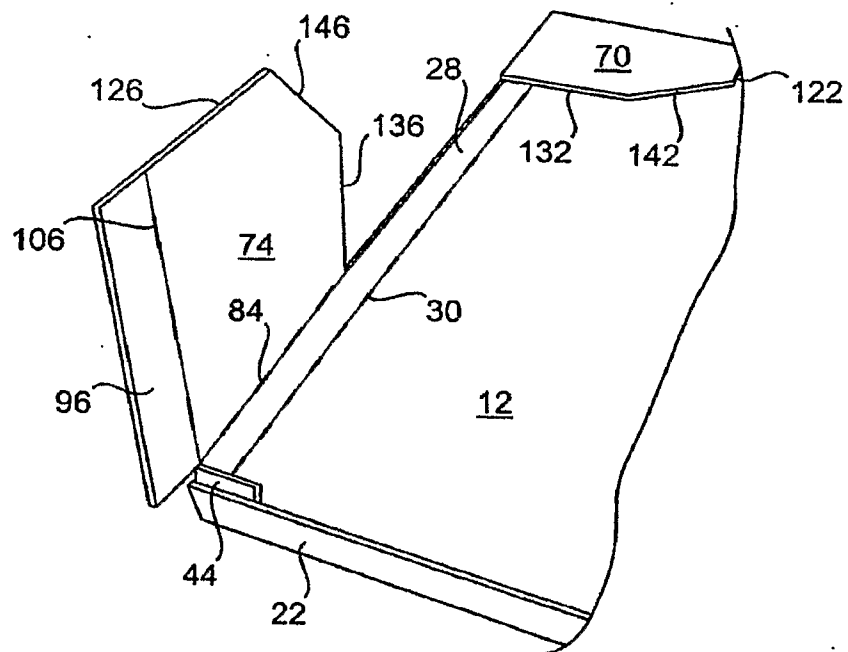


FIG. 5

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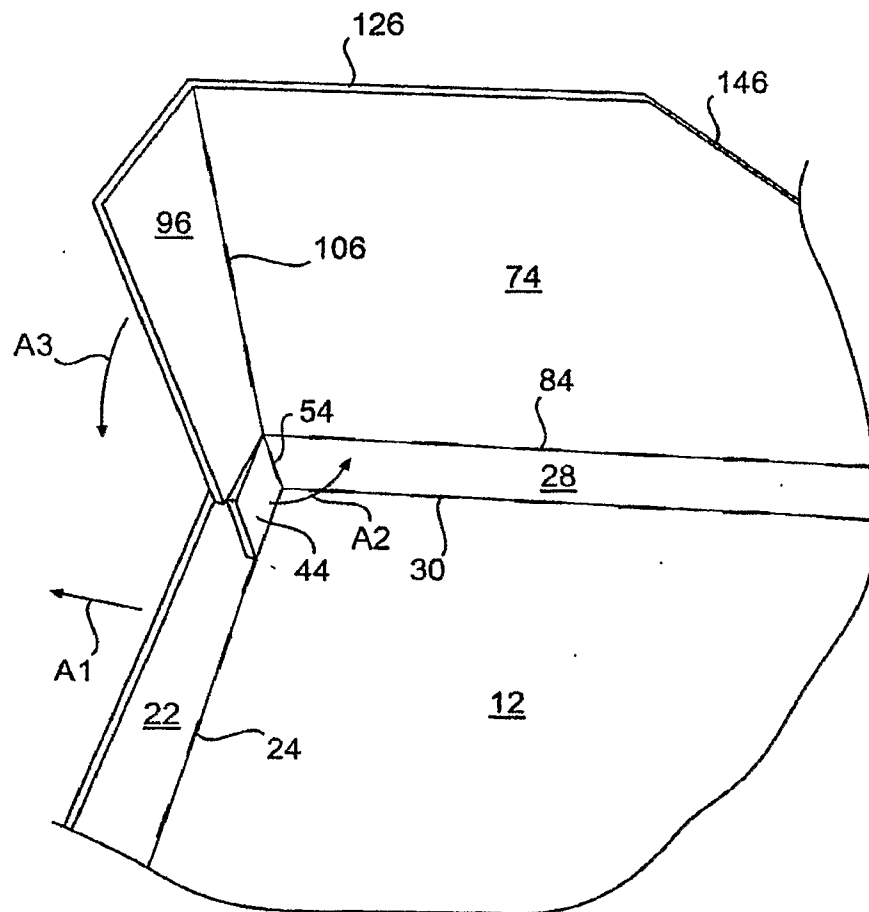


FIG. 6

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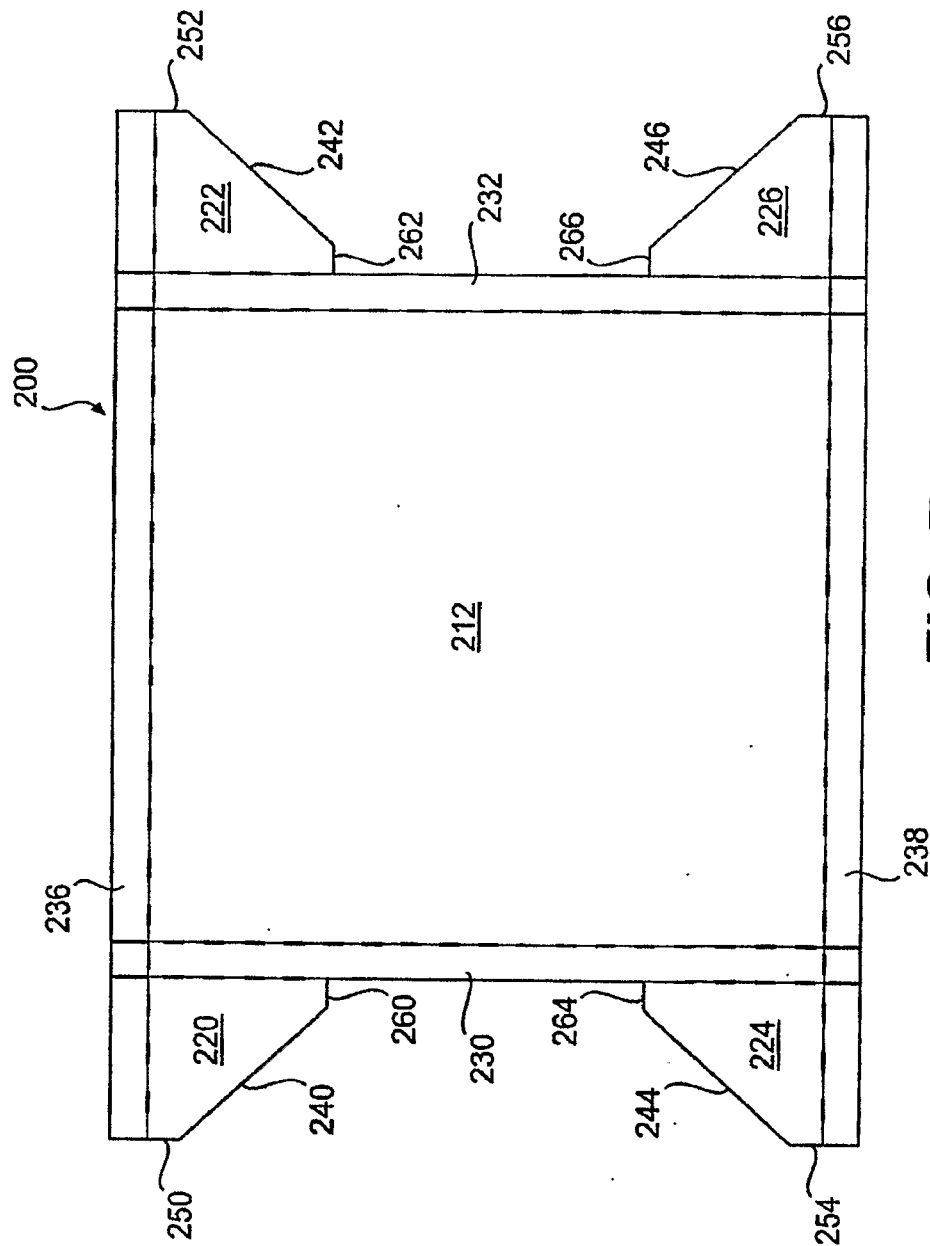
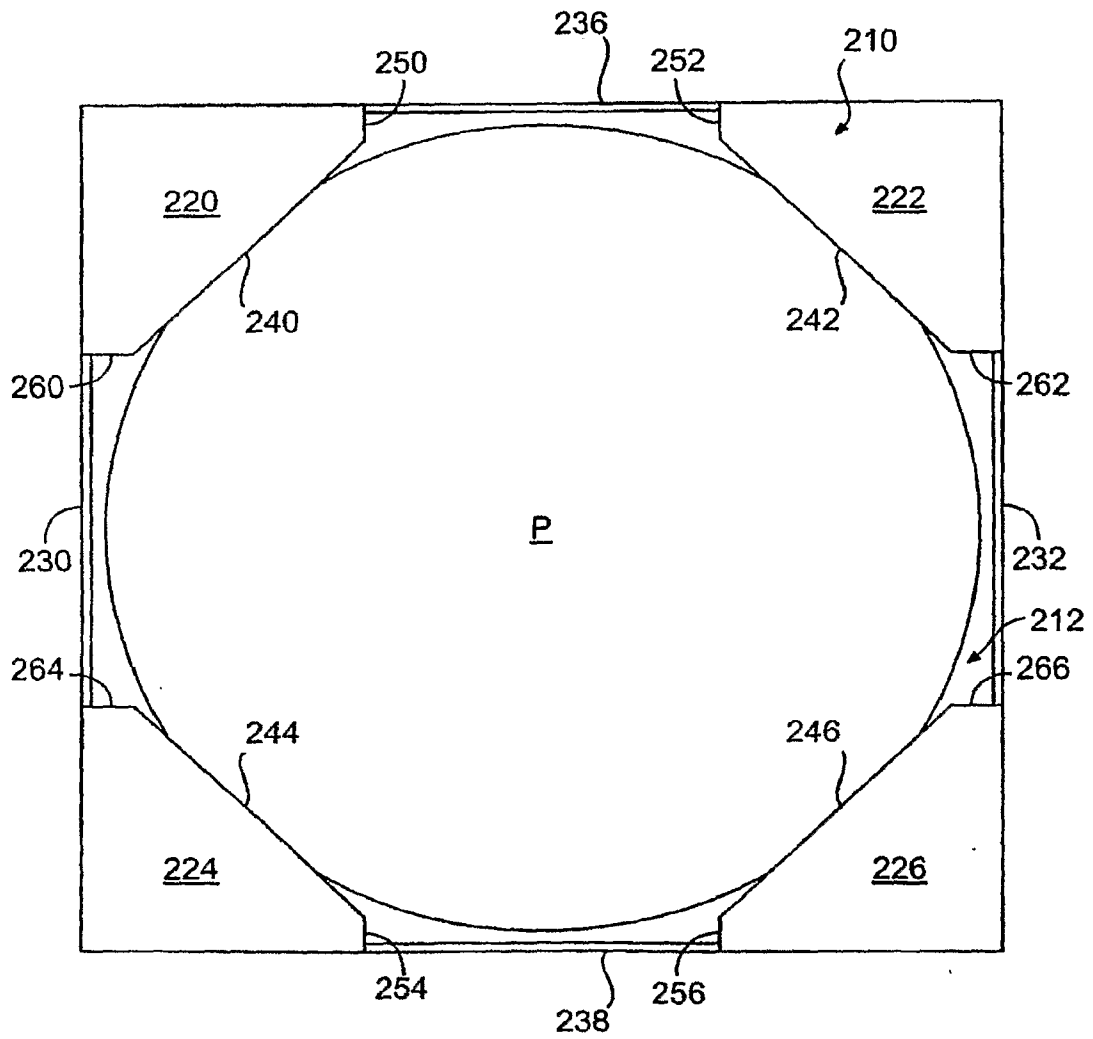


FIG. 7

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**FIG. 8**