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(54) Title: SPILL CONTAINING REFRIGERATOR SHELF ASSEMBLY

(57) Abstract: The specification discloses a method for containing spills on shelving and the like, and the resulting support members made in accordance with the method, by providing the generally flat top surface of a support with a hydrophobic surface which is arranged in a spill containment pattern and which is generally in the plane of the top surface of the support. The majority of the top surface of the support consists of one or more spill containment areas which are of a non-hydrophobic nature and which are bounded by the hydrophobic surfaces, such that spills on the shelving collect in the non-hydrophobic spill containment area or areas and are prevented from spreading by the hydrophobic surfaces.



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SPILL CONTAINING REFRIGERATOR SHELF ASSEMBLY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] Priority is claimed to U.S. Patent Application No. 12/562,920, filed September 18, 2009, which is a continuation-in-part of International Patent Application No. PCT/US09/48775, filed June 26, 2009, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/216,540, filed May 18, 2009, and U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/133,273, filed June 27, 2008, the entire contents of each of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates to shelving and the like, e.g., countertops and table tops, including shelving which may be adapted for use with refrigerators. More particularly, the invention relates to the support surfaces of such articles which have spill containing features.

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] Previous types of shelving have been developed for use as refrigerator and other shelves. Shelving designs exist in the prior art which include means for containing liquid spills and leaks from a container stored on a shelf, and preventing the spill from dripping from the shelf onto the floor or into other parts of a refrigerator, commonly referred to as "spill proof" shelving. For example, Kane, et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,564,809, issued October 14, 1996, discloses a shelf assembly with a shelf panel, a shelf support supporting the panel, and a molded one-piece member encapsulating the edge of the shelf panel and a substantial majority of the shelf support.

[0004] Herrmann, et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,735,589, issued April 7, 1998, discloses a shelf panel for a refrigerator compartment, which includes a shelf panel that is slidably supported for extension and retraction on a support, and which includes slide members that are preferably molded so as to form a rim on the top support surface of the shelf panel to contain liquids.

[0005] Bird, et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,429,433, issued July 4, 1995, also describes a refrigerator shelf which is adapted for containment of spills on the shelf. The shelf includes a planar shelf with a rim molded around the perimeter edge of the shelf. The rim projects above the top surface of the shelf to form a dam for containing liquid spills on the shelf.

[0006] Meier, et al., U.S. Patent 6,120,720, issued September 19, 2000, discloses a method of manufacturing a glass shelf with a plastic edge for retaining spills on the shelf. The glass shelf panel is placed in a cavity of a mold and plastic material is injected into the cavity surrounding the glass shelf panel such that a plastic edging is formed around the perimeter of the glass shelf panel.

[0007] Additional techniques for containing spills in refrigerator shelving include the use of injection molded plastic, so as to encapsulate a support plate forming the shelf, using plastic molded parts to essentially "sandwich" a support plate between the parts, or using a silicone sealant or various other types of adhesives to form physical spill containment barriers around the perimeter of the refrigerator shelving. In addition to the foregoing, it is known to utilize formed lips or ridges on the surface of the support plate itself, so as to essentially provide a physical barrier as a liquid retention feature.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention is a method for containing spills on shelving and the like having a support top surface, and the resulting items made in accordance with the method, by providing the support top surface with a hydrophobic surface which is arranged in a spill containment pattern and which is generally in the plane of the top surface of the support. The majority of the top surface of the support consists of one or more spill containment areas which are of a non-hydrophobic nature and which are bounded by the hydrophobic surfaces, such that spills on the surface collect in the non-hydrophobic spill containment area or areas and are prevented from spreading by the hydrophobic surfaces.

[0009] These and other objects, advantages and features of the invention will be more fully understood and appreciated by reference to the Description of the Preferred Embodiments, and the appended drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] Preferred embodiments of the invention will now be described with reference to the drawings, in which:

[0011] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a prior art shelf assembly mounted on a pair of support brackets, and utilizing the concept of encapsulation of a shelf for providing spill containment features;

[0012] FIG. 2 is a front, sectional view of the shelf assembly shown in FIG. 1, with the absence of the support brackets;

[0013] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a shelf assembly in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention including a shelf mounted on a pair of support brackets, the

shelf including a hydrophobic spill containment pattern disposed on the top surface thereof to contain spilled liquids;

[0014] FIG. 4 is a front, elevation view of the shelf assembly shown in FIG. 3, with the absence of the support brackets;

[0015] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a shelf assembly constructed in accordance with the present disclosure and having a grid-like hydrophobic spill containment pattern;

[0016] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of yet another alternative embodiment shelf assembly constructed in accordance with the present disclosure and having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern that includes first and second borders;

[0017] FIG. 7 is a partial perspective view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a first embodiment the present disclosure;

[0018] FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 7 taken through line VIII-VIII of FIG. 7;

[0019] FIG. 9 is a partial perspective view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a second embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0020] FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 9 taken through line X-X of FIG. 9;

[0021] FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a third embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0022] FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 11 taken through line XI-XI of FIG. 11;

[0023] FIG. 13 is a side view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a fourth embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0024] FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 13 taken through line XIV-XIV of FIG. 13;

[0025] FIG. 15 is a perspective view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a fifth embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0026] FIG. 16 is a perspective view of a support bracket of the shelf assembly of FIG. 15;

[0027] FIG. 17 is a cross-sectional view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 15 taken through line XVII-XVII of FIG. 15;

[0028] FIG. 18 is a schematic partial cross-sectional view of a shelf assembly including support brackets constructed in accordance with a sixth embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0029] FIG. 19 is a top view of a shelf assembly including front and rear trim components in accordance with a seventh embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0030] FIG. 20 is a side view of the shelf assembly of FIG. 19;

[0031] FIG. 21 is a detail view of the front trim component of the shelf assembly of FIGS. 19 and 20 taken from circle XXI of FIG. 20;

[0032] FIG. 22 is a detail view of the rear trim component of the shelf assembly of FIGS. 19 and 20 taken from circle XXII of FIG. 20;

[0033] FIG. 23 is a detail view of front portion of a shelf assembly including a front trim component in accordance with an eighth embodiment of the present disclosure;

[0034] FIG. 24 is a graph showing the water height retention test results after abrasion with a glass jar for three shelves formed in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

[0035] FIG. 25 is a graph showing the water height retention test results after performing a cleaning process on three shelves formed in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure; and

[0036] FIGS. 26A and 26B are photographs demonstrating the stain resistant properties of a shelf having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed of a ceramic frit and a hydrophobic compound in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0037] In the preferred embodiments, the term "shelving and/or the like," "shelving," "shelf," or "shelf and/or the like" encompasses shelves and articles whose top surfaces such as pantry shelves, countertops, stovetops, cook-tops, and table tops. Certain embodiments are especially advantageous for use in refrigerator and freezer shelving.

[0038] In such preferred embodiments of the invention, refrigerator shelving is provided with a spill containment pattern which may consist of a hydrophobic surface in the pattern of a frame-like border, which defines the boundaries of a single non-hydrophobic spill containment area therein. The pattern may be a frame-like border

which extends along the perimeter of the shelf's top surface (FIG. 3), or it may be spaced from the perimeter and encompass a smaller portion of the top surface, and may include an outer border with a final spill catch area between the inner and outer border (FIG. 6). It may consist of a hydrophobic surface in a grid-like pattern, which pattern defines the boundaries of several spill containment areas therein (FIG. 5). Other variations are intended to be within the scope of the present disclosure.

[0039] A preferred embodiment shelf may be incorporated into a shelving assembly with a shelf-supporting mechanism, such as a bracket, and a shelf, which is capable of supporting articles on its top surface. The disclosure provided herein relates to the shelf portion of the assembly, and various brackets that can be used with the shelf.

[0040] The shelf may consist of a substrate formed of metal, glass, plastic, another suitable material, or a combination of any of the foregoing, and which has a hydrophobic surface which is generally in the same plane as the top surface of the shelf substrate and which is arranged in a spill containment pattern to provide a spill containment feature on the top surface of the shelf substrate, as illustrated in FIGS. 3-6 and described below. The majority of the surface area of the top surface of the shelf substrate is non-hydrophobic in nature. The non-hydrophobic region of the top surface is bounded by the hydrophobic spill containment pattern such that spilled liquids are repelled by the hydrophobic spill containment pattern and pool and remain contained on these non-hydrophobic spill containing areas by the hydrophobic surfaces. The shelves described herein can be adapted for use as refrigerator or freezer shelves, for example.

[0041] A hydrophobic or super hydrophobic surface treatment may be applied to the shelf substrate's top surface to create the hydrophobic spill containment pattern described

herein in a variety of methods, and any surface coatings may be used which are known to be hydrophobic or super-hydrophobic or are known to make a surface hydrophobic or super-hydrophobic. The hydrophobic surface described herein is not limited to any specific hydrophobic or super hydrophobic surface treatment, and any method of making a portion of the surface of the shelf substrate hydrophobic may be employed.

[0042] More specifically, according to the preferred embodiments, there are several hydrophobic compounds which may be used. Some of the hydrophobic compounds include: fluorocarbons; fluoroalkyl silanes; fluoroalkoxy silanes; and fluoroalkyl alkyl silanes. Any such hydrophobic compounds or a mixture thereof can be used to create the hydrophobic surfaces described herein, and other applicable hydrophobic compounds could also be used. It is believed that tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl trichlorosilane provides a good example of a suitable hydrophobic compound. Other suitable hydrophobic compounds include, for example, nonafluorohexyldimethyl(dimethylamino)silane, heptadecafluorotetrahydrodecyldimethyl(dimethylamino)silane, tetrahydrodecyl-tris(dimethylamino)silane, tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl silane, (tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl)trimethoxysilane, (tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl)triethoxysilane, n-octadecyl trimethoxysilane, n-octyl triethoxysilane, and heptadecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrodecyl-tris(dimethylamino)silane. It is believed that the above-identified silanes bond and adhere strongly to glass and glass-like surfaces such as the cured ceramic frit material.

[0043] Further in accordance with the preferred embodiments described herein, methods of creating the hydrophobic surface may include, without limitation: application

of a hydrophobic compound to the top surface using an application technique such as spraying; brushing; wiping; dipping; solvent casting; flow coating; curtain coating; roller coating; spin coating; printing; screen printing; ink jet printing; vacuum coating; magnetic field-assisted cathodic sputtering; plasma deposition; plasma magnetron deposition; plasma or atmospheric CVD; powder or liquid pyrolysis; atomization or chemical vapor deposition; electrophoretic deposition; cross-linking processes; etc. Another method of creating the hydrophobic surface can include “roughening” the portion of the surface of the substrate to be made hydrophobic using various methods (sanding, abrading, etching, e.g., acid etching, or otherwise removing material from the surface) and then applying a hydrophobic compound to the “roughened” surface. Etching can be performed using, for example, hydrofluoric acid, sodium silicate, bifluorides, including for example, a ammonium bifluoride sodium bifluoride, and mixtures thereof, any other known etching solutions, and any mixtures thereof. Commercially available etching solutions are available, for example from Armour[®] Products (Hawthorne, New Jersey). For examples, the Armour Etch Bath[®] Glass Dipping Solution (product name) or Armour Etch[®] Glass Etching Cream (product name), available from Armour[®] Products can be used, and includes a mixture of ammonium bifluoride and sodium bifluoride. The etching solution can be applied to the substrate surface with an applicator in the desired pattern. A mask, which is resistant to the etching solution, can be placed on the region of the substrate to be non-hydrophobic to protect this region from being etched. The etching solution can be allowed to remain on the substrate surface for a time in a range of about 15 seconds to about 20 minutes, about 20 seconds to about 15 minutes, about 30 seconds to about 10 minutes, about 45 seconds to about 8 minutes, about 1 minute to about 10 minutes, about

2 minutes to about 8 minutes, about 4 minutes to about 6 minutes, about 15 seconds to about 1 minute, about 20 seconds to about 50 seconds, about 25 seconds to about 45 seconds, about 30 seconds to about 40 seconds, about 1 minute to about 20 minutes, about 5 to about 15 minutes, or about 7 minutes to about 10 minutes. Other suitable times include, for example, about 15 seconds, 20 seconds, 25 seconds, 30 seconds, 35 seconds, 40 seconds, 45 seconds, 50 seconds, 55 seconds, 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes, 5 minutes, 6 minutes, 7 minutes, 8 minutes, 9 minutes, 10 minutes, 11 minutes, 12 minutes, 13 minutes, 14 minutes, 15 minutes, 16 minutes, 17 minutes, 18 minutes, 19 minutes, and 20 minutes.

[0044] The hydrophobic surface can also be formed, for example, by providing a coating of hydrophobic particles on the surface, by using sol-gel deposition to apply a hydrophobic compound to the surface, either on top of or within the matrix of the sol-gel, by applying a metal oxide primer with an integrated or separate hydrophobic compound, by applying a hydrophobic compound comprising a variety of molecular chain lengths to create a coating with surface irregularities, or by adhering a thin material, such as a tape of thin glass or plastic which has been made hydrophobic to the surface. The hydrophobic surface can be formed, for example, by applying a ceramic frit material, with or without structure forming particles therein, to the surface of the substrate in the desired spill containment pattern, curing the frit, and then applying a hydrophobic compound over the cured frit and curing the hydrophobic compound.

[0045] Any combination of the above-described surface treatment methods can be also be used. For example, the substrate can be first prepared by applying and curing a ceramic frit material to the substrate. The ceramic frit material can then be etched using

an etching solution as described above, and a hydrophobic compound can be applied to the etched ceramic frit. Alternatively, the entire substrate including the ceramic frit material can be etched using an etching solution, and a hydrophobic compound can then be applied to the etched ceramic frit. Without intending to be bound by theory, it is believed that etching the ceramic frit prior to application of the hydrophobic compound can improve the hydrophobic properties of the spill containment pattern by creating additional bonding sites on the ceramic frit to which the hydrophobic compound can bond. Additionally, the etched ceramic frit may include more surface area to which the hydrophobic compound can be attached by virtue of the combined macro-scale surface roughening provided by the ceramic frit and micro-scale surface roughening provided by etching the ceramic frit.

[0046] The hydrophobic surface treatments described herein can be cured according to a number of different methods, if curing is required by the surface preparation or the hydrophobic compound, including without limitation: conduction heating; convection heating; UV radiation; VUV radiation; electron beam irradiation; ionizing radiation; laser; IR; and thermal radiation. The hydrophobic surface treatments can also be cured by remaining at ambient conditions for a sufficient length of time, for example, from about 16 hours to about 48 hours, from about 20 hours to about 40 hours, and from about 25 hours to about 35 hours. Curing can be performed in a controlled humidity environment. For example, curing can be performed at less than 70% humidity, less than 60% humidity, less than 50% humidity, less than 40% humidity, less than 30% humidity, less than 20% humidity, less than 10% humidity, or at 0% humidity.

[0047] One preferred embodiment of the shelf assembly comprises a glass or tempered glass shelf substrate which is printed, e.g., screen printed, with a ceramic frit material, over which a hydrophobic coating is applied. The ceramic frit can be patterned on the substrate using any known placing, printing, or other patterning methods. The ceramic frit material is placed or printed in a pattern, for example, a frame-like border pattern on the glass substrate, which defines at least a portion of the spill containment pattern. For example, the ceramic frit material can be screen printed onto the substrate in the desired pattern using, for example, a silk screen having a mesh count in a range of about 80 to about 360, about 100 to about 300, about 120 to about 280, about 140 to about 240, about 160 to about 220, about 180 to about 200, about 86 to about 360. Other suitable mesh counts include about 80, 82, 84, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94, 96, 98, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260, 270, 280, 290, 300, 310, 320, 340, 350, and 360. Various other mesh counts may be suitable depending on the composition and particle size of the frit material used. As described in more detail below, the hydrophobic spill containment pattern, and consequently, the frit pattern, can have a variety of shapes and sizes, and can be placed in a variety of locations on the glass substrate. Additionally, portions of the hydrophobic spill containment pattern can be formed, for example, using different hydrophobic compounds and/or different surface treatments. For example, a portion of the spill containment pattern can be formed, for example, by applying and curing a ceramic frit to the substrate and applying a hydrophobic compound to the cured ceramic frit (as described in more detail below) and another portion of the hydrophobic spill containment pattern can be formed, for example,

by acid etching a portion of the substrate and applying the hydrophobic compound to the etched portion.

[0048] In accordance with various aspects of the invention, the ceramic frit material can include finely ground particles. For example, the ceramic frit material can include lead oxide, silicon dioxide, aluminum oxide, and mixtures thereof. Preferably, the frit material includes silicon dioxide. More preferably, the frit material includes from 5 weight percent (wt.%) to about 100 wt.% silicon dioxide, from about 10 wt.% to about 80 wt.%, from about 20 wt.% to about 60 wt.% from about 30 wt.% to about 40 wt.% from about 15 wt.% to about 75 wt.%, from about 20 wt.% to about 50 wt.%. Other suitable amounts of silicon dioxide in the frit material can include, for example, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90, 95 and 100 wt.%. For example, the frit material can include about 29 wt.% silicon dioxide. The frit material can also include, for example, additives, such as tantalum oxide, titanium dioxide, calcium oxide, zirconium oxide, sodium oxide, potassium oxides, iron oxide magnesium oxide, barium oxide, bismuth oxide, and mixtures thereof. Suitable commercially available frit materials can be used. For example, a commercially available frit material is available from Ferro Corp. (hereinafter “the Ferro frit”) under Product No. A0430 Etch C32 Medium, and contains about 53.71 wt.% lead oxide, about 29 wt.% silicon dioxide, 15.72 wt.% aluminum oxide, 0.39 wt.% tantalum oxide, 0.38 wt.% titanium dioxide, 0.28 wt.% calcium oxide, 0.26 wt.% zirconium oxide, 0.11 wt.% sodium oxide, 0.04 wt.% potassium oxide, 0.04 wt.% iron oxide, 0.03 wt.% magnesium oxide, 0.02 wt.% barium oxide, and 0.02 wt.% bismuth oxide. The particles of the frit material may be mixed with inorganic or organic pigments or dyes, so as to yield a desired color. The ceramic frit

material may be provided as a dry powder or as a paste or other such mixture. Once the ceramic frit material is placed on the substrate, the ceramic frit is then coupled to the substrate. For example, the ceramic frit can be coupled to the substrate by fusing the ceramic frit to the substrate. The ceramic frit can be coupled or fused to substrate by heating the substrate to a temperature in a range of about 1000°F to about 1400°F, about 1100°F to about 1300°F, about 1100°F to about 1200°F, and about 1200°F to about 1400°F. Other suitable temperatures include about 1000°F, 1050°F, 1100°F, 1150°F, 1200°F, 1250°F, 1300°F, 1350°F, and 1400°F. This heat treatment will cause the particles of the ceramic frit to cure by fusing to each other and to the glass surface to form a continuous structure and thereby couple the ceramic frit to the substrate. The pattern of the fused frit will be substantially identical to the pattern in which the frit material was placed on the substrate. It is believed that this fused frit coating can be characterized as being nearly as hard and tough as the glass itself. Also, the coated glass with the ceramic frit material is durable, and resists chipping, peeling, fading, and scratching.

Advantageously, the ceramic frit material is resistant to abrasions from common household containers, such as, for example, glass jars. In addition, the ceramic frit material is substantially resistant to most chemicals. Accordingly, the ceramic frit material is substantially resistant to a variety of cleaners that may be used to clean a glass shelf, including, for example, dish soap, such as Dawn dish soap, Windex, Sparkle, Clorox wipes, and Formula 409 All Purpose Cleaner. A shelf having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed from a ceramic frit can resist multiple cleanings without experiencing a decrease in the shelf's ability to retain spilled liquids.

[0049] In one embodiment, the ceramic frit can include some micro-scale additive particles which will remain unmelted at the temperature at which the frit is sintered, as described for example in U.S. Patents 4,591,530 to Lui, 6,872,441 and 6,800,354 to Baumann, and 5,324,566 and 5,437,894 to Ogawa. The frit is printed or placed in the pattern of a frame-like border at or near the outer perimeter of the shelf substrate's top surface or other desired location for the spill containment pattern. The shelf with the printed frit is then heated to a temperature above the melting point of the primary components of the frit material, but below the melting point of the glass shelf, for a time sufficient to cure the frit so that it is fused or bonded to the top surface of the shelf substrate. The specific time and temperature required to sinter the frit will vary based on the materials chosen for the frit.

[0050] By way of example only, the application of the hydrophobic compound will be described with reference to a glass substrate having a fused frit surface modification. Other surface modifications and/or preparations, including for example, acid etching and other surface roughening methods, can be used as described above, and the hydrophobic compound can be similarly applied to such surface modified substrates. The hydrophobic compound, such as, for example, a fluorocarbon, a fluoroalkyl silane, a fluoroalkoxy silane, or a fluoroalkyl alkyl silane is then applied to the fused frit material. Suitable hydrophobic compounds can include, for example, tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl trichlorosilane, nonafluorohexyldimethyl(dimethylamino)silane, heptadecafluorotetrahydrodecyldimethyl(dimethylamino)silane, tetrahydrodecyl-tris(dimethylamino)silane, tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl silane, (tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl)trimethoxysilane, (tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-

tetrahydrooctyl)triethoxysilane, n-octadecyl trimethoxysilane, n-octyl triethoxysilane, and heptadecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrodecyl-tris(dimethylamino)silane.

[0051] The hydrophobic compound can be applied to the frit material as a hydrophobic solution, which includes a solvent and the hydrophobic compound dissolved or dispersed in the solvent. The solvent can be, for example, dry or wet hexane. Suitable solvents include, for example, hexane, heptanes, methyl chloride, naptha, toluene, acetone, perfluorocarbons, and mixtures thereof. The hydrophobic solution can include from about 0.1% to about 5% of hydrophobic compound. Other suitable ranges include, for example, about 0.5 % to 4%, about 1% to about 3%, about 1% to about 5%, and about 2% to about 4%. Suitable amounts of the hydrophobic compound in the hydrophobic solution, can include, for example, about 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, 0.8, 0.9, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, and 5%. For example, a 1% solution of tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl trichlorosilane, a perfluoroalkyl alkyl silane, in hexane, can be applied to the fused frit, for example by wiping the solution onto the frit or applying the solution using an applicator tip, or by using any other known method. The hydrophobic compound can be applied to the solution using, for example, a one pass method in which a coated applicator is swept across the frit border a single time or a multiple pass method in which the applicator is passed over the frit border two or more times. The hydrophobic solution is then cured by heating it and/or exposing it to controlled humidity for a period of time. For example, conductive heating, convention heating, thermal radiation, UV radiation, VUV radiation, electron beam irradiation, ionizing radiation, laser, IR can be used to cure the hydrophobic solution. The hydrophobic solution can be cured, for example, at a temperature in a range of about 100°F to about 600°F, about 150°F to about

550°F, about 200°F to about 500°F, about 250°F to about 450°F, about 300°F to about 350°F, or about 100°F to about 300°F. Other suitable temperatures include, for example, about 100°F, 150°F, 200°F, 250°F, 300°F, 350°F, 400°F, 450°F, 500°F, 550°F, and 600°F. The hydrophobic solution can be cured, for example, by heating for a time in a range of about 5 minutes to about 1 hour, about 10 minutes to about 45 minutes, about 20 minutes to about 30 minutes, about 10 minutes to about 20 minutes, and about 15 minutes to about 30 minutes. Other suitable times include, for example, about 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60 minutes. Alternatively, the hydrophobic solution can be cured without heating. Heating, however, can accelerate the curing process. For example, the hydrophobic solution can be allowed to cure by leaving the glass substrate having the cured ceramic frit coated with the hydrophobic solution in ambient conditions for a time in a range of about 16 to about 48 hours, about 20 to about 40 hours, about 25 to about 35 hours, about 16 to about 24 hours, or about 20 hours to about 30 hours. The hydrophobic solution can be cured, whether at elevated temperatures or at ambient temperature, in relatively dry environment. For example, the hydrophobic solution can be cured in an environment having less than 70% humidity, less than 60% humidity, less than 50% humidity, less than 40% humidity, less than 30% humidity, less than 20% humidity, less than 10% humidity, or at 0% humidity. Upon curing, the hydrophobic compound preferably forms a continuous hydrophobic layer on the fused frit or other surface treatment.

[0052] Without intending to be bound by theory, it is believed that in the case of a fluorosilane, bonding is achieved between surface Si-OH contained on and extending from the surface of the fused frit material or other modified substrate surface, such as, for

example, an acid etched surface, and the Si-OH groups of the silane. The surface hydroxyl groups can result from partial hydrolysis of the silane and the silicon dioxide in the fused frit material during heating. The Si-OH groups are caused to react with corresponding groups to form Si-O-Si linkages between the silane and the fused frit material. Correspondingly, Si-OH groups of adjacent silane molecules are also caused to react and form Si-O-Si cross linkages, thereby forming a continuous hydrophobic layer across the frit material. The method described herein will produce a hydrophobic surface that is a continuous border around the perimeter of the shelf's top surface which will operate as a spill containment feature.

[0053] One advantage of using a ceramic frit material to prepare the surface of the shelf for coating with the hydrophobic solution as described herein, in addition to improving the durability of the hydrophobic surface, is that frit material is commercially available in multiple colors and can be printed in a manner which allows for the inclusion of designs, company names or logos in the surface area where the frit material is applied to the shelf substrate.

[0054] In accordance with the preferred embodiments, the hydrophobic surface provides a spill containment surface which prevents spilled liquids from leaking off of the shelf substrate's top surface. For example, a frit material can be placed or printed in a continuous border pattern around the perimeter of the glass substrate and fused to the glass substrate as described above. A hydrophobic compound can then be bonded to the fused frit material, and thereby form a hydrophobic spill containment pattern, which bounds a non-hydrophobic spill containment surface formed of the glass substrate. The hydrophobic spill containment pattern repels liquids, causing them to collect in the non-

hydrophobic region or regions of the shelf. The hydrophobicity of the hydrophobic surface is sufficient to repel a spilled liquid and prevent it from crossing onto or over the hydrophobic surface and therefore forces the spilled liquid to bead up or puddle up on the non-hydrophobic regions of the shelf due to the surface tension of the liquid. Thus, the hydrophobic surface is capable of containing spills without the use of a barrier lip or barrier edging used in prior art spill containment assemblies which act as a "dam" for the spilled liquid. The hydrophobic spill containment pattern can retain a spill having a height when pooled in the non-hydrophobic region of less than about 5.5 mm. For example, the spill containment pattern can retain a spill having a height of about 0.5 mm, about 1 mm, about 1.5 mm, about 2 mm, about 2.5 mm, about 3 mm, about 3.5 mm, about 4 mm, about 4.5 mm, about 5mm, or about 5.5 mm. The height of the spill liquid provides a measure of the amount of spilled liquid retained by a shelf regardless of the area of the non-hydrophobic spill containing region of the shelf. The height of the retained spill liquid is determined by dividing the volume of spill liquid retained by the shelf before failure (i.e. leakage) by the area of the non-hydrophobic spill containing region.

[0055] The reference to the fact that the hydrophobic surface is generally in the plane of the top surface of the shelf is intended to include surfaces and surface treatments, all or a portion of which may extend a small distance above the level of the top surface of the shelf which is not readily noticeable to the naked eye. For example, as described in greater detail above, the hydrophobic surface may be a hydrophobic coating, or a combination of a layer of ceramic frit and a hydrophobic coating on the ceramic frit. Such layers typically have a thickness of from about 0.001 microns to about 250 microns.

Other suitable thickness ranges include from about 0.001 microns to about 2 microns, about 0.01 microns to about 1.5 microns, about 0.1 microns to about 1 microns, about 0.001 microns to about 10 microns, about 0.01 microns to about 8 microns, about 0.05 microns to about 7 microns, about 0.1 microns to about 5 microns, about 1 micron to about 4 microns, about 1 micron to about 10 microns, about 2 microns to about 8 microns, about 4 microns to about 6 microns, about 10 microns to about 100 microns, about 20 microns to about 80 microns, about 40 microns to about 60 microns, about 100 microns to about 250 microns, about 150 to about 200 microns, about 1 micron to about 250 microns, about 10 microns to about 200 microns, about 20 microns to about 150 microns, about 30 microns to about 100 microns, about 40 microns to about 80 microns, and about 50 microns to about 70 microns. Other suitable thickness include, for example, about 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.5, 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, and 250 microns.

[0056] A visual perspective of situations involving liquid spillage is illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2 which illustrate a prior art shelving assembly 1000. With reference to FIG. 1, the assembly 1000 is shown in fairly simplistic format. The assembly 1000 may include a number of other components, including elements such as shelf support brackets, for example. Specifically, the assembly 1000 includes a frame 1002 which is rectangular in configuration and surrounds and is secured to an inner plastic rim 1004. The plastic rim 1004 is also a rectangular configuration. The plastic rim 1004 is utilized to encapsulate a shelf panel 1006. The shelf panel 1006 could be constructed of glass or similar materials. The frame 1002, plastic rim 1004 and shelf panel 1006 are supported on a pair of opposing side plates 1008.

[0057] To illustrate the concepts of liquid spillage, a soda can 1010 is illustrated as being left on its side on the upper surface of the shelf panel 1006. The soda can 1010 has spilled liquid which is shown as liquid 1012 on a portion of the shelf panel 1006. The visible edge of the shelf panel 1006 located on its upper surface at the intersection of the perimeter of the plastic rim 1004 may include a sealed edge 1014. As previously described herein, the sealed edge 1014 may merely include some type of a sealing adhesive or, alternatively, a silicone material or the like. In this manner, an attempt is made to essentially provide a raised physical barrier that is sealed to the shelf panel 1006 to seal the spilled liquid 1012 from spillage off of the shelf panel 1006.

[0058] A preferred embodiment shelf assembly 1020 of the present disclosure is illustrated in FIGS. 3 and 4. In accordance with the preferred embodiments described herein, the shelf assembly 1020 is characterized as having a shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface 1030 (shown shaded) arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern 1021 on a top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 to provide the spill containment functions. In FIGS. 3 and 4, the spill containment pattern 1021 of the hydrophobic surface 1030 consists of a frame-like border disposed at or around the outer perimeter of the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, thereby completely bounding, encircling, and/or enclosing a non-hydrophobic central portion 1025 of the shelf panel 1024. More specifically, the spill containment pattern 1021 of the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 3 and 4 includes a continuous pattern formed of parallel left and right side edge containment strips 1021a, 1021b, and parallel front and rear edge containment strips 1021c, 1021d, i.e., all respectively engaged to adjacent ones. Each of the edge containment strips 1021a-1021d are generally uniform in width and arranged in an

elongated linear configuration at a location directly at a respective edge of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 3 and 4, there is no non-hydrophobic area on the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 between the spill containment pattern 1021 and the perimeter edge of the shelf panel 1024. In alternative embodiments, however, at least one of the strips 1021-1021d of the spill containment pattern 1021 depicted in FIGS. 3 and 4 can be offset inward from the perimeter edge of the shelf panel 1024 such that the shelf panel 1024 can include a non-hydrophobic area disposed between at least a portion of the spill containment pattern 1021 and the perimeter edge of the shelf panel 1024.

[0059] Still referring to FIGS. 3 and 4, the side edge containment strips 1021a, 1021b are disposed at substantially right angles relative to the front and rear edge containment strips 1021c, 1021d. So configured, the spill containment pattern 1021 of the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 3 and 4 forms a continuous, generally square, rectangular, and/or box-shape completely bounding, encircling, and/or enclosing the non-hydrophobic central portion 1025, which also has a generally square, rectangular, and/or box-shape.

[0060] As with other known refrigerator shelf assemblies, the shelf assembly 1020 of the present disclosure may also include shelf brackets 1022 for supporting the shelf assembly 1020 in a refrigerator or other appliance, for example. In a preferred embodiment, the shelf brackets 1022 are designed and configured such as to not interfere with and/or intrude upon the top surface 1032 of the shelf panel 1024, thereby maximizing the useable shelf space. Various embodiments of such shelf brackets 1022 will be described below with reference to FIGS. 7-18.

[0061] FIG. 3 also illustrates the concept that the hydrophobic surface 1030 will form a spill containment barrier. For example, a soda can 1026 is illustrated as being turned on its side on the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, and spilled liquid from the soda can 1026 is identified as liquid 1028. In this manner, the spilled liquid 1028 is prevented from spilling downwardly onto other surfaces below the shelf, and the spilled liquid 1028 is contained to the non-hydrophobic central portion 1025 defined on the top surface 1023 of the shelf 1024. Further, the spilled liquid 1028 is also prevented from seeping into cracks or crevices in a manner where substantial bacteria, mold, and other undesirable materials can form. In particular, and in accordance with the preferred embodiments, it should be noted that components such as a plastic rim (or even a frame) may be completely unnecessary with the use of the hydrophobic surface 1030 to provide the spill containment feature. As such, the shelf assembly 1020 depicted in FIGS. 3 and 4 maximizes the available useful shelf space since it does not include a plastic rim, a frame, or any other physical barrier or dam extending above the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 for preventing liquids from spilling off of the shelf panel 1024.

[0062] In addition to the embodiment shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, an alternative embodiment of the shelf assembly 1020 of the present disclosure can include the hydrophobic surface 1030 disposed on the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 in a grid-like spill containment pattern 1021, as shown in FIG. 5. Identical to the spill containment pattern 1021 described above with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4, the grid-like spill containment pattern 1021 depicted in FIG. 5 includes a continuous frame-like border disposed at or around the outer perimeter of the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. More specifically, the frame-like border of the spill containment pattern 1021 depicted in

FIG. 5 includes parallel left and right side edge containment strips 1021a, 1021b, and parallel front and rear edge containment strips 1021c, 1021d. These spill containment strips 1021a-1021d can be generally identical to the corresponding spill containment strips 1021a-1021d described above with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4 and, therefore, will not be described in any further detail.

[0063] In addition to the aforementioned spill containment strips 1021a-1021d, the grid-like spill containment pattern 1021 depicted in FIG. 5 includes two spaced apart longitudinal spill containment strips 1021e, 1021f and two spaced apart lateral spill containment strips 1021g, 1021h. The longitudinal spill containment strips 1021c, 1021d intersect the lateral spill containment strips 1021e, 1021f at generally right angles. As depicted, the longitudinal spill containment strips 1021e, 1021f are parallel to each other, as well as parallel to the left and right side spill containment strips 1021a, 1021b. Moreover, the lateral spill containment strips 1021g, 1021h are parallel to each other, as well as parallel to the front and rear spill containment strips 1021c, 1021d. Other configurations are intended to be within the scope of the disclosure.

[0064] So configured, the grid-like spill containment pattern 1021 of the embodiment of the shelf assembly 1020 of FIG. 5 defines first through ninth non-hydrophobic central portions 1025a-1025i on the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. Each of the non-hydrophobic central portions 1025a-1025i is completely bounded, encircled, and/or enclosed by four of the spill containment strips 1021a-1021h and is therefore square, rectangular, and/or box-shaped. With this configuration, FIG. 6 illustrates that each of the non-hydrophobic central portions 1025a-1025i is capable of containing a liquid 1028 separate from the other non-hydrophobic central portions 1025a-1025i.

[0065] FIG. 6 shows yet another embodiment of a shelf assembly 1020 constructed in accordance with the present disclosure and including a spill containment pattern 1021. Similar to the shelf assemblies 1020 described above with reference to FIGS. 3-5, the shelf assembly 1020 of FIG. 6 includes a continuous frame-like border of a hydrophobic surface 1030 disposed at or around the outer perimeter of the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, thereby completely bounding, encircling, and/or enclosing a non-hydrophobic central portion 1025 of the shelf panel 1024. However, unlike the embodiments described above, the embodiment depicted in FIG. 6 includes a double-border configuration consisting of a first continuous hydrophobic surface border 1017 and a second continuous hydrophobic surface border 1019 disposed inside of the first hydrophobic surface border 1017.

[0066] The first hydrophobic surface border 1017 is disposed about the perimeter edge of the shelf panel 1024, and the second hydrophobic surface border 1019 is offset inwardly from the first hydrophobic surface border 1017. The first hydrophobic surface border 1017 includes parallel left and right side edge containment strips 1017a, 1017b, and parallel front and rear edge containment strips 1017c, 1017d. Each of the edge containment strips 1017a-1017d of the first continuous hydrophobic surface border 1017 are generally uniform in width and arranged in an elongated linear configuration directly at the edge of the perimeter of the shelf panel 1024. The side edge containment strips 1017a, 1017b are disposed at right angles relative to the front and rear edge containment strips 1017c, 1017d. So configured, the first hydrophobic surface border 1017 forms a continuous generally square, rectangular, and/or box-shape completely bounding, encircling, and/or enclosing the non-hydrophobic central portion 1025, which is also

generally square, rectangular, and/or box-shaped. Moreover, as depicted, the second continuous hydrophobic surface border 1019 includes parallel left and right side edge containment strips 1019a, 1019b, and parallel front and rear edge containment strips 1019c, 1019d. Each of the edge containment strips 1019a-1019d of the second hydrophobic surface border 1019 are generally uniform in width and arranged in an elongated linear configuration offset inwardly from the first hydrophobic surface border 1017. The side edge containment strips 1019a, 1019b are disposed at right angles relative to the front and rear edge containment strips 1019c, 1019d such that the second hydrophobic surface border 1019 forms a generally square, rectangular, and/or box-shape completely bounding, encircling, and/or enclosing the non-hydrophobic central portion 1025 of the shelf panel 1024. So configured, the first and second hydrophobic surface borders 1017, 1019 define a non-hydrophobic ring portion 1027 located between the two borders 1017, 1019. The non-hydrophobic ring portion 1027 can advantageously capture any spill overflow which might escape from the non-hydrophobic central portion 1025 and travel over the second hydrophobic surface border 1019. These and other variations in the spill containment pattern 1021 can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the novel concepts of the preferred embodiments of the present disclosure. For example, while Fig. 6 depicts a double-border pattern, a pattern of any number concentric or non-concentric border patterns could be provided on the substrate surface. Each border pattern can, for example, surround at least a portion of the non-hydrophobic region.

[0067] The hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern in accordance with the preferred embodiments described herein eliminates the need for plastic encapsulation material to create a spill containment barrier. Accordingly, the shelves

produced in accordance with the preferred embodiments described herein utilize relatively less material than prior art spill-containing shelves. Further, the shelves described herein have no need for silicone sealants to create a spill containment barrier. With the exception of the hydrophobic tape embodiment, they have no need for adhesives to create a spill containment barrier. Elimination of the need for these materials also results in relatively less use of material. Further, using the hydrophobic surfaces arranged in a spill containment pattern in accordance with the preferred embodiments eliminates the need for formed lips or ridges on the shelf's top surface, which reduces the amount of material used and the complexity of manufacturing, and, therefore, reduces the manufacturing cost.

[0068] Elimination of plastic encapsulation and sealants from the design of the shelf member also eliminates a potential source of failure or leakage since the sealants and plastic encapsulation may have cracks or crevices where they join with the shelf member in which organic or inorganic materials may become entrapped and involve a bond area to the shelf member which may eventually leak. Still further, the use of hydrophobic surfaces arranged in a spill containment pattern retains an amount of liquid comparable to that retained by prior art shelves having spill containing dam features, without the necessity of using the dams.

[0069] Still further, by eliminating the space taken up by plastic encapsulation, sealants, adhesives, or formed lips, ridges, physical barriers, and dams, the relative amount of usable shelf space is increased, i.e., maximized, on the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 in accordance with the preferred embodiments described herein.

[0070] A further aspect of the present disclosure that serves to maximize the usable shelf space includes shelf brackets 1022 that are specifically designed, arranged, and configured to adhere to a bottom surface and/or side edge of the shelf panel 1024, thereby avoiding any necessity to interfere with and/or obstruct at least the perimeter portions of the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024 adjacent to the side edges and, in some embodiments, the entirety of the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024.

[0071] FIGS. 7 and 8 depict a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 100, only one of which is depicted, constructed in accordance with a first embodiment the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface 1030 arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern 1021 on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern 1021 can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0072] The brackets 100 are mirror images of each other and are adhered to side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 10. The brackets 100 of the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 7 and 8 are adapted to be slidably supported on ribs formed in the side panels of an appliance such as a refrigerator. As shown in Fig. 8 above, each bracket 100 includes a horizontal leg 104 and a vertical leg 102 extending downward from an inner edge 105 of the horizontal leg 104. As such, the brackets 100 have a generally upside-down L-shaped cross-section. The brackets 100 of this embodiment are preferably constructed of metal, but could be constructed of plastic or any other foreseeable material. The vertical and horizontal legs 102, 104 are disposed at an angle of approximately 90° relative to each other. So configured, the horizontal leg 104 includes a substantially horizontal top

surface 104a that corresponds to and supports a generally horizontal bottom surface 12a of a corresponding side perimeter portion 12 of the shelf panel 10. Finally, a layer of an adhesive material 106 is disposed between the top surfaces 104a of the horizontal legs 104 of the brackets 100 and the bottom surface 12a of the side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 10 to adhere the shelf panel 10 to the brackets 100. The adhesive material 106 can include a clear acrylic UV-cured adhesive, a clear polyurethane hot melt, or any other adhesive material capable of serving the principles of the present disclosure. So configured, and as illustrated in FIGS. 7 and 8, no aspect of the brackets 100 extends above and/or over the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in this embodiment, the brackets 100 are disposed entirely below the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, e.g., entirely opposite the shelf panel 1024 from its top surface 1023. As such, the usable space on the top surface 1023 is maximized.

[0073] FIGS. 9 and 10 depict a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 200, only one of which is depicted, constructed in accordance with a second embodiment of the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface (not shown) arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern (not shown) on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0074] The brackets 200 are mirror images of each other and are adhered to opposing side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024. The brackets 200 are adapted to be slidably supported on ribs formed in the side panels of an appliance such as a refrigerator. As shown in FIG. 10, each bracket 200 includes a horizontal leg 204 and a vertical leg

202 extending upward from an outer edge 205 of the horizontal leg 204. As such, the brackets 200 have a generally L-shaped cross-section. The vertical leg 202 may or may not extend beyond the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. The brackets 200 of this embodiment can be constructed of plastic, metal, or any other suitable material. The vertical and horizontal legs 202, 204 are disposed at an angle of approximately 90° relative to each other. So configured, the horizontal leg 204 includes a substantially horizontal top surface 204a that corresponds to and supports a generally horizontal bottom surface 12a of a corresponding side perimeter portion 12 of the shelf panel 1024. Finally, a layer of an adhesive material 206 is disposed between the top surfaces 204a of the horizontal legs 204 of the brackets 200 and the bottom surface 12a of the corresponding side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024 to adhere the shelf panel 1024 to the brackets 200. The adhesive material 206 can include a clear acrylic UV-cured adhesive, a clear polyurethane hot melt, or any other adhesive material capable of serving the principles of the present disclosure. So configured, and as illustrated in FIGS. 9 and 10, no aspect of the brackets 200 extends above and/or over the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in this embodiment, the brackets 200 are disposed entirely below the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. The horizontal legs 204 are disposed entirely opposite the shelf panel 1024 from its top surface 1023, and the vertical legs 202 are disposed entirely to the side of the shelf panel 1024. As such, the usable space on the top surface 1023 is maximized.

[0075] FIGS. 11 and 12 depict a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 300 constructed in accordance with a third embodiment the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf

panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface 130 arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern 1021 on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0076] The brackets 300 are adapted to latch into ladder racks, for example, at the rear of an appliance such as a refrigerator in a conventional manner. Each bracket 300 includes an elongated top member 302 with a generally circular cross-section. In one form, depicted in FIG. 12, the top member 302 includes a horizontal supporting surface 304 formed, for example, by forging, stamping, or crushing the round wire in a fixture. So configured, the supporting surface 304 corresponds to and supports a generally horizontal bottom surface 12a of a corresponding side perimeter portion 12 of the shelf panel 1024. In another form, the elongated top member 302 may not include the horizontal supporting surface 304, but rather, can have a perfectly circular cross-section providing a line of contact between the top member 302 and the shelf panel 1024. Finally, a layer of an adhesive material 306 is disposed between the top members 302 of the brackets 300 and the bottom surface 12a of the corresponding side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024 to fix the shelf panel 10 to the brackets 300. The adhesive material 306 can include a clear acrylic UV-cured adhesive, a clear polyurethane hot melt, or any other adhesive material capable of serving the principles of the present disclosure. So configured, and as illustrated in FIGS. 11 and 12, no aspect of the brackets 300 extends above and/or over the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in this embodiment, the brackets 300 are disposed entirely below the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, e.g., entirely opposite the shelf panel 1024 from its top surface 1023. As such, the usable space on the top surface 1023 is maximized.

[0077] FIGS. 13 and 14 depict a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 400, only one of which is shown, constructed in accordance with a fourth embodiment of the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface (not shown) arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern (not shown) on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0078] The brackets 400 are mirror images of each other. The brackets 400 are adapted to latch into ladder racks, for example, at the rear of an appliance such as a refrigerator in a conventional manner. As illustrated, each bracket 400 includes a triangular shaped plate a vertical plate portion 402 and a horizontal plate portion 404, thereby having a generally L-shaped upper cross-section. The brackets 400 of this embodiment can be constructed of metal, plastic, or any other suitable material. The vertical and horizontal plate portions 402, 404 are disposed at an angle of approximately 90° relative to each other. So configured, the horizontal plate portion 404 includes a substantially horizontal top surface 404a that corresponds to and supports a generally horizontal bottom surface 12a of a corresponding side perimeter portion 12 of the shelf panel 1024. Finally, a layer of an adhesive material 406 is disposed between the top surfaces 404a of the horizontal plate portions 404 of the brackets 400 and the bottom surface 12a of the side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024 to fix the shelf panel 1024 to the brackets 400. The adhesive material 406 can include a clear acrylic UV-cured adhesive, a clear polyurethane hot melt, or any other adhesive material capable of serving the principles of the present disclosure. So configured, and as illustrated in FIGS. 13 and

14, no aspect of the brackets 400 extends above and/or over the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in this embodiment, the brackets 400 are disposed entirely below the shelf panel 1024, e.g., entirely opposite the shelf panel 1024 from its top surface 1023. As such, the usable space on the top surface 1023 is maximized.

[0079] FIGS. 15-17 depict a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 500 constructed in accordance with a fifth embodiment of the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface (not shown) arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern (not shown) on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0080] The brackets 500 are mirror images of each other. The brackets 500 are adapted to latch into ladder racks, for example, at the rear of an appliance such as a refrigerator in a conventional manner. As illustrated in FIGS. 16 and 17, each bracket 500 includes a metal tri-angular shaped plate portion 502 and a plastic supporting rail 504. The supporting rail 504 includes an elongated recess 504a receiving an elongated top edge 502a of the plate portion 502. The supporting rail 504 is immovably fixed to the plate portion 502 by snap-fit or adhesion, for example. Additionally, the supporting rail 504 includes a substantially horizontal top surface 504b that corresponds to and supports a corresponding generally horizontal bottom surface 12a of the shelf panel 1024. Finally, the bottom surfaces 12a of the side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024 are adhered to the top surfaces 504b of the supporting rails 504 with an adhesive material (not shown) to fix the shelf panel 10 to the brackets 500. The adhesive material can include a clear acrylic UV-cured adhesive, a clear polyurethane hot melt, or any other

adhesive material capable of serving the principles of the present disclosure. So configured, and as illustrated in FIGS. 15-17, no aspect of the brackets 500 extends above and/or over the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. That is, in this embodiment, the brackets 500 are disposed entirely below the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024, e.g., entirely opposite the shelf panel 1024 from its top surface 1023. As such, the usable space on the top surface 1023 is maximized.

[0081] FIG. 18 depicts a portion of a shelf assembly 1020 including a pair of support brackets 600, only one of which is shown, constructed in accordance with a sixth embodiment of the present disclosure. Similar to the embodiments described above, the shelf assembly 1020 includes a flat shelf panel 1024 with a hydrophobic surface (not shown) arranged and configured in a spill containment pattern (not shown) on its top surface 1023. The spill containment pattern can resemble any of the patterns described above with respect to FIGS. 3-6, or otherwise.

[0082] As shown, the support brackets 600 are adapted to support opposing side perimeter portions 12 of a flat shelf panel 1024 in a manner generally the same as those described above. Each bracket 600 includes a vertical plate portion 602 and a horizontal plate portion 604, thereby having a generally upside-down L-shaped cross-section. The vertical and horizontal plate portions 602, 604 are disposed at an angle of approximately 90° relative to each other. Additionally, however, the horizontal plate portion 604 includes a curved concave profile defining an elongated channel 608 in its topside and extending along the length thereof. Finally, a layer of an adhesive material (not shown) is disposed in the channel 608 between the bracket 600 and a bottom surface 12a of the side perimeter portions 12 of the shelf panel 1024. While the channel 608 of the embodiment

depicted above is formed by the horizontal plate portion 604 being curved, the channel 608 could alternatively be formed simply by having a recess in the top surface of the horizontal plate portion 604. So configured, the bottom surface of the horizontal plate portion 604 does not necessarily have to be curved, as illustrated.

[0083] This channel concept for receiving adhesive could be applied to any of the support brackets described above with reference to FIGS. 7-17. For example, the horizontal legs 104, 204, 404 of the brackets 100, 200, 400 depicted in FIGS. 7 and 8, FIGS. 9 and 10, and FIGS. 13 and 14, respectively, could include channels disposed in the top surfaces 104a, 204a, 304a thereof for receiving adhesive. Similarly, the top members 302 of the brackets 300 depicted in FIGS. 11 and 12 could include channels disposed in top surfaces thereof for receiving adhesive. In the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 11 and 12, the channels could be formed directly into the horizontal supporting surfaces 304 of the top members 302 of the brackets 300. Finally, in the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 15-17 channels for receiving adhesive could be formed in the horizontal top surfaces 504b of the supporting rails 504 of the brackets 500. Therefore, it should be appreciated that the concept of providing channels in the top surfaces of the support brackets for receiving adhesive is not limited to the embodiment depicted in FIG. 18, but rather, can be applied to any of the embodiments expressly described herein, as well as any embodiment covered by the scope of the attached claims.

[0084] As mentioned above, any of the foregoing shelf brackets 100-600 can be constructed of any one or more of a variety of materials such as metal, plastic, etc. and they may be attached to the shelf panel 1024 using any one or more of a variety of

different adhesives, or other attachment means. The process and/or method for assembling these components can also include a variety of variations.

[0085] For example, in one embodiment the brackets described with reference to Figs. 7 and 8, for example, could be constructed of a sheet metal with an epoxy polyester hybrid powder disposed on them. The brackets are placed into a fixture and the adhesive, which can include Loctite 3494 acrylic UV/Visible light-cured adhesive, is applied to the top surface of the brackets automatically. The glass shelf panel is then placed into the fixture on top of the adhesive and a clamping pressure is applied to the top of the glass shelf panel. The adhesive “wets out,” i.e., the adhesive spreads out to a thickness of about 0.006” to about 0.010” thick. The parts are then passed under a mercury UV lamp (wavelength of about 365nm, at about 200-400 watts per inch) for about 12-18 seconds, with the adhesive being disposed about 5.5” to about 6” away from the lamp. Once the adhesive is cured, the clamping pressure is removed and the assembly can be removed from the fixture.

[0086] In an alternative to this method, a hot-melt polyurethane adhesive can be used to secure the shelf panel to the brackets. First, the brackets are placed into a fixture, and a melted polyurethane adhesive is applied instead of the UV cured adhesive described above. The part is again clamped as the adhesive quick-sets. No lights are needed. The assembly can then be removed from the fixture.

[0087] In yet another alternative method, an adhesive tape, such as 3M VHB tape, can be used instead of a liquid adhesive. This tape would be placed onto either the underside of the glass shelf panel or on the top surface of the support brackets. Protective paper would then be removed from the tape, and the glass shelf panel and the support brackets

can be joined together in a fixture, similar to that described above. A small amount of pressure is applied to the glass shelf panel to set the tape, and then the assembly can be removed from the fixture.

[0088] While the foregoing embodiments of the shelf assembly 1020 have been described as including shelf panels 1024 with top surfaces 1023 that are completely free from intrusion or other obstruction, thereby maximizing the available shelf space, alternative embodiments of the shelf assembly 1020 can include rear and/or front trim components. Such rear and/or front trim components are minimally invasive, but can perform functions that may be desirable in certain applications.

[0089] For example, as mentioned above, the shelf assemblies 1020 described with reference to FIGS. 7 and 8, and FIGS. 9 and 10, include support brackets 100, 200, respectively, that are adapted to be slidably supported on ribs formed in the side panels of an appliance such as a refrigerator. Such slidable shelf assemblies 1020 can benefit from the incorporation of rear and front trim components.

[0090] For example, FIGS. 19-22 illustrate one embodiment of such a slidable shelf assembly 1020 including, for the sake of illustration only, the support brackets 100 described above with reference to FIGS. 7 and 8. The shelf assembly 1020 of FIGS. 19-22 could equally include the support brackets 200 described with reference to FIGS. 9 and 10. The shelf assembly 1020 includes a completely flat glass shelf panel 1024, a pair of opposing support brackets 100, a front trim component 14, and a rear trim component 16. The support brackets 100 are adhered to the bottom of the side edges of the shelf panel 1024 for slidably supporting the shelf panel 1024 within a refrigerator in a manner identical to that described with reference to FIGS. 7 and 8.

[0091] The front trim component 14 includes an elongated plastic member with a length substantially identical to the width of the shelf panel 1024. As shown in more detail in FIG. 21 the front trim component 14 includes a generally U-shaped attachment portion 18 and a lip portion 20 extending outward from the attachment portion 18. The attachment portion 18 defines an elongated channel 22 with a plurality of barbed ribs 24 formed on both the upper and lower legs 18a, 18b of the attachment portion 18 and extending into the channel 22. The channel 22 receives the front edge of the shelf panel 1024 such that the barbed ribs 24 frictionally engage the panel 1024 and fix the front trim component 14 thereto. So configured, the front trim component 14 and, more particularly, the lip portion 20 of the front trim component 18 serves as a “bumper,” for example, to prevent bottles or other glass objects that are being loaded into the refrigerator from impacting the bare glass edge of the shelf panel 1024 and breaking the same.

[0092] Referring now to FIG. 22, the rear trim component 16 of the shelf assembly 1020 is illustrated as being substantially identical to the front trim component 14, but without the lip portion extending outward. Instead, the rear trim component 16 merely includes a generally U-shaped attachment portion 26 having upper and lower legs 26a, 26b. The attachment portion 26 defines an elongated channel 28 with a plurality of barbed ribs 30 formed only on the upper leg 26a of the attachment portion 26. The channel 28 receives the rear edge of the shelf panel 1024 such that the barbed ribs 30 frictionally engage the shelf panel 1024 and fix the rear trim component 16 thereto. So configured, the rear trim component 16 serves as a “stopper” to prevent items stored on

the back portion of the shelf panel 1024 from sliding off of the shelf panel 1024 in the event that a user abruptly slides the shelf assembly 1020 out of the refrigerator.

[0093] While FIG. 21 depicts a front trim component 14 that is U-shaped and receives the front edge of the shelf panel 1024, other configurations are intended to be within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, FIG. 23 illustrates an alternative front trim component 32. The trim component 32 extends generally the length of and is fixed to the front edge of the shelf panel 1024 with a layer of adhesive 34. The front trim component 32 includes a generally L-shaped cross-section and includes a horizontal leg 36 and a vertical leg 38 disposed at an angle of approximately 90° relative to the horizontal leg 36. The front trim component 32 is preferably constructed of a plastic material such that the vertical leg 38 thereof can absorb the impact of glass bottles being loaded into the refrigerator, for example, and prevent breakage. While the trim component 32 in FIG. 23 is described as being constructed of plastic, other materials are intended to be within the scope of the present disclosure. One advantage of the trim component 32 depicted in FIG. 23 is that it does not interfere with, encroach upon, or otherwise obstruct the top surface 1023 of the shelf panel 1024. As such, the available space on the top surface 1023 is maximized while also providing the “bumper” function.

[0094] The following examples are merely intended to illustrate the shelf assemblies of the present disclosure, and are not meant to limit the scope thereof in any way.

EXAMPLES

EXAMPLES 1-29: WATER RETENTION TESTING

[0095] The shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern of various embodiments of the present disclosure were tested to determine that amount of water that could be retained on the shelf without failure (i.e. leakage). To accommodate for variations in the area of the shelves, which would affect the volume of liquid retained, the amount of retained water was measured as the height of the water retained in the non-hydrophobic region. Testing was completed by first leveling the shelf using a leveling apparatus. The shelf can be placed over a tray to catch any leakage from the shelf. The test water had a temperature in a range of 32°F to 50°F. Water was poured slowly so as not to cause “waves” or splashes” onto the geometric center of the non-hydrophobic region. For example, water can be poured onto the shelf using a small funnel. A screw can be inserted into the funnel to baffle the flow, if needed. Water can be introduced into the funnel in about 5 mm or about 10 mm increments. Water volume was measured prior to pouring onto the shelf, using, for example, graduated cylinders. Water was poured onto the shelf at a distance of about 1 mm to about 2 mm above the shelf. The shelf was continually filled with water until overflow just began to occur. The height of the water retained on the shelf was then determined by dividing the volume of water poured onto the shelf just prior to overflow by the area of the non-hydrophobic region.

[0096] Shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed using the Ferro frit, and a 1% solution of tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl trichlorosilane in hexane applied to the frit, were tested in accordance with the above described method. The silane was cured on the frit at a temperature of about 200°F for about 15 minutes. The spill

containment pattern was formed as a border around the perimeter of the glass shelf, at or near the edge of the shelf. The shelves were tested at varying temperatures and humidity conditions. The average water height retention was about 4.43 mm.

Examples No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ambient Temperature (°F)	78	78	78	78	79	79	79	79
Ambient Humidity (%)	55	55	55	55	56	56	56	56
Area of the Nonhydrophobic Region (cm ²)	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6
Height of Retained Water (mm)	4.57	4.45	4.27	4.45	4.39	4.39	4.33	4.33

Examples No.	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Ambient Temperature (°F)	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81
Ambient Humidity (%)	55	55	55	55	56	56	56	56
Area of the Nonhydrophobic Region (cm ²)	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6	1639.6
Height of Retained Water (mm)	4.39	4.51	4.39	4.57	4.45	4.51	4.51	4.39

[0097] Shelves prepared with a hydrophobic spill containment pattern using an acid etch surface treatment and tridecafluoro-1,1,2,2-tetrahydrooctyl trichlorosilane as the hydrophobic solution were also tested for water height retention. Acid etching was performed using Armour Etch[®] Glass Etching Cream. Shelves were prepared by etching for about 3 minutes to about 6 minutes. Example 25 was etched twice using an etching time of from 3 to 6 minutes for each etching process. Specifically, a first etching procedure was performed by applying the etching solution to the substrate, allowing it to

remain on the substrate for about 3 minutes to about 6 minutes, and washing the etching solution from the surface of the substrate. A second etching procedure was then performed by again applying the etching solution, allowing it to remain on the substrate for about 3 minutes to about 6 minutes, and washing the etching solution from the surface. The fluorosilane was applied and the shelf was baked for about 20 minutes at 200°F.

[0098] The shelves were first tested for water height retention shortly after having the hydrophobic spill containment pattern was formed and cooled. The shelves were then retested sometime after the first test. As shown in the data below, in general, the water height retention properties of the shelves improved after the first testing. Without intending to be bound by theory, it is believed that when the spill containment pattern is first contact with water after formation, additionally silicon oxide groups remaining on the surface of silane and/or the surface-modified substrate by hydrolyzed by the water, thereby creating additional bonding sites between the silane and the surface-modified substrate and improving the hydrophobic nature of the spill containment pattern. The average water height of the acid etch samples was about 5.18 mm. The average water height of the acid etched shelves, which were etched for about 3 minutes was about 5.18 mm. The average water height of the acid etched shelves, which were etched for about 4 minutes was about 5.19 mm. The average water height of the acid etched shelves, which were etched for about 5 minutes was about 5.18 mm. The average water height of the acid etched shelves, which were etched for about 6 minutes was about 5.19 mm.

Examples No.	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Etch time (min)	3	3	4	6	3	5	3	4
Area of the Nonhydrophobic Region (cm ²)	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6
Height of Retained Water (mm)	5.14	5.09	4.99	5.09	4.86	5.09	5.09	5.09
Retested height of retained water (mm)	5.60	5.04	5.34	5.39	5.29	5.39	5.34	5.34
Average	5.37	5.06	5.17	5.24	5.08	5.24	5.22	5.22

Examples No.	25	26	27	28	29
Etch time	2 etching procedures performed	6	5	6	5
Area of the Nonhydrophobic Region (cm ²)	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6	982.6
Height of Retained Water (mm)	5.09	5.09	5.09	5.09	5.14
Retested height of retained water (mm)	--	5.14	5.09	5.34	5.29
Average	--	5.11	5.09	5.22	5.22

EXAMPLE 30: ABRASION RESISTANCE

[0099] The shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern of various embodiments of the present disclosure were tested to determine the ability of the shelf to retain a spill (simulated by water) following repeated abrasion of the hydrophobic treatment. The amount of water retained by the shelf before failure was measured before any abrasions were applied using the method described above and the height of the retained water was calculated. Next, a one quart glass jar was used to make abrasions by placing it on the hydrophobic region and sliding the jar horizontally along the surface of

the shelf until the jar has passed over the entire hydrophobic region. The jar was then slide back to its original position, passing over the hydrophobic surface once more. The forward and backward motion of the jar is defined as one jar abrasion cycle. About fifty jar abrasion cycles were performed. The water height retention test was repeated after each fifty abrasion cycles. As shown in Fig. 24, a shelf having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed from a ceramic frit and a hydrophobic compound did not lose effectiveness for retaining water in the non-hydrophobic region of the shelf after 300 abrasion cycles. Shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed by acid etching the substrate and applying the hydrophobic compound to the acid etched region showed some loss of effectiveness after 300 abrasion cycles.

EXAMPLE 31: RESISTANCE TO CLEANING

[00100] The shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern of various embodiments of the present disclosure were tested to determine the ability of the shelf to retain a spill (water) following repeated cleaning cycles. First the shelves were tested prior to any cleaning treatment to determine a baseline water retention level. Water retention height was tested in accordance with the method described above. Next, five cleaning cycles for each of four cleaning methods were performed on the glass shelf. A cleaning cycle is defined as five forward and backward motions of the cleaning product/applicator perpendicular to the hydrophobic treatment with a consistent 2 kg load. Four different cleaning methods were performed along portions of the hydrophobic spill containment pattern, including, Windex wiped with a paper towel, Dawn dish soap wiped with a cotton dish cloth, Formula 409 cleaner wiped with a sponge, and Clorox wipes.

Each cleaning method was performed on a separate portion of the spill containment pattern. The water height retention test was repeated after each five cleaning cycles.

[00101] The Windex/paper towel cleaning method was prepared by saturating a 5 inch square of paper towel with Windex Original formula so that the paper towel was completely wet, but not dripping. The Dawn dish soap/cotton dish cloth method was performed using a solution containing 2 ml of Dawn dish soap in one liter of room temperature water. The cotton dish cloth was then dipped in the solution and applied to the shelf. The Formula 409/sponge method was performed by cutting a sponge into an approximately 1 inch by 1 inch square and saturating the sponge with Formula 409 All Purpose Cleaner. The Clorox wipe method was performed using a Clorox Wipe folded into a 1 inch by 1 inch square. All methods were performed using a 2 kg mass applied to the applicator.

[00102] As shown in Fig. 25, a shelf having a hydrophobic pattern formed from a ceramic frit and a hydrophobic compound did not lose effectiveness after 30 cleaning cycles. Shelves having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed by acid etching the glass substrate and applying a hydrophobic compound to the etched portion minimally lost effectiveness after 30 cleaning cycles.

EXAMPLE 32: STAIN RESISTANCE

[00103] Stain resistance of a shelf having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure was tested against a variety of staining agents, including, spaghetti sauce, canned beets, grape juice, yellow mustard, butter, Italian dressing, cherry Kool-Aid, and Soy sauce. Each staining agent was applied to approximately one inch areas of the shelf, including a portion of the hydrophobic spill

containment pattern and the non-hydrophobic region, and then allowed to stand for approximately 72 hours. The majority of the dried material was then wiped from the shelf with a paper towel and clean wash cloth containing a mixture of water and Dawn dish soap was used to remove any remnants of the material. As shown in Figures 26A and 26B, a shelf having a hydrophobic spill containment pattern formed from a ceramic frit and a hydrophobic compound in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure was stain resistant to all staining agents.

[00104] As earlier described, the hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern in accordance with the preferred embodiments provides a spill containment feature which prevents spilled liquids from leaking off of the top surface of the shelf, and shelves in accordance with the preferred embodiments can be used in various applications, such as refrigerator shelves.

[00105] It will be apparent to those skilled in the pertinent arts that other embodiments of shelving members in accordance with the invention may be designed. That is, the principles of shelving members in accordance with the disclosure are not limited to the specific embodiments described herein. For example, shelf members or other support surfaces having a hydrophobic spill containment surfaces could be used in various settings, such as shelving in other settings, tables, countertops or the like, and are not limited to use as refrigerator shelves.

Further, it will be apparent to those skilled in the pertinent art that any method which may be used for creating a hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern in substantially the same plane as the top surface of the shelf member is within the scope of the disclosure described herein, even if such method requires the use of multiple

pieces to manufacture the shelf member. For example, a frame of hydrophobic material may be bonded to the shelf member such that it forms a continuous border which is generally in the same plane as the top surface of the shelf. Accordingly, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications and other variations of the above-described illustrative embodiments of the disclosure may be effected without departing from the spirit and scope of the novel concepts of the invention.

For example, in addition to the foregoing and in addition to the specific subject matter recited in the appending claims, the present invention may be characterized by any one or more of the following aspects.

Aspect 1. A shelf assembly comprising:

a shelf panel having a completely flat top surface which is capable of supporting articles which may be placed on said shelf panel;

a hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern on the said top surface;

wherein the majority of the surface area of said top surface of the shelf panel is not hydrophobic, thereby providing one or more non-hydrophobic central portions bounded by said spill containment pattern of said hydrophobic surface.

Aspect 2. The shelf assembly of Aspect 1, wherein said spill containment pattern is a continuous border which defines a single non-hydrophobic central portion within said border.

Aspect 3. The shelf assembly of any one of Aspects 1 or 2, wherein said spill containment pattern is a continuous border located near the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel.

Aspect 4. The shelf assembly of any one of Aspects 1 or 2, wherein said spill containment pattern is located along the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel.

Aspect 5. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said spill containment pattern comprises a first continuous border and a second continuous border spaced from said first continuous border, the first continuous border located along the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel, and the second continuous border spaced inwardly from said first continuous border such that the second continuous border completely bounds a non-hydrophobic central portion of the top surface of the shelf panel, and the first and second continuous borders together define between them area non-hydrophobic ring portion for containing overflow from said non-hydrophobic central portion.

Aspect 6. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said spill containment pattern is in the form of a grid pattern on the top surface of the shelf panel and wherein said grid pattern defines a plurality of non-hydrophobic central portions on the top surface of the shelf panel, each of the plurality of non-hydrophobic central portions completely bounded by the grid pattern.

Aspect 7. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said shelf panel is comprised of a material chosen from the group consisting of glass, plastic, metal and combinations thereof.

Aspect 8. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein the shelf panel is transparent.

Aspect 9. The shelf assembly of Aspect 8, wherein the shelf panel is glass.

Aspect 10. The shelf assembly of Aspect 7, wherein the hydrophobic surface is transparent.

Aspect 11. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein at least some portion of the hydrophobic surface is colored.

Aspect 12. The shelf assembly of Aspect 11, wherein the hydrophobic surface contains a colored portion in a form chosen from the group consisting of a pattern, a company name, a company logo and combinations thereof.

Aspect 13. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein the hydrophobic surface comprises:

a ceramic frit layer adjacent to and bonded to the top surface of said shelf panel;
and

a hydrophobic compound coated over the ceramic frit layer.

Aspect 14. The shelf assembly of Aspect 13, wherein said ceramic frit layer contains additive particles that create roughness in a top surface of the ceramic frit layer.

Aspect 15. The shelf assembly of any one of Aspects 13 or 14, wherein at least a portion of said ceramic frit layer is colored.

Aspect 16. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic coating over a roughened area in the surface of said shelf panel.

Aspect 17. The shelf assembly of Aspect 16, wherein said roughened area is made by etching the surface with acid.

Aspect 18. The shelf assembly of Aspect 16, wherein said roughened area is made by binding particles to surface of the shelf panel.

Aspect 19. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a coating of hydrophobic particles on the surface of said shelf panel.

Aspect 20. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic compound applied over or within the matrix of a cured sol gel composition.

Aspect 21. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a metal oxide primer with an integrated hydrophobic compound.

Aspect 22. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic coating applied over a metal oxide primer.

Aspect 23. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic compound comprising a variety of molecular chain lengths to create a coating with surface irregularities.

Aspect 24. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein the hydrophobic surface arranged in the spill containment pattern has a thickness in the range of approximately 0.001 microns to approximately 250 microns.

Aspect 25. The shelf assembly of any one of the preceding Aspects, wherein the hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic compound selected from the group consisting of fluorocarbons, fluoroalkyl silanes, fluoroalkoxy silanes, fluoroalkyl alkyl silanes, and combinations thereof.

Aspect 26. A method of manufacturing a shelf capable of containing liquid spills thereon comprising:

providing a panel having a generally flat top surface which is capable of supporting articles which may be placed on said panel;

applying a hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern generally in the plane of said top surface;

leaving the majority of the surface area of said top surface of the panel non-hydrophobic, thereby providing one or more non-hydrophobic central portions bounded by the spill containment pattern of the hydrophobic surface.

Aspect 27. The method of Aspect 26, wherein applying a hydrophobic surface comprises:

applying a ceramic frit to the top surface of the panel in a spill containment pattern;

curing the ceramic frit to couple the ceramic frit to the top surface of the panel;

applying a hydrophobic compound to the cured ceramic frit; and
curing the hydrophobic compound.

Aspect 28. The method of Aspect 27, wherein curing the ceramic frit comprises heating the ceramic frit to a temperature in a range of about 1000°F to about 1400°F.

Aspect 29. The method of Aspect 27 or 28, wherein curing the hydrophobic compound comprises heating the hydrophobic compound to a temperature in a range of about 100°F to about 600°F.

Aspect 30. The method of Aspect 27 or 28, wherein curing the hydrophobic compound comprises exposing the hydrophobic compound to ambient temperature.

Aspect 31. The method of any one of Aspect 27 to 30, wherein applying the hydrophobic compound comprises applying a hydrophobic solution comprising the hydrophobic compound dispersed or dissolved in a solvent to the cured ceramic frit.

Aspect 32. The method of any one of Aspect 27 to 31, further comprising etching the cured ceramic frit with an etching solution prior to applying the hydrophobic compound to the cured ceramic frit.

Aspect 33. The method of any one of Aspect 27 to 31, further comprising etching the entire panel including the cured ceramic frit prior to applying the hydrophobic compound to the cured ceramic frit.

What is Claimed:

1. A shelf assembly, comprising:

a completely flat shelf panel having a top surface and a bottom surface, the top surface capable of supporting articles;

a hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern generally in the plane of said top surface;

at least one non-hydrophobic central portion completely bounded by the spill containment pattern for containing liquids on the top surface of the shelf panel; and

at least one support bracket attached to the bottom surface of the shelf panel such that the top surface of the shelf panel is completely free from intrusion or other obstruction, thereby maximizing the available shelf space on the top surface of the shelf panel.

2. A shelf assembly, comprising:

a completely flat shelf panel having a top surface and a bottom surface, the top surface capable of supporting articles;

a hydrophobic surface arranged in a spill containment pattern generally in the plane of said top surface;

at least one non-hydrophobic central portion completely bounded by the spill containment pattern for containing liquids on the top surface of the shelf panel; and

at least one support bracket attached only to the bottom surface of the shelf panel such that the top surface of the shelf panel is completely free from intrusion or other obstruction, thereby maximizing the available shelf space on the top surface of the shelf panel.

3. The shelf assembly of claim 1 or 2, further comprising an adhesive material disposed between the support bracket and bottom surface of the shelf panel thereby attaching the support bracket to the shelf panel.

4. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the at least one support bracket includes a pair of support brackets, each of which is adhered to the bottom surface of the shelf panel.

5. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the at least one support bracket is disposed entirely below the top surface of the shelf panel.

6. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the at least one support bracket is disposed entirely opposite the shelf panel from the top surface of the shelf panel.

7. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 3 to 6, wherein the adhesive material comprises a clear adhesive material.

8. The shelf assembly any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the at least one support bracket includes a top surface and the adhesive material is disposed between the top surface of the support bracket and the bottom surface of the shelf panel.

9. The shelf assembly of claim 8, wherein the top surface of the support bracket defines a channel receiving the adhesive material.

10. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the at least one support bracket includes a generally L-shaped cross-section.

11. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said spill containment pattern is a continuous border which defines a single non-hydrophobic central portion within said border.

12. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said spill containment pattern is a continuous border located near the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel.

13. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein said spill containment pattern is located along the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel.

14. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said spill containment pattern comprises a first continuous border and a second continuous border spaced from said first continuous border, the first continuous border located along the perimeter of the top surface of the shelf panel, and the second continuous border spaced inwardly from said first continuous border such that the second continuous border completely bounds a non-hydrophobic central portion of the top surface of the shelf panel, and the first and second continuous borders together define between them area non-hydrophobic ring portion for containing overflow from said non-hydrophobic central portion.

15. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said spill containment pattern is in the form of a grid pattern on the top surface of the shelf panel and wherein said grid pattern defines a plurality of non-hydrophobic central portion on the top surface of the shelf panel, each of the plurality of non-hydrophobic central portions completely bounded by the grid pattern.

16. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 15, wherein said shelf panel is comprised of a material chosen from the group consisting of glass, plastic, metal and combinations thereof.

17. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 16, wherein the shelf panel is transparent.

18. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 17, wherein the shelf panel is glass.

19. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 18, wherein the hydrophobic surface is transparent.

20. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 19, wherein at least some portion of the hydrophobic surface is colored.

21. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 20, wherein the hydrophobic surface contains a colored portion in a form chosen from the group consisting of a pattern, a company name, a company logo and combinations thereof.

22. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 21, wherein the hydrophobic surface comprises:

a ceramic frit layer adjacent to the top surface of said shelf panel; and

a hydrophobic compound coated over the ceramic frit layer.

23. The shelf assembly of claim 22, wherein said ceramic frit layer contains additive particles that create roughness in a top surface of the ceramic frit layer.

24. The shelf assembly of claim 22 or 23, wherein at least a portion of said ceramic frit layer is colored.

25. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 24, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic coating over a roughened area in the surface of said shelf panel.

26. The shelf assembly of claim 25, wherein said roughened area is made by binding particles to surface of the shelf panel.

27. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 26, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a coating of hydrophobic particles on the surface of said shelf panel.

28. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 27, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic compound applied over or within the matrix of a cured sol gel composition.

29. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 28, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a metal oxide primer with an integrated hydrophobic compound.

30. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 29, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic coating applied over a metal oxide primer.

31. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 30, wherein said hydrophobic surface comprises a hydrophobic compound comprising a variety of molecular chain lengths to create a coating with surface irregularities.

32. The shelf assembly of any one of claims 1 to 31, wherein the hydrophobic surface arranged in the spill containment pattern has a thickness in the range of approximately 0.001 microns to approximately 250 microns.

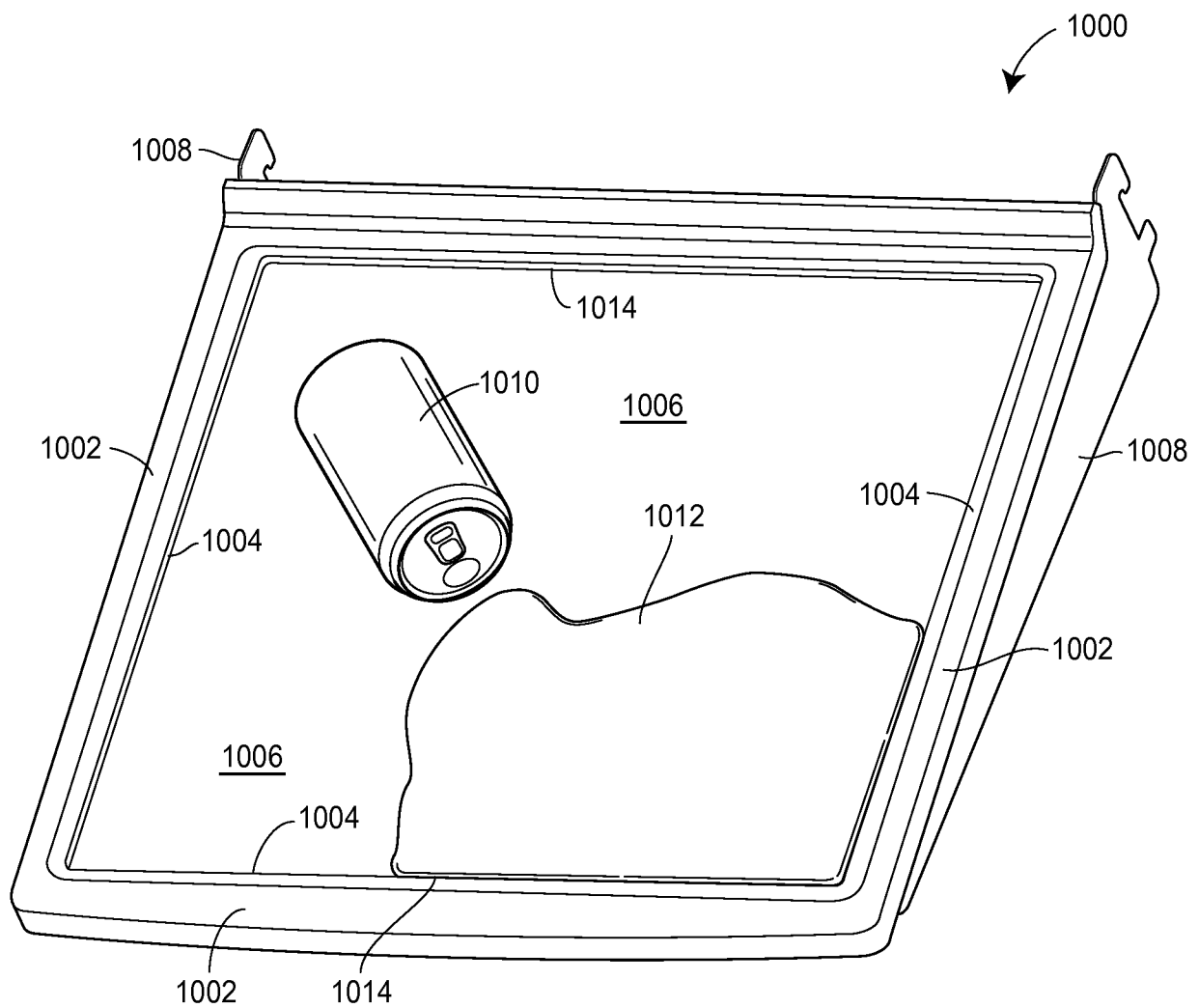


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

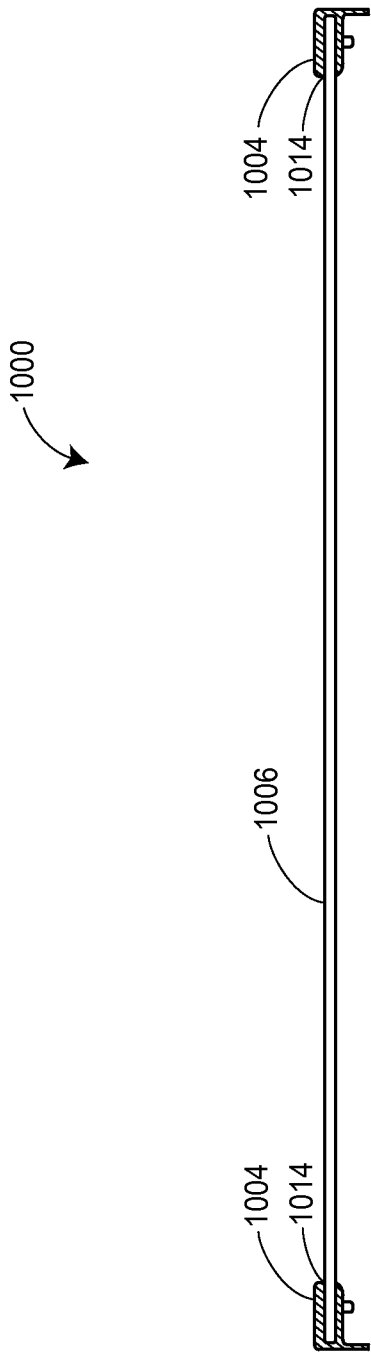
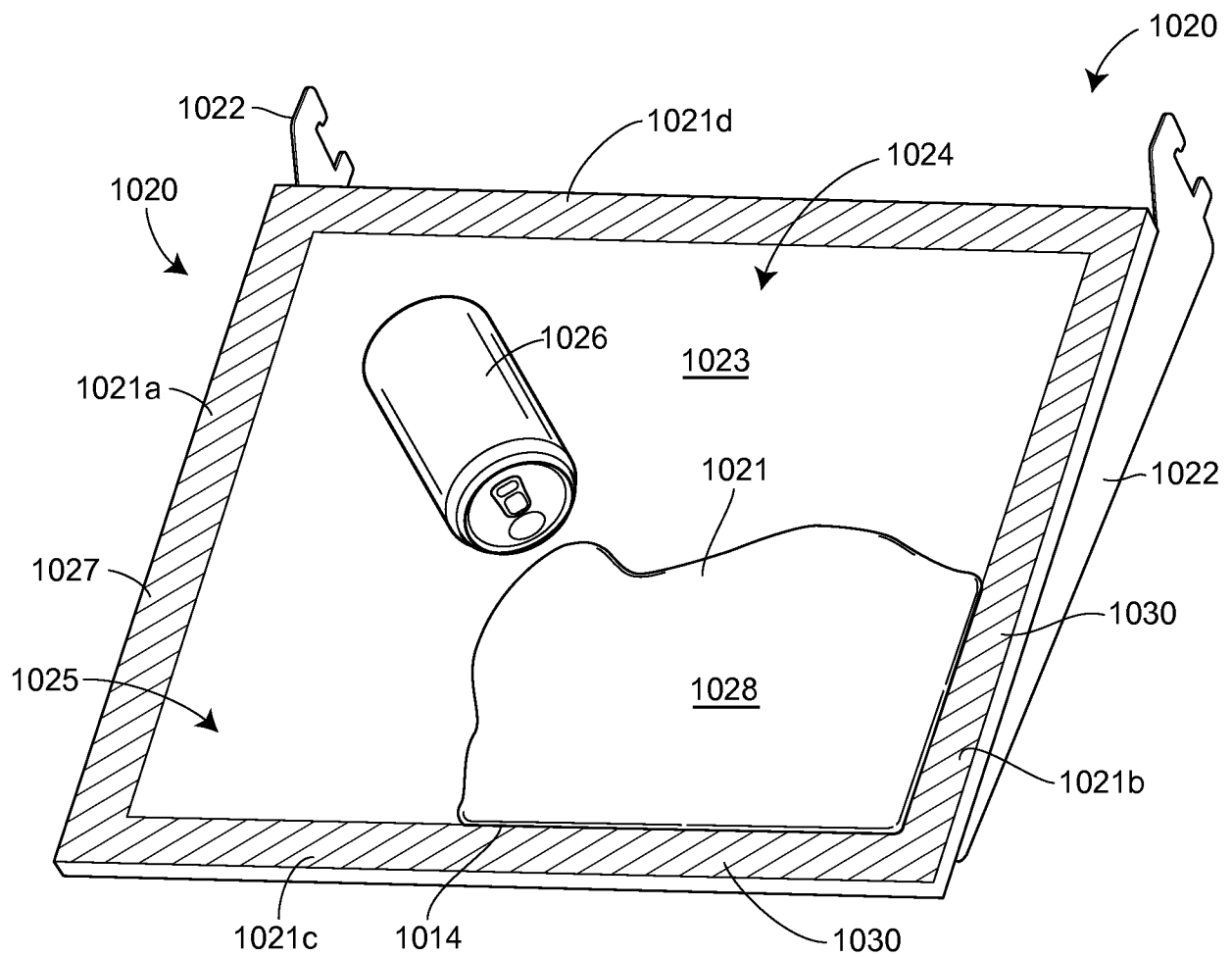


FIG. 2
PRIOR ART

**FIG. 3**

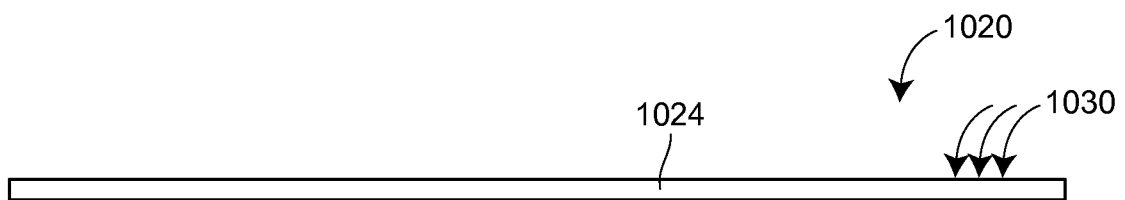


FIG. 4

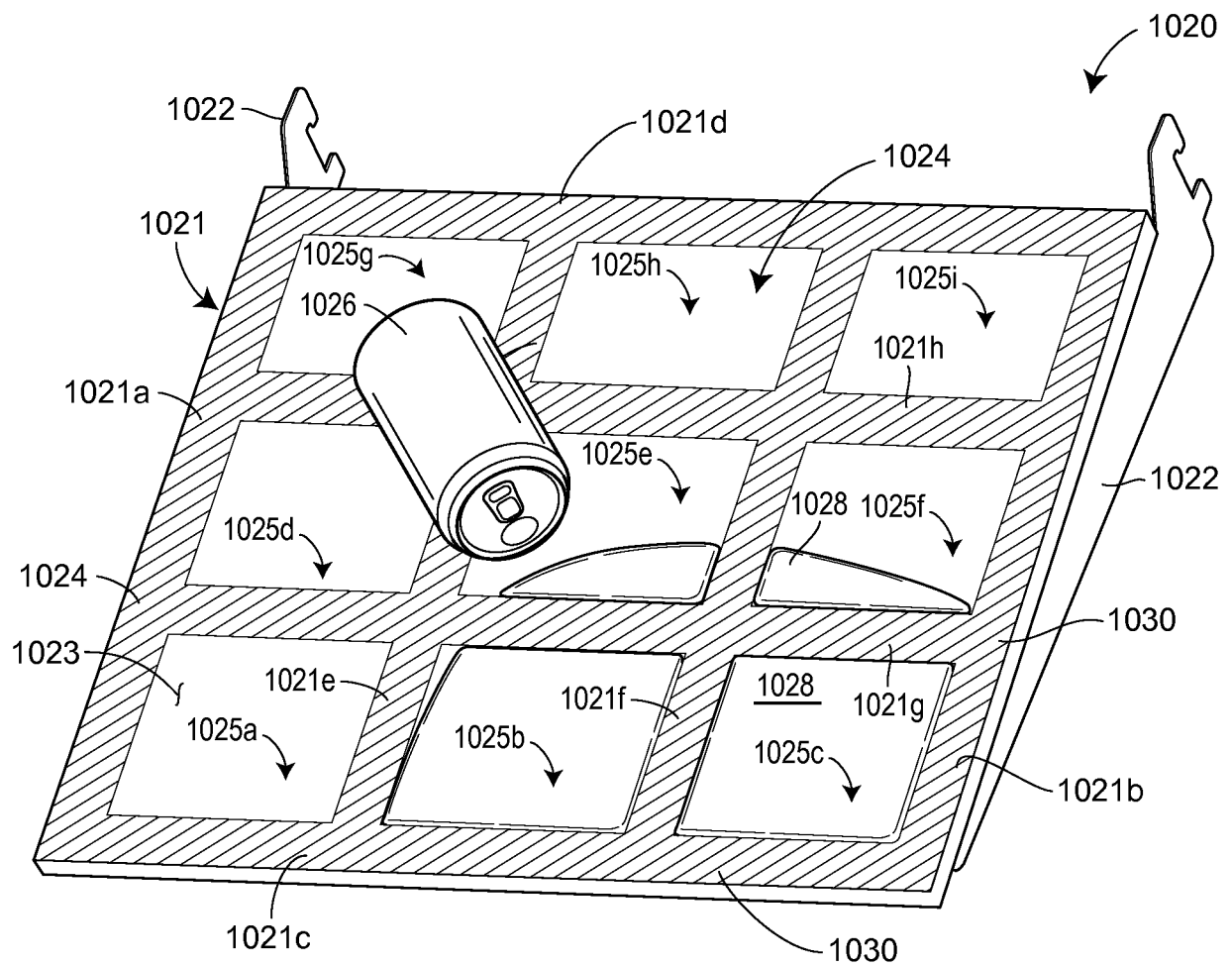


FIG. 5

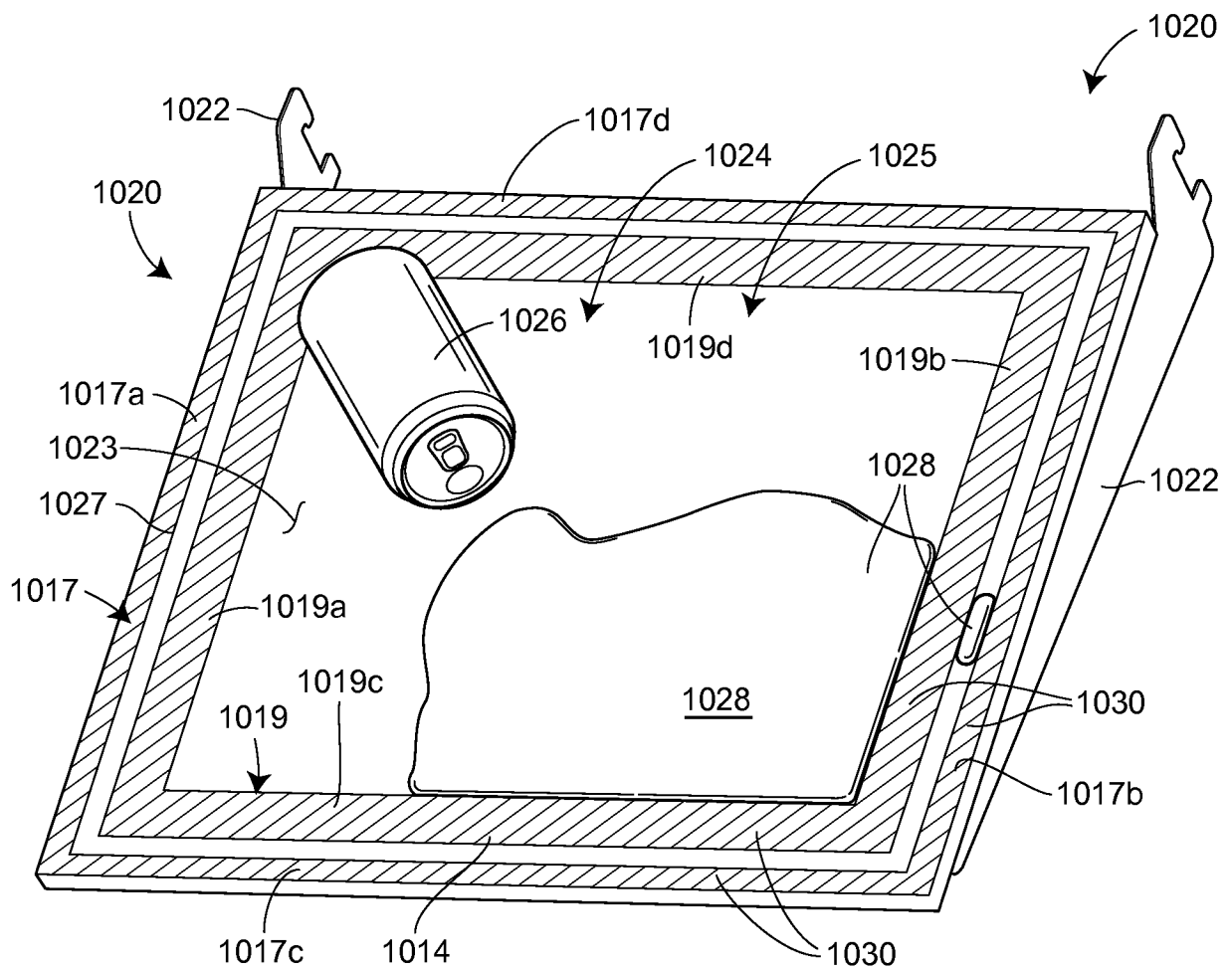


FIG. 6

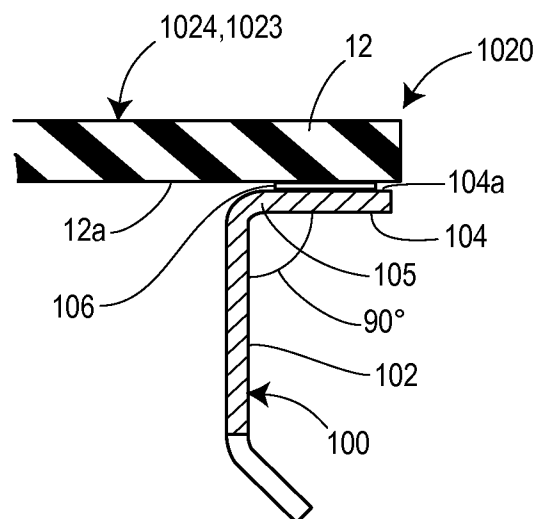
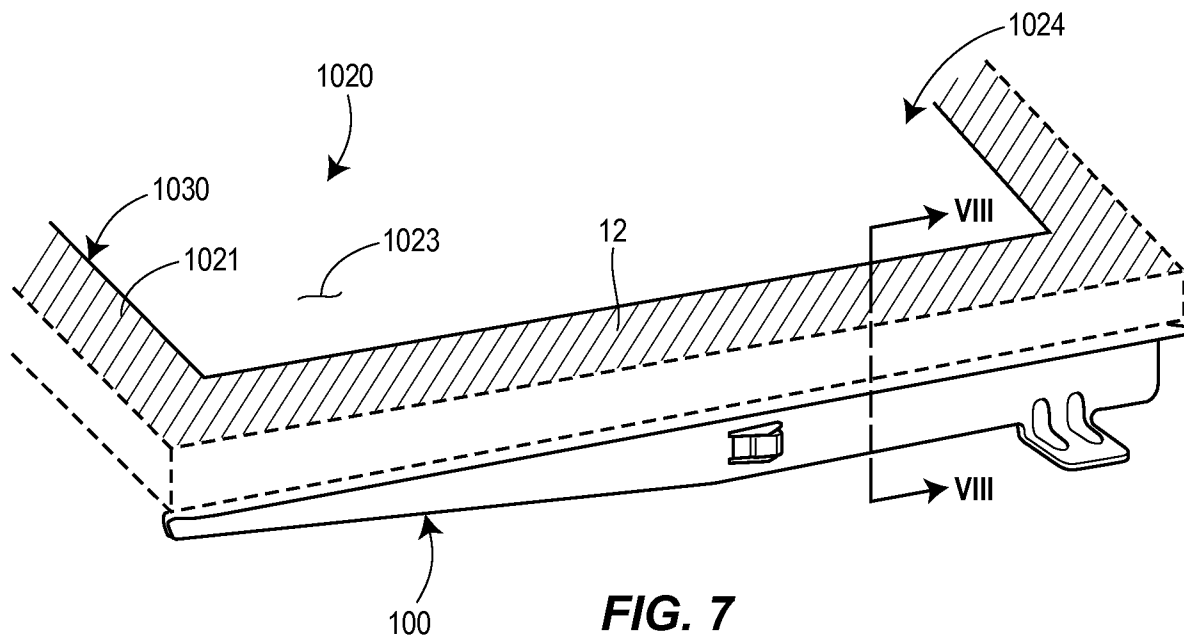


FIG. 8

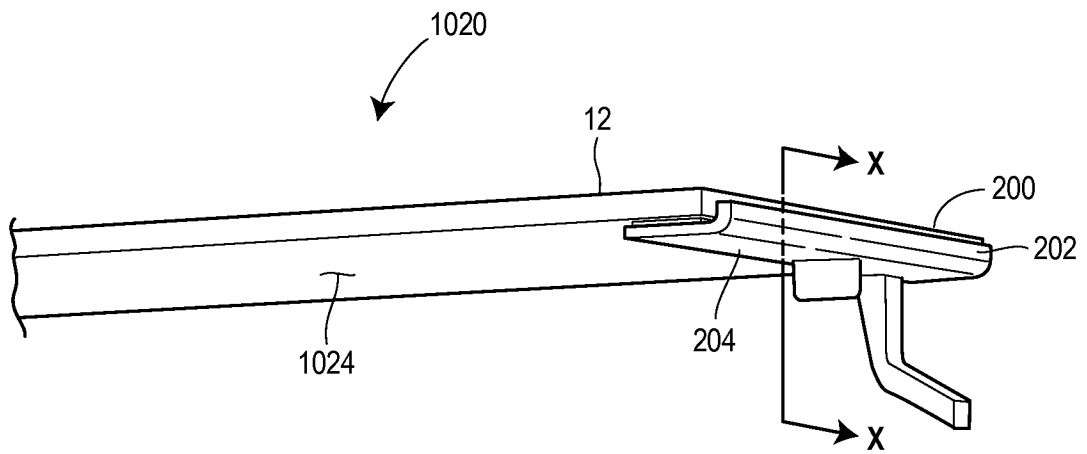


FIG. 9

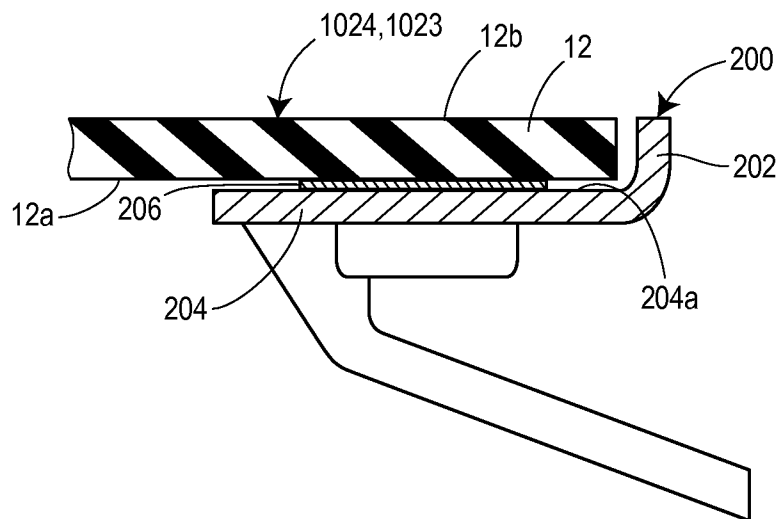


FIG. 10

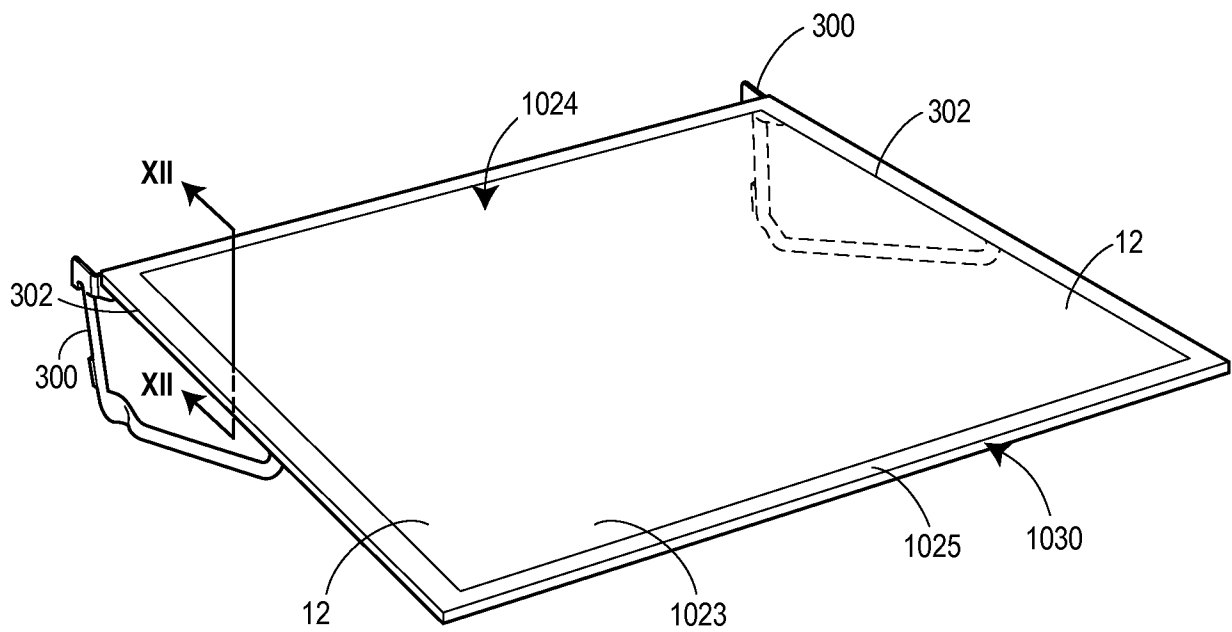


FIG. 11

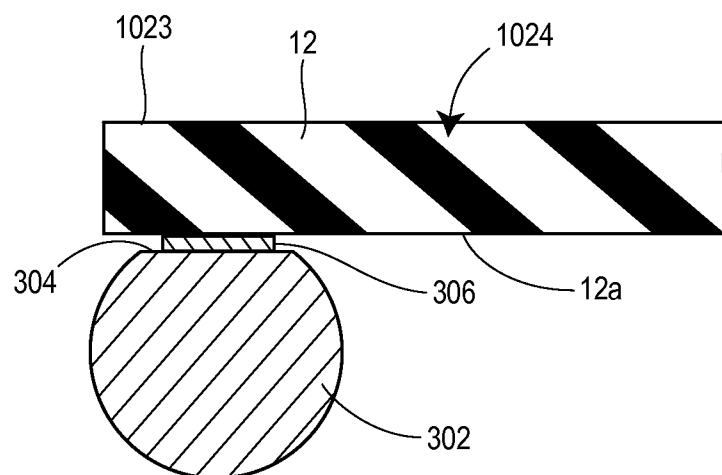


FIG. 12

10/18

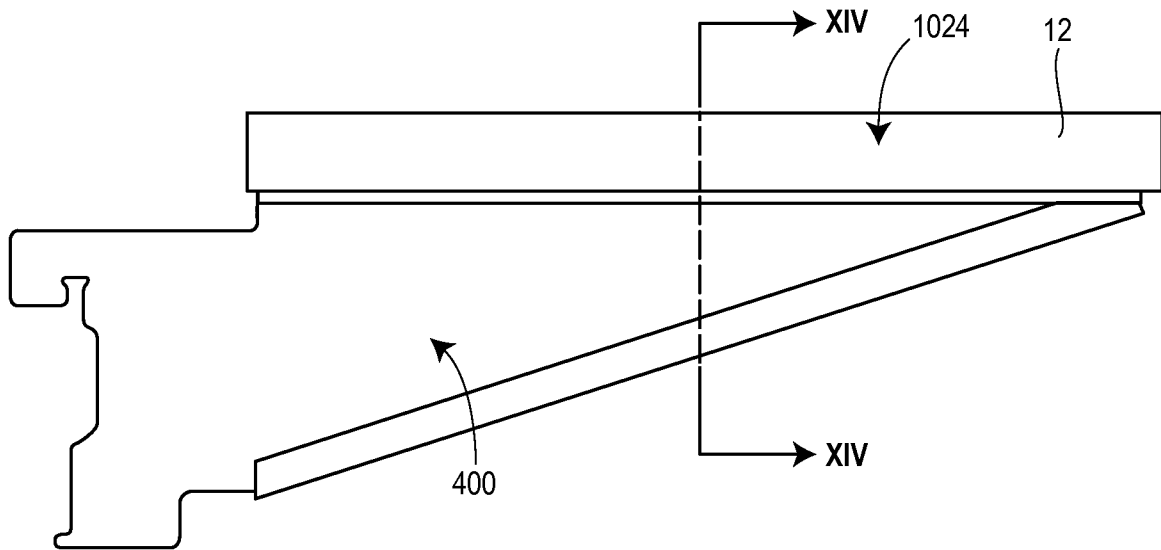


FIG. 13

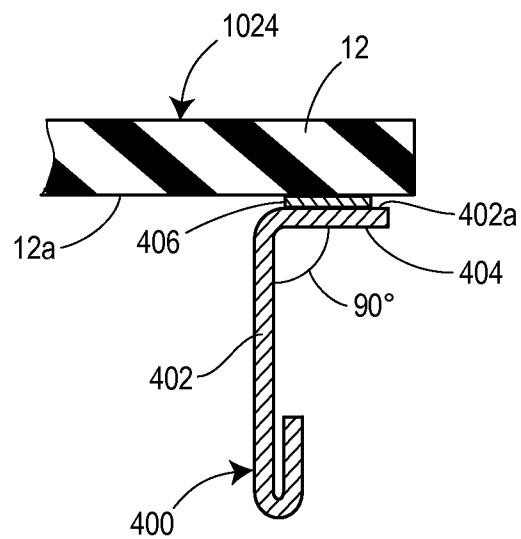


FIG. 14

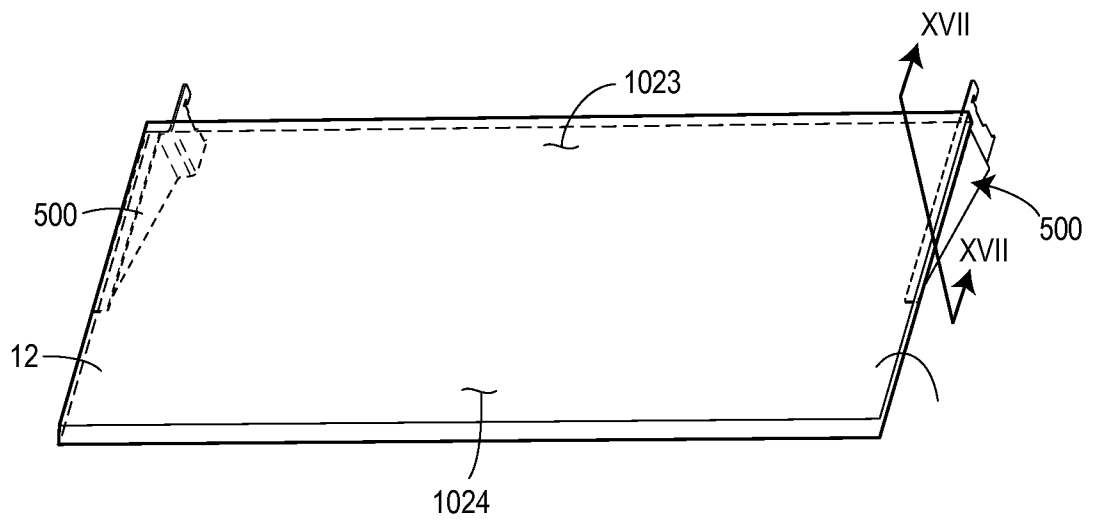


FIG. 15

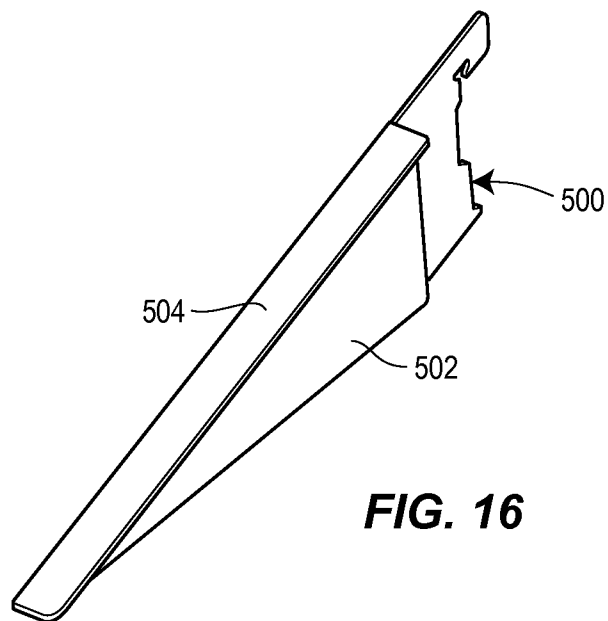


FIG. 16

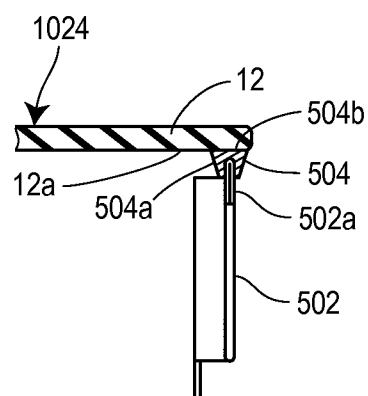
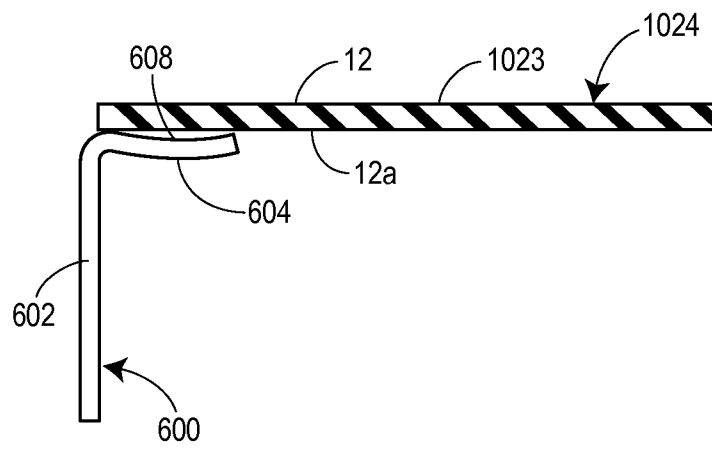


FIG. 17

**FIG. 18**

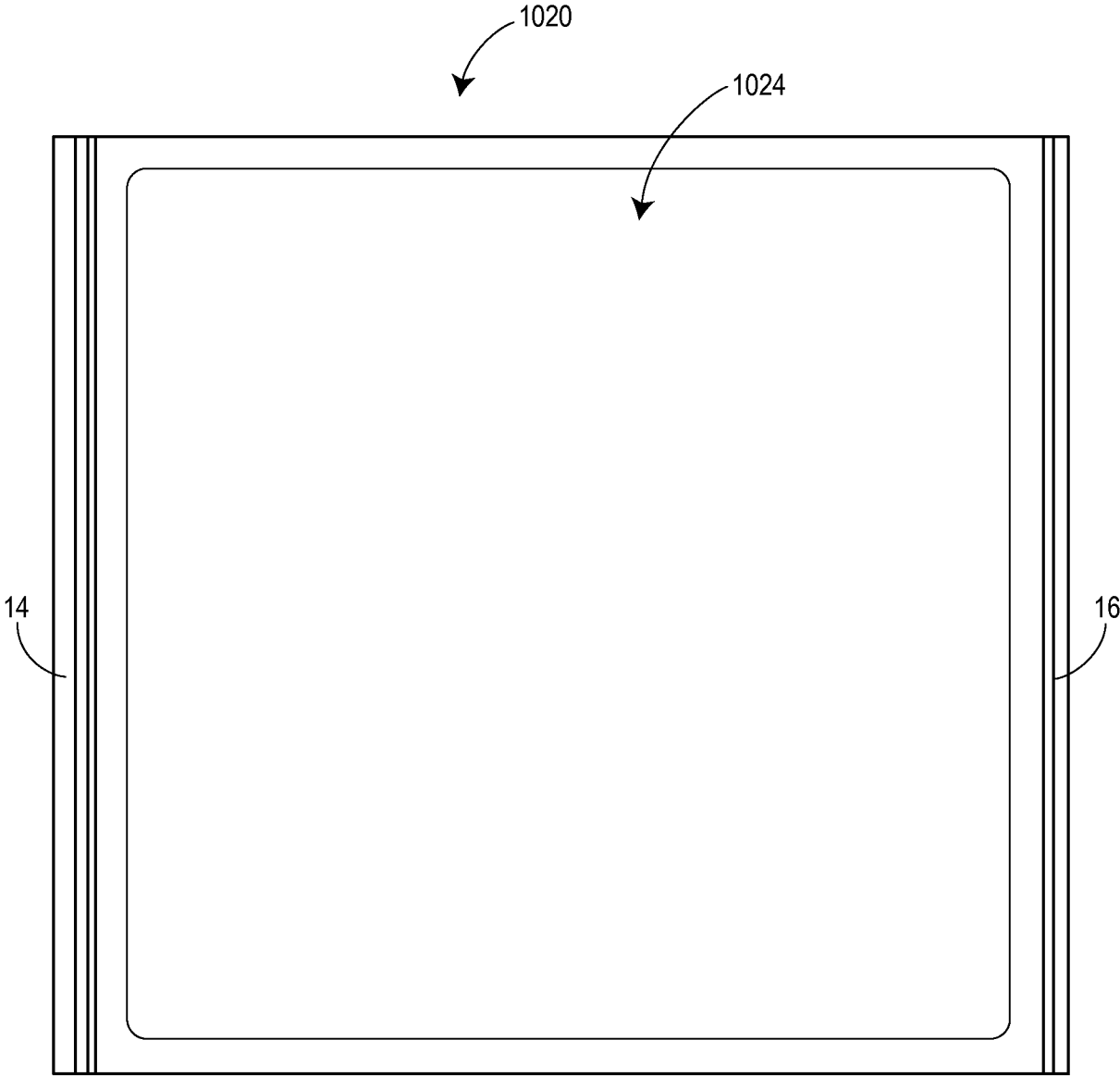


FIG. 19

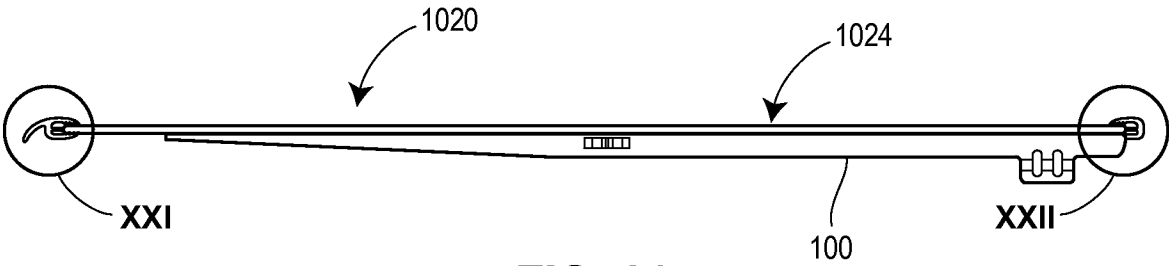


FIG. 20

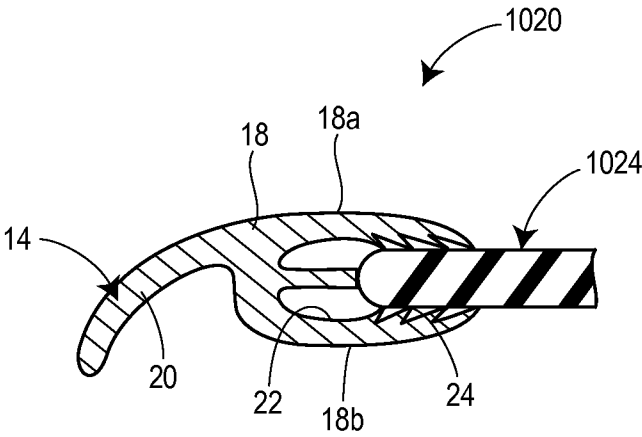


FIG. 21

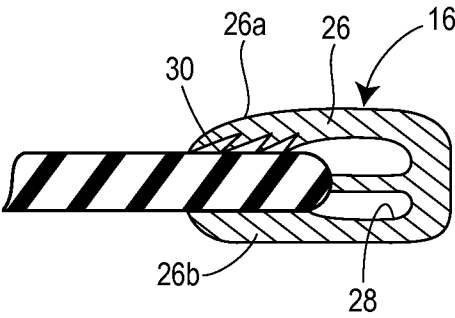


FIG. 22

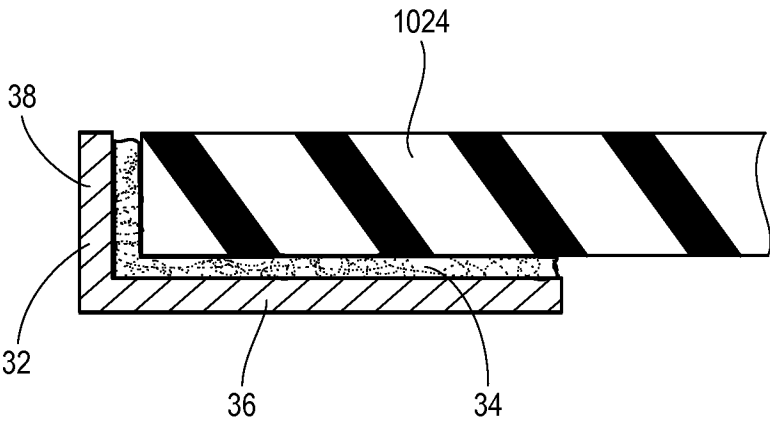


FIG. 23

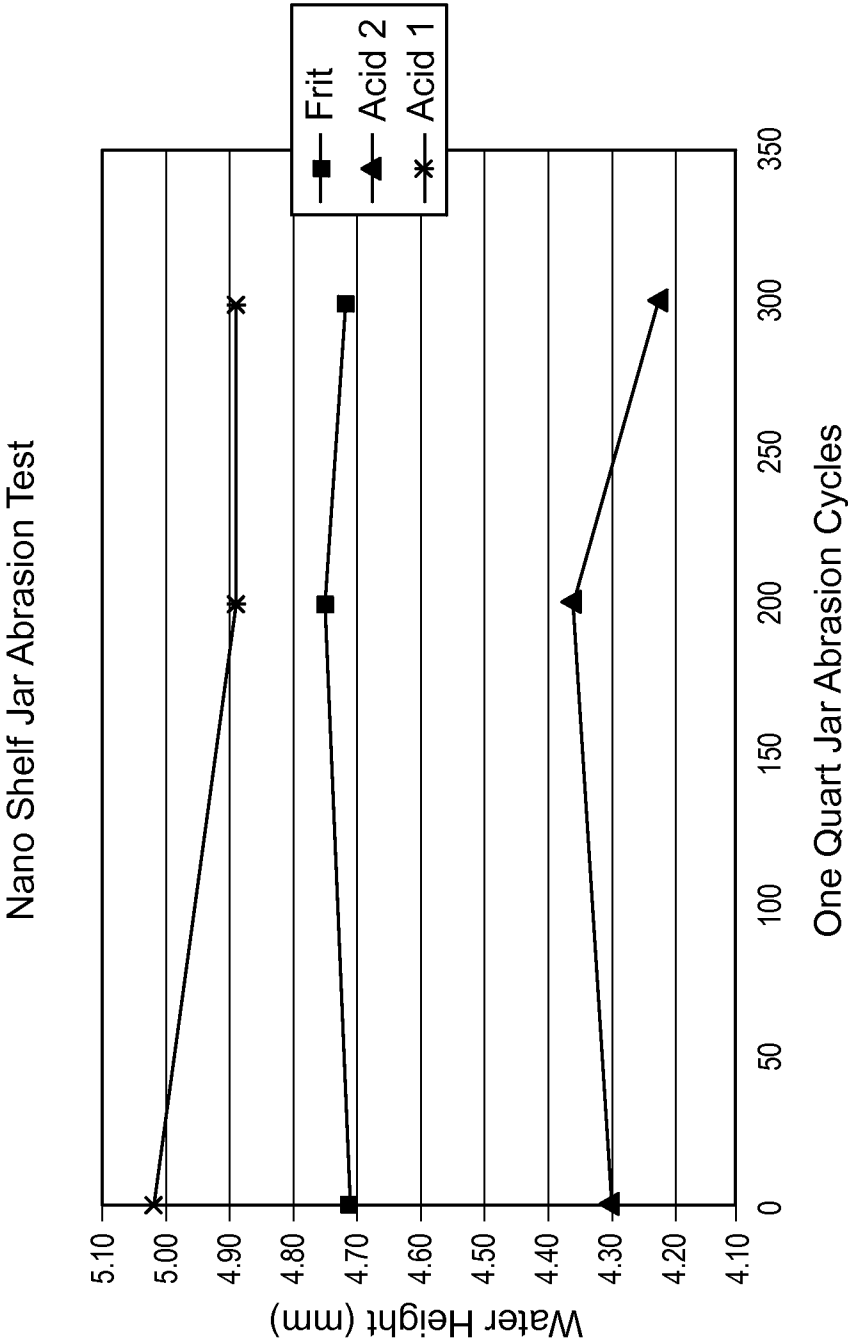


FIG. 24

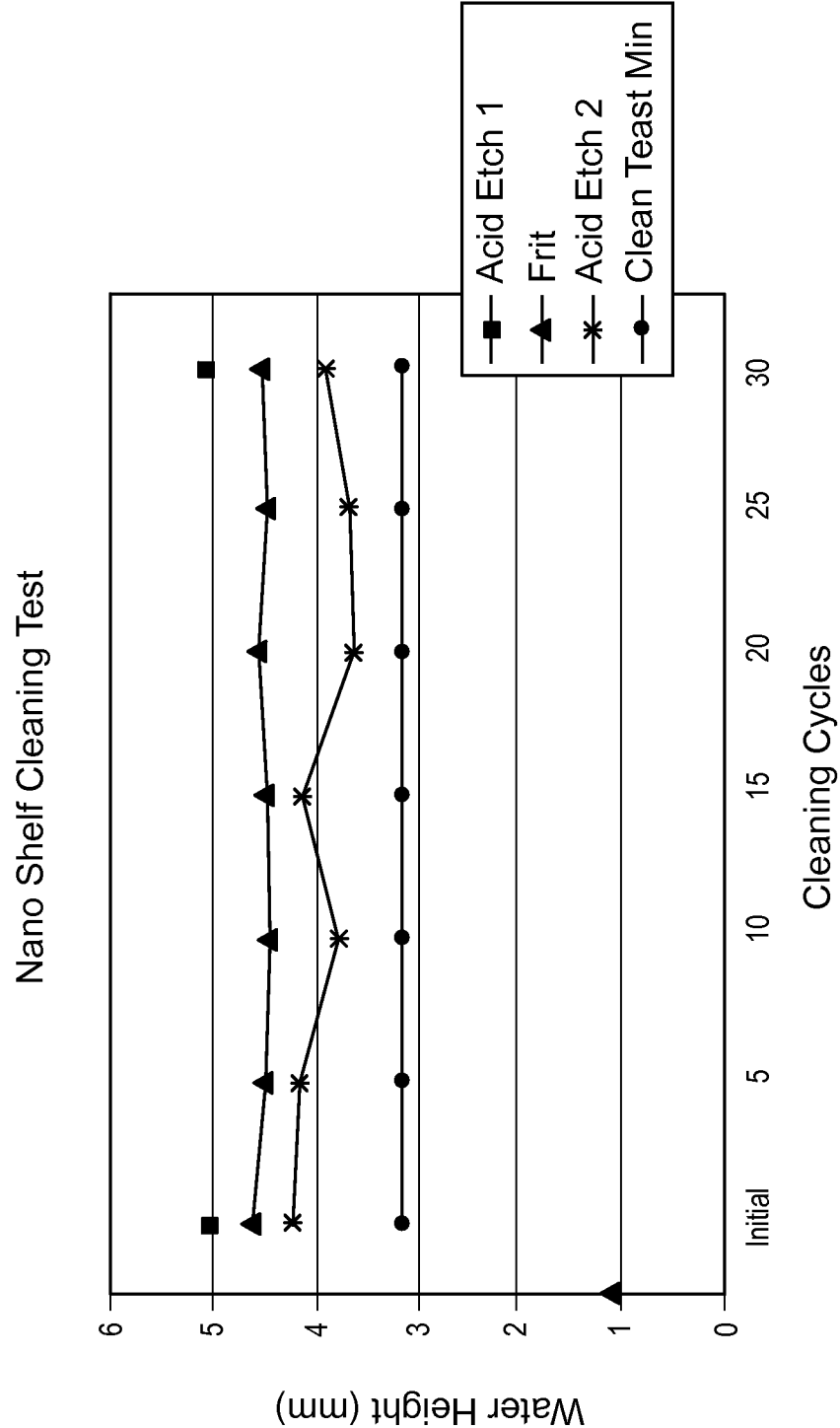


FIG. 25

Stains allowed to dry for 72 hrs

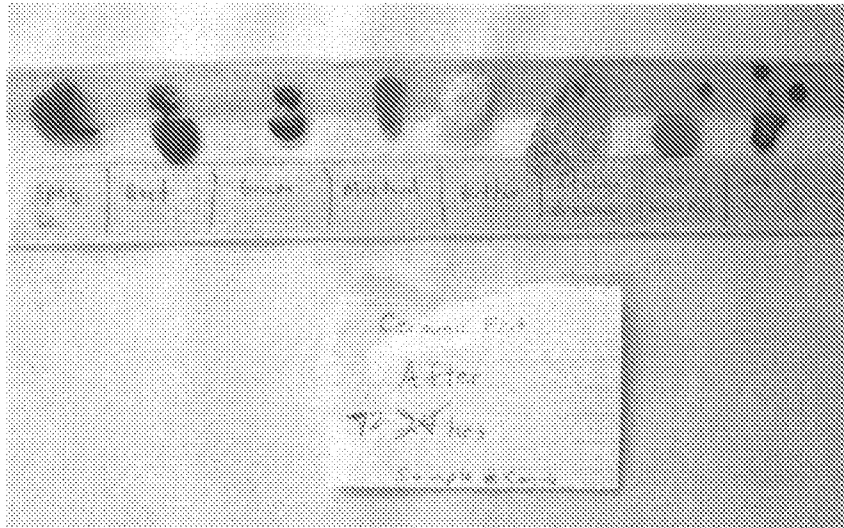


FIG. 26A

After cleaning with wet dish rag

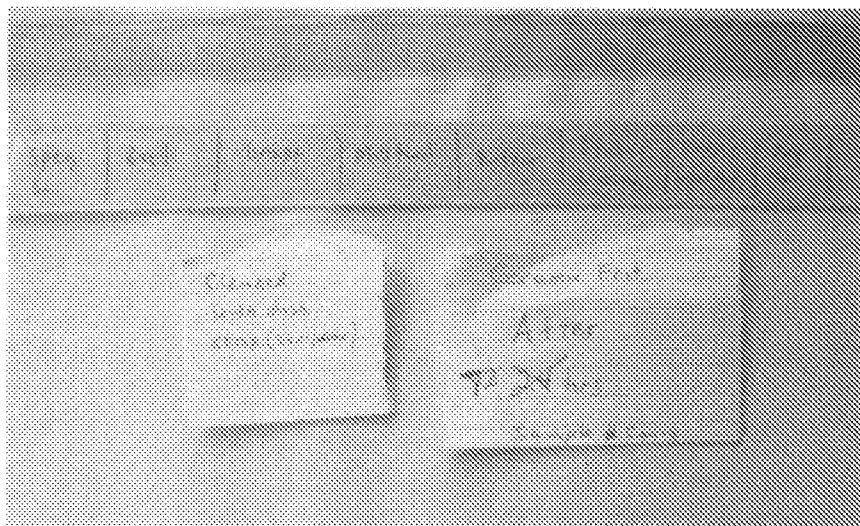


FIG. 26B