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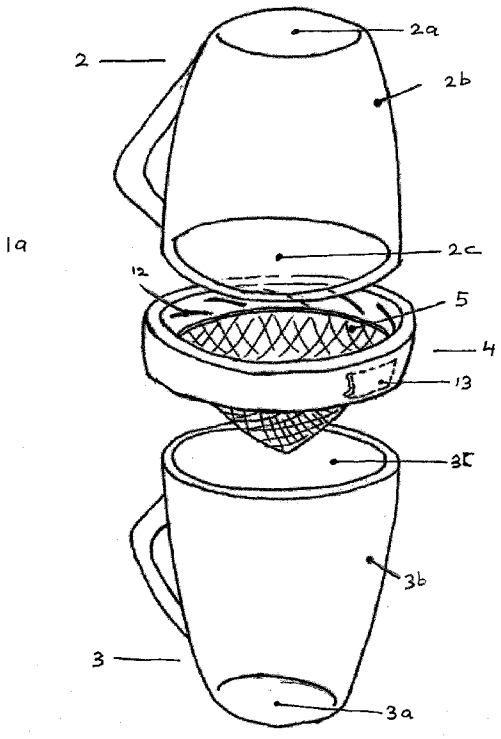
[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: CONTAINER ASSEMBLY FOR PREPARING A BEVERAGE

FIG 1



(57) Abstract: The invention relates to a container assembly (1) for preparing a beverage comprising a first container body (2) having a floor panel (2a), a side wall (2b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (2c) opposite of the floor panel, a second container body (3) having a floor panel (3a), a side wall (3b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (3c) opposite of the floor panel; and a connector means (4) comprising a liquid permeable wall section (5). The invention further relates to a method for preparing a beverage using said container assembly.

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Container assembly for preparing a beverage

Field of the invention

The present invention relates to a container assembly for preparing a beverage and a method for preparing a beverage.

Background prior art

Many beverages are made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material (also known as infusing material). Well known examples of this are tea, coffee, herbal infusions and the like.

Tea and coffee are widely consumed for example at home, or out of home in e.g. a café or restaurant. Freshly brewed tea is a beverage typically made by soaking processed leaves, buds or twigs of the tea bush (for the purpose of this invention collectively named tea leaves), *Camellia sinensis*, in hot water for a couple of minutes. In the western world the most common way of packing tea leaves is in a teabag, which usually is a small paper bag containing about 1 to 5 gram of tea leaves. Brewing of tea is usually done by contacting the teabag with hot water, that is water of about 70 to 100 degrees Celsius, by putting the teabag in e.g. a cup or pot with the hot water. Alternatively, for example, hot water can be poured on the teabag after the teabag has been placed in the cup or pot.

It is also possible to use loose tea leaves, i.e. tea leaves that are not pre-packed and proportioned. The loose tea leaves can e.g. be placed in a tea infuser, also known as a tea ball or tea egg. The tea infuser is used the same way as a teabag. It is also possible to simply add the loose tea leaves per se to e.g. a cup or pot and remove the loose tea leaves using a tea strainer before consumption of the tea.

Preparing freshly brewed tea thus involves removal of the tea leaves after the desired time of brewing and/or before consumption, e.g. to prevent the tea from becoming to strong or bitter. This may be inconvenient as the wet tea leaves, either in a pre-packed format like e.g. a teabag, or as loose tea leaves, easily drip liquid over nearby areas. Where these areas are preparation surfaces this can be messy and unhygienic. Where these areas are areas of human skin (e.g. on the hands of a user) this can be unsafe in that the skin may be scalded by hot liquid."

Some consumers associate teabags with low(er) quality tea and loose tea leaves with high(er) quality tea. This (perceived) difference in quality is especially important in the out of home situation, as higher quality e.g. usually justifies a higher price.

Unfortunately some consumers feel that in the out of home situation freshly brewed tea is not much different from the tea they make at home, as teabags and loose tea leaves are readily available for use at home. The consumer experience of drinking tea out of home may therefore be perceived as uneventful. For coffee, the out of home situation is often quite different from that at home. Apart from specific blends of coffee that are not always readily available for use at home, the consumer can also choose from different kinds of coffee like e.g. espresso, cappuccino, café macchiato and café latte. When a professional espresso machine is used this further adds a theater-like element. Each of these elements alone or in combination create what is sometimes referred to as a special coffee experience.

Thus, in the out of home situation consumers ordering freshly brewed tea may feel that the tea and the tea experience they get is not much different from the tea and tea experience they can get at home as there is no special tea

experience associated with a beverage that is made in essentially the same way as one does at home.

US 5,632,194 discloses an infusion maker which comprises a beaker, an inner cup mounted in the beaker for containing boiling water for steeping tea, and a ball valve means coupled to the inner cup to control the passage of the bottom center through hole of the inner cup. Regular infusion makers for preparing tea are commonly comprised of a cup, a strainer suspended in the cup at the top for holding tea leaves and a lid covered on the cup. Because the strainer is suspended in the cup at the top, tea leaves cannot be fully dipped in boiling water in the cup. Furthermore, when the strainer is taken out of the cup, tea infusion will drop from the strainer to wet nearby area. The infusion maker of US 5,632,194 comprises an inner cup for holding tea leaves and boiling water. When the inner cup is lifted from the beaker the tea infusion flows through the ball valve means in the beaker. This infusion maker thus allows the tea leaves to be fully immersed in the boiling water. The inner cup may still wet nearby area as the ball valve means is positioned at the bottom end of the inner cup.

It is an object of the invention to provide an alternative method to prepare a beverage, preferably a beverage that is made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material.
It is another object of the invention to provide an improved method to prepare a beverage, preferably a beverage that is made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material.
It is a further object of the invention to provide a method to prepare a beverage, preferably a beverage that is made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material, that is more convenient in that e.g. the tea leaves are easily separated from the infusion liquid or that no tea is spilled when the tea leaves are separated from the infusion liquid.

It is still a further object of the invention to provide a method to prepare a beverage, preferably a beverage that is made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material, that when used will provide a special tea experience (e.g. an experience that is different from conventional ways of making such a beverage or is fun to do).

It is also an object of the invention to provide a method to prepare a beverage, preferably a beverage that is made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material, that is easy and/or safe to use.

Summary of the invention

Accordingly, to meet at least partly, the objects mentioned above, in a first aspect the invention provides a container assembly for preparing a beverage comprising:

- a first container body having a floor panel, a side wall rising from the floor panel and an open end opposite of the floor panel;
- a second container body having a floor panel, a side wall rising from the floor panel and an open end opposite of the floor panel; and
- a connector means comprising a liquid permeable wall section.

In a second aspect the invention provides a method for preparing a beverage using the container body according to the invention.

Detailed description of the invention

Container assembly

The container assembly for preparing a beverage according to the invention comprises:

- a first container body (2) having a floor panel (2a), a side wall (2b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (2c) opposite of the floor panel;

- a second container body (3) having a floor panel (3a), a side wall (3b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (3c) opposite of the floor panel; and
- a connector means (4) comprising a liquid permeable wall section (5);

characterized in that the side walls at the open end of the first and the second container body being engageable with the connector means thereby forming a watertight container assembly (1b) having an inner space wherein at least part of the liquid permeable wall section is positioned between the first and second container bodies thereby separating the inner space of the container assembly in two distinct spaces (6a, 6b), further characterized in that the connector means (4) comprises a venting means (7).

The container assembly according to the invention can be used for example as follows. Liquid is put in the second container body. The connector means comprising a liquid permeable wall section is attached to the open end of the second container body. Infusing material is placed on top of the liquid permeable wall section of the connector means. The first container body is then attached to the connector means by connecting the open end of the first container body to the connector means, and the resulting watertight container assembly (i.e. the container assembly in the closed configuration) is turned upside down to start the infusion process. This allows the liquid to flow from the second container body thereby passing through the liquid permeable wall section into the first container body. The first container body now comprises the infusing material and the liquid. To stop the infusion process, the watertight container assembly is turned upside down again. The liquid will flow from the first container body into the second container body passing through the liquid permeable wall section thereby filtering out the infusing material. The first container body and connector means are then separated from the second container body by detaching the second container body from the connector means to provide the second container body comprising the liquid free of

infusing material and the first container body with the connector means still attached to it comprising the extracted infusing material.

It is also possible e.g. to put the infusing material in the second container body. Attach the connector means to the second container body. Fill the first container body with liquid and attach the second container body with the already attached connector means to the first container body to form the watertight container assembly. The infusion process is started by turning the watertight container assembly upside down.

The container body

The brewing process takes place in one of the two container bodies (which can then be defined as being the brewing chamber). The other one of the two container bodies will hold the prepared beverage from which the beverage can then be served by either acting as for example a (tea) pot or as a drinking cup by itself.

The shape of the two container bodies may be identical or of different design to accentuate the function of the container body in view of the above. For example the container body that will hold the prepared beverage may be shaped as a drinking cup including for example a handle, while the container body that acts as the brewing chamber may be shaped quite differently.

The container bodies may have a different capacity (i.e. different volume). The container body acting as the brewing chamber for example may have a smaller capacity compared to the container body holding the prepared beverage and for example only facilitate part of the total amount of liquid present in the watertight container assembly whereas the container body holding the prepared beverage is large enough to facilitate the total amount of liquid present. Preferably the capacity of each of the container bodies is such that the total amount of liquid

present in the watertight container assembly can be held within each one of the container bodies alone.

Suitable material for the container bodies is any material suitable for holding a liquid, preferably a liquid at the required temperature for preparing the beverage (e.g. hot water for preparing tea) and include for example glass, ceramic, metal, polymers including plastic like for example perspex and polycarbonate, and laminated materials like for example paper coated with plastic or wax. The two container bodies of a container assembly according to the present invention may be of the same material or different materials. It is also possible that different materials are used in combination for a container body, for example part glass and part ceramic. Optionally the container body comprises more than one part, for example a glass cup with a separate metal exterior including for example a handle for holding the glass cup.

Preferably at least the container body that will act as the brewing chamber is at least in part transparent to allow the consumer to see the brewing process including the infusing material when the container assembly is assembled to form the watertight container assembly. This allows a visual element when the container body according to the invention is used for preparing a beverage and for example enhances the overall experience by providing a theater-like effect.

The connector means

The connector means comprises oppositely directed end portions that are engageable with the side walls at the open end of the first and second container body thereby forming a watertight container assembly having an inner space (i.e. an enclosed space).

For the purpose of the invention the term “watertight” means that essentially no liquid consisting essentially of water will pass through the connection between

each one of the first and second container body and the connector means under normal conditions (i.e. from inside to outside the watertight container assembly and vice versa). Normal conditions are defined as being a pressure difference between the inside of the watertight container assembly and the outside of the watertight container assembly of at most 100% of the higher pressure (e.g. the inside pressure of the watertight container assembly is twice or half the outside pressure, said outside pressure being the atmospheric pressure), for example 80% or 50%.

Suitable locking mechanisms that can be used to engage the side walls at the open end of the first and second container body with the connector means are well known in the art and readily available to the skilled person and include for example the use of friction to establish a watertight connection and the use of a thread (12) placed either at the connector means or at the side wall at the open end of the container body that allows the two to be screwed together to form a watertight connection. Another example is the use of one or more clips (13) placed either at the connector means or at the side wall at the open end of the of the container body that allows the two to be locked together to form a watertight connection as illustrated in figures 6 and 7.

A container assembly according to the invention may comprise the same mechanism or different mechanisms to connect the first as well as the second container body to the connector means (i.e. the same kind of mechanism to connect both the first and second container body to the connector means or two different kinds of mechanism to connect the first and second container body, respectively, to the connector means).

Preferably the mechanism to connect the first container body is different from the mechanism that connects the second container body to the connector

means. This may prevent the user from opening the wrong mechanism (i.e. decoupling the wrong container body) by mistake.

Preferably a thread is used to connect the side wall at the open end of the first container body and one or more clips are used to connect the side wall at the open end of the second container body to the connector means. Preferably the thread and clips are placed on the connector means. Most preferably the clips are used to connect the container body that will hold the prepared beverage. This preferred embodiment is illustrated in figures 6 and 7.

The engagement between each one of the first and second container body and the connector means is reversible (i.e. couple and decouple) but tight enough to allow the watertight container assembly to be handled (e.g. turned upside down) without unwanted decoupling (i.e. falling apart). This can easily be achieved by applying for example friction (as for example used when the side wall of the container body and the connector means are screwed together) or by securing the connection with a locking mechanism (as for example is the case when clips are used).

Preferably the container body that will hold the prepared beverage does not comprise any recognizable part of a mechanism used for connecting the container body to the connector means (i.e. the most recognizable part is placed on the connector, for example the clips are placed on the connector).

<u>The liquid permeable wall section</u>

The connector means comprises a liquid permeable wall section placed in such a way that the liquid permeable wall section separates the inner space of the watertight container assembly in two distinct spaces (that is when the container assembly is in the closed configuration). When the first and second container body are attached to the connector means, liquid can flow freely from the first

container body into the second container body and vice versa, but can only do so by passing through the liquid permeable wall section of the connector means. This ensures that the infusing material is confined to one of the two distinct spaces.

The liquid permeable wall section allows liquid to pass through but does not allow particles to pass trough, i.e. the wall section is made of a porous material. Thus the liquid permeable wall section basically acts like a sieve. The porous material can be any material that allows components to diffuse through the wall section through the pores. Preferably the size of the pores is such that essentially all of the infusion material will not pass through the wall section. However, it is allowable for some of the smaller particles of the infusion material to pass depending on the desired end result of the beverage.

The liquid permeable wall section can be made from any suitable material for such purpose like for example a polymer like plastic like for example nylon; a fibrous material like for example paper, or metal like for example stainless steel as used for tea strainers. The porous material may for example contain little slits or holes or any means that is suitable for the stated use. Preferably the liquid permeable wall section is a mesh, more preferably a plastic or a metal mesh. More preferably a nylon or a stainless steel mesh.

The liquid permeable wall section may have any shape. In the case of relatively small pores (e.g. average mean size is smaller than 0.5 mm) the free flow of liquid may be negatively influenced and prevent the liquid to flow from the first container body into the second container body or vice versa. Therefore preferably the liquid permeable wall section is not a flat surface, i.e. at least part of the surface of the wall section is not in the same plane as an other part of the wall section, for example convex or concave. Preferably the liquid permeable wall section has a cone shape.

Should a flat surface be preferred, for example for esthetic reasons, then the liquid permeable wall section preferably is a mesh. Preferably the mesh size is big enough to allow easy passage of the liquid.

Liquid

For the purpose of the invention liquid is defined as any liquid suitable for preparing a beverage, more preferably any liquid suitable for preparing a beverage made by the infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate matter. Suitable liquids are for example tap water and mineral water. The liquid may also be a combination of water and milk as for example used in India to make chai.
Sometimes, a certain amount of alcohol is added to a beverage (e.g. rum).

Venting means

Infusion or extraction of taste and flavor compounds from an insoluble particulate material (also known as infusing material) to make a beverage like for example tea, coffee, herbal infusions and the like are best done with hot water. The temperature of the water may be different for a given infusing material. For tea the temperature of the water may vary from about 70 to 100 degrees Celsius depending on the kind of tea. White tea for example is usually made with water of about 74 degrees Celsius while black tea is best made with water of about 100 degrees Celsius.

When a hot liquid like for example hot water is used pressure may build up inside the watertight container assembly (i.e. the container assembly in the closed configuration). When opening the watertight container assembly after the brewing process is complete (i.e. when the container body is decoupled from the connector means) care must be exercised to allow the pressure build up inside the watertight container body to escape.

The container assembly according to the invention therefore comprises a venting means.

The venting means allows for the release of the overpressure, if any, that built up inside the watertight container assembly. Suitable venting means include for example a pressure relief valve that is operated manually (i.e. the valve is opened manually to let the overpressure escape). Another example is the solution used in the threaded neck or cap of carbonated drinks as described in US 5,462,186. Here the cam tracks are intersected by a plurality of vertical venting slots or pathways along their helical length to vent headspace gas.

The connector means comprises the venting means. Preferably the venting means is a pressure relief valve.

It is also possible to use a venting means that does not require manual operation but automatically equalizes the pressure between the pressure inside and outside the watertight container assembly. A preferred venting means is a gas permeable membrane, that is a membrane that allows gas and vapor to pass but is not permeable to the liquid phase. Vapor is defined as the gas phase component of another state of matter (e.g. liquid or solid) which does not completely fill its container. It is distinguished from the pure gas phase by the presence of the same substance in another state of matter. So for example when using the container assembly according to the invention nitrogen is a gas and water in the gas phase is called vapor as there will also be liquid water present inside the watertight container assembly. Preferably the gas permeable membrane allows gas and water vapor to pass but is not permeable to the liquid phase being essentially water.

Gas permeable membranes are known in the art and suitable gas permeable membranes include for example Vyon ® from the company Porvair Technology.

Connector means comprising a separate and detachable holder

When the brewing process is completed the first container body with the connector means still attached to it will comprise the extracted infusing material (i.e. no liquid will be present but the infusing material will be wet). It could be more convenient if the extracted infusing material could be easily disposed of by for example just throwing away the liquid permeable wall section and therewith the extracted infusing material without the need to clean the liquid permeable wall section.

Therefore, preferably the connector means comprises a detachable holder (8) wherein the holder comprises the liquid permeable wall section and a rim (9) enclosing the liquid permeable wall section all round at the outer edges of the liquid permeable wall.

The oppositely directed end portions that are engageable with the side walls at the open end of the first and second container body thereby forming a watertight container assembly having an inner space (i.e. an enclosed space) are now a separate part of the connector means, for the purpose of this invention called the engaging part (14), and together with the holder comprising the liquid permeable wall section essentially form the connector means as is for example illustrated in Figure 4.

The holder is placed in a secure but reversible manner in the engaging part of the connector, that is the holder will stay in place when for example the watertight container assembly is turned upside down but can be easily removed from the engaging part of the connector means. Suitable methods include for example a bayonet mount or clamping the holder between the engaging part of the connector means and the side wall at the open end of a container body.

When using a venting means there is a risk that part of the infusing material may clog the venting means. When for example a gas permeable membrane is used as the venting means especially the smaller parts of the infusing material may clog the pores of the gas permeable membrane thereby preventing a proper working.

Preferably the holder comprises a gas permeable section (10a) that overlies an opening (10b) in the connector means when the holder is combined with the connector means while maintaining a watertight container assembly.

The holder comprises a gas permeable membrane like for example Vyon ® that when combined with the engaging part of the connector means overlies an opening in said engaging part. Any difference between the pressure inside and outside the watertight container assembly will then automatically be equalized. As the gas permeable membrane is part of the holder that is disposed of after use (i.e. one or a limited number of times) the gas permeable membrane does not get a chance to get clogged to such extend that it does not work properly anymore. The opening in the engaging part of the connector means should be adequately covered by the gas permeable membrane and optionally a part of the rim to ensure a watertight seal.

The container assembly of the present invention allows the use of infusing material like for example loose tea leaves and further aromatics like for example flowers and spices as insoluble particulates or pieces of sugar as soluble particulates. These can be added separately when using the container assembly but it may be preferred to pre-pack a selected mix of tea leaves and aromatics.

Preferably the holder comprises infusing material wherein the infusing material is sealed in the holder with a removable seal (11). The seal is removed prior to

use of the holder when making a beverage. Preferably the holder comprises tea leaves and optionally further aromatics.

Preferably the container assembly for preparing a beverage is suitable for preparing a beverage wherein said beverage is a drinkable liquid infusion from an infusible insoluble particulate material.

In a second aspect the invention provides for a method for preparing a beverage comprising the steps of:

a. providing a container assembly according to the invention;
b. providing a liquid;
c. providing infusion material;
d. followed by connecting the first and second container body to the connector means to form a watertight container assembly comprising the liquid and the infusion material;

wherein the infusion process is started by turning the watertight container assembly upside down and the infusion process is stopped by turning the watertight container assembly upside down again.

Preferably the liquid is present in one container body and the infusion material is present in the other container body after step d.

Figures

The invention is illustrated by the embodiments in Figures 1 to 7. It is noted that these embodiments are intended to clarify the invention and are not intended to limit the invention to these embodiments per se.

Figure 1 shows a container assembly according to the invention.

Figure 2 shows a container assembly according to the invention in the closed configuration.

Figure 3 shows a connector means according to the invention comprising a venting means.

Figure 4 shows a connector means according to the invention comprising a separate and detachable holder.

Figure 5 shows a connector means according to the invention comprising a separate and detachable holder further comprising a venting means.

Figure 6 shows a connector means with preferred locking mechanisms being a thread and a clip, wherein the clip is in the open position.

Figure 7 shows a connector means with preferred locking mechanisms being a thread and a clip, wherein the clip is in the closed position.

Claims

1. Container assembly (1) for preparing a beverage comprising:
   a. a first container body (2) having a floor panel (2a), a side wall (2b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (2c) opposite of the floor panel;
   b. a second container body (3) having a floor panel (3a), a side wall (3b) rising from the floor panel and an open end (3c) opposite of the floor panel; and
   c. a connector means (4) comprising a liquid permeable wall section (5);
   characterized in that the side walls at the open end of the first and the second container body being engageable with the connector means thereby forming a watertight container assembly (1b) having an inner space wherein at least part of the liquid permeable wall section is positioned between the first and second container body thereby separating the inner space of the container assembly in two distinct spaces (6a, 6b), further characterized in that the connector means (4) comprises a venting means (7).

2. Container assembly according to claim 1 characterized in that the venting means is a pressure relief valve.

3. Container assembly according to claim 1 or 2 characterized in that the connector means (4) comprises a separate and detachable holder (8), said holder comprising the liquid permeable wall section (5) and a rim (9) enclosing the liquid permeable wall section all round at the outer edges of the liquid permeable wall.

4. Container assembly according to claim 3 characterized in that the holder comprises a gas permeable section (10a) that overlies an opening (10b) in the connector means when the holder is combined with the connector means while maintaining a watertight container assembly.

5. Container assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 4 characterized in that the container assembly comprises a first and a second cup (2,3), each cup having a side wall provided with an external surface configuration (2b, 3b), an end closure wall (2a, 3a) and an open end (2c, 3c).

6. Method for preparing a beverage comprising the steps of:
   a. providing a container assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 5;
   b. providing a liquid;
   c. providing infusion material;
   d. followed by connecting the first and second container body to the connector means to form a watertight container assembly comprising the liquid and the infusion material;

   wherein the infusion process is started by turning the watertight container assembly upside down and the infusion process is stopped by turning the watertight container assembly upside down again.

7. Method according to claim 6 wherein the liquid is present in one container body and the infusion material is present in the other container body after step d.

FIG 1

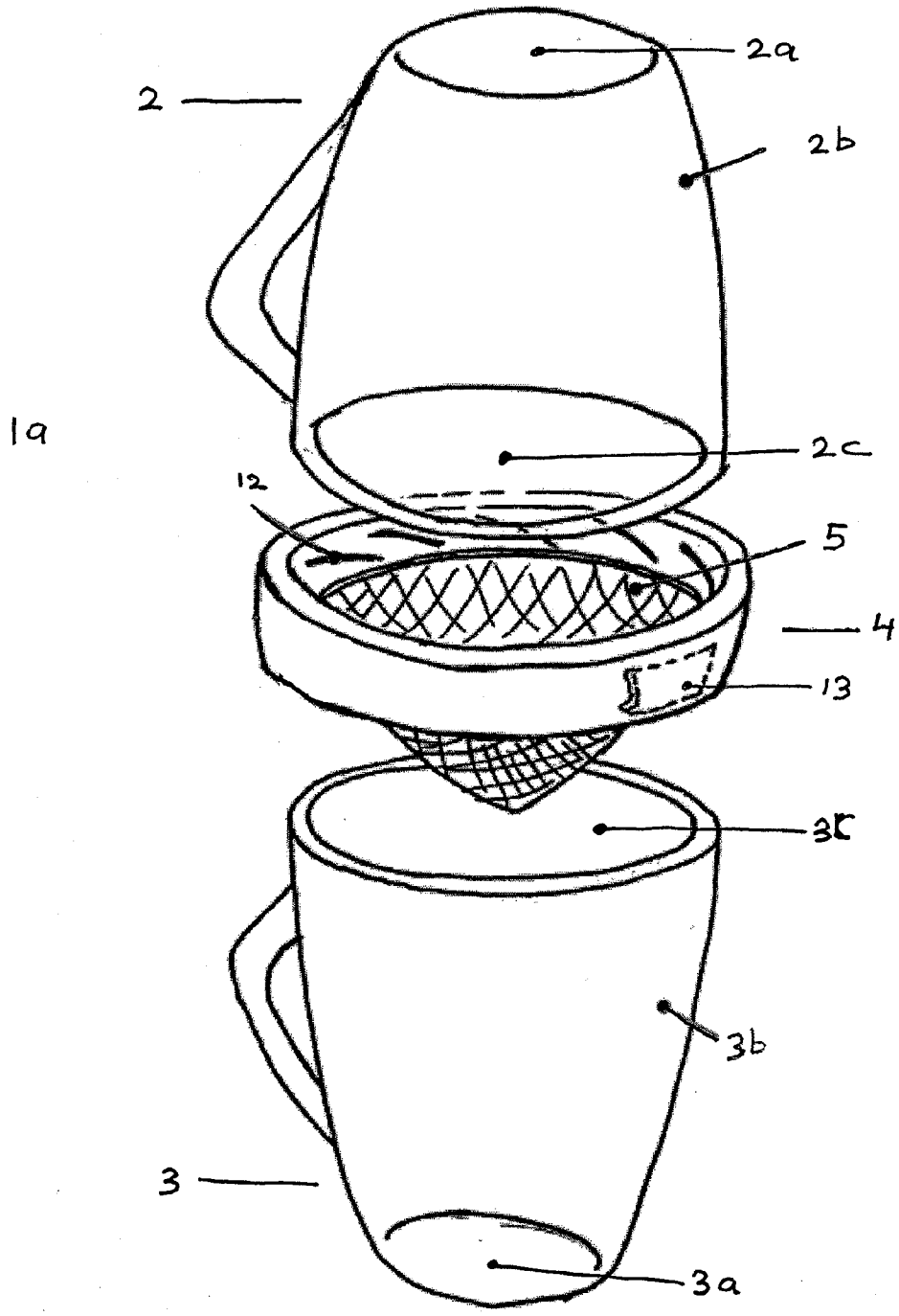


FIG 2

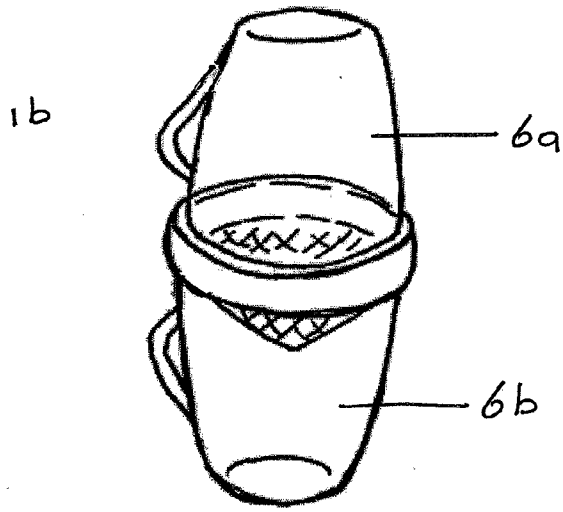


FIG 3

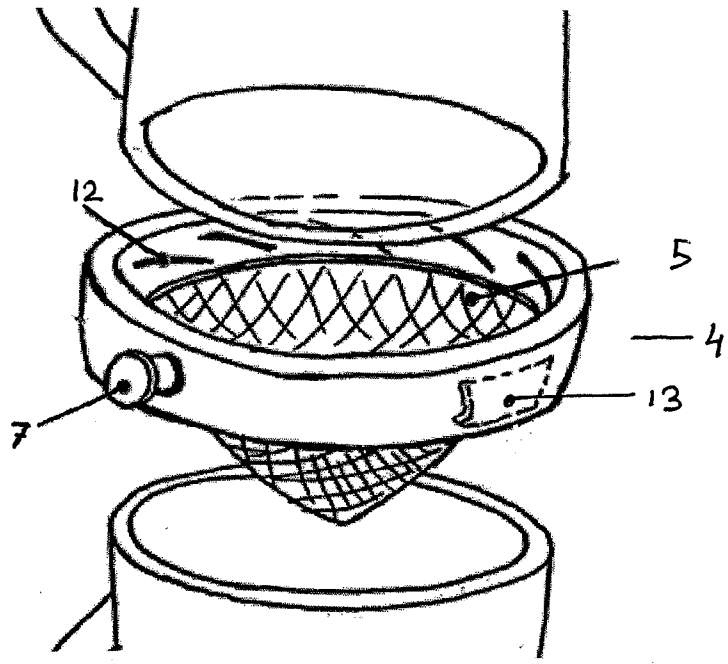


FIG 4

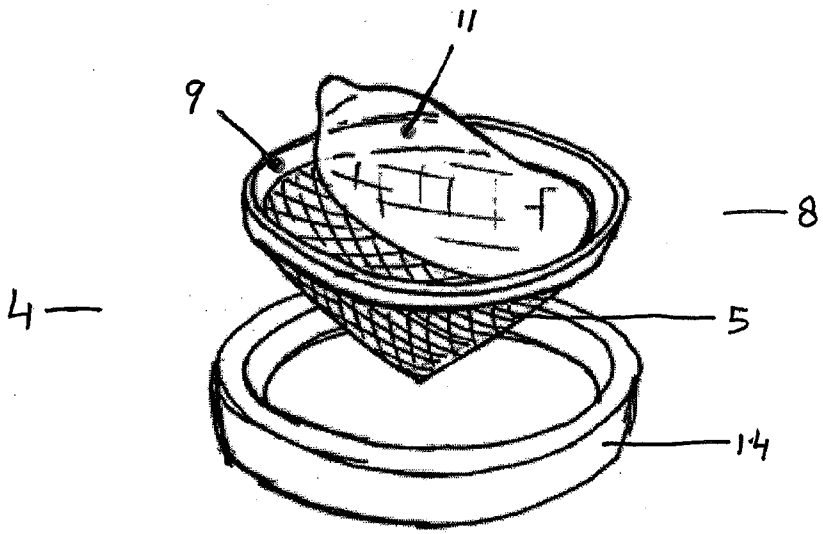


FIG 5

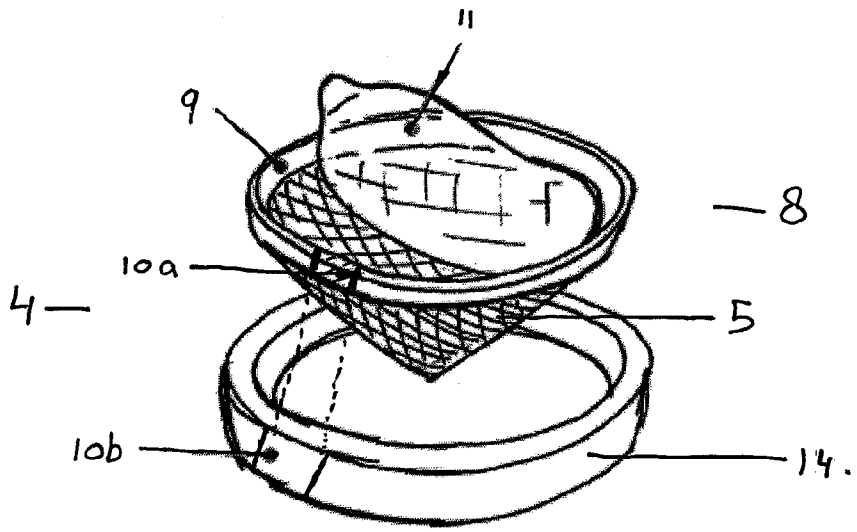


FIG 6

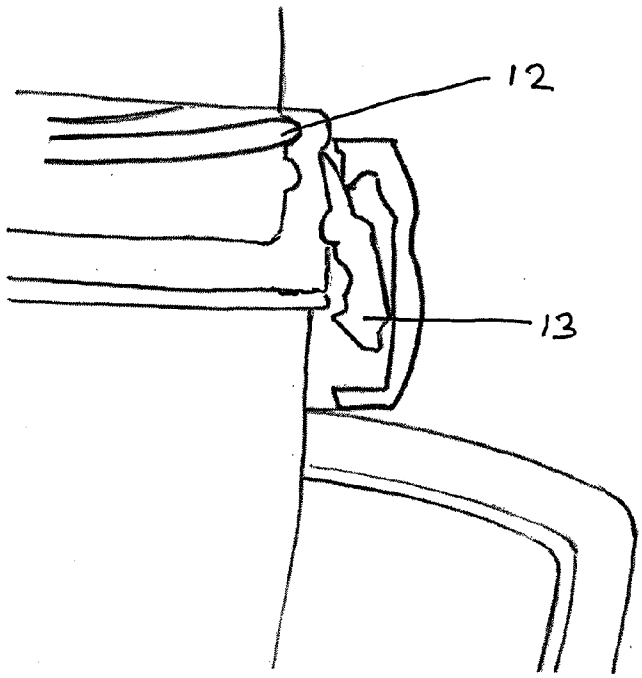
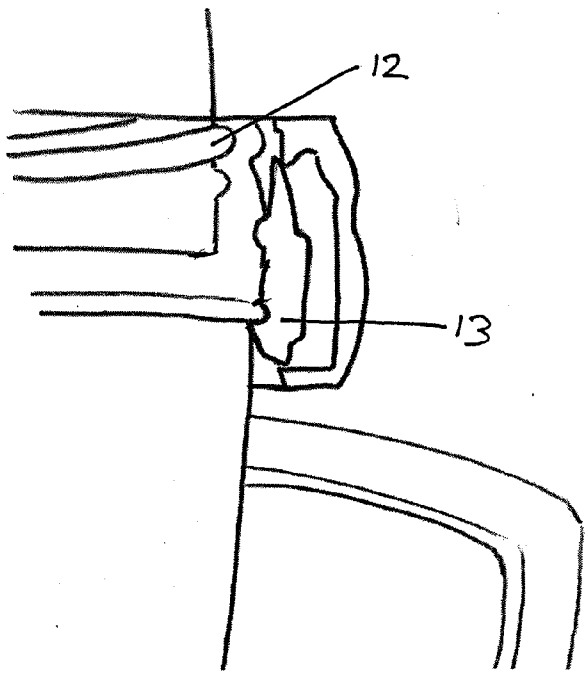


FIG 7



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2009/063546

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. A47J31/16 A47J31/18 A47J31/02

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
A47J

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

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 1 825 174 A (BLOOM SETH W) 29 September 1931 (1931-09-29) page 1, line 41 - page 2, line 62; figures 1,2	1-5
X	GB 759 903 A (SAM KASAKOFF) 24 October 1956 (1956-10-24)	1,3,5
Y	figures 1-5	6-7
Y	US 2008/173183 A1 (CHEN CHIA-SHENG [TW]) 24 July 2008 (2008-07-24) page 1, paragraph 11 - page 2, paragraph 12; figures 1,6-9	6-7
A	FR 1 279 323 A (SOC D CONST D ARTICLES EN ALUM; REVOL PERE & FILS ETS) 22 December 1961 (1961-12-22) the whole document	1,5-7

-/--

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

[X] See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
24 February 2010	04/03/2010

Name and mailing address of the ISA/	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Hinrichs, Wiebke

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2009/063546

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4 143 590 A (KASAKOFF SAM) 13 March 1979 (1979-03-13) the whole document -----	1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No
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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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