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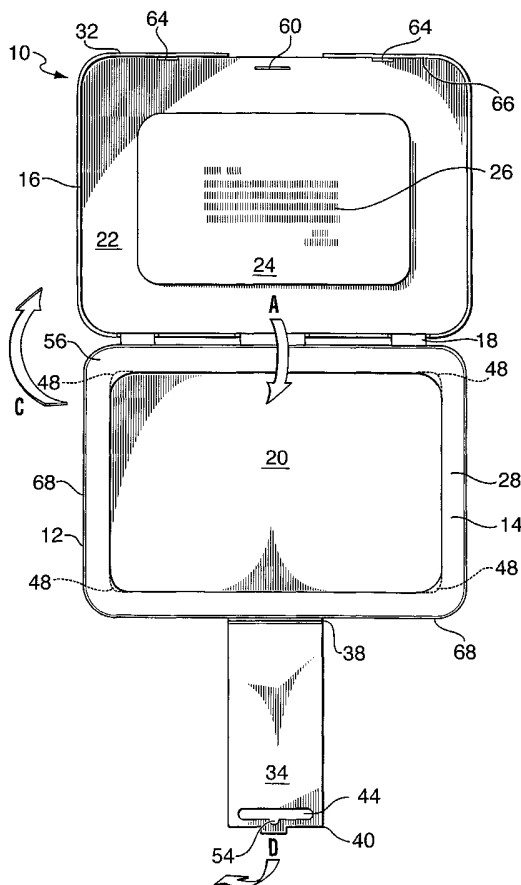
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(54) Title: DOCUMENT CONTAINER



(57) Abstract: There is provided a container useful to hold a document such as a photograph for transport such as mailing. The container comprises a first panel, a second panel and securing means. The first panel has a peripheral edge and includes a document securing face. The second panel is hinged to the peripheral edge of said first panel. The first and second panels are moveable between an open position wherein the document securing face is spaced apart from said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would be visible, and a closed position wherein the document securing face is substantially covered by said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would not be visible and would be secured between said panels. The securing means is adapted to releasably secure said first and second panels in the closed position. The document container may further include a peripheral lip secured to one of the panels and adapted to substantially surround and frictionally engage an edge of the other panel in the closed position.

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION**DOCUMENT CONTAINER**

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to document containers, and particularly document containers useful for document display and transport.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A variety of document containers and display apparatus are known.
10 Variations on document display apparatus useful for protecting documents during transport, such as mailing, are also known.

United States Patent 5,678,756 of Sugiura discloses an envelope which can be used as a photo stand as well as a mailing container. However, this envelope may not be entirely suitable for use as a frame because a smooth finished
15 appearance is not provided. In particular, the envelope display portion may permit movement of the photograph relative to the envelope, allowing gaping of the "frame" relative to the photograph. Similarly, the envelope provides only limited protection to the document during transport because it is flexible, which may allow for damage to the document due to folding, as well as allowing the entry of unwanted foreign
20 materials which may deface the document itself.

United States Patent 4,531,316 of Farnum teaches a frame and protector for photographs and similar items which is also useful as an envelope for mailing. This apparatus may suffer some of the frailties discussed with respect to the patent of Sugiura, above. In particular, there is a risk that the document may be
25 damaged by folding, or the entry of undesired foreign materials during transport.

Two-panelled document display apparatus are also known. For example, United States Patent 4,326,349 of Daughtry teaches a greeting card

display device, one embodiment of which is a two-leaved folder-style display apparatus adapted to stand on end on a table or other surface and display two faces of a card or a similar document. However, this apparatus covers only a portion of the document and may be unsuitable for use in document transport where protection of
5 the document from foreign materials is desirable.

Thus, it is an object of the present invention to provide an improved document container.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In an embodiment of the invention there is provided a container comprising a first
10 panel, a second panel and securing means. The first panel has a peripheral edge and includes a document securing face. The second panel is hingedly secured to the peripheral edge of said first panel. The first and second panels are moveable between an open position wherein the document securing face is spaced apart from said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would be
15 visible, and a closed position wherein the document securing face is substantially covered by said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would not be visible and would be secured between said panels. The securing means is adapted to releasably secure said first and second panels in the closed position. In one embodiment of the invention, the document container further includes
20 a peripheral lip secured to one of the panels and adapted to substantially surround and frictionally engage an edge of the other panel in the closed position.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon referring to the drawings in
25 which:

FIGURE 1 is a top plan view of an embodiment of the document container of the present invention in an open position.

FIGURE 2 is a bottom plan view of an embodiment of the document container of the present invention in an open position.

FIGURE 3 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the document container of the present invention in a folded position.

5 FIGURE 4 is a top plan view of an embodiment of the document container of the present invention in a closed position, wherein the closure has not yet been engaged.

FIGURE 5 is a bottom plan view of an embodiment of the document container of the present invention in a closed position with the closure engaged.

10 While the invention will be described in conjunction with the illustrated embodiments, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to such embodiments. On the contrary, it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications and equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

15 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description, similar features in the drawings have been given similar reference numerals.

Figure 1 depicts an embodiment of the document container 10 of the present invention. The document container 10 includes a first panel 12 (also referred to as a document folder) and a second panel 16 (also referred to as a cover panel) joined by one or more hinges 18.

The document container 10 depicted in Figure 1 is shown in the open position. The document container 10 may also be moved into a folded position (as depicted in Figure 3) and a closed position (as depicted in Figures 4 and 5).

25 The document container 10 also includes a securing means such as a closure which is depicted in Figures 1 through 5 as a strap 34 and strap restraint 36.

The first panel 12 includes a document panel 14. The document panel 14 includes a document securing face 20.

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The second panel 16 includes an inner face 22 which may include a note panel 24 bearing or adapted to bear a written message 26.

The portion of the first panel 12 immediately surrounding the document securing face 20 is preferably formed to create a frame region 28 suitable to provide an aesthetically pleasing frame around a picture or other document 30 (shown only in Figure 3) to be secured against the document securing face 20.

Either the document panel 14 or the second panel 16 may include a peripheral lip 32 secured to its outer edge. The peripheral lip 32 as shown in Figure 1 extends substantially upwardly from the edge of second panel 16. The peripheral lip 32 is dimensioned such that the other panel (as shown in Figure 1, the other panel is the first panel 12) can fit within the walls of the peripheral lip 32, such that the edge of the peripheral lip 32 is substantially flush with the back 52 (see in Figure 2) of the document panel in the closed position.

Figure 2 depicts a bottom plan view of the document container 10 shown in Figure 1. The outer surface 42 of the second panel 16 includes a depression 62. This depression 62 has a depth approximately equal to the thickness of the strap 34, thereby allowing the outer surface of the strap 34 and the outer surface 42 of the second panel 16 to be substantially flush when the strap 34 is engaged with the strap restraint 36. As seen in Figure 2, the first panel 12 has a back 52 including corner supports 52 and mounting slits 48 which slits 48 extend through the first panel 12 from the document securing face 20 to the back 52.

The peripheral lip 32 is preferably substantially rigid, but sufficiently flexible to allow the lip to snap over the edge of the other panel. The peripheral lip 32 may be adapted to reduce the entry of foreign material into the document container 10 when in the closed position. The peripheral lip may also provide considerable rigidity to the document container 10, allowing it to resist bending and resultant damage to the document 30. The peripheral lip will help contain additional documents while in transit.

The document container 10 is moved into the closed position by rotation of the panels together about the hinge 18; for example by rotation of the second panel 16 in the direction shown by Arrow A in Figure 1. In particular, the inner

face 22 of the second panel 16 may be rotated toward the document securing face 20 of the document panel 14 until the two faces are substantially abutting.

Figure 4 depicts the document container 10 in a closed position wherein the strap 34 has not yet been secured to the strap restraint 36. To engage the strap to the strap restraint, the strap 34 is rotated in the direction of Arrow B shown on Figure 4 into the position shown in Figure 5 wherein the strap 34 curves over and lies substantially flush against the outer surface 42 of the second panel 16. The strap 34 engages the strap restraint 36 by insertion of the strap restraint 36 through the corresponding hole 44 in the strap 34. The strap 34 may be even more securely retained in position in transit through the application of a sealing means such as an adhesive label 46 (shown in ghost on Figure 5) over a portion of the strap 34 and the outer surface 42 of the second panel 16, when the strap 34 is engaged with the strap restraint 36.

The adhesive label 46 may bear the address of the intended recipient of the document 30 and document container 10 or other information of interest. The adhesive label 46 may also be used to indicate if anyone has tampered with the document container 10 once it has been closed.

A document 30, such as a photograph, may be inserted and secured to the document securing face 20 through the insertion of the corners of the document 30 through document mounting slits 48 on the document securing face 20 of the document panel 14. The corners of the document 30 may be further secured through the use of corner supports 50 present on the back 52 of the document panel 14. The corner supports 50 (shown in Figure 2) reduce the mobility of the corners of the document 30 thereby reducing the likelihood of slippage.

The document container 10 may include a hanger 54 which may be used to hang the document container 10 prior to sale, for example on a store rack for display purposes, as well as by the recipient of the document.

The document container 10 may be moved from the closed position into an open position by rotation of the document securing face 20 of the document panel 14 away from the inner face 22 of the second panel 16. The document container 10 is moved from the open position of Figure 1 to the folded position of

Figure 3 by rotation of the panels about the hinge 18 so that the outer surface 42 of the second panel 16 moves toward the back 52 of the document panel 14. For example, the first panel 12 may be rotated in the direction of Arrow C in Figure 1. In particular, the back 52 of the document panel 14 is rotated about the hinge 18 toward
5 the outer surface 42 of the second panel 16.

The document container 10 is preferably secured in the open position of Figure 3 using a suitable brace. As shown in Figures 1 through 5, it is possible to use the strap 34 as a brace. To enable the strap 34 to function as a brace, it includes a strap catch 58 (shown in Figure 2) or similar device which is adapted to insert into
10 a catch hole 60 extending through the second panel 16. In order to secure the document container 10 in the open position of Figure 3, the panels are rotated about the hinge 18 to move the document container 10 into the folded position of Figure 3 and the strap 34 is rotated in the direction of Arrow D on Figure 1, such that the strap 34 moves closer to the back 52 of the document panel, sufficient to allow insertion of
15 the strap catch 58 into the catch hole 60.

It will be appreciated that a wide variety of braces are contemplated and fall within the scope of the invention. The use of the strap 34 as a brace is considered preferable, but is not necessary.

Similarly, the strap 34 and strap restraint 36 may be replaced by any
20 other suitable closure, such as an adhesive closure, a snap closure, or any similar device.

A first end 38 of the strap 34 as depicted in Figure 1 is secured to the front panel 12 and the second end 40 of the strap 34 is adapted to releasably engage the strap restraint 36. While a particular form of strap restraint 36 has been
25 shown in the figures, it will be appreciated that a wide variety of strap restraints are possible.

In some instances the use of an additional closure may be desired. Snaps 64 may be secured to the inner edge 66 of the peripheral lip 32. These snaps engage a portion of the other perimeter of the opposite panel. As shown in Figure 1,
30 the snap 64 on the peripheral lip 32 are located on the second panel 16 and therefore engage the perimeter 68 of the document panel 14.

In one embodiment of the invention the document container 10 is made from injection moulded plastic and may in some cases be a one-piece construction. However, any suitable material may be used. In selecting the material for the document panel 14, it is desirable to select a substantially rigid material so as to
5 reduce the likelihood of bending of the document 30 during transport. Similarly, it is preferable that the second panel 16 also be formed of rigid material; although if sufficient rigidity is provided by the first panel 12 and peripheral lip 32 (if present), a less rigid material may be used for the second panel 16. Both the document panel 14 and the second panel 16 should be formed from material which is resistant to
10 cutting and abrasion such as might be encountered during mailing or similar transport. The strap 34 and brace may also be formed from injection moulded plastic, or other suitable materials. The strap 34 must be flexible and sufficiently resilient to prevent inadvertent opening of the document container 10 during transport.

The hinges 18 may be made by any suitable method and material,
15 including conventional hinges such as small piano-type hinges of other loop-and-pin hinges, or the use of flexible members, such as injection moulded plastic joining the two panels.

In an embodiment of the invention the entire folder, as well as the closure and brace are formed in a single piece from injection moulded plastic.

20 A note panel 24, such as an adhesive label may be affixed to the inner face 22 of the second panel 16 at the time that the document 30 is inserted or at another time. In an embodiment of the invention a label is applied to the back 52 of the document panel 14. This label may include address or return address information, or may be applied to protect corners of the document 30 extending
25 through the document mounting slits 48.

Thus, it is apparent that there has been provided in accordance with the invention a DOCUMENT CONTAINER that fully satisfies the objects, aims and advantages set forth above. While the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications
30 and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing

description. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations as fall within the spirit and broad scope of the invention.

WHAT I CLAIM AS MY INVENTION:

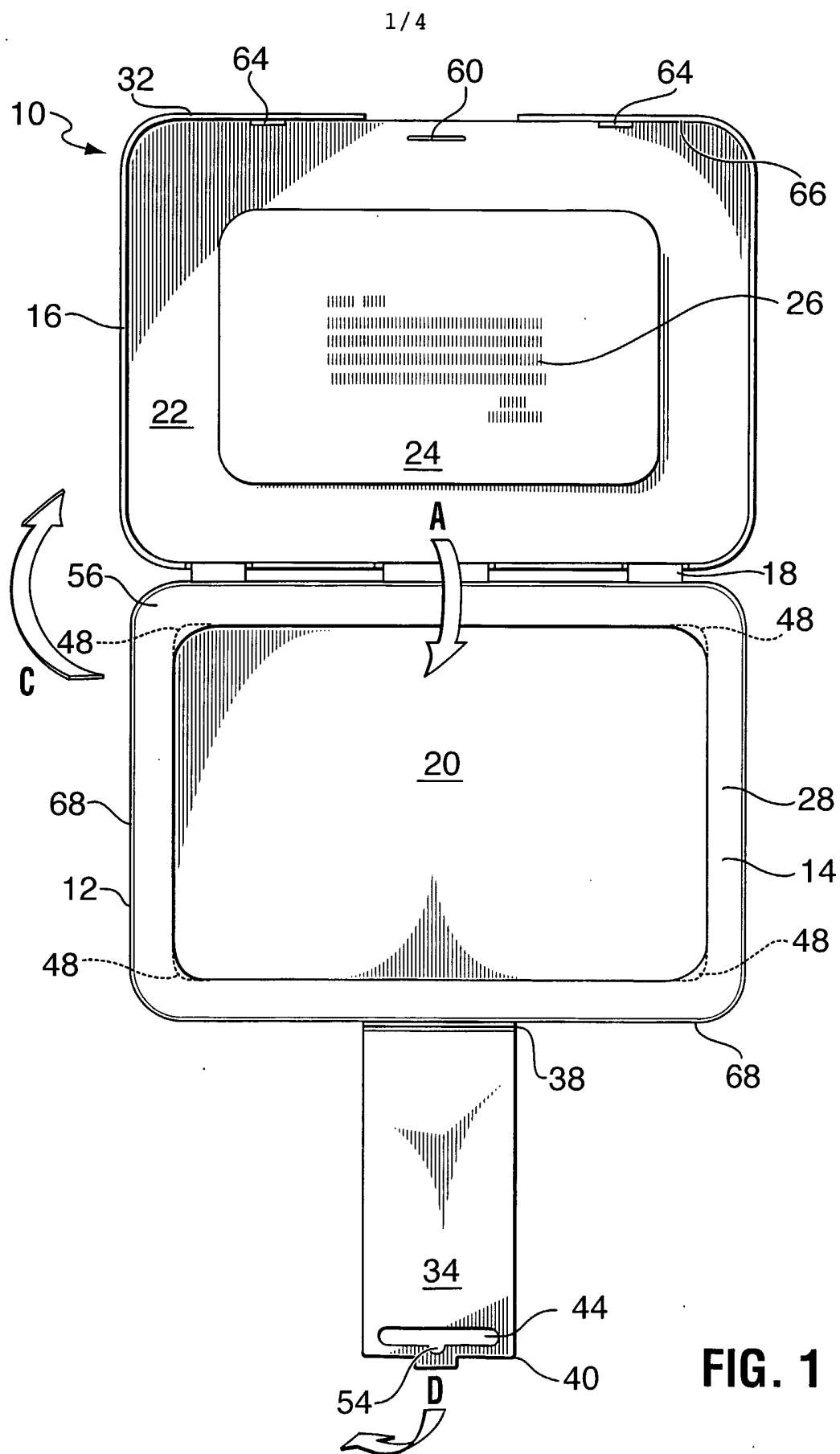
1. A container comprising:
 a first panel;
 said first panel having a peripheral edge and including a document
5 securing face;
 a second panel hingedly secured to the peripheral edge of said first
panel;
 said first and second panels being moveable between an open
position wherein said document securing face is spaced apart from said second
10 panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would be visible, and a
closed position wherein said document securing face is substantially covered by said
second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would not be visible
and would be secured between said panels; and
 securing means adapted to releasably secure said first and second
15 panels in the closed position.
2. The document container of claim 1 further including a peripheral lip
secured to one of said panels and adapted to substantially surround and frictionally
engage an edge of the other panel in the closed position.
3. The document container of claim 1 further including a brace having a
20 first end securable to said document panel and a second end securable to said
second panel and adapted to allow said panels to be maintained in the folded
position.
4. The document container of claim 1 wherein said closure includes a
strong flexible strap restraint fixedly secured to one said panel, and a strap having a
25 first end secured to the other said panel and a second end adapted to releaseably
engage said strap restraint so as to maintain said panels in the closed position.

- 10 -

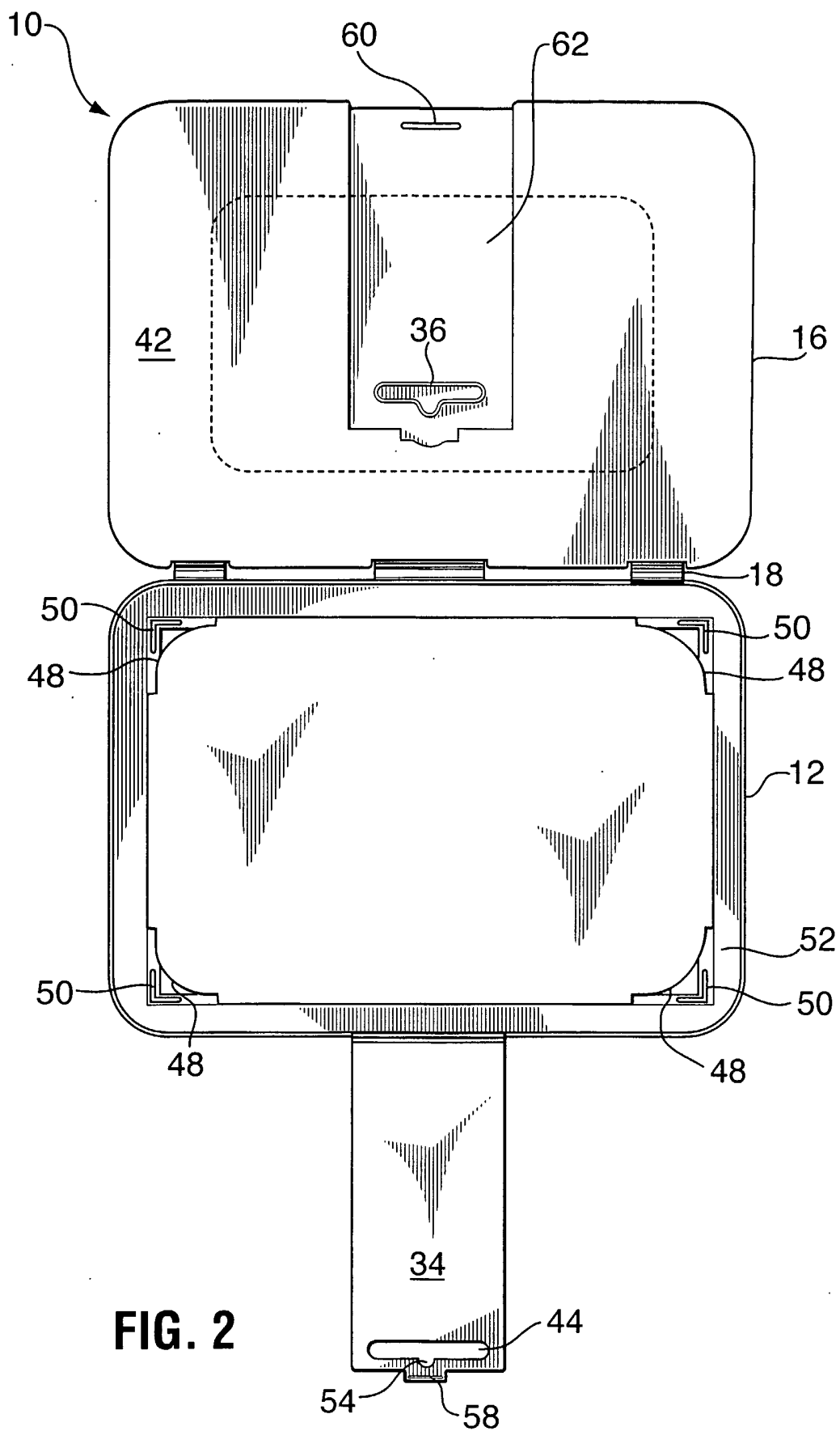
5. The document container of claim 3 wherein said strap has a length of between about one-third and five-thirds the width of said second panel;
6. The document container of claim 5 further including a strap catch fixedly secured to the same panel as the strap restraint and being adapted to releaseably engage said strap so as to maintain said panels in the open position.
7. The document container of claim 1 further including a hanger operatively secured to said first panel and adapted to permit said container to be hung in the open position.
- 10 8. The document container of claim 1 further including a hanger operatively secured to said first panel and adapted to permit said container to be hung in the closed position.
9. The document container of claim 1 further including document mounting slits adjacent to at least two opposed corners of said document securing face and adapted to receive document corners such that in operation a document may be secured by inserting the corners of the document in said slits.
- 15 10. The document container of claim 1 further including sealing means adapted to be adhesively secured to a portion of said closure in the closed position to resist unintentional opening.
- 20 11. The document container of claim 1 wherein said second panel includes:
 an inner face proximal to said document securing face in the closed position;
 said document container further including a message panel securable to said inner face.
- 25

12. The document container of claim 1 further including a frame region secured to the perimeter of said document securing face.
13. A container comprising:
a first panel;
5 said first panel having a peripheral edge and including a document securing face;
a second panel hingedly secured to the peripheral edge of said first panel;
said first and second panels being moveable between an open
10 position wherein said document securing face is spaced apart from said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would be visible, and a closed position wherein said document securing face is substantially covered by said second panel such that in operation a document secured thereto would not be visible and would be protected from abrasion;
15 securing means adapted to releasably secure said first and second panels in the closed position.
said securing means including a strong flexible strap restraint fixedly secured to one said panel, and a strap having a length of between about one-thirds and five-thirds the width of said second panel and having a first end secured to the
20 other said panel and a second end adapted to releasably engage said strap restraint so as to maintain said panels in the closed position;
said document container further including a strap catch fixedly secured to the same panel as the strap restraint;
said strap catch being adapted to releasably engage said strap so
25 as to maintain said panels in the open position;
a brace having a first end securable to said document panel and a second end securable to said second panel and adapted to allow said panels to be maintained in the open position;
such that in operation a document may be secured to the document
30 securing face and the first panel moved into the closed position and secured by said

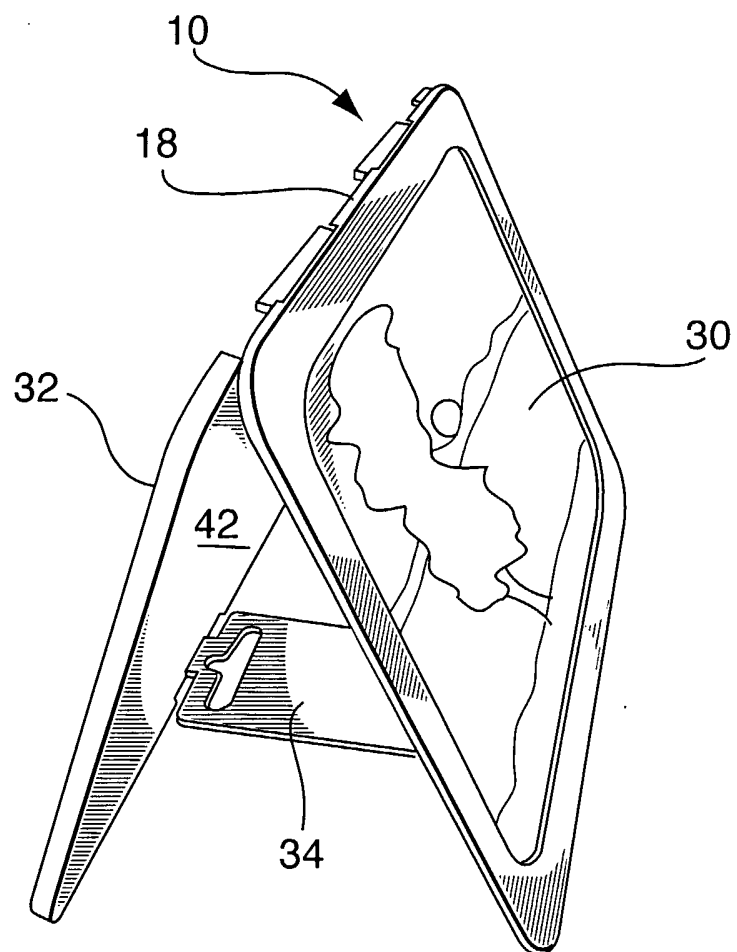
closure for safekeeping or transport, following which the closure may be released and the panels may be moved into the open position and secured using said brace to permit viewing of the document.



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**FIG. 3**

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