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SHINOZAKI et al.

(54) SMOKELESS FLAVOR INHALATOR

(71) Applicant: **JAPAN TOBACCO INC.**, Tokyo (JP)

(72) Inventors: **Yasuhiro SHINOZAKI**, Tokyo (JP); **Kazuhiko KATAYAMA**, Tokyo (JP); **Takeshi AKIYAMA**, Tokyo (JP); **Yoshiaki ISHIKAWA**, Tokyo (JP); **Manabu YAMADA**, Tokyo (JP)

(73) Assignee: **JAPAN TOBACCO INC.**, Tokyo (JP)

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USPC **131/329**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A smokeless flavor inhalator includes a tobacco material as a flavor generator, and a heater for heating the tobacco material to allow flavor components to be released from the tobacco material while preventing smoke from being generated from the tobacco material. The heater has a carbon heat source and a cooling element. The carbon heat source and the cooling element cooperatively keep the heating temperature of the tobacco material at a temperature of 50 to 200° C.

CARBON COMBUSTION + HIGH-TEMP. GAS HEATING + COOLING

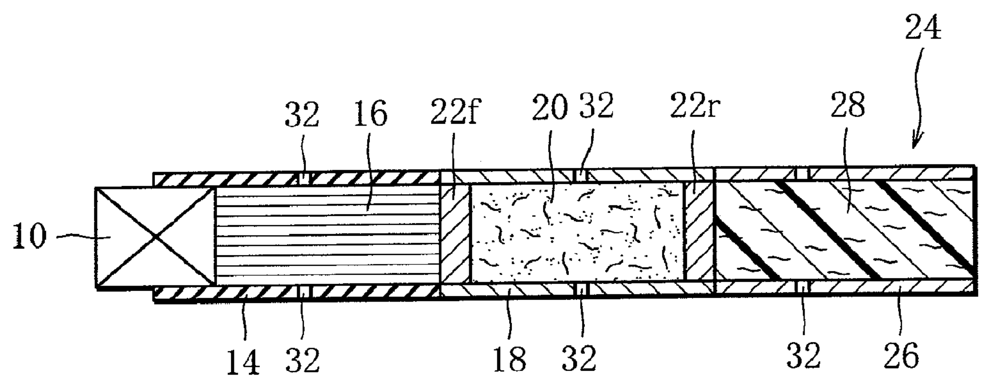


FIG. 1

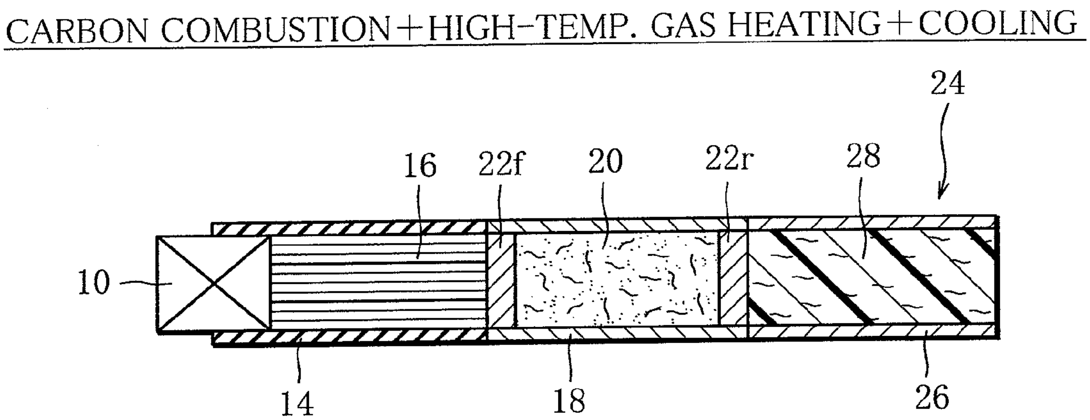

CARBON COMBUSTION+HIGH-TEMP. GAS HEATING+COOLING
24
16
22f
20
22r
28
10
14
18
26

FIG. 2

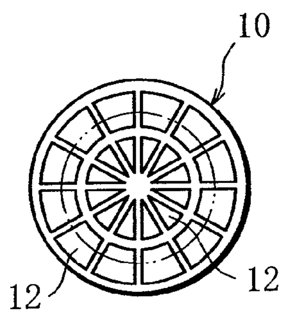

10
12
12

FIG. 3

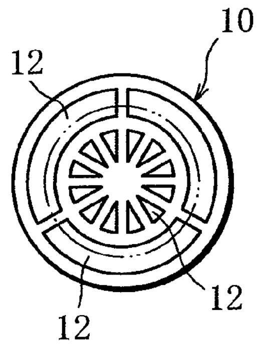


FIG. 4

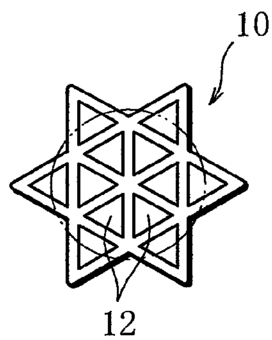


FIG. 5

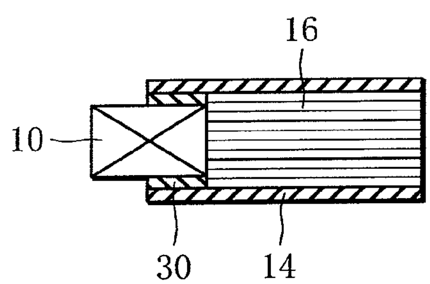


FIG. 6

CARBON COMBUSTION + HIGH-TEMP. GAS HEATING + COOLING

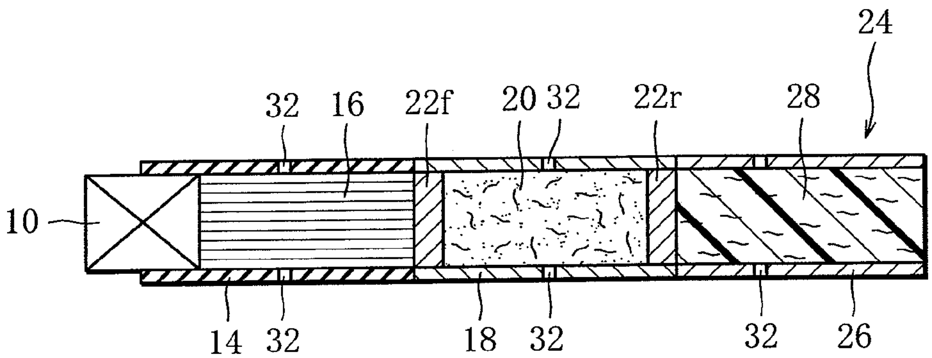


FIG. 7

CARBON COMBUSTION + HIGH-TEMP. GAS/THERMAL CONDUCTION HEATING + COOLING

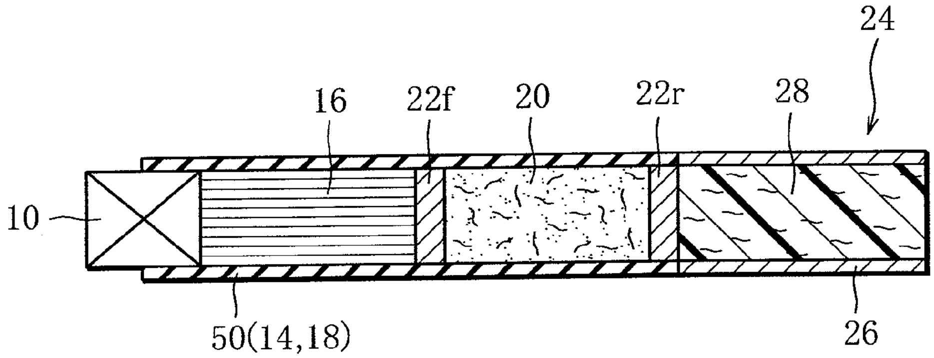


FIG. 8

CARBON COMBUSTION＋THERMAL CONDUCTION HEATING

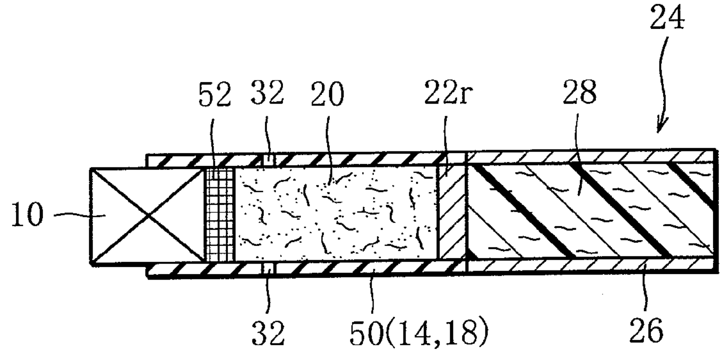


FIG. 9

CARBON COMBUSTION＋THERMAL CONDUCTION HEATING

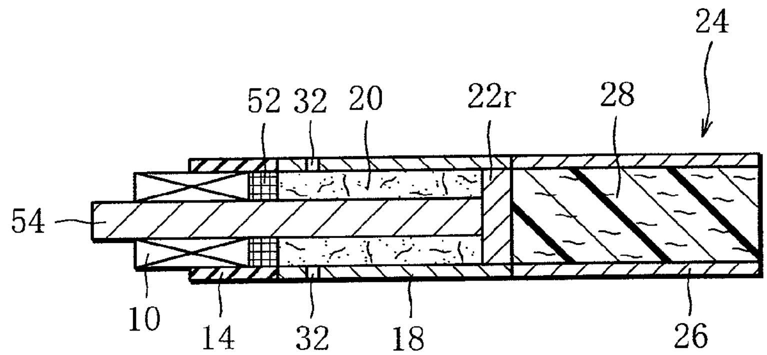


FIG. 10

CARBON COMBUSTION＋THERMAL CONDUCTION HEATING

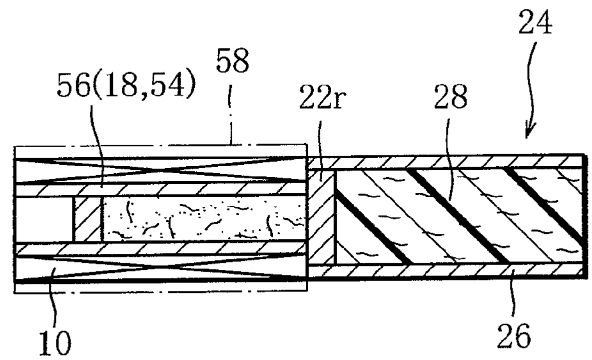


FIG. 11

CARBON COMBUSTION＋AIR HEATING

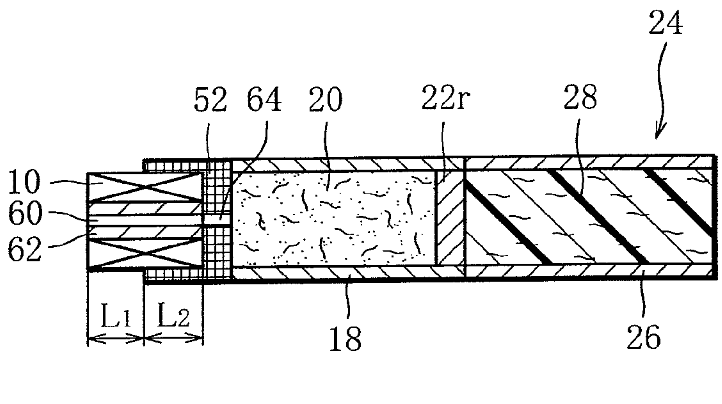


FIG. 12

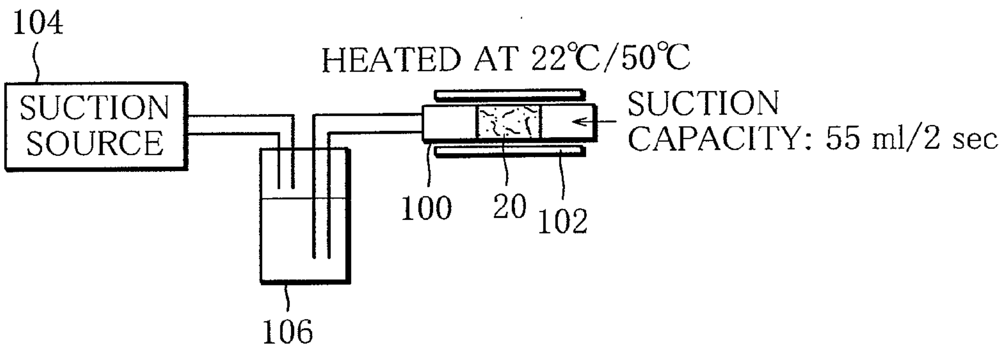

104
SUCTION SOURCE
HEATED AT 22℃/50℃
SUCTION CAPACITY: 55 ml/2 sec
100
20
102
106

FIG. 13

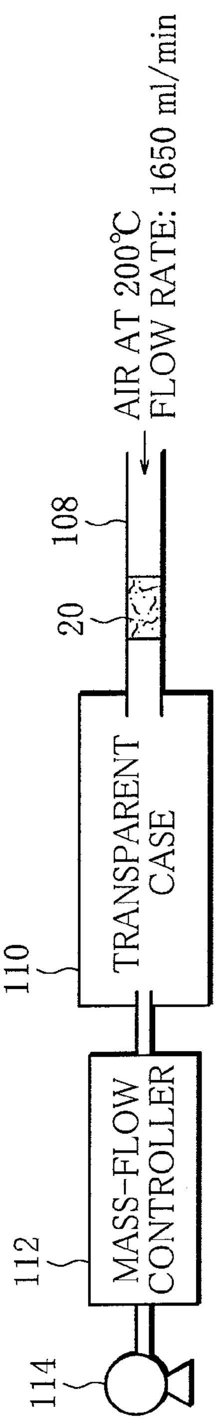

AIR AT 200°C
FLOW RATE: 1650 ml/min
108
20
TRANSPARENT CASE
110
MASS-FLOW CONTROLLER
112
114

FIG. 14

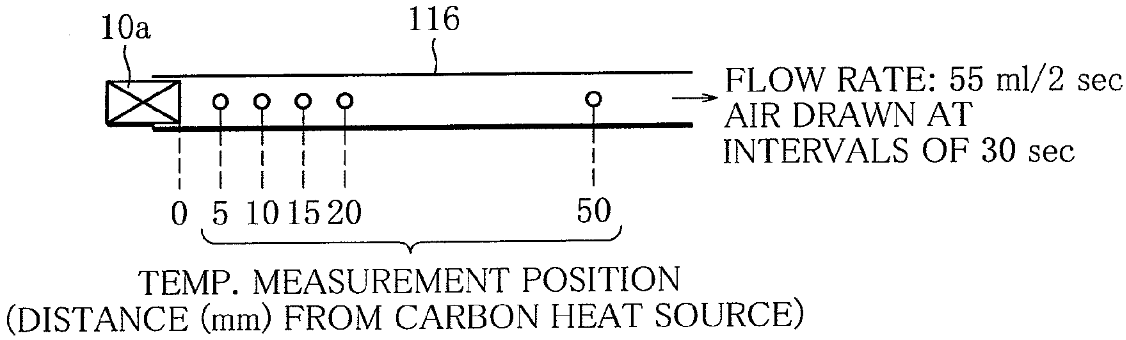


FIG. 15

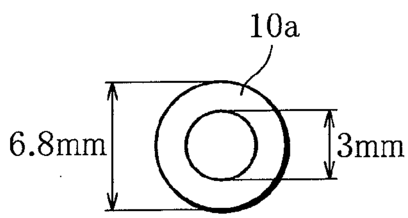


FIG. 16

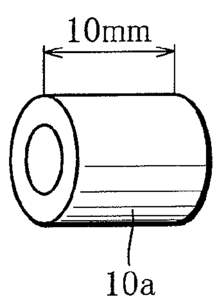


FIG. 17

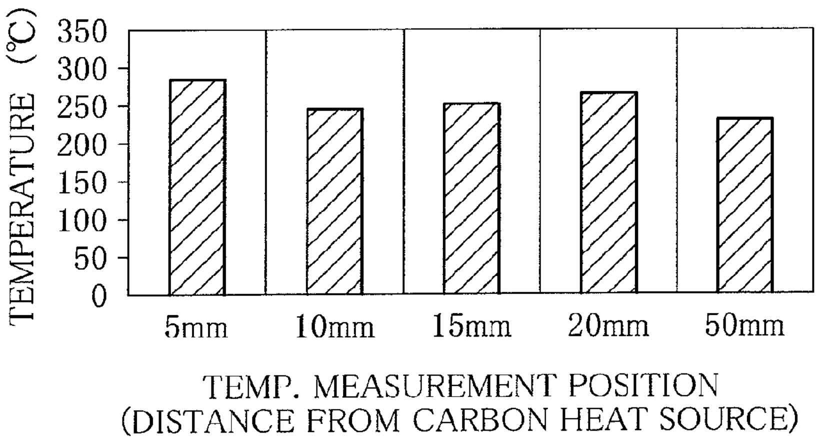

TEMPERATURE (℃)
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
5mm
10mm
15mm
20mm
50mm
TEMP. MEASUREMENT POSITION
(DISTANCE FROM CARBON HEAT SOURCE)

FIG. 18

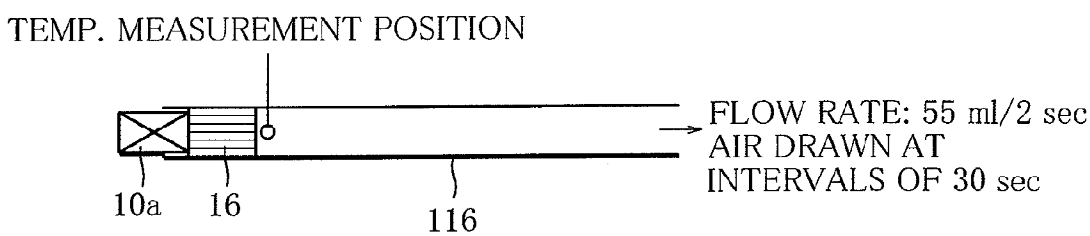

TEMP. MEASUREMENT POSITION
FLOW RATE: 55 ml/2 sec
AIR DRAWN AT
INTERVALS OF 30 sec
10a
16
116

FIG. 19

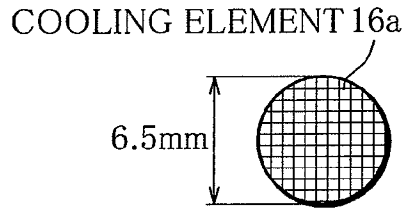


FIG. 20

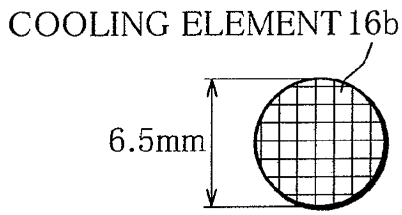


FIG. 21

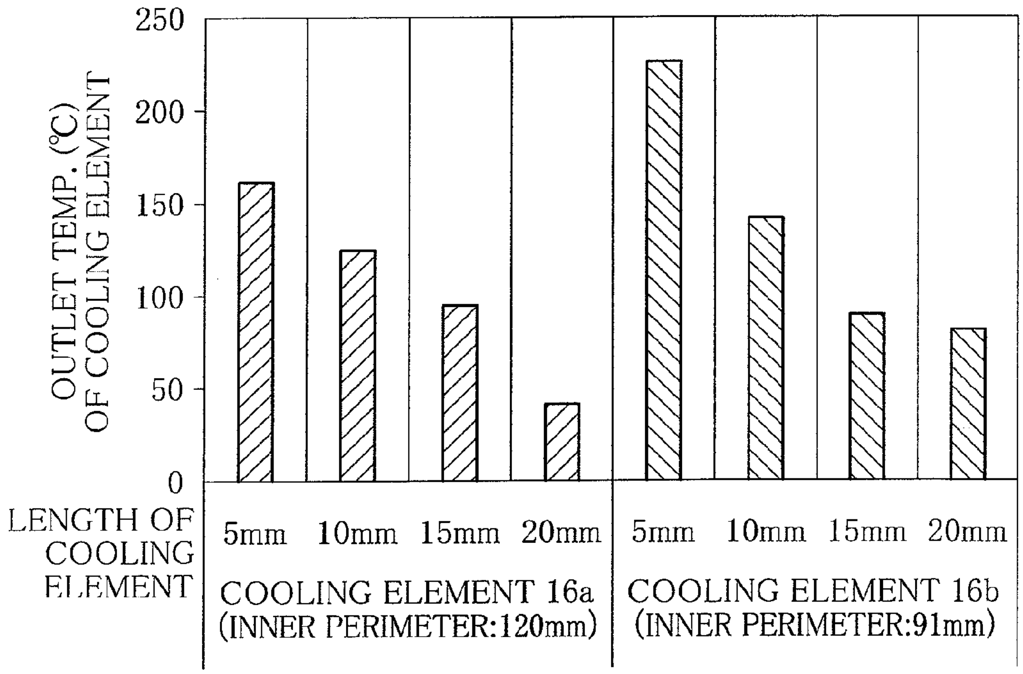
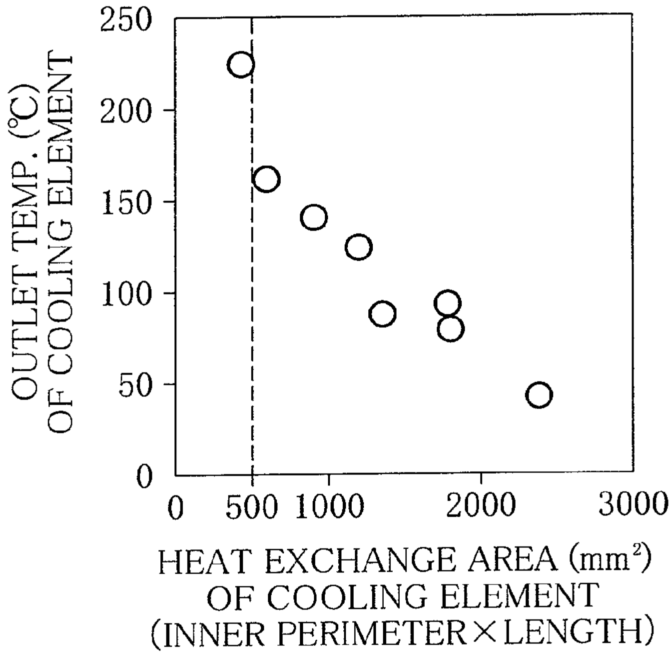

250
200
150
100
50
0
OUTLET TEMP. (℃)
OF COOLING ELEMENT
LENGTH OF
COOLING
ELEMENT
5mm
10mm
15mm
20mm
5mm
10mm
15mm
20mm
COOLING ELEMENT 16a
(INNER PERIMETER:120mm)
COOLING ELEMENT 16b
(INNER PERIMETER:91mm)

FIG. 22


250
200
150
100
50
0
OUTLET TEMP. (°C)
OF COOLING ELEMENT
0
500
1000
2000
3000
HEAT EXCHANGE AREA (mm²)
OF COOLING ELEMENT
(INNER PERIMETER×LENGTH)

SMOKELESS FLAVOR INHALATOR

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to smokeless flavor inhalators capable of releasing flavor without generating aerosol to allow users to inhale and enjoy the released flavor.

BACKGROUND ART

[0002] Smoking articles such as cigarettes and cigars are typical flavor generation products using, as a medium, the smoke (aerosol) produced by the combustion of tobacco leaves to allow users to enjoy the flavor of tobacco through the senses of taste and smell.

[0003] Meanwhile, in recent years, there have been known a variety of substitutes for the smoking articles that allow the user to enjoy the flavor of tobacco. The substitutes for the smoking articles can be roughly classified into two types, non-heating type and heating type. In either type, tobacco leaves are not burned, and thus it is possible to prevent the sidestream smoke or smell of the burned tobacco leaves from affecting the people around the user.

[0004] For example, the non-heating type smoking article substitute disclosed in Patent Document 1 identified below includes a holder provided with an air inlet opening and a mouthpiece, and an air permeable vessel accommodated in the holder. The air permeable vessel is filled with a tobacco material impregnated with the flavor components of tobacco.

[0005] With the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 1, the user has only to inhale, through the mouthpiece, the air that has passed through the tobacco material, without lighting the tobacco material, to enjoy the flavor of tobacco contained in the air.

[0006] The heating-type substitutes for the smoking articles, on the other hand, can be classified in more detail according to the type of heat source and the method of transferring heat from the heat source to the tobacco material or the flavor generator.

[0007] Specifically, the smoking article substitutes disclosed in Patent Documents 2 to 6 use a carbon heat source. The carbon heat source heats air by utilizing the heat of combustion thereof, to produce a high-temperature gas flow for heating the tobacco material or the flavor generator. In the heating-type smoking article substitutes, the flavor components of tobacco are vaporized and released invariably by heating the tobacco material or the flavor generator.

[0008] The smoking article substitutes disclosed in Patent Documents 7 and 8 also use a carbon heat source. In these substitutes, heat generated by the combustion of the carbon heat source is transferred to the tobacco material or the flavor generator to heat same.

[0009] The smoking article substitutes disclosed in Patent Documents 9 to 13 use a liquid or gas fuel as the heat source.

[0010] Specifically, in the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 9, a liquid fuel is burned with the aid of a catalyst, and the tobacco material or the flavor generator is heated by a high-temperature gas flow created by the combustion heat of the liquid fuel.

[0011] The smoking article substitute of Patent Document 10 is equipped with a micro gas burner as an attachment, which is used to heat a cigarette.

[0012] In the smoking article substitutes of Patent Documents 10 to 12, butane gas is burned with the aid of a catalyst, and heat generated by the combustion of the gas is transferred to the tobacco material or the flavor generator to heat same.

[0013] The smoking article substitute of Patent Document 13 is provided with a heat sink, which stores heat therein as it is heated by the flame of a gas lighter (external heat source). The heat stored in the heat sink is transferred through a heat pipe to a volatile component (flavor generator) to heat same.

[0014] The smoking article substitutes disclosed in Patent Documents 14 to 17 are provided with a heat source utilizing the heat of chemical reaction. Specifically, in the smoking article substitutes of Patent Documents 14 and 15, the heat source generates heat by utilizing an exothermic reaction between two chemicals (e.g., quicklime and water), to heat the tobacco material or the flavor generator. In the smoking article substitutes of Patent Documents 16 and 17, the heat source generates heat by utilizing the heat of oxidation reaction of metal, to heat the tobacco material or the flavor generator.

[0015] The smoking article substitutes disclosed in Patent Documents 18 to 21 are all provided with a heat source utilizing electrical energy. Namely, the heat source converts electrical energy to heat energy, which is used to heat the tobacco material or the flavor generator.

[0016] With regard to the smoking article substitute disclosed in Patent Document 22, additives to be added to the tobacco material and heating conditions for heating the additives are defined with a view to heightening the flavor component releasing effect.

PRIOR ART LITERATURE

[0017] Patent Document 1: JP H02-2331 A1
[0018] Patent Document 2: JP S63-35468 A1
[0019] Patent Document 3: JP H06-46818 A1
[0020] Patent Document 4: JP H03-45658 B1
[0021] Patent Document 5: JP 3012253 B1
[0022] Patent Document 6: JP H02-84164 A1
[0023] Patent Document 7: JP 3013914 B1
[0024] Patent Document 8: WO 2009/22232
[0025] Patent Document 9: WO 2008/113420
[0026] Patent Document 10: JP 2006-504065 A1
[0027] Patent Document 11: WO 2007/12007
[0028] Patent Document 12: WO 2009/79641
[0029] Patent Document 13: JP 2008-35742 A1
[0030] Patent Document 14: U.S. Pat. No. 4,892,109 B1
[0031] Patent Document 15: JP H02-190171 A1
[0032] Patent Document 16: JP H06-114105 A1
[0033] Patent Document 17: WO 2009/92862
[0034] Patent Document 18: U.S. Pat. No. 5,144,962 B1
[0035] Patent Document 19: U.S. Pat. No. 5,060,671 B1
[0036] Patent Document 20: WO 2004/80216
[0037] Patent Document 21: JP 2006-525798 A1
[0038] Patent Document 22: JP S62-501050 A1

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

Problems to be Solved by the Invention

[0039] In the case of the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 1, no smoke is produced from the tobacco material, but the amount of the flavor components released from the tobacco material is small, so that the user will not be completely satisfied with the flavor derived from the tobacco material.

[0040] In this connection, in the smoking article substitutes of Patent Documents 2 to 21, the tobacco material or the flavor generator is heated, thus allowing a large amount of flavor components to be released from the tobacco material or the flavor generator, compared with the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 1. It is therefore thought that the user will be able to enjoy the flavor to an extent equivalent to that to which the user senses when smoking an ordinary filter cigarette. Since the heating of the tobacco material or the flavor generator is accompanied by the generation of aerosol, however, the smoking article substitutes of Patent Documents 2 to 21 are not perfectly smokeless.

[0041] On the other hand, the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 22 is smokeless and at the same time is capable of releasing an increased amount of flavor components. In the case of the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 22, however, it is necessary that a large amount of water should be contained in the tobacco material. Specifically, the water content needs to be 0.25 to 7 g, preferably, 1 to 5 g per gram of the tobacco material.

[0042] In the case of ordinary filter cigarettes, the water content per gram of the tobacco material is 0.1 to 0.15 g, and even in snuff having a relatively high water content such as snus, the upper-limit water content per gram of the tobacco material is 0.5 g or thereabout from the standpoint of preservative quality. In view of this, the smoking article substitute of Patent Document 22 is not suitable for commercial realization from the standpoint of the preservative quality of the tobacco material.

[0043] Aside from the preservative quality, the water content of the tobacco material decreases due to the heating of the tobacco material. Thus, as the user repeatedly inhales, the amount of the flavor components released from the tobacco material varies, which brings a feeling of strangeness to the user.

[0044] An object of the present invention is to provide a smokeless flavor inhalator permitting compatibility between smokelessness and strengthening of flavor and also capable of stabilizing the amount of flavor components released each time the user inhales through the flavor inhalator.

Means for Solving the Problems

[0045] To achieve the above object, the present invention provides a smokeless flavor inhalator comprising: a casing having a mouthpiece, the casing being configured to generate a flow of air guided therethrough toward the mouthpiece when a user inhales through the mouthpiece; a flavor generator arranged inside the casing and capable of releasing a flavor component into the air flow; and a heater for keeping the flavor generator heated at a heating temperature of 50 to 200° C., to allow the flavor component to be released while preventing generation of aerosol from the flavor generator, wherein the heater includes a carbon heat source having air permeability and attached to a distal end of the casing for heating the air, and an incombustible cooling element having air permeability and arranged inside the casing and between the carbon heat source and the flavor generator for cooling the air heated by the carbon heat source.

[0046] In the above smokeless flavor inhalator, the heater keeps the heating temperature of the flavor generator at a temperature of 50 to 200° C. Accordingly, when the user inhales through the flavor inhalator, the flavor generator releases the flavor component into the air flow guided toward the mouthpiece, without generating any aerosol (smoke). The flavor inhalator is therefore not only smokeless but is capable of delivering the flavor component into the user's mouth.

[0047] Preferably, the cooling element has a plurality of through holes formed therethrough, and the through holes provide the cooling element with a heat exchange area of 500 mm^2 or more. The presence of the cooling element serves to shorten the distance required between the carbon heat source and the flavor generator, making it possible to reduce the length of the flavor inhalator.

[0048] More detailed and preferred constructions of the present invention will become apparent from the following description of the embodiments and modifications taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Advantageous Effects of the Invention

[0049] The smokeless flavor inhalator of the present invention permits flavor components to be effectively released from the flavor generator without an aerosol being generated from the flavor generator, whereby the flavor components of the flavor generator can be adequately delivered into the user's mouth.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0050] FIG. **1** is a longitudinal sectional view of a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a first embodiment.

[0051] FIG. **2** exemplifies an end face of a carbon heat source.

[0052] FIG. **3** exemplifies another end face of the carbon heat source.

[0053] FIG. **4** exemplifies still another end face of the carbon heat source.

[0054] FIG. **5** is a longitudinal sectional view of a heat source holder according to modification 1(1) of the first embodiment.

[0055] FIG. **6** is a longitudinal sectional view of a flavor inhalator according to modification 1(2) of the first embodiment.

[0056] FIG. **7** is a longitudinal sectional view of a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a second embodiment.

[0057] FIG. **8** is a longitudinal sectional view of a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a third embodiment.

[0058] FIG. **9** is a longitudinal sectional view of a flavor inhalator according to modification 3(1) of the third embodiment.

[0059] FIG. **10** is a longitudinal sectional view of a flavor inhalator according to modification 3(2) of the third embodiment.

[0060] FIG. **11** is a longitudinal sectional view of a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a fourth embodiment.

[0061] FIG. **12** schematically illustrates a first testing device.

[0062] FIG. **13** schematically illustrates a second testing device.

[0063] FIG. **14** schematically illustrates a third testing device.

[0064] FIG. **15** is an end view of a carbon heat source used in the third testing device.

[0065] FIG. **16** is a perspective view of the carbon heat source of FIG. **15**.

[0066] FIG. **17** is a graph showing test results obtained using the third testing device.

[0067] FIG. **18** schematically illustrates a fourth testing device.

[0068] FIG. 19 is an end view of a cooling element used in the fourth testing device.

[0069] FIG. 20 is an end view of another cooling element used in the fourth testing device.

[0070] FIG. 21 is a graph showing test results obtained using the fourth testing device.

[0071] FIG. 22 is a graph showing the relations between heat exchange areas and outlet temperatures of the cooling element.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0072] A smokeless flavor inhalator according to a first embodiment, illustrated in FIG. 1, is categorized as Carbon Combustion+High-temperature Gas Heating+Cooling type and is shaped like a rod as a whole.

[0073] Carbon Heat Source:

[0074] The inhalator of FIG. 1 has a carbon heat source 10 at a distal end thereof. In the following, the carbon heat source 10 will be described in detail.

[0075] The carbon heat source 10 is cylindrical in shape and is obtained by molding a mixture of high-purity carbon particles, an incombustible additive, an organic or inorganic binder, and water into shape. Specifically, the carbon heat source 10 has a carbon ratio of 10 to 99 weight % or a carbon content of 1 to 120 mg/mm.

[0076] The high-purity carbon particles are obtained, for example, by heating carbon at a high temperature of 750° C. or more for 5 minutes or more in an inert gas atmosphere. This heating process removes volatile components, which are impurities contained in carbon particles. As a result, odor emitted from the carbon particles is lessened.

[0077] For the incombustible additive, carbonates or oxides of sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and silicon may be used. The incombustible additive accounts for 40 to 89 weight % of the carbon heat source 10. Preferably, calcium carbonate is used as the incombustible additive. The incombustible additive is optional and may be omitted.

[0078] The organic binder is one, or a mixture of two or more, of alginates, CMC, EVA, PVA, PVAC and sugars, and accounts for 1 to 10 weight % of the carbon heat source 10. A preferred organic binder is ammonium alginate.

[0079] For the inorganic binder, on the other hand, mineral-based binders, such as refined bentonite, or silica-based binders, such as colloidal silica, water glass and calcium silicate, may be used. The inorganic binder accounts for 5 to 20 weight % of the carbon heat source 10.

[0080] The inorganic binder is superior to the organic binder in that the former emits no smoke when the carbon heat source 10 is burned. Where the organic binder is used, the carbon heat source 10 is preferably obtained by a carbonizing-and-baking process. The carbonizing-and-baking process removes the organic binder from the carbon heat source 10, and therefore, the carbon heat source 10 does not emit odor when burned. The carbonizing-and-baking process is described in detail in, for example, JP 3024703 B1.

[0081] The carbon heat source 10 has at least one through hole 12 extending in an axial direction thereof. FIGS. 2 to 4 each illustrate an exemplary concrete shape of an end face of the carbon heat source 1. As clearly shown in FIGS. 2 to 4, adjacent ones of the through holes 12 are set apart from each other by a partition wall. In this case, the partition wall has a thickness of 0.1 to 0.5 mm.

[0082] Heat Source Holder:

[0083] The carbon heat source 10 is attached to a distal end of a heat source holder 14. In the following, the heat source holder 14 will be described in detail.

[0084] The heat source holder 14 has heat resistance and is tubular in shape. Preferably, the heat source holder 14 holds the carbon heat source 10 in such a manner that a predetermined length of the carbon heat source 10 projects from the distal end of the heat source holder 14.

[0085] The heat source holder 14 has a peripheral wall with a laminated structure, for example. Specifically, the peripheral wall is constituted by a single laminate including a metal layer and a paper layer bonded together, or by a plurality of such laminates superposed one upon the other in a radial direction of the heat source holder 14. An inner surface of the peripheral wall has to be constituted by the metal layer. The metal layer is made of an aluminum alloy, for example, and the total thickness of the metal layers included in the peripheral wall is preferably larger than or equal to 30 μm. The paper layer may be obtained from wrapper paper used for cigarettes, tip paper used for filter-tipped cigarettes, or other paper material such as ordinary paper, incombustible paper and flame-resistant paper.

[0086] The metal layer has excellent heat conductivity. Accordingly, when the carbon heat source 10 is burned and thus the paper layer is heated by the heat from the carbon heat source 10, the metal layer keeps the heating temperature of the paper layer lower than the burning temperature of the paper layer. The emission of odor due to scorching of the paper layer can therefore be suppressed.

[0087] Instead of the peripheral wall with the aforementioned laminated structure, the heat source holder 14 may have a peripheral wall made of an incombustible material, or a composite peripheral wall including a wall section constituted by the aforementioned peripheral wall with the laminated structure and a wall section made of an incombustible material. For the incombustible material, one of inorganic materials including ceramics, meerschaums, glass and metals or a mixture of two or more of the inorganic materials may be used.

[0088] Cooling Section:

[0089] The heat source holder 14 accommodates a cooling element 16. The cooling element 16 has air permeability and heat resistance and is located adjacent to the carbon heat source 10. In the following, the cooling element 16 will be described in detail.

[0090] The cooling element 16 is made of an inorganic material such as ceramics, meerschaums, glass, metals and calcium carbonate, hydrates, or water absorptive polymers. Specifically, the cooling element 16 has a honeycomb structure, a foamed structure or a packing structure, the packing structure being obtained by packing pellets or a granular or fibrous material into a mold. More specifically, the cooling element 16 includes internal passages. These internal passages have a total inner surface or a heat exchange area of 500 mm^2 or more. Preferably, the cooling element 16 contains the inorganic material of 90 to 95 wt %.

[0091] The cooling element 16 may alternatively have a composite structure including two or more different structures selected from the above structures, and the different structures may be juxtaposed so as to be closely adjacent to each other or with a space therebetween in the axial direction of the heat source holder **14**. The cooling element **16** may contain water, an aromatic, an extraction liquid of tobacco components, and the like.

[0092] Material Holder:

[0093] A material holder **18** is coupled to the proximal end of the heat source holder **14**. The material holder **18** has heat resistance and is tubular in shape. The material holder **18** is made of paper, metal or synthetic resin, or is farmed using the laminated structure of the aforementioned laminates.

[0094] Tobacco Material:

[0095] A tobacco material **20**, as a flavor generator, is contained in the material holder **18**. The tobacco material **20** may be ordinary shredded tobacco used for cigarettes, granular tobacco used for snuff, rolled tobacco, or molded tobacco. The rolled tobacco is obtained by forming a sheet of reconstituted tobacco into a roll and has channels therein. The molded tobacco is obtained by molding granular tobacco into shape.

[0096] The tobacco material **20** may be admixed with a flavor-developing aid. The flavor-developing aid contains at least one of carbonates, hydrogen carbonates, oxides and hydroxides of alkali metals and/or alkaline-earth metals. A preferred flavor-developing aid is potassium carbonate. The tobacco material **20** may further contain a desired aromatic or aromatics.

[0097] Specifically, the tobacco material **20** is 5 to 30 mm in length and has a resistance of 10 to 120 mmAq to draw. It is to be noted here that the tobacco material **20** has a water content equivalent to that of shredded tobacco used in ordinary cigarettes, that is, a water content of 10 to 20 weight %.

[0098] In this embodiment, the tobacco material **20** is held between front and rear stoppers ***22f*** and ***22r*** to be kept within the material holder **18**. Each of the stoppers ***22f*** and ***22r*** is shaped like a disk and has air permeability. Specifically, the stoppers ***22f*** and ***22r*** are fitted into respective opposite ends of the material holder **18** and are each made of a filter material such as acetate and paper, or a membrane material such as nonwoven fabric, or formed using an inorganic molded piece having air permeability.

[0099] Mouthpiece:

[0100] A mouthpiece **24** is connected to a rear end of the material holder **18**. The mouthpiece **24** includes a tubular filter holder **26**. The filter holder **26** is made of paper or a synthetic resin and has a rear end forming a mouthpiece.

[0101] A filter **28** is accommodated in the filter holder **26**. The filter **28** is in the form of a solid cylinder and is made of acetate fibers, paper or the like. Acetate fibers and paper have the property of not readily adsorbing the flavor components of the tobacco material **20**. The filter **28** may have at least one through hole axially extending therethrough. Further, the filter **28** may be a combination of different kinds of filter materials, like dual filters and the like for cigarettes.

[0102] To use the flavor inhalator of the first embodiment, the user first lights the carbon heat source **10** of the flavor inhalator and then inhales with the mouthpiece **24** held in his/her mouth. The inhalation creates a flow of air from the outside of the flavor inhalator into the user's mouth cavity through the through holes **12** of the carbon heat source **10**, the cooling element **16** in the heat source holder **14**, the front stopper ***22f***, the tobacco material **20**, the rear stopper ***22r***, the filter **28** and the mouthpiece **24**.

[0103] While passing through the through holes **12** in the carbon heat source **10**, the air flow is heated by the combustion heat of the carbon heat source **10**. Accordingly, the air flow just left the carbon heat source **10** forms a high-temperature gas flow.

[0104] The high-temperature gas flow is cooled in some degree while passing through the cooling element **16**, thus turning to a heated gas flow. The heated gas flow heats the tobacco material **20** when passing through the tobacco material **20**, but the heating of the tobacco material **20** by the heated gas flow does not lead to burning of the tobacco material **20** or generation of aerosol (smoke) from the tobacco material **20**.

[0105] Specifically, the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** is kept within a temperature range of 50 to 200° C. This temperature range is higher than an ambient temperature (concretely, 5 to 35° C.) at which the flavor inhalator is used, but is sufficiently lower than the heating temperature of the carbon heat source **10**. Namely, the cooling element **16** has the function of lessening the amount of heat transferred from the carbon heat source **10** to the tobacco material **20**.

[0106] Where the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** is kept within the above temperature range, liquid contained in the tobacco material **20**, such as water, is not aerosolized and the flavor components of the tobacco material **20** are satisfactorily released into the heated gas flow passing through the tobacco material **20**. Moreover, the aforementioned flavor-developing aid promotes the release of the flavor components from the tobacco material **20** into the heated gas flow; on the other hand, the amount of the flavor components adsorbed by the filter **28** of the mouthpiece **24** is small.

[0107] Consequently, the flavor inhalator allows the heated gas flow containing a large amount of the flavor components of the tobacco material **20** to be delivered into the user's mouth cavity without generating an aerosol, so that the user can fully enjoy the flavor of the tobacco material **20**.

[0108] When the carbon heat source **10** is burned, the generation of smoke from the carbon heat source **10** is minimized as stated above, and therefore, the carbon heat source **10** also does not constitute a source of aerosol (smoke).

[0109] The term "smokeless" used herein means that the aerosol generated from the flavor inhalator during use has a concentration of 1.0×10^5 particles/cc or less. Aerosol with such a concentration is substantially invisible and the concentration is virtually unmeasurable because of the influence of the background of ambient air.

[0110] The water content of the tobacco material **20** is equivalent to that of shredded tobacco contained in ordinary cigarettes. Accordingly, although the tobacco material **20** is heated to a temperature falling within the aforementioned temperature range and its water content varies as a result, the amount of the flavor components in the heated gas flow inhaled per puff of the user is almost constant. As a result, the user can enjoy the flavor of the tobacco material **20** reliably and stably even if he/she repeatedly puffs.

[0111] Where an aromatic or aromatics different from the tobacco-specific flavor components are contained in the tobacco material **20**, the user can of course enjoy the aromatic or aromatics at the same time.

[0112] In the first embodiment described above, the heat source holder **14**, the material holder **18** and the filter holder **26** constitute a casing of the flavor inhalator. Of these holders **14**, **18** and **26** connected to one another, at lease two of the holders may be formed as a one-piece body, or adjacent ones of the holders may be previously connected to each other by tip paper or the like. Further, the holders may be detachably connected to one another.

[0113] The present invention is not limited to the aforementioned first embodiment and may be modified in various ways.

[0114] In the following, various modifications and other embodiments will be described in order. In the following description, identical reference signs are used to denote members or sections having functions identical with those of the members or sections already explained above, and description of such members and sections is omitted for brevity's sake. The following description is focused on the differences.

[0115] FIG. **5** illustrates modification 1(1) of the flavor inhalator of the first embodiment.

[0116] In modification 1(1), as is clear from FIG. **5**, a heat insulator **30** is arranged between the carbon heat source **10** and the heat source holder **14**. The heat insulator **30** is tubular in shape and is made of an inorganic material such as inorganic fibers, or formed using an inorganic molded piece, for example.

[0117] The heat insulator **30** reduces the transfer of heat from the carbon heat source **10** to the heat source holder **14** and prevents the generation of smoke due to scorching of the heat source holder **14**. Also, the heat insulator **30** may be so arranged as to surround the entire outer periphery of the carbon heat source **10**. In this case, smoke, if produced in a small amount due to the combustion of the carbon heat source **10**, is dispersed within the heat insulator **30** and does not become visible.

[0118] FIG. **6** illustrates modification 1(2) of the smokeless flavor inhalator of the first embodiment.

[0119] In modification 1(2), the flavor inhalator has a plurality of air inlet holes **32** formed in at least one of the heat source holder **14**, the material holder **18** and the filter holder **26**. The air inlet holes **32** are located downstream of the carbon heat source **10** and are arranged at intervals in the circumferential direction of the corresponding holder. Specifically, in modification 1(2) illustrated in FIG. **6**, the air inlet holes **32** are formed in each of the heat source holder **14**, the material holder **18** and the filter holder **26**.

[0120] When the user inhales through the mouthpiece **24** of the flavor inhalator of FIG. **6**, outside air flows into the corresponding holder through the air inlet holes **32**. This inflow of air reduces the flow rate of the aforementioned high-temperature gas flow or heated gas flow, and the air thus introduced mixes with the high-temperature gas flow or the heated gas flow, lowering the temperature of the high-temperature gas flow or the heated gas flow. That is, the air introduced through the air inlet holes **32** adds to the cooling function of the cooling element **16** and is very effective in keeping the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** within the aforementioned temperature range.

[0121] FIG. **7** illustrates a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a second embodiment.

[0122] Specifically, the flavor inhalator of FIG. **7** is categorized as Carbon Combustion+High-temperature Gas/Thermal Conduction Heating+Cooling type.

[0123] The flavor inhalator of the second embodiment is provided with a heat conduction holder **50**. The heat conduction holder **50** not only serves as both of the heat source holder **14** and the material holder **18** but has the function of transferring the heat of the carbon heat source **10** to the tobacco material **20**. Accordingly, the heat conduction holder **50** is made of a highly heat-conductive material.

[0124] In the second embodiment, even while the supply of the heated gas flow from the carbon heat source **10** to the tobacco material **20** is stopped between a user's puff and another, the heat conduction holder **50** allows heat to be transferred from the carbon heat source **10** to the tobacco material **20**. Thus, even during the period between a user's puff and another, the tobacco material **20** is continuously heated to emit the flavor components having a rich taste and aroma.

[0125] FIG. **8** illustrates a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a third embodiment. This flavor inhalator is categorized as Carbon Combustion+Thermal Conduction Heating type.

[0126] The flavor inhalator of the third embodiment is also provided with the heat conduction holder **50** but uses an incombustible element **52**, in place of the cooling element **16** and the front stopper **22*f***.

[0127] The incombustible element **52** has air impermeability and heat resistance. Specifically, the incombustible element **52** is constituted by a filler of inorganic fibers or an inorganic molded piece and, as clearly shown in FIG. **8**, is interposed between the carbon heat source **10** and the tobacco material **20** within the heat conduction holder **50**.

[0128] Since the incombustible element **52** is impermeable to air, the heat conduction holder **50** has a plurality of air inlet holes **32** formed in the outer periphery thereof.

[0129] In the flavor inhalator of the third embodiment, heat generated by the combustion of the carbon heat source **10** is transferred to the tobacco material **20** only through the heat conduction holder **50**, and the tobacco material **20** is heated to a temperature within the aforementioned temperature range only by the thus-transferred heat. That is, the heat conduction holder **50** performs a function similar to that of the aforementioned cooling element **16**. In this case, it is unlikely that the user will inhale the combustion gas produced by the combustion of the carbon heat source **10**.

[0130] In the third embodiment, the carbon heat source **10** need not have air permeability. Where the carbon heat source used is impermeable to air, the incombustible element **52** may have air permeability. Thus, in the case of the third embodiment, either the carbon heat source **10** or the incombustible element **52** has only to be impermeable to air, in order to prevent the combustion gas from flowing into the tobacco material **20**.

[0131] Also, where air permeability is imparted to the carbon heat source **10**, the carbon heat source **10** preferably has a circular cross section, as illustrated in FIG. **2** or **3**. The carbon heat source **10** illustrated in FIG. **2** or **3** has a large effective heat transfer area with respect to the inner peripheral surface of the heat conduction holder **50**, compared with the carbon heat source **10** shown in FIG. **4**.

[0132] FIG. **9** illustrates modification 3(1) of the flavor inhalator of the third embodiment.

[0133] In modification 3(1), the flavor inhalator is provided with a heat conduction rod **54**, in place of the heat conduction holder **50**. The heat conduction rod **54** extends through the carbon heat source **10**, the incombustible element **52** and the tobacco material **20** in their center and has an outer end projecting from the carbon heat source **10** and an inner end disposed in contact with the rear stopper **22*r***. In the case of modification 3(1), therefore, the carbon heat source **10**, the incombustible element **52** and the tobacco material section **20** are each tubular or annular in shape.

[0134] The heat conduction rod **54** is made of a metal having high heat conductivity, for example, an aluminum alloy, and is a solid member or a hollow member with at least one end closed. Compared with the solid heat conduction rod, the hollow heat conduction rod **54** has small heat capacity and thus is capable of satisfactorily and quickly conducting heat from the carbon heat source **10** to the tobacco material **20**. The heat conduction rod **54** may, in this case, have an outer diameter of 1 to 5 mm, and the length of the tobacco material section **20** may be 5 to 50 mm.

[0135] FIG. **10** illustrates modification 3(2) of the flavor inhaler of the third embodiment.

[0136] In modification 3(2), a heat conduction pipe **56** is arranged inside the hollow carbon heat source **10** coaxially therewith. The heat conduction pipe **56** serves as both of the material holder **18** and the heat conduction rod **54**.

[0137] Specifically, the heat conduction pipe **56** has an air inlet opening located at a distal end face of the carbon heat source **10**, and the front stopper **22*f*** is fitted into the distal end portion of the heat conduction pipe **56**. A gap of 5 mm or more is provided between the front stopper **22*f*** and the air inlet opening. The gap serves to reliably prevent the tobacco material **20** from burning when the carbon heat source **10** is lighted.

[0138] The carbon heat source **10** is surrounded by an outer heat insulator **58**. The outer heat insulator **58** is in the form of a thin pipe and has air permeability, that is, breathability. The outer heat insulator **58** serves to reduce the radiation of heat from the carbon heat source **10**, thereby making it possible to keep the amount of heat necessary for sustaining the combustion of the carbon heat source **10**, and thus is very effective in securing combustion sustention of the carbon heat source **10**.

[0139] In cases where the heat conduction pipe **56** has such high heat conductivity that the tobacco material **20** may possibly be heated to a temperature above the aforementioned temperature range, an insulator in the form of a thin pipe (not shown) is arranged between the carbon heat source **10** and the heat conduction pipe **56**, and/or between the heat conduction pipe **56** and the tobacco material **20**. The heat conduction pipe **56** has an outer diameter of 3 to 8 mm and an inner diameter of 2 to 7 mm.

[0140] FIG. **11** illustrates a smokeless flavor inhalator according to a fourth embodiment. This flavor inhalator is categorized as Carbon Combustion+Air Heating type.

[0141] In the fourth embodiment, the carbon heat source **10** has an air inlet hole **60** formed in the center thereof. The air inlet hole **60** axially penetrates through the carbon heat source **10**.

[0142] Further, the carbon heat source **10** has a heat-resistant coating **62** covering the entire inner surface of the air inlet hole **60**. The heat-resistant coating **62** may be made of clay, or a metal oxide such as iron oxide, alumina, titania, silica, silica-alumina, zirconia and zeolite, or a mixture of clay and two or more of the mentioned metal oxides.

[0143] Further, the incombustible element **52** has a through hole **64** formed in the center thereof and connected to the air inlet hole **60**. As is clear from FIG. **11**, the incombustible element **52** has an extension surrounding the rear end portion of the carbon heat source **10**. In this case, the incombustible element **52** serves also as the heat source holder **14**. In FIG. **11**, the reference sign L_1 represents a projection length of the carbon heat source **10** projecting from the incombustible element **52**, and the reference sign L_2 represents an overlap length (length of the extension) of the incombustible element **52** overlapping with the carbon heat source **10**.

[0144] With the flavor inhalator of the fourth embodiment, when the user inhales through the mouthpiece **24** after lighting the carbon heat source **10**, air flows into the tobacco material **20** through the air inlet hole **60** of the carbon heat source **10** and the through hole **64** of the incombustible element **52**, and the air is heated to a temperature within the aforementioned temperature range in the process of passing through the carbon heat source **10**. Thus, the flavor inhalator of this embodiment also permits the flavor components of the tobacco material **20** to be adequately delivered into the user's mouth cavity without generating an aerosol.

[0145] As will be clear from the above, the smokeless flavor inhalator of the present invention requires that the tobacco material **20** be heated to a temperature of 50° C. to 200° C. while the inhalator is in use. For the purpose of verification, a first testing device shown in FIG. **12** was prepared.

[0146] The first testing device is provided with a heat resistant tube **100** accommodating the tobacco material **20**, and a heater **102** surrounding the tube **100** and capable of heating the tube **100**, namely, the tobacco material **20**, up to 22° C. or 50° C. The tobacco material **20** subjected to the test contained 230 mg of tobacco particles made from Burley tobacco leaves and 14 mg of potassium carbonate. The tobacco particles had a particle diameter of 0.5 to 1.18 mm.

[0147] The first testing device is further provided with a suction source **104**, which is connected to the tube **100** through an impinger **106**. The suction source **104** is configured to draw in air or a gas from the tube **100** through the impinger **106** at a flow rate of 55 ml/2 sec (corresponding to one puff).

[0148] With the tobacco material **20** heated to 22° C., the suction gas was drawn to the suction source **104** while being allowed to bubble in the impinger **106** so that a flavor component (nicotine) of the tobacco material contained in the suction gas might be collected in the impinger **106**. As a result, it was found that the amount of the collected flavor component was 0.7 μg/puff.

[0149] Further, with the tobacco material **20** heated to 50° C., the flavor component was collected in the impinger **106** in the same manner, and it was found that the amount of the collected flavor component was 9.0 μg/puff.

[0150] The above two test results reveal that when the tobacco material **20** is heated to a temperature of 50° C., the amount of the flavor component released is more than one digit larger than when the tobacco material **20** is heated to 20° C. This proves that the tobacco material **20** needs to be heated to 50° C. or higher in order to deliver an adequate amount of the flavor component into the user's mouth.

[0151] FIG. **13** illustrates a second testing device.

[0152] The second testing device is provided with a heat resistant tube **108** accommodating the tobacco material **20**. The tobacco material **20** subjected to the test contained 35 mg of tobacco particles made from Burley tobacco leaves, and the tobacco particles had a particle diameter of 0.5 to 1.18 mm.

[0153] The tube **108** is connected through a transparent case **110** and a mass-flow controller **112** to a suction pump **114**, which is capable of drawing in air from the tube **108** at a flow rate of 1,650 ml/min.

[0154] Suction of air by means of the suction pump **114** at the mentioned flow rate was repeated while gradually raising the temperature of the air flowing into the tube **108**, and as a result, it was confirmed that no aerosol (smoke) was observed inside the transparent case **110** insofar as the temperature of the air, that is, the temperature of the tobacco material **20**, was 200° C. or less. This guarantees that no smoke is generated from the tobacco material **20** as long as the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** is kept at 200° C. or lower.

[0155] Further, in the smokeless flavor inhalator of the present invention, the cooling element **16** needs to have the heat exchange area of 500 mm^2, as stated above. For the purpose of verification, a third testing device illustrated in FIG. **14** was prepared.

[0156] The third testing device is provided with a tube **116** made of heat resistant paper. The tube **116** has a hollow cylindrical carbon heat source **10***a* attached to a distal end thereof. The carbon heat source **10***a* subjected to the test was obtained by extrusion molding and contained 80 weight % of active carbon, 15 weight % of calcium carbonate, and 5 weight % of carboxymethylcellulose (CMC). Specifically, as illustrated in FIGS. **15** and **16**, the carbon heat source **10***a* had an inner diameter of 3 mm, an outer diameter of 6.8 mm, and a length of 10 mm.

[0157] The proximal end of the tube **116** is connected to a suction source (not shown), and the suction source is configured to draw in air from the tube **116** at a flow rate of 55 ml/2 sec (corresponding to one puff) at intervals of 30 seconds. Further, the tube **116** has five temperature sensors (not shown) attached thereto. The temperature sensors are located at distances of 5 mm, 10 mm, 15 mm, 20 mm and 50 mm from the carbon heat source **10***a*, respectively, and are each capable of measuring the temperature in the tube **116**.

[0158] While the suction of air by means of the suction source was repeated with the carbon heat source **10** lighted, the temperatures in the tube **116** were measured by the respective temperature sensors. The measurement results are shown in FIG. **17**.

[0159] As is clear from FIG. **17**, the temperature in the tube **116** shows a tendency to lower with increasing distance from the carbon heat source **10***a*, and in order for the temperature in the tube **116** to drop to 200° C. or less, a distance of 50 mm or more from the carbon heat source **10***a* is needed.

[0160] In other words, in the case of the third testing device not including the cooling element **16**, a distance of 50 mm or more needs to be secured between the carbon heat source **10***a* and the tobacco material **20** in order to restrict the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** to a temperature not higher than 200° C., at and below which generation of smoke (aerosol) from the tobacco material **20** can be avoided.

[0161] Thus, where the smokeless flavor inhalator does not include the cooling element **16**, a distance of 50 mm or more needs to be provided between the carbon heat source **10***a* and the tobacco material **20**. Such a flavor inhalator is, however, extraordinarily long and is not practical.

[0162] FIG. **18** illustrates a fourth testing device prepared for verifying the function of the cooling element **16**.

[0163] Compared with the third testing device, the fourth testing device includes the cooling element **16** having air permeability as well as heat resistance and arranged inside the tube **116** in a position adjacent to the carbon heat source **10***a*. The temperature sensor is arranged only at the outlet end (downstream end) of the cooling element **16** to measure the temperature in the tube **116** at the outlet of the cooling element **16**.

[0164] For use with the fourth testing device, multiple pieces of cylindrical cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b*, illustrated in FIGS. **19** and **20**, respectively, were prepared. The cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b* were each obtained by extrusion molding and contained 95 weight % of calcium carbonate and 5 weight % of carboxymethylcellulose (CMC).

[0165] The cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b* are identical in outer diameter (6.5 mm) but are different in the opening area of their internal passages. Specifically, the cooling element **16***a* had an opening area of 17.2 mm^2 obtained, for example, by 52 through holes each with a square (0.57 mm×0.57 mm) cross-section. In this case, the total length of the inner perimeters of all through holes is 120 mm.

[0166] On the other hand, the cooling element **16***b* had an opening area of 24.1 mm^2 obtained, for example, by 21 through holes each with a square (1.23 mm×1.23 mm) cross-section. In this case, the total length of the inner perimeters of all through holes is 90.9 mm.

[0167] Since the heat exchange areas of the cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b* are each given by: inner perimeter x length, the cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b* with different lengths were prepared.

[0168] With one cooling element **16***a* set in the fourth testing device, a suction test was conducted in the same manner as that performed using the third testing device, and the suction test was repeated with respect to all cooling elements **16***a* with different lengths. Similarly, each of the cooling elements **16***b* with different lengths was subjected to the suction test.

[0169] FIGS. **21** and **22** show the test results. As is clear from FIG. **21**, the greater the length, the lower the outlet temperature of the cooling element **16** becomes, regardless of whether the cooling element tested is the cooling element **16***a* or the cooling element **16***b*.

[0170] With regard to the heat exchange areas of the cooling elements **16***a* and **16***b*, the test results indicate that a heat exchange area of 500 mm^2 is needed in order to keep the outlet temperature of the cooling element **16**, that is, the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20**, at 200° C. or below. In the case of the cooling element **16***a*, a heat exchange area of 500.4 mm^2 (=120 mm×4.17 mm) or more can be ensured if the cooling element **16***a* has a length of 4.17 mm or more. In the case of the cooling element **16***b*, on the other hand, a heat exchange area of 500.5 mm^2 (=91 mm×5.5 mm) or more can be ensured if the cooling element **16***b* has a length of 5.5 mm or more.

[0171] Thus, by including the cooling element **16***a* or **16***b* in the smokeless flavor inhalator, it is possible to significantly shorten the distance (length of the cooling element **16***a* or **16***b*) needed between the carbon heat source **10** and the tobacco material **20**, so that the overall length of the smokeless flavor inhalator can be reduced to a practical level.

[0172] The cooling element **16***a* or **16***b* located between the carbon heat source **10** and the tobacco material **20** need not be disposed in direct contact with the carbon heat source **10** or the tobacco material **20**. A predetermined space may be provided between the carbon heat source **10** and the cooling element **16***a* or **16***b*, or between the cooling element **16***a* or **16***b* and the tobacco material **20**.

[0173] The presence of the cooling element **16***a* or **16***b* makes it unnecessary to introduce outside air to the upstream side of the tobacco material **20**, that is, into the region between the carbon heat source **10** and the tobacco material **20**, in order to keep the heating temperature of the tobacco material **20** at a temperature not higher than 200° C., and also prevents the ignition performance of the carbon heat source **10** from being deteriorated due to the inflow of the outside air.

Specifically, the introduction of outside air leads to reduction in the amount of the outside air passing through the carbon heat source **10** when the carbon heat source **10** is lighted, deteriorating the ignition performance of the carbon heat source **10**.

[0174] The present invention is not limited to the embodiments and modifications described above and may be modified in various other ways.

[0175] For example, the flavor generator is not limited to the aforementioned tobacco material and may be a liquid or solid aromatic, other than the flavor components of the tobacco material, carried on a base material of cellulose or the like. Also, the flavor inhalator of the present invention may be implemented by optionally combining the elements in the aforementioned embodiments and modifications with commonly known means without departing from the purpose of the invention.

EXPLANATION OF REFERENCE SIGNS

[0176] **10** carbon heat source
[0177] **12** through hole (flow path)
[0178] **14** heat source holder (casing)
[0179] **16** cooling element
[0180] **18** material holder
[0181] **20** tobacco material (flavor generator)
[0182] **24** mouthpiece
[0183] **28** filter
[0184] **30** heat insulator
[0185] **32** air inlet hole (flow path)
[0186] **50** heat conduction holder (casing)
[0187] **52** incombustible element
[0188] **54** heat conduction rod
[0189] **56** heat conduction pipe
[0190] **60** air inlet hole (flow path)

1. A smokeless flavor inhalator comprising:

a casing having a mouthpiece, said casing being configured to generate a flow of air guided therethrough toward the mouthpiece when a user inhales through the mouthpiece;

a flavor generator arranged inside said casing and capable of releasing a flavor component into the air flow; and

a heater for keeping said flavor generator heated at a heating temperature of 50 to 200° C., to allow the flavor component to be released while preventing generation of aerosol from said flavor generator,

wherein said heater includes:

a carbon heat source having air permeability and attached to a distal end of said casing for heating the air, and

an incombustible cooling element having air permeability and arranged inside said casing and between the carbon heat source and said flavor generator for cooling the air heated by the carbon heat source.

2. The smokeless flavor inhalator according to claim **1**, wherein said cooling element has a plurality of through holes formed therethrough, the through holes providing the cooling element with a heat exchange area of 500 mm^2 or more.

3. The smokeless flavor inhalator according to claim **2**, wherein said cooling element is arranged adjacent to the carbon heat source in close contact therewith or with a predetermined space therebetween.

4. The smokeless flavor inhalator according to claim **3**, wherein said cooling element contains inorganic matter.

5. The smokeless flavor inhalator according to claim **4**, wherein the inorganic matter accounts for 90 to 95 weight % of said cooling element.

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