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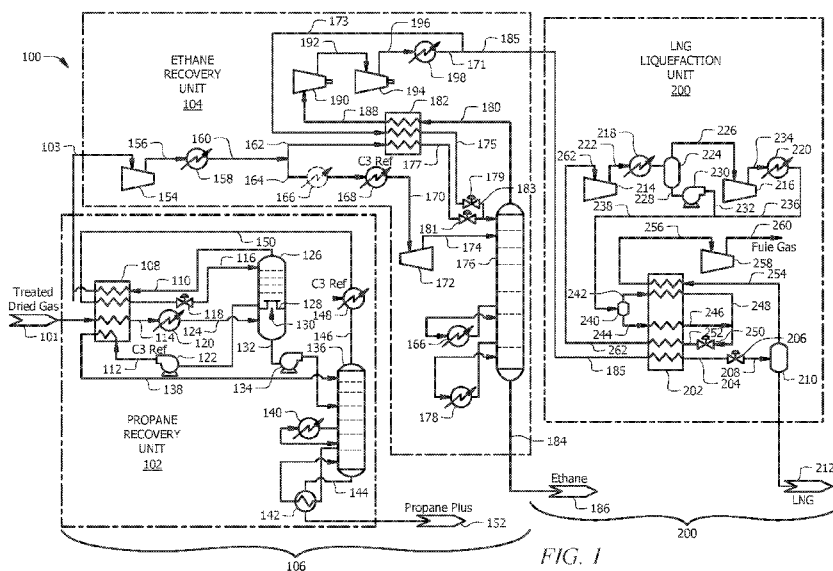


FIG. 1

(57) **Abstract:** A LNG liquefaction plant includes a propane recovery unit including an inlet for a feed gas, a first outlet for a LPG, and a second outlet for an ethane-rich feed gas, an ethane recovery unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the ethane-rich feed gas, a first outlet for an ethane liquid, and a second outlet for a methane-rich feed gas, and a LNG liquefaction unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the methane-rich feed gas, a refrigerant to cool the methane-rich feed gas, and an outlet for a LNG. The LNG plant may also include a stripper, an absorber, and a separator configured to separate the feed gas into a stripper liquid and an absorber vapor. The stripper liquid can be converted to an overhead stream used as a reflux stream to the absorber.

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- *as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))*
- *as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii))*

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SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR LNG PRODUCTION WITH PROPANE AND ETHANE RECOVERY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a PCT international application of and claims priority to co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 15/158,143, filed on May 18, 2016, and entitled “Systems and Methods for LNG Production with Propane and Ethane Recovery”, which is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes as if reproduced in its entirety.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Hydrocarbon drilling and production systems can include the extraction of natural gas from wellbores in subterranean earthen formations. For ease of transport or storage, the natural gas can be liquefied. The liquefaction process includes condensing the natural gas into a liquid by cooling. The liquefied natural gas (LNG) can then be moved and stored more efficiently. Prior to condensing, the natural gas can be treated or processed to remove certain components such as water, dust, helium, mercury, acid gases such as hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide, heavy hydrocarbons, and other components.

[0004] Natural gas streams may contain methane, ethane, propane, and heavier hydrocarbons together with minor portions of hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide. A particular gas composition may include 85% to 95% methane and 3% to 8% ethane with the balance being propane and heavier hydrocarbons. The ethane plus liquid content of such a gas ranges from 2 to 5 GPM (gallons of ethane liquid per thousand standard cubic feet of gas) and is generally considered or identified as a “lean gas.” However, certain natural gas streams include different compositions. Shale gas, for example, may be “richer” than the “lean gas” noted above, with ethane content ranging from 12% to 23%, ethane plus liquid content of 5 to 11 GPM, and heating values from 1,200 to 1,460 Btu/scf. Such an ethane-rich natural gas stream is generally considered or identified as a “wet gas.” It is noted that a “wet gas” may also refer to a gas composition having a relatively high concentration of components heavier than methane.

[0005] It is often necessary for the hydrocarbon liquid content in a wet gas or shale gas stream to be removed to meet pipeline gas heating value specifications. In some cases, a hydrocarbon dewpointing unit using refrigeration cooling is used to remove the hydrocarbon liquid content. However, in some cases, the hydrocarbon dewpointing unit may not be sufficient to meet the pipeline gas heating value specifications. For example, with a wet gas or shale gas, the high heating value of the ethane content may exceed the pipeline gas heating value specifications. Accordingly, a natural gas liquid (NGL) recovery unit is needed to remove the hydrocarbon liquids. In some cases, the NGL contents captured by a NGL recovery unit provide economic value. In other cases, a natural gas where the non-methane component is limited can provide an economic value, such as for vehicle fuels.

[0006] Many feed gases are provided to the NGL recovery system at relatively high pressure, such as 900 psig or higher, for example. Such an NGL recovery system includes an expander to expand the lean feed gas to a lower pressure, such as 450 psig, for example, for feeding into the fractionation columns. However, a wet or rich shale gas is initially provided at low pressure.

SUMMARY

[0007] An embodiment of a LNG liquefaction plant includes a propane recovery unit including an inlet for a feed gas, which may be chilled, a first outlet for a LPG, and a second outlet for an ethane-rich feed gas, an ethane recovery unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the ethane-rich feed gas, a first outlet for an ethane liquid, and a second outlet for a methane-rich feed gas, and a LNG liquefaction unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the methane-rich feed gas, a refrigerant to cool the methane-rich feed gas, and an outlet for a LNG. The propane recovery unit may include a stripper, an absorber, and a separator configured to separate the chilled feed gas into a liquid that is directed to the stripper and a vapor that is directed to the absorber and is fractionated. The chilled stripper liquid may be converted to an overhead stream used as a reflux stream to the absorber. In some embodiments, the LNG liquefaction plant further includes a pump, a chiller, and a letdown valve, wherein the pump is configured to pump an absorber bottom liquid to the stripper, wherein the converted overhead stream is an ethane-rich overhead stream, and wherein the chiller is configured to chill the ethane-rich overhead stream and the letdown valve is configured to let down pressure in the ethane-rich overhead stream to thereby provide a two-phase reflux to the absorber. In certain embodiments, the stripper is a non-refluxed stripper.

[0008] In some embodiments, the overhead stream is directed to the absorber for cooling and reflux in the absorber to recover propane from the chilled feed gas without turbo-expansion. The stripper may operate at least 30 psi higher than the absorber, such that the stripper overhead stream generates Joule Thomson cooling to reflux the absorber. In some embodiments, about 99% of the propane content of the chilled feed gas is recovered as the LPG. In certain embodiments, the ethane recovery unit further includes a compressor to compress the ethane-rich feed gas and is configured to split the ethane-rich feed gas into first and second portions. The ethane recovery unit may further include a chiller to chill the first ethane-rich portion and an expander to expand the first ethane-rich portion prior to entering a demethanizer. At least one of the second ethane-rich portion and a first portion of a high pressure residue gas from the demethanizer may be directed as a reflux stream to the demethanizer. About 90% of the ethane content of the ethane-rich feed gas may be recovered as the ethane liquid. The LNG liquefaction unit may be configured to use the refrigerant to cool and condense the methane-rich feed gas to form the LNG with about 95% purity methane.

[0009] In some embodiments, the LNG liquefaction plant includes co-production of the LPG and the ethane liquid from a rich low pressure shale gas. The rich low pressure shale gas can be supplied at about 400 to 600 psig. The rich low pressure shale gas may include about 50 to 80% methane, about 10 to 30% ethane, a remaining component including propane and heavier hydrocarbons, and a liquid content of 5 to 12 GPM. The feed gas may be pre-treated to remove carbon dioxide and mercury, and dried in a molecular sieve unit.

[0010] An embodiment for a method for LNG liquefaction includes providing a rich low pressure shale gas to a propane recovery unit, converting the rich low pressure shale gas, in the propane recovery unit, to a LPG and an ethane-rich feed gas, converting the ethane-rich feed gas, in an ethane recovery unit, to an ethane liquid and a methane-rich feed gas, and converting the methane-rich feed gas, in a LNG liquefaction unit, to a LNG using a refrigerant. The method may further include separating the rich low pressure shale gas into a liquid that is directed to a stripper and a vapor that is directed to an absorber and is fractionated, converting the stripper liquid to an overhead stream, and providing the overhead stream as a reflux stream to the absorber.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS AND TABLES

[0011] For a detailed description of exemplary embodiments, reference will now be made to the accompanying drawings and tables in which:

[0012] Figure 1 is an equipment and process flow diagram for an embodiment of a LNG liquefaction plant or system in accordance with principles disclosed herein;

[0013] Figure 2 is a heat composite curve for a propane recovery unit of the LNG liquefaction plant of Figure 1;

[0014] Figure 3 is a heat composite curve for an ethane recovery unit of the LNG liquefaction plant of Figure 1;

[0015] Figure 4 is a heat composite curve for a LNG liquefaction unit of the LNG liquefaction plant of Figure 1; and

[0016] Table 1 illustrates stream compositions for the LNG liquefaction plant of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] In the drawings and description that follow, like parts are typically marked throughout the specification and drawings with the same reference numerals. The drawing figures are not necessarily to scale. Certain features of the disclosed embodiments may be shown exaggerated in scale or in somewhat schematic form and some details of conventional elements may not be shown in the interest of clarity and conciseness. The present disclosure is susceptible to embodiments of different forms. Specific embodiments are described in detail and are shown in the drawings, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered an exemplification of the principles of the disclosure, and is not intended to limit the disclosure to that illustrated and described herein. It is to be fully recognized that the different teachings of the embodiments discussed below may be employed separately or in any suitable combination to produce desired results.

[0018] Unless otherwise specified, in the following discussion and in the claims, the terms “including” and “comprising” are used in an open-ended fashion, and thus should be interpreted to mean “including, but not limited to ...”. Any use of any form of the terms “connect”, “engage”, “couple”, “attach”, or any other term describing an interaction between elements is not meant to limit the interaction to direct interaction between the elements and may also include indirect interaction between the elements described. The various characteristics mentioned above, as well as other features and characteristics described in more detail below, will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading the following detailed description of the embodiments, and by referring to the accompanying drawings.

[0019] In various embodiments described below, a LNG liquefaction plant or system includes an NGL recovery unit. In some embodiments, the LNG liquefaction plant with NGL recovery is configured for processing shale gas. In some embodiments, the shale gas is a rich or wet shale gas. In still further embodiments, the shale gas is at a low pressure, relative to a leaner

shale gas, when processed. These and other embodiments will be described in more detail below.

[0020] Referring to Figure 1, a LNG liquefaction plant or system 100 includes a NGL recovery unit 106 and a LNG liquefaction unit 200. In some embodiments, the NGL recovery unit 106 includes a propane recovery unit 102 and an ethane recovery unit 104. The NGL recovery unit 106 includes an inlet or initial feed stream 101 fluidically coupled to the propane recovery unit 102 at an exchanger 108. Also fluidically coupled to the exchanger 108 is a conduit 110 including an overhead vapor stream, a conduit 112 including an absorber bottom stream, a conduit 114 including a cooled shale gas stream, a conduit 116 including an ethane enriched reflux stream, a conduit 138 including a heated bottom stream, a conduit 146 including a cooled stripper overhead stream, and a conduit 103 including an ethane rich feed stream. The conduit 112 includes a pump 122 and further couples to an absorber 126. The conduit 114 includes a chiller 120 to further cool the shale gas stream to a two phase stream 124 that is directed into the absorber 126. The conduit 116 includes a valve 118.

[0021] The absorber 126 includes a separator that is integrated in the bottom of the absorber 126. The absorber 126 further includes a chimney tray 128 that receives a flashed vapor stream 130. In some embodiments, trays or packing are used as the contacting devices in the absorber 126. The conduit 110 is fluidically coupled to the absorber 126, as is a conduit 132. A pump 134 can be used to pump a flashed liquid stream in the conduit 132.

[0022] The conduit 132 is fluidically coupled to a stripper 136, as is the conduit 138. A reboiler 140 and a reboiler 142 are fluidically coupled to the stripper 136. A conduit 146 is coupled to the stripper 136 and includes an overhead stream. A chiller 148 is coupled into the conduit 146 and can cool the overhead stream into a stream 150 that is directed into the exchanger 108. A conduit 144 is fluidically coupled to the stripper 136 to direct a liquid propane gas (LPG) stream 152 out of the propane recovery unit 102. In some embodiments, trays or packing are used as the contacting devices in the stripper 136.

[0023] The conduit 103 is fluidically coupled to the ethane recovery unit 104 and directs the ethane rich feed stream into a compressor 154. The compressor 154 is fluidically coupled to a conduit 156 to direct the compressed stream to an exchanger 158 that can cool the compressed stream into a cooled high pressure stream 160. The conduit 156 splits into a conduit 162 for carrying a demethanizer reflux stream and a conduit 164 for carrying a stream to a demethanizer reboiler 166 for cooling. Additionally, the conduit 164 includes a chiller 168 for further cooling into a stream 170. The conduit 164 is fluidically coupled to an expander 172, which is in turn fluidically coupled to a conduit 174 for directing a depressurized and cooled feed stream to a

demethanizer 176. The demethanizer 176 is configured to fractionate the feed stream, with assistance from the reboiler 166 and a reboiler 178, into an ethane bottom liquid stream, or ethane liquid, 186 directed through a conduit 184 and a methane overhead vapor stream directed through a conduit 180.

[0024] The conduit 180 is fluidically coupled between the demethanizer 176 and an exchanger 182 for carrying the overhead vapor stream to the exchanger 182. A conduit 188 is fluidically coupled between the exchanger 182 and a compressor 190 for carrying a residue gas stream to the compressor 190. In some embodiments, the compressor 190 is driven by the expander 172. A conduit 192 is coupled between the compressor 190 and a compressor 194 to further compress the residue gas stream. A conduit 196 is coupled between the compressor 194 and a chiller or exchanger 198 which cools the residue gas stream in a conduit 171 before the cooled residue gas stream is directed into the LNG liquefaction unit feed stream conduit 185. A conduit 173 is also fluidically coupled between the conduit 171 and the exchanger 182 for directing a portion of the high pressure residue gas stream back to the exchanger 182. As shown in Figure 1, the demethanizer reflux stream conduit 162 is also fluidically coupled to the exchanger 182. The streams in conduits 162, 173 are chilled and condensed in the exchanger 182 using the overhead vapor stream of the conduit 180, thereby providing two lean reflux streams in conduits 175, 177 that are directed through valves 179, 181 and combined in a conduit 183 that is fluidically coupled to the demethanizer 176.

[0025] The feed stream conduit 185 fluidically couples to the LNG liquefaction unit 200 at a heat exchanger cold box 202. In some embodiments, as will be detailed more fully below, the LNG liquefaction unit 200 cools, condenses, and subcools the feed stream using a single mixed refrigerant (SMR). In other embodiments, other mixed refrigerants, external refrigerants, or internal refrigerants may be used. In various embodiments, the particular composition of the working fluid in the liquefaction cycle is determined by the specific composition of the feed gas, the LNG product, and the desired liquefaction cycle pressures. In certain embodiments, a small or micro-sized LNG plant may include a gas expander cycle that uses nitrogen or methane, particularly for offshore applications where liquid hydrocarbons are to be minimized.

[0026] A conduit 204 fluidically coupled to the exchanger cold box 202 carries a liquefied and subcooled LNG stream across a letdown valve 206 to expand the LNG stream. A conduit 208 is coupled between the letdown valve 206 and a LNG flashed tank 210 for storage of the LNG product prior to export to a customer via LNG outlet stream conduit 212.

[0027] The SMR cycle uses two compression stages, comprising a first compressor 214 and a second compressor 216, with intercoolers. The first stage compressor 214 receives an input

stream 262 and discharges a compressed stream 222 that is cooled by a chiller 218 and separated in a separator 224, thereby producing a liquid to a conduit 228. The liquid in the conduit 228 is pumped by a pump 230 forming a stream 232 prior to entering the exchanger cold box 202 via a conduit 238. The second stage compressor 216 receives an outlet vapor stream 226 from the separator 224 and discharges a compressed stream 234 that is cooled by a chiller 220 and carried by a conduit 236 to mix with the stream 232. The mixed stream in the conduit 238 is further separated in a separator 240, thereby producing a vapor stream 242 and a liquid stream 244. Both of streams 242, 244 are cooled and condensed in the exchanger cold box 202, exiting the exchanger cold box 202 as streams 246, 248 that are then mixed prior to a letdown valve 250. The subcooled liquid stream is then let down in pressure in the valve 250 to form a stream 252, and chilled to form a stream 262 from the exchanger cold box 202 and which supplies the refrigeration duty to the feed gas and the mixed refrigerant circuit that includes the first and second stage compressors 214, 216.

[0028] A conduit 254 is coupled to the LNG flashed tank 210 for carrying a gas stream to the exchanger cold box 202. The gas stream passes through the exchanger cold box 202 into a conduit 256 that is coupled to a compressor 258 for compressing the gas stream into a fuel gas stream 260.

[0029] In operation, the LNG liquefaction plant 100 receives the initial gas feed stream 101 at the propane recovery unit 102 of the NGL recovery unit 106. In some embodiments, the initial feed stream 101 includes a shale gas, or a wet shale gas. In an exemplary embodiment, the stream includes a 77 MMscfd shale gas with the composition shown in the "Stream 101 Feed Gas" column of Table 1. In further embodiments, the shale gas is treated. For example, the shale gas can be treated for mercury removal, carbon dioxide removal, and/or dried with molecular sieves. The initial feed stream 101 is cooled in the exchanger 108 by the overhead vapor stream in the conduit 110 from the absorber 126, and by the absorber bottom stream in the conduit 112. In some embodiments, the initial feed stream 101 is cooled to about 10°F to 30°F to form the cooled shale gas stream in the conduit 114. The cooled shale gas stream is further cooled in the chiller 120, to form the two phase stream 124. In some embodiments, the stream is further cooled to about -23°F to -36°F. The two phase stream 124 is separated in the absorber 126 into the flashed liquid stream and the flashed vapor stream. The flashed liquid stream is pumped through the conduit 132 by the pump 134 and into the stripper 136. The flashed vapor stream 130 enters the bottom of the absorber through the chimney tray 128, and its propane content is absorbed in the absorber 126 by the ethane enriched reflux stream coming from the conduit 116.

[0030] The absorber 126 produces a propane depleted overhead vapor stream in the conduit 110 and an ethane enriched bottom stream in the conduit 112, separated as described above by the separator and the chimney tray 128. In some embodiments, the bottom stream is enriched with about 50% to 70% ethane content. The ethane enriched bottom stream is pumped by the pump 134, heated in the exchanger 108, and then fed to the top of the stripper 136. In some embodiments, the propane depleted overhead stream is heated in the exchanger 108 to about 70°F, thereby forming the ethane rich feed stream in the conduit 103 prior to feeding the ethane recovery unit 104. Consequently, it is possible that the turbo-expander in conventional NGL processes is not required in certain embodiments of the present NGL recovery unit 106. Further properties of an exemplary ethane rich feed stream are shown in the “Stream 103 Feed to Ethane Recovery” column of Table 1.

[0031] The stripper 136, operating at a higher pressure than the absorber in certain embodiments, removes the ethane content using heat from the reboilers 140, 142, producing the LPG stream 152. In some embodiments, the vapor pressure of the LPG stream 152 is 200 psig or lower. In some embodiments, the LPG stream 152 contains about 2% to 6% ethane. Further properties of an exemplary LPG stream 152 are shown in the “Stream 152 LPG Product” column of Table 1. Consequently, the LPG product is a truckable product that can be safely transported via pipeline or trucks. The stripper 136 overhead stream in the conduit 146 is cooled by the propane chiller 148 to form the stream 150. In some embodiments, the stream 150 is cooled to about -33°F to -36°F. The cooled stream 150 is further chilled in the exchanger 108. In some embodiments, the exchanger 108 chills the stream to about -40°F to -45°F, or a lower temperature. Exchanger chilling occurs prior to a letdown in pressure, such as at the valve 118, that results in the lean reflux stream to the absorber 126. Consequently, the top of the stripper 136 refluxes the absorber 126 via the conduit 146, the stream 150, the exchanger 108, and finally the conduit 116 that delivers the ethane enriched reflux stream to the absorber 126.

[0032] The ethane rich feed stream in the conduit 103 is directed from the propane recovery unit 102 to the ethane recovery unit 104, and compressed in the compressor 154. In some embodiments, the stream is compressed to about 1,000 to 1,200 psig. The compressed stream in the conduit 156 is cooled in the exchanger 158 to form the cooled high pressure stream 160. The cooled high pressure stream 160 is split into two portions: the stream in the conduit 162 and the stream in the conduit 164. The conduit 164 stream is cooled in the demethanizer side reboiler 166 and by the propane chiller 168. In some embodiments, the conduit 164 stream is cooled to about -33°F or lower. In certain embodiments, the flow in the conduit 164 is about

70% of the total flow in the conduit 156 of the cooled high pressure stream 160. The cooled stream 170 after the propane chiller 168 is let down in pressure in the expander 172. In some embodiments, the stream 170 is let down in pressure to about 350 to 450 psig and chilled to about -100°F. The conduit 174 is for directing the depressurized and cooled feed stream to the demethanizer 176.

[0033] The demethanizer 176 is refluxed with the cooled high pressure stream in the conduit 162 and with the high pressure residue gas stream in the conduit 173. In some embodiments, the stream in the conduit 173 is about 20% to 30% of the total flow in the conduit 171. Both streams in the conduits 162, 173 are separately chilled using the demethanizer overhead stream in the conduit 180 and condensed in the subcool exchanger 182, generating two lean reflux streams to the demethanizer 176. In some embodiments, the two lean reflux streams are chilled to about -100°F. The demethanizer 176 fractionates the feed stream in the conduit 174 into the ethane bottom liquid stream 186 and the methane overhead vapor stream directed through the conduit 180. Further properties of an exemplary ethane bottom liquid stream 186 are shown in the “Stream 186 Ethane Product” column of Table 1. The residue gas stream from the subcool exchanger 182 in the conduit 188 is compressed by the compressor 190 which is driven by the expander 172. The residue gas stream is then further compressed by the compressor 194, and chilled by the exchanger 198. In some embodiments, the residue gas stream is compressed to about 900 psig before entering the feed stream conduit 185 and being fed to the LNG liquefaction unit 200. Further properties of an exemplary residue gas stream in the feed stream conduit 185 are shown in the “Stream 185 Feed to LNG Unit” column of Table 1.

[0034] In some embodiments, the residue gas stream in the conduit 185 enters the heat exchanger cold box 202 of the LNG liquefaction unit 200 at a pressure of 870 psig and a temperature of 95°F, and is cooled, condensed, and subcooled using a single mixed refrigerant (SMR), for example. Various refrigerants can be used in other embodiments, such as other external refrigerants or internal refrigerants such as a boil off gas (BOG) generated from the LNG itself. The liquefied and subcooled LNG stream coming out of the cold box 202 in the conduit 204 is expanded across the letdown valve 206 to produce the LNG product stream in the conduit 208. In some embodiments, the liquefied and subcooled LNG stream in the conduit 204 is at a pressure of about 890 psig and a temperature of about -255°F. In some embodiments, the LNG product stream in the conduit 208 is at nearly atmospheric pressure (>1.0 psig) and further sub-cooled to about -263°F, and stored in the LNG flashed tank 210 for export to customers as the LNG stream in the conduit 212. Further properties of an exemplary

LNG stream in the conduit 212 are shown in the “Stream 212 LNG Product” column of Table 1.

[0035] The SMR cycle uses two compression stages, including the first compressor 214 and the second compressor 216. The first stage compressor 214 discharge is cooled and separated in the separator 224, producing a liquid which is pumped by the pump 230 forming the stream 232 prior to entering the cold box 202. In some embodiments, the second stage compressor 216 discharges at about 570 psig and is mixed with the stream 232 and further separated in the separator 240 producing the vapor stream 242 and the liquid stream 244. Both streams are cooled and condensed, exiting the cold box 202 as the streams 246, 248 at, for example, -255°F. The subcooled liquid is then let down in pressure in the letdown valve 250 and chilled to, for example, -262°F to form the stream 262 which supplies the refrigeration duty to the feed gas and the mixed refrigerant circuit.

[0036] In some embodiments, propane recovery of the disclosed systems and processes is 95%. In further embodiments, propane recovery is 99%. The efficiency of the propane recovery unit 102 is demonstrated by the temperature approaches in the heat composite curve in Figure 2. The change in relationship between the hot composite curve and the cold composite curve from left to right over the HeatFlow axis shows the efficiency of the propane recovery unit 102. In some embodiments, the power consumption of the propane recovery unit 102 is driven by the propane chillers 120, 148, requiring about 7,300 HP. In some embodiments, LPG liquid production is about 7,200 BPD, or about 610 ton per day. In some embodiments, the specific power consumption for LPG production is about 8.9 kW/ton per day.

[0037] The efficiency of the ethane recovery unit 104 is demonstrated by the close temperature approaches in the heat composite curve in Figure 3. The similar nature between the hot composite curve and the cold composite curve from left to right over the HeatFlow axis shows the efficiency of the ethane recovery unit 104. In some embodiments, the power consumption of the ethane recovery unit 104 is driven by the feed gas compressor 154, and the propane chiller 168, requiring about 9,000 HP. In some embodiments, ethane liquid production is about 10,000 BPD, or about 580 ton per day. In some embodiments, the specific power consumption to produce ethane is about 11.6 kW/ton per day.

[0038] The efficiency of the LNG liquefaction unit 200 is demonstrated by the close temperature approaches in the heat composite curve in Figure 4. The similar nature between the hot composite curve and the cold composite curve from left to right over the HeatFlow axis shows the efficiency of the LNG liquefaction unit 200. In some embodiments, the power consumption of the LNG liquefaction unit 200 is driven by the mixed refrigerant compressors

214, 216, requiring about 15,900 HP to produce 970 ton per day of LNG. In some embodiments, the specific power consumption for the LNG production is 12.2 kW/ton per day.

[0039] Thus, certain embodiments for LNG production are disclosed, with co-production of LPG and ethane in an efficient and compact process. In certain embodiments, wet or rich shale gas at low pressure can be converted to three liquid products: LPG, ethane liquid, and LNG. In some embodiments, the disclosed LNG liquefaction plant and process can recover 99% propane and 90% ethane while producing an LNG product with 95% methane purity. In some embodiments, the LNG liquefaction plant receives shale gas at a pressure of about 450 to 600 psig, or alternatively about 400 to 600 psig, with ethane plus liquid content of 5 to 12 GPM, and processes such a rich gas in three units: a propane recovery unit, an ethane recovery unit, and an LNG liquefaction unit. In certain embodiments, the propane recovery unit receives and processes the gas prior to the ethane recovery unit, and the ethane recovery unit receives and processes the gas prior to the LNG liquefaction unit. Consequently, propane, ethane, aromatics and other components desired to be removed from or minimized in the rich shale gas can be addressed according to the appropriate specifications for feeding into the LNG liquefaction unit, which can include other known LNG liquefaction units other than the embodiments described herein.

[0040] In certain embodiments, the propane recovery unit 102 includes brazed aluminum exchangers, propane chillers, an integrated separator-absorber and a non-refluxed stripper, wherein the separator provides a flashed vapor to the absorber, and a flashed liquid that is pumped, heated, and fed to a stripper. In some embodiments, the stripper does not require a condenser and reflux system. Liquid from the absorber bottom is pumped and fed to the non-refluxed stripper, which produces an ethane rich overhead that is chilled and let down in pressure to the absorber as a two-phase reflux. In some embodiments, the LNG liquefaction plant includes a high propane recovery process while processing a rich feed gas at low pressure, using the stripper overhead for cooling and reflux to recover propane from the feed gas, without turbo-expansion. In certain embodiments, propane recovery is about 99% propane recovery.

[0041] In some embodiments, the absorber operates between about 450 to 550 psig pressure. In further embodiments, the stripper operates at least 30 psi, alternatively at 50 psi, and alternatively at 100 psi or higher pressure than the absorber, such that the stripper overhead vapor can generate cooling using Joule Thomson cooling to reflux the absorber. Based on the feed gas composition shown in Table I, in some embodiments, the absorber operates at about -45°F to -65°F in the overhead and about -40°F to -60°F in the bottom, while the stripper operates at about 10°F to 20°F in the overhead and about 150°F to 250°F in the bottom. In

certain embodiments, these temperatures may vary and are dependent on the feed gas compositions.

[0042] In some embodiments, the propane recovery unit recovers 99% of the propane and heavier hydrocarbons, producing an LPG liquid product with a vapor pressure of about 200 psig or lower pressure and an overhead vapor depleted in the propane and heavier hydrocarbon components. In certain embodiments, such a LPG product is a truckable LPG product, and the absorber overhead vapor is depleted in propane, containing the methane and ethane hydrocarbons only.

[0043] In some embodiments, the ethane recovery unit includes gas compressors, brazed aluminum exchangers, propane chillers, turbo-expanders and a demethanizer. In some embodiments, the feed gas is compressed to about 900 to 1,200 psig or higher pressure, and the compressed gas is split into two portions with 70% chilled and expanded to feed the demethanizer while the remaining portion is liquefied in a subcool exchanger, forming a reflux to the demethanizer. In certain embodiments, the demethanizer operates at about 350 to 450 psig or higher pressure. In still further embodiments, a portion of the high pressure residue gas, for example, about 20% to 30%, is recycled back to the subcool exchanger and then to the demethanizer as another or second reflux stream. Subsequently, the ethane recovery unit produces a 99% purity ethane liquid and a residue gas with 95% methane content.

[0044] Finally, in some embodiments, the residue gas from the ethane recovery unit is liquefied using a multi-component refrigerant in brazed aluminum exchangers. In some embodiments, the multi-component refrigerant contains nitrogen, methane, ethane, propane, butane, pentane, hexane, and other hydrocarbons. In some embodiments, the mixed refrigerant is compressed to about 500 to 700 psig, cooled by an air cooler and condensed in the cold box prior to let down in pressure which generates cooling to subcool the high residue gas stream to about -250 to -260°F. The subcooled LNG is further let down in pressure to about atmospheric pressure, producing the LNG liquid product.

[0045] The above discussion is meant to be illustrative of the principles and various embodiments of the present disclosure. While certain embodiments have been shown and described, modifications thereof can be made by one skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and teachings of the disclosure. The embodiments described herein are exemplary only, and are not limiting. Accordingly, the scope of protection is not limited by the description set out above, but is only limited by the claims which follow, that scope including all equivalents of the subject matter of the claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A LNG liquefaction plant comprising:
 - a propane recovery unit including an inlet for a chilled feed gas, a first outlet for a LPG, and a second outlet for an ethane-rich feed gas;
 - an ethane recovery unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the ethane-rich feed gas, a first outlet for an ethane liquid, and a second outlet for a methane-rich feed gas; and
 - a LNG liquefaction unit including an inlet coupled to the second outlet for the methane-rich feed gas, a refrigerant to cool the methane-rich feed gas, and an outlet for a LNG.
2. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 1, wherein the propane recovery unit further comprises a stripper, an absorber, and a separator configured to separate the chilled feed gas into a liquid that is directed to the stripper and a vapor that is directed to the absorber and is fractionated.
3. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 2, wherein the chilled stripper liquid is converted to an overhead stream used as a reflux stream to the absorber.
4. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 3 further comprising a pump, a chiller, and a letdown valve, wherein the pump is configured to pump an absorber bottom liquid to the stripper, wherein the converted overhead stream is an ethane-rich overhead stream, and wherein the chiller is configured to chill the ethane-rich overhead stream and the letdown valve is configured to let down pressure in the ethane-rich overhead stream to thereby provide a two-phase reflux to the absorber.
5. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 2, wherein the stripper is a non-refluxed stripper.
6. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 3, wherein the overhead stream is directed to the absorber for cooling and reflux in the absorber to recover propane from the chilled feed gas without turbo-expansion.

7. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 3, wherein the stripper operates at least 30 psi higher than the absorber, such that the stripper overhead stream generates Joule Thomson cooling to reflux the absorber.
8. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 3, wherein about 99% of the propane content of the chilled feed gas is recovered as the LPG.
9. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 2, wherein the fractionated vapor is a low pressure residue gas containing ethane and methane components.
10. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 1, wherein the ethane recovery unit further comprises a compressor to compress the ethane-rich feed gas and is configured to split the ethane-rich feed gas into first and second portions.
11. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 10, wherein the ethane recovery unit further comprises a chiller to chill the first ethane-rich portion and an expander to expand the first ethane-rich portion prior to entering a demethanizer.
12. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 11, wherein at least one of the second ethane-rich portion and a first portion of a high pressure residue gas from the demethanizer is directed as a reflux stream to the demethanizer.
13. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 12, wherein about 90% of the ethane content of the ethane-rich feed gas is recovered as the ethane liquid, and wherein a second portion of the high pressure residue gas from the demethanizer is the methane-rich feed gas.
14. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 1, wherein the LNG liquefaction unit is configured to use the refrigerant to cool and condense the methane-rich feed gas to form the LNG with about 95% purity methane.
15. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 1 further comprising co-production of the LPG and the ethane liquid from a rich low pressure shale gas.

16. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 15, wherein the rich low pressure shale gas is supplied at about 400 to 600 psig.
17. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 15, wherein the rich low pressure shale gas comprises about 50 to 80% methane, about 10 to 30% ethane, a remaining component including propane and heavier hydrocarbons, and a liquid content of 5 to 12 GPM.
18. The LNG liquefaction plant of claim 1, wherein the chilled feed gas is pre-treated to remove carbon dioxide and mercury, and dried in a molecular sieve unit.

19. A method for LNG liquefaction comprising:
 - providing a rich low pressure shale gas to a propane recovery unit;
 - converting the rich low pressure shale gas, in the propane recovery unit, to a LPG and an ethane-rich feed gas;
 - converting the ethane-rich feed gas, in an ethane recovery unit, to an ethane liquid and a methane-rich feed gas; and
 - converting the methane-rich feed gas, in a LNG liquefaction unit, to a LNG using a refrigerant.
20. The method of claim 19 further comprising:
 - separating the rich low pressure shale gas into a liquid that is directed to a stripper and a vapor that is directed to an absorber and is fractionated;
 - converting the stripper liquid to an overhead stream; and
 - providing the overhead stream as a reflux stream to the absorber.

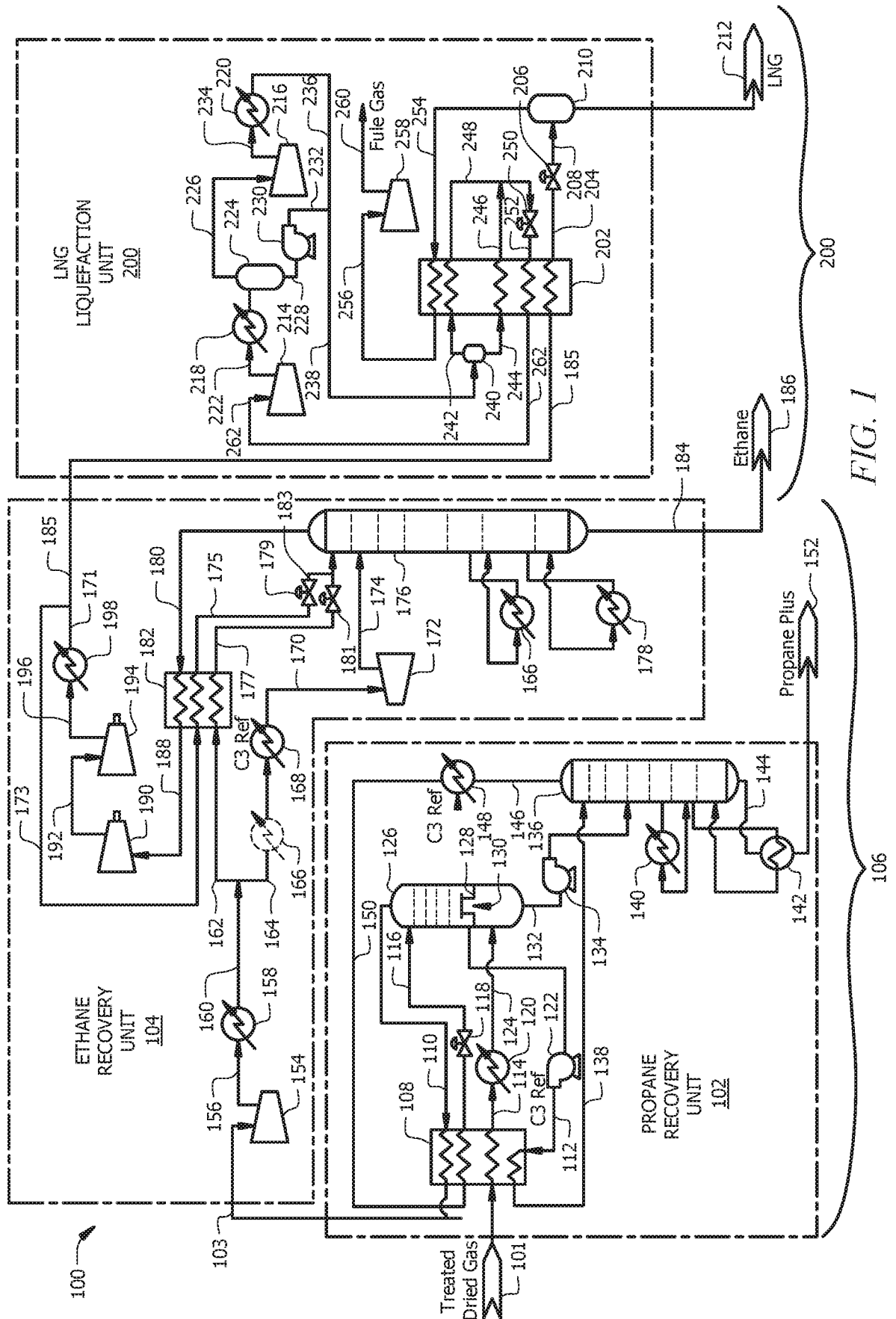


FIG. 1

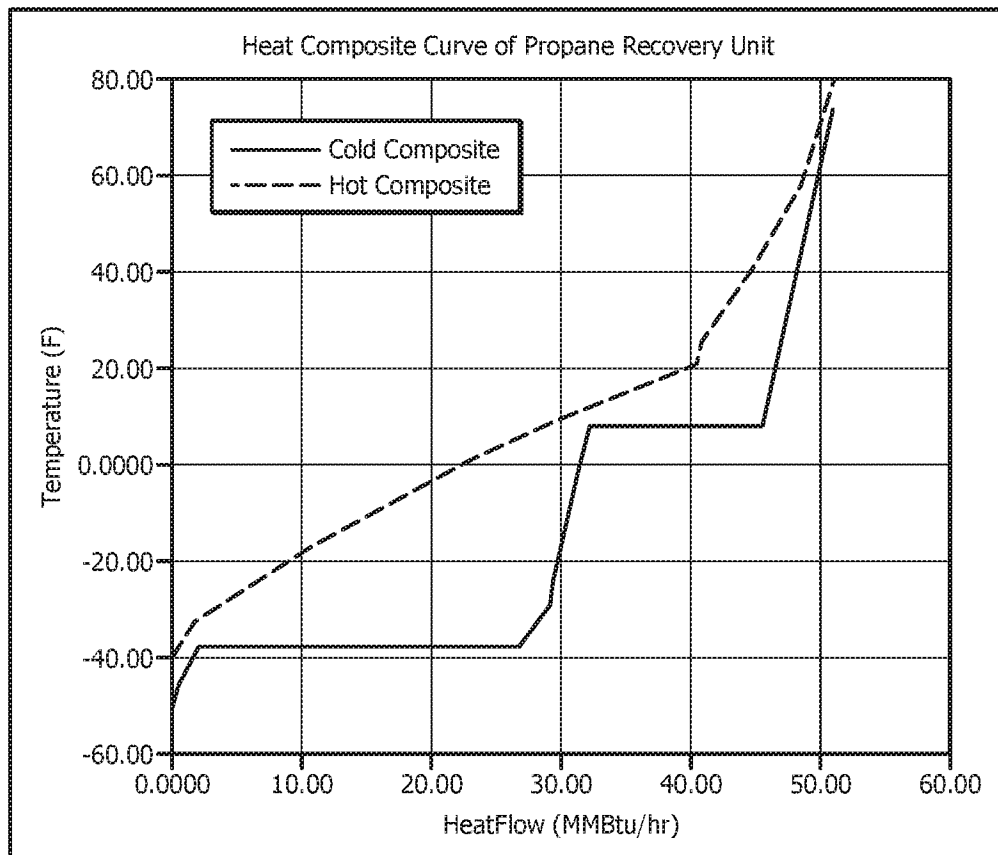


FIG. 2

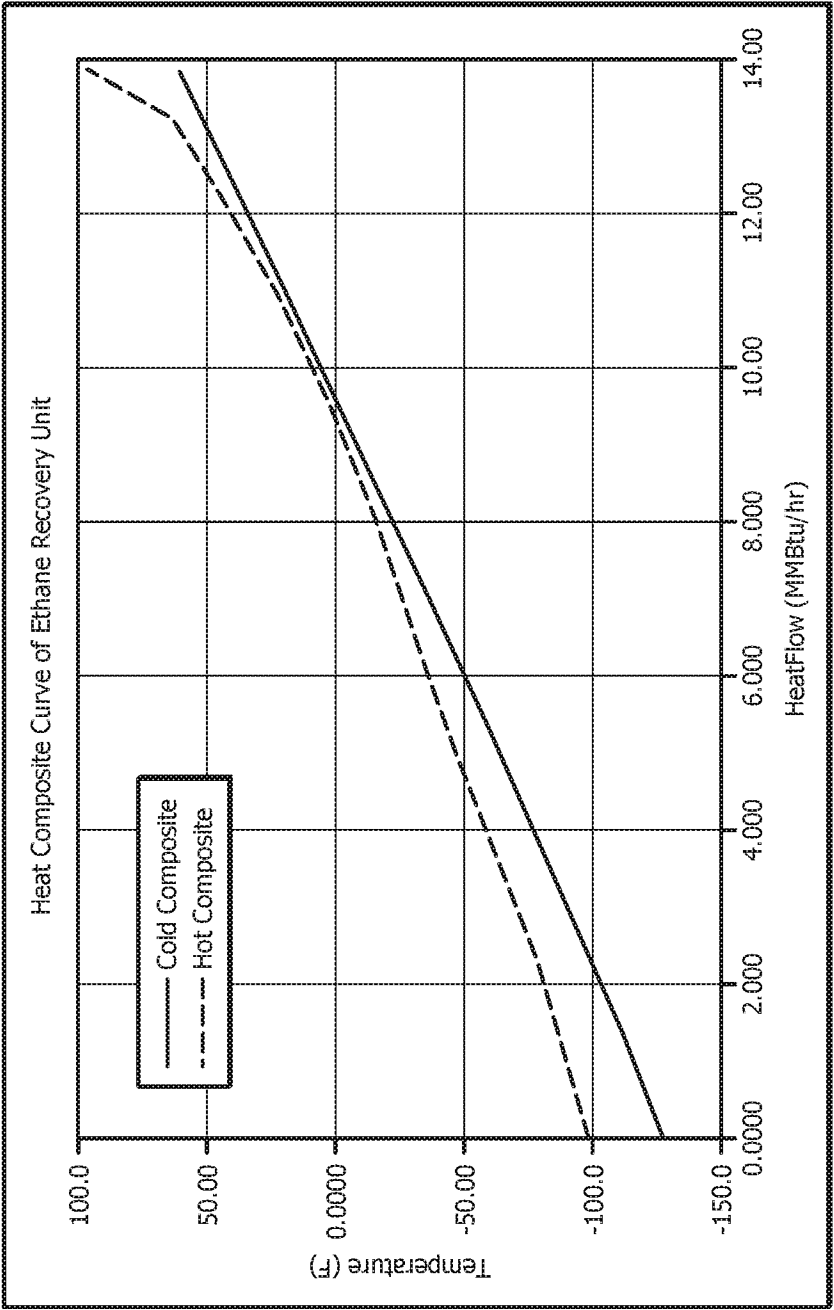


FIG. 3

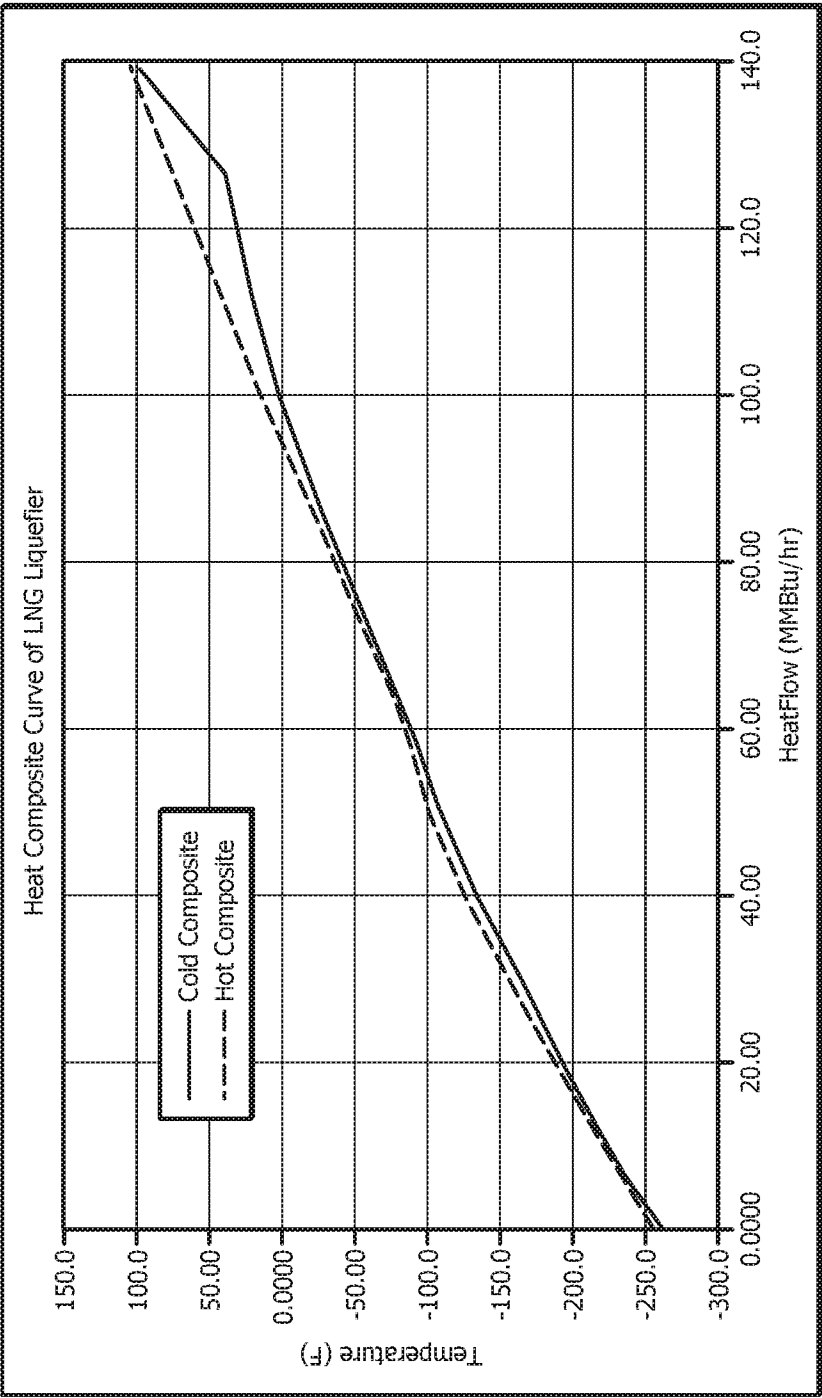


FIG. 4

Table 1 - Stream Compositions

Stream Mole %	Stream 101 Feed Gas	Stream 152 LPG Product	Stream 103 Feed to Ethane Recovery	Stream 186 Ethane Product	Stream 185 Feed to LNG Unit	Stream 212 LNG Product
Nitrogen	1915	0.000	2.216	0.000	2.908	1.377
Methane	61.670	0.000	71.369	0.125	93.640	94.993
Ethane	22.860	1.615	26.263	99.243	3.450	3.626
Propane	10.134	73.397	0.151	0.626	0.003	0.003
i-Butane	0.814	5.943	0.001	0.003	0.000	0.000
n-Butane	2.109	15.401	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.000
i-Pentane	0.193	1.409	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
n-Pentane	0.239	1.749	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
n-Hexane	0.052	0.381	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
n-Heptane	0.013	0.092	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
n-Octane	0.002	0.013	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Gas Flow, MMSCFD	77.48	10.61	67.01	15.96	51.05	48.56
Pressure, psia	472	483	1,200	1,205	905	17
Temperature, °F	80	145	231	57	96	-261.5
Ton per day	2,213	609	1,608	576	1,032	972

FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2016/034362**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER****F25J 1/00(2006.01)i, F25J 1/02(2006.01)i**

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)

F25J 1/00; F25J 3/02; F25J 3/00; C10L 3/08; F25J 1/02; C10L 3/10

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

Korean utility models and applications for utility models

Japanese utility models and applications for utility models

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

eKOMPASS(KIPO internal) & keywords: lng liquefaction, propane, ethane, methane, shale gas

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	US 2013-0061633 A1 (FLUOR TECHNOLOGIES CORPORATION) 14 March 2013 See paragraphs [0029]-[0032]; claims 1, 9, 8 and figures 2A-2B.	1-20
A	US 2014-0182331 A1 (LINDE PROCESS PLANTS, INC.) 03 July 2014 See paragraphs [0243]-[0252]; claim 17 and figure 1.	1-20
A	US 2011-0265511 A1 (FISCHER et al.) 03 November 2011 See paragraphs [0026]-[0035], [0048], [0050]-[0054], [0071] and figures 1-5.	1-20
A	EP 2521761 B1 (JOHNSON MATTHEY PLC) 25 November 2015 See paragraphs [0054]-[0074]; claims 1, 4, 7-9 and figures 2-5.	1-20



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

08 December 2016 (08.12.2016)

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/US2016/034362

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