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(54) Title: CUSTOMIZED SHADING DEVICE INCLUDING PHOTOVOLTAIC CAPABILITIES

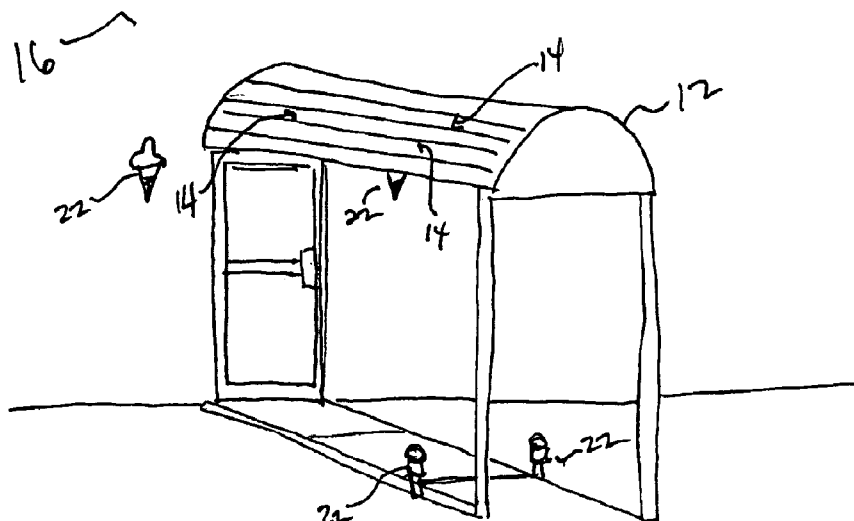


FIG. 2

(57) Abstract: A customized awning, window covering or other shading device that includes customized photovoltaic modules, panels or other photovoltaic-type devices and capabilities. The awning includes a cost-effective, energy-efficient means of providing solar power to run low-voltage devices at a desired interior or exterior location, while also maintaining or enhancing the aesthetic appearance or physical attributes of the shading device.



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CUSTOMIZED SHADING DEVICES INCLUDING PHOTOVOLTAIC PROPERTIES

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 61/134,366 filed July 8, 2008 entitled Customized Shading Device Including Photovoltaic Properties and is hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to a customized awning, window covering or other shading/covering apparatus that includes photovoltaic modules, panels or other photovoltaic-type devices and capabilities.

[0003] In particular, it is known in the art that consumers use awnings and window coverings on their homes and businesses, for example, in order to provide shading or protection from light and other environmental elements (wind, rain, snow, insects, etc). Further, it is known in the art that consumers use photovoltaic modules, panels and other devices (also known as solar panels or solar cells) to generate energy for their homes or businesses. There are numerous patents that describe some form of solar energy devices, ranging from basic to complex applications using solar energy and/or solar energy-generating devices (for example, US Publication No. 2005/0263178, which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety). However, many such devices are complicated, requiring (at a minimum) knowledge of implementing and managing solar energy-generating equipment, as well as expert knowledge in the art of solar energy generation and special tooling to effectively place or use a device or system. Or fixtures such as solar panels are often static in size and/or application and, as result, can be costly, complicated to use or install or inadequate to perform if a customized application and use is desired.

[0004] There exists a need for a device that provides cost-effective, energy-efficient, customizable solutions that are easy to install and use, while also providing an aesthetically pleasing effect.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] In one aspect, the present invention provides a customized shading device including photovoltaic capabilities.

[0006] In another aspect, the present invention provides a device that is easy to install.

[0007] In yet another aspect, the present invention provides a device that cost-effective to manufacture and purchase.

[0008] In yet another aspect, the present invention provides a device that may be custom manufactured based on both shading and energy needs.

[0009] In yet another aspect, the present invention includes a device that provides a reliable, cost-effective and efficient source of energy.

[0010] In yet another aspect, the present invention includes a device that provides a reliable, cost-effective source of energy at a location where common electricity sources may be limited or unreachable.

[0011] In yet another aspect, the present invention includes a device that provides a reliable, rechargeable system to run low-voltage devices.

[0012] In yet another aspect, the present invention includes a device that provides a safe power source to run low-voltage devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is a front view of one embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0015] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional side view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 4 is a front view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0017] FIG. 5 is a side view of the embodiment of the device of FIG. 4 in accordance with the present invention.

[0018] FIG. 6 is a front view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 7 is a side view of the embodiment of the device of FIG. 6 in accordance with the present invention.

[0020] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0021] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

[0022] FIG. 10 is a flowchart illustrating one embodiment of a device in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0023] FIG. 1 illustrates a device 10 according to one embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that houses at least one photovoltaic portion 14. The device of this embodiment further generally includes (the following not shown in FIG. 1) wires to guide electricity from the photovoltaic portion to an energy storage portion (for example, a battery) a power control portion and at least one load (to and from

which power may be directed), some of which are not shown in FIG. 1 but are nonetheless inherent to this embodiment of the invention. The device 10, as shown in FIG. 1, is mounted to a surface wall 16 of a house, in this example providing shade and elemental covering over a window 24 of the house.

[0024] FIGS. 2 and 8 illustrate a device 10 according to another embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions 14. The device 10 of this embodiment further generally includes (the following, some of which are not shown in FIGS. 2 and 8) wires to guide electricity from the photovoltaic portion to an energy storage portion, from an energy storage portion to a power control portion and thereafter, to a load 22 (for example an exterior light 22).

[0025] FIG. 3 illustrates a device 10 according to another embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that houses at least one photovoltaic portion 14. The device 10 of this embodiment further includes wires 18 to guide electricity from the photovoltaic portion 14 to an energy storage portion 20 and from the energy storage portion 20 to a power control portion (not shown), which thereafter directs electricity to or from a load 22 (in this embodiment, low-voltage appliances, such as a ceiling fan 22 and an exterior house light 22). The device 10 of this embodiment is affixed angularly to an exterior surface 16 of a home, above a window 24 used for shading against sun and environmental elements.

[0026] FIG. 4 illustrates a device 10 according to one embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions 14. The device of this embodiment further generally includes wires to guide electricity from the photovoltaic portion to an energy storage portion, from an energy storage portion to a power control portion, and thereafter, directs electricity to at least one load, each of which are not shown in FIG. 4 but are nonetheless inherent to this embodiment of the invention. The device 10, as shown in FIG. 4, is mounted to a

surface wall 16 of a house, in this example providing shade and elemental covering over a window 24 of the house.

[0027] FIG. 5 illustrates a side-view of the device 10 according to the embodiment shown in FIG. 4. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions (not shown in FIG. 5). The device 10 is mounted to a surface wall 16 of the house, at a predetermined angle 26 respective to the surface wall 16 of the house, in order to obtain a desired shading results with respect to the window 24 of the house or in order to obtain a desired solar power capture/efficiency, or both.

[0028] FIG. 6 illustrates a device 10 according to another embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that is operably connected with at least one photovoltaic portion housing 14a and at least one photovoltaic portion 14, which may or may not cover substantially all of the surface of the shading portion 12 of the device 10. In this embodiment of the present invention, the shading portion 12 houses a plurality of photovoltaic portion housings 14a and each photovoltaic housing 14a houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions 14. The device 10, as shown in FIG. 6, is mounted to a surface wall 16 of a house, in this example providing shade and elemental covering over a window 24 of the house.

[0029] FIG. 7 illustrates a side-view of the device 10 according to the embodiment shown in FIG. 6. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that is operably connected with at least one photovoltaic portion housing 14a, which each house, respectively, at least one photovoltaic portion (not shown). In this embodiment of the present invention, the shading portion 12 houses a plurality of photovoltaic portion housings 14a and each photovoltaic housing 14a houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions (not shown). The device 10 is mounted to a surface wall 16 of the house, the shading portion 12 having a predetermined angle 26 respective to the surface wall 16 of the house, and the photovoltaic portion housing 14a having predetermined angles 28

(which may be different or similar predetermined angles) respective to the shading portion 12, in order to obtain desired shading results with respect to the window 24 of the house or in order to obtain a desired solar power capture/efficiency, or both.

[0030] FIG. 9 illustrates a device 10 according to another embodiment of the present invention. The device 10 generally includes at least one shading portion 12 that is operably connected with at least one photovoltaic portion housing 14a, which each house, respectively, at least one photovoltaic portion 14. In this embodiment of the present invention, the shading portion 12 houses a plurality of photovoltaic portion housings 14a and each photovoltaic housing 14a houses a plurality of photovoltaic portions 14. The device 10 is mounted to a surface wall 16 of the house, the shading portion 12 having a predetermined angle (not shown) respective to the surface wall 16 of the house, and the photovoltaic portion housing 14a having predetermined angles (not shown)(which may be different or similar predetermined angles) respective to the shading portion 12 and/or the surface wall 16 of the house, in order to obtain desired shading results with respect to the window 24 of the house or in order to obtain a desired solar power capture/efficiency, or both.

[0031] With regards to the present invention, as illustrated in FIGS. 1-9, a shading portion 12 of a device 10 may include any number of materials, designs, shapes and lengths that would serve to shade a window, sidewalk, outdoor recreational apparatus (for example, an outdoor spa or hot tub), or other such features and apparatus as would be contemplated by one of skill in the art, from sunlight and/or other environmental elements. Accordingly, a shading portion 12 may include a variety of shapes and sizes, including but not limited to rectangular, square, curved (dome or canopy, for example) or any combination thereof. A shading portion 12 may include a variety of materials, including but not limited to, plastic, metal, wood, glass, elastic or semi-elastic materials (such as nylon, polyester, canvas, etc) and any combination thereof. A shading portion 12 further may include any predetermined length selected to achieve a desired

aesthetic and/or physical result. All of these features may be chosen on a custom basis. Most preferably, a shading portion 12 will easily house and support a photovoltaic portion 14, in its desired shape, size and material (as further described herein). Also, most preferably, a shading portion 12 is comprised of material that is weather-, water- and/or temperature-resistant or tolerant.

[0032] With regards to the present invention, as illustrated in FIGS. 1-9, a photovoltaic portion housing 14a and photovoltaic portion 14 of a device 10 may include any number of materials and designs and sizes that would serve to provide sufficient energy to support the energy needs of a low-voltage device (as described herein), in a cost-effective manner. Any material capable of generating photovoltaic properties (as described herein)(for example, a solar panel) is contemplated for use in the present invention, provided that it includes reliable functionality and is resistant and/or tolerant to environmental elements. The types of materials contemplated for use in housing and placement of the photovoltaic portion 14 at, near or within a shading portion 12 would include, but are not limited to, different types of metals (for example, aluminum), plastics, wood, glass, elastic and semi-elastic materials and fabrics, as well as any number of combinations thereof. Most preferably, the size and shape of the photovoltaic portion 14 provides the desired, reciprocal energy-producing and energy-support effects (for example, the "load" need of a power source 20, which is thereafter transferred to a particular low-voltage device, as effected by a particular geographic region; that is, availability and duration of sunlight exposure) to accommodate as many low-voltage devices as desired.

[0033] As shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, a load 22 (for example, a DC (Direct Current) and/or low-voltage device 22) contemplated for use in accordance with the present invention includes, but is not limited to, such devices as lights, ceiling fans (whether interior or exterior) and other similar apparatus. As shown in FIG. 3, wires 18 (such as DC wires) and/or lighter gauge wires (for example, wires which can be cut and spliced easily) may be used to direct power from a

photovoltaic portion 14 to an energy storage portion 20 and accordingly, from an energy storage portion to a power control portion (not shown) to or from a load 22. The wires 18 described herein are connected therebetween using supporting devices and methods as would be contemplated by anyone of ordinary skill in the art. Also as shown in FIG. 3, an energy storage portion 20 is used to house the electrical energy collected as a result of the functionality of the photovoltaic portion 20, which will provide power for a load 22. Most preferably, an energy storage portion 20 is a rechargeable battery (or solar rechargeable battery), which includes a basic hard jamming circuit and self-regenerating system (for example, a deep cycle battery).

[0034] Examples of such batteries include but are not limited to motorcycle batteries (which are typically effective to 10 degrees below zero, and thus would be preferable for regions experiencing cold climates), forklift batteries, and car batteries, to name a few. Further, it is contemplated herein that batteries 20 may be strung together to obtain the desired load size (battery sizes are optional, as is voltage). Therefore, the load and voltage are both flexible and may be chosen to provide a desired effect. Most preferably, the battery 20 is kept on a charger (for example, a battery tender or a trickle charger). Such a device is preferable due to both its inherently minimal use of the electricity generated by the photovoltaic portion 14 and its ability to keep the battery for a duration of up to 5-6 years or more (cost-effective). It is also preferable that a power control portion 30 (as shown and described in FIG. 10 below and herein) is used to regulate and direct energy. For example, a voltage regulator 30 may be used, which serves to smooth out the transition (for example, prevents or minimizes a stall or kill) when the electricity is generated by the photovoltaic portion 14. More specifically, the use of a voltage regulator is preferable either when electricity is not being drawn by a load 22 or when the sun is not out (for optimal collection of light by the photovoltaic portion 14). A voltage regulator typically regulates approximately 110 volts.

[0035] FIG. 10 is a flowchart illustrating an electrical wiring and/or system of at least one embodiment of the present invention, as described herein. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize the need to consult a regional, national or international electrical code, in conjunction with the following-described system. In at least one embodiment of the present invention, the electrical wiring and/or system may include connectivity between at least one photovoltaic portion 14, at least one energy storage portion 20 (for example, a battery, as earlier described), and at least one load portion 22 (for example, a ceiling fan, as earlier described), each of which are operably connected with at least one power control portion 30 (for example, a voltage regulator, as earlier described).

[0036] A power control portion 30 may perform several functions for the system of the present invention. For example, the power control portion 30 may prevent power leakage back through the photovoltaic portion 14 when they are in darkness and may thereby configured to adjust the loading of the photovoltaic portion 14 to maximize energy retrieved from the photovoltaic portions 14 (for example, photovoltaic "cells"). The power control portion 30 may further route power to and from an energy storage portion 20, so as to accommodate any requirements and limitations of the energy storage portion 20. For example, a chemical battery 20 can be charged by the incoming power but must be protected against, for example, overcharging or overheating. Supercapacitors or ultracapacitors 20 also may be used and are typically more tolerant of charging speeds, but have great variations in terminal voltage that must be accommodated. The power control portion 30 may also control the rate of voltage discharge and limits how low the discharged voltage can go to protect the energy storage portion 20 from damage.

[0037] In at least one embodiment of the present invention, the power control portion 30 may also regulate the output voltage as needed by various load portions 22, as well as limit the maximum and surge currents that a load portion 22 is likely to draw. The power control portion 30 may also give certain load portions 22, for example, emergency lights 22, higher priority than other load

portions 22 operably connected with the system, when the available stored power is running low.

[0038] In at least one embodiment of the present invention, the electrical wiring/system may be configured for specific system voltage to accommodate system needs. For example, a system configured around the common automotive battery voltage (which ranges from approximately 11 V to 15 V) can use different load portions 22 designed for automotive and recreational vehicle uses. Commercially available converters can generate 120 V AC from a 12 V system for specific load portions 22 that use a higher voltage.

[0039] In at least one embodiment of the present invention, the device 10 may be installed by a commercial entity trained in installing the device 10 and in conformance with local, regional, national or international electrical code, as would be known by one of ordinary skill in the art. It is also contemplated herein that a device 10 may be installed by an individual if sold in kit form, in whole or in part, so long as the applicable electrical code (as earlier described) is implemented.

[0040] Although the invention has been described in terms of particular embodiments and applications, one of ordinary skill in the art, in light of this teaching, can generate additional embodiments and modifications without departing from the spirit of or exceeding the scope of the claimed invention. Accordingly, it is to be understood that the drawings and descriptions herein are proffered by way of example to facilitate comprehension of the invention and should not be construed to limit the scope thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A customized shading device comprising at least one shading portion, at least one photovoltaic portion, at least one energy storage portion, and at least one power control portion, wherein said at least one shading portion houses said at least one photovoltaic portion, wherein said photovoltaic portion captures solar energy, wherein said at least one energy storage portion stores said captured solar energy for present or future use and wherein said at least one power control portion routes energy to and from said energy storage portion.
2. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said energy storage portion directs energy to at least one load.
3. The customized shading device of claim 2 wherein said at least one load comprises a low-voltage household appliance.
4. The customized shading device of claim 2 wherein said at least one load comprises a ceiling fan.
5. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said at least one energy storage portion comprises a battery.
6. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said at least one energy storage portion comprises an ultracapacitor.
7. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said at least one energy storage portion comprises a voltage regulator.
8. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said at least one photovoltaic portion comprises at least one PV cell.

9. The customized shading device of claim 1 wherein said at least one shading portion comprises a housing for said at least one photovoltaic portion.

10. A customized shading device comprising at least one shading portion, at least one photovoltaic portion, at least one energy storage portion, and at least one power control portion, wherein said at least one shading portion houses said at least one photovoltaic portion, wherein said photovoltaic portion captures solar energy, wherein said at least one energy storage portion stores said captured solar energy for present or future use and wherein said at least one photovoltaic portion is arranged in a predetermined orientation to capture a desired amount of solar energy.

11. The customized shading device of claim 10 wherein said at least one photovoltaic portion arranged in a predetermined orientation to capture a desired amount of solar energy comprises a predetermined angle relative to the surface of a building to which said customized shading device is operably connected.

12. The customized shading device of claim 10 wherein said at least one shading portion comprises a shading portion substantially covered at its surface with said photovoltaic portion.

13. The customized shading device of claim 12 wherein said photovoltaic portion comprises a plurality of photovoltaic cells.

14. The customized shading device of claim 10 wherein said at least one shading portion comprises an awning.

15. The customized shading device of claim 10 wherein said at least one shading portion comprises a canopy over a walkway.

16. The customized shading device of claim 10 wherein said at least one shading portion comprises at least a portion of the roof of a gazebo.

17. A method of capturing solar energy for at least one load, comprising the steps of:

Providing a shading device;

Installing at least one photovoltaic cell on said shading device;

Providing at least one energy storage device to collect and convert solar energy from said at least one photovoltaic cell to a usable form; and

Providing at least one power control device to regulate the flow of said collected and converted solar energy into said usable form by said at least one load;

Wherein said collected and converted solar energy into said usable form is used instantly or stored for future use by said load.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein said at least one load comprises a low-voltage load.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein said at least one power control device comprises a power control device that regulates and directs a higher priority of energy to one load over another.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein said power control device regulates and directs a higher priority to emergency lighting over an alternative load.

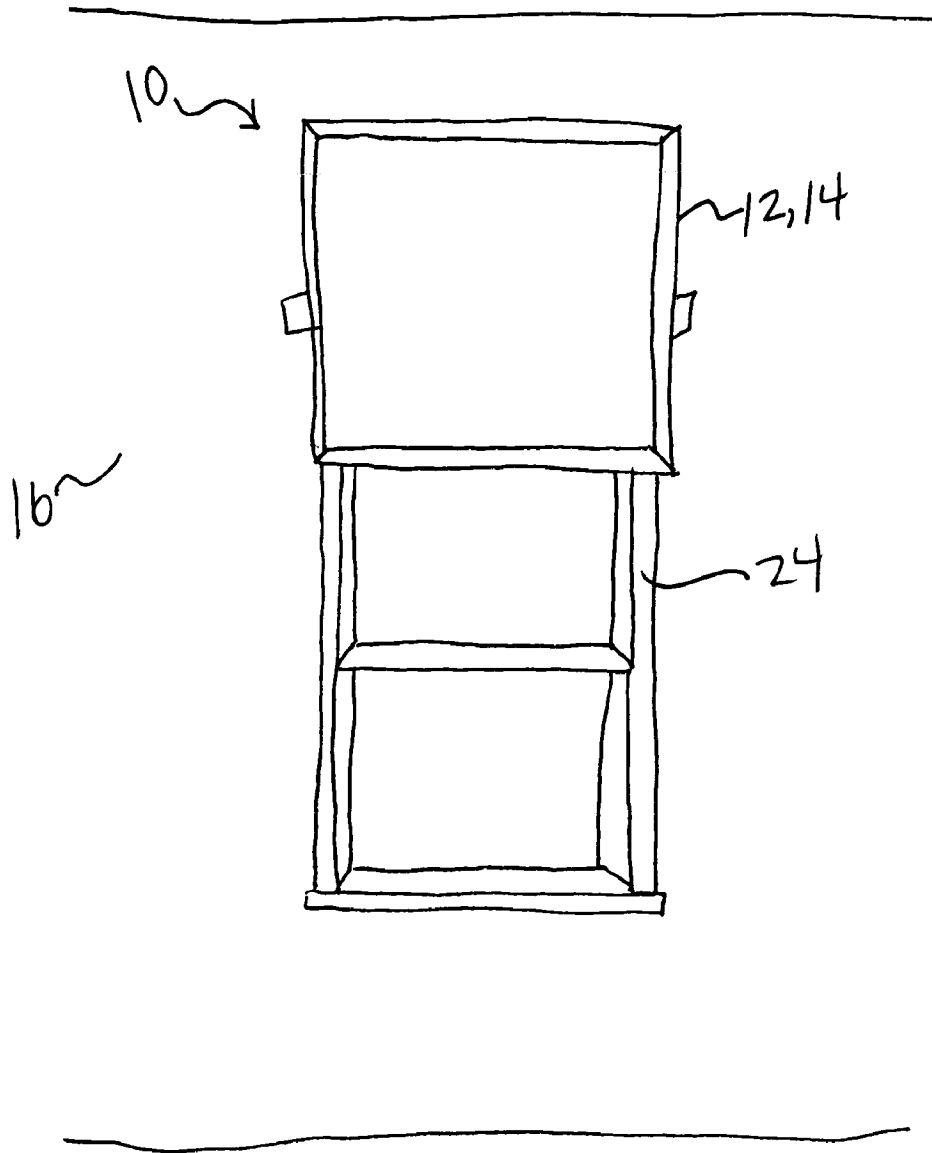


FIG. 1

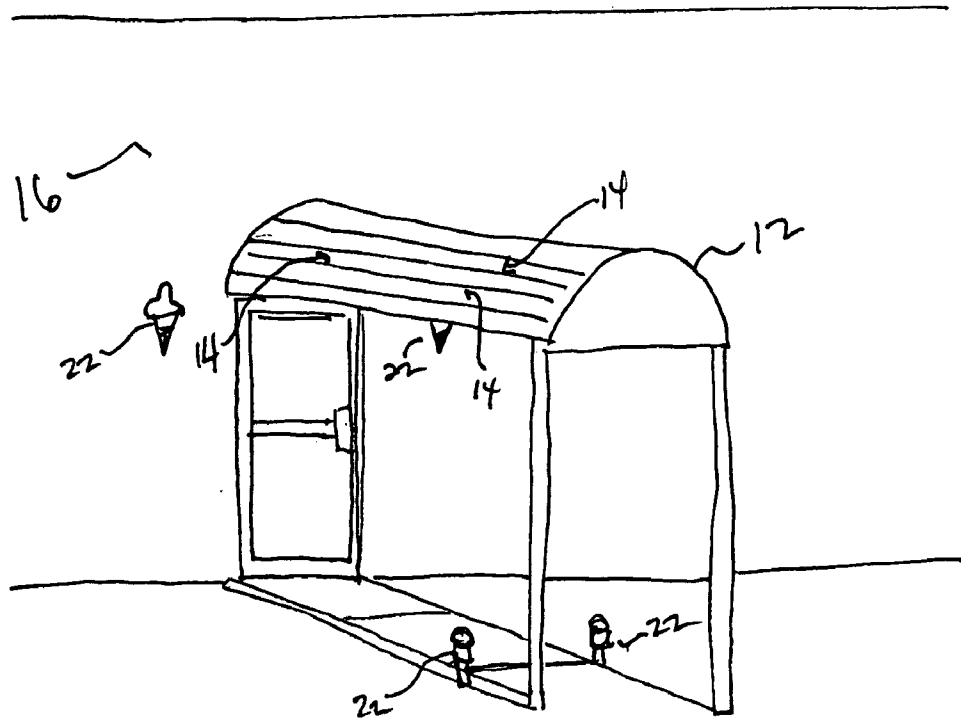


FIG. 2

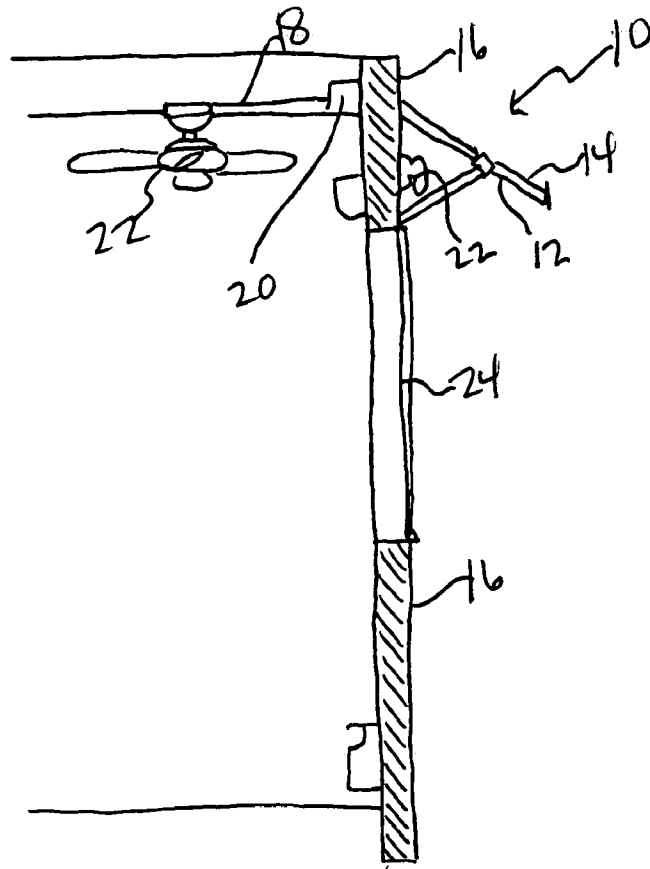


FIG. 3

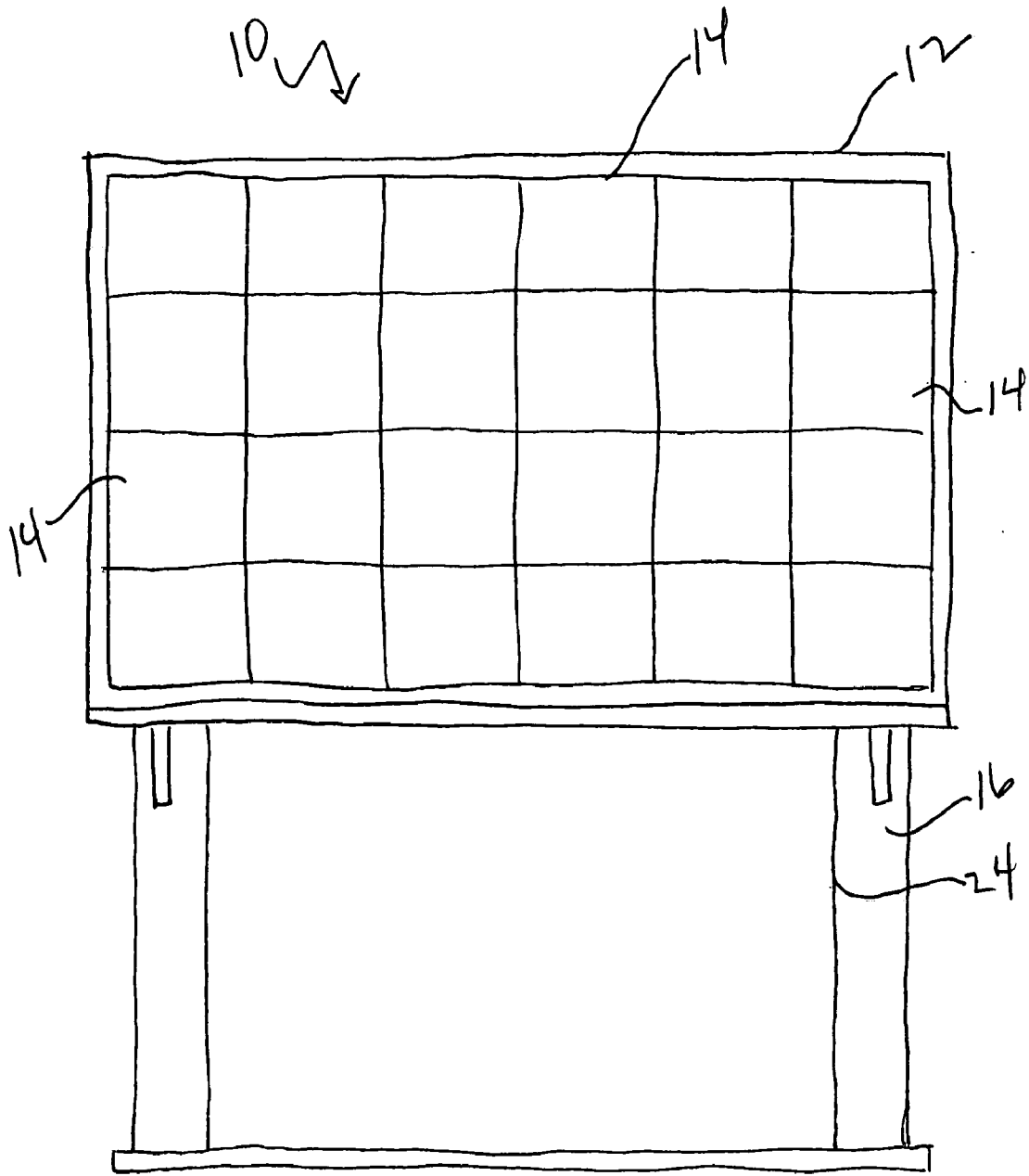


FIG. 4

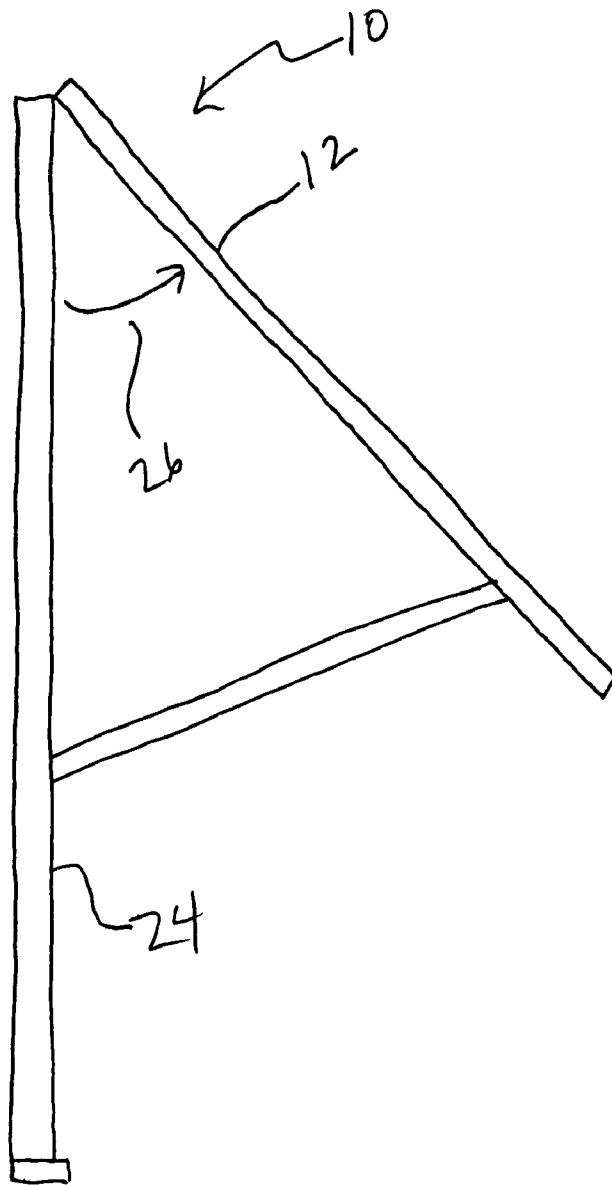


FIG. 5

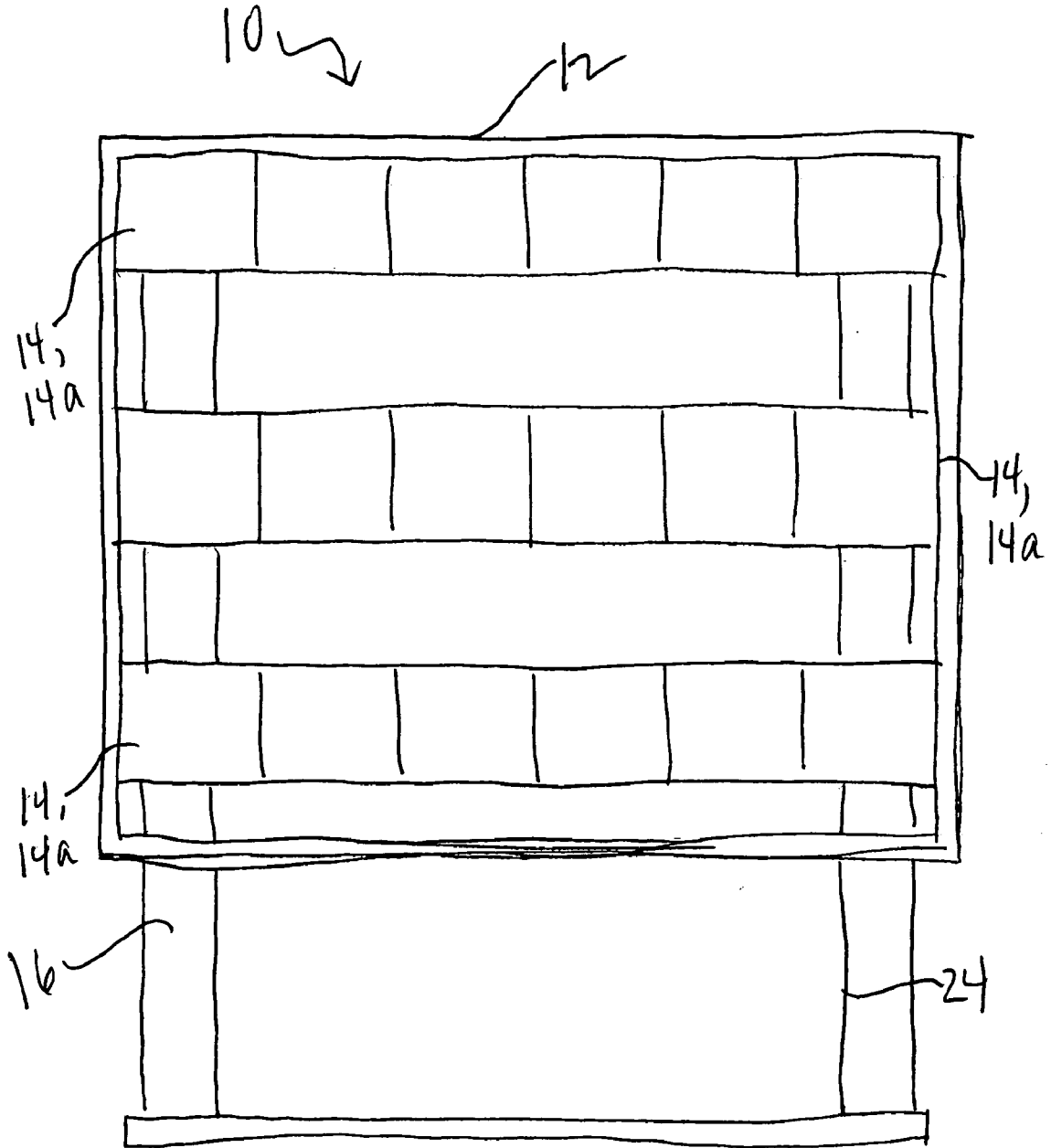


FIG. 6

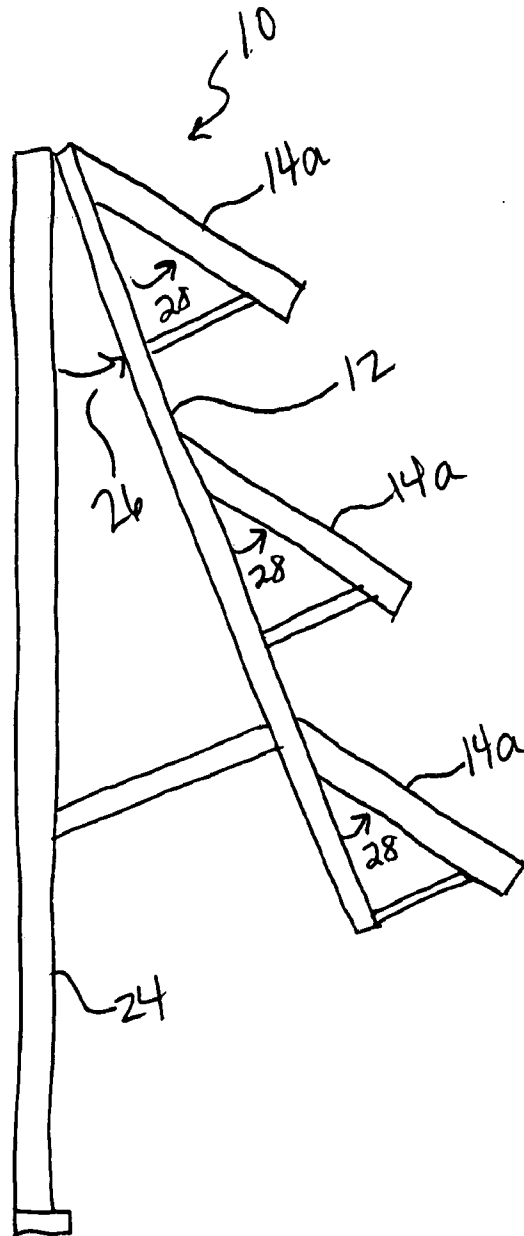


FIG. 7

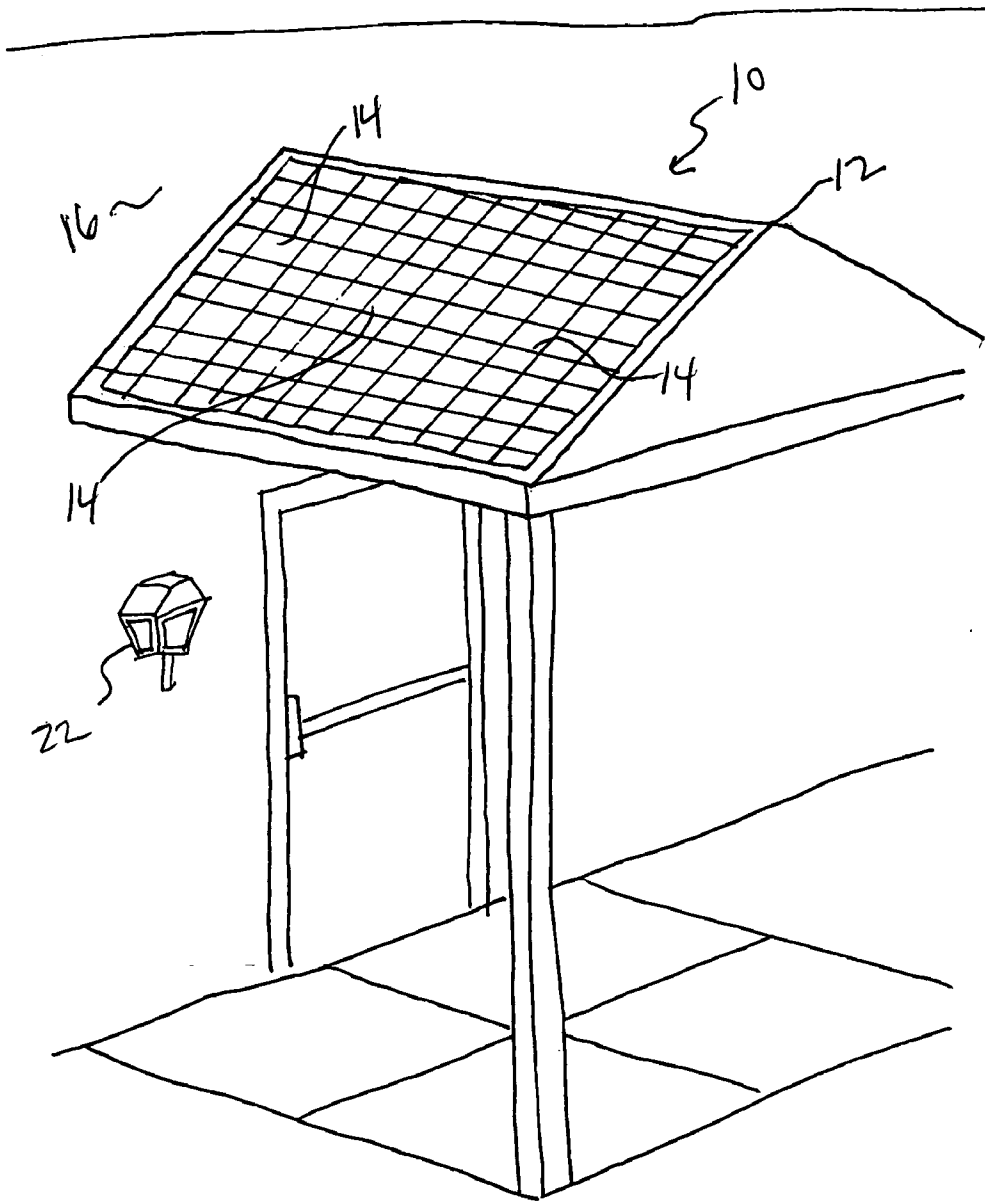


FIG. 8

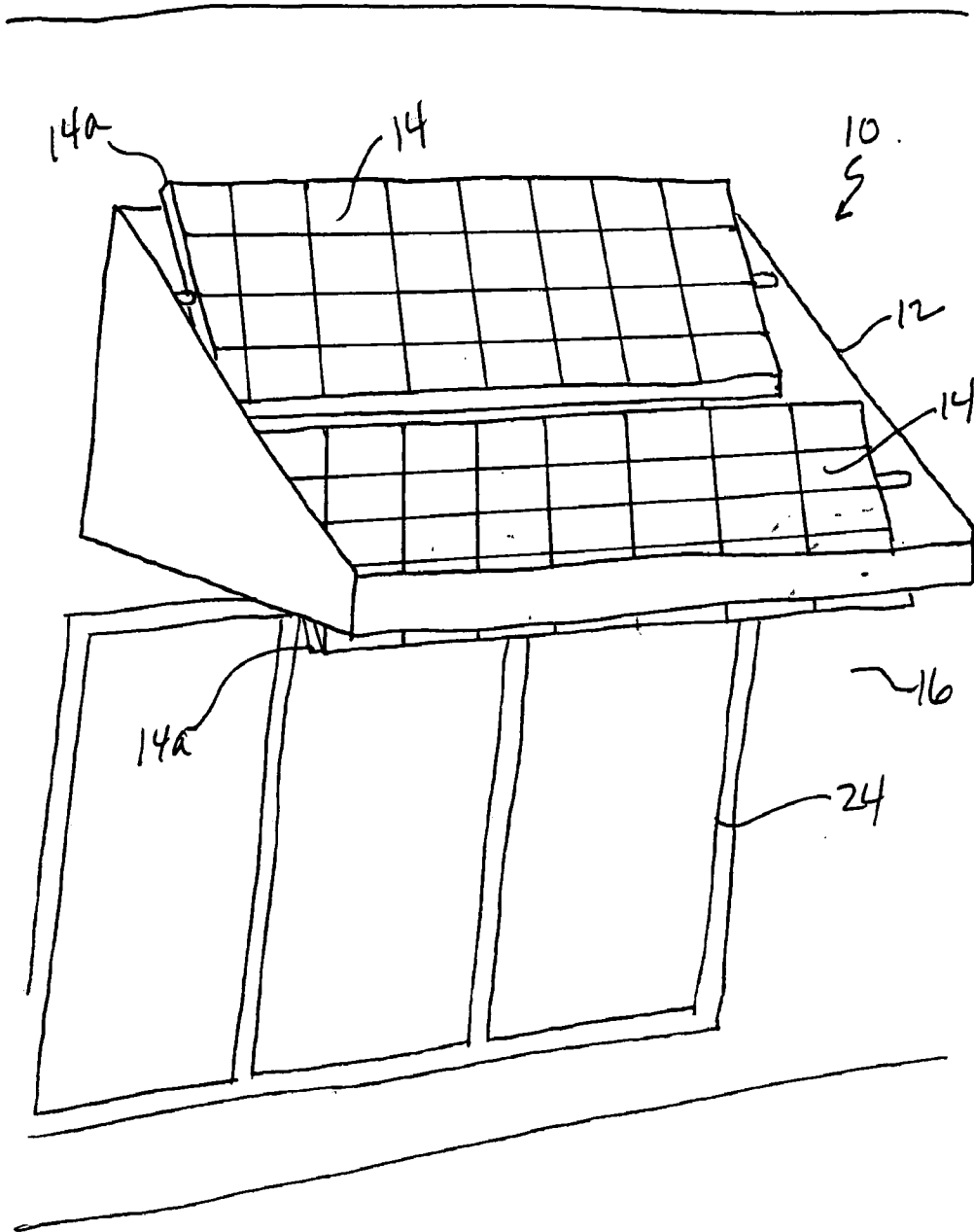


FIG. 9

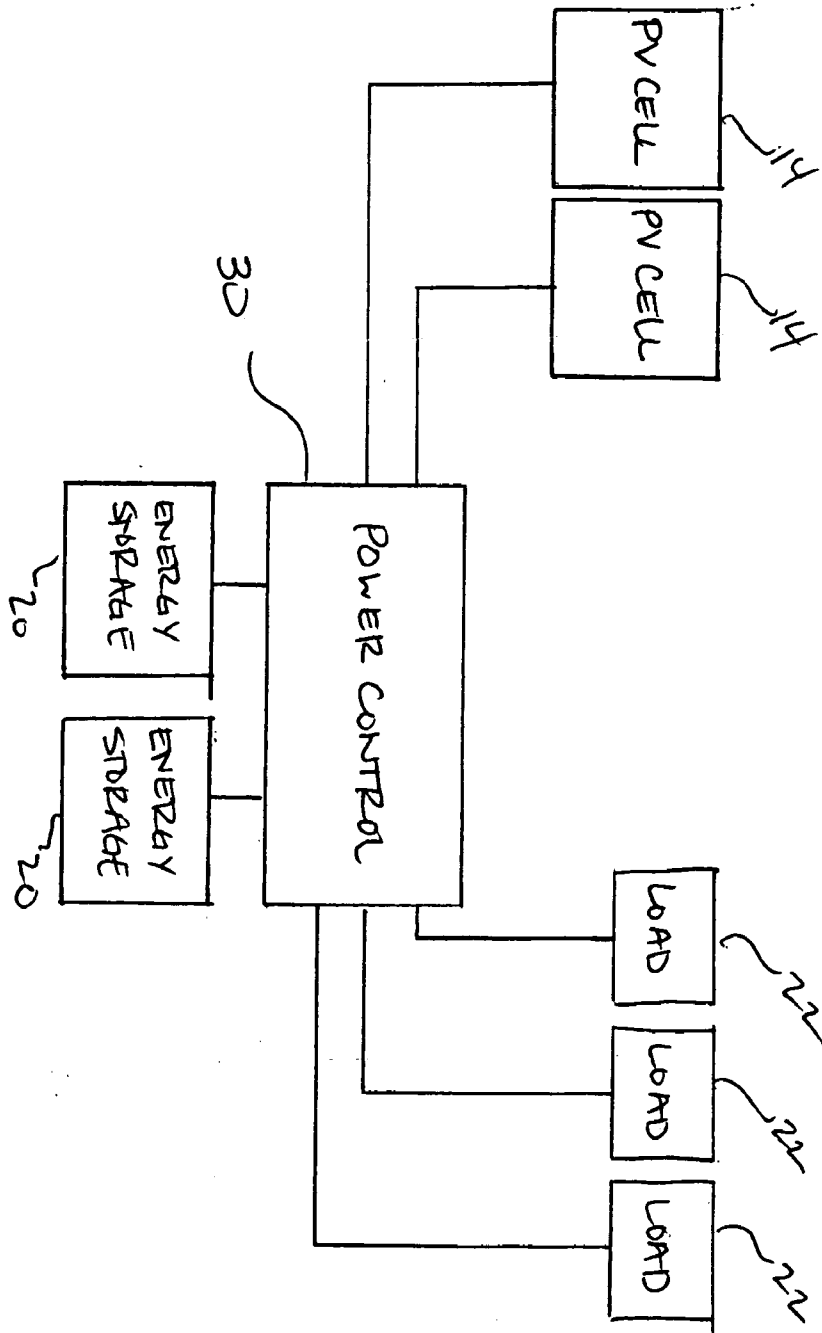


Fig. 10

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2009/049870

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC(8) - E04B 1/34 (2009.01)
 USPC - 52/73
 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)
 IPC(8) - E04B 1/34 (2009.01)
 USPC - 52/73

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

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

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X — Y	US 2004/0065025 A1 (DURHAM) 08 April 2004 (08.04.2004) entire document	1-3, 5, 8-12, 14-18 ----- 4, 6-7, 13, 19-20
Y	US 5,172,711 A (MUELLER et al) 22 December 1992 (22.12.1992) entire document	4, 13
Y	US 4,959,603 A (YAMAMOTO et al) 25 September 1990 (25.09.1990) entire document	6-7
Y	US 4,297,000 A (FRIES) 27 October 1981 (27.10.1981) entire document	19-20

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:	“T” later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
“A” document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	“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
“E” earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	“Y” document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
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“O” document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
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Date of the actual completion of the international search 17 August 2009	Date of mailing of the international search report 01 SEP 2009
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Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. 571-273-3201	Authorized officer: Blaine R. Copenheaver PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300 PCT OSP: 571-272-7774
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