



(22) Date de dépôt/Filing Date: 2018/06/18

(41) Mise à la disp. pub./Open to Public Insp.: 2018/12/20

(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2021/02/09

(30) Priorités/Priorities: 2017/06/20 (US62/522165);
2017/06/20 (US62/522174); 2017/06/20 (US62/522170);
2017/07/23 (US62/535938); 2018/06/11 (US16/004801)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *F21S 10/04* (2006.01),
F21V 11/08 (2006.01), *F21V 11/14* (2006.01),
F21V 14/04 (2006.01), *F24D 15/00* (2006.01)

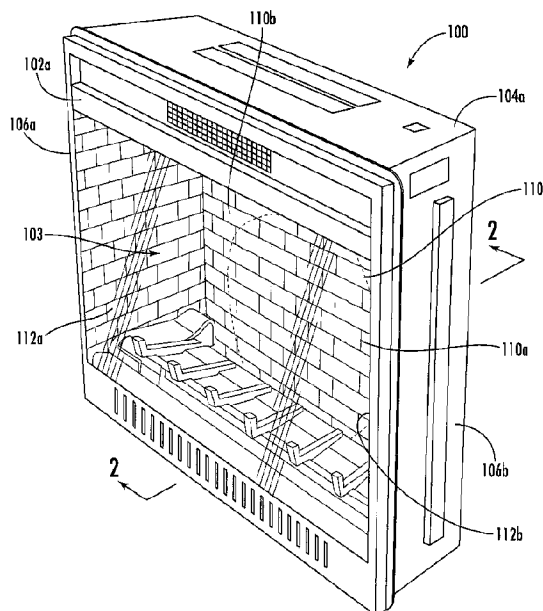
(72) Inventeurs/Inventors:
JONES, PAUL, US;
LASSEN, WILLARD, US;
MARSHALL, JOHN R., JR., US

(73) Propriétaire/Owner:
LIVING STYLE (B.V.I.) LIMITED, GB

(74) Agent: SMART & BIGGAR IP AGENCY CO.

(54) Titre : APPAREIL SIMULANT LA FLAMME DESTINE A SIMULER LES FOYERS COMPORTANT UN PARE-
ETINCELLE PRESENTANT DES SEGMENTS DE FLAMME NON CONTINUS

(54) Title: FLAME SIMULATING ASSEMBLY FOR SIMULATED FIREPLACES INCLUDING A FLAME SCREEN HAVING
NON-CONTINUOUS FLAME SEGMENTS



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A flame simulating assembly is provided with a reflected flickering light that includes only one light source. Light from the light source passes through a rotating flicker element onto an angled reflector, or mirror, that reflects light up onto a simulated fuel bed and the some of the light is reflected off of the flicker elements towards a flame screen to create a simulated flame. The dipping flicker elements creates a fluttering light effect due to the flicker elements "intermittently dipping" into the light path. This fluctuating light is reflected onto the logs and ember bed in front and creates a dancing effect, which simulates glowing embers.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A flame simulating assembly is provided with a reflected flickering light that includes only one light source. Light from the light source passes through a rotating flicker element onto an angled reflector, or mirror, that reflects light up onto a simulated fuel bed and the some of the light is reflected off of the flicker elements towards a flame screen to create a simulated flame. The dipping flicker elements creates a fluttering light effect due to the flicker elements "intermittently dipping" into the light path. This fluctuating light is reflected onto the logs and ember bed in front and creates a dancing effect, which simulates glowing embers.

W035 P03296-US1

**FLAME SIMULATING ASSEMBLY FOR SIMULATED FIREPLACES
INCLUDING A FLAME SCREEN HAVING NON-CONTINUOUS
FLAME SEGMENTS**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

- [0001] This application is related to and claims benefit of U.S. Application No. 62522165 filed June 20, 2017, U.S. Application No. 62522170 filed June 20, 2017, U.S. Application No. 62522174 filed June 20, 2017, and U.S. Application No. 62535938 filed July 23, 2017.

BACKGROUND

[0002] 1. Technical Field

- [0003] The present disclosure relates generally to artificial or simulated fireplaces and stoves, and more particularly to an electronic flame simulating assembly with an enhanced flickering light and modular design.

[0004] 2. Background of the Related Art

- [0005] In simulated fireplaces, electronic flames or simulated flames are often used to provide the simulated fireplace with a more realistic visual flame or fire effect and also to play a role in decoration. Prior art flame simulation devices may include a light source and rotating reflector which are installed behind or beneath a screen wall with flame-shaped slots, also called a flame screen. Many prior art devices also include two-way mirrored back walls which temper the passage of backlighting to soften the edges of simulated flames created behind the back wall. However, these false back walls add substantial depth to the devices. These configurations take up more space, are more costly, and are more fragile in transit.

- [0006] Many devices additionally include a simulated fuel bed that includes simulated logs and embers of the fire. The simulated fuel bed and logs must

be independently lit by a separate light source(s) adding further cost and complexity to the devices.

[0007] Therefore, there is a perceived need in the industry for a simulated fireplace that includes a fuel bed and flame screen that have an enhanced simulated burning visual effect, that does not require additional back lighting components which can significantly increase the cost of manufacture and cost of operation of the simulated fireplace. Furthermore, there is also a desire to reduce cost of operation of simulated fireplaces, namely, reduced electrical needs of the simulated fireplace.

SUMMARY

[0008] The present disclosure provides in one respect, a flame simulating assembly with a reflected flickering light system that includes a light source that shines through a rotating flicker rod with a plurality of flicker elements. Some of the light from the light source is reflected off of the rotating flicker element up towards a flame screen to create a flame effect. Some of the light from the light source passes through the rotating flicker elements onto an angled reflector, or mirror, that reflects light up onto a simulated fuel bed. The light that is reflected off the mirror first passes through gaps in the flicker elements as the flicker rod rotates and the terminal ends of the flicker elements dip into and out of the light path. The dipping flicker elements creates a fluttering light effect due to the flicker elements “intermittently dipping” into the light path. This fluctuating light is reflected onto the logs and ember bed in front and creates a dancing effect, which simulates glowing embers and burning logs. The logs and ember bed may or may not be additionally lit from the inside. A significant portion of the emitted light is also reflected from the flicker elements and up through a screen wall with flame-shaped slots and openings, and onto an imaging screen or wall, to further simulate flames.

[0009] Another novel aspect of the present disclosure solves the problems of the prior art by providing a flame simulating assembly with a flame screen that has non-continuous flame-shaped segments that have sharper edges, are generally wider than they are tall, and taper outwardly from the center to the edges of the flame screen. The non-continuous flame-shaped segment can, for example, be non-continuous in a vertical direction, or along the beam angle of the light source. This unique flame shape configuration results in a more pronounced triangular shape of the resulting simulated flame. The triangular outline shape of the non-continuous cutouts can create an artificial fire shape that better resembles a real fire, and that is wider at the bottom than at the top, with greater intensity at the center than at the edges. In alternative embodiments, the non-continuous cutouts can have an outline of any other shape including an elongated triangular, rectangular, oval, parabolic, sinusoidal, etc. shape.

[0010] Further embodiments can include an improved simulated light assembly which can channel, or direct, light at a desired forward angle and prevent side spill of light to provide for enhanced flame shapes for a more realistic flame. While the terms, channel and direct, are used, this is not intended to limit the function of the device. A portion of the light may be channeled while other portions of the light may diffuse through the channel walls.

[0011] A further novel aspect of the present disclosure provides a flame simulating assembly with an integrated ember bed and flame screen assembly. The integrated ember bed and flame screen may be molded as a single piece of plastic, providing many advantages. The ember bed can be lit from inside by the flicker element, creating a glowing ember bed, in addition to projecting the simulated flame through an integrated flame screen. The cost is reduced since the flame screen may be made from the same plastic instead of steel, injection molded instead of stamped in a secondary forming operation, and the depth can be decreased due to the elimination of a

barrier between flicker element and ember bed. The cutout shapes of the flame screen may also be advantageously punched out, either before or after injection molding. Separate logs or grate elements can be attached or built into the molding process. The molding process can be any molding process including injection molding, vacuum molding, or blow molding. Moreover, in some embodiments, the integrated assembly can be fused together after discrete portions are molded.

[0011a] According to some embodiments disclosed herein, there is provided a flame simulating assembly for providing a moving image of fluctuating flames, comprising: an enclosure having a bottom, a top, a rear wall, and two side walls, a light source disposed along the rear wall; a rotating flicker rod having a plurality of reflective flicker elements disposed in the path of the light source and configured to reflect the light upward towards a portion of the rear wall above the light source; a flame screen having a plurality of non-continuous flame segments, each of the plurality of flame segments having both curved edges and sharp points, and at least two outermost non-continuous flame segments taper outwardly from a center of the flame screen to a respective edge of the flame screen; and an imaging wall for receiving reflected light from the flicker element passing through the flame screen; whereby the reflected light from the flicker rod which is passed through the flame screen provides a realistic fire shape appearing wider at the base, closer to the flame screen, than at the top, and the light at a center of the realistic fire shape has a greater intensity than at respective edges of the realistic fire shape.

[0012] Accordingly, it can be seen that the present disclosure provides a unique and novel flame simulating assembly with improved flame appearance, better design, fewer parts and less cost.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- [0013] These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood with reference to the following description, appended claims, and accompanying drawings where:
- [0014] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a first exemplary embodiment of an electric fireplace;
- [0015] Fig. 2 is a partial perspective cross-sectional view of the fireplace of Fig. 1;
- [0016] Fig. 2A is a partial perspective cross section view of the fireplace of Fig. 1;
- [0017] Figs. 2B-2H are perspective views of alternative ember bed reflectors;
- [0018] Fig. 3 is a rear perspective view of a flame screen assembly of the fireplace of Fig. 1;
- [0019] Fig. 4 is another rear perspective view of the flame screen of Fig. 3 with a light shield in accordance with the teachings of the present invention;
- [0020] Fig. 5 is a rear view of the flame simulation sub-assembly of Fig. 4;
- [0021] Fig. 6 is a bottom perspective view of a first embodiment of a light shield;

[0022] Fig. 7 is a front view of the light shield of Fig. 6;

[0023] Fig. 8 is a bottom view of a light assembly, light shield, and flicker assembly;

[0024] Fig. 9 is a front view of the subassembly of Fig. 8;

[0025] Fig. 10 is a perspective view of the subassembly of Fig. 8;

[0026] Fig. 11 is a top view of the subassembly of Fig. 8 with a front reflector;

[0027] Fig. 12 is a top view of an embodiment of a flicker element in a flat configuration before assembly onto the electric fireplace;

[0028] Fig. 13 is a schematic of a prior art flame screen;

[0029] Fig. 14 is a schematic of an embodiment of a flame cut-out in accordance with the present invention;

[0030] Fig. 15 is a schematic of an alternative embodiment of a flame cut-out;

[0031] Fig. 16 is a top perspective view of a flame screen;

[0032] Fig. 17 is a partial perspective view of a second exemplary embodiment of an electric fireplace with an integrated ember bed and flame screen;

[0033] Fig. 18 is a partial perspective cross-sectional view of the fireplace of Fig. 17;

[0034] Fig. 19 is a partial perspective cross-sectional view of the fireplace of Fig. 17;

[0035] Fig. 20 is a rear perspective view of a combined flame-screen and fuel bed of the fireplace of Fig. 17;

[0036] Fig. 21 is a front perspective view of the combined flame-screen and fuel bed of Fig. 20;

[0037] Fig. 22 is a front perspective view of the combined flame-screen and fuel bed of Fig. 20 with a simulated log;

[0038] Fig. 23 is a perspective view of a third exemplary embodiment of an electric fireplace;

[0039] Fig. 24 is a cross sectional view of Fig. 23;
[0040] Fig. 25 is a front perspective view of the light sub-assembly of Fig. 23;
and
[0041] Fig. 26 is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 23.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

[0042] Certain exemplary embodiments will now be described to provide an overall understanding of the principles of the structure, function, manufacture, and use of the device and methods disclosed herein. One or more examples of these embodiments are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Those skilled in the art will understand that the devices and methods specifically described herein and illustrated in the accompanying drawings are non-limiting exemplary embodiments and that the scope of the present invention is defined solely by the claims. The features illustrated or described in connection with one exemplary embodiment may be combined with the features of other embodiments. Such modifications and variations are intended to be included within the scope of the present disclosure. Further, in the present disclosure, like-numbered components of the embodiments generally have similar features, and thus within a particular embodiment each feature of each like-numbered component is not necessarily fully elaborated upon. Additionally, to the extent that linear or circular dimensions are used in the description of the disclosed systems, devices, and methods, such dimensions are not intended to limit the types of shapes that can be used in conjunction with such systems, devices, and methods. A person skilled in the art will recognize that an equivalent to such linear and circular dimensions can easily be determined for any geometric shape. Further, to the extent that directional terms like top, bottom, up, or down are used, they are not intended to limit the systems, devices, and methods disclosed herein. A person skilled in the art will

recognize that these terms are merely relative to the system and device being discussed and are not universal.

[0043] Generally, a novel, electronic simulated fireplace is disclosed. As noted above, traditional electric or electronic fireplaces suffer from a number of drawbacks including complicated manufacturing, a large number of parts, poor quality flame projections, and housing sizes that are too large for many locations. The instant disclosure provides a number of advantages over the prior art. The instant disclosure provides a number of sub-assemblies that individually, or in combination, provide a more realistic moving image of fluctuating flames, a more realistic glow for an ember bed, a more compact design, or a more integrated design.

[0044] In an exemplary embodiment, illustrated in Figs. 1-15, the electric fireplace 100 can include a housing, or enclosure, having front and back walls 102a, 102b, top and bottom walls 104a, 104b, and side walls 106a, 106b. Through an opening in the front wall 102a a firebox cavity 103 can be defined which is visible through a transparent glass panel or a set of glass doors (not shown). The firebox cavity 103 can be defined by a firebox rear wall 110, firebox top and bottom walls, and firebox side walls 112a, 112b. The firebox cavity 103 is intended to create the appearance of a traditional fireplace firebox. The side walls 112a, 112b and the rear wall 110 may or may not be given the appearance of brick or stone to provide an authentic look and feel. The side walls 112a, 112b may or may not be angled relative to the rear wall 110. In the illustrated embodiment, a gradation of color from a central location 110a on the firebox rear wall to the firebox side walls may provide the illusion of soot build-up 110b towards the outer edges while also providing a brighter, lighter central portion for enhanced reflection and flame appearance in the center. For example, the central portion 110a may be yellow, red, brown, or brick colored, and the color can then fade to a black, grey, or generally soot-like color as it extends away from the central portion forming a gradation 110b. Alternatively, the

firebox side walls 112a, 112b and the firebox rear wall 110 can have any appearance, texture, or color.

[0045] The interior of the housing can provide space for various internal components of the electric fireplace, including a heater/blower unit (not shown in this embodiment) which provides a warm air flow from the fireplace unit 100 and further including a flame simulation assembly 120 which provides the visual effect of moving flames on the firebox rear wall 110. Referring briefly to Figs. 17-18, an exemplary configuration of the heater is located in a compartment at the top of the housing. However, in alternative embodiments, the heater can be disposed in other areas of the device. In general, the heater/blower unit can be controlled, with a controller (not shown), to provide hot air to heat the surrounding area to further add to the realism of the electric fireplace and its' utility as a space heater. The controller can additionally be used to control the flame simulation assembly and any other feature of the device.

[0046] The flame simulation assembly 120 can generally include a flame simulating light source 130, a flicker element 140, and a flame simulator element (flame screen) 150 all of which work in concert to create the shape and appearance of moving flames on the firebox rear wall 110. In the illustrated embodiment, the rear wall 110 functions as an imaging screen, and the flame simulating components are located in front of the rear wall 110. The rear wall panel 110 may alternatively have other shape configurations and/or have areas of matte or glossy finishes depending on the desired flame effect and the configuration of the flame simulating assembly 120 located forwardly thereof. In addition to the flame simulation assembly 120, the fireplace 100 may include an ember bed simulation assembly 160. In some embodiments the ember bed simulation assembly 160 is a fully, or partially, separate assembly from the flame simulation assembly 120. In other embodiments, the ember bed simulation assembly 160 is integrated into, and with, the flame simulation assembly 120. As will

be discussed in detail below, the various embodiments can provide an enhanced realistic flame and ember simulation. In some embodiments, various sub-assemblies can be integrated together to decrease the overall footprint of the fireplace assembly.

[0047] In the first embodiment, as shown in Figs. 1, 2, and 2A, the electric fireplace 100 is shown. As noted above, the electric fireplace 100 can generally include a housing having a heater at a top portion thereof and a flame simulation assembly 120 and an ember bed simulation assembly 160 in a bottom portion thereof.

[0048] In general, the flame simulation assembly 120 can include a single flame simulating light source 130 which can be used to illuminate both a flame simulation assembly 120 and an ember bed simulation 160 assembly – without additional light sources. The flame simulation assembly 120 can generally include the flame simulating light source 130, a light shield 131, a rotating flicker element 140 which can angle the light generated by the light source 130, and a flame screen 150. The flame simulation assembly 120 can be a single subassembly housed by a flame simulation housing. The flame simulation housing can have two sidewalls 124a, 124b, a lower rear wall 126, and an upper rear wall 128. In the illustrated embodiment, the lower rear wall 126 can have a generally upside-down “L” shape that includes an upper horizontal piece 126a and a lower vertical piece 126b. Extending upward and forward, at an angle, from a forward edge of the upper horizontal piece 126a can be the flame screen support 128. The flame screen support 128 can be disposed in an angle of approximately 50 degrees to 70 degrees from the horizontal. In the illustrated embodiment the flame screen support 128 has a flame screen 150 integrated directly thereon.

[0049] The single light array, or source, 130 can be disposed beneath the flame screen 150 proximate on the lower rear wall 126 of the flame simulation housing. The light array 130 can include a plurality of bulbs or light emitting diodes (LEDs) 134 disposed on a printed circuit board (PCB) or mounted on a support 132 and wired together. In the exemplary

embodiment, the light array 130 is disposed against the lower rear wall 126b and oriented such that the PCB 132 is parallel to both the rear and front walls 102a, 102b and the bottom and top walls 104a, 104b. In an alternative embodiment (see Figs. 23-26), the light array 130 can be angled upward relative to the rear wall 110 so that it is partially directed up towards the top wall 104a of the fireplace housing. This arrangement will be discussed hereinafter with regards to the embodiment of Figs. 23-26. In some embodiments, the light array 130 can be an elongated panel that includes a plurality of sources 134. The light sources 134 can be any of traditional incandescent light bulbs, halogen bulbs, fluorescent bulbs, or light emitting diodes (LEDs) disposed thereon. The light sources 134 can be any color including white, or various hues of yellow, red, orange, blue, and violet. The various colors and color combinations can be used to create a realistic flame effect. In the illustrated embodiment, as shown in Fig. 5, LEDs are shown in an array of groups 136 of LEDs. The groups of LEDs 136 can be three columns of LEDs 134, with three, two, and three LEDs disposed in columns. The LEDs 134 in each column can be aligned with the LEDs of the other columns such that they form rows. Alternatively, any number of LEDs 134 can be grouped in the array 130. For example, as shown in Fig. 8, two groups of LEDs on either side of the center LED group can include three LEDs each, in a generally triangular shape. Any of the groupings of LEDs 136 can have any geometric configuration. The array of LEDs, as shown, are arranged such that the distance between each of the LED groups 136 changes, as shown in Fig. 5. The center LED group 136a can be a first distance D1 from the second sets 136b on either side. The third sets 136c can be a second distance D2 from the second sets 136b. The fourth sets 136d can be a third distance D3 from the third sets 136c. The first, second, and third distances D1, D2, D3, can be equal or different than one another. Moreover, any number of groups 136 can be used. The

locations of LED groups 136a-d can be a function of the design of the flame shield 150 used, as discussed below. However, in some alternative embodiments, the distance between the LED groups 136 can be the same along the length of the array 130. This single light array 130 is designed to output enough light to create realistic flames on the rear wall 110 of the housing, a glow effect on the rear wall of the housing and illuminate the ember bed 160 and logs 192 to simulate burning embers and logs.

[0050] As noted above, the flame simulation assembly 120 can additionally include a light channeling shield, light focusing system, or light path guidance system, 131 to further optimize the realism of the flames generated thereby. Referring now to Fig. 4, an exemplary embodiment of a light channeling shield 131 is shown generally disposed in the flame simulation assembly 120. In order to mitigate, or prevent, the crossing of flames or diagonal flame shapes, a partition shield can be used to block the light shining from the LED groups 136 at steep beam angles. In other words, each individual LED group 136 can have a beam angle that defines how much the light is distributed. The exemplary light shield 131 can direct, or focus, the light from the LED groups 136 such that each LED group 136 is only illuminating certain portions of the flame simulation assembly 120 or the ember bed assembly 160. The exemplary light channeling shield 131 accomplishes this goal by providing a channel 137 for each group of LEDs 136 in the array 130 to direct the light emitted therefrom. The shield 130 can be made from an opaque or translucent material to permit a select amount of diffuse light to pass therethrough. Alternatively, the shield 131 can be made from a solid material that may prevent light from crossing over into other channels 137. In a further alternative, the top wall 133 can be made from a translucent material and the side walls 135 can be opaque. The shield 131 can be designed such that each channel 137 has the correct geometry to channel the light in a forward direction away from the LED panel 132. In general, the shield 131 can

include a longitudinally extending planar top wall, or upper plate, 133 with a plurality of perpendicular spaced shield walls, or partition, 135. The spaced shield walls 135 can be arranged such that they are spaced to accommodate the spacing of the LED groups 136 discussed above, as shown in Fig. 5. Moreover, the shield walls 135 can have a length that is approximately equal to the width of the top plate 133. The top wall 133 can be translucent such that a desired amount of diffuse light is permitted to shine through to create a glow effect on the back wall 110 of the housing, creating a secondary glowing effect of the ember bed giving off more light from its base. In alternative embodiments, each LED or group of LEDs 136 can have individual shade or cone walls, or partitions, disposed around each group or around each LED. Such alternative walls can have alternative shapes, geometries and configurations that provide the effect of creating “spot lights” to direct or focus the light in the desired areas of the assembly.

[0051] In an alternative embodiment, a light source 132 and light channel 131 can have LED groups 136', and the associated shield walls 135', closer in the middle with gradually farther apart toward the outer edges. For example, as shown in Figs. 6-8, the middle, first, two shield walls 135' can be spaced a distance D1'. The shield walls 135' can be mirrored on either side of the centerline in the illustrated embodiment, for the sake of ease, only one side of shield walls 135' will be discussed. The second shield wall can be spaced a distance D2' from the first shield wall, the third shield wall can be spaced a distance D3' from the second shield wall, and the fourth shield wall can be spaced a distance D4' from the third shield wall. In the illustrated embodiment, $D1' < D2' < D3' < D4'$. This can match the overall design of the flame cutouts (taller in the middle) of a flame shield (not shown) and will more effectively illuminate the center of the flame cutouts. However, in other embodiments, the distance between the shields can be equal, or have any suitable dimensioning.

[0052] Referring back to Figs. 3-5, the secondary effect of directing a diffuse glow onto the back-imaging panel 110 and side walls 110a, 110b can contribute to the simulation of the glow of a real fireplace. For example, as shown in Figs. 3-5, the flame simulation housing 122 can include a cutout 121 on the upper horizontal piece 126a of the lower rear wall 126. The top surface 133 of the light shield 131 can be partially, or completely, disposed within the cutout 121. As noted above, the light shield 131 can be translucent so as to allow a desired amount of light from the LEDs to pass therethrough. The light can pass up through the cutout 131 to the back wall 110 to create a glow. The glow effect may be separate from the light channel effect 131 and could be used independently of the light channel shield 131. A translucent material of sufficient diffusive properties could be used to take advantage of existing LED light, or light from a secondary LED source to create a glow.

[0053] Referring to Figs. 4, 5, 9, and 10, the shield 131 can be positioned between the LEDs 134 and the flicker spindle, or rotating flicker rod, 142 or between the flicker rod 142 and the flame effect cutout 150. The shallower angle light channeled by the shield 131 effectively illuminates and creates realistic vertically extending flame images, while the shield 131 blocks steep beam angle light from jumping across to adjacent cutout portions 152 of the flame screen 150 and creating distorted horizontally extending flame images. Therefore, it can be seen that the simulated flame assembly 120 provides a unique solution to the problems of the prior art by providing a simulated flame assembly with a light channeling shield 131 that more accurately directs shallow angle light through the flame screen cutouts 152 and provides a background glow effect.

[0054] The light from the light source 134 can pass through the light shield 131 such that it is directed towards the rotating flicker rod 140. The light that hits the flicker element, as shown via arrow A, can (A) be reflected through the slotted flame screen, as shown via arrow B, and onto the

imaging wall, forming a simulated flame, and (B) pass intermittently through the flicker element, as shown via arrow C, and onto the reflector, where the light is reflected, as shown via arrow D, onto simulated ember, or fuel bed, 160 creating a glowing or burning ember effect.

[0055] As noted above, light from the LEDs 134 is directed through the light channel 131 towards the flicker element portion 140 of the flame simulation assembly 120. Generally, the flicker element 140 can be disposed on a flicker rod 142 which turns about an axis that is generally located vertically above at least a portion of the LEDs 134, for example above the light path A. The rod 142 can be supported by the light simulation housing side panels 124a, 124b. Further, a motor (not shown) can be secured to one of the light simulation housing side panels 124a, 124b and retain one terminal end of the rod 142 therein. The motor can rotate the rod 142 such that the flicker element 144 rotates with the rod 142 to create a flicker effect. In the illustrated embodiment, the flicker element 144 can be a single piece of reflective material that is threaded onto, and secured to, the rod 142. In some embodiments, the flicker element can be stamped as a single piece of material, as shown in Fig. 12. The flicker element 144 can be alternatively laser cut, manually cut, or molded. Further, the flicker element 144 can be made from any flexible or semi-flexible material that is reflective. In one embodiment, the flicker element 144 can be made from a reflective mylar strip. The flicker element 144 can have a variety of shapes and designs to permit the light from the LEDs 134 to selectively be reflected upwards towards the flame screen 150 or passed through to be reflected onto the ember bed 160. In the illustrated embodiment, the flicker element 144 can be threaded onto the rod 142 such that there are two types of paddles, flicker shapes, or flamelets. A plurality of first "X" shaped type paddles 144a are fixed to the rod 142 in a first angular orientation relative to the rod and a plurality of second "X" shaped type paddles 144a fixed to the rod 142 in a second angular orientation relative to the rod. The plurality of first "X"

shaped paddles and the plurality of second “X” shaped paddles 144a can be angularly offset from one another with respect to the rod 142. The second type of paddle can be an “T” shaped paddle 144b which can be angularly offset from another set of “T” shaped paddles 144b and both of the plurality of first and second “X” shaped paddles 144a. The relative spacing and orientation of the various paddles 144 can be a function of how the flicker element 144 is threaded onto the rod 142. Each of the “T” and “X” shaped paddles 144a, 144b can have contoured edges, undulating outline, elongate curvilinear outline, or a unique wavy patterned outline as shown in at least FIG. 2A and 9-12. For example, the width of the arms of the paddles 144a, 144b can vary between thicker portions and thinner portions as a function of the undulating outline.

[0056] As illustrated, the rod 142 of the flicker element 149 is disposed forward of the LED panel 132, towards the front wall 102a, and vertically above the LEDs 132, away from the bottom wall 104b. In use, as the rod 142 is rotated by the motor, the distal ends of the paddles 144 move into and out of the path of the light from the light source 132, such that the paddles “dip” into the path of light, see light path arrows C and D, as shown in Fig. 2. The relative angular locations of the paddles 144 and the relative side-to-side spacing thereof can permit a portion of the light to reflect off the plurality of paddles 144 and onto the flame screen when they “dip” into the path of the light. When the paddles 144 are not “dipping” into the path of the light, the light is able to pass by or around the flicker element 140 and onto the ember bed reflector 170, as discussed further below, then up towards the ember bed 160. The dipping flicker elements 144 creates a fluttering light effect due to the flicker elements “intermittently dipping” into the light path. This fluctuating light is reflected off the ember bed reflector 170 through to both the ember bed 160 in front and the logs 192 to create a dancing effect, which simulates glowing embers and logs. The angularly offset relationship and linear spacing of the various paddles 144,

or flicker elements, can provide for the advantage of using a single light source 130 to illuminate, or activate, the ember bed 160 and the simulated flames (on the rear imaging wall 110).

[0057] In use, the light from the LED array 130 is directed, by the light shield 131, at the flicker element 140. A portion of the light is reflected against the paddles 144 upward towards the flame screen 150. A further portion of the light passes through the flicker element 140 towards the ember bed reflector 170, which is discussed further below. Therefore, it can be seen that the simulated flame assembly 120 provides a unique solution to the problems of the prior art by providing a simulated flame assembly 120 with a reflected flickering light that relies on a single light source 130 to light the fuel bed 160 and simulated flame yet provides a simulated burning effect to both. Consequently, component manufacturing costs and electricity usage of the simulated fireplace are reduced.

[0058] The light that is reflected upward from the flicker element 140 is directed towards the flame screen 150 before passing to the back wall 110. The flame screen can selectively permit the reflected light, from the flicker element, through to the back wall. Advantageously, the exemplary flame screen includes vertically non-continuous flame cut outs which are segmented along the path of reflected light. The non-continuous flame screen can, for example, be non-continuous in a vertical direction, or along the beam angle, or light path, of the light source as shown in Fig. 16. In some embodiments the flame screen can be removably fitted to the flame simulation housing so that alternate flame screens can be used. In other embodiments, as shown in Figs. 3-5, the flame screen can be integral in the housing.

[0059] Prior art flame screens 50, as shown in Fig. 13, can suffer from elongated cutouts 52 which extend the entire length which the light would be passing through. The result of the prior art flame screen 50 is that the simulated flames are elongated and unrealistic. Referring now to Figs. 14,

15, and 16, exemplary embodiments of flame screens 150, 150' with non-continuous flame segments 152, 152' are shown. The segments 152, 152' can be generally non-continuous along a given beam path B. The flame screen 150, 150' can include a plurality of slots 152, 152' forming flame segments that are vertically or angularly non-continuous, have both curved edges 154, 154', and sharper edges 156, 156' than prior art flame screens. As shown in at least Fig. 16, a plurality of linear divergent light paths B, extend generally up from the flicker element (not shown in Fig. 16), up to 75° from a vertical center line V. As noted above, the spread of the light towards the flicker element, and up to the flame screen, is restricted by the light channel 131. A plurality of the linear divergent light paths can cross over the flame segments in a non-continuous manner such that a plurality of both long and short non-continuous light projections are created on the back wall of the fireplace. From a functional standpoint, the non-continuous segments act to start and stop (permit and block) the light transmission from the rotating flicker element, in an irregular pattern, i.e. intermittently flicker the light creating the flame to more realistically simulate the dancing irregular non-continuous image of a "flame". As seen in at least Fig. 9, the combination of the flicker element 140 having the paddles 144a, 144b, oriented such that they have differing undulating widths as well as rotational sweeping through or dipping into the light, and the flame cut-outs 152, 152' create realistic flames on the back imaging wall 110. The unique shape of both the paddles 144a, 144b and the flame segments 152 result in varied light paths from the light source 130 through the flame screen 150.

[0060] The flame segments 152, 152' can be arranged in a generally triangular pattern, as shown in Fig. 14, with the center of the pattern forming the peak 159' of the triangular pattern and the sides 158b' tapering downward, dramatically and, thus, forming a more pronounced fire shape. For example, the triangular pattern can include a lower straight edge 158a' and two concave edges 158b' extending upward towards a topmost vertex.

In some embodiments, the triangular pattern can be an isosceles triangular pattern. The flame segments 152, 152', as shown, can have a variety of shapes and sizes, where collectively they form the flame pattern, but individually do not necessarily form a flame pattern alone in isolation.

[0061] The exemplary flame screens 150, 150' can permit the light that is reflected up from the flicker element 140 to pass through the non-continuous segments 152, 152' to create realistic flames on the rear wall 110 of the housing. The broken-up flames from the flame screen 150 are seen, in conjunction with an optional glow effect from the rear of the flame simulation housing to create a realistic flame.

[0062] As discussed above, some of the light, shown via arrow C, that is directed from the light source 130 towards the flicker element 140 passes by the flicker element 140 as the paddles 144 dip in and out of the path of the light. The light that passes by the flicker element can continue to the ember bed reflector 170, as seen in Fig. 2 and 2A.

[0063] Referring now to Figs. 2 and 2A, the ember bed reflector 170 can have a generally exaggerated "Z" shape having a base portion 172 and at least one reflector portion 174, 176. In the illustrated embodiment, the ember bed reflector 170 can have a first reflector portion 174 and a second reflector portion 176 both extending upward at different angles. The ember bed reflector 170 can be made from a sheet of reflective material that has been bent or molded into the preferred shape. The faces of the first and second reflector portions 174, 176 are preferably reflective. In some embodiments, the ember bed reflector 170 can be made from a reflective material or coated with a reflective material. The reflector portions 174, 176 can be straight, as shown in Fig. 2B, or have a convex angled shape, as shown in Fig. 2C, or alternatively, have a curved or parabolic shape, either concave or convex, as shown in Figs. 2D-2F. In an alternative embodiment, the second reflector portion 176 may be omitted, as shown in Fig. 2B. In some embodiments, the ember bed reflector 170 can be integrated into the cover 102a, as shown in

Figs. 2G and 2H. The light, shown via arrow D, can be reflected upward towards the ember bed portion 160 and the log grate 190. The ember bed 160 itself can be disposed laterally rearward towards the rear wall 110 of the enclosure. In some embodiments, the ember bed portions 160 and the log grate 190 can be an integral assembly formed into a unitary piece. Light from the ember bed reflector 170 can be reflected against the ember bed 160 to illuminate it and the light can be reflected up towards the log grate 190. On the log grate 190, one or more logs can be placed and the front face of the log 192, in addition to the grate 190, can be illuminated from the light, including from arrow D. A portion of the log 194 can have a shadow 196 where the light D is blocked by the grate bar 192. In some embodiments the log 194 can additionally include an internal light source 197 which may glow through the log in the area 196 where the shadow is formed by the grate bar 192. The internal illumination creates an internal glow in the shadow area 196 giving the appearance of actual glowing embers. In some alternative embodiments, logs can be illuminated from below by the light coming through the ember bed, as shown in Fig. 22 for example. In addition, or alternatively, the logs can be further illuminated by secondary smaller light sources (not shown) disposed at various locations within the logs themselves. The combination of the flicker elements 144 and the ember bed reflector 170 can advantageously illuminate the ember bed without the need for additional light source.

[0064] Referring to Figs. 18-21, in an alternative embodiment 200, the assembly can include a fully integrated ember bed 260 and flame screen 250 which are formed or molded into a single housing, or component, 222. The embodiment of Figs. 18-22 can be generally the same as the first embodiment of Figs. 1-16, however in place of the discrete, separate, ember bed 160 and flame screen 150; an integrated, contoured, simulated fire simulation housing 222 can be provided. In some embodiments, the single component 222 can be manufactured from plastic, metal, or a composite

material. In one example, the single component 222 can be molded plastic. As shown in Fig. 19, the integrated ember bed 260 and flame screen 250 can form a generally shallow, inverted V-shape, similar to a roof, to hide the flame screen 250 from view of the user and enhance the realism of the simulated flame. At the peak 221 of the inverted V-shape, a groove 232 can be formed to support the grates 290 which can hold the faux logs 292, as shown in Figs. 18 and 22. In alternative embodiments, the grates 290 can be integral with the ember bed assembly. Such an integrated ember bed 260 and flame screen 250 can additionally include a plurality of cut-outs 225 on the upper horizontal piece 226a of the lower rear wall 226 to permit light from a light source 230 to pass through the light shield 231, similar to the cut out of Figs. 3-5. Alternatively, in place of a plurality of smaller cut-outs 225, the upper horizontal piece 226a can include several medium sized windows, one large window, or no window at all. The integrated ember bed 260 can have a textured surface and/or a reflective coating. For example, the reflective coating can include a combination of glitter, reflective metal or glass flakes, miniature piercings, translucent colored stained glass 262, and/or a serrated bottom (not shown), to enhance the visual effect of burning embers. In some embodiments, the integrated ember bed 260 can include a motor and actuator arm to move the ember bed 260 with gentle pulsations to create an added visual effect of burning embers. The integrated assembly can advantageously provide for a lower cost manufacturing and assembly of the overall device 200 as there are less parts that need to be assembled and connected. In some embodiments, the reflector 270 can be integral with the ember bed as well. Alternatively, the reflector 270 can be integral with the front wall of the enclosure, as discussed above with respect to Figs. 2G and 2H. In use, light is directed from the light source 230 past the flicker element 240 to both the ember bed reflector 270, and on to the ember bed 260, and through the flame screen 250 in the same fashion as the embodiment of Fig. 1-16. Further, a heater 213 is shown disposed in an

upper compartment 214 of the housing 201. As such, a detailed discussion of the various sub-assemblies of this embodiment will not be repeated for brevity.

[0065] In a further alternative, exemplary embodiment illustrated in Figs. 23-26, the fireplace may be designed such that the ember bed reflector is omitted to further reduce the overall footprint of the device 300. This can be accomplished by reorienting the light source 330 and the flicker element 340. For example, the flame simulation assembly 320 can include a single flame simulating light source 330 which can be used to illuminate both a flame simulation screen 350 and a combined ember bed and log assembly 360. The flame simulation assembly 320 can generally include the flame simulating light source 330, a light shield 331, a flicker element 340 which can angle the light generated by the light array, and a flame screen 350. The flame simulation assembly 320 can be a single subassembly housed by the flame simulation housing 322. The flame simulation housing 322 can have two sidewalls 324a, 324b, a lower rear wall 326, and an upper rear wall 328. In the illustrated embodiment, the lower rear wall 326 can have a generally angled "L" shape that includes an upper angled piece 326a and a lower angled piece 326b. Extending upward and forward, at an angle, from a forward edge of the upper angled piece can be the flame screen support 328, the flame screen support 328 can be at a steeper angle than the flame screen support of Fig. 1.

[0066] The single light array 330 can be disposed beneath the flame screen 350 on the lower rear wall 326b of the flame simulation housing 322. The light array 330 can include a plurality of bulbs disposed on a printed circuit board (PCB) or mounted on a support 332 and wired together. In the exemplary embodiment, the light array 330 can be oriented such that the PCB 332 is at an angle relative to both the rear and front walls and the bottom and top walls and the LEDs are angled upward. The angle of the PCB and the light source can be approximately 20 degrees to 40 degrees

from the bottom panel of the housing. In some embodiments, the light array 330 can be a panel that includes a plurality of sources. The light channeling shield 331 can similarly be angled upward, at an angle of approximately 70 degrees, in parallel to the upper angled piece 326a to direct the light towards the flicker element 340. In some embodiments, the light shield 331 can be integrated, or molded, as part of the ember bed 360 and log mold 370 and/or molded with the flame screen 350, or all the aforementioned components can be molded together. The upward angle of the light channeling shield 331 and the light source 330 itself can direct a portion of the light source directly towards the ember bed 360 and logs 370. Like the other embodiments, the light source 330 projects light at the flicker element, as shown as arrow A' such that some light, shown as arrow B', is reflected towards the flame screen 350, as discussed above, and some of the light, shown as arrow C', is directed towards the ember bed 360 and logs 370 as the flicker paddles 344 dip in and out of the light path. The flicker element 340 can include the rod 342 and the flicker rod 343 can be disposed above, and forward of, the light channeling shield 331 and light source 330. The ember bed 360 and logs 370 can be a single piece molded from plastic that is selectively thinned in strategic locations (not shown), such that light may pass through the thinned portions of the plastic material, creating the glowing and/or burning ember effect. Due to the relative locations and steep angles of the light source 330, the light channel 331, flicker element 340, and the ember bed 360 can be disposed closer together, thereby permitting the depth of the device 300 to be further reduced. In some embodiments, the ember bed 360 and the flame simulation housing 322 can be integrated into a single unit, like the embodiment of Figs. 18-22.

[0067] Although the embodiments shown herein illustrate a simulated flame with a front projection system onto an imaging wall, it would be appreciated by one skilled in the art that the simulated flame assembly described herein may be adapted for a rear projection configuration, or an indirect projection

using one or more mirrors. In particular, instead of light projected onto an imaging wall at the back of the enclosure, the light could be projected forward onto a rear surface a light-transmitting imaging screen that is positioned forwardly and closer to the ember bed.

[0068] Further, it would be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications can be made to the illustrated embodiments without departing from the spirit of the present invention. All such modifications and changes are intended to be within the scope of the present invention. While the present disclosure provides for various embodiments, it is intended for the subassemblies of the various embodiments to be discrete subassemblies that can be used in the various embodiments interchangeably.

CLAIMS:

1. A flame simulating assembly for providing a moving image of fluctuating flames, comprising:
 - an enclosure having a bottom, a top, a rear wall, and two side walls,
 - a light source disposed along the rear wall;
 - a rotating flicker rod having a plurality of reflective flicker elements disposed in the path of the light source and configured to reflect the light upward towards a portion of the rear wall above the light source;
 - a flame screen having a plurality of non-continuous flame segments, each of the plurality of flame segments having both curved edges and sharp points, and at least two outermost non-continuous flame segments taper outwardly from a center of the flame screen to a respective edge of the flame screen; and
 - an imaging wall for receiving reflected light from the flicker element passing through the flame screen;whereby the reflected light from the flicker rod which is passed through the flame screen provides a realistic fire shape appearing wider at the base, closer to the flame screen, than at the top, and the light at a center of the realistic fire shape has a greater intensity than at respective edges of the realistic fire shape.
2. The flame simulating assembly of claim 1, wherein the plurality of flame segments are disposed in a triangular pattern.
3. The flame simulating assembly of claim 2, wherein the triangular pattern includes one straight edge along the bottom of the triangle and two concave edges extending to the topmost vertex.
4. The flame simulating assembly of claim 3, wherein the triangular pattern is an isosceles triangle and the two concave edges are the same length.

5. The flame simulating assembly of claim 2, wherein none of the plurality of flame segments extend from one edge of the triangular pattern to another edge of the triangular pattern.

6. The flame simulating assembly of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of light channels directing light from the light source along a plurality of divergent light beam paths.

7. The flame simulating assembly of claim 6 wherein said plurality of divergent light paths cross over the non-continuous flame segments in a non-continuous manner such that intermittent light projections are created on the back wall of the fireplace.

8. A flame simulating assembly for providing a moving image of fluctuating flames, comprising:

- an enclosure having a bottom, a top, a rear wall, and two side walls,
- a light source disposed along the rear wall;

- a rotating flicker rod having a plurality of reflective flicker elements disposed in the path of the light source and configured to reflect the light upward towards a portion of the rear wall above the light source, the reflective flicker elements having a plurality of paddles having differing undulating widths, said reflective flicker elements rotatably sweeping through light created by the light source;

- a flame screen having a plurality of non-continuous flame segments, each of the plurality of flame segments having both curved edges and sharp points, and at least two outermost non-continuous flame segments taper outwardly from a center of the flame screen to a respective edge of the flame screen; and

- an imaging wall for receiving reflected light from the flicker element passing through the flame screen;

- whereby reflected light from the flicker rod which is passed through the flame screen passes through the flame screen along a plurality linear divergent

light paths that cross over the flame segments in a non-continuous manner such that a plurality of both long and short non-continuous light projections are created on the back wall of the fireplace, and the light at a center of the reflected light on the imaging wall has a greater intensity than at respective edges of the reflected light on the imaging wall.

9. The flame simulating assembly of claim 8, further comprising a plurality of light channels directing light from the light source along the plurality of divergent light beam paths.

10. The flame simulating assembly of claim 8, wherein the plurality of flame segments are disposed in a triangular pattern.

11. The flame simulating assembly of claim 9, wherein the plurality of flame segments are disposed in a triangular pattern.

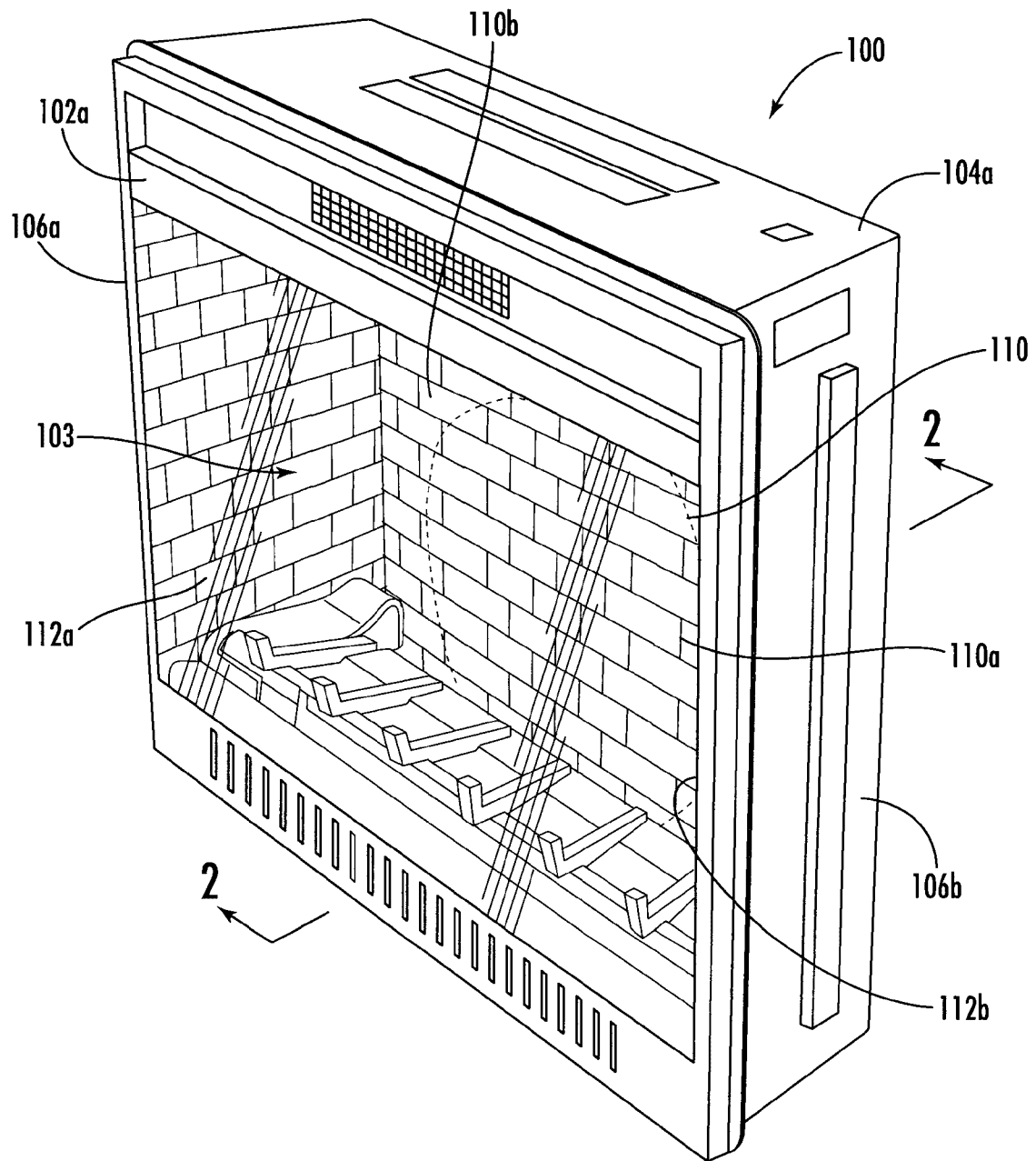
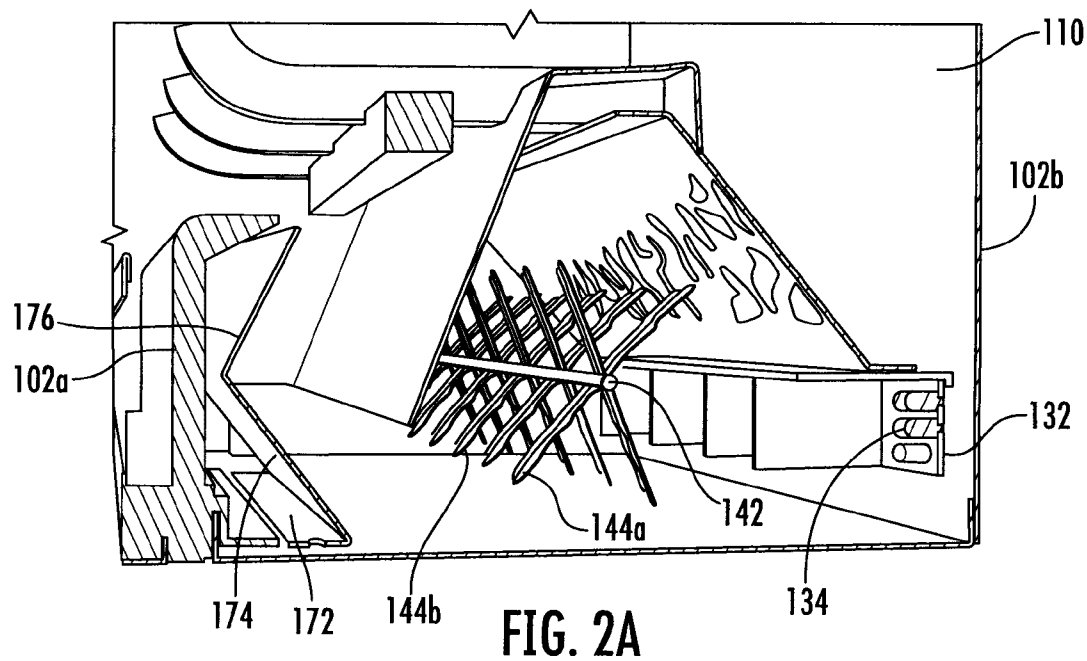
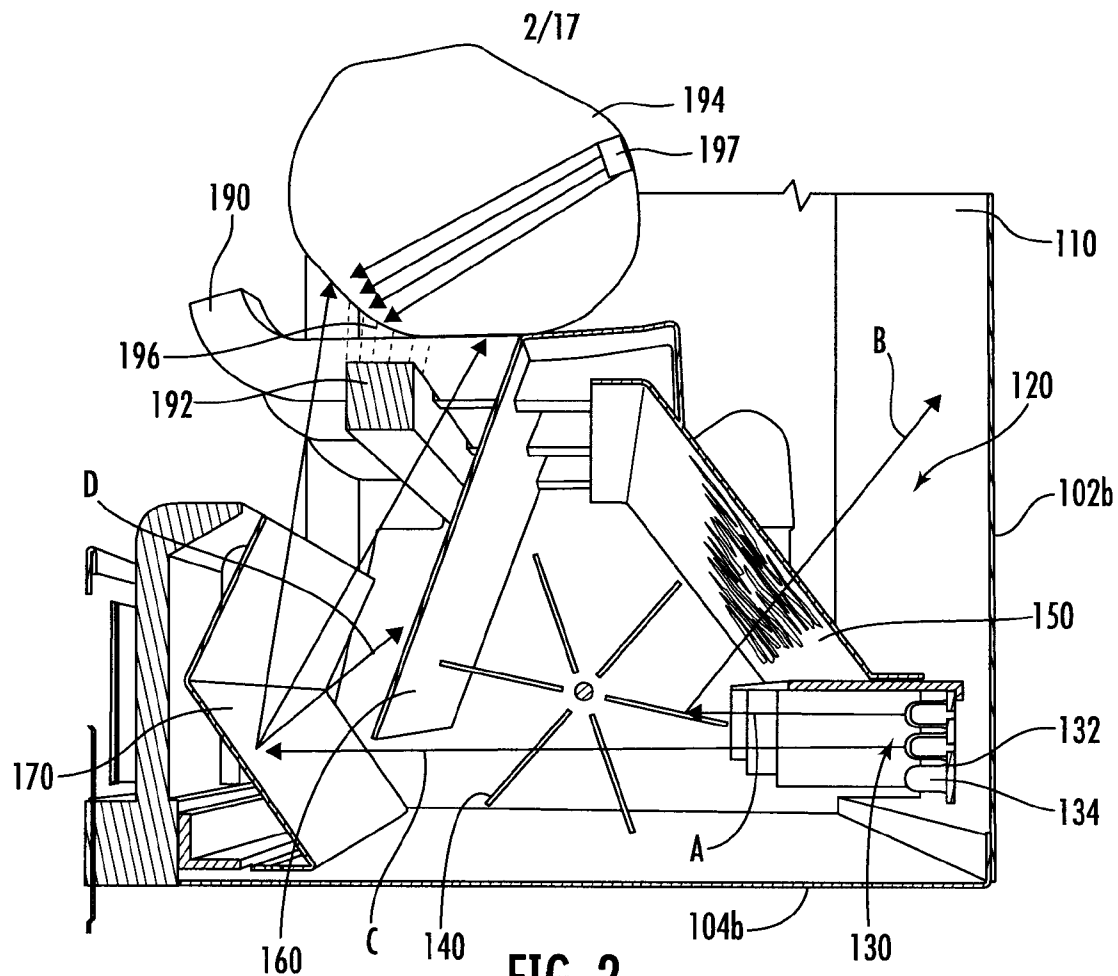
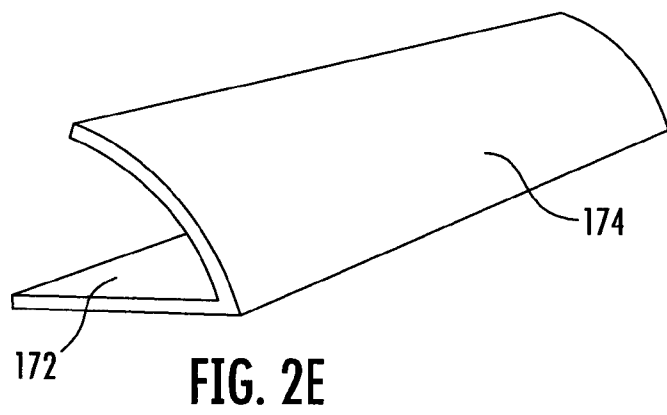
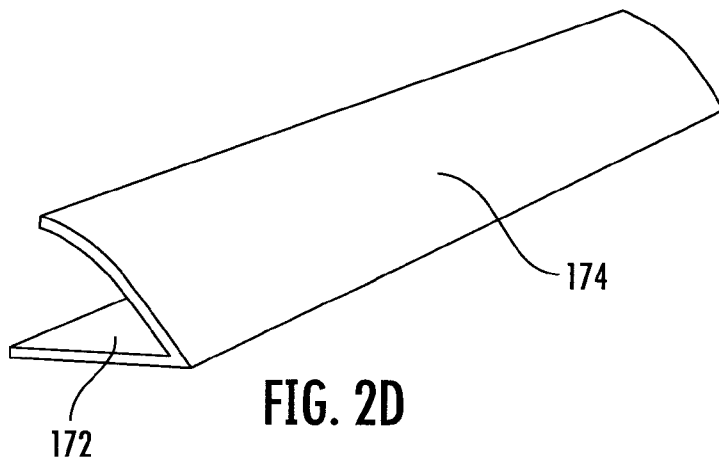
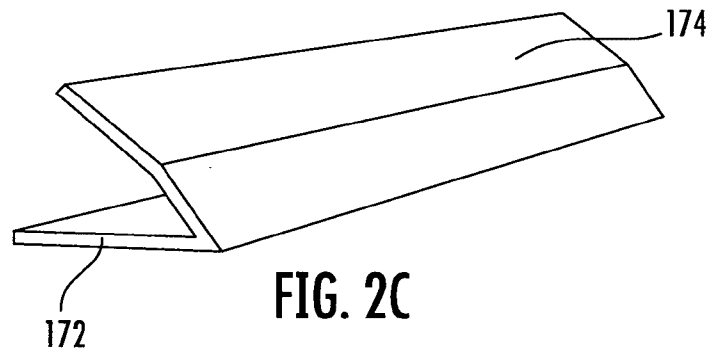
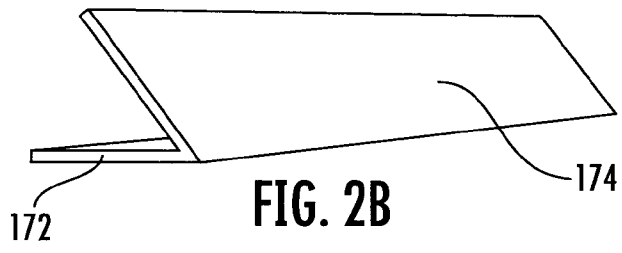


FIG. 1





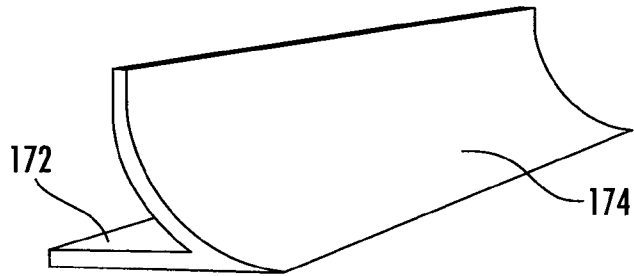


FIG. 2F

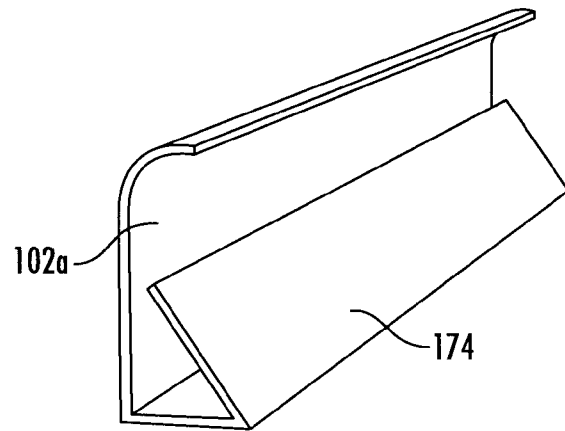


FIG. 2G

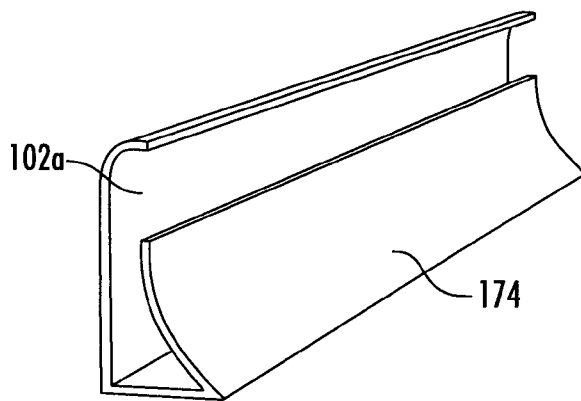
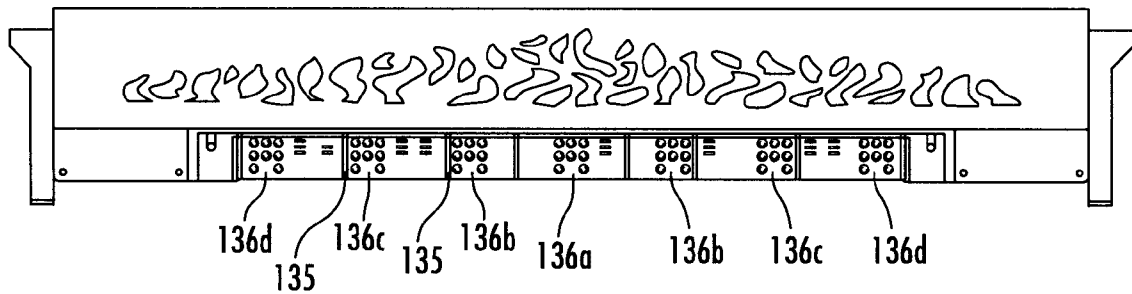
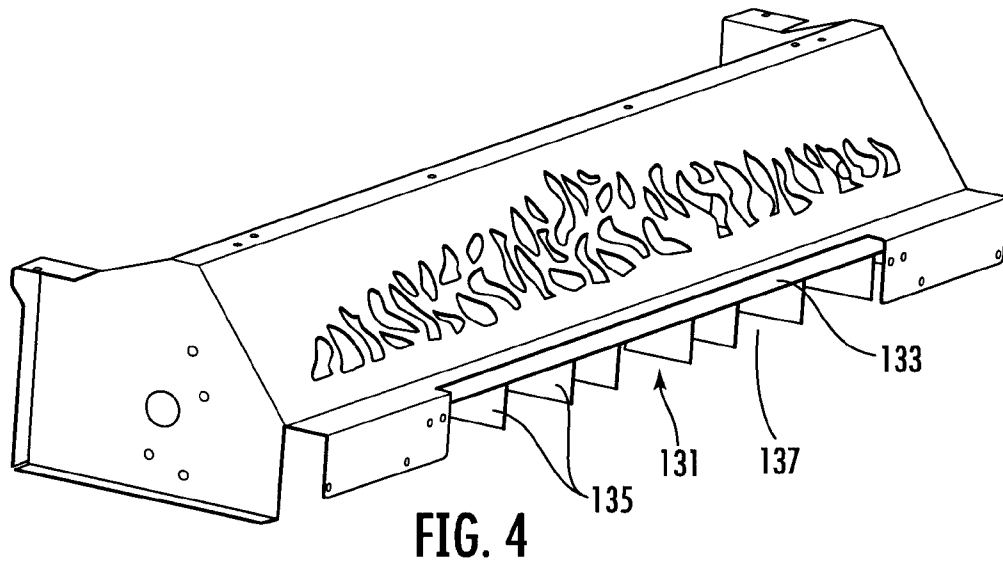
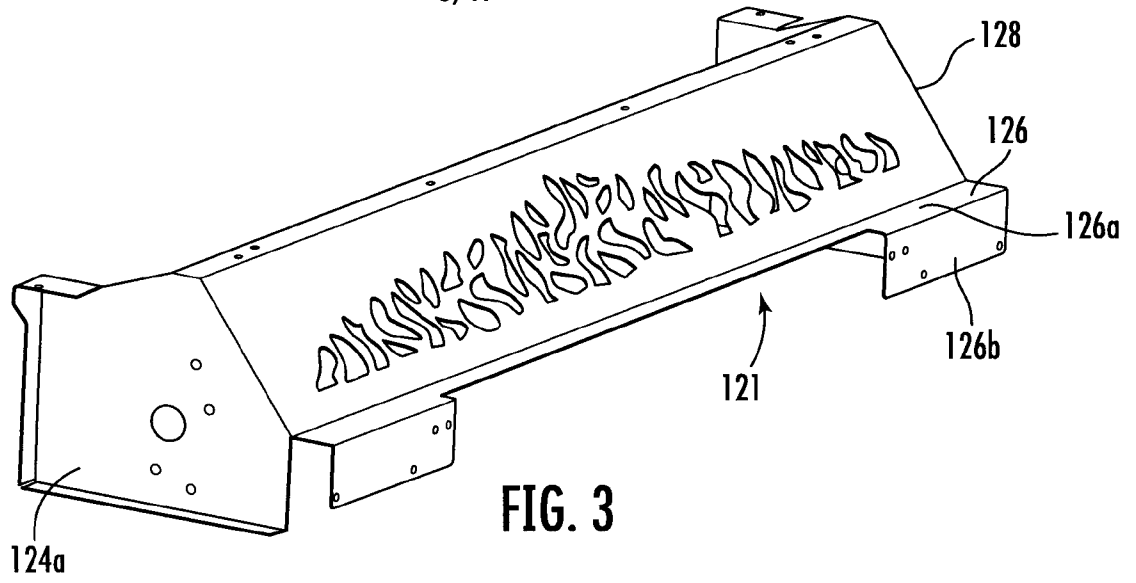
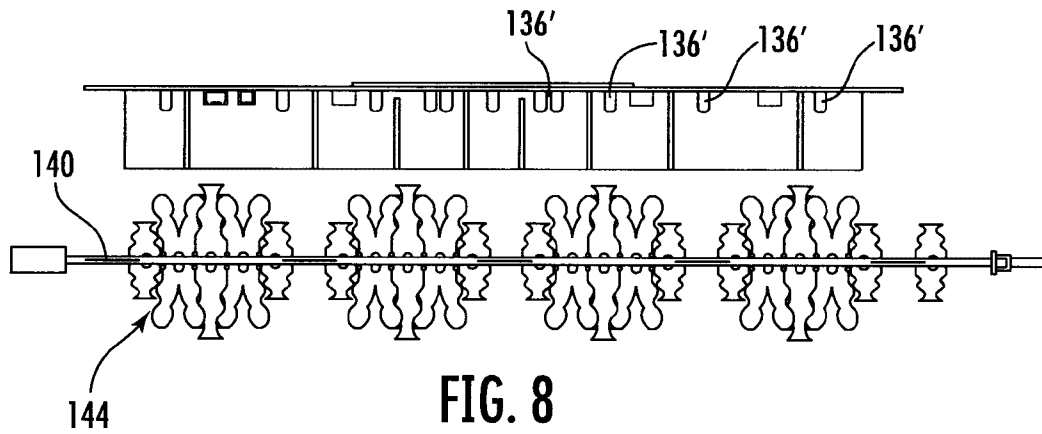
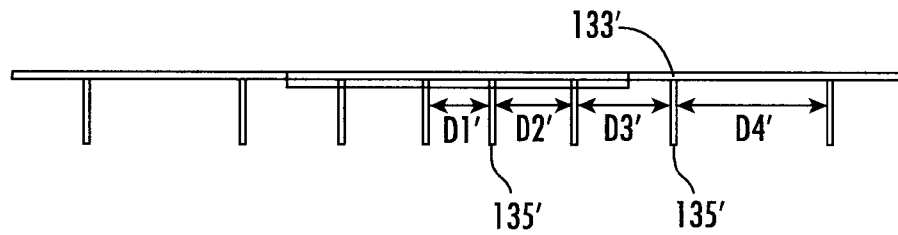
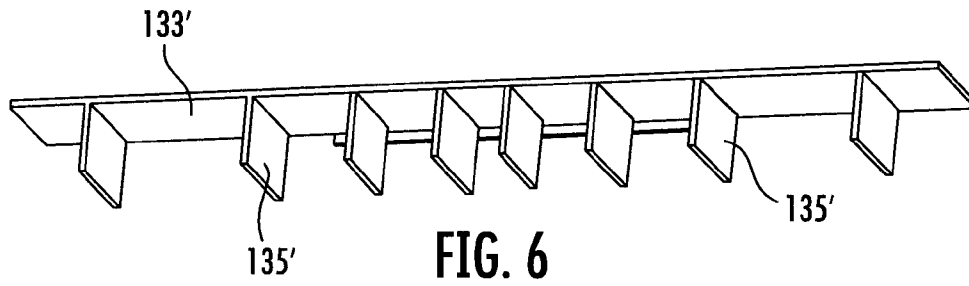
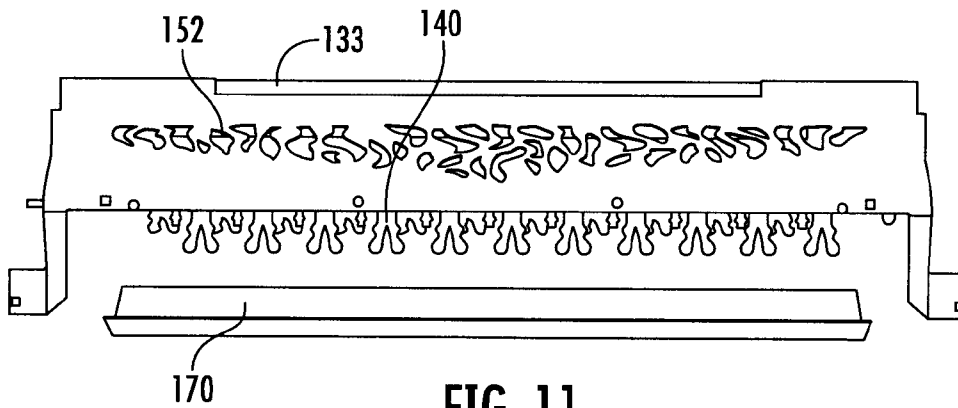
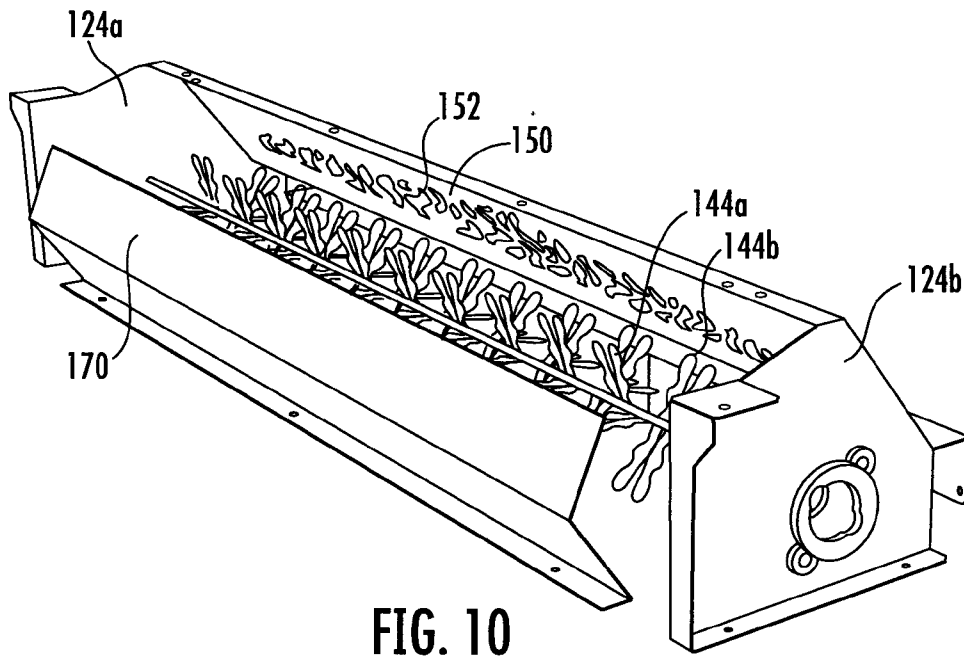
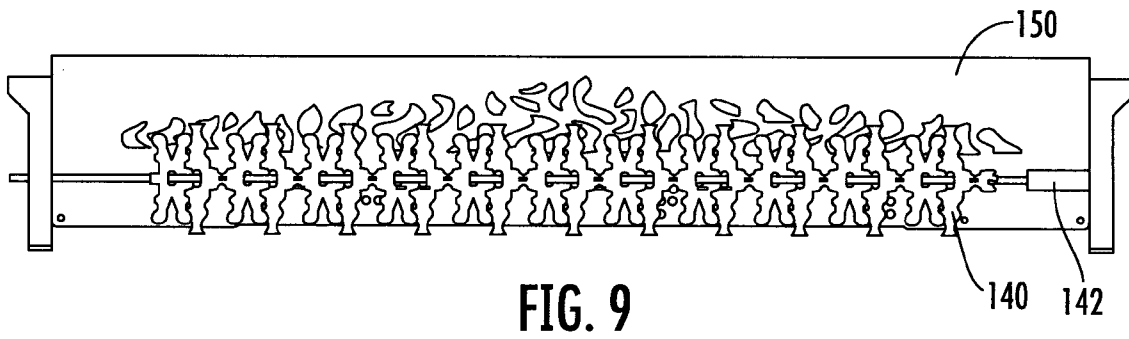


FIG. 2H

5/17







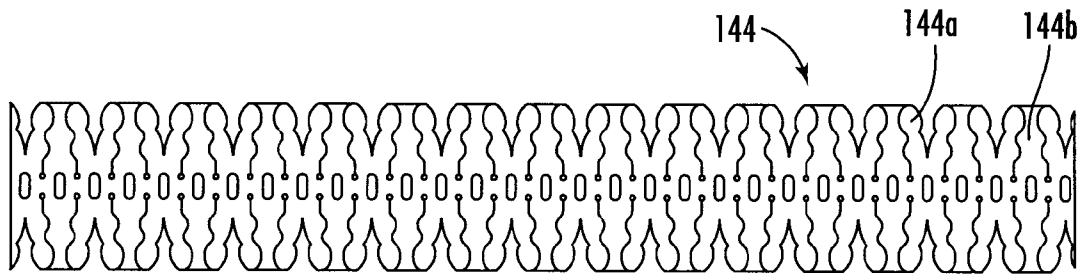
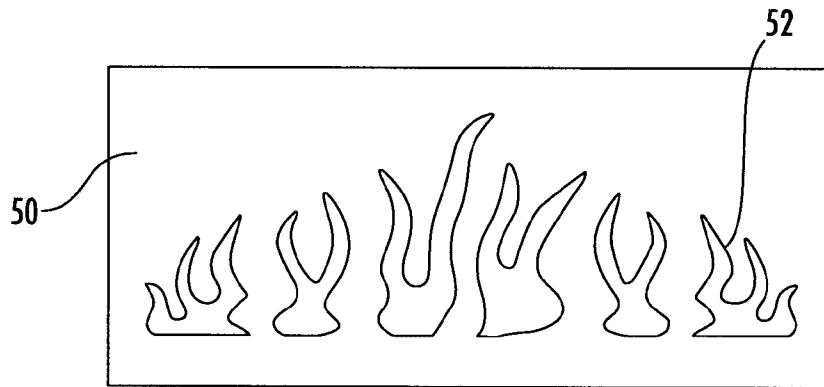


FIG. 12



**FIG. 13
(PRIOR ART)**

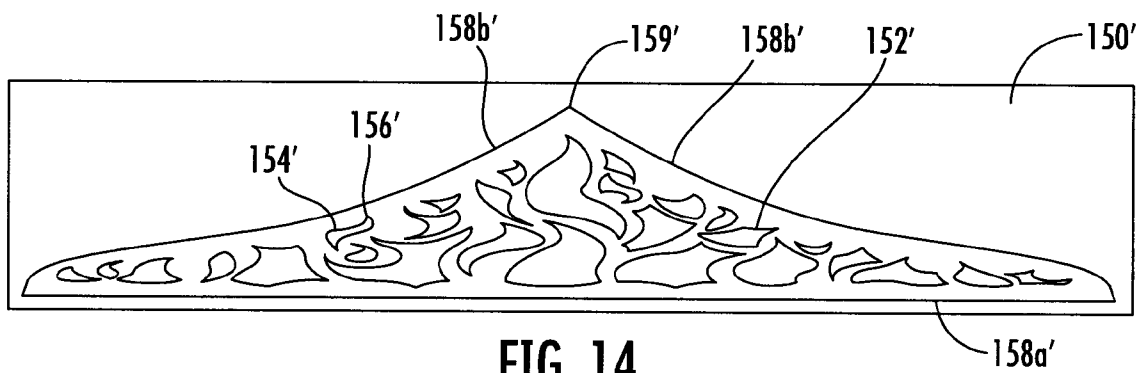


FIG. 14

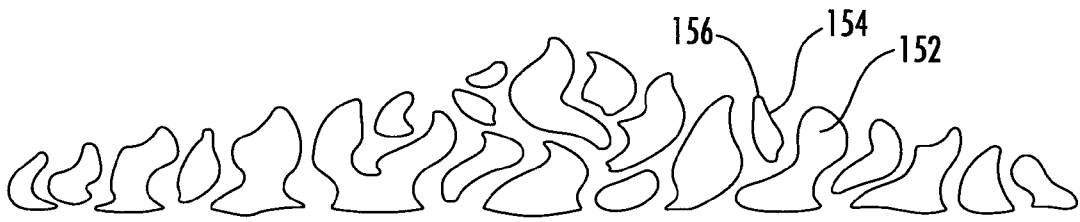


FIG. 15

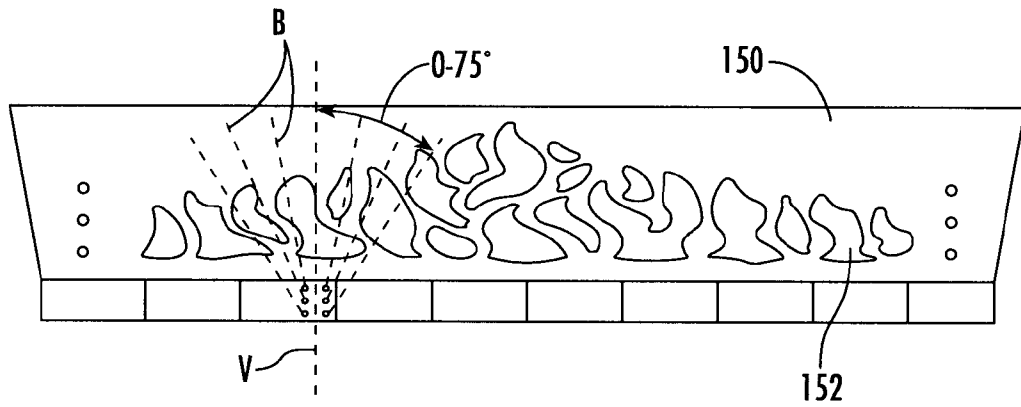
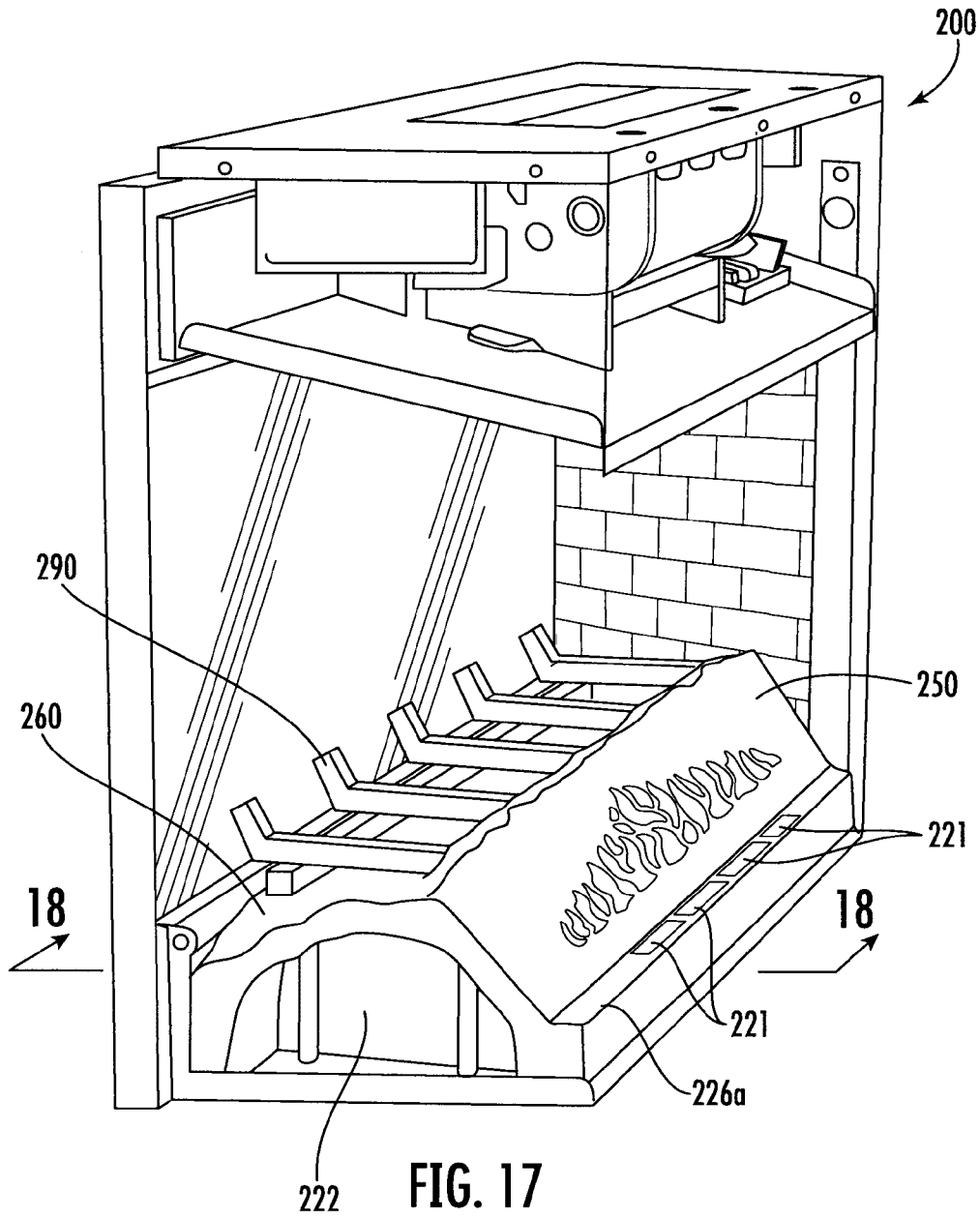


FIG. 16



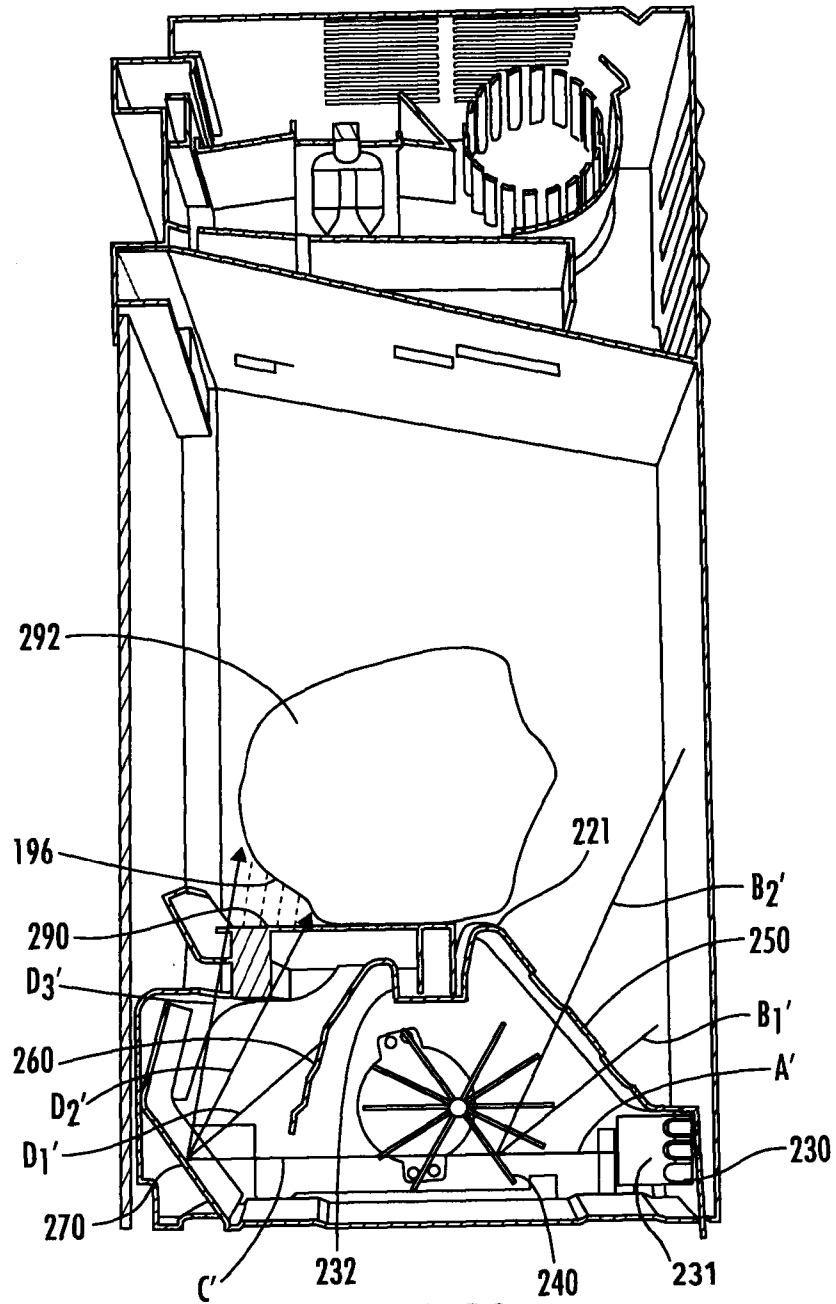


FIG. 18

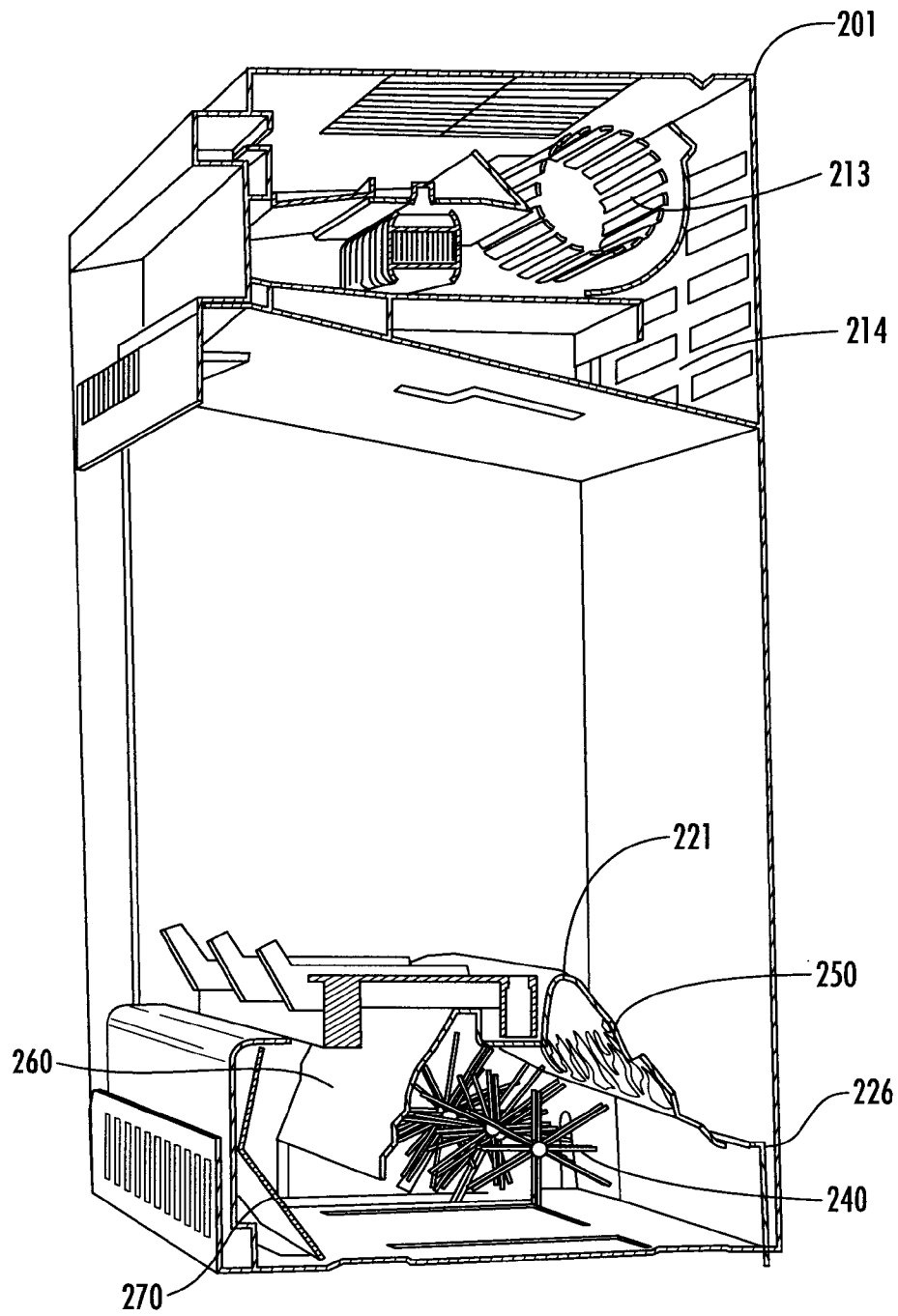


FIG. 19

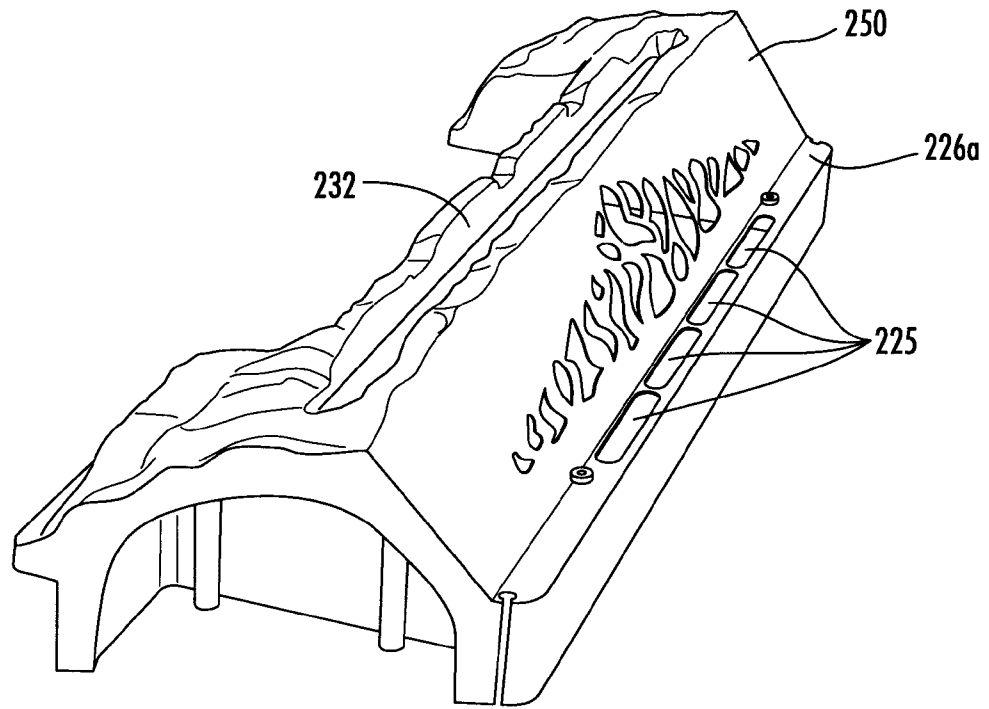


FIG. 20

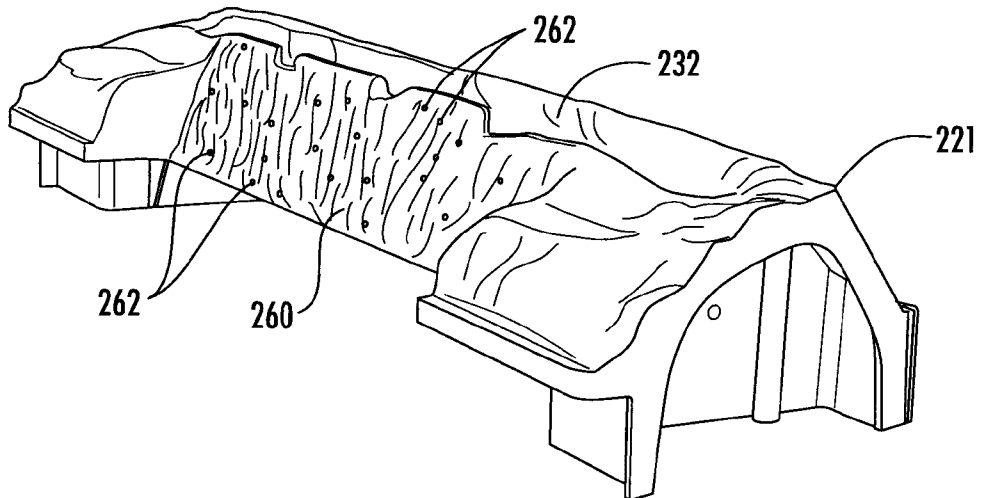
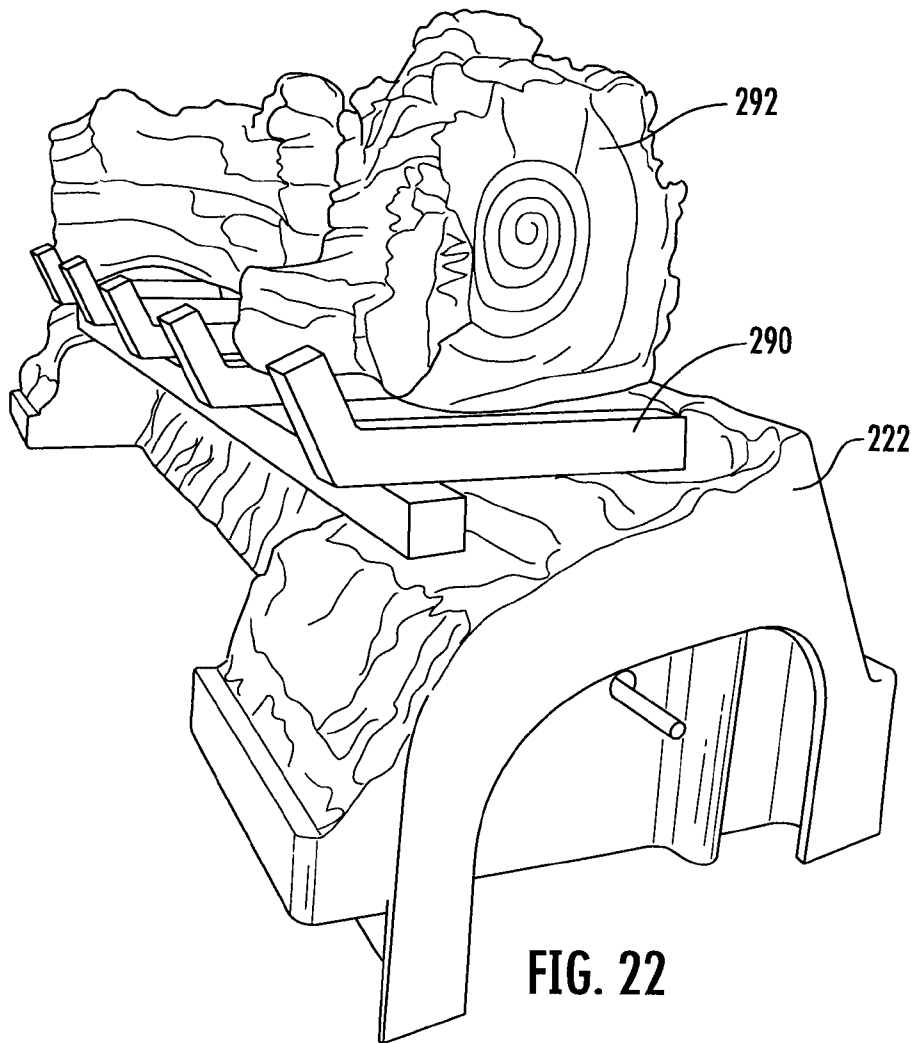


FIG. 21



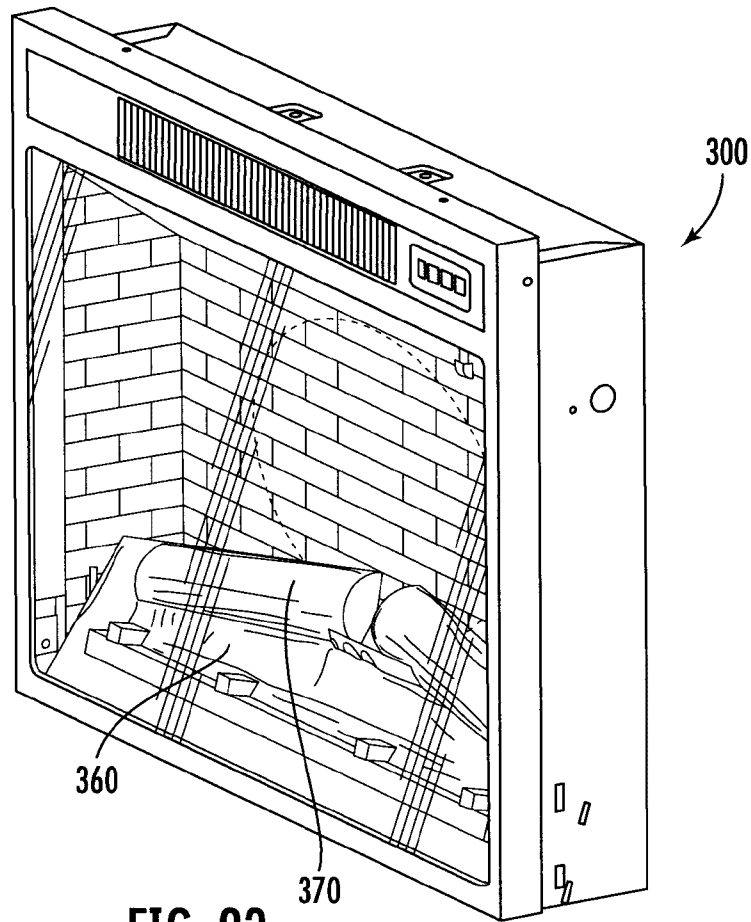


FIG. 23

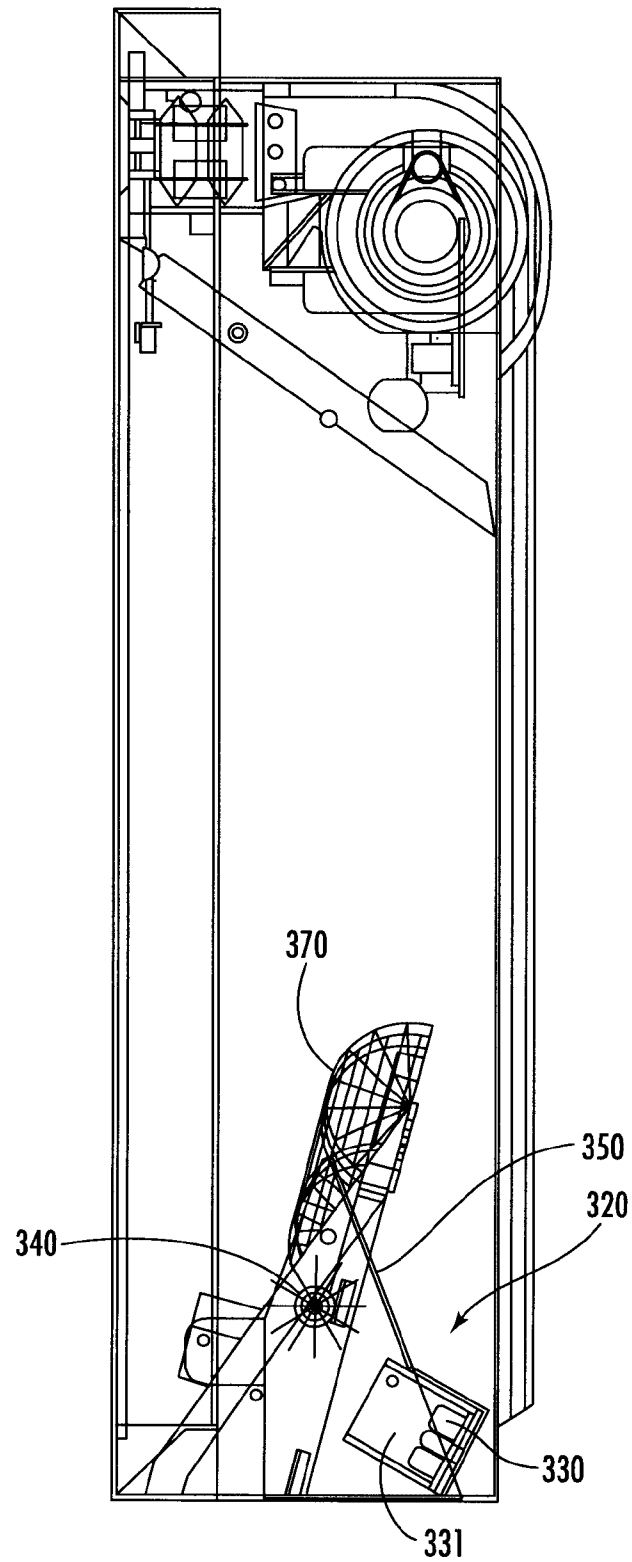


FIG. 24

