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(54) **TABLE LITTER COLLECTION CONTAINER**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A collection container for disposal of individual consumable items typically packaged in paper or plastic, food litter, personal and other litter generated within a restaurant, lounge, cafeteria, home, or other gathering place. The opaque container may be vase-like, square or any other shape that is open on the top, closed on the bottom, and has upright sides. It will have the distinctive logo, registered or unregistered trademark, service mark or other art work of a restaurant, corporation, company or art work customized for the customer applied to or on its exterior. The artwork is digitally processed and could be printed on or attached using a standard decal, ceramic decal or by sublimation printing. The container itself may be disposable. The container may allow the use of a liner. The liner may be paper, plastic or other disposable material.

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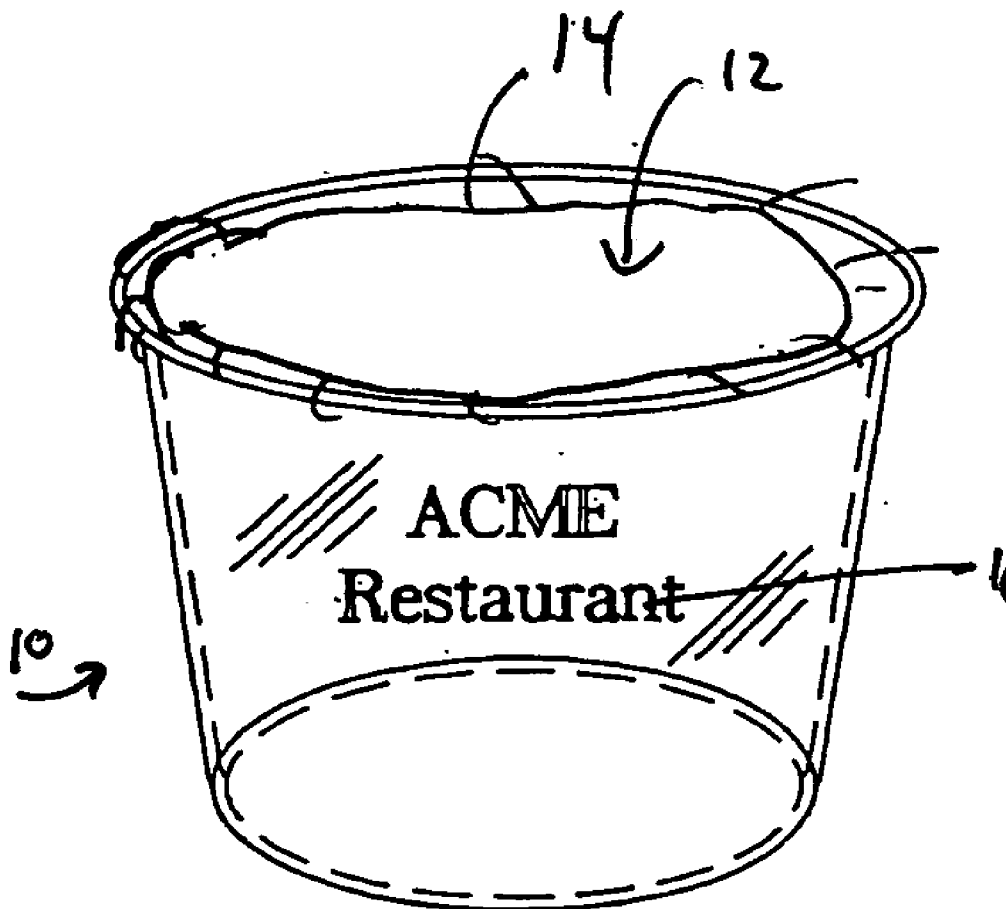
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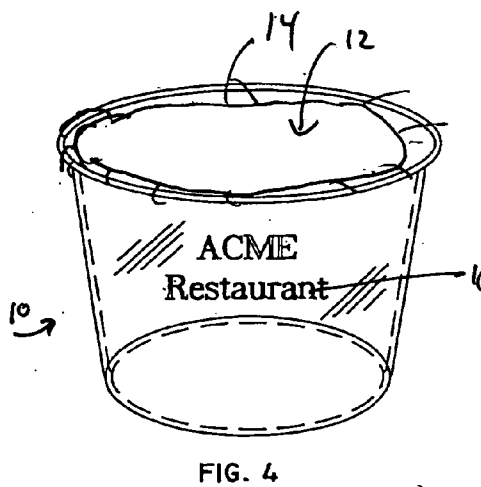
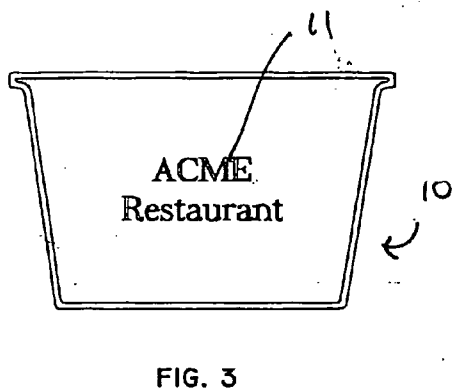
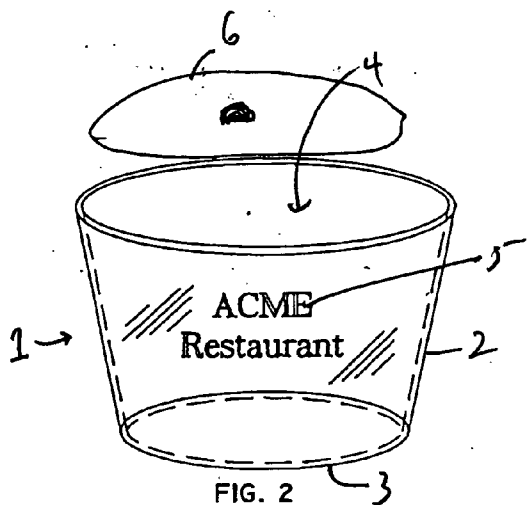
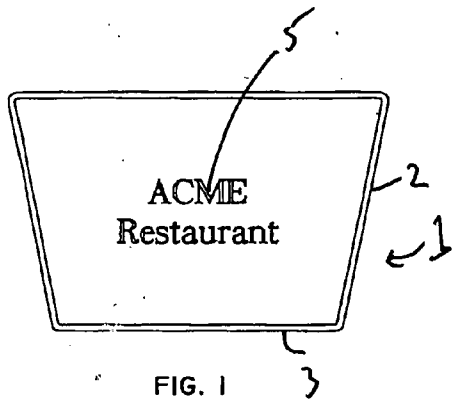
Related U.S. Application Data

(60) **Provisional application No. 60/476,483, filed on Jun. 6, 2003.**

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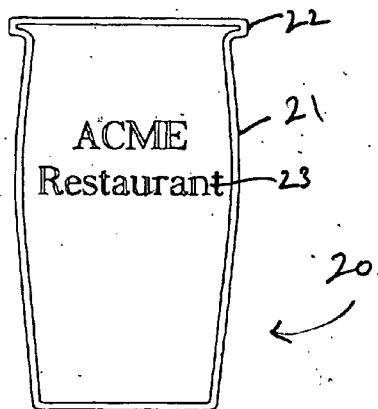


FIG. 5

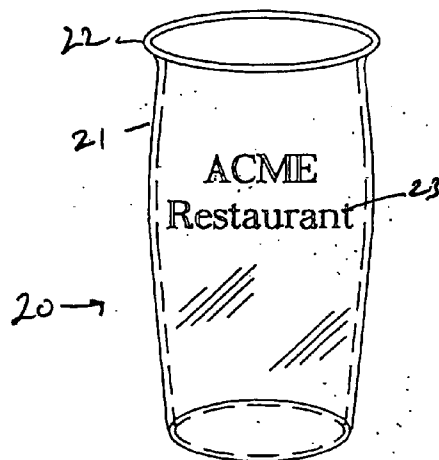


FIG. 6

TABLE LITTER COLLECTION CONTAINER

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application 60/476,483 filed Jun. 6, 2003 which is pending.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Remarkable advances in the packaging industry have produced very low-cost individual serving size packaging. Consumers may choose from a variety of seasonings and other consumable items typically packaged in paper or plastic. Examples are salt, pepper, sugar, sweetener, butter, jelly, crackers, mints, etc. Diet-conscious consumers are even taking their own lowfat—low-carbohydrate seasoning in small disposable containers such as plastic or paper bags to dining and sitting establishments. Most dining table settings include an individual serving caddy of some type. There is currently no appropriate polite solution to the problem of what to do with the waste.

[0003] During a sitting, consumers are confronted with deciding where to dispose of said trash, e.g., on the table, on an empty plate, on the edge of a plate, in a plate the consumer has finished using, etc. Used personal tissues, toothpicks and similar soiled items are also a disposal issue for the consumer and attending personnel. Currently there is no tasteful and accepted container available to collect table and personal litter.

[0004] The business where the sitting took place either has to have the server continuously keep an eye on the consumer and remove the trash as needed or wait until the consumer has left and then incur the labor cost and time lost due to sorting the trash from the dishes, etc. In both cases the employee is exposed to a customer's personal litter.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention is a convenient, tasteful device to provide a more pleasant experience for the consumer (a designated container for litter). The invention benefits a business when the consumer self-sorts table and personal litter away from the dining table area and dishes (reduced labor to clean the table). The invention is another platform for the business or vendors to promote themselves by marking the outside surface of the container with their distinctive logos, registered or unregistered trademarks, service marks or other promotional art work. The business can sell these marked containers to consumers as souvenirs, novelty items or for other uses.

[0006] The invention consists of a collection container for disposal of condiment wrappers, tissues, napkins and or other food litter generated within a restaurant, lounge, cafeteria, home, or other gathering place. The opaque container may be vase like, square or any other shape that is open on the top closed on the bottom and has upright sides. It will have the distinctive logo, registered or unregistered trademark, service mark or other art work of a restaurant, corporation, company or art work customized for the customer applied to or on its exterior. The artwork may be digitally processed and printed on or attached using a standard decal, ceramic decal or by sublimation printing means. The container itself may be disposable. The container may allow the use of a liner. The liner may be paper, plastic or any other disposable material.

[0007] The invention provides a collection container to be used on a dining or lounge table to accept litter during the course of a sitting. The opaque container can be ceramic, plastic, paper or metal. It can be shaped like a vase, square, crock, bowl or any other shape that is open on the top, closed on the bottom, and has upright sides, depending on the customer's needs.

[0008] The shape, color and material used to make the container depend on the customer's needs. An example is a barrel shape for a business that uses a barrel in its logo. The exterior of the container will have digitally processed artwork on it that was developed specifically for that customer, along with the sellers' artwork telling the user what the item is for. A business would purchase the container with artwork that contains its distinctive logo, registered or unregistered trademark, service mark or other artwork. Using the earlier example, the container would be barrel shaped with artwork that makes it look like the barrel on business's logo. The container would also be sold in standard shapes directly to consumers with open domain or the customized artwork of their choice. All artwork is printed directly on, attached to or printed into the container using a standard decal, ceramic decal or by sublimation printing. The inside of the container may be shaped to accept a liner. The liner may be paper, plastic or any other disposable material.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional elevation view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention wherein the upright sides are flared from the base at a slight angle to the top.

[0010] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the embodiment in FIG. 1. The entire container may be coated as needed to receive digitally processed permanent artwork on its exterior surfaces.

[0011] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the present invention wherein the table litter collection container consists of a paper or plastic construction and is disposable.

[0012] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the embodiment in FIG. 3.

[0013] FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the present invention wherein the upright sides are made in a vase like form with the edges at the top rounded.

[0014] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the embodiment in FIG. 5. The entire container may be coated to receive digitally processed permanent artwork on its exterior surfaces.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0015] In the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, reference is made to the accompanying drawings that form a part hereof, and in which are shown by way illustration, and not by way of limitation, specific preferred embodiments in which the invention may be practiced. It will be appreciated that these are diagrammatic figures, and that the illustrated embodiments are not shown to scale. Further, like structure in the drawings is indicated with like reference numerals throughout.

[0016] The preferred embodiment of the present invention is intended for use in moderate to upscale establishments and is shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. The table litter collection container, 1, consists of ceramic construction. The upright sides, 2, are flared from the base, 3, at a slight angle to the top. The entire container is coated to receive digitally processed permanent artwork, 5, on its exterior surfaces using sublimation printing. The interior, 4, of the container may contain a disposable liner to receive any kind of litter generated during a sitting at a dining or lounge business or at home. The liner is disposed of when the table is cleaned and a new liner is placed inside the container. The container itself can be washed in an industrial dishwashing machine as needed. A lid, 6, can be provided. Another embodiment as described above would be to use ceramic decals or sublimation printing to print artwork on the exterior surface.

[0017] Another embodiment for low cost establishments is shown in FIGS. 4 and 5. The table litter collection container, 10, consists of a paper or plastic construction and is disposable. Digital artwork, 11, is applied directly on the paper or plastic using sublimation printing or a standard decal. The interior, 12, of the container may contain a disposable liner, 14, to receive any kind of litter generated during a sitting at a dining or lounge business or at home. The liner is disposed of when the table is cleaned and a new liner is placed inside the container.

[0018] Another embodiment for fine dining applications is shown in FIGS. 5 and 6. The table litter collection container, 20, consists of ceramic construction. The upright sides are made in a vase like form with the edges, 21, at the top, 22, rounded. The vase shape shown is an example of a custom shape made to meet the customer's needs. The entire container is coated to receive digitally processed artwork, 23, on its exterior surfaces. Artwork is applied using a standard decal, ceramic decal or sublimation printing. The artwork could be such to match the place setting. A customized lid (not shown) could also be included. The interior of the container may contain a disposable liner to receive any kind of litter generated during a sitting at a dining or lounge business or at home. The liner is disposed of when the table is cleaned and a new liner is placed inside the container.

[0019] In all the above-described embodiments, the container is open on the top and closed on the bottom and has upright sides. It has digitally processed artwork on its exterior that is either printed on or attached using a standard decal, a ceramic decal or sublimation printing. Digital processed artwork makes low-cost customized applications possible. The shape and form of the container is customized to meet customer requirements. The interior of the container may contain a disposable liner to receive any kind of litter generated during a sitting at a dining or lounge business or at home. The liner is disposed of when the table is cleaned and a new liner is placed inside the container. Applications are anywhere food, drinks or other refreshments are consumed.

[0020] Sublimation printing is a method of transferring dyes or inks into a clear coating on a substrate by pressing transfer paper against the clear coated surface under heat and pressure as well known. Dispersible dye crystals or inks are printed in reverse images on transfer paper or film that is to be used to transfer print the article to be decorated. The dyes sublime, or melt, under heat and pressure to be driven into the receiving surface that is in contact with the transfer paper. Sublimation printing is described in U.S. Pat. Nos.

4,587,155; 4,670,084; 4,668,239; 6,129,699; 6,335,749 and published application WO92/21,514 each of which is incorporated herein by reference thereto. It is particularly preferred to apply the digital artwork on a ceramic surface, apply a ceramic glaze and then fire the container in an oven.

[0021] A particular feature of the present invention is the business method wherein a customer can provide custom artwork to a supplier. The supplier can then print the custom artwork onto a container by a sublimation printing technique. The customer then receives the container from the supplier and places it on a table for use by a patron. The container preferably has a distinctive logo, registered or unregistered trademark, service mark or other art work, of a restaurant, corporation, company or art work customized for the customer applied on its exterior

[0022] The artwork can include logos such as the restaurant name, menus or special items. The low cost allows the containers to be treated as a souvenir which extends the marketing beyond the immediate area.

[0023] Having described the invention in detail and by reference to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be apparent that modifications and variations are possible without departing from the scope of the invention defined in the appended claims.

Claimed is:

1. A method for providing a customized table litter collection container comprising:

a customer supplying custom art work to a supplier;

said supplier applies said custom art work to a table litter collection container to create a customized table litter collection container;

said supplier provides said customized table litter collection container to said customer;

said customer places said customized table litter collection container on a table for use by a patron.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the customized table litter collection container is square and is open on the top, closed on the bottom, and has upright sides.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the customized table litter collection container is made of ceramic, metal or any other coatable material.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the container is made of plastic, paper or a disposable material.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the customized table litter collection container has a distinctive logo, registered or unregistered trademark, service mark or other art work, of a restaurant, corporation, company or art work customized for the customer applied on its exterior.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the customized table litter collection container has artwork which is digitally printed directly on the container by sublimation printing.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the customized table litter collection container has a standard decal, ceramic decal or a decal applied thereon.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the customized table litter collection container further comprises a disposable liner.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the customized table litter collection container further comprises a lid.