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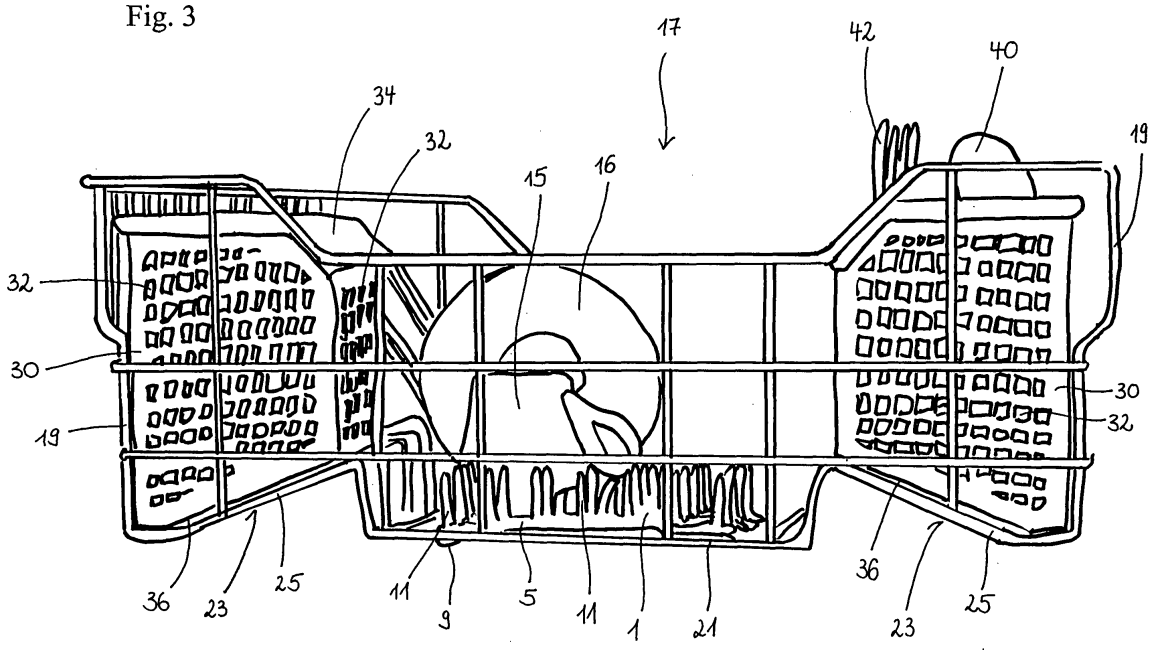
(54) **Cutlery basket and basket set for a dishwashing machine comprising quick access zone**

(57) The invention relates to a cutlery basket (30) for storing cutlery (40, 42) in a dishwashing machine, comprising side elements and a bottom element, wherein the lower surface (36) of the bottom element has a contoured shape. Also provided is a basket set for a dishwashing machine comprising a dishwasher basket (17) and cutlery basket (30), wherein the bottom surface of the dishwasher basket (17) has at least one contoured region (25), the lower surface (36) of the cutlery basket (30) has a contoured shape and wherein the contoured region (25) and the contoured shape mate to each other or approximately mate to each other.

Fig. 3



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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a cutlery basket for storing small to medium sized cutlery and to a basket set comprising a dishwasher basket and at least one cutlery basket.

[0002] In a conventional dishwashing machine cutlery is stored in a cutlery basket arranged on the lower basket of the dishwashing machine or on a separate tray formed as top drawer of the dishwashing machine. Delicate glassware is stored on glass supports at the sides of the upper basket. When loading cutlery, dishes and glassware into the dishwashing machine, the individual parts are sorted and placed at the convenient positions or compartments of the dishwashing machine.

[0003] It is an object of the invention to provide a cutlery basket for a dishwasher basket and a basket set, comprising a dishwasher basket and at least one cutlery basket, which provide a conventional dishwashing machine with a quick access loading zone.

[0004] The invention is defined in claims 1, 13 and 29, respectively.

[0005] Particular embodiments are set out in the dependent claims.

[0006] In everyday loading processes for loading cutlery and dishes into a dishwashing machine the user needs some time to sort the cutlery and dishes and to place them at the appropriate location on the upper or lower basket. For example the cutlery is placed in the cutlery basket on the lower basket, glasses are placed on specific glass supports at the sides of the upper basket, and small and large plates are inserted in the corresponding plate inserts in the lower or upper basket. This is alright, when the user has enough time and when all users take care while loading. Time however is sometimes limited and last minute placements are then not made so carefully. In particular small children only partially open the dishwashing machine's door, partially draw out the upper basket and place their dishes anywhere in the front region of the basket. The invention provides a cutlery basket and a basket set designed to provide a quick access zone for last minute loading of the dishwashing machine.

[0007] According to claim 1 a cutlery basket for a dishwashing machine is provided which has a contoured bottom surface such that the cutlery basket is adapted to be placed on a contoured bottom in a dishwasher basket. Contoured means a shape or profile which deviates from the horizontal plane or from one vertical level. Small structures of the bottom wall which deviate from a horizontal plane are not meant hereby. Preferably the overall lower surface of the bottom element of the cutlery basket is contoured. Small structures are for example dipping aids often provided at the bottom of conventional cutlery baskets and being below 1 to 2 cm^2. The contour may comprise a curved region, stepped region, a cone, a dome, a partial cylinder mantle or the like. Inclined sections (relative to a horizontal plane) of the contour function as dripping aid as they drain washing liquid to lower parts of the bottom.

[0008] In a preferred embodiment the contour of the cutlery basket and the contour of the dishwasher basket mate to each other resulting in a proper mechanical support of the cutlery basket on the dishwasher basket.

[0009] When the overall (vertical) height of the cutlery basket is below 17 cm, 15 cm or 13 cm it is designed to be placed within the upper dishwasher basket. Particularly loading cutlery into the upper basket avoids multiple bending down of the user for each piece of cutlery. Preferably, the cutlery basket of the invention may be comprised in a quick access zone in the upper dishwasher basket.

[0010] According to one embodiment three foot points are provided. For example one or more additional legs extending downward from the bottom surface are provided which together with the lowest section of the contoured bottom surface span a triangle or a plane at one vertical level resulting in the basked being freestanding when placed on a horizontal working area. The one or more legs may be provided at positions such that the legs protrude through the mesh of the dishwasher basket when the cutlery basket is placed at a predefined location in the dishwasher basket.

[0011] In an embodiment a flexible mat device is provided to be arranged in the dishwashing basket, preferentially on the bottom of the basket. The flexible mat device has a base structure adapting at least in part flexibly or elastically to the contour of the bottom of the basket or to the contour of the place in the basket where the flexible mat device is placed. Depending on the need, the flexible mat device may be placed into the basket or removed from it. By the flexibility and in consequence by its at least partial adaptation to the contour of the basket, the mat device can be placed nearly at all desired portions within the basket, and on the other hand the volume required within the basket for placing the mat device is minimal. When it is removed, the flexible mat device may be bent, e.g. folded or rolled, and stored outside the dishwashing machine with minimum storing volume requirements. Due to its flexibility the flexible mat device or soft pad is at least partially elastic, so that it is bent, e.g. it gives way elastically, when cutlery or dishes are placed on top of the flexible mat device preventing damage to delicate dishes e. g. delicate glassware or additionally adapting to the form of the cutlery or dishes placed on the flexible mat device resulting in an improved support within the basket. In the present context, a dish or dishes which can be places on the flexible mat device of the invention preferably comprise(s) any plate, bowl, cup, pot, jug, pitcher, vas etc. which is made from an suitable material, such as e.g. china, earthenware, any plastics material or the like, s well as glassware of any kind which can be places on the flexible mat device of the invention, such as e.g. a drinking glass of any kind, a glass plate, glass bowl, class cup, glass pat, glass jug, glass pitcher, glass vase etc..

[0012] In a preferred embodiment, the flexible mat device or soft pad is made of an elastic material or it is at least partially coated with an elastic material, in particular with a soft material, such that damages to dishes, e.g. glassware are further reduced. Also lateral movements on the flexible mat device are inhibited while the basket is drawn out of or pushed into the dishwashing machine. In particular, if dishes or cutlery are loaded in last minute in a rush movement the dropping of the dishes is dampened thereby avoiding mechanical stress to the dishes. Therefore, the soft pad if the invention is a preferred component of a dishwasher basket of the invention which comprise a quick access zone. Further, the generation of noise while loading/unloading the dishes or cutlery and during the dishwashing program or the movement of the basket is reduced.

[0013] In another embodiment a mat device or soft pad is provided similar to the above mentioned flexible mat device, however comprising at least partially a rigid supporting structure. The supporting structure is at least partially covered by an elastic material, in particular a soft material, and/or a flexible structure, in particular a soft flexible structure, is attached thereto to place dishes or cutlery. The rigid supporting structure, which at least partially forms the base of the mat device can at least partially bridge or span steps or unevenness in a basket of a dishwashing machine. For example one end of the mat device may be placed against a side wall of the basket, while the other end rests on the bottom of the basket. Then the mat device is inclined within the basket and the dishes or cutlery are placed on the soft elastic material or on the flexible structure in the quick access zone of the mat device. In an embodiment, rigid supporting structure portions of the mat device are linked with flexible connection elements, such that also the mat device having a rigid supporting structure may be bent and partially adapted to the contour of the basket, depending on its orientation within the basket.

[0014] It should be noted that the mat device and the flexible mat device may also be used as a shelf or as a supporting pad, which either of provides the function of supporting dishes and cutlery and may optionally be placed within a basket of a conventional dishwashing machine at the desired location. In the following, when mentioning 'mat device', reference is normally made to the flexible mat device as well as to the mat device.

[0015] In a preferred embodiment a plurality of supporting elements like pins, are protruding from the base structure of a mat device (soft pad) and give an additional support for the cutlery and dishes placed on the mat device. Preferentially, the supporting elements are flexible or elastic, such that they are bent, when dishes like cups are placed on the mat device, thereby improving the mechanical stability of the placed goods. In a further preferred embodiment, the supporting elements are made of two components, a soft component for example on the surface on which the goods are placed, and a rigid one on the bottom side or in the core of the supporting elements. Alternatively, some or all of the supporting elements may be made of a semi-rigid material. In this case, the supporting elements are partially bent to a certain degree resulting in an adaptation to the contour of the goods placed on the mat device, while the semi-rigid supporting elements themselves exert a counter force onto the placed good.

[0016] In a further embodiment, the supporting elements are at least partially hollow, such that their flexibility is improved. On the other hand, the mat device may be positioned onto a pin, for example a pin of a plate insert, by inserting its tip into the recess of the supporting element. Thereby the mat device may be mounted to the pins of the basket or may be spanned between pins of the basket.

[0017] Preferably, the ground area of the flat mat device is significantly smaller than the ground area of the basket where the mat device is to be placed. For example, the area is smaller than one third of the basket's area, preferentially smaller than one forth or one fifth of this area. In preferred embodiments the mat device can be clipped to a wire of the dishwasher basket and/or it can simply be laid on the grid of the dishwasher basket.

[0018] Reference is made in detail to preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings which show:

Fig. 1 a perspective view on a soft pad,

Fig. 2 the soft pad of Fig. 1 placed within a basket of a dishwashing machine, and

Fig. 3 an arrangement of the soft pad and two cutlery baskets in the basket.

[0019] Fig. 1 shows a perspective view on a soft pad 1 which is homogenously fabricated from a single elastic material by injection molding. The elastic material provides flexibility to adapt and change the basic form of the soft pad and results in an elastic surface of the soft pad in the areas where cutlery or dishes are placed. Further, the elastic material is resistant against the temperature and chemical conditions used during the dishwashing cycles. On the other hand, the soft pad has a residual rigidity, such that it at least partially stretches back to its base form as shown in Fig. 1, when no force is exerted to the soft pad 1.

[0020] The soft pad 1 comprises a base frame 3 formed of longitudinal bars 5 and cross bars 7, thereby forming an interlinked platform. The longitudinal bars 5 are extending beyond the cross bars 7 and are curved downward to bends 9. When placed in a basket, the downward bending bends 9 mesh with the grid of the basket, thereby laterally fixing the soft pad 1 within a basket 17 as shown in Fig. 2.

[0021] Perpendicular to the upper surface of the longitudinal bars 5 and cross bars 7 flexible fingers extend upward for receiving and supporting dishes and cutlery

placed upon the soft pad 1.

[0022] Fig. 2 schematically shows the soft pad 1 of Fig. 1 placed within the basket 17 (only partially shown). The grid of the basket 17 is formed of side bars 19 and bottom bars 21. The soft pad 1 is placed here at the center front section of the upper basket 17. A cup 15 is placed on the soft pad 1 where the rim of the cup 15 is placed between the flexible fingers. Where the rim of the cup 15 runs over the center of fingers 11, the fingers are bent by the cup 15 and abut against the side or inner wall of the cup, as for example shown by fingers 11a and 11b.

[0023] The soft pad placed in the front section of the upper basket of a dishwashing machine provides a quick access zone for the user. Even if the washing machine's door is only partially opened and the upper basket is only partially drawn out of the tub, the user may place the dishes and cutlery even in a hastily manner upon the soft pad 1 without damage due to its soft and elastic bearing surface.

[0024] Fig. 3 shows a basket set, comprising a quick access zone, consisting of the upper basket 17, the soft pad 1 placed at a center front section of the basket, and two cutlery baskets 30 positioned in glass support columns 23 of the basket 17. As in Fig. 2 the cup 15 is placed on the soft pad 1, a saucer 16 is placed in a plate insert of the basket 17, and a spoon 36 as well as a fork 42 are deposited in the opening 34 of the right cutlery basket 30.

[0025] In the depicted embodiment the two cutlery baskets 30 are identically formed and exchangeable. Both or one of them can be removed from the basket 17 dependent on the user's need for supporting space for glasses in the glass supports 23 or for storing space for cutlery. The cutlery basket height from the lowest point to the upper rim is about 14 cm and they are designed for receiving short cutlery like spoons, knifes, pastry forks and so on. To optimally use the limited height from the bottom of the upper basket to the upper tub wall of a dishwashing machine, the bottom of the cutlery basket is adapted to the curvature given by the contour of the bottom of basket 17. As the supporting surfaces of left and right glass supports 23 are formed by inclined bars 25 which are inclined to the horizontal plane except a short horizontal section at the outer periphery, the cutlery baskets 30 have correspondingly inclined lower surfaces 36 mating with the contour of the glass supports 23. The inclination angle of at least a portion of the cutlery basket's bottom is in the range of 10° to 40°, preferentially in the range from 15° to 30°.

[0026] The side and bottom walls of the cutlery baskets are provided with holes 32 for spraying the washing liquid in and draining it out. The dripping off of washing liquid benefits from the inclined bottom form. By this way no shaping using small contours like array-arranged pyramids at the horizontal bottom of conventional cutlery baskets is required.

[0027] The inside of the cutlery baskets 30 is divided into several compartments (here six in a 2x6 array - not shown) and due to the inclination of the bottom, the depth of the compartments varies from the inner to the outer side of the cutlery baskets. Medium length cutlery can be placed in the compartments having the greater depth while short cutlery can be placed in the compartments having the smallest depth. When unloading the cutlery baskets 30 the picking out of short cutlery is improved thereby, avoiding for example a puncture of the user's hand by forks or knives stored in the same compartment.

[0028] As mentioned above in connection with last minute loading of dishes and cutlery on the soft pad 1, the arrangement of one or more cutlery baskets at a right and/or left front section of a dishwasher basket, preferably of the upper dishwasher basket, extends the quick access zone by the cutlery basket(s) which, when placed in the front of the upper basket 17, can also be loaded with the door of the dishwashing machine partially opened and the upper basket only partially drawn out.

[0029] In an embodiment not shown here, the cutlery basket 30 has mounting or fixing means to attach the cutlery basket in a mechanically stable way to the basket 17. In another embodiment, the sidewalls and/or the compartment walls of the cutlery basket are inclined relative to the vertical axis. Thereby the cutlery basket can be placed in e.g. in the upper basket 17 of a dishwashing machine with an orientation towards a ceiling shower arranged at the center of the upper tub wall. Thereby the amount of washing liquid sprayed into the cutlery basket is increased.

[0030] In another embodiment the cutlery basket's bottom is contoured as such, however the contour is formed in a manner or legs are provided extending from the lower surface such that the cutlery basket can be placed on a horizontal plane when taken out of the dishwashing machine's basket. For example the cross-section of the lower surface 36 of the cutlery basket 30 (e.g. in the plane as shown in Fig. 3) is formed like a sawtooth such that the basket can stand on a horizontal working area with the left and right bottom ends. For example the width of the left cutlery basket 30 as shown in Fig. 3 extends beyond the glass support 23 towards the right side and subsequently to the upward incline of the bottom element of the cutlery basket, which is parallel to the inclined bar 25 of the upper basket 17, the bottom element of the cutlery basket is provided with a downward step ending on the basket's bottom having the same level as the horizontal section of inclined bar 25 on the left side of the cutlery basket 30. In this way or using one or more legs extending downward from the bottom the cutlery basket has at least three foot points arranged in a horizontal plane.

Reference Numerals List

[0031]

1	soft pad
3	base frame
5	longitudinal bar
7	cross bar

9	bend
11,11a,11b	flexible finger
15	cup
16	saucer
17	basket
19	side bar
21	bottom bar
23	glass support
25	inclined bar
30	cutlery basket
32	hole
34	opening
36	inclined lower surface
40	spoon
42	fork

Claims

1. Cutlery basket (30) for storing cutlery (40, 42) in a dishwashing machine, comprising side elements and a bottom element, wherein the lower surface (36) of the bottom element has a contoured shape.

2. Cutlery basket (30) according to claim 1, wherein the contoured bottom surface (36) of the cutlery basket is adapted to be placed on a mating surface region (25) of a dishwasher basket, in particular of an upper dishwasher basket.

3. Cutlery basket according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the overall lower surface (36) of the bottom element is contoured, wherein in particular the lower surface does not form a horizontal plane.

4. Cutlery basket according to any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the contoured shape comprises at least an inclined surface section inclined relative to a horizontal plane when the cutlery basket (30) is in its use orientation.

5. Cutlery basket according to any of claims 1 to 4, comprising at least one handle.

6. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein the storing volume of the cutlery basket (30) is divided into at least two compartments.

7. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein the overall height of the cutlery basket (30) is equal to or less than 17 cm, preferentially 15 cm, and more preferentially equal to or less than 13 cm.

8. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein the surface, in particular the inner surface, of the cutlery basket (30) is at least partially covered by an elastic material and/or at least partially formed of an elastic material.

9. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, comprising at least one mounting element adapted to attach or secure the cutlery basket (30) in a dishwasher basket (17).

10. Cutlery basket according to claim 9, wherein the at least one mounting element is a detent.

11. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, comprising at least three foot points arranged in a horizontal plane and spanning a triangle.

12. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein at least a portion of at least one side elements and/or of at least a portion of a compartment wall is inclined to a vertical axis in the use position of the cutlery basket (30).

13. Cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein at least one of the profiles of the contour extends over a bottom area of at least 5 cm^2, preferentially of at least 10 cm^2, more preferentially of at least 20 cm^2.

14. Basket set for a dishwashing machine comprising a dishwasher basket (17) and at least one cutlery basket (30), in particular a cutlery basket according to any of the previous claims, wherein the bottom of the dishwasher basket (17) comprises at least one contoured region (25), the lower surface (36) of the cutlery basket (30) has a contoured shape and wherein the contoured region (25) of the dishwasher basket and the contoured shape of the cutlery basket lower surface mate to each other or approximately mate to each other.

15. Basket set according to claim 14, wherein the contoured region (25) of the dishwasher basket (17) is a bearing region designed to bear delicate dishes, in particular glassware.

16. Basket set according to.claim 14 or 15 comprising at least one mat device (1) adapted to be arranged in the dishwasher basket (17) in particular on the bottom of the dishwasher basket (17).

17. Basket set according to claim 16, wherein at least one mat device (1) and/or at least one cutler basket (17) is arranged at a front section of the dishwasher basket (17), in particular of the upper dishwasher basket.

18. Basket set according to claim 16 or 17, wherein a cutlery basket (30) is arranged at the front right and/or left side of the dishwasher basket, in particular of the upper dishwasher basket.

19. Basket set according to claim 16, 17 or 18, wherein at least one mat device (1) is a flexible mat device comprising an at least partially flexible base structure (3), the base structure being adapted to be bent.

20. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 19, wherein at least one mat device (1) comprises a base structure (3) wherein at least part of the base structure comprises a rigid supporting structure which is at least partially covered by an elastic material and/or wherein the base structure (3) supports a flexible structure (11) for receiving dishes (15) or cutlery.

21. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 20, wherein a plurality of supporting elements (11) is protruding from the base structure (3) of the mat device (1).

22. Basket set according to claim 21, wherein at least one supporting element (11) of the mat device (1) comprises at least one pin, stud, finger, plate insert and/or cup insert.

23. Basket set according to claim 21 or 22, wherein at least one supporting element (11)of the mat device (1) is flexible and/or elastic.

24. Basket set according to claim 21, 22 or 23, wherein at least one supporting element (11) comprises a soft and/or a rigid and/or semi-rigid material, in particular wherein at least one supporting element (11) comprises two components including at least one soft component.

25. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 24, wherein the base structure (3) of the, mat device (1) is at least in part web-shaped.

26. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 25, wherein the base structure (3) of the mat device (1) comprises flexible connecting elements (7, 9) which are interconnectable or interlinkable joining elements of the base structure (3).

27. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 26, wherein the mat device (1) is at least partially formed of an elastic material, in particular wherein at least the bas structure (3) and/or the supporting elements (11) of the mat device (1) is/are formed of an elastic material.

28. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 27, wherein the flexible material is EPDM, Sandoprene or a soft plastic material.

29. Basket set according to any of claims 16 to 28, comprising at least one mounting element for mounting the mat device (1) in the dishwasher basket (17), preferably on the bottom of the dishwasher basket (17)

30. Dishwashing machine comprising a cutlery basket (30) and/or a basket set (17, 30) according to any of the previous claims.

31. Dishwashing machine according to claim 30, comprising an upper dishwasher basket according to at least one of claims 16 to 29, comprising a quick access zone.

Fig. 1

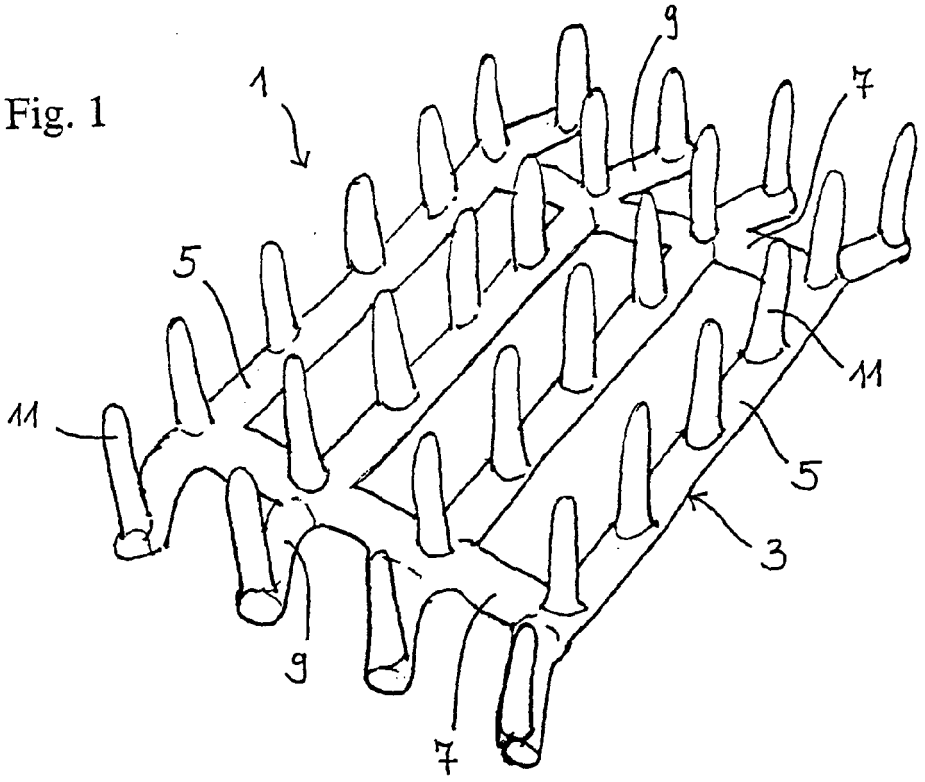
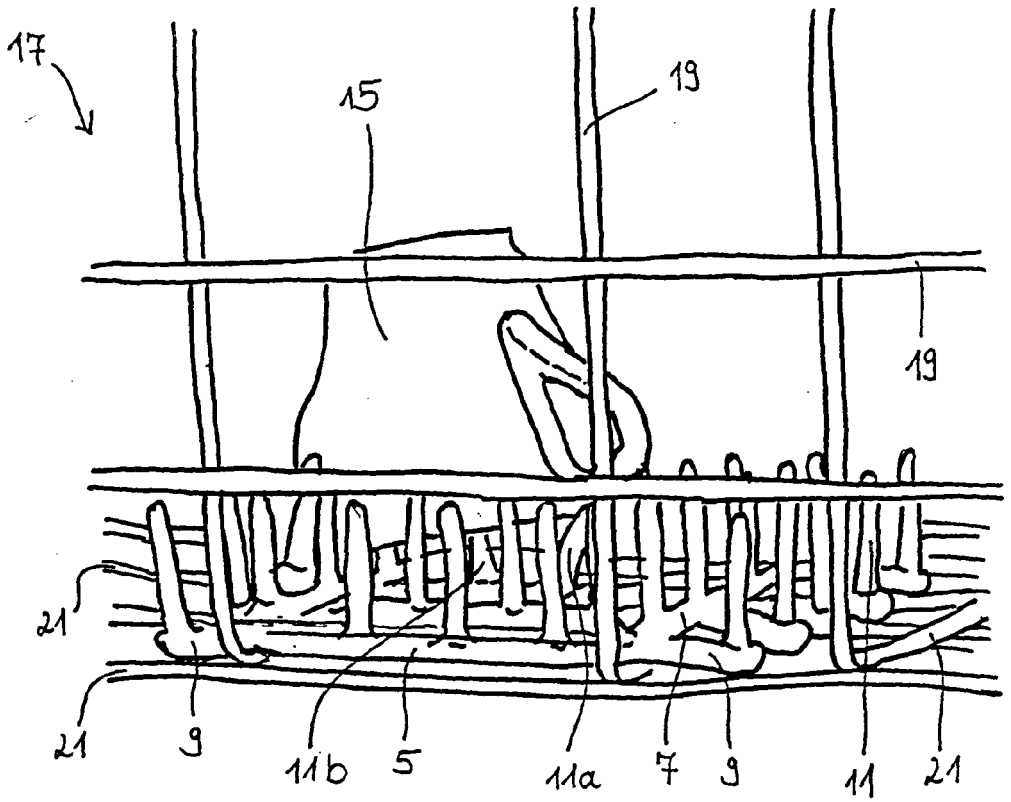


Fig. 2



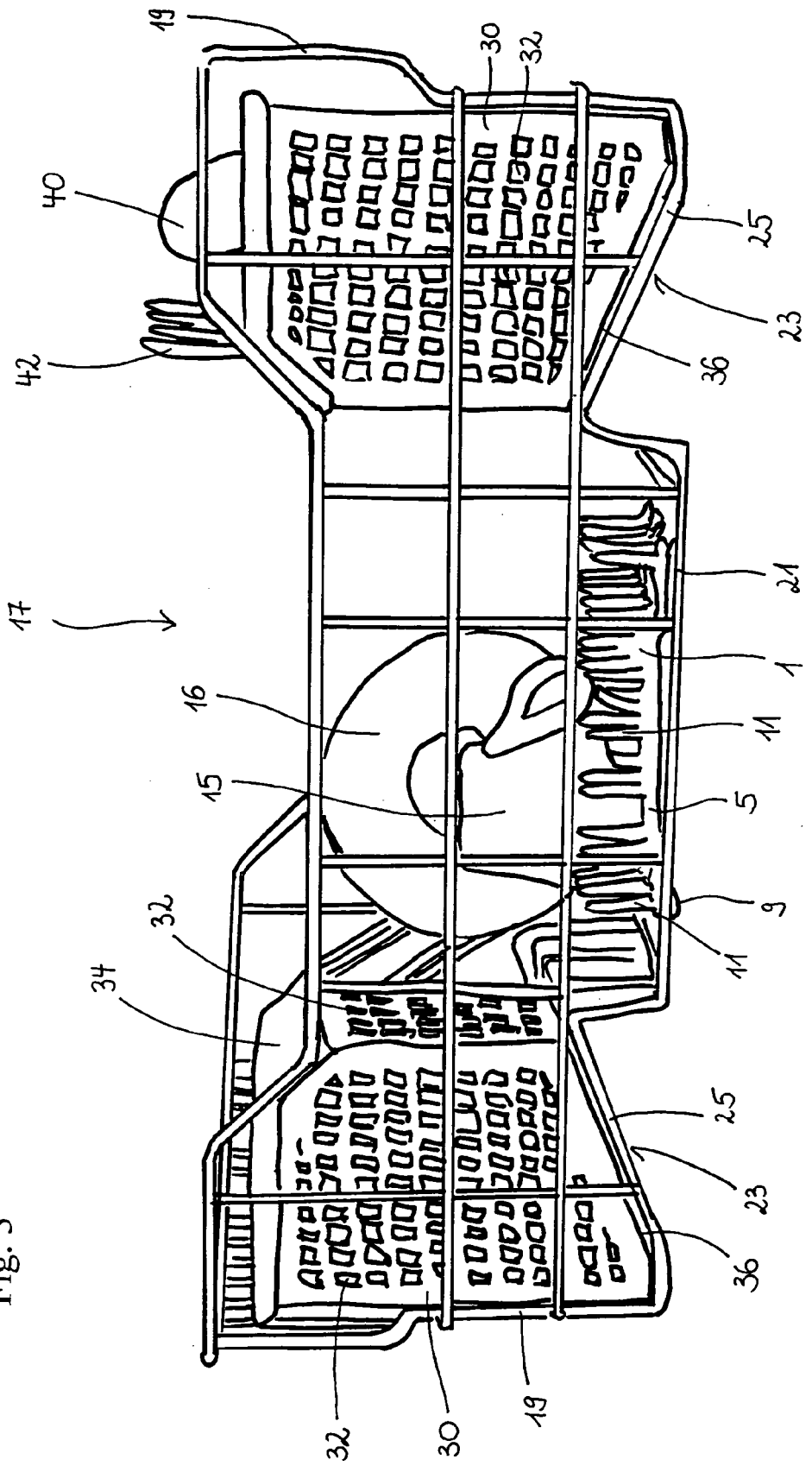


Fig. 3

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 05 02 4984

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
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Y A	WO 2004/000090 A (ARCELIK A.S; ERCIN, FERHAN; BASTUJI, CEM) 31 December 2003 (2003-12-31) * figure 1 *	6 1-5,7-15	
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X	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 2000, no. 03, 30 March 2000 (2000-03-30) & JP 11 332809 A (TOTO LTD), 7 December 1999 (1999-12-07) * abstract *	16-29	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (IPC) A47L B08B
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
Munich	13 April 2006	Clarke, A

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category
A : technological background
O : non-written disclosure
P : intermediate document

T : theory or principle underlying the invention
E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date
D : document cited in the application
L : document cited for other reasons

& : member of the same patent family, corresponding document

EPO FORM 1503 03.82 (P04C01)

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Application Number
EP 05 02 4984

CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

☐ Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):

☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

☐ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.

☒ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.

☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:

☐ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

European Patent Office

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B

Application Number
EP 05 02 4984

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. claims: 1-15,30

Cutlery basket

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2. claims: 16-29,31

Mat device to be arranged in the bottom of a dishwasher basket

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ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP 05 02 4984

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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13-04-2006

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82