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(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication****Riley et al.**(10) **Pub. No.: US 2008/0203870 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: Aug. 28, 2008**(54) **KITCHEN APPLIANCE CONFIGURED TO ALLOW VARIATION OF AESTHETIC APPEARANCE THEREOF****Related U.S. Application Data**

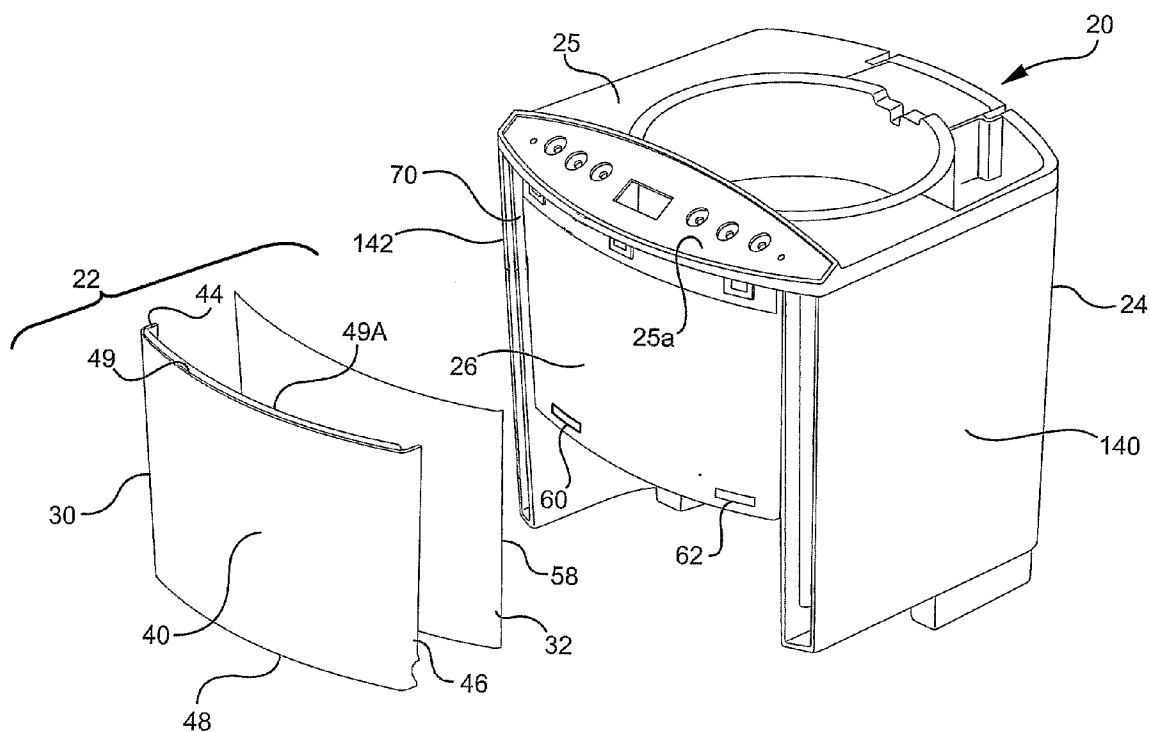
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Antony Sit, Hong Kong (CN)**Publication Classification**(51) **Int. Cl.**
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EAST HAVEN, CT 06512 (US)(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is directed to a kitchen appliance having a front portion (26), and a front panel assembly (22) removably attached to the front portion (26). In one embodiment, the front panel assembly (22) comprises a transparent panel (30) and a colored member (32) positioned between the transparent panel (30) and the front portion (26) of the kitchen appliance wherein the colored member (32) is visible through the transparent panel (30).

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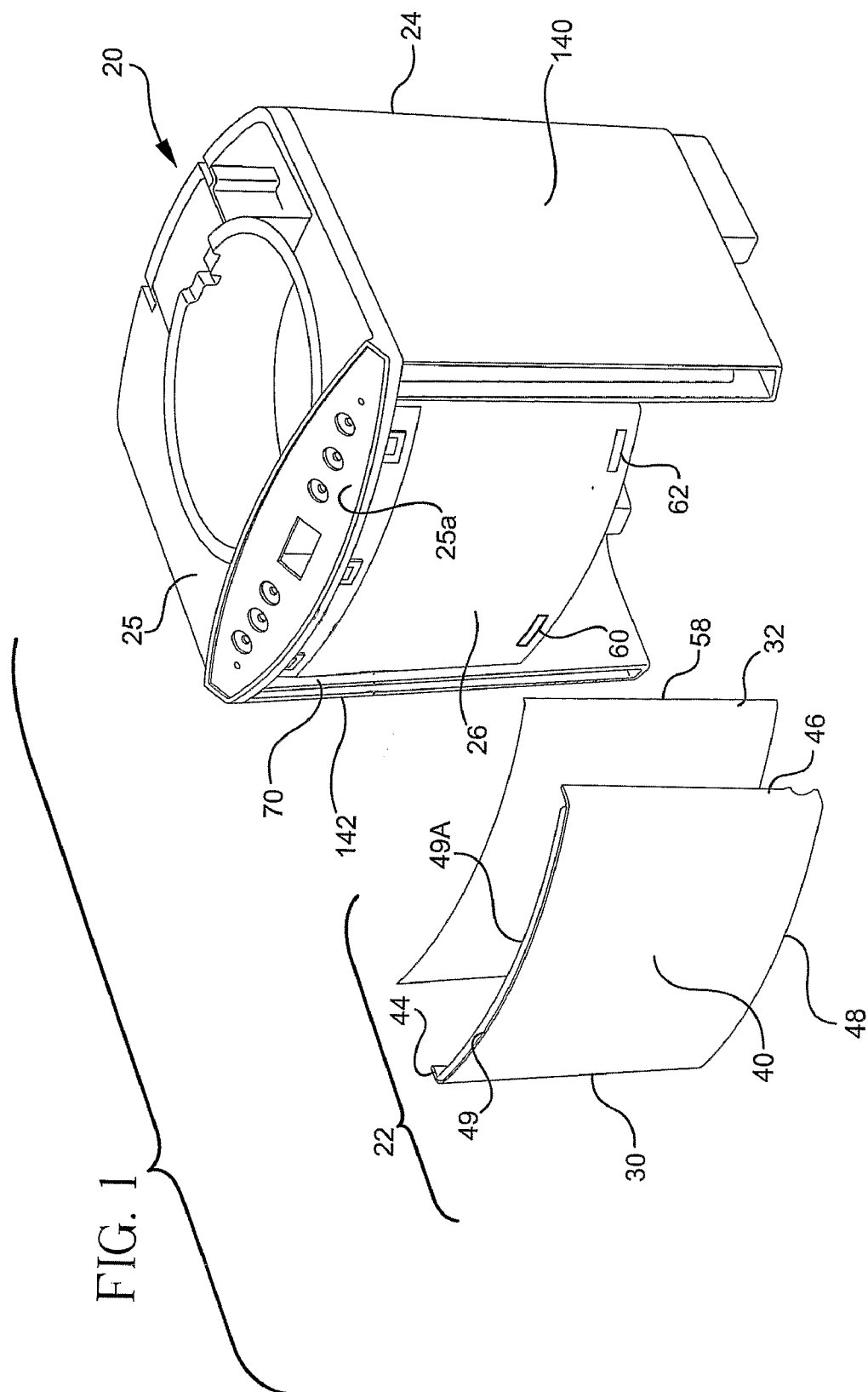
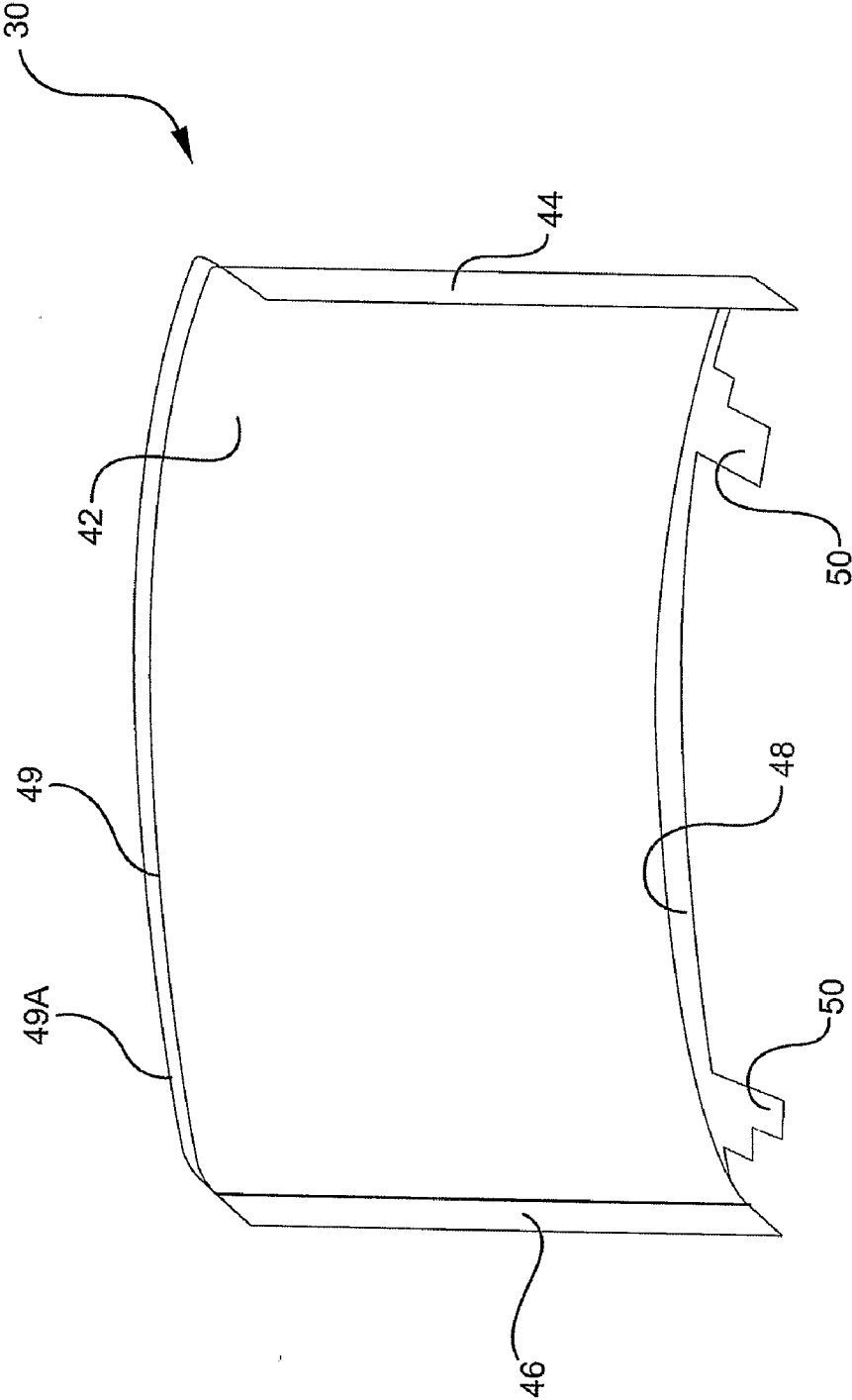


FIG. 2



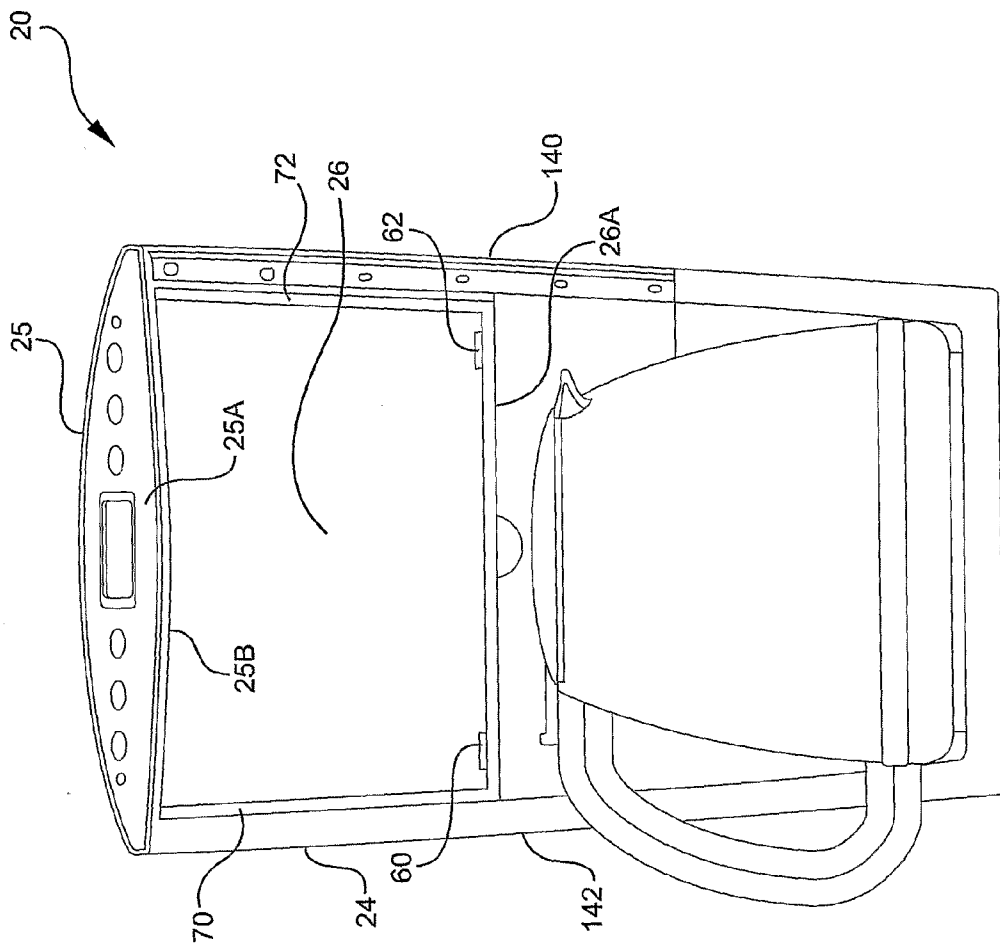


FIG. 3

FIG. 4A

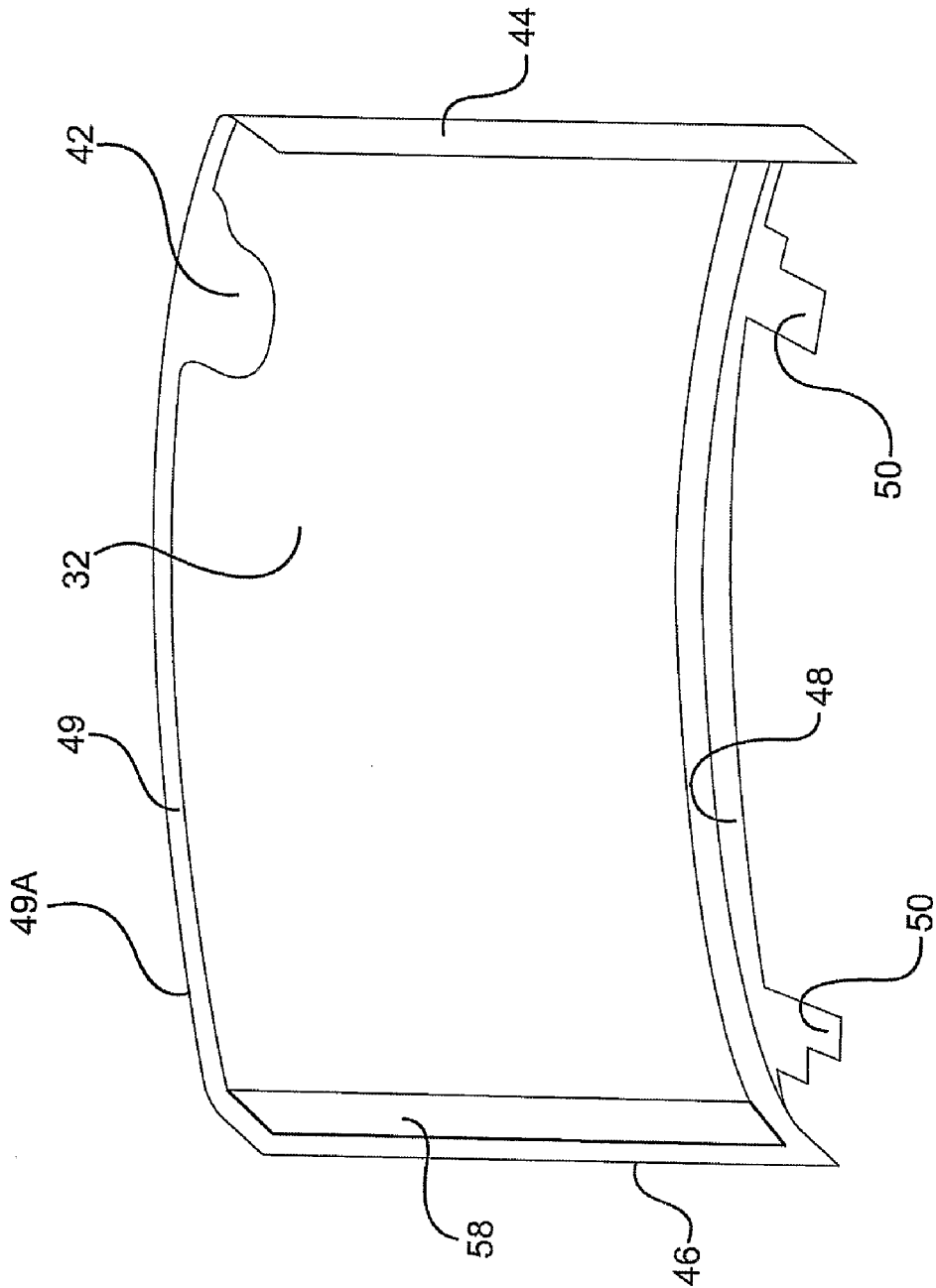


FIG. 4B

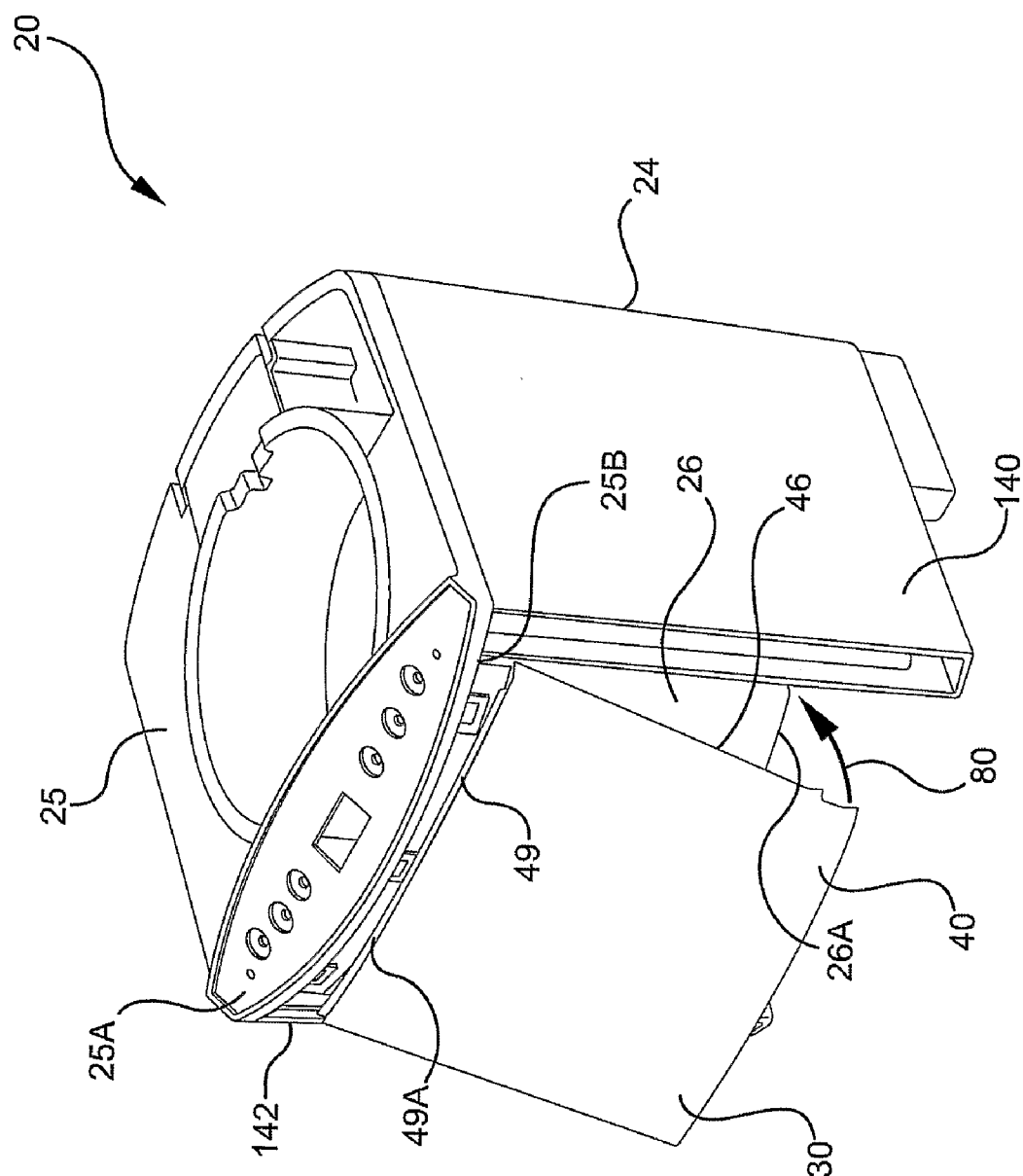


FIG. 4C

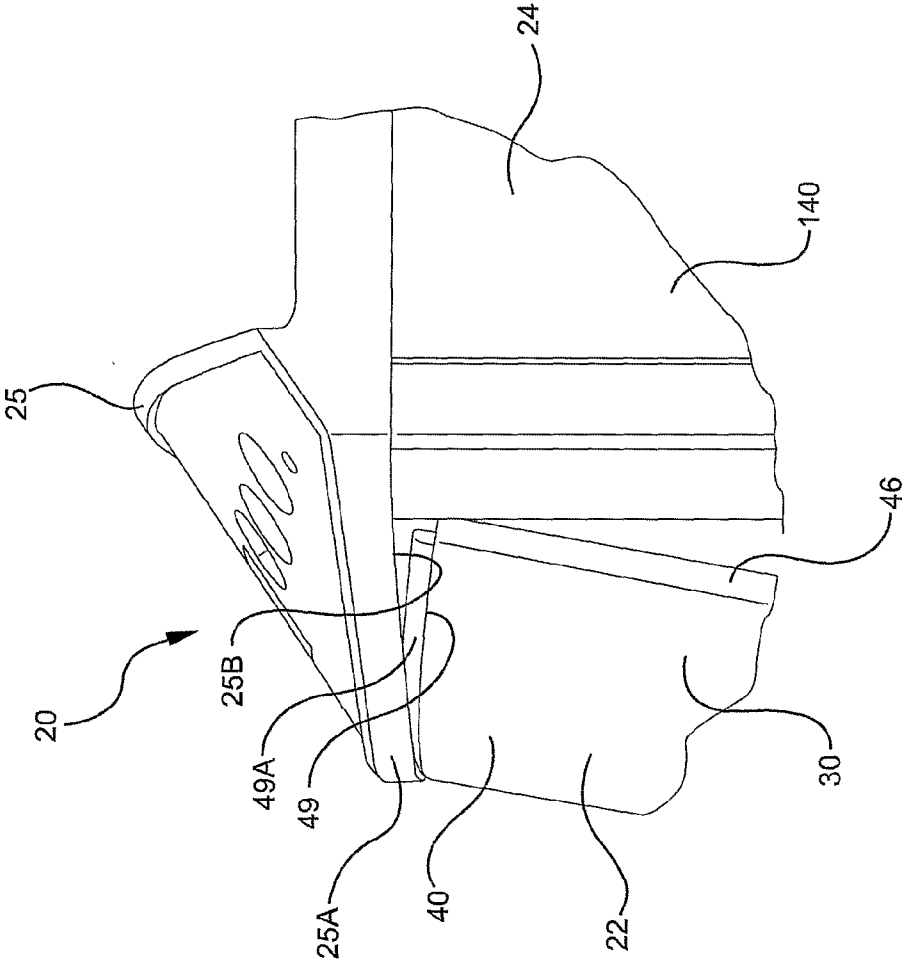
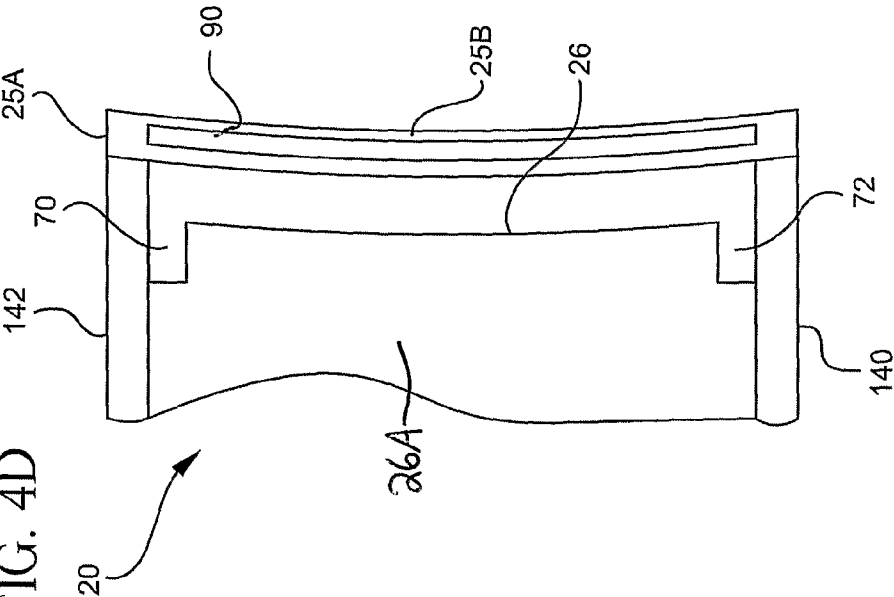
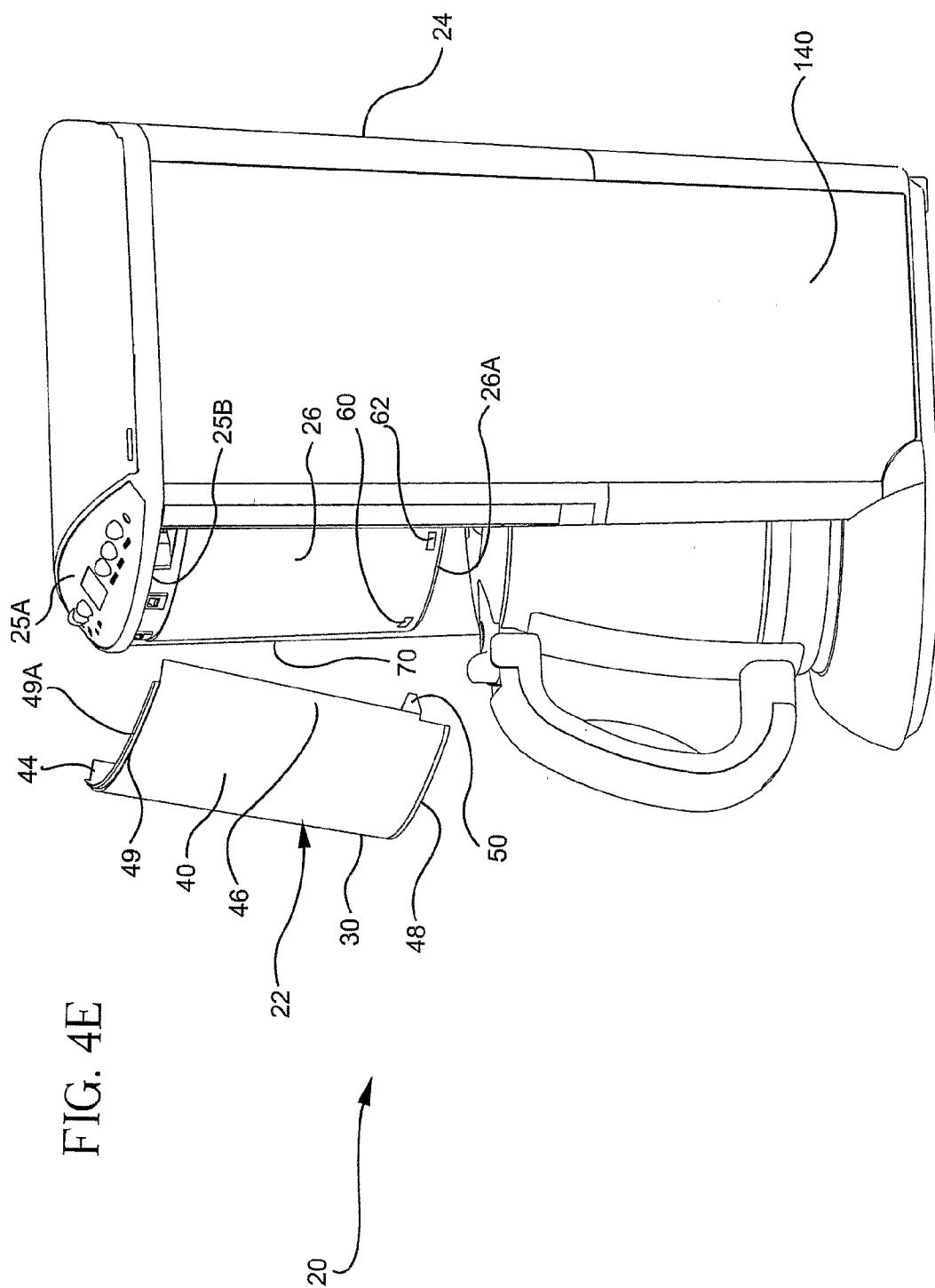
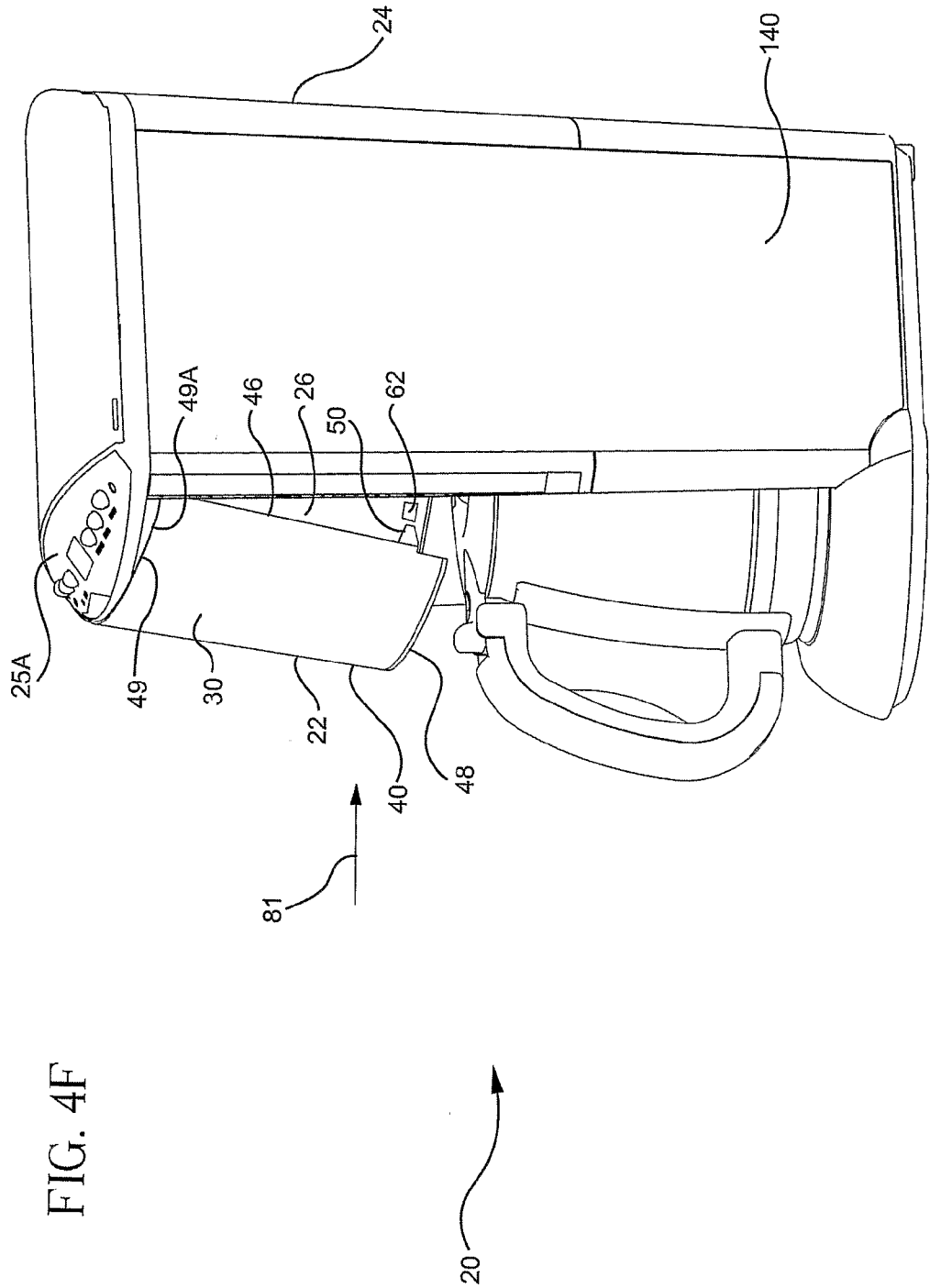


FIG. 4D







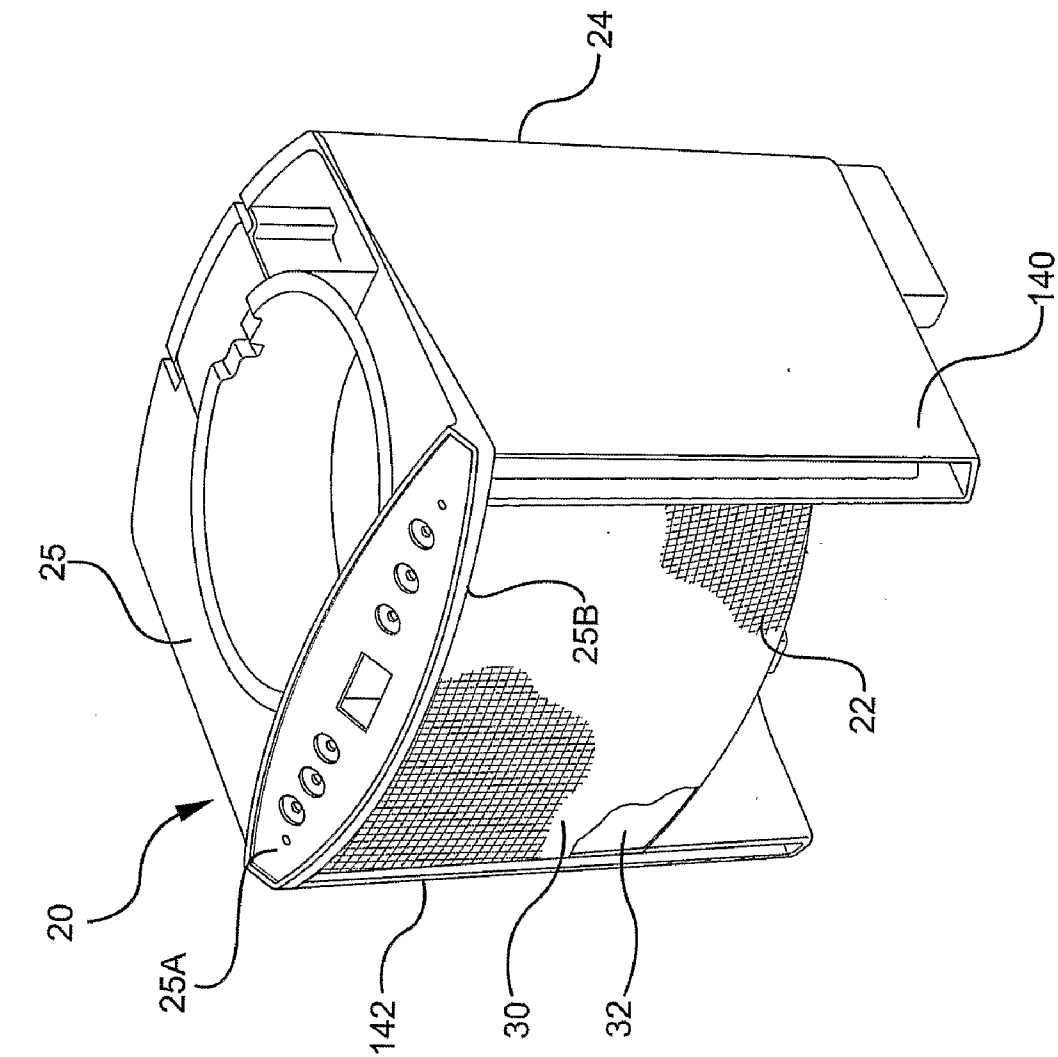


FIG. 5

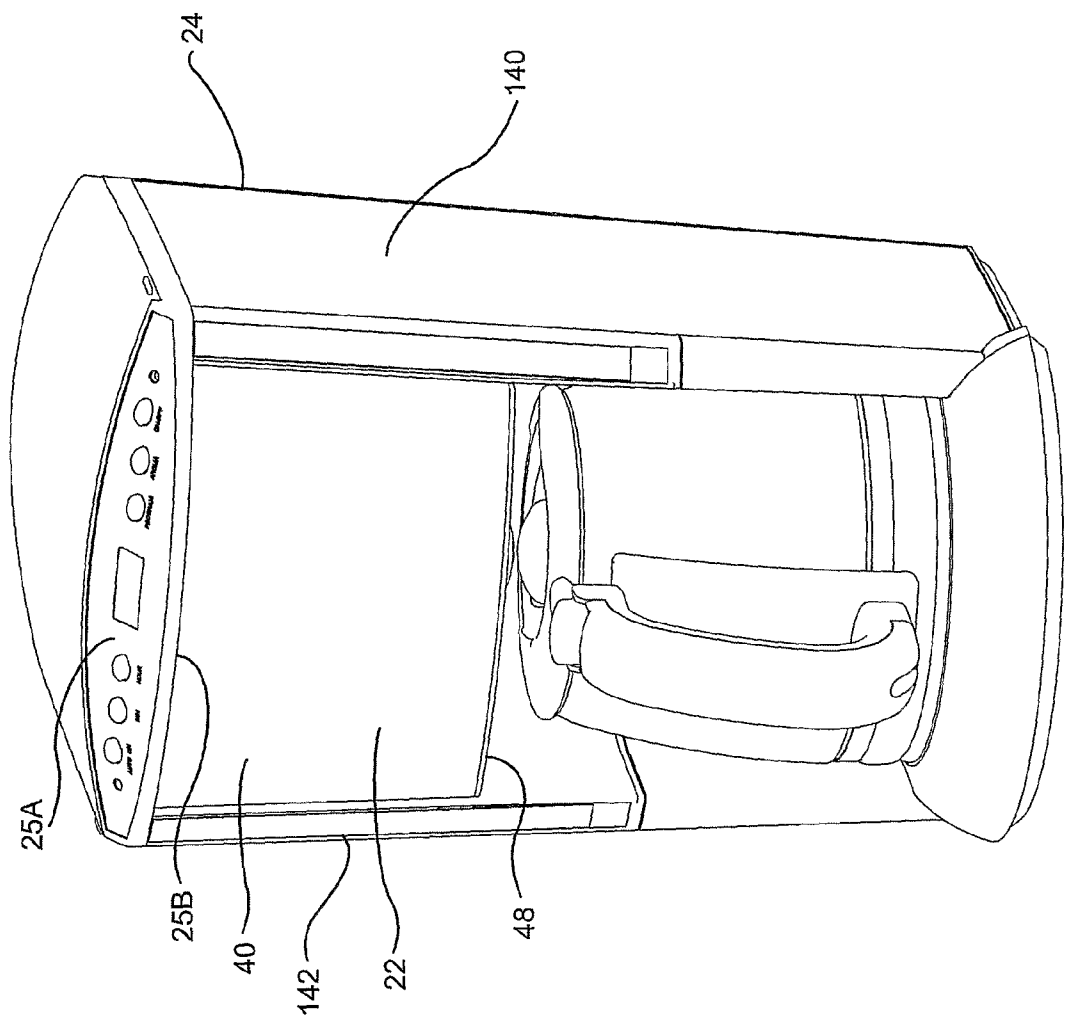
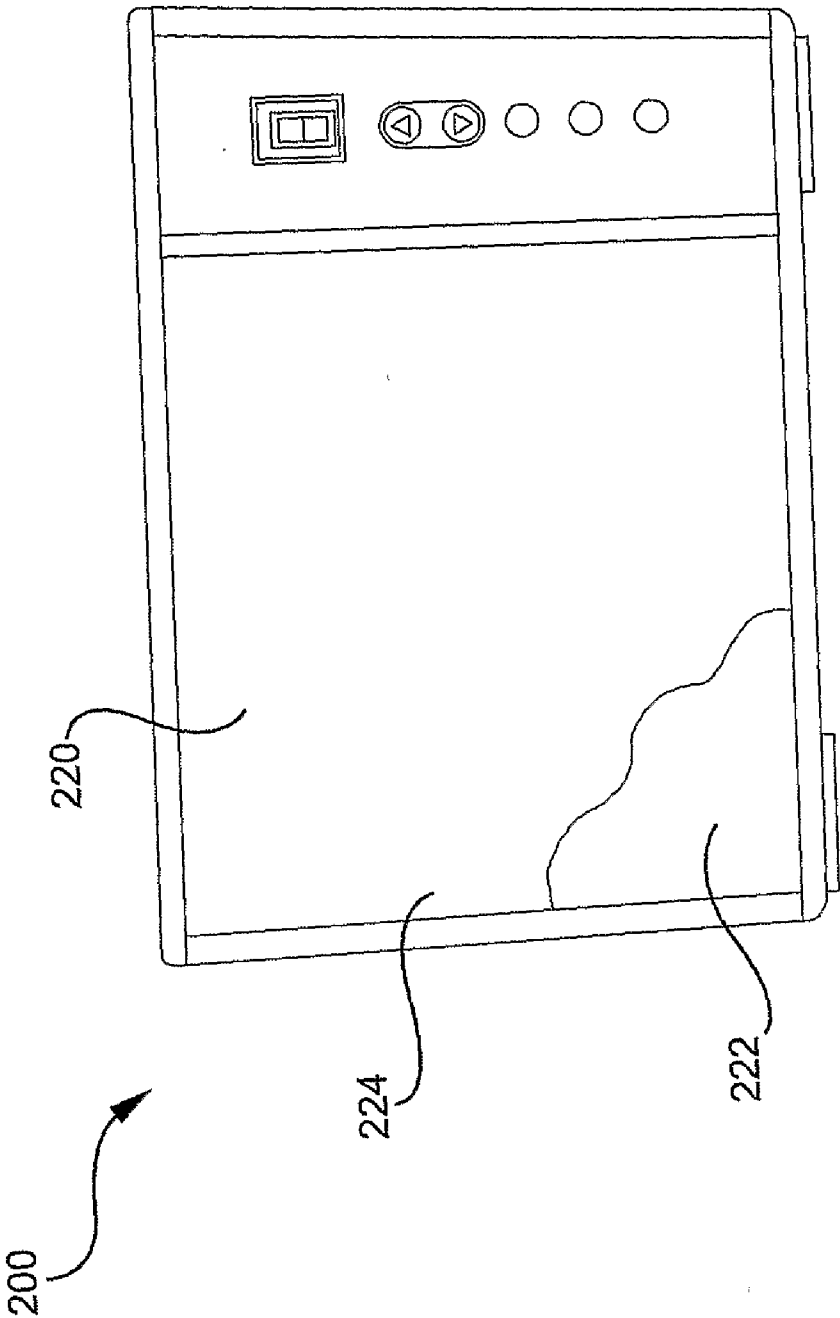


FIG. 5A

FIG. 6



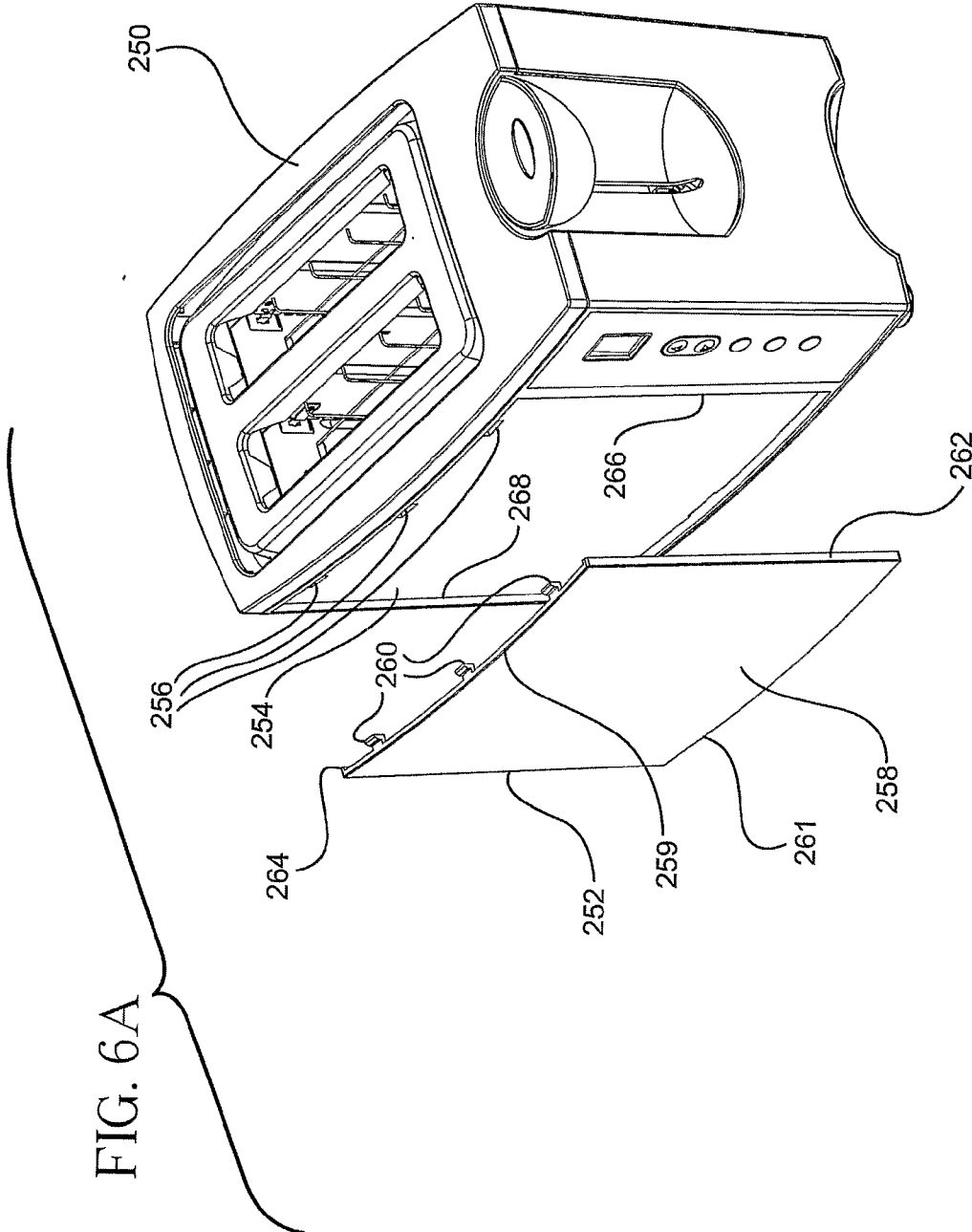


FIG. 7

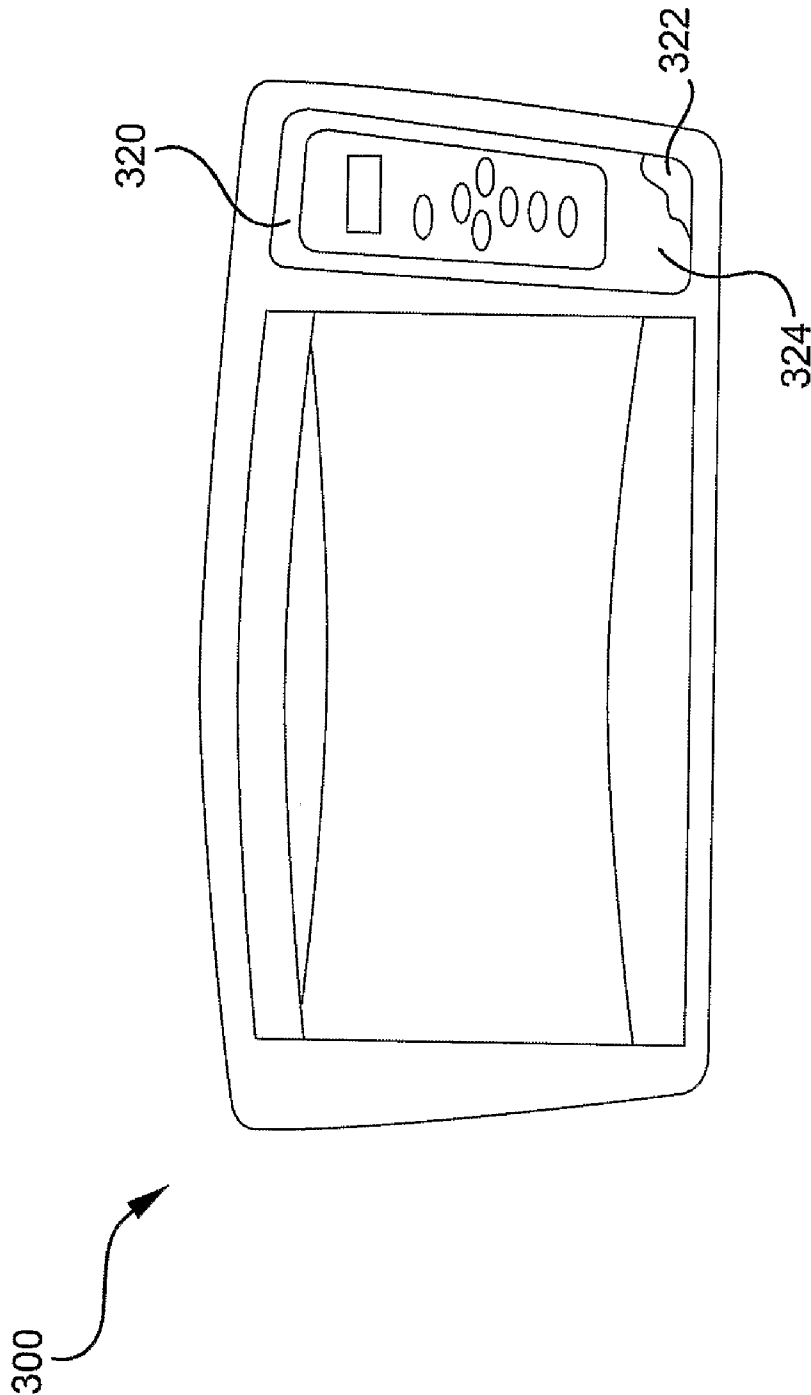


FIG. 7A

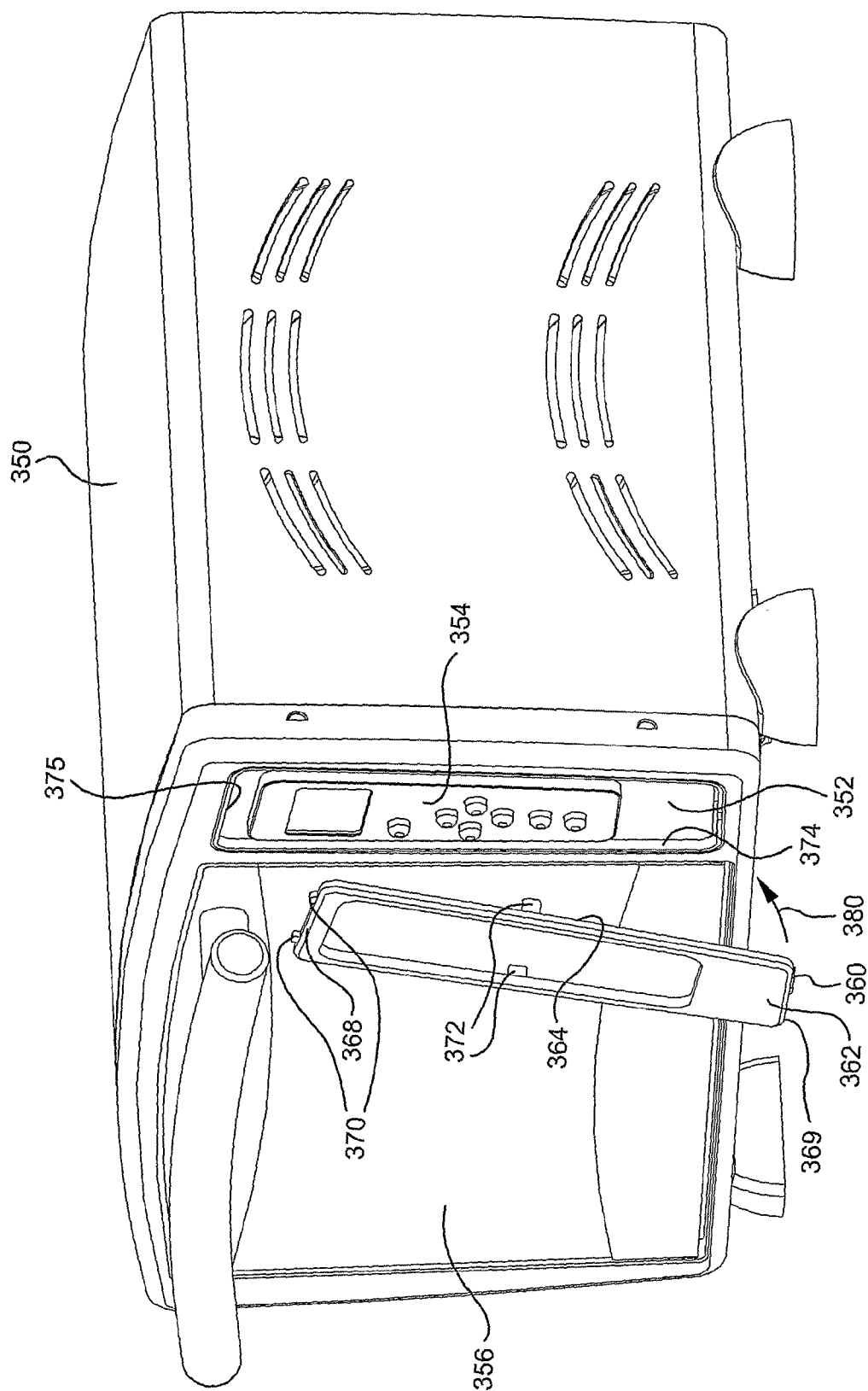
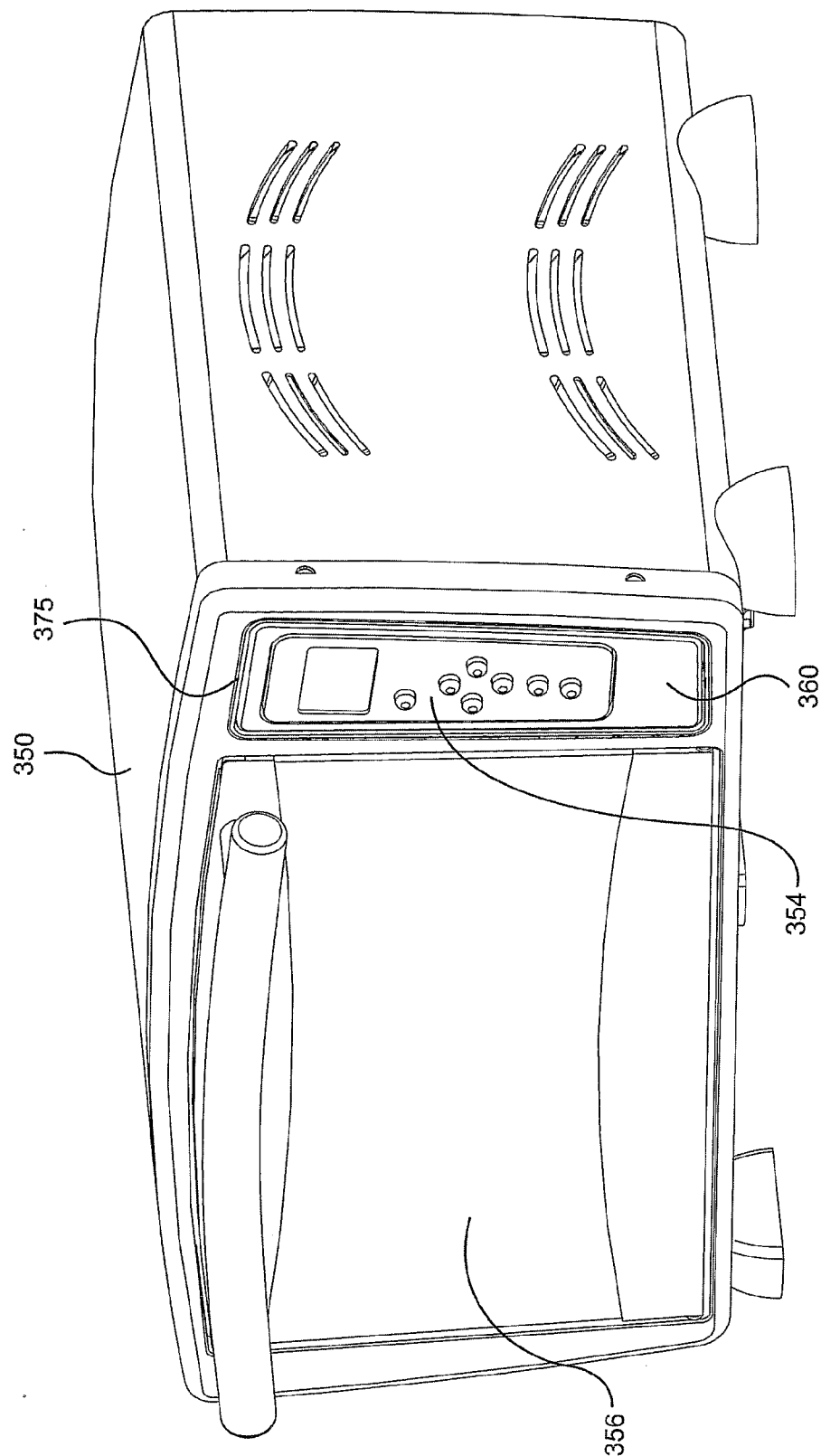


FIG. 7B



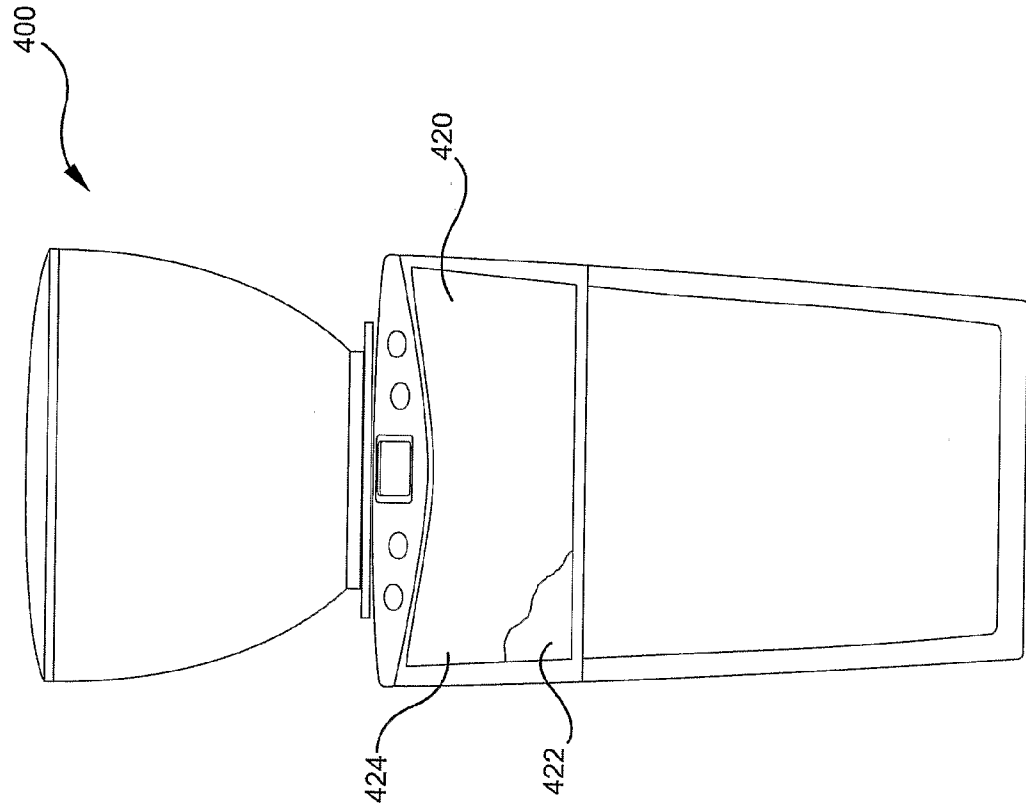
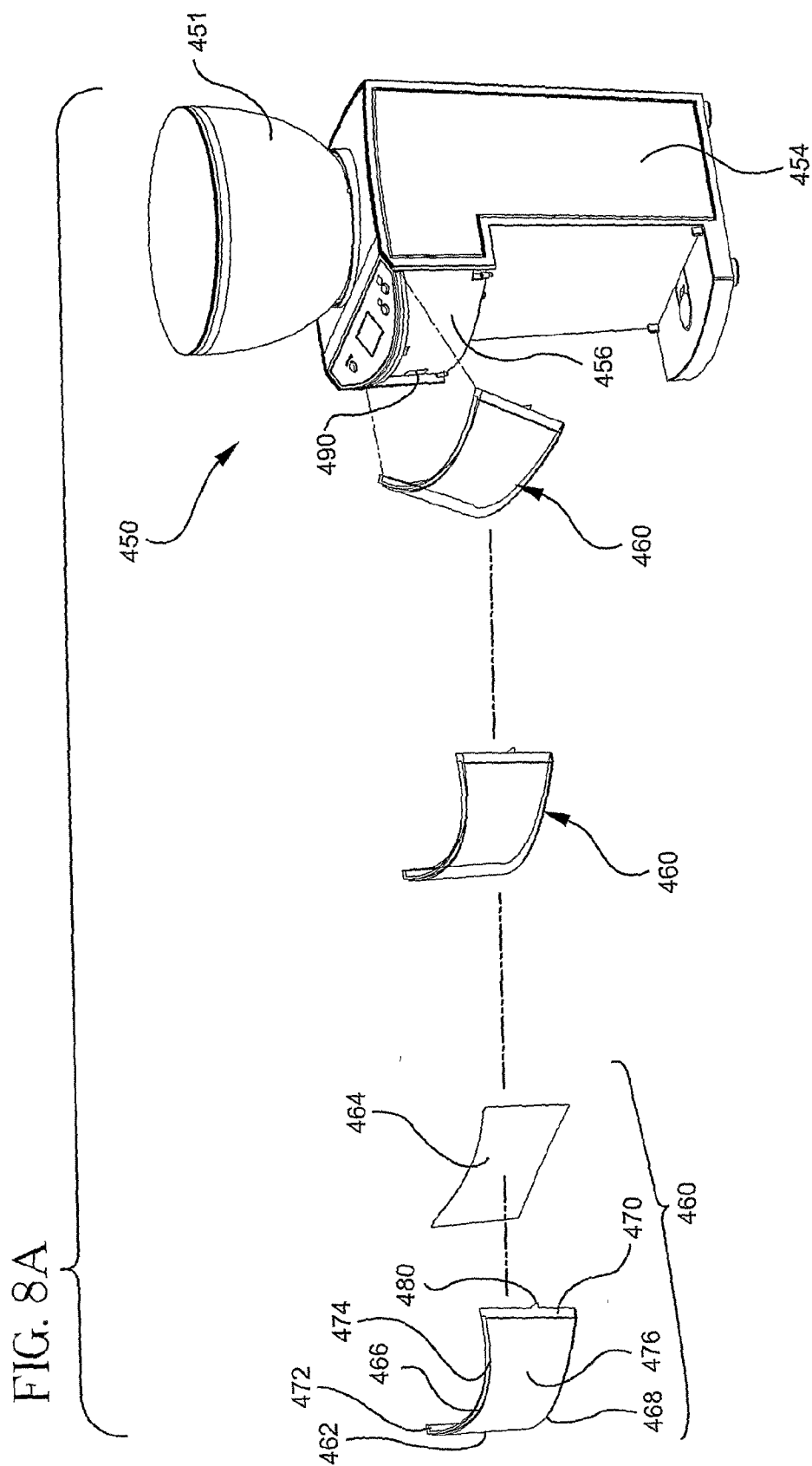
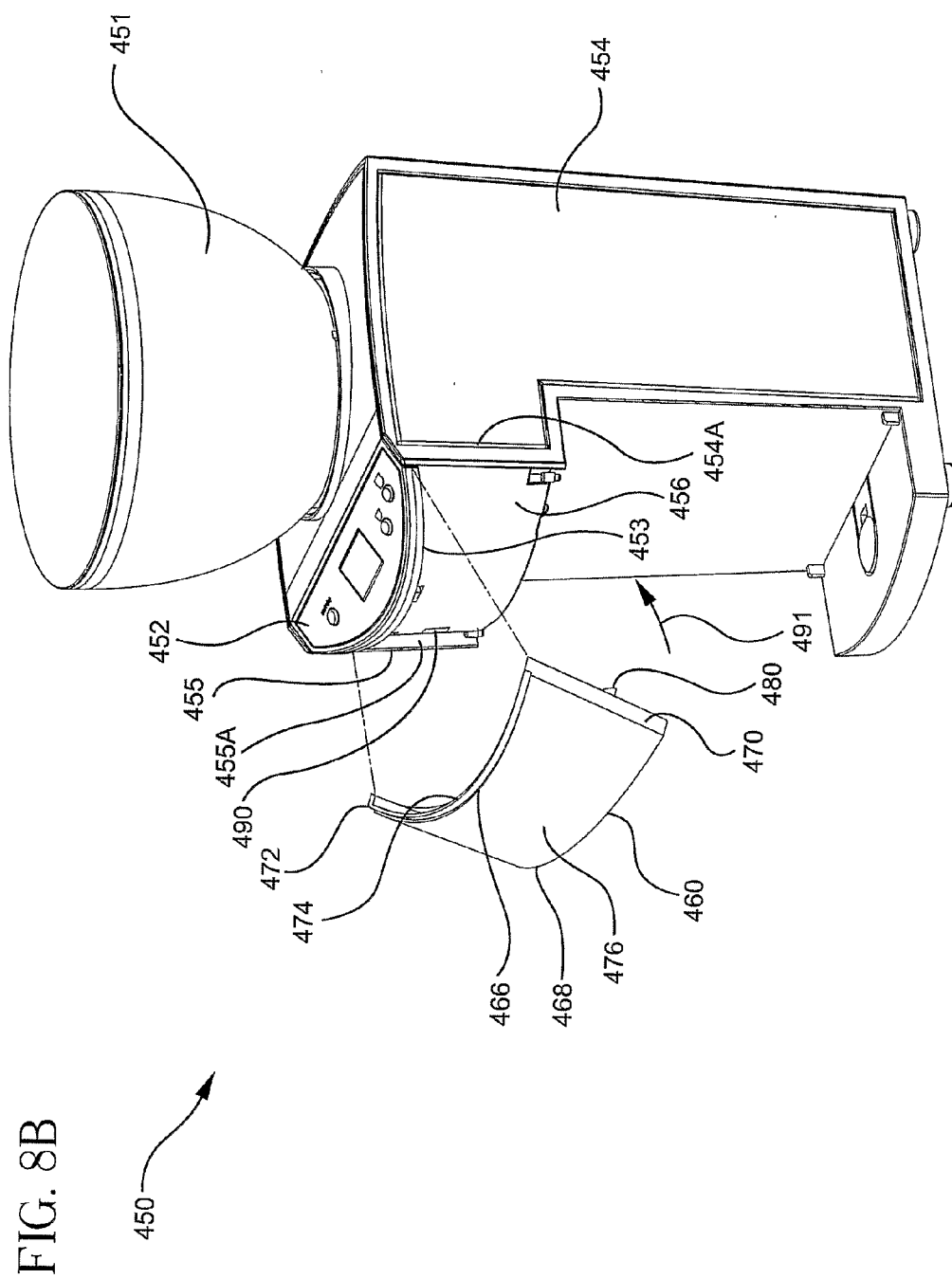


FIG. 8





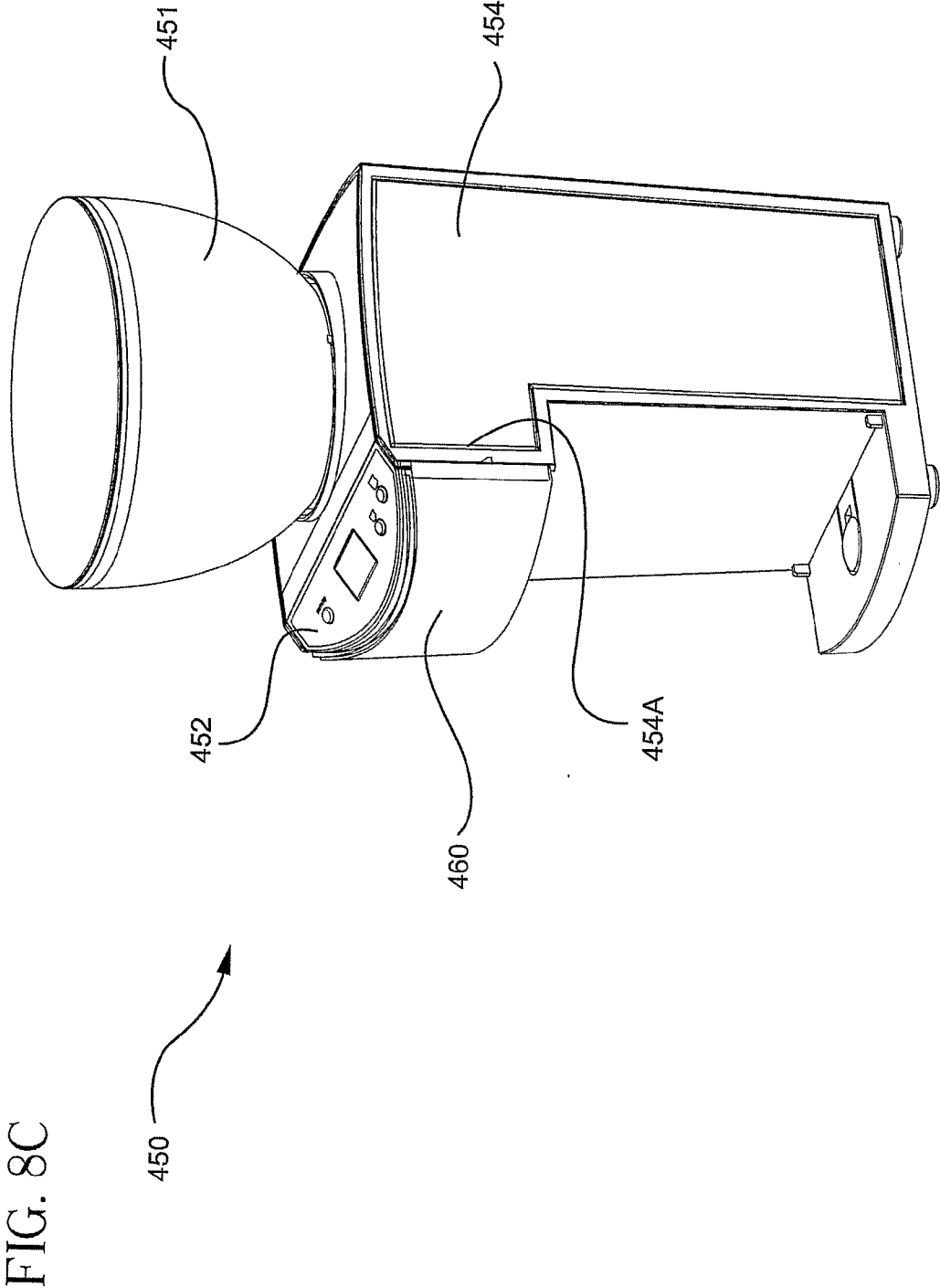


FIG. 9A

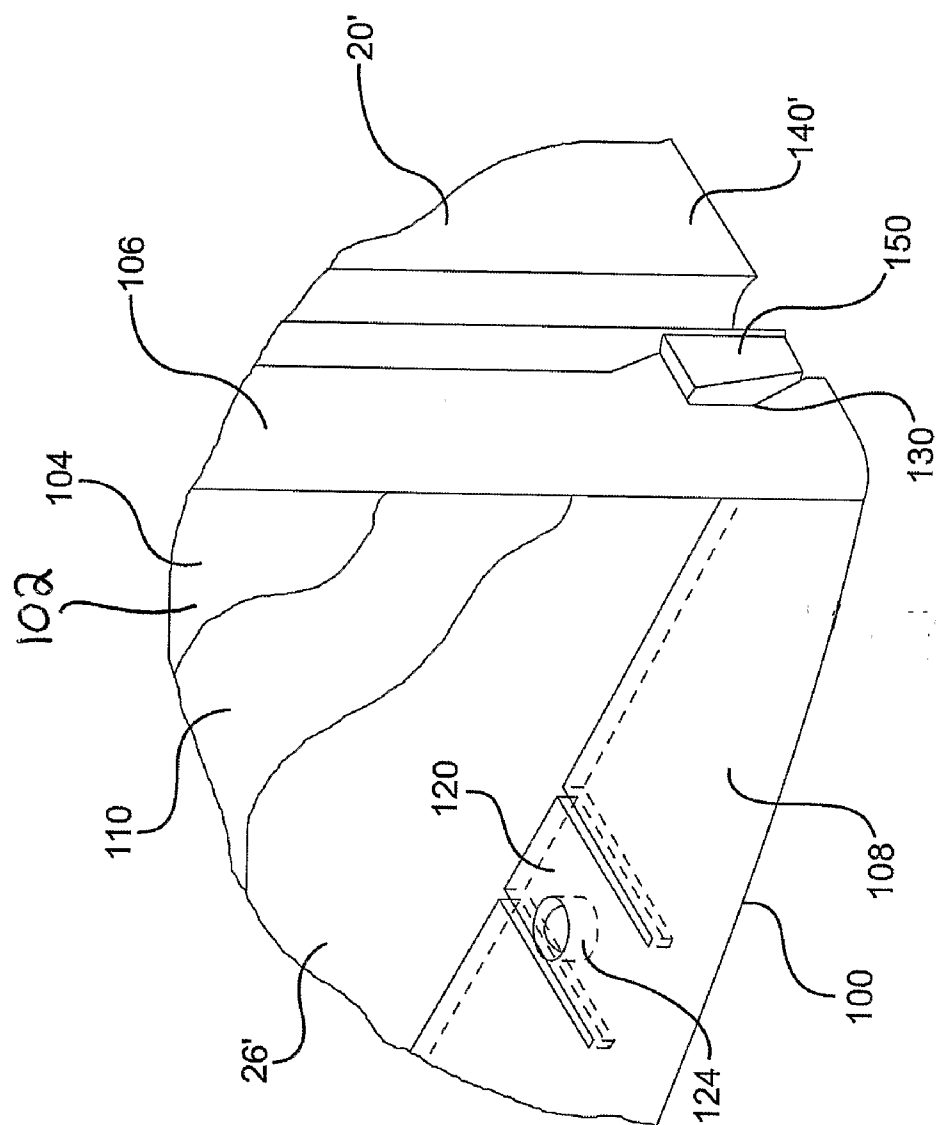


FIG. 9B

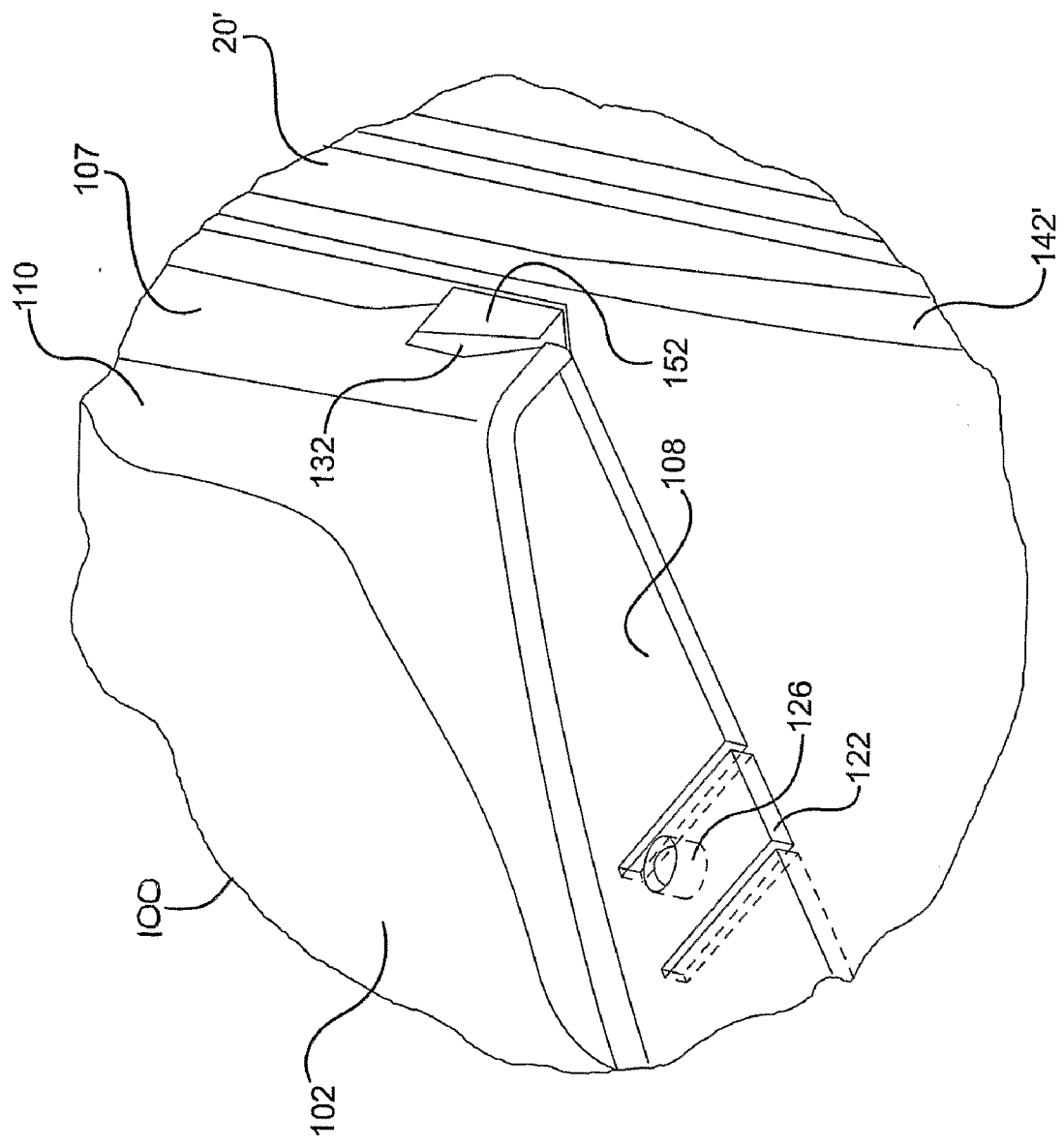


FIG. 9C

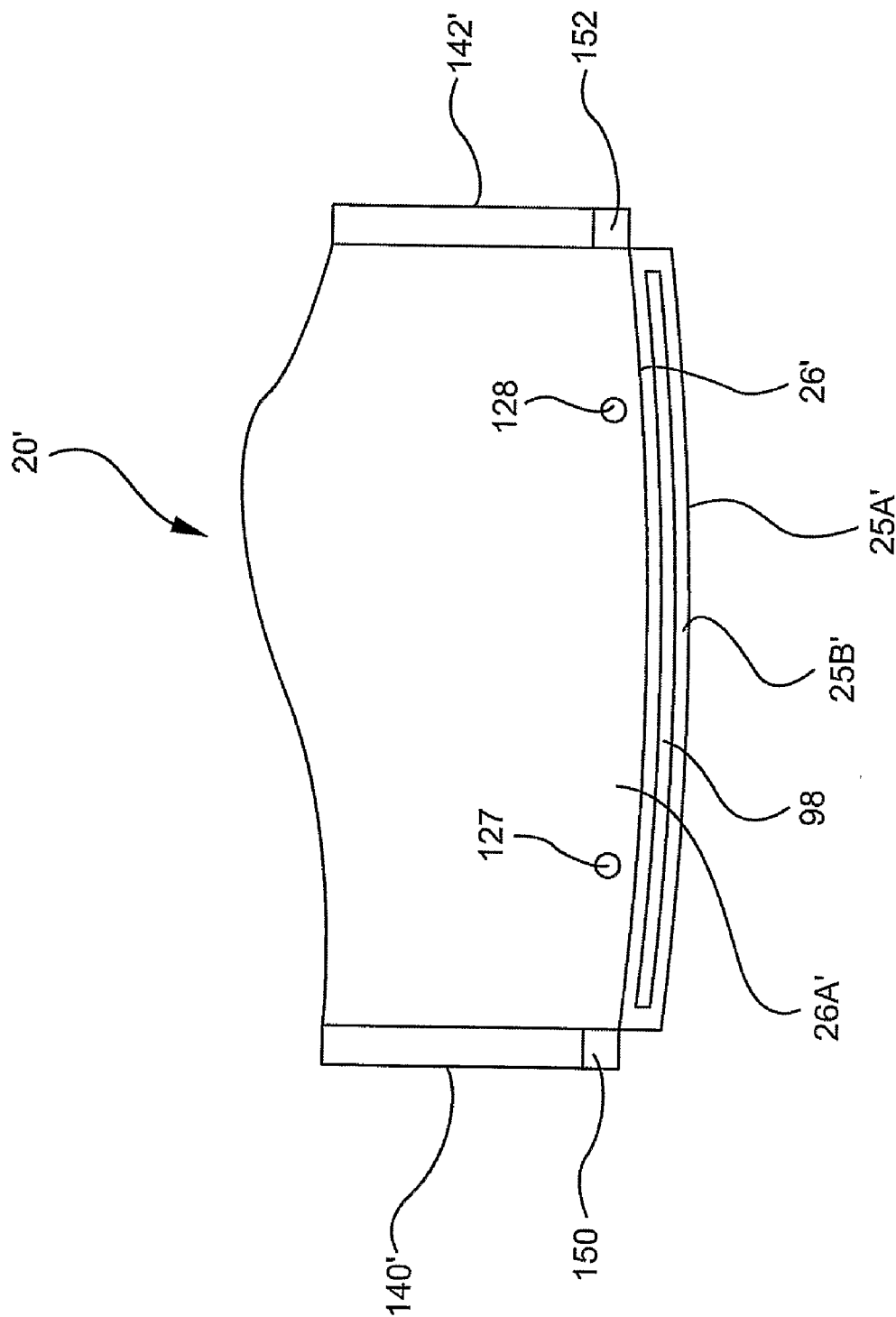
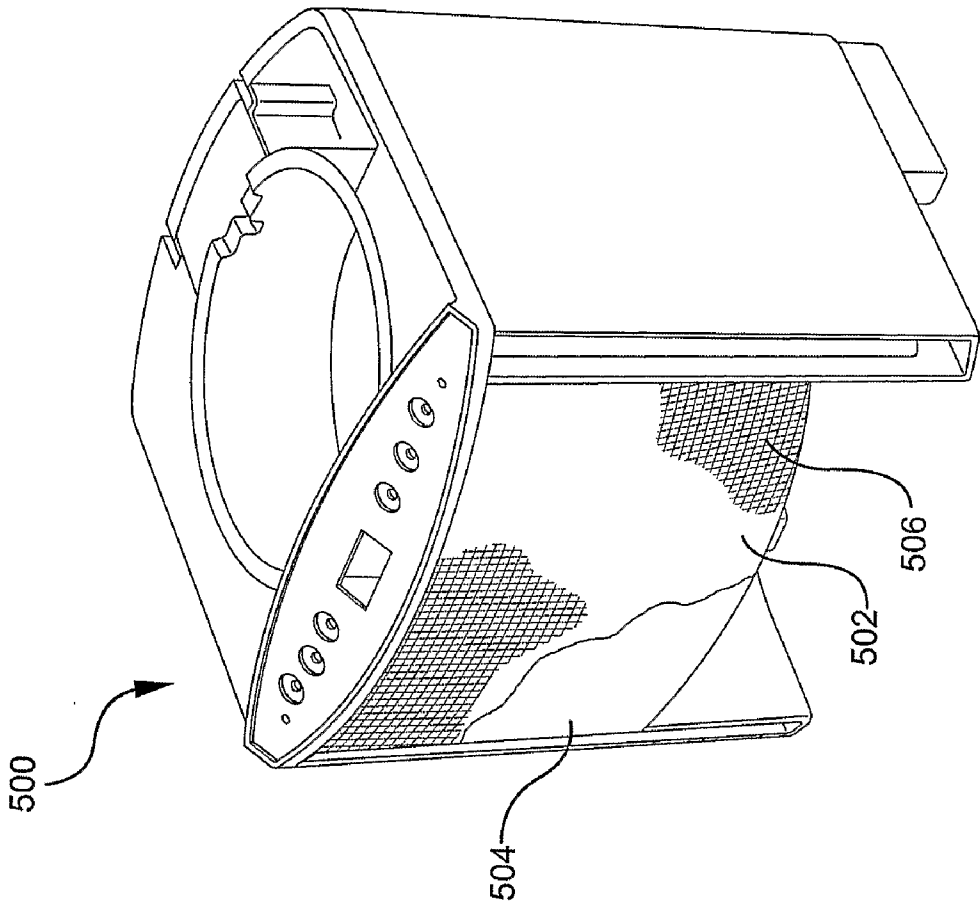


FIG. 10



KITCHEN APPLIANCE CONFIGURED TO ALLOW VARIATION OF AESTHETIC APPEARANCE THEREOF

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of the filing date of copending and commonly owned U.S. provisional application No. 60/664,807, filed Mar. 24, 2005. The entire disclosure of provisional application No. 60/664,807 is hereby incorporated by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention generally relates to a kitchen appliance having the capability for changing the aesthetic appearance thereof.

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] Kitchen appliances such as coffee makers, toasters, microwave ovens, etc. typically come in a variety of colors. Consumers typically buy an appliance that has a color that matches or corresponds to the color scheme of the consumer's kitchen. However, if the consumer changes the color scheme of his or her kitchen, the color of the kitchen appliance may no longer match or correspond to the new color scheme of the kitchen. Similarly, if the consumer changes the design and/or decor of his or her kitchen, the aesthetic appearance of the kitchen appliance may no longer be compatible with the design and/or decor of the kitchen.

[0004] What is needed is a simple and inexpensive way to change the color scheme and/or the aesthetic appearance of a kitchen appliance to suit the consumer's needs.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention is directed to, in one aspect, a kitchen appliance that is configured to allow a user to vary the color scheme or the aesthetic appearance of that kitchen appliance so that the color scheme or aesthetic appearance matches the color or design scheme of the user's kitchen or other surroundings. Additional advantages of the invention are that it allows the user to vary the color scheme or the general aesthetic appearance of the kitchen appliance so that it conforms to current design trends and/or the user's personal design choices.

[0006] Thus, in one embodiment, the present invention is directed to a kitchen appliance comprising a front portion, and a front panel assembly removably attached to the front portion of the appliance. The front panel assembly comprises a substantially transparent panel removably attached to the front portion and a colored member positioned between the front portion and the substantially transparent panel such that the colored member is visible through the substantially transparent panel. The appliance includes means for removably attaching the front panel assembly to the front portion of the appliance.

[0007] In another embodiment, the present invention is directed to an appliance having a front portion, and a front panel assembly removably attached to the front portion of the appliance. The front panel assembly comprises a substantially transparent panel removably attached to the front portion and a pre-selected decorative item positioned between the front portion and the substantially transparent panel such that the pre-selected decorative item is visible through the

substantially transparent panel. The pre-selected decorative item can be a photograph, drawing, post card, a piece of fabric, a piece of leather, a piece of suede, wallpaper, wrapping paper, holiday season decor or any other suitable decorative item that is sized to fit between the substantially transparent panel and the front portion of the appliance.

[0008] In a further embodiment of the invention, the kitchen appliance comprises a front portion, and a front panel assembly removably attached to the front portion of the appliance. The front panel assembly comprises a colored, front panel that is removably attached to the front portion. The colored, front panel has a predetermined color. The consumer may change the color scheme of the kitchen appliance by removing the colored, front panel and replacing it with an interchangeable colored, front panel having a different color.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] The features of the invention are believed to be novel. The figures are for illustration purposes only and are not drawn to scale. The invention itself may best be understood by reference to the detailed description which follows taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

[0010] FIG. 1 is a partial, exploded view of a coffee maker and front panel assembly in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

[0011] FIG. 2 is a rear elevational view of a transparent panel of the front panel assembly shown in FIG. 1;

[0012] FIG. 3 is a front elevational view of the coffee maker of FIG. 1 without the front panel assembly attached thereto;

[0013] FIG. 4A is a rear elevational view of the front panel assembly of FIG. 1;

[0014] FIGS. 4B and 4C are partial, perspective views showing how the front panel assembly is removably attached to the front portion of the coffee maker;

[0015] FIG. 4D is a view of the underside of an overhang portion of the coffee maker, the view also partially showing the underside of the front portion of the coffee maker of FIG. 1;

[0016] FIGS. 4E and 4F are exploded views, in perspective, illustrating how the front panel assembly is removably attached to the coffee maker;

[0017] FIG. 5 is a partial, perspective view showing the front panel assembly removably attached to the coffee maker;

[0018] FIG. 5A is a perspective view of the entire coffee maker of FIG. 5 wherein the front panel assembly is removably attached thereto;

[0019] FIG. 6 is a front elevational view of a toaster in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

[0020] FIG. 6A is an exploded view, in perspective, showing how the front panel assembly is removably attached to the toaster of FIG. 6;

[0021] FIG. 7 is a front elevational view of a toaster oven in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention;

[0022] FIG. 7A is an exploded view, in perspective, illustrating how the front panel assembly is removably attached to a toaster oven in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

[0023] FIG. 7B is a perspective view showing the toaster oven of FIG. 7A wherein the front panel assembly is removably attached thereto;

[0024] FIG. 8 is a front elevational view of a coffee grinder and front panel assembly in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

[0025] FIGS. 8A and 8B are exploded views, in perspective, illustrating how the front panel assembly is removably attached to the coffee grinder;

[0026] FIG. 8C is a perspective view showing the front panel assembly removably attached to the coffee grinder;

[0027] FIG. 9A is a partial, perspective view of a front corner of a coffee maker with a front panel assembly removably attached thereto in accordance with another embodiment of the invention, the view being seen from outside the coffee maker;

[0028] FIG. 9B is a partial, perspective view of the opposite front corner of the coffee maker of FIG. 9A, the view being seen from inside the coffee maker;

[0029] FIG. 9C is a partial, plan view of the underside of a front portion of a coffee maker of FIGS. 9A and 9B;

[0030] FIG. 10 is partial, perspective view of a coffee maker and front panel assembly in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

[0031] FIG. 11A is an exploded view, in perspective, of a front panel assembly in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

[0032] FIG. 11B is a top view of a front panel shown in FIG. 11A; and

[0033] FIG. 11C is a perspective view of a template used to trim or crop a photograph that is used with the front panel assembly of FIG. 11A.

MODES FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0034] Referring to FIG. 1, there is shown coffee maker 20 and front panel assembly, indicated by reference numeral 22, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. The portion of coffee maker 20 that is shown in FIG. 1 is the top portion of the housing of coffee maker 20 and is indicated by reference number 24. Top portion 24 of coffee maker 20 has interior frame 25 which has exterior overhang 25A. Overhang 25A has underside 25B. Coffee maker 20 also includes front portion 26 which has a bottom portion 26A (see FIG. 4D). Front panel assembly 22 comprises substantially transparent panel 30 and colored member 32. Colored member 32 may be configured as a color panel or a piece of colored fabric. Colored member 32 is discussed in detail in the ensuing description. In accordance with the invention, front panel assembly 22 is removably attached to front portion 26 so as to provide the coffee maker 20 with a particular color scheme and appearance. A coffee carafe, known in the art, is positioned below front portion 26 (see FIG. 3). Coffee maker 20 also includes sidewalls 140 and 142.

[0035] Referring to FIG. 2, there is shown transparent panel 30. Panel 30 may be fabricated from plastic or any other suitable material provided that such material is substantially transparent. Panel 30 is curved so that it conforms to the shape of front portion 26 of coffee maker 20. Panel 30 has exterior side 40 (see FIG. 1), interior side 42, flanged end 44 and flanged end 46. Panel 30 includes bottom end portion 48 which is also flanged so as to support colored member 32. Thus, the flanged configuration of bottom end portion 48 functions as a seat for colored member 32. Panel 30 has top end portion 49 which defines lip 49A. Panel 30 further includes tabs 50 that extend from the bottom end portion 48. The purpose of tabs 50 is discussed in the ensuing description.

[0036] Referring to FIGS. 1 and 4A, colored member 32 comprises a relatively flat, thin, flexible sheet. Colored member 32 may be fabricated from a variety of materials, e.g. plastic, PVC, paper, cardboard, etc. The thinness and flexibil-

ity of colored member 32 allows it to conform to the shape of panel 30. As shown in FIG. 1, colored member 32 has flanged ends, one of which being shown as end 58. Colored member 32 is positioned on interior side 42 of panel 30 as shown in FIG. 4A.

[0037] In an alternate embodiment, colored member 32 may be fabricated from a fabric. Such fabrics include nylon, polyester, Dacron, cotton, and combinations thereof. In another embodiment, colored member 32 is fabricated from suede. In a further embodiment, colored member 32 is fabricated from PU micro-fiber. An important benefit of using a fabric to fabricate colored member 32 is that the fabric may offer a textured look or appearance. If colored member 32 is a fabric, it will naturally conform to the shape of front portion 26 of coffee maker 20 and panel 30. In addition to the materials listed above, colored member 32 can be fabricated from leather or synthetic leather. Thus, colored member 32 can be any decorative member that exhibits the desired color, texture, design or other aesthetic qualities.

[0038] In an alternate embodiment, colored member 32 does not have flanged ends.

[0039] Referring to FIGS. 1, 3, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F, front portion 26 of coffee maker 20 is configured to have slots 60 and 62 and channels 70 and 72. Each slot 60 and 62 is configured to receive a corresponding tab 50 of panel 30. Channel 70 is sized to receive flanged end 44 of panel 30 (see FIG. 2). Similarly, channel 72 is sized to receive flanged end 46 of panel 30 (see FIG. 2). Referring to FIG. 4D, there is shown a view of the underside 26A of front portion 26, and underside 25B of overhang 25A. As shown in FIG. 4D, underside 25B has channel 90 formed therein that is sized to receive lip 49A of top end 49 of panel 30. As shown in FIGS. 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F, in order to attach front panel assembly 22 to front portion 26, the user positions front panel assembly 22 so that lip 49A of transparent panel 30 is positioned under overhang 25A and adjacent to underside 25B. The user then moves front panel assembly 22 upward so that lip 49A is inserted into the channel 90 in underside 25B. Next, the user pushes front panel assembly 22 forward, as indicated by arrow 80 (see FIG. 4B) and arrow 81 (see FIG. 4F), so that tabs 50 are inserted into slots 60 and 62. Tabs 50 are slightly angled with respect to interior side 42 of panel 30 so that when tabs 50 are inserted into slots 60 and 62, a frictional relationship is created between tabs 50 and the perimetrical edges of slots 60 and 62. This configuration prevents transparent panel 30 from becoming loose and falling off of front portion 26 of coffee maker 20. FIGS. 5 and 5A show front panel assembly 22 completely attached to front portion 26 of coffee maker 20. For purposes of understanding the invention, in FIG. 5, a portion of transparent panel 30 is cut away to show colored member 32.

[0040] Colored member 32 is visible through transparent panel 30. Colored member 32 is positioned between interior side 42 of transparent panel 30 and front portion 26 of coffee maker 20 and remains positioned that way when front panel assembly 22 is completely attached to front portion 26 of coffee maker 20. Colored member 32 is also supported by bottom flanged end portion 48 of panel 30 so that colored member 32 does not slip downward (see FIG. 4A).

[0041] In order to remove front panel assembly 22 from front portion 26 of coffee maker 20, a user may use his or her finger tips to grasp the bottom portion of panel 30, adjacent bottom end 48, and pull panel 30 outward in a direction opposite to that indicated by arrow 81 in FIG. 4F. The user can

then remove colored member 32 and insert another colored member having a different color. For example, if the current colored member 32 is colored yellow, the user can replace it with another colored member 32 that is colored green.

[0042] In an alternate embodiment, interior frame 25 is configured so that it can be raised, with respect to front portion 26 and sidewalls 140 and 142, thereby freeing lip 49A of panel 30 from channel 90. In such a configuration, the user can then grasp the upper portion of panel 30, adjacent top end 49, and then pull panel 30 outward so that panel 30 can swing outward. The user can then maneuver panel 30 so that tabs 50 are removed from slots 60 and 62.

[0043] In accordance with the invention, a plurality of interchangeable, colored members 32 are provided, each with a different color. The plurality of colored members 32 may include colored members fabricated with fabrics. Preferably, the interchangeable colored members are provided with the kitchen appliance at the time of purchase.

[0044] In one embodiment, panel 30 is sized and configured to allow a user to conveniently store several unused colored members 32 between panel 30 and front portion 26 of coffee maker 20. In this way, the outer most colored member has the desired or selected color and is visible through transparent panel 30 and the remaining colored members are stored between the outer most colored member and front portion 26.

[0045] In a further embodiment, colored member 32 is replaced by a photograph. The photograph is visible through transparent panel 30. Alternately, transparent panel 30 can be configured to have the design of a picture frame. This embodiment is further described in the ensuing description. Thus, it is to be understood that colored member 32 can be configured as any one of a variety of decorative items, e.g. drawing, picture, post card, wallpaper, cloth, fabric, holiday season decor, or other personalized item.

[0046] Referring to FIGS. 9A and 9B, there is shown front panel assembly 100 in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. This embodiment provides a different way to removably attach the front panel assembly to a front portion of a coffee maker. FIGS. 9A, 9B and 9C show portions of coffee maker 20' which has overhang 25A'. Overhang 25A' is part of a control panel (not shown) and has underside 25B' (see FIG. 9C). Coffee maker 20' further includes front portion 26' and sidewalls 140' and 142'. Front portion 26' has underside 26A'. FIG. 9C shows underside 25B' and underside 26A'. Underside 25B' has channel 98 formed therein which performs the same function as channel 90 shown in FIG. 4D. Front portion 26' and sidewalls 140' and 142' are generally similar to front portion 26 and sidewalls 140 and 142, respectively, of coffee maker 20 described in the foregoing description, except for some additional structural features which are described in the ensuing description.

[0047] FIG. 9A is a view of the exterior side of front panel assembly 100. Specifically, FIG. 9A is a view of a corner portion of coffee maker 20' and front panel assembly 100. The view of FIG. 9A is a view seen from the outside of coffee maker 20'. FIG. 9B is view of the interior side of front panel assembly 100 and shows the opposite corner of front panel assembly 100. The view of FIG. 9B is a view seen from inside coffee maker 20'. Front panel assembly 100 comprises substantially transparent front panel 102. Panel 102 has exterior side 104, a pair of flanged ends 106 and 107, a top end (not shown), and bottom, flanged end 108. The top end of panel 102 is substantially the same as top end 49 of panel 30 (see FIG. 1) and also has a lip which is not shown but is similar to

lip 49A (see FIG. 1). Front panel assembly 100 includes colored member 110. A portion of panel 102 is cut away in order to show colored member 110, and portions of panel 102 and colored member 110 are cut away in order to show front portion 26' and bottom, flanged end 108. Bottom, flanged end 108 includes resilient members 120 and 122. Only a portion of each member 120 and 122 is contiguous with bottom end 108 so as to provide each member 120 and 122 with a degree of resiliency. Member 120 has a protrusion 124. Similarly, member 122 has a protrusion 126. Referring to FIG. 9C, underside 26A' has recesses or cavities 127 and 128 that are sized to receive protrusions 124 and 126, respectively. Flanged ends 106 and 107 have notches 130 and 132, respectively. Sidewall 140' defines stepped portion 150 which is sized to fit into notch 130. Similarly, sidewall 142' has a stepped portion 152 that is sized to fit into notch 132. In order to attach front panel assembly 100 to the front portion 26', the user positions front panel assembly 100 in the same manner as done for front panel assembly 22 as described in the foregoing description and shown in FIGS. 4B, 4C, 4E and 4F. Thus, the user positions panel 102 so that the lip on its top edge (not shown) is positioned under the exterior overhang 25A' and adjacent to underside 25B'. (see FIG. 9C). Next, the user moves front panel assembly 100 upward so that the lip (not shown) on the upper end of panel 102 is inserted into channel 98. The user then pushes panel assembly 100 forward so that protrusions 124 and 126 are inserted into corresponding recesses or cavities 127 and 128, respectively, and the stepped portions 150 and 152 are inserted into notches 130 and 132, respectively, of panel 102.

[0048] In order to remove front panel assembly 100 from the front portion 26', the user may use his or her fingers to pry members 120 and 122 downward so as to remove protrusions 124 and 126, respectively, from the recesses 127 and 128, respectively. The user then pulls front panel assembly 100 outward and then moves panel assembly 100 downward as so to remove the lip (not shown) from channel 98.

[0049] In an alternate embodiment, notches 130, 132 and stepped portions 150 and 152 are not used. Instead, coffee maker 20' is configured to have a vertical channel (not shown) between front portion 26' and sidewall 140', and another vertical channel (not shown) between front portion 26' and sidewall 142'. As front panel assembly 100 is being attached to front portion 26', flanged end 106 is inserted into the corresponding vertical channel between front portion 26' and sidewall 140', and flanged end 107 is inserted into the corresponding vertical channel between front portion 26' and sidewall 142'.

[0050] Although the foregoing description is in terms of a coffee maker, it is to be understood that the invention may be applied to other appliances as well. Referring to FIG. 6, there is shown a toaster in accordance with the invention. Toaster 200 has front panel assembly 220 which comprises colored member 222 and clear panel 224. For purposes of understanding this embodiment of the invention, a portion of clear panel 224 is cut away to show colored member 222. Toaster 200 is configured to have corresponding slots and channels, similar to slots 60, 62 and vertical channels 70, 72, respectively, of coffee maker 20, to allow front panel assembly 220 to be removably attached to toaster 200.

[0051] FIG. 6A illustrates another embodiment. In this particular view, a toaster is indicated by reference number 250 and the front panel assembly is indicated by reference number 252. Toaster 250 has a front portion 254. Front portion 254

includes slots 256 that are on the upper, peripheral portion of front portion 254. Front panel assembly 252 comprises transparent panel 258 and a colored member (not shown), but similar to colored member 32 described in the foregoing description. Transparent panel 258 has an upper end 259 and protruding tabs 260 that extend from upper end 259. Transparent panel 258 has bottom end 261 and flanged sides 262 and 264. Toaster 250 includes vertical frame members 266 and 268 that are on the periphery of front portion 254. Transparent panel 258 is sized so as to frictional fit between vertical frame members 266 and 268 such that flanged side 262 abuts the inner portion of frame member 266 and flanged side 264 abuts the inner portion of frame member 268. In order to attach panel assembly 252 to toaster 250, the user maneuvers panel 252 so that protruding tabs 260 are inserted into slots 256. The user then pivots panel assembly 252 toward front portion 254 of toaster 250. As panel assembly 252 approaches front portion 254, flanged sides 262 and 264 frictionally slide against the inner portions of vertical frame members 266 and 268, respectively. In order to remove panel assembly 252 from toaster 250, the user can use his or her finger tip or finger nail to pry bottom end 261 outward. Once this is done, the user can then maneuver panel assembly 252 so that protruding tabs 260 are withdrawn from slots 256.

[0052] Referring to FIG. 7, there is shown a toaster oven in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. Toaster oven 300 has front panel assembly 320 which comprises colored member 322 and clear panel 324. For purposes of understanding this embodiment of the invention, a portion of clear panel 324 is cut away to show colored member 322. Toaster oven 300 is configured to have corresponding slots and channels, similar to slots 60, 62 and channels 70, 72, respectively, of coffee maker 20, to allow front panel assembly 320 to be removably attached to toaster oven 300.

[0053] Referring to FIGS. 7A and 7B, there is shown a specific embodiment of a toaster oven and panel assembly in accordance with the present invention. Toaster oven 350 has a recessed or sunken front portion 352 which surrounds a control panel 354. Toaster oven 350 has door 356 which is not pertinent to the invention and therefore, is not discussed in detail. Front panel assembly 360 comprises transparent panel 362 and colored member 364 that is located behind transparent member 362. Both transparent panel 362 and colored member 364 are configured to have an opening to receive control panel 354. Transparent panel 362 has a top end 368 and a bottom end 369. Transparent panel 362 further includes resilient, rearwardly extending members 372. As shown in FIG. 7A, front portion 352 is surrounded by wall 374. Wall 374 has upper portion 375 which has a pair of cavities or indentations (not shown). Each of these aforesaid cavities or indentations is sized to receive a corresponding protruding tab 370. Front portion 352 has a pair of slots (not shown). Each of these slots is located on a respective side of control panel 354. Each of these aforesaid slots is sized for receiving a corresponding one of rearwardly extending members 372, and is located at a predetermined location so as to create a frictional relationship between the perimetrical edge of each slot and the corresponding rearwardly, extending member 372. In order to attach front panel assembly 360 to toaster oven 350, the user first maneuvers front panel assembly 360 so that protruding tabs 370 are inserted into the corresponding cavities (not shown) in upper portion 375 of wall 374. Next, the user then pivots front panel assembly 360 toward-toaster oven 350, as indicated by arrow 380, so that rearwardly

extending members 372 are inserted into corresponding slots (not shown) in front portion 352 and front panel assembly 360 is completely disposed within the recessed front portion 352. In order to remove front panel assembly 360 from front portion 352, the user can use his or her finger tip to pry bottom end 369 of transparent panel 362 outward. This enables the user to pull front panel assembly 360 outward so that rearwardly extending members 372 are withdrawn from the corresponding slots (not shown) in front portion 352. Once this is done, the user can then move front panel assembly 360 downward so that protruding tabs 370 are withdrawn from the indentations or cavities (not shown) in upper portion 375 of wall 374.

[0054] Referring to FIG. 8, there is shown a coffee grinder in accordance with the invention. Coffee grinder 400 has front panel assembly 420 which comprises colored member 422 and clear panel 424. For purposes of understanding this embodiment of the invention, a portion of clear panel 424 is cut away to show colored member 422. Coffee grinder 400 is configured to have corresponding slots and channels, similar to slots 60, 62 and channels 70, 72, respectively, of coffee maker 20, to allow front panel assembly 420 to be removably attached to coffee grinder 400.

[0055] FIGS. 8A, 8B and 8C, illustrate one particular embodiment of a coffee grinder and front panel assembly in accordance with the invention. Coffee grinder 450 includes bowl 451 for holding coffee beans. However, bowl 451 is known in the art and is not pertinent to the invention and therefore, is not discussed in detail. Coffee grinder 450 further includes control panel 452 which has overhanging portion 453. Overhanging portion 453 has a bottom side (not shown) that has a channel (not shown) formed therein. The channel is similar to channel 90 shown in FIG. 4D. The purpose of this channel in the bottom side of overhang 453 is described in the ensuing description. Coffee grinder 450 has sidewall 454 that has extending portion 454A. Coffee grinder 450 includes opposite sidewall 455 that has extending portion 455A. Coffee grinder 450 further comprises front portion 456 between extending portions 454A and 455A. Front portion 456 has a generally convex curvature. Front panel assembly 460 comprises transparent panel 462 and flexible colored member 464. Transparent panel 462 has a curvature that conforms to the curvature of front portion 456 of coffee grinder 450. Transparent panel 462 has top end 466, bottom end 468 and flanged sides 470 and 472. Top end 466 defines lip 474 that extends for the substantially the entire length of top end 466. Transparent panel 462 has exterior side 476 and an opposite, interior side (not shown). Flanged side 470 has protruding portion 480. Flanged side 472 also has a protruding portion (not shown). The purpose of these protruding portions (e.g. portion 480) is discussed in the ensuing description. Colored member 464 is positioned against the interior side of transparent panel 462 and is positioned between flanged sides 470 and 472. Due to its flexibility, colored member 464 conforms to the contour of transparent panel 462. Coffee grinder 450 includes a pair of slots formed in front portion 456. One of these slots is shown as slot 490 which is adjacent wall portion 455A (see FIGS. 8A and 8B). The other slot (not shown) is adjacent to wall portion 454A. As shown in FIGS. 8A and 8B, in order to attach front panel assembly 460 to coffee grinder 450, the user first maneuvers panel assembly 460 so that lip 474 is inserted into the channel (not shown) formed in the underside of overhang 453. The user then pivots the panel assembly 460 toward coffee grinder

450, as indicated by arrow 491 (see FIG. 8B), so that the rearwardly extending portions of sidewalls 470 and 472 (e.g. portion 480) are inserted into the slots formed in front portion 456 (e.g. slot 490) and front panel assembly 460 completely covers front portion 456 of coffee grinder 450. When front panel assembly 460 is completely attached to front portion 456, flanged sides 470 and 472 of transparent panel 462 confront sidewall portions 454A and 455A, respectively. In a preferred embodiment, transparent panel 462 is sized so that flanged sides 470 and 472 frictionally contact sidewall portions 454A and 455A, respectively. In order to remove panel assembly 460 from front portion 456, the user can use his or her finger tip to pry bottom end 468 of transparent panel 462 outward and away from front portion 456. Once this is done, the user can then maneuver front panel assembly 460 so that lip 474 is withdrawn from the channel (not shown) in the underside of overhang 453.

[0056] In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, the front panel assembly (e.g. front panel assembly 22) is configured to be comprised only of a single, colored panel that can be removably attached to the front portion of the kitchen appliance. Such a single, colored panel replaces the separate transparent panel and the colored member described in the embodiments above. For example, in one embodiment, the aforesaid single, colored panel has the same structure as panel 30 so as to allow the single, color panel to be removable attached to the front portion of the appliance. In a preferred embodiment, the single, colored panel is molded plastic. In a further embodiment, the single, colored panel is configured to have a pattern or design thereon that can be formed by any suitable method, e.g. printing, heat transfer, etc.

[0057] In a further embodiment, a leather panel is used in place of the transparent panel and colored member. In such an embodiment, the front panel assembly comprises a backing member that has the same structure as panel 30 (see FIG. 1) and a piece of leather that is rigidly attached to the backing member. The backing member can be removably attached to the front portion of a kitchen appliance in the same manner that panel 30 is removably attached to the front portion 26 of coffee maker 20 (see FIGS. 1-4F).

[0058] Referring to FIG. 10, there is shown an upper portion of a coffee maker 500 and front panel assembly 502 in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention. Coffee maker 500 is similar to coffee maker 20 described in the foregoing description. In this embodiment, front panel assembly 502 comprises a support panel 504 and a fabric 506 that is permanently attached to the support panel 504. A portion of fabric 506 is cut away in order to show support panel 504. Support panel 504 is permanently attached to the front portion of coffee maker 500. Therefore, in this embodiment, a clear panel, such as clear panel 30 described in the foregoing description, is not used. In this embodiment, fabric 506 has the color desired by the user. Support panel 504 may be permanently attached to the front portion of coffee maker 500 by any suitable technique, e.g. adhesive, rivets, laminations, etc. Support panel 504 can be made from any suitable material, e.g. plastic, PVC. In an alternate embodiment, a fabric 506 is not used, but rather, leather or synthetic leather is attached to support panel 504.

[0059] In an alternate embodiment, support panel 504 is not used and fabric 506 is attached directly to the front portion of the coffee maker 500.

[0060] Referring to FIG. 11A, there is shown a front panel assembly in accordance with a further embodiment of the

invention. Front panel assembly 600 comprises substantially transparent panel 602 which is configured to function as a photo frame. Referring to FIG. 11B, panel 602 has front side 604 and rear side 605. Rear side 605 faces the front portion of the kitchen appliance (e.g. front portion 26 coffee maker 20 shown in FIG. 1). Panel 602 also includes sides 606 and 608. Side 606 has rib 610 that extends vertically for substantially the entire height of panel 602. Similarly, side 608 has rib 612 that extends vertically for substantially the entire height of panel 602. Panel 602 has a flanged, bottom end 614 and members 616 that extend from flanged bottom end 614. Panel 602 is configured to be removably attached to a front portion of a kitchen appliance in the same manner as front panel 30, which was described in the foregoing description, is removably attached to front portion 26 of coffee maker 20 (see FIGS. 1-4F). Thus, sides 606 and 608 are frictionally inserted into vertical channels on either side of a front portion of a kitchen appliance (similar to vertical channels 70 and 72 shown in FIG. 3), and members 616 are frictionally inserted into slots in the front portion of a kitchen appliance (similar to the manner in which tabs 50 are inserted into slots 60 and 62 shown in FIGS. 4E and 4F). Referring to FIG. 11C, template 630 is configured and shaped to allow a user to trim or crop a desired photograph 632 to a predetermined size that allows the user to insert the edges of photograph 632 behind ribs 610 and 612 so that the photograph 632 confronts interior wall 605 of panel 602. Bottom flanged end 614 supports photograph 632 and ribs 610 and 612 retain the photograph 632 in place. Once photograph 632 is completely inserted so that the entire photograph 632 can be seen through panel 602, the user can then attach front panel assembly 600 to the front portion of the kitchen appliance. Although the foregoing description is in terms of a photograph being used with panel 602, it is to be understood that template 630 can be used to trim or crop any suitable decorative item, e.g. drawing, wallpaper, fabric, etc., so that such decorative item has a size commensurate with panel 602 and the edges or peripheral portions of the decorative item can be inserted behind ribs 610 and 612. Preferably, template 630 is provided with the kitchen appliance.

[0061] In an alternate embodiment, panel 602 does not have ribs 610 and 612 but rather, is configured to have a transparent front wall and a rear wall and a space between the front and rear walls. The user can then insert the photograph or decorative item in the space between the front and rear walls so that the photograph or decorative item is visible through the transparent front wall.

[0062] In a preferred embodiment, the kitchen appliance of the invention is provided with a kit that comprises the front panel assemblies, color members and templates (e.g. template 630) to allow the user to change the color and/or aesthetic appearance of the kitchen appliance.

[0063] The principles, preferred embodiments and modes of operation of the present invention have been described in the foregoing specification. The invention which is intended to be protected herein should not, however, be construed as limited to the particular forms disclosed, as these are to be regarded as illustrative rather than restrictive. Variations and changes may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit of the invention. Accordingly, the foregoing detailed description should be considered as exemplary in nature and not as limiting the scope and spirit of the invention as set forth in the attached claims.

1. An appliance comprising:
a housing having a front portion;
a front panel assembly exhibiting a pre-selected color and having a size sufficient for covering the front portion of the housing; and
means for attaching the front panel assembly to the housing.
2. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein the attaching means is configured to removably attach the front panel assembly to the housing.
3. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein the front panel assembly comprises a substantially transparent panel, the substantially transparent panel having an interior side that confronts the front portion of the housing, and an exterior side opposite the exterior side.
4. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein the front panel assembly comprises a single panel configured to have the pre-selected color.
5. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein the front panel assembly comprises a substantially transparent panel which is configured to have a shape that provides a space between the front portion of the housing and the substantially transparent panel, the space being of sufficient size to receive a decorative item.
6. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein front panel assembly comprises:
a substantially transparent panel;
a colored member configured to have the pre-selected color; and
wherein when front panel assembly is removably attached to the housing of the appliance, the colored member is between the front portion of the housing and the substantially transparent panel, and the pre-selected color is visible through the substantially transparent panel.
7. The appliance according to claim 6 wherein the colored member is flexible.
8. The appliance according to claim 1 wherein the front panel assembly comprises a fabric having the pre-selected color.
9. The appliance according to claim 8 wherein the front panel assembly further comprises a support panel, the fabric being attached to the support panel and the support panel being attached to the front portion of the housing.
10. A front panel assembly configured to be removably attached to a front portion of an appliance, the front panel assembly exhibiting a pre-selected decorative scheme and being sized to cover at least a portion of the front portion of the appliance.
11. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein the front panel assembly is sized to cover substantially the entire front portion of the appliance.
12. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein the front panel assembly comprises a single panel configured to have a pre-selected color.
13. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein front panel assembly comprises:
a substantially transparent panel;
a colored member configured to have a pre-selected color; and
wherein when front panel assembly is removably attached to the housing of the appliance, the colored member is between the front portion of the housing and the substantially transparent panel such that the pre-selected

color is visible through the substantially transparent panel thereby providing the appliance with a desired color scheme.

14. The front panel assembly according to claim 13 wherein the colored member is flexible.
15. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein front panel assembly comprises a substantially transparent panel which is configured to have a shape that provides a space between the substantially transparent panel and the front portion of the housing when the front panel assembly is attached to the appliance housing, the space being of sufficient size to receive a decorative member.
16. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein the front panel assembly comprises:
a support panel configured to be attached to the front portion of the housing; and
a material attached to the support panel, the material exhibiting a pre-selected color and texture.
17. The front panel assembly according to claim 16 wherein material is a fabric.
18. The front panel assembly according to claim 16 wherein the material is chosen from the group consisting of leather and synthetic leather.
19. The front panel assembly according to claim 10 wherein front panel assembly comprises:
a substantially transparent panel having an interior side facing the front portion;
a decorative member positioned beside the interior side of the substantially transparent panel; and
wherein when front panel assembly is removably attached to the front portion of the housing, the decorative member is between the front portion and the substantially transparent panel such that the decorative member is visible through the substantially transparent panel.
20. The front panel assembly according to claim 19 wherein the decorative member is a photograph.
21. The front panel assembly according to claim 19 wherein the decorative member is a color panel having a pre-selected color.
22. A kitchen appliance comprising:
a housing having a front portion; and
a front panel assembly removably attached to the housing so as to confront the front portion of the housing, the front panel assembly comprising a substantially transparent panel, and a decorative member positioned between the substantially transparent panel and the front portion, the decorative item exhibiting a pre-selected color and texture.
23. An appliance comprising:
a housing having an exterior surface; and
a front panel assembly removably attached to at least a portion of the exterior surface of the housing, the front panel assembly exhibiting a pre-selected color.
24. An appliance comprising:
a housing having an exterior surface; and
a front panel assembly removably attached to at least a portion of the exterior surface of the housing, the front panel assembly comprising a substantially transparent panel, and a decorative member positioned between the substantially transparent panel and the at least a portion of the exterior surface of the housing, the decorative item exhibiting a pre-selected color and texture.