ITEM OF KITCHEN FURNISHINGS

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Appl. No.: 11/630,820

PCT Filed: Oct. 18, 2004

PCT No.: PCT/EP04/11705

§ 371(c)(1), (2), (4) Date: Dec. 27, 2006

Foreign Application Priority Data

Jul. 12, 2004 (IT) ......................... MI2004A001393

Publication Classification

Int. Cl. A47L 25/00 (2006.01)

U.S. Cl. 15/302; 392/491; 15/246;
15/257.01

ABSTRACT

A furniture unit (1) for a fitted kitchen comprises a support structure to which is operatively associated a steam generating unit (5) capable of being placed in fluid communication with an accessory (6) for the delivery of steam. Preferably, the above-mentioned fluid communication is achieved by the interposition of first connection means (8) capable of being engaged removably by complementary second connection means (9), in which the first connection means (8) are in fluid communication with the above-mentioned steam generating unit (5) and are associated with the structure of the item of furnishings and in which the second 10 connection means (9) are placed in fluid communication with the accessory (6).
ITEM OF KITCHEN FURNISHINGS

[0001] The present invention relates to an item of kitchen furnishings, particularly a fitted furniture unit, according to the introduction to claim 1.

[0002] In kitchens there is always a requirement to ensure hygiene and perfect cleanliness of the area, particularly of the work surface, the cookers, the sink and other components of the kitchen. This is a direct consequence of the fact that during the preparation of dishes, the above-mentioned parts of a kitchen and its furnishings are likely to come into contact with foodstuffs.

[0003] At present, kitchen areas are cleaned using detergents and/or other equivalent products which, in any case, are not sufficient in themselves to ensure that thorough hygiene is achieved. Furthermore, kitchens are also cleaned using suitable household electrical appliances which, however efficient they may be, have the disadvantage of being cumbersome and inconvenient to take out and put back.

[0004] Moreover, especially with small-sized kitchens, it should be pointed out that the use of a household electrical appliance for cleaning is not very practical because of the size of the household electrical appliances themselves. Besides, the use of electrical appliances for cleaning in a kitchen may sometimes be dangerous as it is not certain that they are water tight, so that accidental contact with water, near the sink for example, may have unwelcome consequences for the user.

[0005] The technical problem addressed by the present invention is to meet the above requirement and at the same time eliminate the problems mentioned with reference to known technology.

[0006] This problem is solved by an item of kitchen furnishings, particularly a fitted furniture unit, having the characteristics set out in claim 1.

[0007] Other advantages and characteristics of the item of kitchen furnishings according to the present invention will become clear from the following detailed description of some preferred examples of embodiment, provided purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the appended drawings, in which:

[0008] FIGS. 1, 2 and 3 show schematic perspective views of different forms of embodiment of an item of kitchen furnishings according to the invention;

[0009] FIGS. 4 and 5 show schematic perspective views of different forms of embodiment of a component of the item of furnishings according to the invention;

[0010] FIGS. 6, 7 and 8 show schematic views in section illustrating different forms of embodiment of a component of the item of furnishings according to the invention;

[0011] FIG. 9 shows a schematic perspective view of an element of furnishings for a kitchen according to the invention corresponding to a further form of embodiment, and

[0012] FIG. 10 shows a perspective view of a kitchen comprising an item of furnishings according to the invention corresponding to a form of embodiment of the invention.

[0013] With reference to the appended drawings, the number 1 indicates as a whole an item of kitchen furnishings according to the present invention.

[0014] In the example, the item of furnishings 1 is produced as a furniture unit having a substantially parallelepiped shape formed by a base, an upper work surface 2 and a plurality of side walls, among them a front wall 3, which taken together form a load-carrying structure. Alternatively, the furniture unit may comprise a frame forming a load-carrying structure which acts as a support for a bottom, side cover panels and an upper work surface.

[0015] The furniture unit 1 may take various forms. In the example, it comprises a plurality of doors and front drawers.

[0016] Advantageously, a steam generating unit 5 capable of being placed in fluid communication with an accessory 6 for the delivery of steam is operatively associated with the structure of the furniture unit 1.

[0017] The above-mentioned steam generating unit 5 is completely integrated into the structure of the furniture unit 1. Preferably, the steam generating unit 5 is accommodated in a housing provided in the furniture unit 1 so as to be supported by it inside the housing in a safe, sheltered position and not causing an obstruction.

[0018] According to a preferred form of embodiment, the steam generating unit 5 is accommodated in a box-shaped body 7 having substantially the same dimensions as a drawer (cf. FIGS. 4 and 5), so that it can be operatively associated with the furniture unit 1 in the space of and at least partially withdrawable from the furniture unit, as shown for example in FIGS. 1, 3, 6, 7 and 8.

[0019] As described previously, the steam generating unit 5 is capable of being placed in fluid communication with the accessory 6 for the delivery of steam. So that the accessory 6 can be easily connected to and disconnected from the steam generating unit 5, the above-mentioned fluid communication is produced by the interposition of quick-connection means enabling steam to pass through and where appropriate electric current, electric signals and suction air, as will become clearer from what follows in the description. These connection means can be quickly connected to or disconnected from each other.

[0020] More particularly, the above-mentioned quick-connection means comprise first connection means 8 capable of being engaged removably by second connection means 9 complementary to them, in which:

[0021] the first connection means 8 are in fluid communication with said steam generating unit 5 and are attached to the structure of the furniture unit 1 to be supported by them and

[0022] the second connection means 9 are in fluid communication with the accessory 6 for the delivery of steam.

[0023] According to a preferred form of embodiment, the above-mentioned first connection means 8 are accessible from the outside of the furniture unit.

[0024] In the form of embodiment in FIG. 1 or FIG. 6, the first connection means 8 are positioned so as to be substantially at the level of the upper work surface 2, so as to be accessible from the upper part of the furniture unit 1. Preferably, in this form of embodiment, the first connection means 8 are made to project upwards into a space 10 which is formed in the upper part of the work surface 2 and is
closed by an openable door 11. In this way, the first connection means 8, while being easily accessible, can be completely hidden when it is not necessary to use the steam generating unit 5 and the accessory 6.

[0025] In the form of embodiment in FIG. 2 or FIG. 7, the first connection means 8 are positioned so as to be accessible from the front wall 3 of the furniture unit 1. In this case too, a covering door may be provided.

[0026] In the form of embodiment in FIG. 3 or FIG. 8, the first connection means 8 are accessible only when the box-shaped body 7 inserted into the space of a drawer has been partially withdrawn from the furniture unit.

[0027] With reference to the steam generating unit 5, it should be noted that this may be of any type. For example, this unit may provide for a boiler 12 connected to a supply tank 13 capable of ensuring continuous water replenishment for the boiler. In a different arrangement, the boiler may be of the discontinuous replenishment type.

[0028] It is also possible to use a steam generator in which the water is stored directly in the boiler.

[0029] Alternatively, the steam generating unit 5 may also be of the flash steam generation type, meaning that it has no storage tank for the steam generated.

[0030] In relation to the different possible configurations of the box-shaped body 7 in which the steam generating unit 5 is housed, it should be noted that it may provide the first connection means 8 positioned on the front panel (as illustrated in FIG. 4) or arranged in a side position, preferably close to the front end (as illustrated in FIG. 5).

[0031] Close to the first connection means 8 there are also means for operation, regulation and control, shown generically as a whole in the drawing by the number 14, necessary to activate and control the operation of the steam generating unit 5 accommodated in the furniture unit 1, and also to regulate the delivery of steam sent to the accessory 6. These means are known in themselves and will not be described in detail in what follows.

[0032] The steam generating unit 5 is connected to the electrical network.

[0033] The tank 13 of the steam generating unit 5 has a filler opening 15 through which it is replenished with water. Alternatively, the tank 13 may be connected to a water network by water connection means (not shown), so as to provide a fresh supply of water to the tank 13.

[0034] The accessory 6 for the delivery of steam may be of any type, for example a clothes iron or a nozzle for the delivery of the steam to which delivery spouts, brushes and similar may be fitted.

[0035] Advantageously, the fluid communication between the accessory 6 for the delivery of steam and the second connection means 9 is provided by a flexible pipe 16 having a length of the order of a few metres.

[0036] Where the accessory 6 requires a supply to one or more electrical components, as in the case of the heating plate of a clothes iron, for example, the electrical supply to these may be provided by means of suitable cables running along the flexible steam feed pipe 16. In this case, the above-mentioned quick-connection means, that is the first connection means 8 and the second connection means 9, have to make provision not only for the steam to pass through but also for the electrical continuity of the electric cables between the steam generating unit 5 and the accessory 6.

[0037] According to a form of embodiment not shown, the furniture unit 1 comprises a suction unit operatively associated with said structure and in fluid communication with said accessory 6 for the delivery of steam. This is useful where it is wished to have delivery of steam at the same time as suction of condensate or other material by the accessory.

[0038] The suction unit may be useful, for example, for connection to an ironing board with suction.

[0039] It may usefully be pointed out that the furniture unit 1 may also comprise a pull-out ironing board 17, to be used when required after taking it out from the furniture unit 1, as shown in FIG. 9.

[0040] According to a further form of embodiment not shown in the drawings, the furniture unit 1 comprises a steam distribution network capable of placing the steam generating unit 5 in fluid communication with a plurality of steam delivery points at a distance from each other. At each of the above-mentioned steam delivery points the first connection means are present, capable of being engaged removable by the second connection means connected to the accessory. This makes available different steam delivery points to which the accessory 6 may be attached and is a useful solution in the case of large-sized furniture units, for example in the kitchen of a company canteen.

[0041] At the first connection means 8 or more precisely before them relative to the direction in which the steam flows, the furniture unit 1 may comprise a steam superheater associated with the pipe in which the steam flows. This is useful where it is wished to have superheated steam, that is to say extremely hot steam with no condensate, delivered by the accessory.

[0042] The item of furnishings according to the invention lends itself to being produced in standard sizes to be inserted in a fitted kitchen, as illustrated in FIG. 10.

[0043] In the use of the item of furnishings according to the present invention, it is clear that when installed in the kitchen, by itself or together with other furniture units, the element allows rapid and easy use of steam appliances without any need to have special equipment. In fact, all that is needed is to make sure that the tank contains sufficient water, switch on the steam generating unit and connect to the first connection means the second connection means joined to the accessory.

[0044] It is clear that the type of accessory to be connected may vary according to the type of operation to be carried out, for example cleaning the work surface of the kitchen or ironing.

[0045] As can be appreciated from what has been described, the item of furnishings according to the invention meets the above-mentioned requirement and at the same time overcomes the disadvantages referred to in the introductory part of the present description with reference to the known technology. This is because the item of furnishings according to the invention makes a flow of steam available, to be used for example for thorough cleaning of the work
surface, the sink or other parts of the kitchen, without having to use cumbersome household electrical appliances. Moreover, the possibility of connecting the accessories for the delivery of steam close to the work surface or the front surface of the item of furnishings is found to be extremely practical and convenient.

[0046] A further advantage of the item of furnishings according to the invention lies in the fact that the steam generating unit is completely integrated into the furniture unit in an internal position, so as to avoid any danger of contact with the user or with liquids.

[0047] A further advantage of the item of furnishings according to the invention lies in the fact that it lends itself to being produced in standard sizes and measurements, so that it can be easily integrated into a standard kitchen.

[0048] A still further advantage of the item of furnishings according to the invention lies in the fact that it occupies little space and does not spoil the appearance of the item of furnishings.

[0049] Clearly, a person skilled in the art, for the purpose of meeting incidental and specific requirements, will be able to make numerous changes and produce numerous variants to the item of furnishings described above, without thereby departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.

[0050] Thus, for example, the item of furnishings may differ from the furniture unit described above, and may be an under-sink unit, a built-in module, a table, a dresser or still other unit.

1-20. (canceled)

21. An item of kitchen furnishings, characterized in that it comprises a support structure to which is operatively associated a steam generating unit capable of being placed in fluid communication with an accessory for the delivery of steam.

22. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said steam generating unit is integrated in this structure.

23. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said fluid communication is achieved by the interposition of first connection means capable of being engaged removable by complementary second connection means, in which:

said first connection means are in fluid communication with said steam generating unit and are associated with said structure of the item of furnishings to be supported by it and

said second connection means are in fluid communication with said accessory for the delivery of steam.

24. An item of furnishings according to claim 23, in which said first connection means are accessible from the outside of said item of furnishings.

25. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said steam generating unit is accommodated in a housing of said item of furnishings.

26. An item of furnishings according to claim 23, in which said first connection means are accessible from the upper surface of said item of furnishings.

27. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said steam generating unit is housed in a box-shaped body accommodated as a drawer in said item of furnishings.

28. An item of furnishings according to claim 27, in which said first connection means are supported in said box-shaped body accommodated as a drawer in said item of furnishings.

29. An item of furnishings according to claim 28, in which said first connection means are supported by the front of said box-shaped body accommodated as a drawer in said item of furnishings.

30. An item of furnishings according to claim 28, in which said first connection means are accessible from the outside of said item of furnishings when said box-shaped body accommodated as a drawer in said item of furnishings is at least partially withdrawn from the item of furnishings.

31. An item of furnishings according to claim 23, comprising a steam distribution network to place said steam generating unit in fluid communication with a plurality of steam delivery points, at each of which there are present said first connecting means capable of being engaged removable by said second connection means capable of being engaged removable by said second connection means.

32. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, comprising water connection means capable of connecting said steam generating unit to a water network.

33. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said item of furnishings is a furniture unit of a fitted kitchen.

34. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, comprising a suction unit operatively associated with said structure and in fluid communication with said accessory for the delivery of steam, so as to allow delivery of steam and suction at the same time.

35. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said steam generating unit comprises a boiler and a tank for continuous replenishment of water in the boiler.

36. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said steam generating unit comprises a flash steam generator.

37. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said second connection means are connected in fluid communication with said accessory by means of a flexible pipe.

38. An item of furnishings according to claim 21, in which said accessory is chosen from a group comprising: a clothes iron, a steam delivery nozzle, a nozzle providing steam delivery and suction of dust and/or liquids at the same time.

39. An item of furnishings according to claim 23, comprising a steam superheater positioned close to said first connection means.

40. An item of furnishings according to claim 23, in which said first connection means are attached to the item of furnishings.