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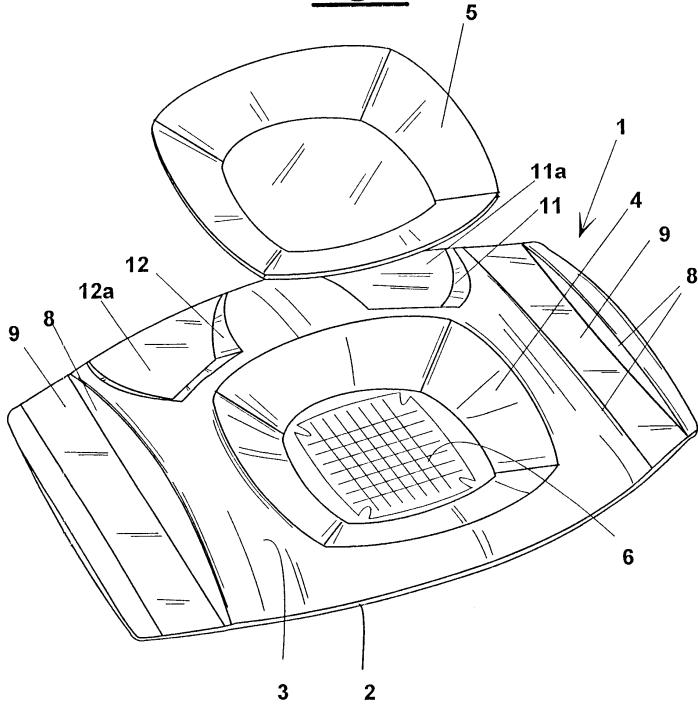
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(54) Meal support board

(57) A meal support board (1) for the consumption of meals at the table consists of a stiff shell (2) comprising a three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) having at least a recess (4) suitable for containing a dish (5). The recess (4) has shape surrounding the dish (5), for containing it firmly, shielding it from wind and preventing food from cooling, stiffening the dish owing to the stiff or semi-rigid structure of the meal support board (1). This way the temperature of food is maintained and the dish is prevented from flying away in case of meals outdoors.

At the sides of the three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) substantially rectangular recesses (8) are provided that can be used for holding the cutlery, or a folded napkin, or bread-sticks. Further recesses (11 and 12) are provided for holding a piece of fruit, a portion of bread, a glass, etc.. The dish can have standard shape available on the market, or custom shape, suitable for a multiple use with the meal support board (1), which has square shape with curved edges and can be used both for a soup and for solid food.

Fig. 3



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Description**Field of the invention**

[0001] The present invention relates to a meal support board that can be used associated to disposable dishes on a table or on other spot.

Background of the invention

[0002] Flexible meal support boards are known, for example made of foam, thick plastic film, braided straw, fabric, etc., that can be put on the table for the consumption of meals thereon. Their use is mainly at breakfast or for fast meals without the need of laying the table, in particular without covering it with a table-cloth.

[0003] The existing flexible meal support boards are normally decorated with colours and fancy drawings, and are in particular suitable for young users.

[0004] Flexible meal support boards are used as well in public places to eat a snack or a fast meal where the table is not or not completely laid down.

[0005] In many cases, the dishes used thereon are disposable, made of paper or thin plastic film. In this case, there is the drawback that the dish is exposed to air and to wind, when present, with the double disadvantage that the hot meals in the dishes quickly get cooled and the light dishes can be blown away by wind.

Summary of the invention

[0006] It is, therefore, object of the present invention to provide a meal support board, to be used for example on a table, that is capable of overcoming the above drawbacks, stiffening a dish of paper or light plastics and shielding it adequately from wind or from cooling.

[0007] It is another object of the present invention to provide such a meal support board that is pleasant aesthetically, that is portable and can be handled easily.

[0008] It is a further object of the present invention to provide such a meal support board that allows appropriate support also to cutlery, to a container of beverages, a portion of bread or a piece of fruit, a napkin or bread-sticks, etc., around the dish.

[0009] These and other objects are achieved by the meal support board according to the present invention whose characteristic is that it consists of a stiff or semi-rigid shell comprising:

- at least a portion having a flat bottom wall for resting on a table;
- at least a three-dimensionally shaped portion having at least a recess suitable for containing and protecting a dish.

[0010] Preferably, the three-dimensionally shaped portion has, at the sides of said at least one recess for the dish, further recesses shaped to contain cutlery, a

glass, a portion of bread and/or a piece of fruit, bread-sticks, napkin.

[0011] Advantageously, the bottom walls of the recess for the dish, and/or the recesses for the cutlery, bread, bread-sticks, napkin, are coplanar to one another and form a plurality of portions conformed for resting on the table.

[0012] Always preferably, the three-dimensionally shaped portion has said recess for the dish arranged in order to present an edge of the dish slightly lowered and inclined towards the user.

[0013] In a particularly preferred embodiment, the meal support board has a quadrangular elongated shape, and in the vicinity of the two opposite ends two recesses are provided substantially rectangular for housing cutlery and/or napkins and/or bread-sticks. The end edges external to said rectangular recesses can be raised from the bottom of the rectangular recesses same for an easy grip of the support board, the recess for the dish being in substantially central position between said two rectangular recesses.

[0014] Also the recesses for the glass and/or the bread and/or the piece of fruit are located between the two rectangular recesses opposite to the side of the user, i.e. opposite to the central recess for the dish of the support board.

[0015] The three-dimensionally shaped portion of the meal support board is convex towards the exterior. For improving aesthetically its aspect it can have smooth or rough surface, with fancy pattern, and can have drawings, signs or polychrome decorations.

[0016] To improve the capacity of the dish, the recess for the dish has substantially square shape with curved edges. This way, the dish has the same shape both for a soup and for a solid food.

[0017] Object of the invention, furthermore, is a dish suitable to fit completely into the corresponding recess, the dish being stiffened owing to the sustaining and protective walls of the meal support board.

Brief description of the drawings

[0018] Further characteristics and the advantages of the meal support board according to the invention will be made clearer with the following description of an embodiment thereof, exemplifying but not limitative, with reference to the attached drawings, wherein:

- figure 1 shows a cross sectional longitudinal view of a meal support board according to the invention and its relative dish;
- figure 2 shows a top plan view of the meal support board of figure 1;
- figure 3 shows a perspective view of dish and meal support board of figure 1.

Description of a preferred embodiment

[0019] With reference to figure 1, according to the present invention, a meal support board 1 for the consumption of meals at the table consists of a stiff shell 2 comprising a portion 3 shaped three-dimensionally having at least a recess 4 suitable for containing a dish 5. Recess 4 has a bottom wall 6 suitable for resting on a level surface 7, for example of a table or other spot. At the sides of the portion 3 shaped three-dimensionally substantially rectangular recesses 8 are provided having bottom wall 9 coplanar to the bottom wall 6 of recess 4.

[0020] Recess 4 has shape suitable for containing dish 5, i.e. is shaped in order to follow the profile of the dish, thus rendering it substantially stiff. The dish can have standard shape available on the market, or custom shape, suitable for a multiple use with meal support board 1.

[0021] Meal support board 1 thus structured has preferably central recess 4 for dish 5 nearer to a side 10 of the shell 2, that is the side of the user.

[0022] Opposite to side 10 with respect to central recess 4 further recesses 11 and 12 are provided which also have bottom walls 11a and 12a preferably coplanar to bottom walls 6 and 9.

[0023] Lateral rectangular recesses 8 can, for example, be used for holding the cutlery, or a folded napkin, or bread-sticks.

[0024] The other central recesses 11 and 12, adjacent to recess 4 for dish 5, can be used for example for holding a piece of fruit, a portion of bread, a glass, etc..

[0025] The bottom walls 7, 9, 11a, 12a, steadily fit onto the level surface 7. Obviously, being the meal support board stiff, it can also be picked up and carried to another location.

[0026] Alternatively, a recess can be provided for housing more securely the glass, made through the support board or drawn on the support board.

[0027] Central recess 4 has then the function of containing firmly dish 5, shielding it from wind and from cooling, stiffening it owing to the stiff or semi-rigid structure of the meal support board. This way temperature of food is maintained for a longer time and the dish is prevented from flying away in case of meals outdoors.

[0028] Preferably, central recess 4 for dish 5 is arranged in order to offer the dish slightly inclined towards the side 10 of the user. The walls and the bottom 6 of recess 4, advantageously, are knurled or rough with an anti-slippery function for dish 5.

[0029] As shown in the figures, meal support board 1 has a quadrangular elongated shape, having two rectangular recesses 8 in the vicinity of the two opposite ends. The edges of such rectangular recesses 8 can be slightly raised from the bottom 9 of the rectangular recesses same, for an easy grip of the meal support board and for containing the cutlery or the bread-sticks or the napkins resting on them.

[0030] The three-dimensionally shaped portion 3 is convex towards the above, in order to shield the dish from wind and to provide to the dish same stiff supporting walls. It has smooth surface, that alternatively can be rough, or with the fancy pattern, and/or can have drawings, signs or polychrome decoration.

[0031] To improve capacity dish 5 has square shape with curved edges, thereby recess 4 for the dish has corresponding shape to contain it. This way, the dish 4 has the same shape both for the soup and for solid food.

[0032] Dish 5 can be executed in plastics, or in paper coated by a plurality of layers of exfoliable transparent film. This way, a same dish can be used for more meals without washing or changing it.

[0033] The foregoing description of a specific embodiment will so fully reveal the invention according to the conceptual point of view, so that others, by applying current knowledge, will be able to modify and/or adapt for various applications such an embodiment without further research and without parting from the invention, and it is therefore to be understood that such adaptations and modifications will have to be considered as equivalent to the specific embodiment. The means and the materials to realise the different functions described herein could have a different nature without, for this reason, departing from the field of the invention. It is to be understood that the phraseology or terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and not of limitation.

[0034] The invention is not limited to the embodiment described above, but may be varied in accordance with the spirit of the invention and in the scope of the following claims.

Claims

1. A meal support board that can be used on a table **characterised in that** it consists of a stiff shell (2) comprising:
 - at least a portion having a flat bottom wall (8) for resting on a table or the like;
 - at least a three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) having at least a recess (4) suitable for containing a dish (5) of predetermined shape.
2. Meal support board according to claim 1, wherein said three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) has, adjacent to said at least one recess (4), further recesses (8, 11, 12) shaped to contain cutlery, a glass, a portion of bread and/or a piece of fruit, bread-sticks, napkin.
3. Meal support board according to claim 2, wherein the bottom walls (6, 9, 11a, 12a) of said recesses (4, 8, 11, 12) for the dish (5), and/or for the cutlery, glass, bread, bread-sticks, napkin, are coplanar and arranged as a plurality of support feet on a table (7).
4. Meal support board according to claim 1, wherein

said three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) has said recess for the dish (5) arranged to present the dish (5) slightly inclined towards the user.

5. Meal support board according to claim 1, wherein said shell (3) has a quadrangular elongated shape and has two opposite ends at which two substantially rectangular recesses (8) for cutlery and/or napkins and/or bread-sticks are provided, the end edges external to said rectangular recesses being raised from the bottom of the recesses same for an easy grip of the support board, the recess (4) for the dish (5) being in substantially central position between said two rectangular recesses (8). 10

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6. Meal support board according to claim 5, wherein said recesses (11,12) for the glass and/or the bread and/or the piece of fruit are located between said two rectangular recesses opposite to the side (10) of the user, i.e. at the side of the meal support board opposite to the central recess (4) for the dish (5). 20

7. Meal support board according to claim 1, wherein said three-dimensionally shaped portion (3) of said shell (3) is convex towards the above. 25

8. Meal support board according to claim 1, wherein said recess for the dish (5) has substantially square shape with curved edges, whereby said dish (5) has the same shape both for a soup and for solid food, the bottom (6) of said recess being rough to prevent said dish (5) from slipping. 30

9. Dish (5) suitable for being used with a meal support board (1) according to the previous claims, characterised in that it has a shape fitting to said recess (4) for the dish (5). 35

10. Dish(5) suitable for being used with a meal support board (1) according to claims from 1 to 9, characterised in that it has a bottom of paper coated by a plurality of layers of transparent exfoliable film. 40

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Fig. 1

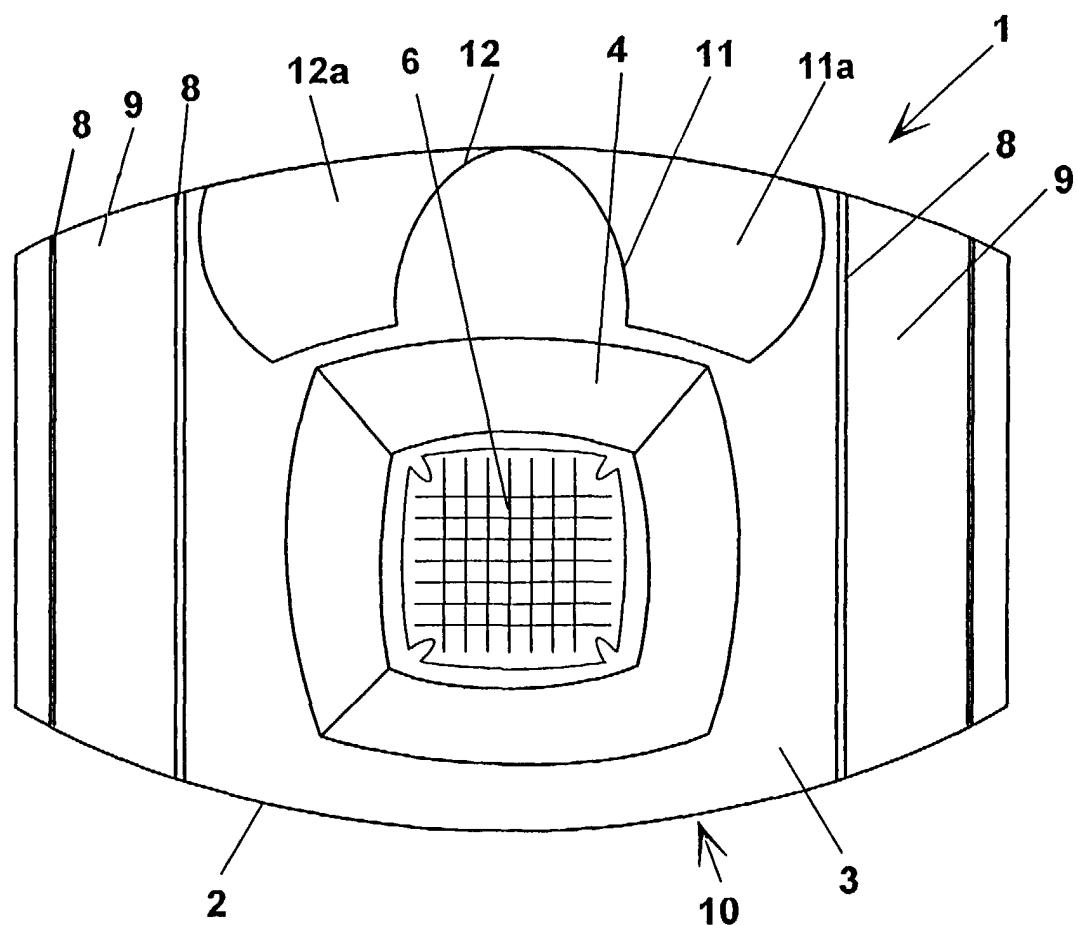
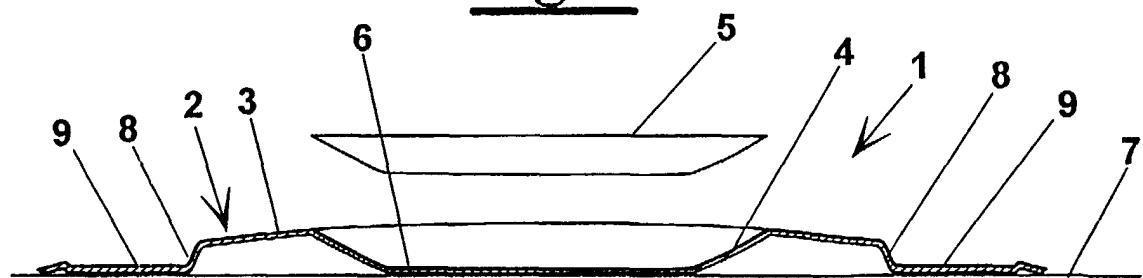
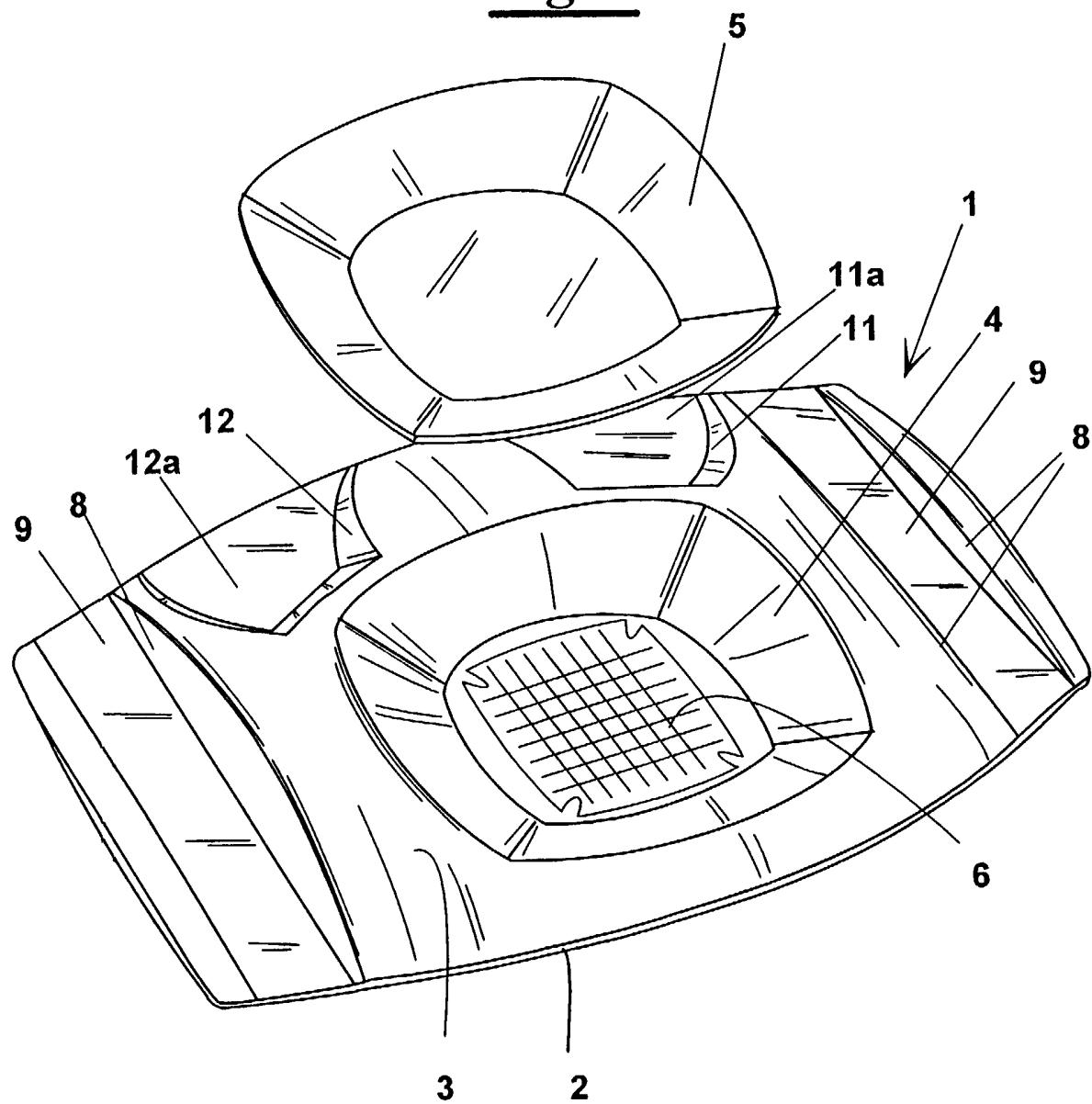


Fig. 2

Fig. 3





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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 83 0686

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	
X	US 3 305 124 A (WHITEFORD) 21 February 1967 (1967-02-21) * column 3, line 75 - column 5, line 61; figures 3-8 *	1-3,5,6, 8,9	A47G23/06
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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	
THE HAGUE	21 July 2000	Vistisen, L	
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			

ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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EP 99 83 0686

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