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(54) **Countertop fixture adapters**

(57) Provided herein are adapters useful in constructing countertops for kitchens and other areas in which fixtures such as sinks and cooking range tops are desired to be installed. Through use of an adapter according to the invention, on-site cutting of holes or voids

in stone countertops is eliminated and countertops may be fabricated using plain rectangular slabs of stone or other materials readily. Use of an adapter according to the invention reduces labor and costs associated with countertop fabrication and installation.

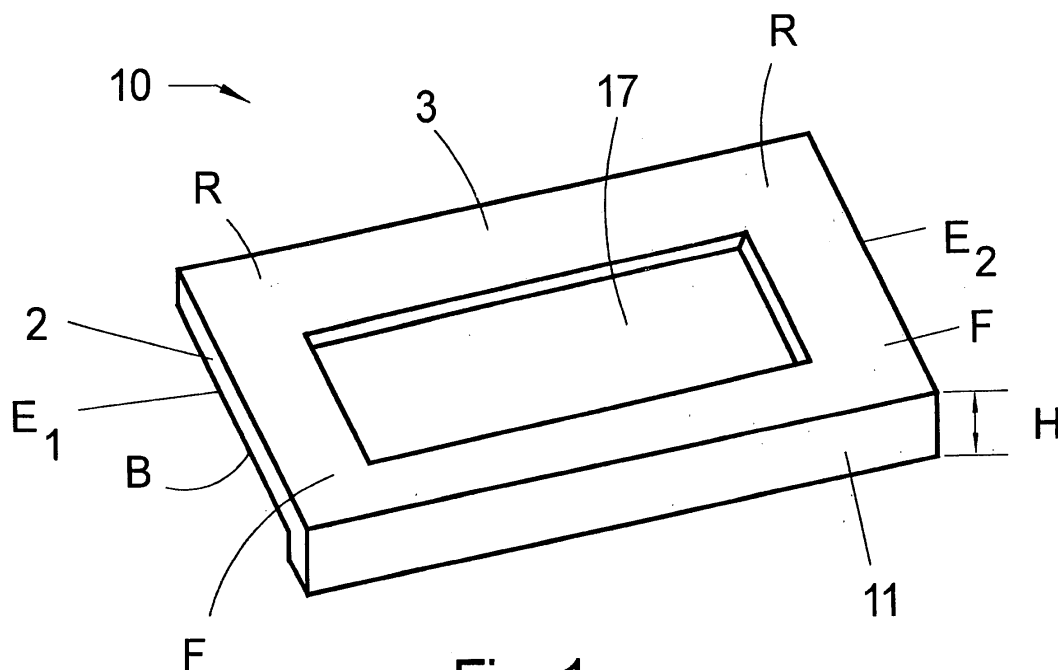


Fig. 1

Description

Technical Field

[0001] This invention relates generally to countertops and their installation. More particularly, it relates to countertops of the type commonly installed in a work area, such as a kitchen, and to devices and methods for enabling installation of fixtures such as sinks and cooking ranges atop such counters.

Background

[0002] Kitchens and other areas requiring a stable flat surface upon which work may be conducted have been known for some time as benefiting from having built-in countertops which line the inner perimeter of the room. It is believed that nearly all kitchens include at least one countertop upon which foods are cut, prepared, or otherwise processed by people prior to being cooked, eaten, or stored.

[0003] Kitchen countertops have over the years been comprised of a wide variety of materials, including without limitation: wood, plastic veneered wood, polymer composites, metals, laminated substrates, stainless steel, polymers such as CORIAN® polymer, epoxies, and natural stone. While each countertop material is inherently possessed of its own properties of appearance, porosity, durability, hardness, ease-of-cleaning, and longevity, there is a common bond between all countertops that prior to their installation in a given kitchen setting, the individual pieces which shall comprise the finished countertop in its final installed configuration must first be cut to a proper size, which is dictated by the dimensions of the kitchen in which the countertop is to be installed, and by the location(s) in the countertop at which fixtures such as sinks and cooking range tops are to be located.

[0004] A premium material from which countertops are fabricated are natural stone materials, including a wide variety of marbles and granites. To prepare natural stone materials to be suitable for use as countertops, the raw stone is first cut into slabs of the appropriate length, width, and thickness dimension. Then, the surface which is to be the work surface is polished to a high luster using techniques known to those skilled in the art, which also may include rounding or beveling of end and/or edge portions. After being cut into an appropriate length to fit a particular installation, the countertop slab is placed into its final position and may be secured in place using a conventional construction adhesive between the underside of the slab and the frame upon which it rests, which is often a wooden cabinet. At this stage, the countertop is ready for use by persons desiring to prepare foodstuffs. However, in many installations it is necessary to provide an opening in the countertop itself, to provide for a sink or a cooking range to be located in the countertop. Provision of the opening for such fixtures is commonly provided at the installation site by the installation personnel,

because providing the opening prior to installation of the countertop in its final installed position results in a large section of the slab being removed from a position centrally disposed with respect to its width dimension, which substantially weakens the slab as a whole and would in most cases effectively render it non-transportable without a high probability of breakage.

[0005] Providing an opening for a sink or a cooking range typically requires that a rectangular hole having a dimension on the order of about 30 inches by 20 inches be cut into the stone slab, which stone slab is commonly about 1 to about 2 inches thick. Thus, the cutting of such a hole provision is not a small or trivial undertaking, and is commonly carried out by a skilled laborer using a hand-held diamond saw. In addition to generating high frequency sound of large amplitude and large volumes of dust, both of which are harmful to the workmen in the area, especially over the course of many installations over the years, the operation inherently includes the possibility that the slab will be broken, marred, defaced, blemished, or otherwise irreparably damaged during the cutting, or a sizing error made. For cases where the slab is irreparably damaged, the damaged slab must be removed and replaced by a fresh one, which may easily result in a delay taking days or even weeks, not to mention the expense of the new materials and the time required to prepare the slab for installation.

[0006] In view of the foregoing difficulties, natural stone countertops are so highly valued that the cost and tedium associated with their installation has not represented an obstacle. However, if the difficulties associated with the fabrication and installation of natural stone countertops could be overcome, then the method and devices associated with overcoming such obstacles would be well-received by the industry. This would be especially true if it were made possible to install stone countertops without generating large volumes of sonic energy and dust. Further, if a device and method were provided which greatly simplified the operations, the overall cost associated with providing natural stone countertops could be drastically reduced, which would render natural stone countertops within the financial reach of a wider variety of end users. The fulfillment of these and other objects of the present invention shall become apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art after a thorough consideration of what follows in this specification.

Summary of the Invention

[0007] In one embodiment, the invention provides an adapter useful as a component in providing countertops in a work area which comprises: a) a substantially planar base portion which comprises a first end portion, a second end portion, a front portion and a rear portion, a top surface, a bottom surface, a length dimension and a width dimension; b) a front lip portion having a length dimension, a width dimension, and a thickness dimension, wherein the front lip portion is attached to the front portion

of the base portion such that the length dimension of the front lip portion coincides with the length dimension of the base portion and the width dimension of the front lip portion extends in a direction downward from the plane of the base portion; and c) a cutout hole disposed through the base portion, which cutout hole is adapted to receive a fixture selected from the group consisting of: cooktop ranges and sink basins.

[0008] In another embodiment, there is provided an adapter useful as a component in providing countertops in a work area which comprises: a) a substantially planar base portion which comprises a first end portion, a second end portion, a front portion and a rear portion, a top surface, a bottom surface, a length dimension and a width dimension; b) a front wall portion having a length dimension, a width dimension, and a thickness dimension; c) a rear wall portion having a length dimension, a width dimension, and a thickness dimension, wherein the front wall portion is attached to the front portion of the base portion such that the length dimension of the front wall portion coincides with the length dimension of the base portion and the width dimension of the front lip portion extends in a direction downward from the plane of the base portion; d) a first bottom portion disposed beneath the bottom surface portion of the base portion at the first end portion of the base portion, wherein the first bottom portion has a first end portion and a second end portion, wherein the first end portion of the first bottom portion is in contact with the rear wall portion and wherein the second end portion of the first bottom portion is in contact with the front wall portion such that the rear wall portion, the front wall portion, the first bottom portion and the base portion collectively define a slot at the first end portion of the adapter which is adapted to received the end of a countertop; and e) a cutout hole disposed through the base portion, which cutout hole is adapted to receive a fixture selected from the group consisting of: cooktop ranges and sink basins.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0009] In the annexed drawings:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an adapter according to one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a sink according to one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an adapter according to an alternate embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of a sink according to an alternate form of the invention;

FIG. 5 is a side view of a sink assembly according to one form of the invention;

FIG. 6 is a side view of a sink assembly according to another form of the invention;

FIG. 7 is a sink installed in a countertop according to one form of the invention; and

FIG. 8 is an adapter installed in a countertop accord-

ing to one form of the invention.

Detailed Description

[0010] Referring to the drawings and initially to **FIG. 1** there is shown an adapter **10** according to one embodiment of the invention. The adapter **10** comprises a base portion **2**, which in one preferred form of the invention is substantially rectangular in configuration and is comprised of sheet stock, which may be comprised of any material of construction, including without limitation: polymers, woods, stone, or metal, and is preferably comprised of stainless steel in one form of the invention. The base portion **2** has a front portion labeled **F** and a rear portion labeled **R**, and further includes a substantially planar top surface **3**, a first end portion **E₁**, and a second end portion **E₂**. There is also a front lip portion **11** shaped substantially in the form of a rectangular solid, which may be simply sheet metal, which is attached to the front portion **F** of the base portion **2** along the entire length of the base portion **2** in such a fashion in this embodiment that the angle which the front lip portion **11** makes at its point of attachment to the base portion **2** is about 90 degrees. The front lip portion **11** may be attached to the base portion **2** using conventional means, such as conventional fasteners including brackets, screws, welds, and adhesives. In one preferred form of the invention, the front lip portion **11** and the base portion collectively comprise the same single manufacture, such as in the case when the adapter **10** is of singular construction having been made by an injection molding process when the adapter **10** is comprised of a polymer, or from its fabrication from sheet steel or the like by means of conventional metalworking operations, including bending the lip portion **11** from a flat piece of steel or other metal. The adapter **10** also includes a cutout hole **17** which is a relatively large rectangular hole or void which is cut clear through the base portion **2**.

[0011] An adapter such as that provided in **FIG. 1** is particularly useful in providing a countertop made from stone in a kitchen setting which includes a sink or a cooking range, without the need for cutting out a hole for the sink or cooking range in the stone slab counter itself. An adapter **10** from **FIG. 1** in one embodiment is used in conjunction with a pair of rectangular slabs of stone countertop material to provide a countertop having a sink or cooking range, by providing for one end of one piece of rectangular slab stone countertop to be sized such that one of its ends is contained beneath the base portion **2** at its first end portion **E₁** in a position analogous to that shown in **FIG. 8**, i.e., the end of the stone slab resides beneath the surface of the base portion **2** at first end portion **E₁** so that the end of the stone slab is hidden from view by virtue of its being beneath the top surface **3** of the base portion **2**. Similarly, a second slab of stone countertop may have its end portion shrouded by its being inserted into end **E₂** of the adapter **10**, thus providing a construct which comprises two rectangularly-shaped

stone countertop slabs whose ends each protrude into the ends **E₁** and **E₂** of the adapter **10** of the invention to yield a long countertop having stone slabs at each end and the adapter **10** between them. Such an adapter **10** may include a cutout hole **17** of standard size to enable a cooking range to be supported therein, or alternatively beneath which an undermount sink may be provided, as undermount sinks are well-known in the art, or into which a countertop sink may be placed or dropped. Thus, an adapter according to the present invention can completely eliminate the need for on-site cutting out of a mounting hole for an undermount sink or a drop-in countertop cooking range in a stone countertop setting. The front lip portion **11** shields from view the fact that there is no stone material along the front portion of the adapter, and it is thus preferable that the height dimension **H** conform substantially, or be at least equal to the thickness of the countertop employed in a given installation. The cross-sectional relief of the front lip portion in this embodiment is as a rectangle; however it is entirely within the scope of the present claimed invention that its cross section may take on any shape which is either the same as or different from the contour of the front portion of the stone slabs used as the countertop surface. Further shown in **FIG. 1** is the bottom surface **B** of the base portion **2**, which is often in contact with the top surface of a countertop.

[0012] In **FIG. 2** is shown a perspective view of a sink provided according to one embodiment of the invention which utilizes the concept previously specified for the adapter in **FIG. 1**. This sink comprises a base portion **2**, which in one preferred form of the invention is substantially rectangular in configuration and is comprised of sheet stock, which may be comprised of any material of construction including without limitation polymers, woods, stone, or metal, and is preferably comprised of stainless steel in one form of the invention: The base portion **2** has a front portion labeled **F** and a rear portion labeled **R**, and further includes a substantially planar top surface **3**, a first end portion **E₁**, and a second end portion **E₂**. There is also a front lip portion **11** shaped substantially in the form of a rectangular solid, which may be simply sheet metal, which is attached to the front portion **F** of the base portion **2** along the entire length of the base portion **2** in such a fashion in this embodiment that the angle which the front lip portion **11** makes at its point of attachment to the base portion **2** is about 90 degrees. The front lip portion **11** may be attached to the base portion **2** using conventional means, such as conventional fasteners including brackets, screws, welds, and adhesives, or may be of singular construction with the base portion as previously specified in the description of **FIG. 1**. There are fixture holes **9** which extend through the base portion **2** to allow fitment of a standard sink faucet fixture. Additionally, there is a basin **5** having a drain hole **7**. The basin **5** may be part of the same construct as the front lip portion **11** and base portion **2**, as in the case when this device is fabricated from a single piece of steel stock, as the manufacture of one-piece metal sinks is

well known in the art. In an alternative embodiment, the basin may be an undermount sink which is affixed to the adapter **10** from the underside using fastening means known to those skilled in the art including without limitation adhesives such as epoxies or welding. Further shown in **FIG. 2** is the bottom surface **B** of the base portion **2**.

[0013] In **FIG. 3** is shown a perspective view of an adapter **14** according to an alternate embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment the adapter **14** comprises a base portion **21** which is preferably substantially rectangular and includes a substantially planar top surface **33**. The base portion **21** has a front portion **F** and a rear portion **R**. There is also a front wall portion **16** shaped substantially in the form of a rectangular solid, which may be simply sheet metal, which is attached to the front portion **F** of the base portion **21** along the entire length of the base portion **21** in such a fashion in this embodiment that the angle which the front wall portion **16** makes at its point of attachment to the base portion **21** is about 90 degrees. The front wall portion **16** may be attached to the base portion **21** using conventional means, such as conventional fasteners including brackets, screws, welds, and adhesives, or it may be an integral part of the base portion as previously described. There is also a first end portion **E₁** and a second end portion **E₂**. The adapter **14** also includes a cutout hole **17** which is a relatively large rectangular or other shaped hole or void which is cut out clear through the base portion **21**. Thus, along the longest length dimension of the adapter **14** there is a region (labeled **W** in **FIG. 3**) on the top surface portion **33** between the short dimension on the perimeter of the cutout hole **17** and the end **E₁** of the adapter **14**. In this embodiment there is also provided a rear wall **15** which is analogous to the front wall portion **16** and extends along the entire length of the adapter **14** on its rear portion. Further, there is also a bottom portion **13** which is rectangularly shaped having a first end and a second end and is disposed such that its first end contacts the rear wall **15** and its second end contacts the front wall **16**. The width of the bottom portion **13** is preferably no greater than width **W** of the region between the perimeter of the short dimension of the cutout hole **17** and the end of the adapter **14** to enable a sink or cooktop range to be dropped into the cutout hole **17**, or in the case when it is desired to employ an undermount sink, to be mounted thereunder. The bottom portion **13**, together with the rear wall **15**, front wall **16**, and base portion **21** define a slot **S** which is rectangularly shaped and is thus adapted to receive the end of a stone slab countertop. The second end portion **E₂** of the adapter **14** in one embodiment is identically fitted with another bottom portion analogous to bottom portion **13** and also thus includes a slot identical to slot **S**. Further shown in **FIG. 3** is the bottom surface **B** of the base portion **21**. In this **FIG. 3** is also shown a z-axis. The adapter of **FIG. 3** is in one embodiment symmetrical such that when rotated 180 degrees about the z-axis, it appears identical to the drawing in **FIG. 3**. The

same is true for the embodiment later shown in **FIG. 4**.

[0014] An adapter **14** such as that provided in **FIG. 3** is particularly useful in providing a countertop made from stone in a kitchen setting which includes a sink or a cooking range, without the need for cutting out a hole for the sink or cooking range in the stone slab counter itself. An adapter **14** from **FIG. 3** in one embodiment is used in conjunction with a pair of rectangular slabs of stone countertop material to provide a countertop having a sink by providing for one end of one piece of rectangular slab stone countertop to be inserted into the slot **S** at its first end portion **E₁** as later shown in **FIG. 7**, i.e., the end of the stone slab resides beneath the surface of the base portion **21** at first end portion **E₁** so that the end of the stone slab is hidden from view by virtue of the top surface **33** of the base portion **21** and the front wall portion **16**. Similarly, a second slab of stone countertop may have its end portion shrouded by its being inserted into an analogous slot at end **E₂** of the adapter **14**, thus providing a construct which comprises two rectangularly-shaped stone countertop slabs whose ends each protrude into the slots **S** at ends **E₁** and **E₂** of the adapter **14** of this embodiment of the invention to yield a long countertop having a stone slab at each end and the adapter **14** between them. The adapter **14** may further include a cutout hole **17** of standard size to enable a cooking range to be supported therein, or alternatively beneath which an undermount sink may be provided. Thus, an adapter according to this embodiment of the present invention completely eliminates the need for on-site cutting out of a mounting hole for an undermount sink or a drop-in countertop cooking range in a stone countertop setting. The front wall portion **16** shields from view the fact that there is no stone material along the front portion of the adapter, and it is thus preferable that the height dimension **H** conform substantially, or be at least equal to the thickness of the countertop employed in a given installation. The cross-sectional relief of the front wall portion in this embodiment is as a rectangle; however it is entirely within the scope of the present claimed invention that its cross section may take on any shape which is either the same as or different from the contour of the front portion of the stone slabs used as the countertop surface, i.e., it may be convexly rounded or beveled, etc. Further, the front wall portion or front lip as elsewhere described herein can be fastened, stamped, moulded, machined or cast to the base portion. The front wall or lip can be shaped to conform to the front edge of the countertop sections with which it is used in conjunction with, including bull-nose, beveled, or simply square. The front lip or wall can be wrapped under the counter as well.

[0015] In **FIG. 4** is shown a perspective view of a sink provided according to an alternate embodiment of the invention which utilizes the concept previously specified for the adapter **14** in **FIG. 3**. This comprises a base portion **21**, which in one preferred form of the invention is substantially rectangular in configuration and is comprised of sheet stock, which may be comprised of any material

of construction including without limitation polymers, woods, stone, or metal, and is preferably comprised of stainless steel in one form of the invention. The base portion **21** has a front portion labeled **F** and a rear portion labeled **R**, and further includes a substantially planar top surface **33**, a first end portion **E₁**, and a second end portion **E₂**. There is also a front wall portion **16** shaped substantially in the form of a rectangular solid, which may be simply sheet metal, which is attached to the front portion **F** of the base portion **21** along the entire length of the base portion **21** in such a fashion in this embodiment that the angle which the front wall portion **16** makes at its point of attachment to the base portion **21** is about 90 degrees. The front wall portion **16** may be attached to the base portion **21** using conventional means, such as conventional fasteners including brackets, screws, welds, and adhesives, or it may be an integral part of the construction, i.e., the device of **FIG. 4** may be of singular construction, being fabricated from one piece of continuous material, such as steel, porcelain, wood, polymers, etc., made by known manufacturing methods, such as extrusion, molding, sculpting, bending etc., as may be all embodiments of adapters set forth in this specification.. There may in this embodiment, and others, optionally be fixture holes **9** which extend through the base portion **21** to allow fitment of a standard sink faucet fixture. Additionally, there is a basin **51** having a drain hole **71**. The basin **51** may be part of the same construct as the front wall portion **16** and base portion **21**, as in the case when this device is fabricated from a single piece of steel stock, as the manufacture of one-piece metal sinks is well known in the art. In an alternative embodiment, the basin **51** may be an undermount sink which is affixed to the adapter **14** from the underside using fastening means known to those skilled in the art including without limitation adhesives such as epoxies or welding. There is also a bottom portion **13** and a rear wall portion **15** as previously described, which together with the base portion **21** and the front wall portion **16** collectively define a slot **S** into which the end of a stone slab countertop may be inserted.

[0016] In **FIG. 5** is shown a side view of a sink according to the embodiment described in relation to **FIG. 4**. In this **FIG. 5** are shown the respective positions of the base portion **21**, front wall portion **16**, bottom portion **13**, rear wall **15**, basin **51**, and slot **S**. Further shown in **FIG. 5** is the bottom surface **B** of the top surface **33** (**FIG. 4**) of the base portion **21**.

[0017] In **FIG. 6** is shown a side view of a sink according to the embodiment previously specified in relation to **FIG. 2**, showing the base portion **2**, front lip portion **11**, and basin **5**. Further shown in **FIG. 6** is the bottom surface **B** of the base portion **2**.

[0018] In **FIG. 7** is shown a sink **51** installed in a countertop according to one form of the invention using the adapter **14** from **FIG. 3**. This countertop comprises a first rectangularly-shaped counter **C₁** and a second rectangularly-shaped counter **C₂**, wherein the end of the coun-

ter **C₁** is inserted into the slot **S** of the adapter **14** (**FIG. 3**) to a distance no greater than **W**, thus providing a countertop having an adapter according to the invention between two stone slab countertops and thus eliminating the need for on-site cutting of stone. The slab counters **C₁** and **C₂** each have a top surface **101**.

[0019] In **FIG. 8** is shown an adapter installed in a countertop according to one form of the invention using the adapter **10** from **FIG. 1**. This countertop comprises a first stone slab counter **C₁** and a second stone slab counter **C₂**, wherein the ends of the counter are disposed beneath the top surface **3** of the base portion **2** sufficiently to hide the end of the stone slab beneath the top surface **3**, thus providing a countertop having an adapter according to the invention between two stone slabs and thus eliminating the need for on-site cutting of stone. The cutout hole **17** may be provided with a drop in cooktop, a drop in sink, an undermount sink, or other fixture. The slab counters **C₁** and **C₂** each have a top surface **101**.

[0020] Although the adapters of the present invention have been described as being useful in combination with stone slab countertops, they are not limited exclusively to countertops made from such materials but are rather useful with countertops made from all known materials from which countertops may be fabricated, including without limitation, wood, ceramics, metal, composites, resins, etc.. The present invention enables anyone capable of making a square cut to be able to install a fixture.

[0021] The cutout holes and sink basins which are to be used in conjunction therewith may comprise many different shapes and contours, as such are known in the art including ovals, etc. In addition, the present invention contemplates the use of cutout holes for housing other appliances, and when used in conjunction with a sink basin, the sink basin may or may not include faucet holes. A sink or adapter according to the present invention may be stamped from sheetstock, moulded, cast, machined from steel, polymers, stone etc. In certain embodiments, the sink or adapter will extend from the front edge of the counter to the rear, thus eliminating the need for as much granite, where 2 pieces join on each side, which simultaneously makes installation much easier and less time-intensive.

For purposes of this application, an adapter **10** or **14** can be considered as a central fixture unit, inasmuch as it is disposed in a central location within a continuous countertop in its final intended installed position.

[0022] Consideration must be given to the fact that although this invention has been described and disclosed in relation to certain preferred embodiments, obvious equivalent modifications and alterations thereof will become apparent to one of ordinary skill in this art upon reading and understanding this specification and the claims appended hereto. This includes subject matter defined by any combination of any one of the various claims appended hereto with any one or more of the remaining claims, including the incorporation of the features and/or limitations of any dependent claim, singly or

in combination with features and/or limitations of any one or more of the other dependent claims, with features and/or limitations of any one or more of the independent claims, with the remaining dependent claims in their original text being read and applied to any independent claims so modified. This also includes combination of the features and/or limitations of one or more of the independent claims with features and/or limitations of another independent claims to arrive at a modified independent claim, with the remaining dependent claims in their original text being read and applied to any independent claim so modified. Accordingly, the presently disclosed invention is intended to cover all such modifications and alterations, and is limited only by the scope of the claims which follow.

Claims

1. An adapter useful as a component in providing countertops in a work area which comprises:
 - a) a substantially planar base portion which comprises a first end portion, a second end portion, a front portion and a rear portion, a top surface, a bottom surface, a length dimension and a width dimension;
 - b) a front lip portion having a length dimension, a width dimension, and a thickness dimension, wherein said front lip portion is attached to said front portion of said base portion such that the length dimension of said front lip portion coincides with the length dimension of said base portion and the width dimension of said front lip portion extends in a direction downward from the plane of said base portion; and
 - c) a sink basin attached to said base portion, said base portion, said lip portion, and said sink basin collectively comprising a one-piece construct.
2. An adapter according to claim 1 wherein said front lip portion extends downward from the plane of said base portion such that the width dimension of said front lip portion intersects said planar base portion at an angle of about 90 degrees.
3. An adapter according to claim 1 wherein said substantially planar base portion is substantially rectangular in shape.
4. An adapter according to claim 1 wherein said sink basin is substantially rectangular, circular, or oval in shape.
5. A countertop assembly comprising the adapter of claim 1 and further comprising:

d) a first section of countertop having a top surface and an end portion, wherein the end portion of said first section of countertop is disposed beneath said first end portion of said substantially planar base portion of said adapter such the top surface of said first section of countertop is in effective mechanical contact with said bottom surface of said base portion of said adapter. 5

6. A countertop assembly according to claim 5 wherein said first section of countertop is substantially rectangular. 10

7. A countertop assembly according to either claims 5 or 6 which further comprises: e) a second rectangular section of countertop having a top surface and an end portion, wherein the end portion of said second rectangular section of countertop is disposed beneath said second end portion of said substantially planar base portion of said adapter such the top surface of said second section of countertop is in effective mechanical contact with said bottom surface of said base portion of said adapter. 15 20

8. A countertop assembly according to claim 7 wherein said second section of countertop is substantially rectangular. 25

9. A countertop assembly according to claim 5 wherein said front lip portion has a cross-sectional relief that is contoured to be the same as the contour of the front portion of said countertops. 30

10. A countertop assembly according to claim 5 wherein said front lip portion has a cross-sectional relief that is contoured to be different than the contour of the front portion of said countertops. 35

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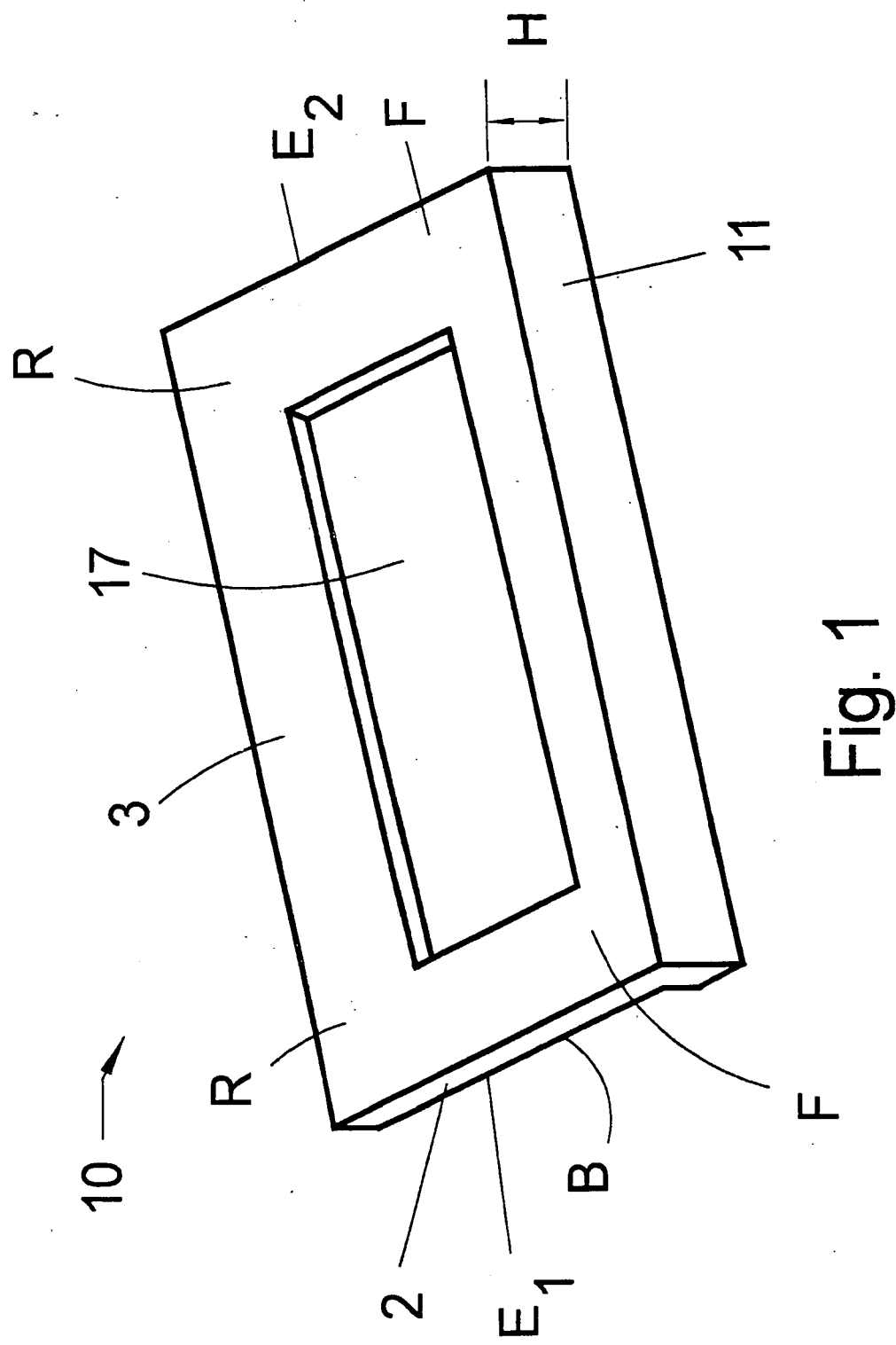


Fig. 1

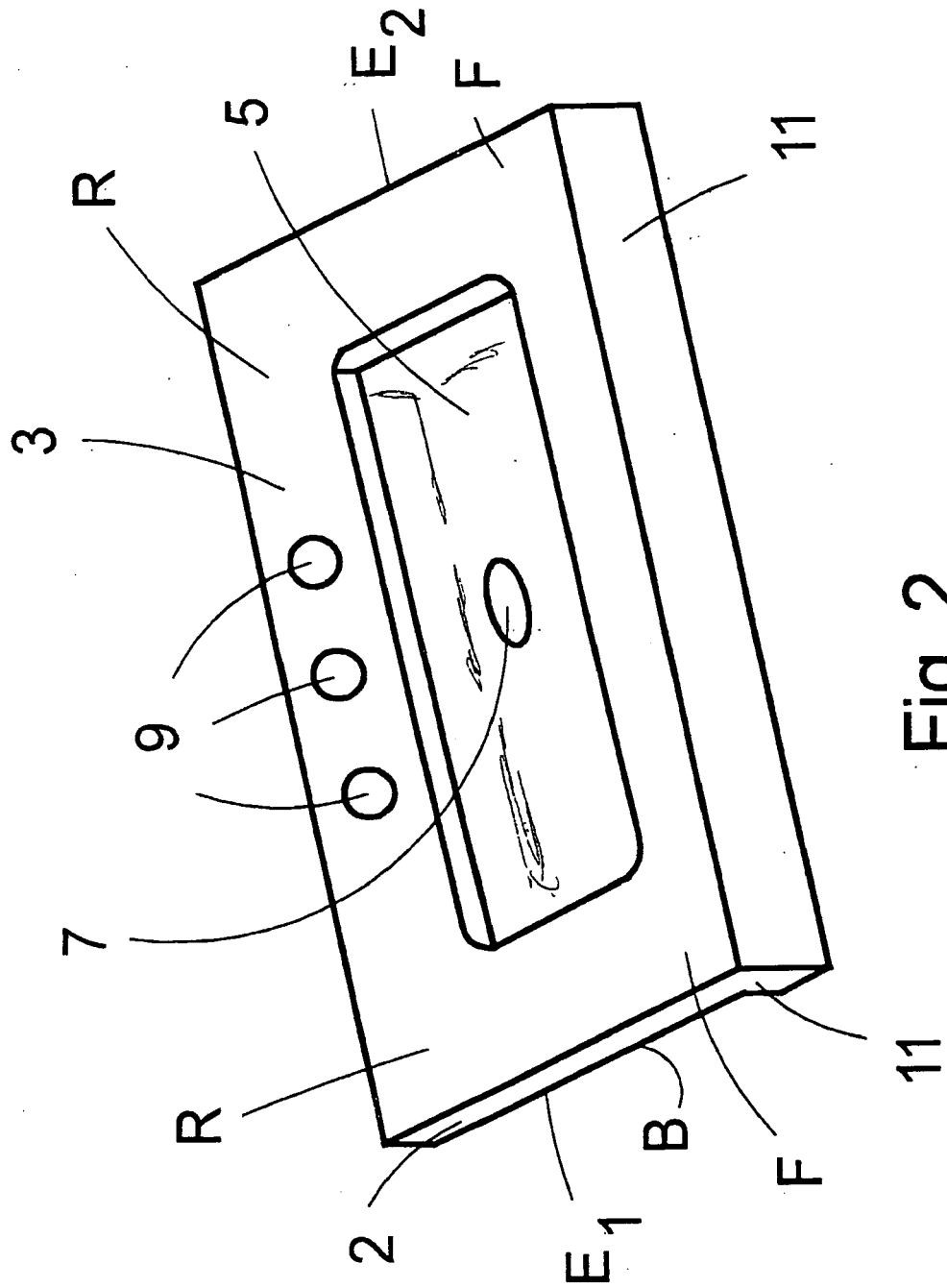


Fig. 2

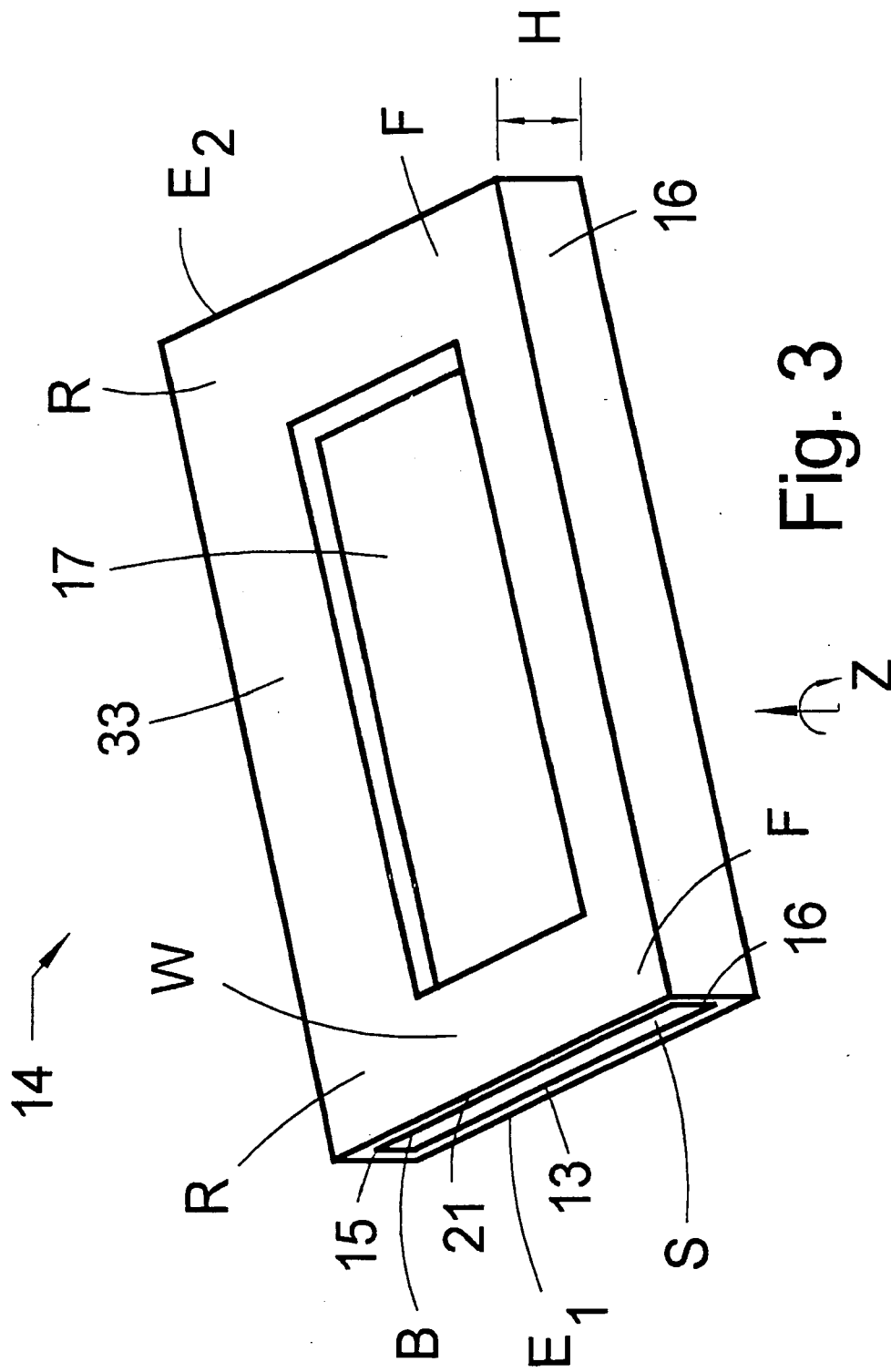


Fig. 3

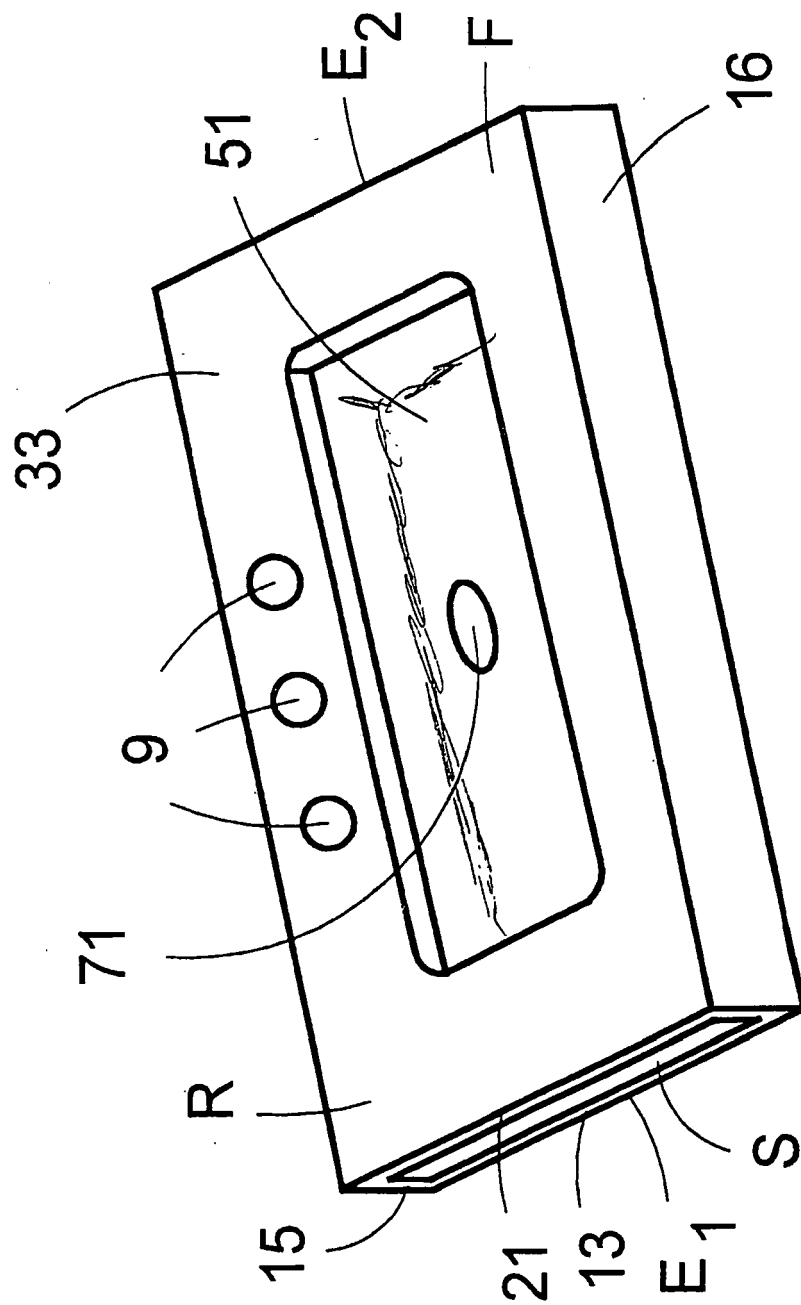


Fig. 4

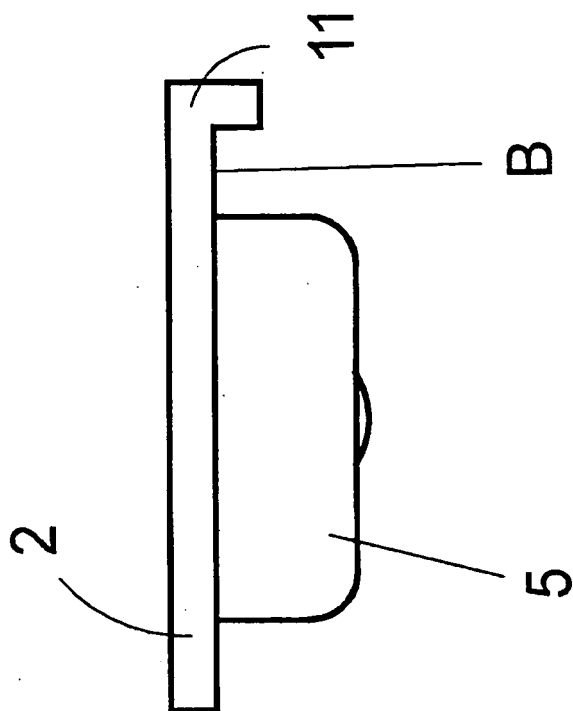


Fig. 6

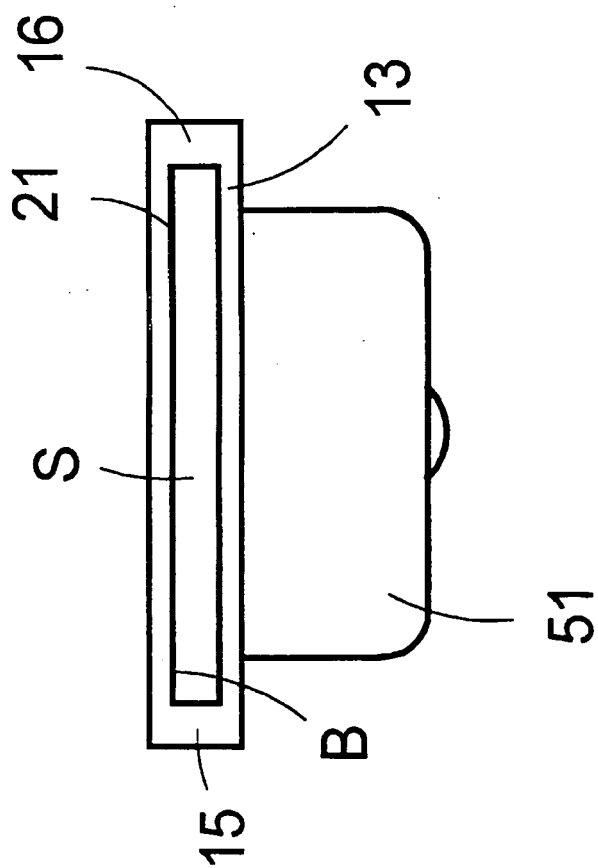
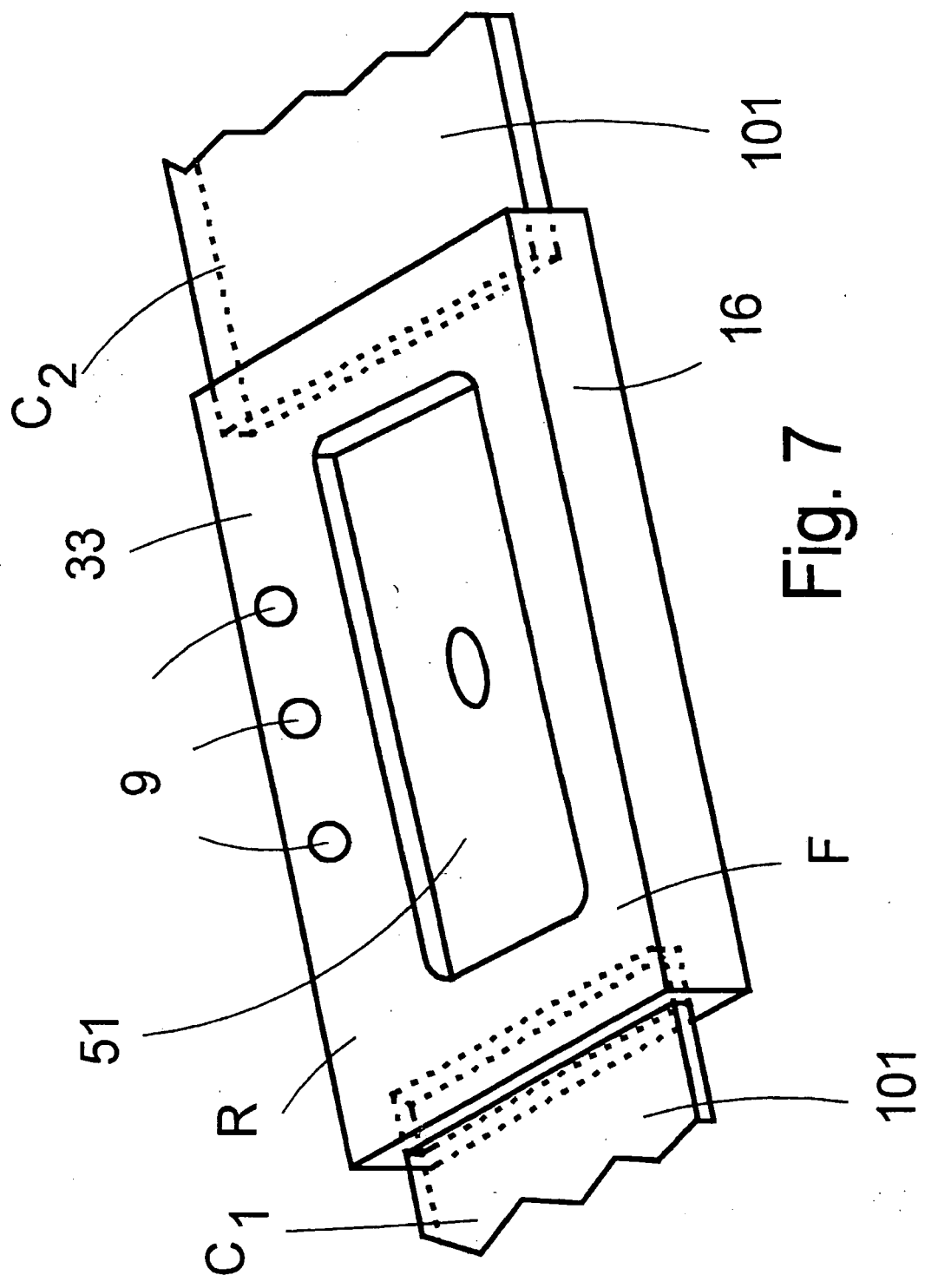
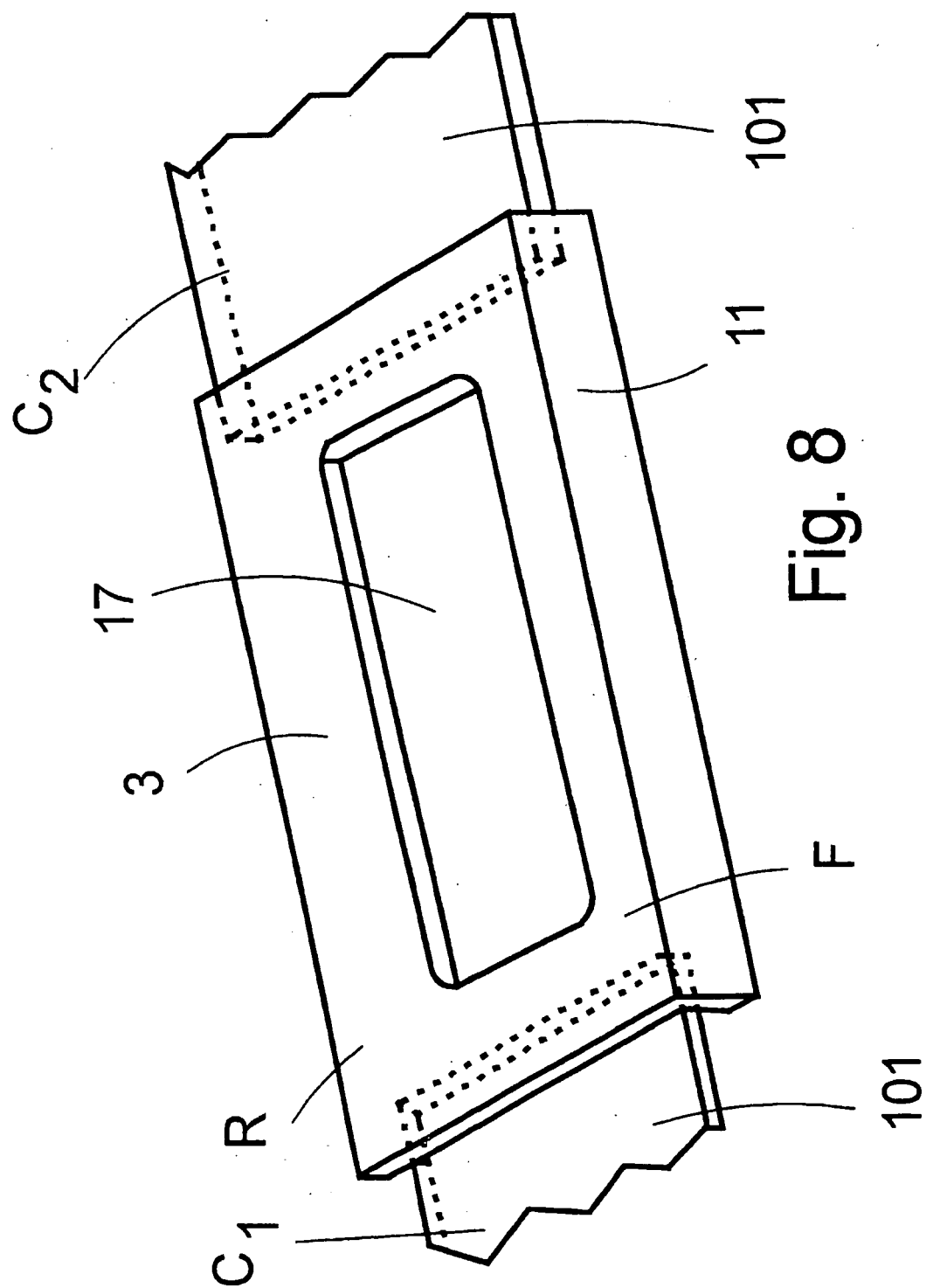


Fig. 5







EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 09 01 5357

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search The Hague		Date of completion of the search 24 February 2010	Examiner Jones, Clive
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			

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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24-02-2010

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