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(54) **ICE MAKER**

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(21) Appl. No.: **18/310,604**

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(63) Continuation of application No. 17/147,965, filed on Jan. 13, 2021, now Pat. No. 11,674,731.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F25C 1/22 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC *F25C 1/22* (2013.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A commercial ice maker purges water from a sump via a passive drain valve instead of an active drain pump. The ice maker uses a large freeze plate, but still can accommodate the passive drain valve within a standard enclosure footprint. A bottom wall of the ice maker has a drain passaging groove formed in an upper surface. The drain valve is supported above the bottom wall and drain tube is at least partially received in the drain passaging groove. The drain valve can include a valve body that has a valve seat and a movable valve member that opens and closes a valve passage through the valve seat. The valve member radially overlaps the valve seat along a longitudinal axis when the valve member is closed.

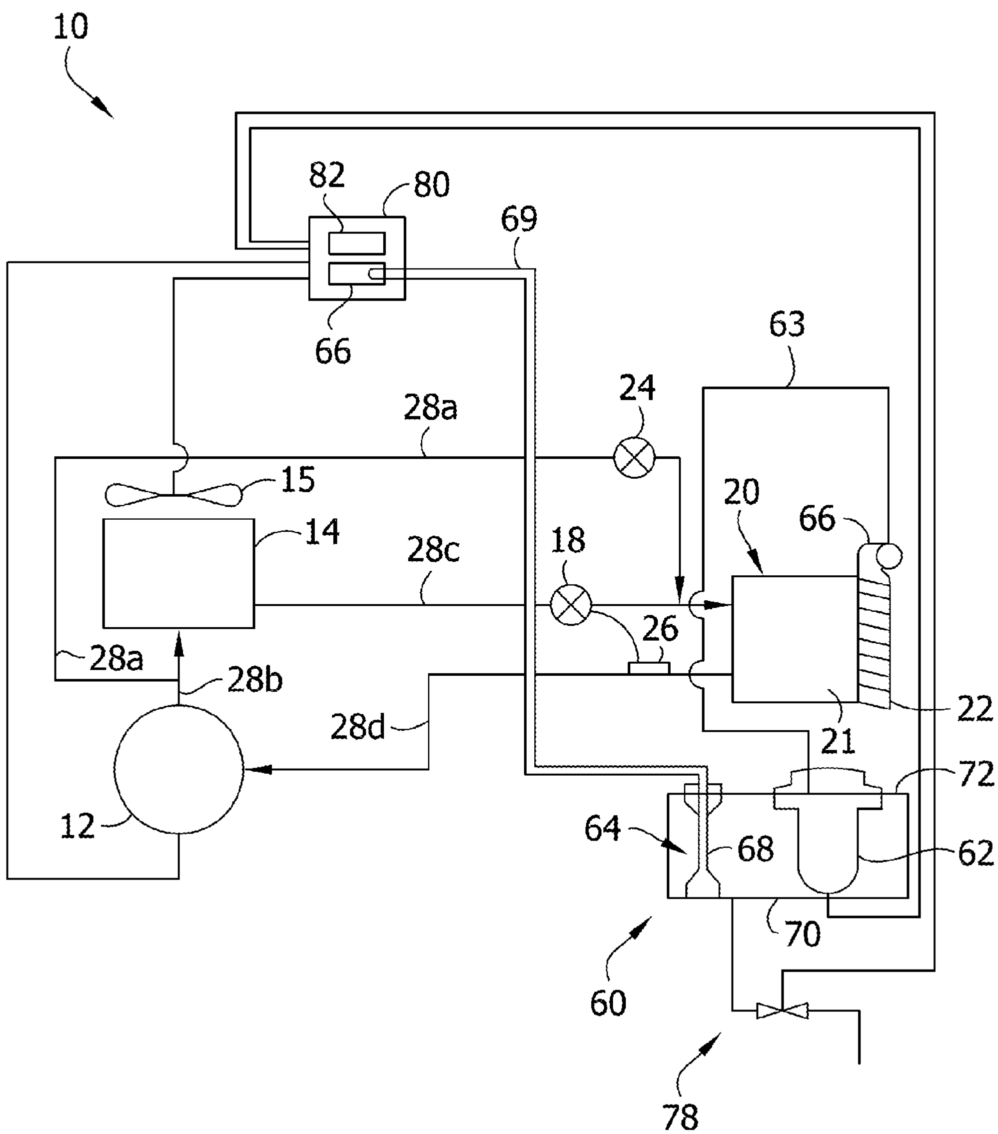

FIG. 1

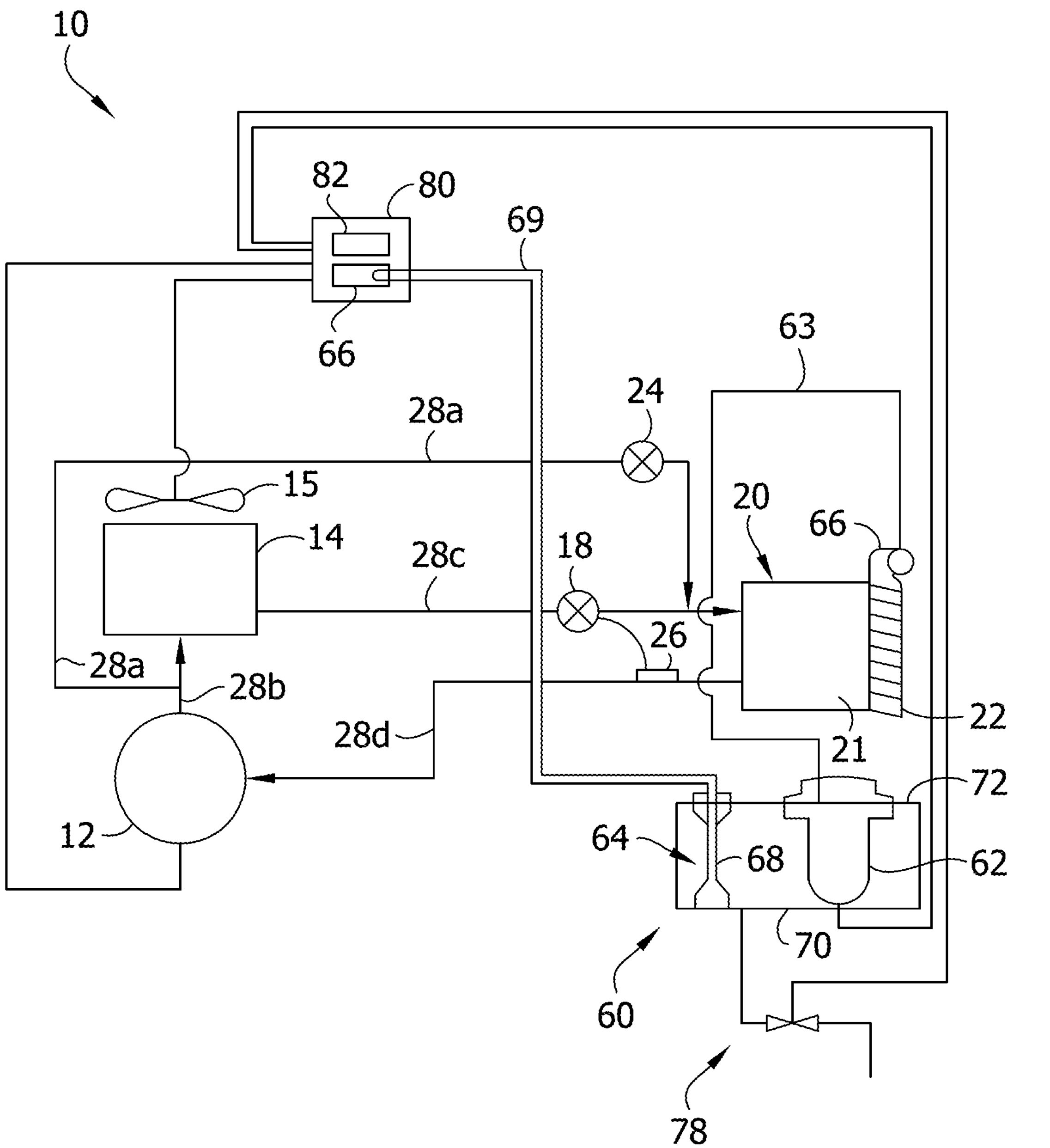
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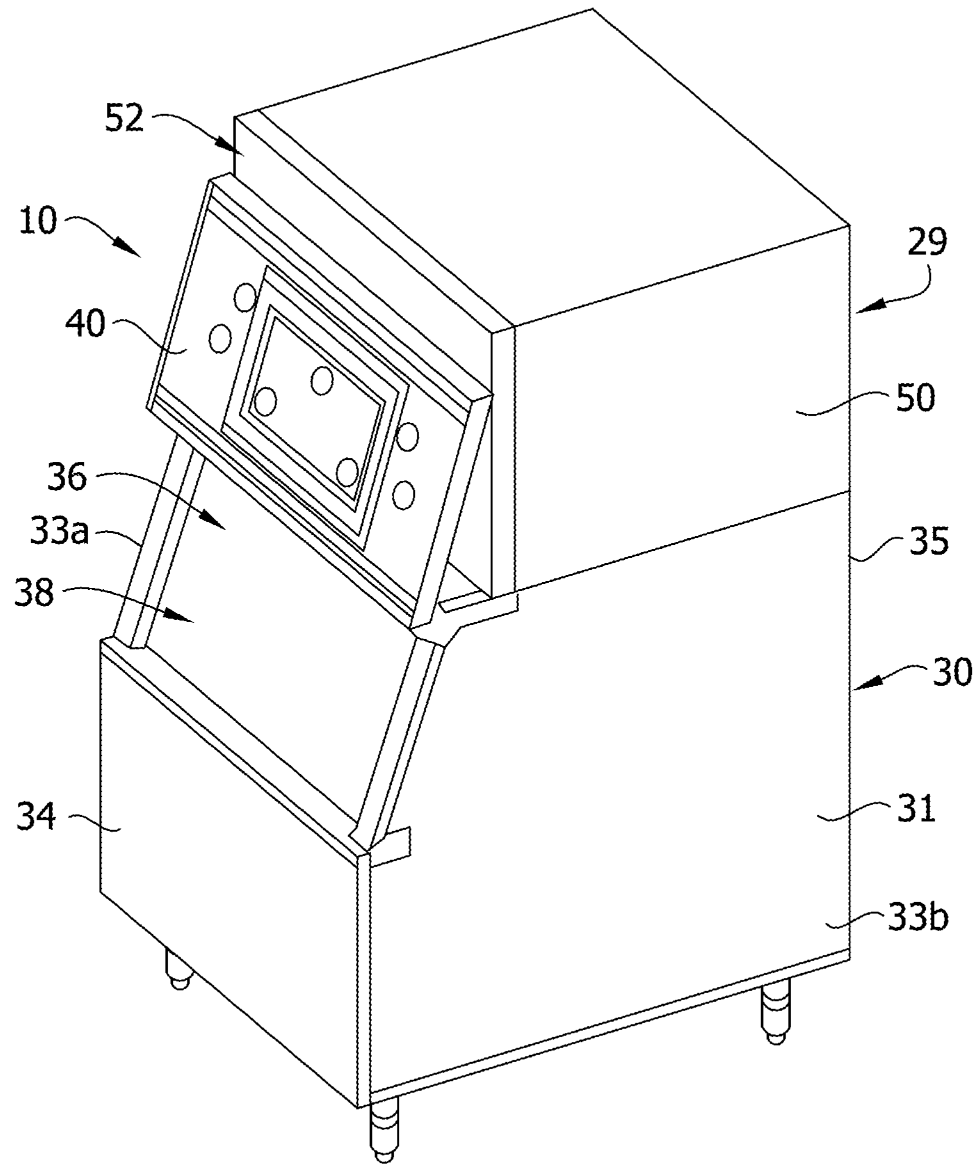
FIG. 2



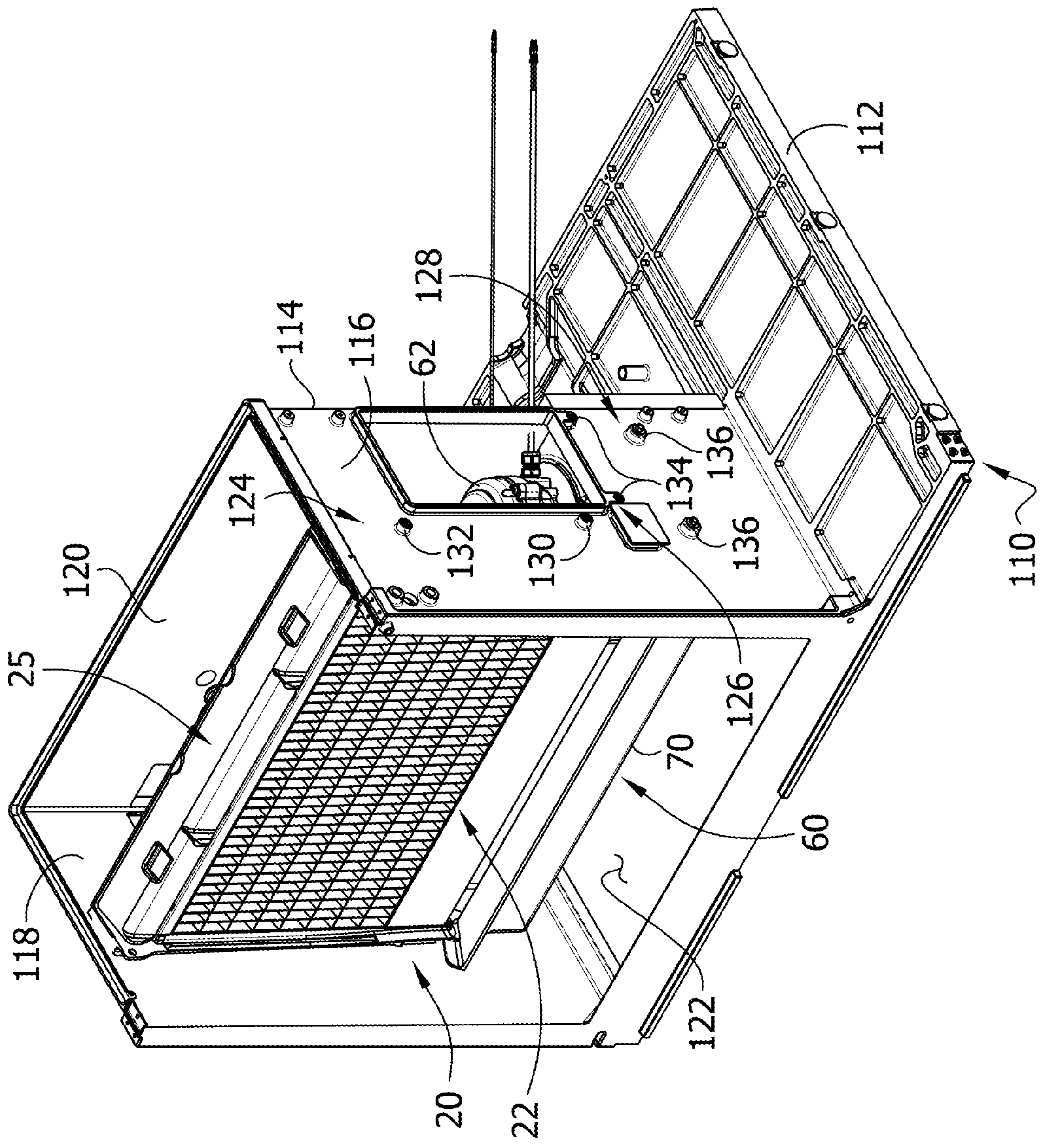

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FIG. 3

FIG. 4

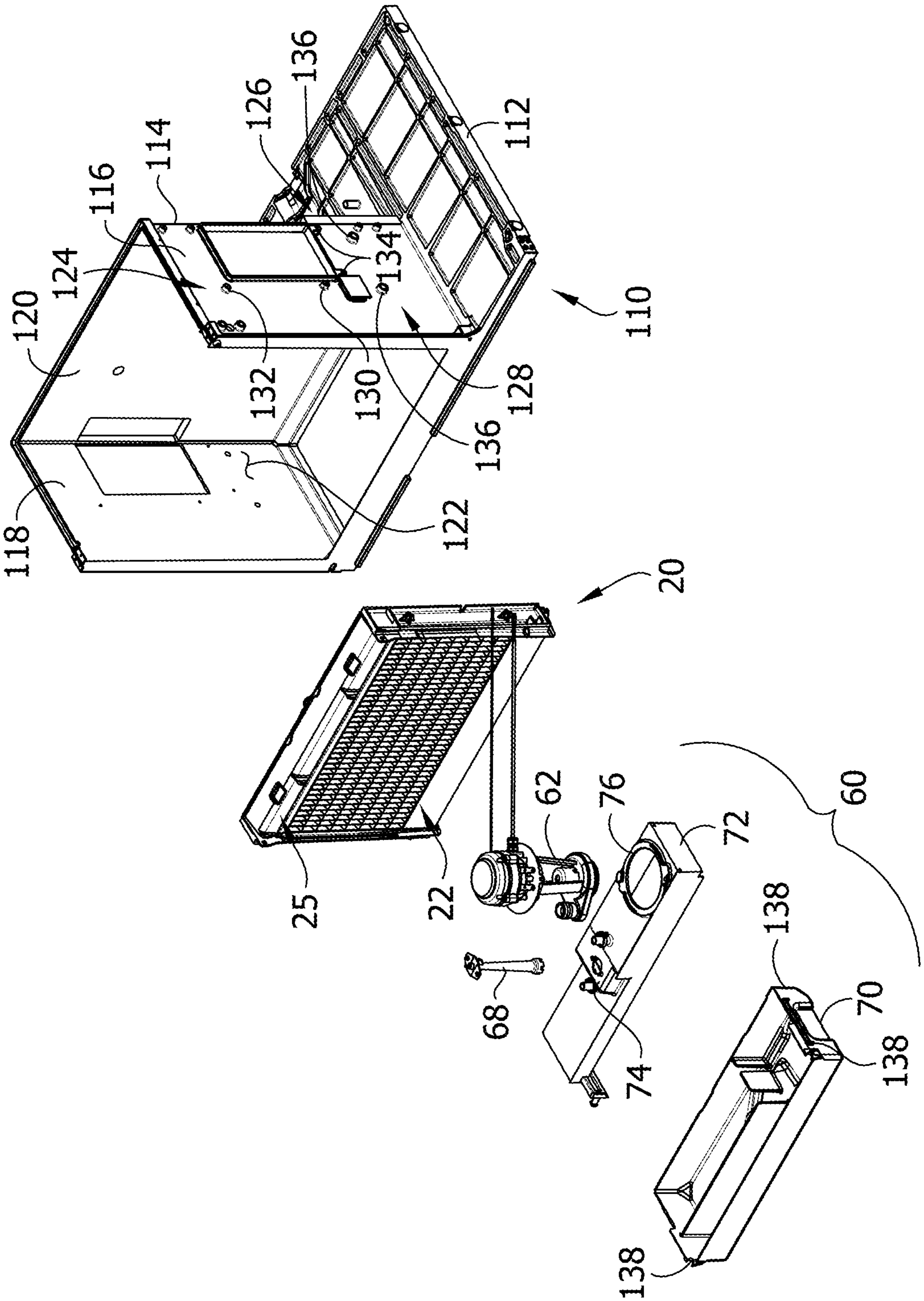

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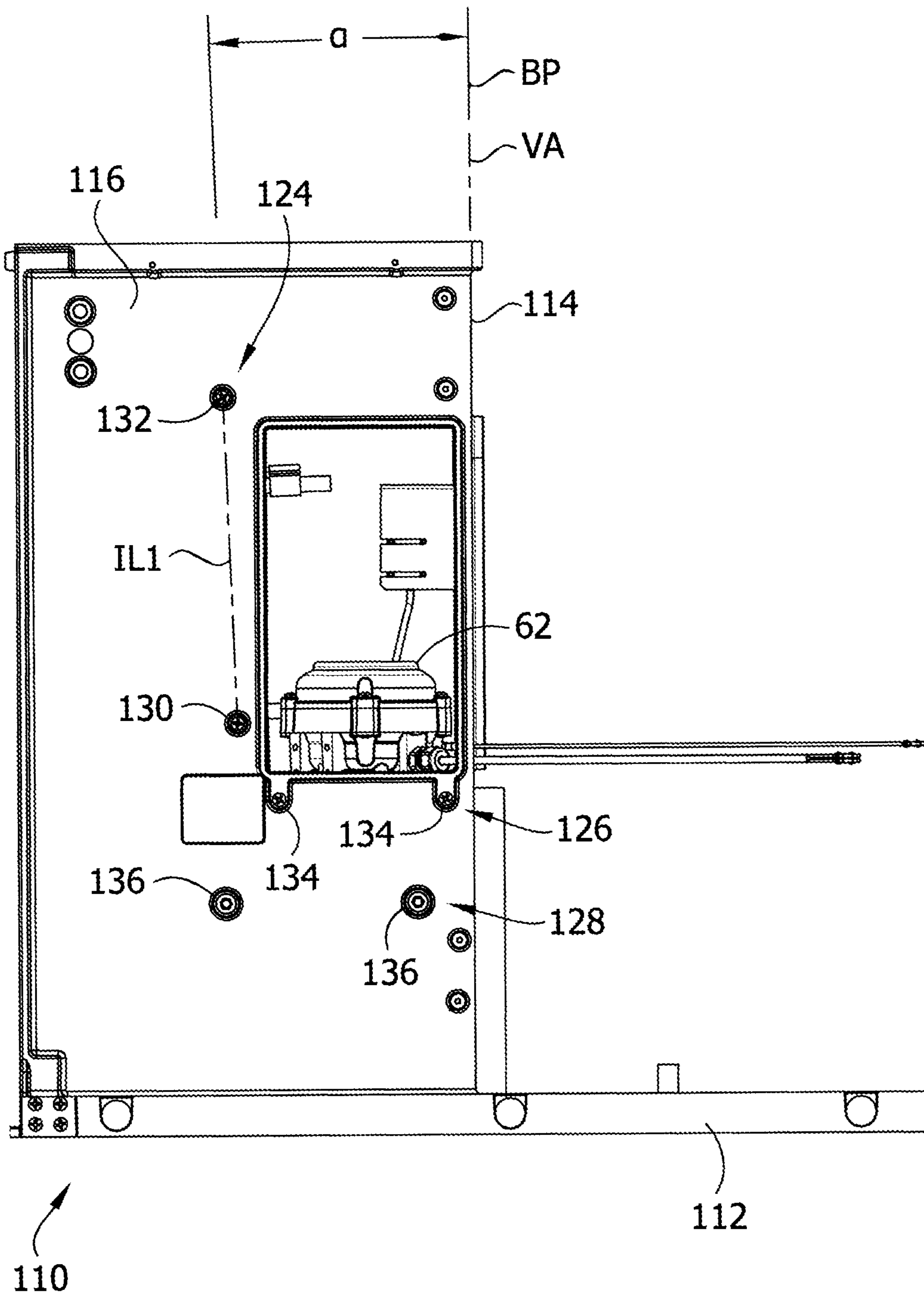
FIG. 5



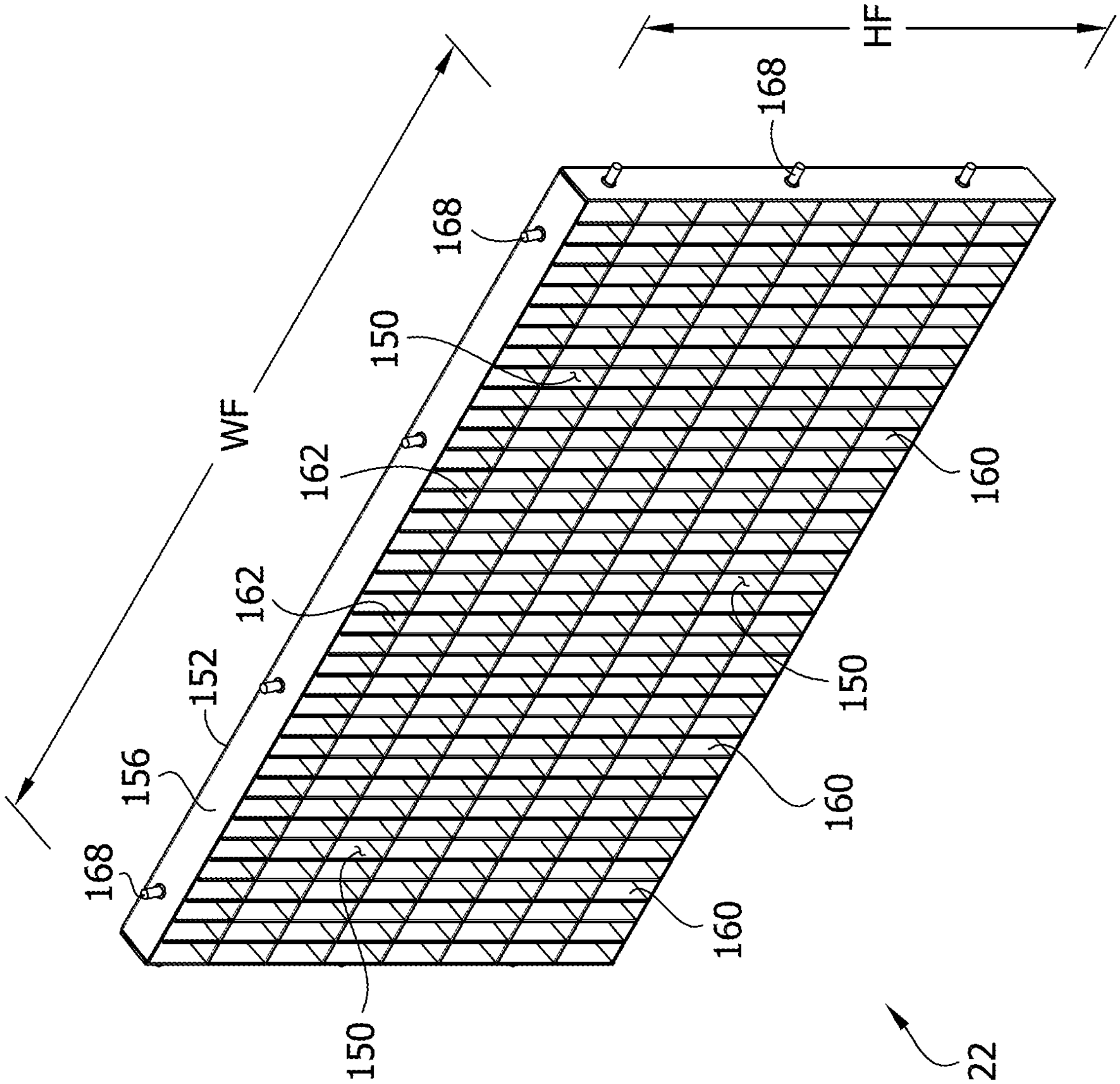


FIG. 6

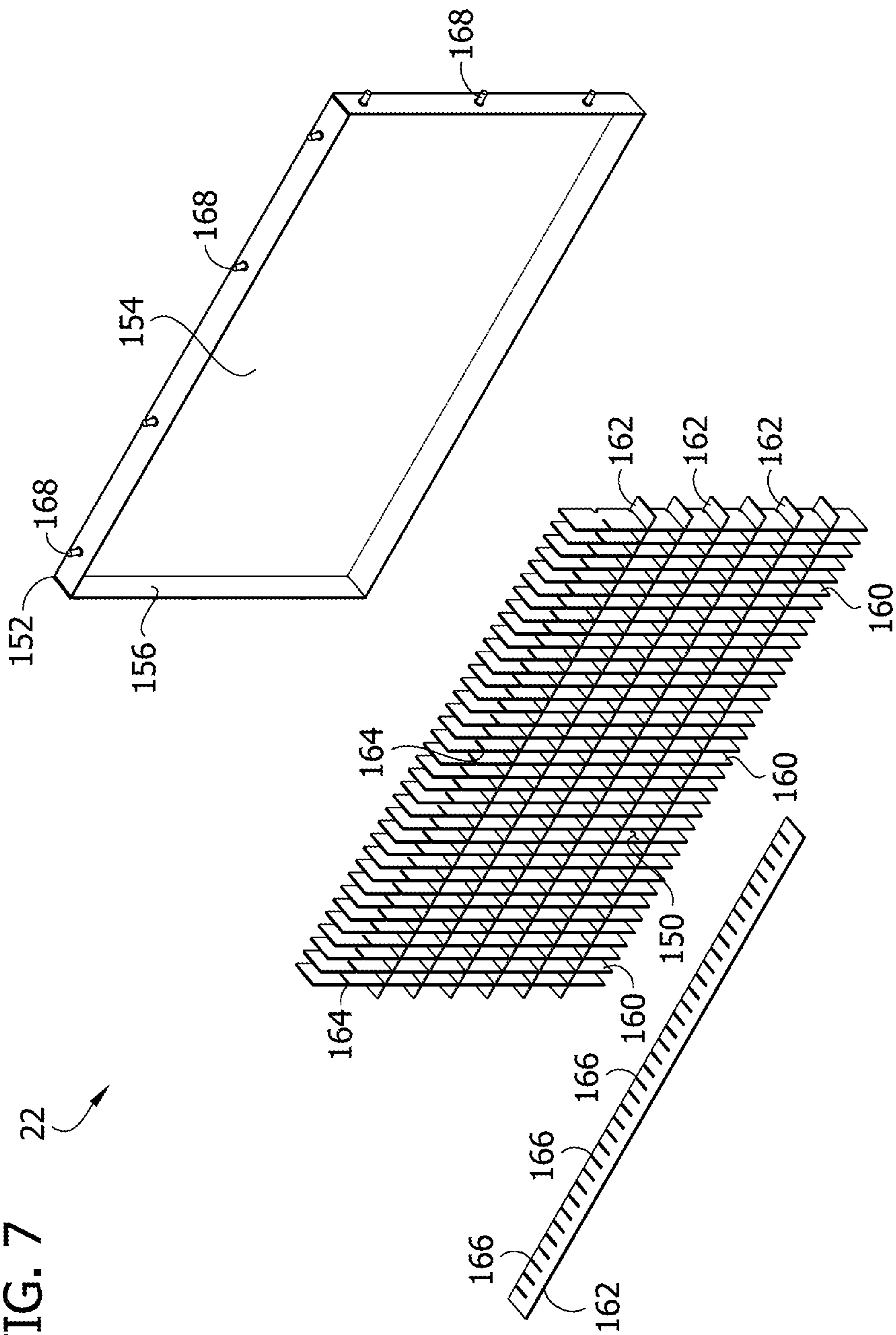


FIG. 7

FIG. 8

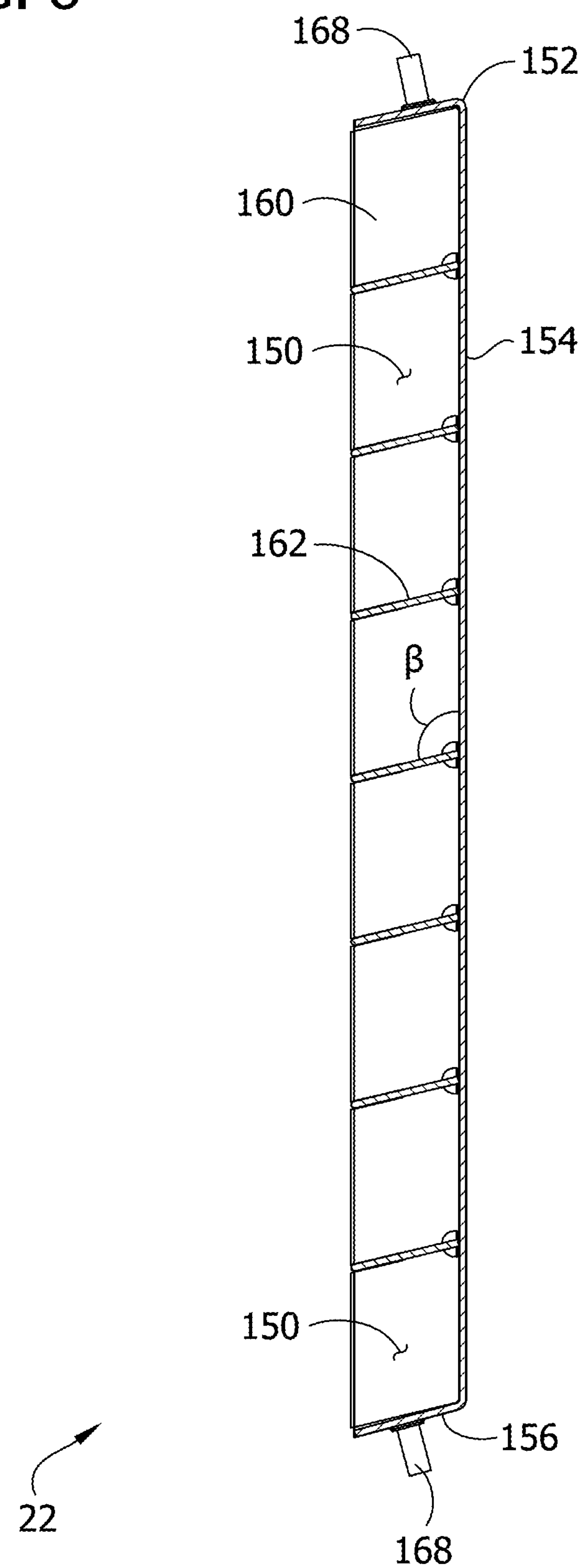


FIG. 9

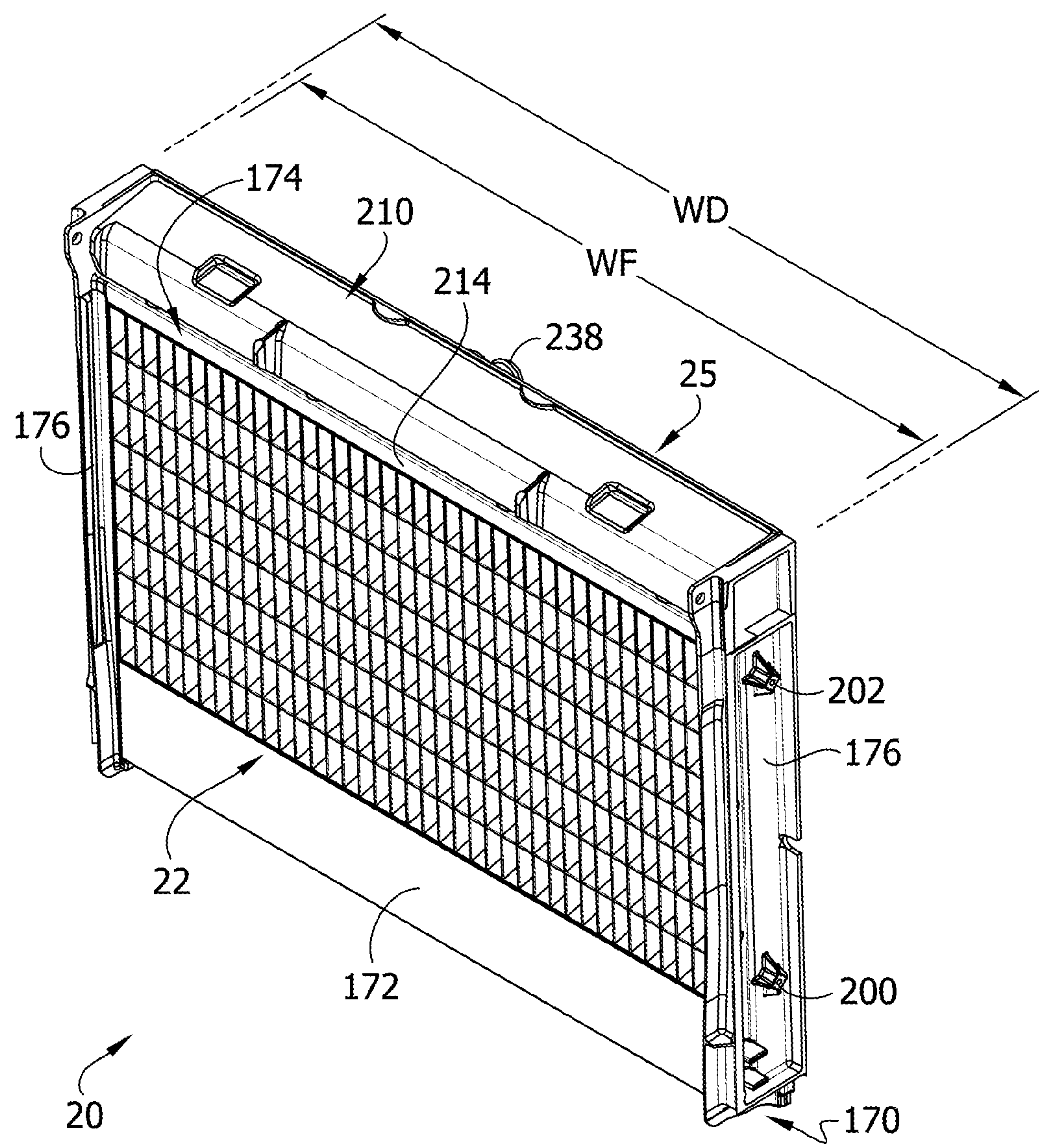
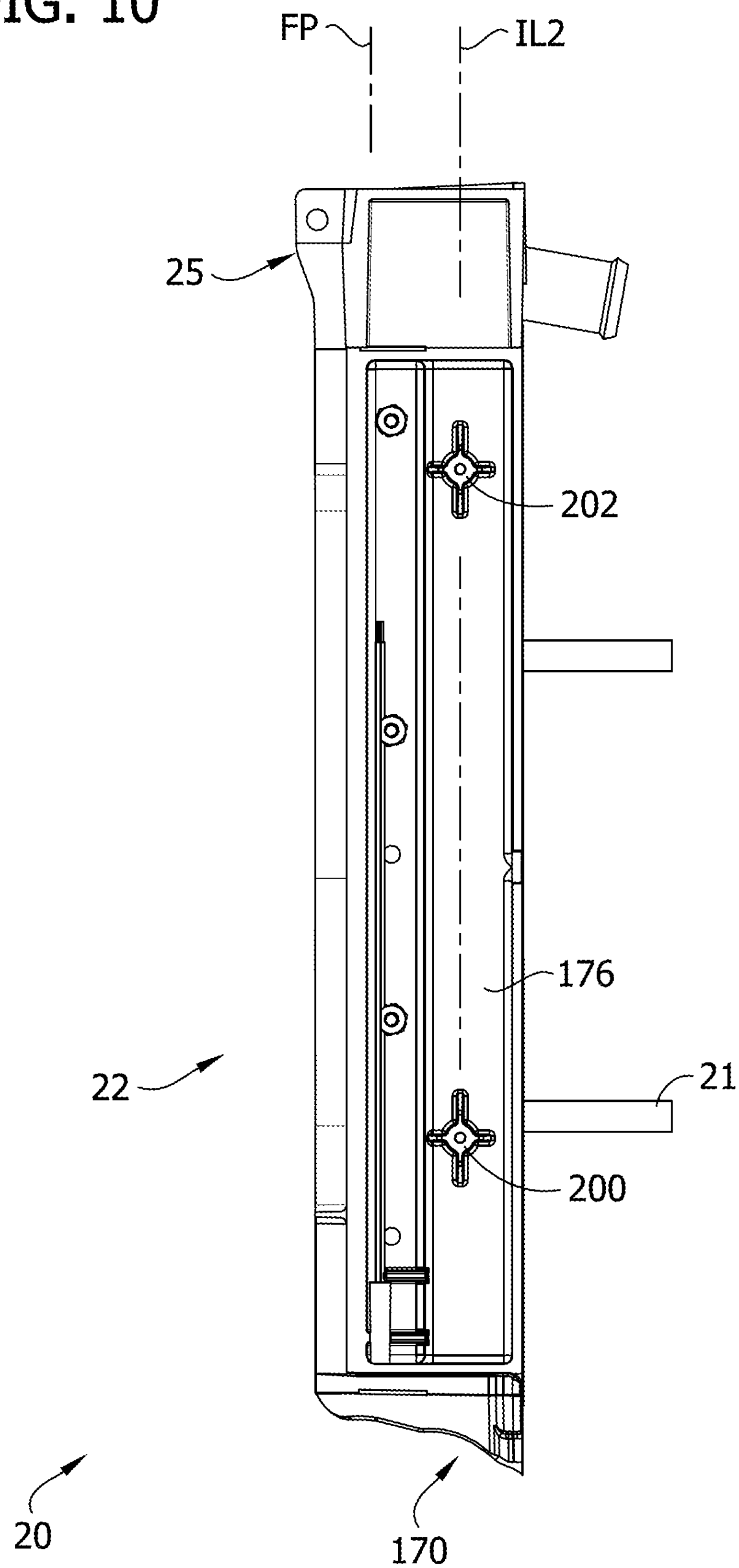


FIG. 10



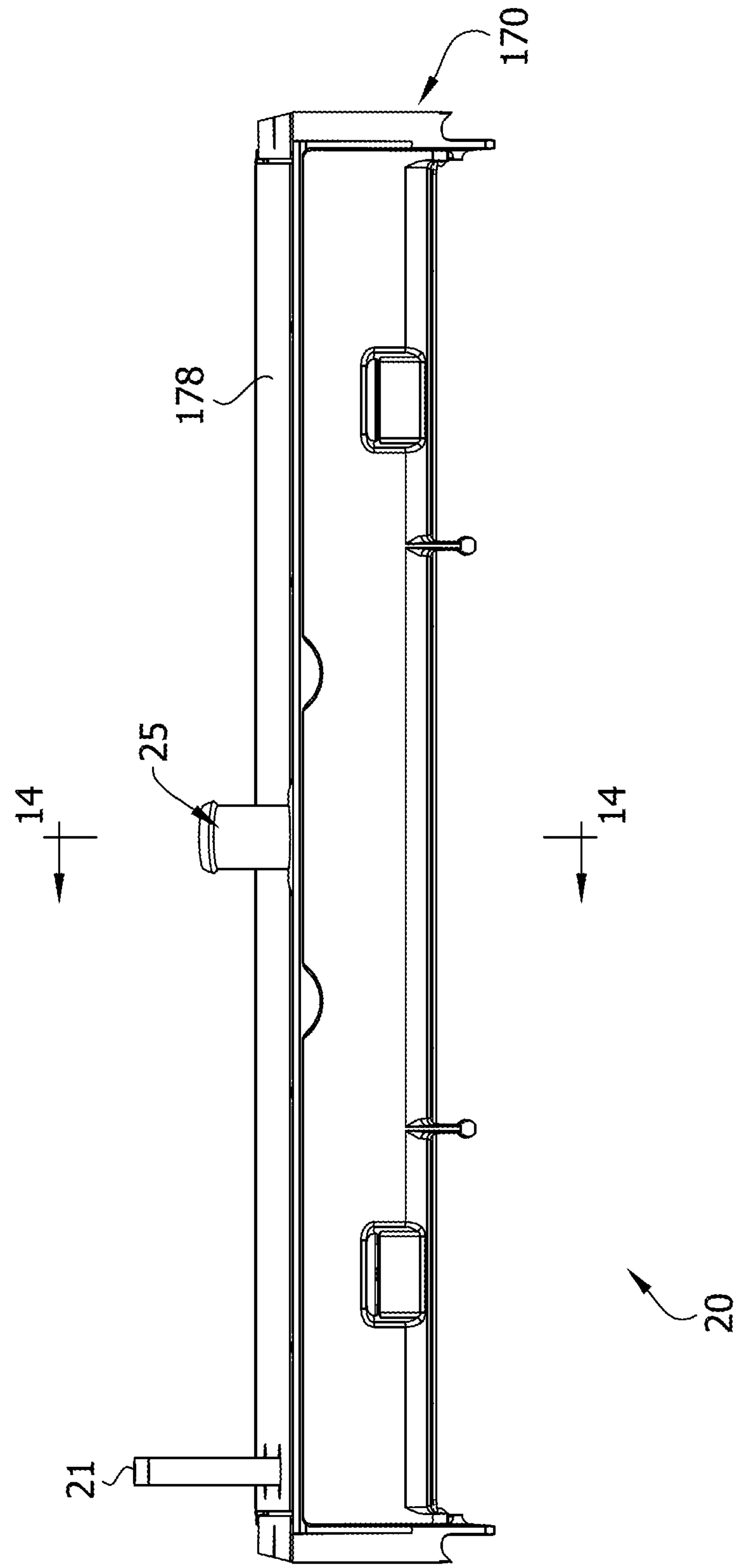


FIG. 11

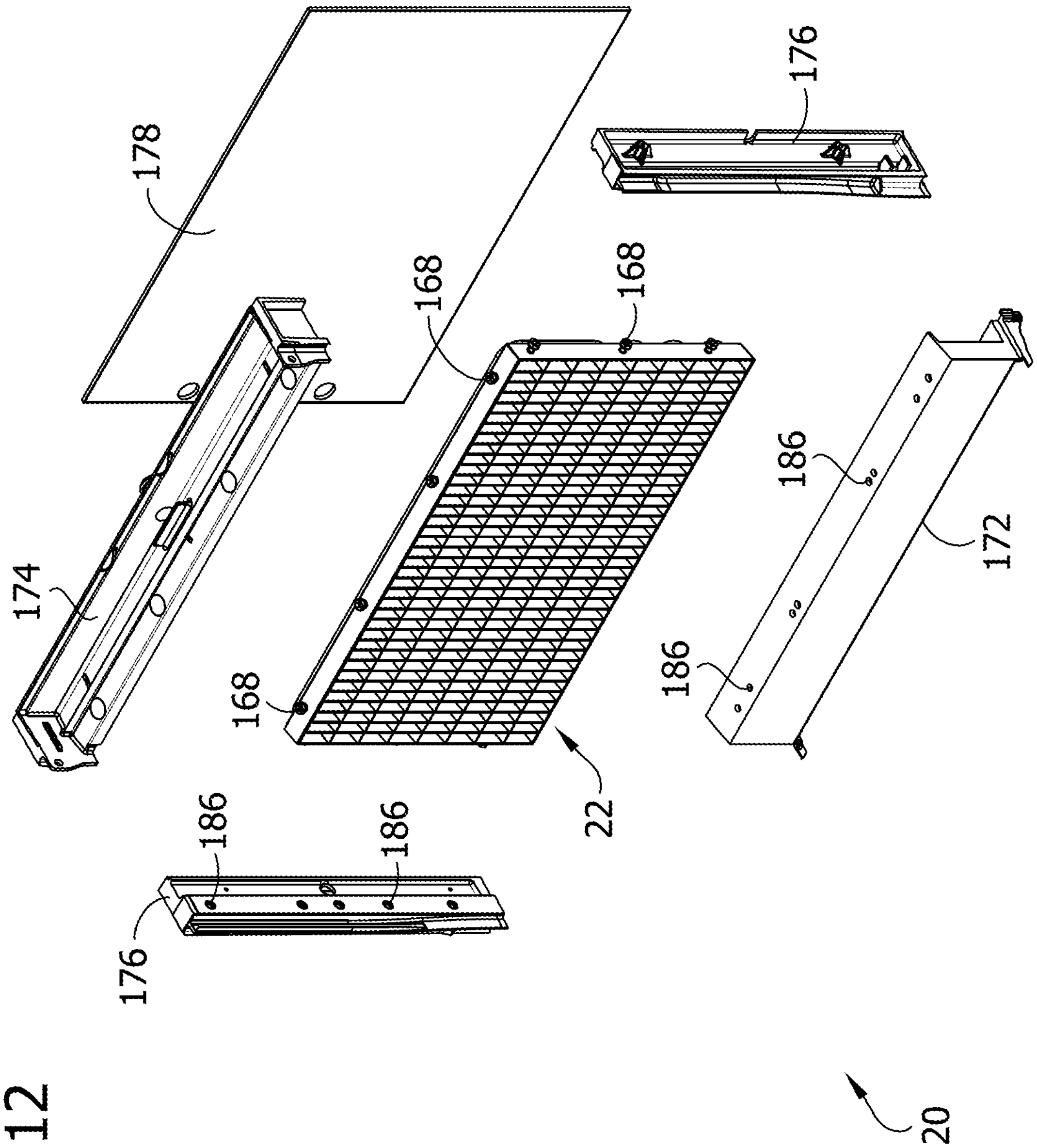


FIG. 12

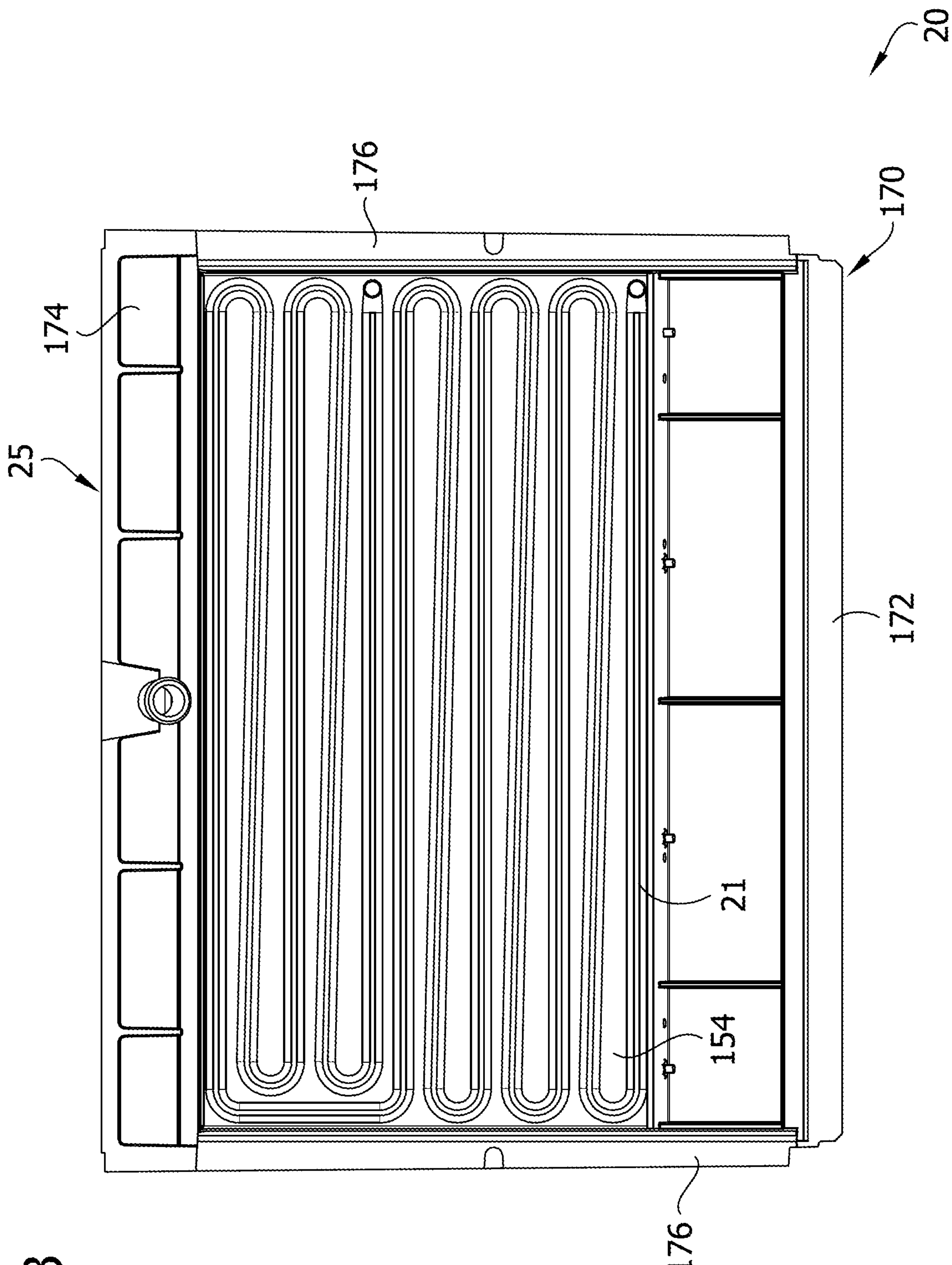


FIG. 13

FIG. 14

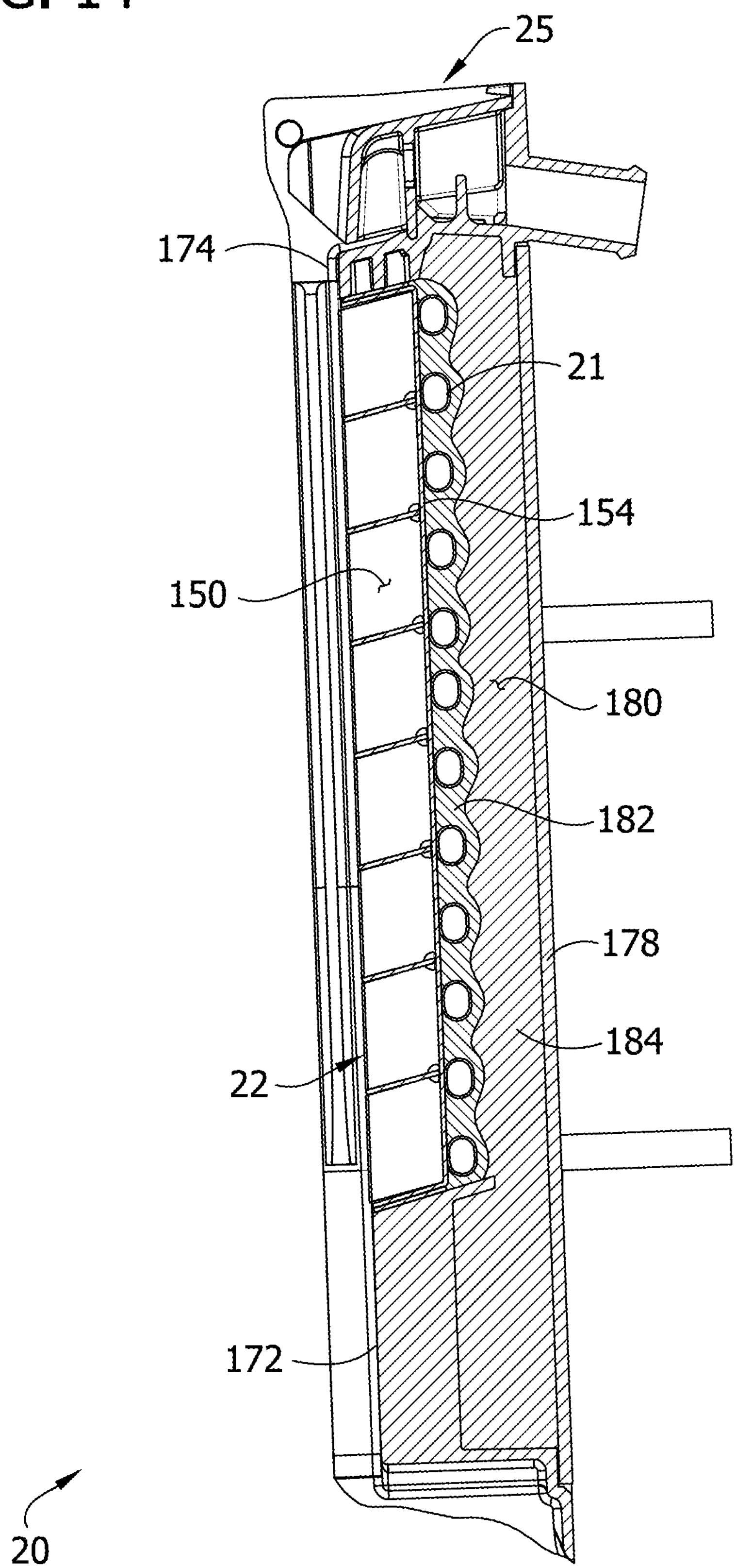


FIG. 15

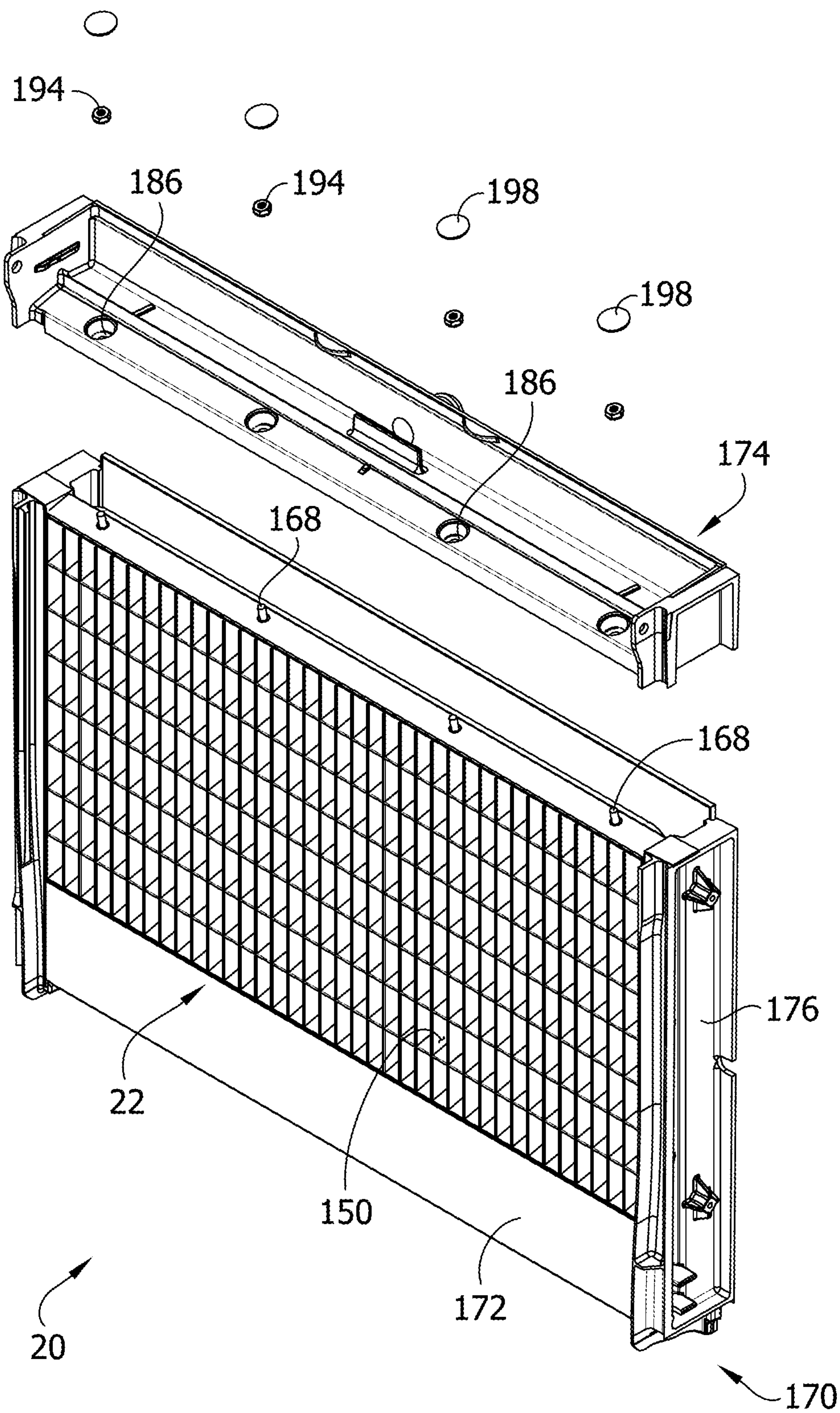


FIG. 16

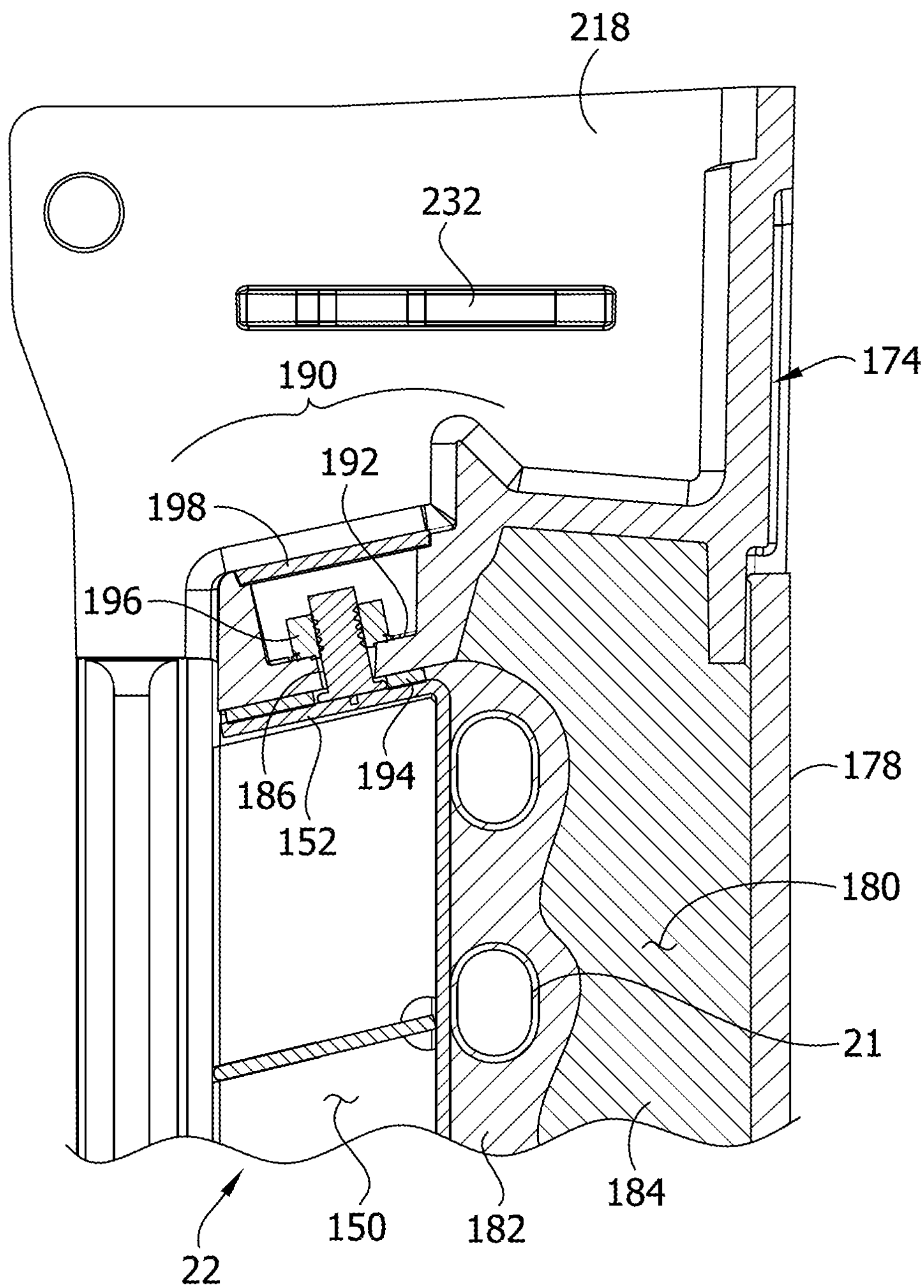
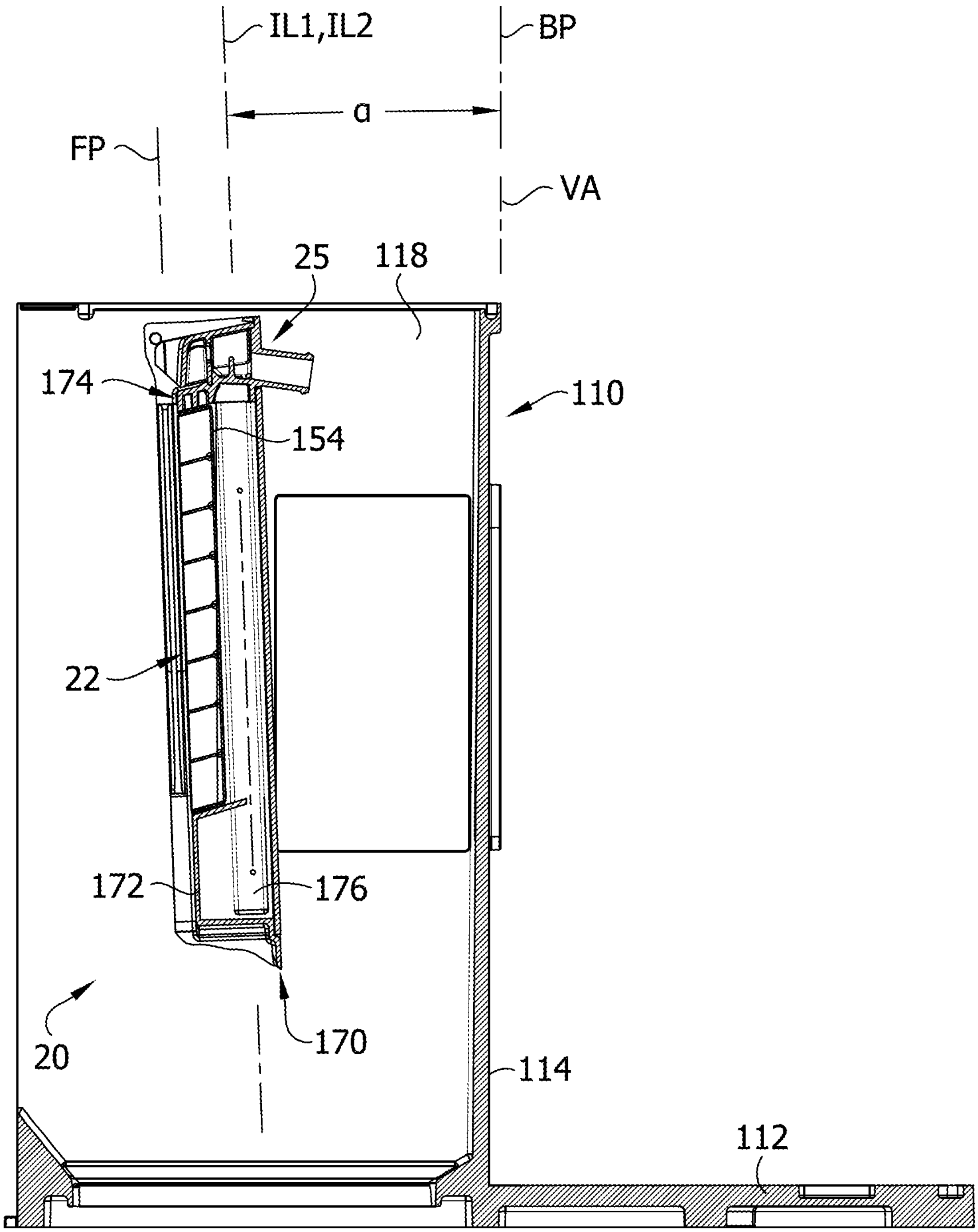


FIG. 17



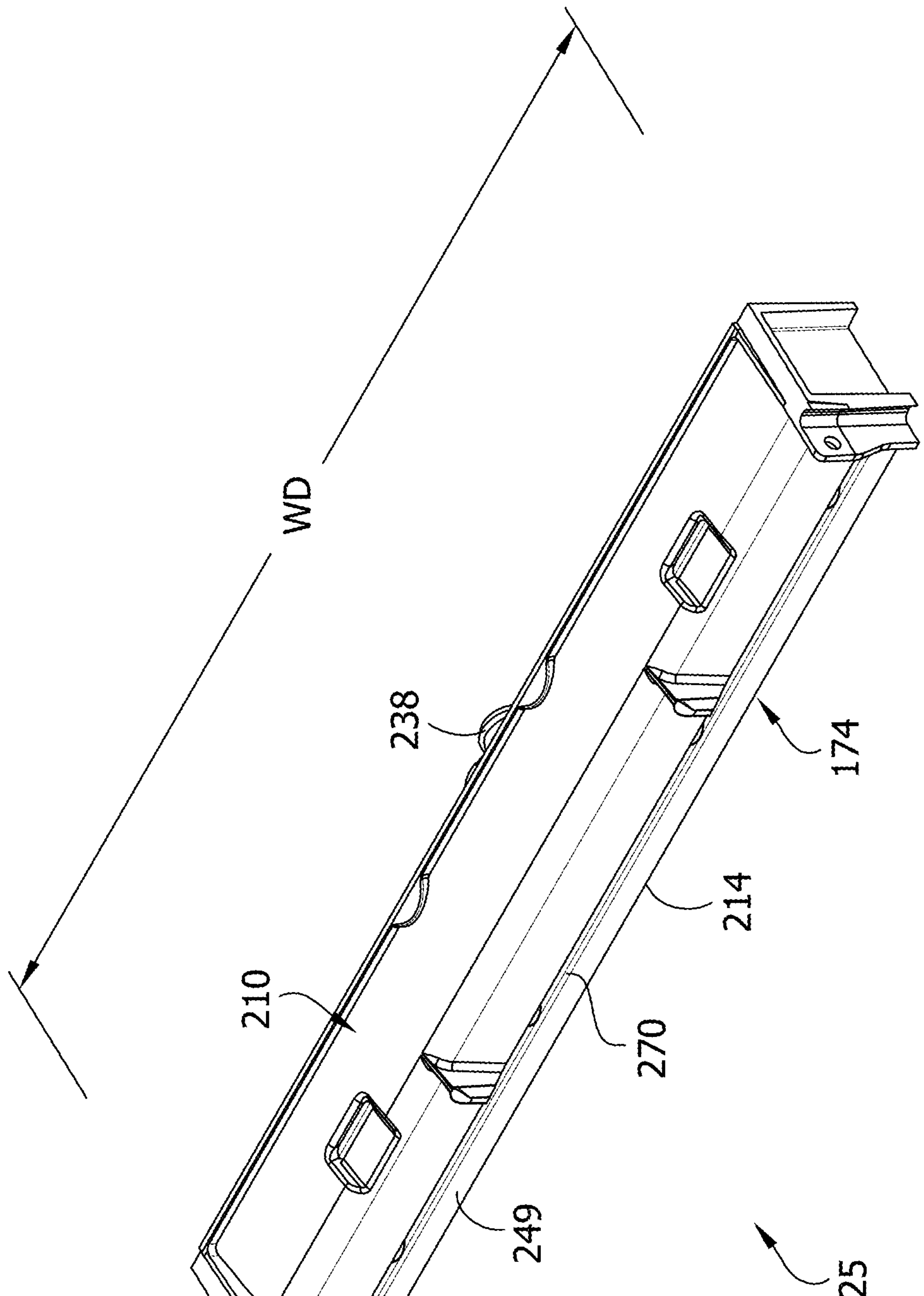


FIG. 18

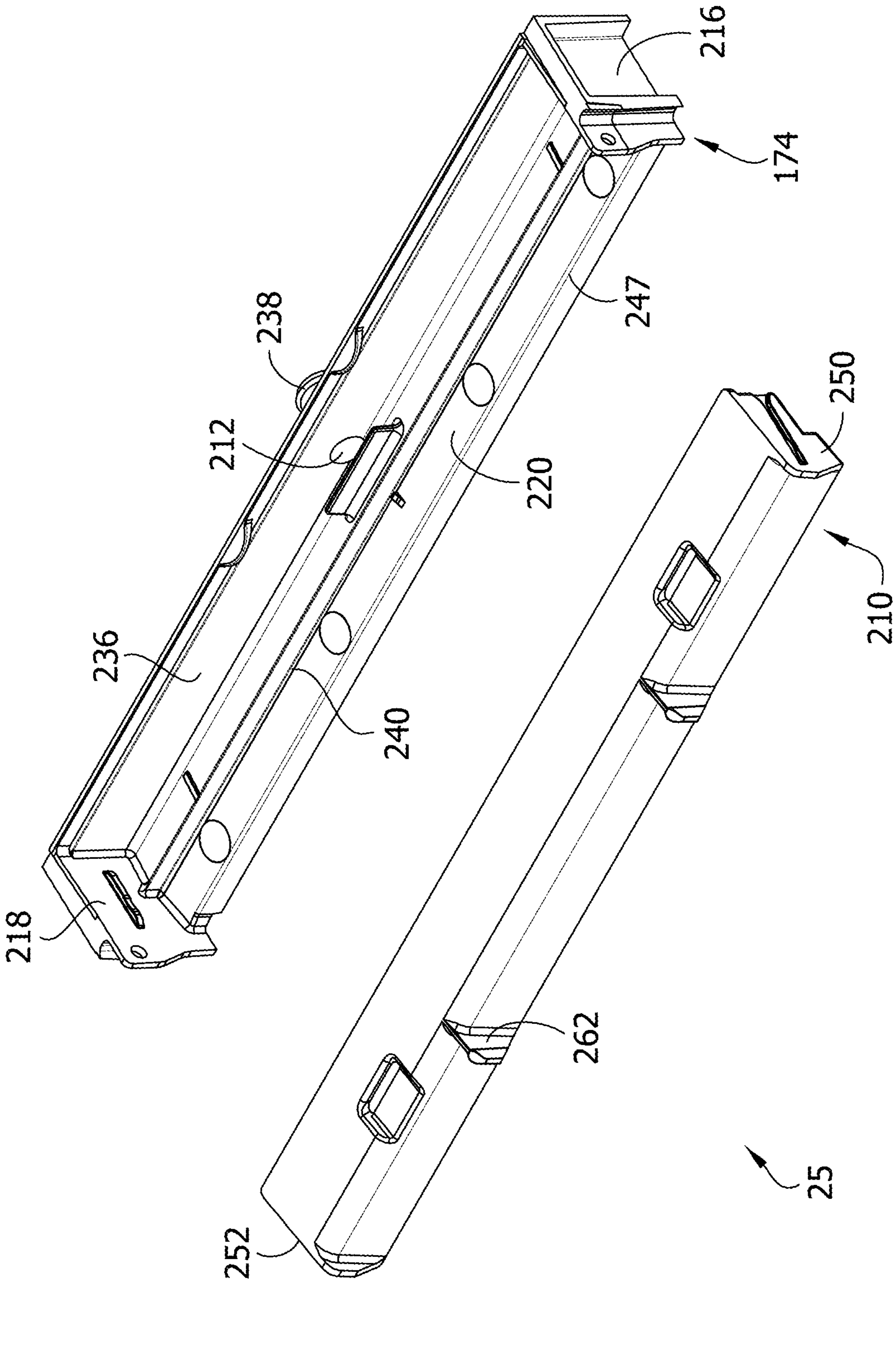


FIG. 19

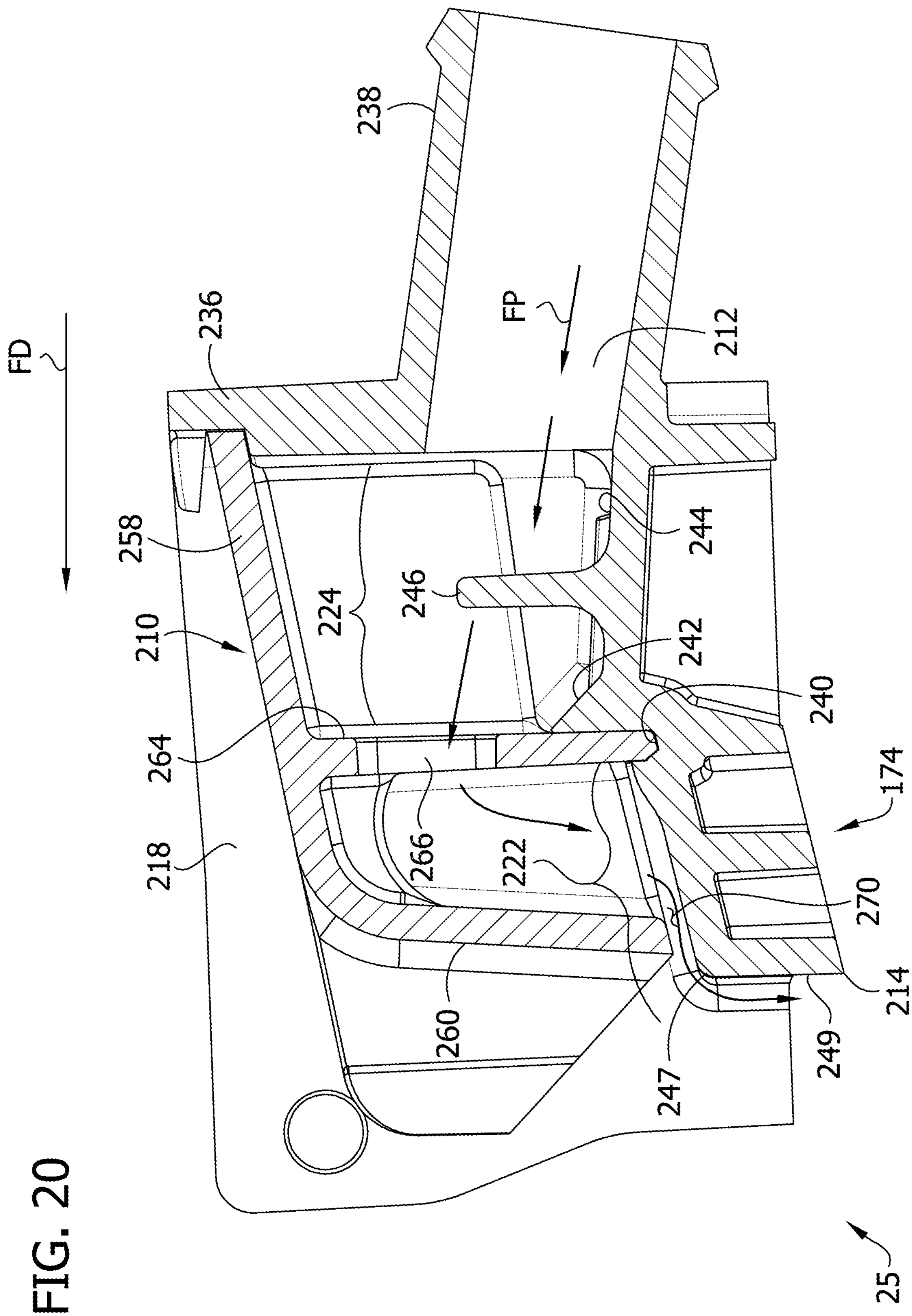

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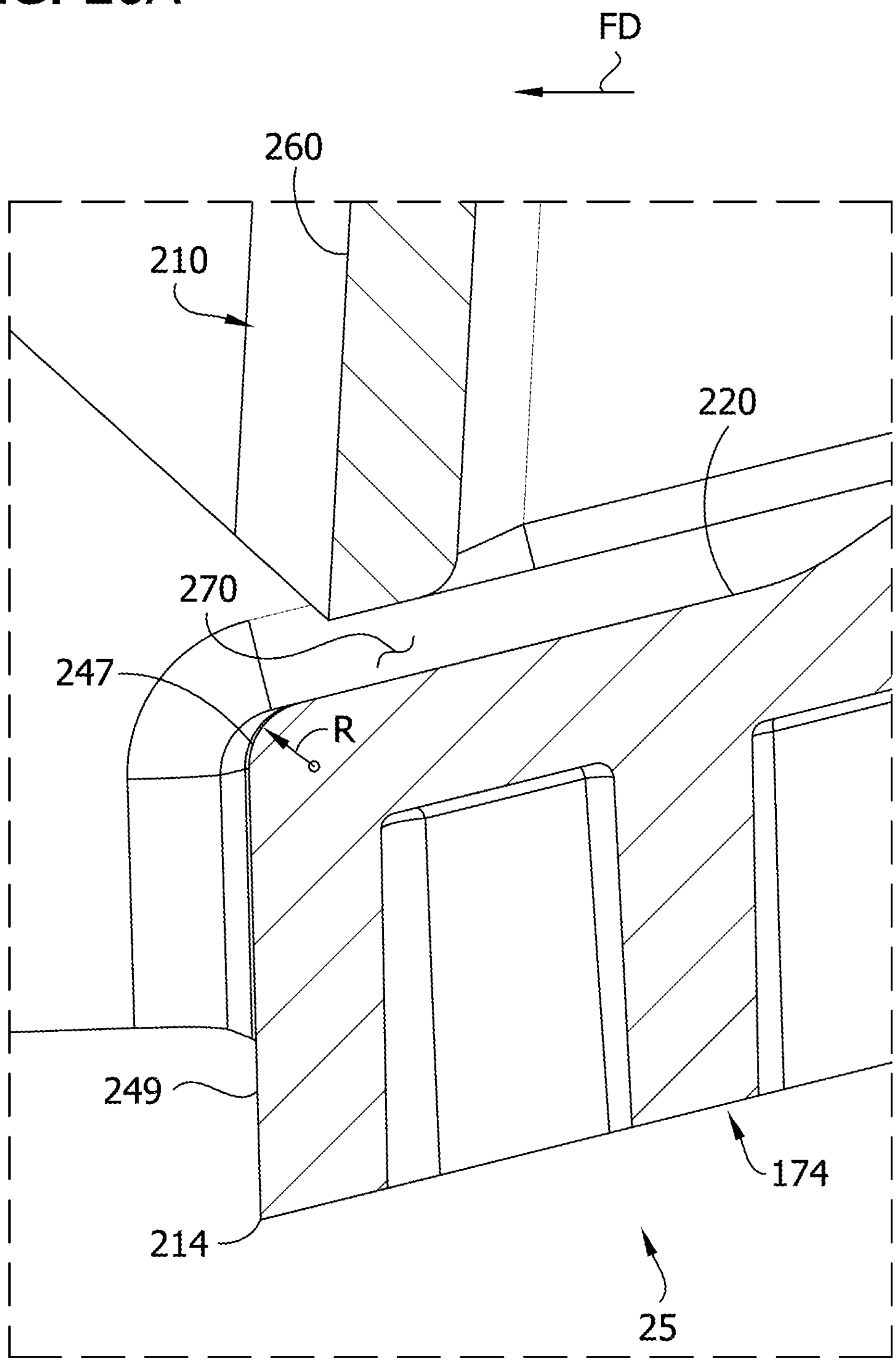
FIG. 20

FIG. 20A



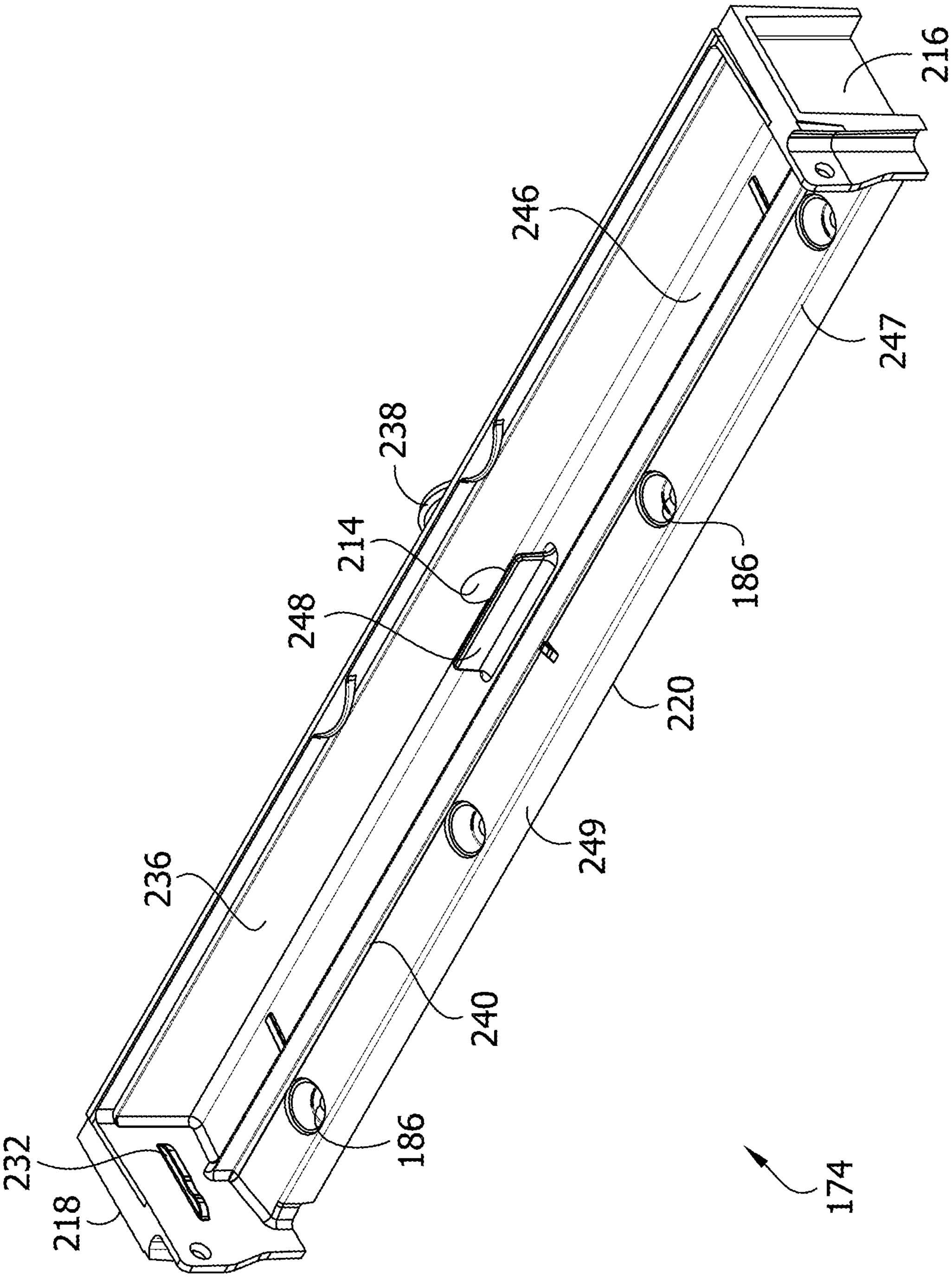


FIG. 21

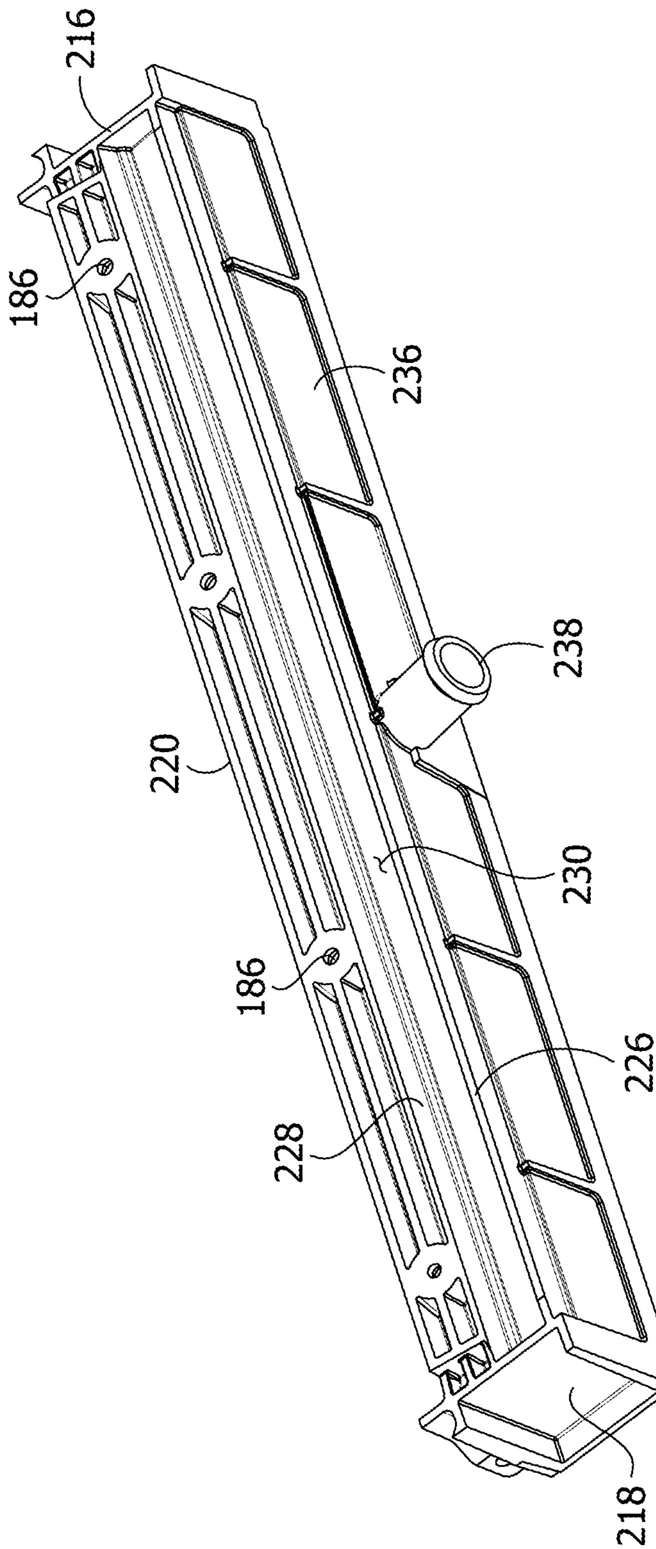
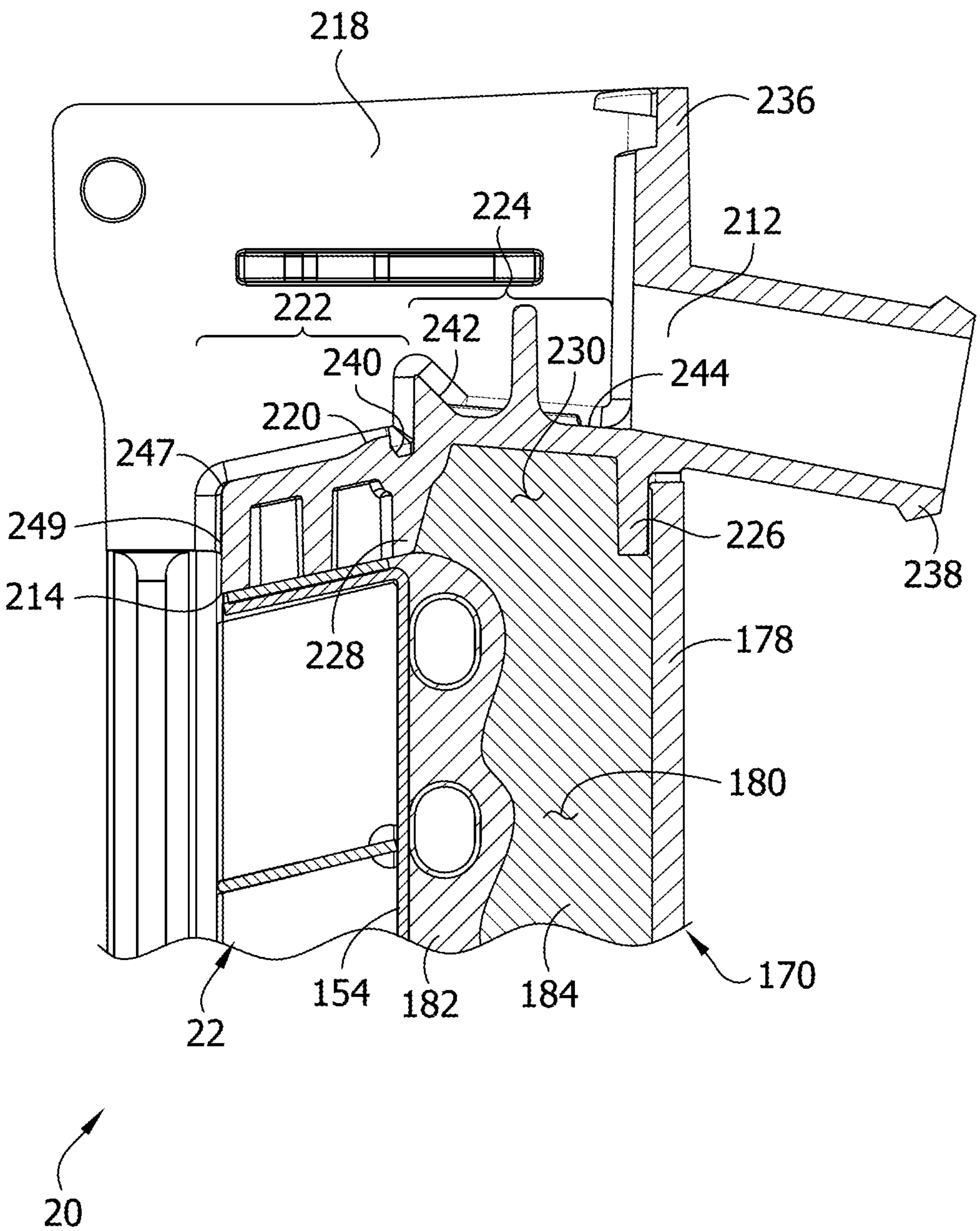


FIG. 22

FIG. 23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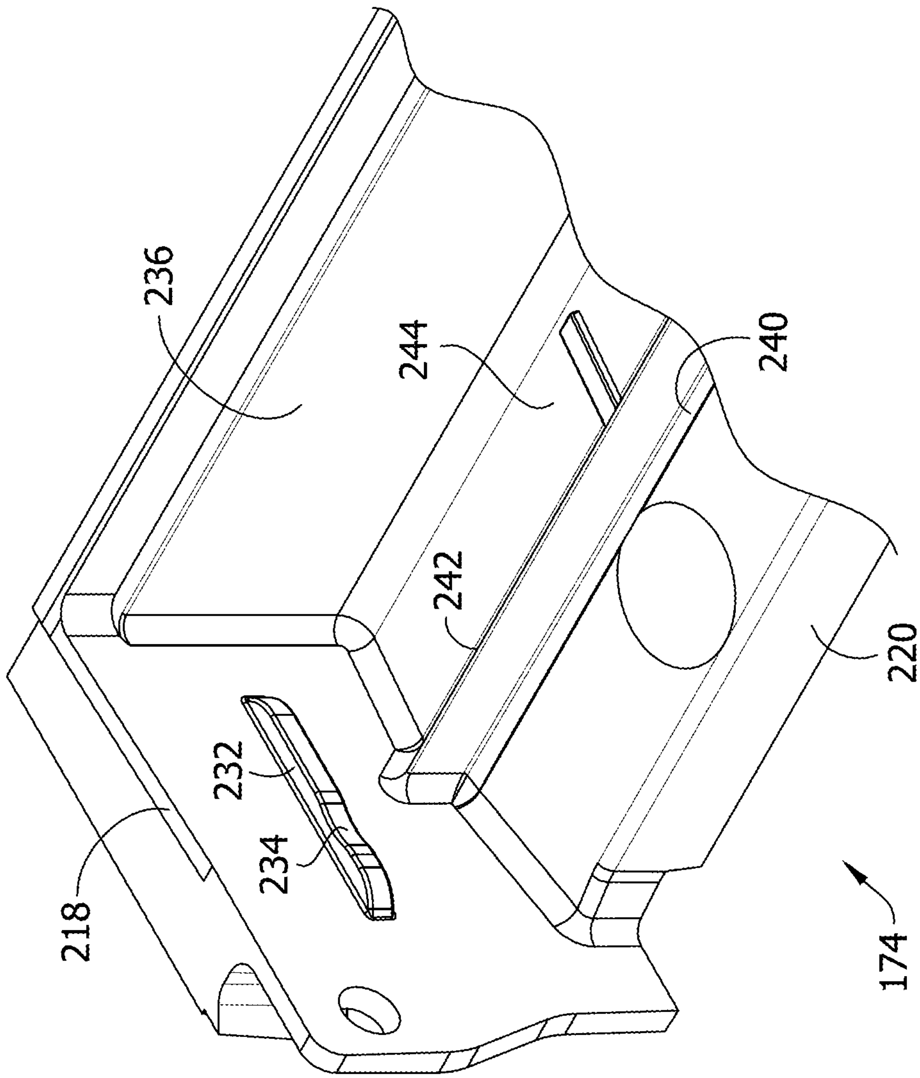

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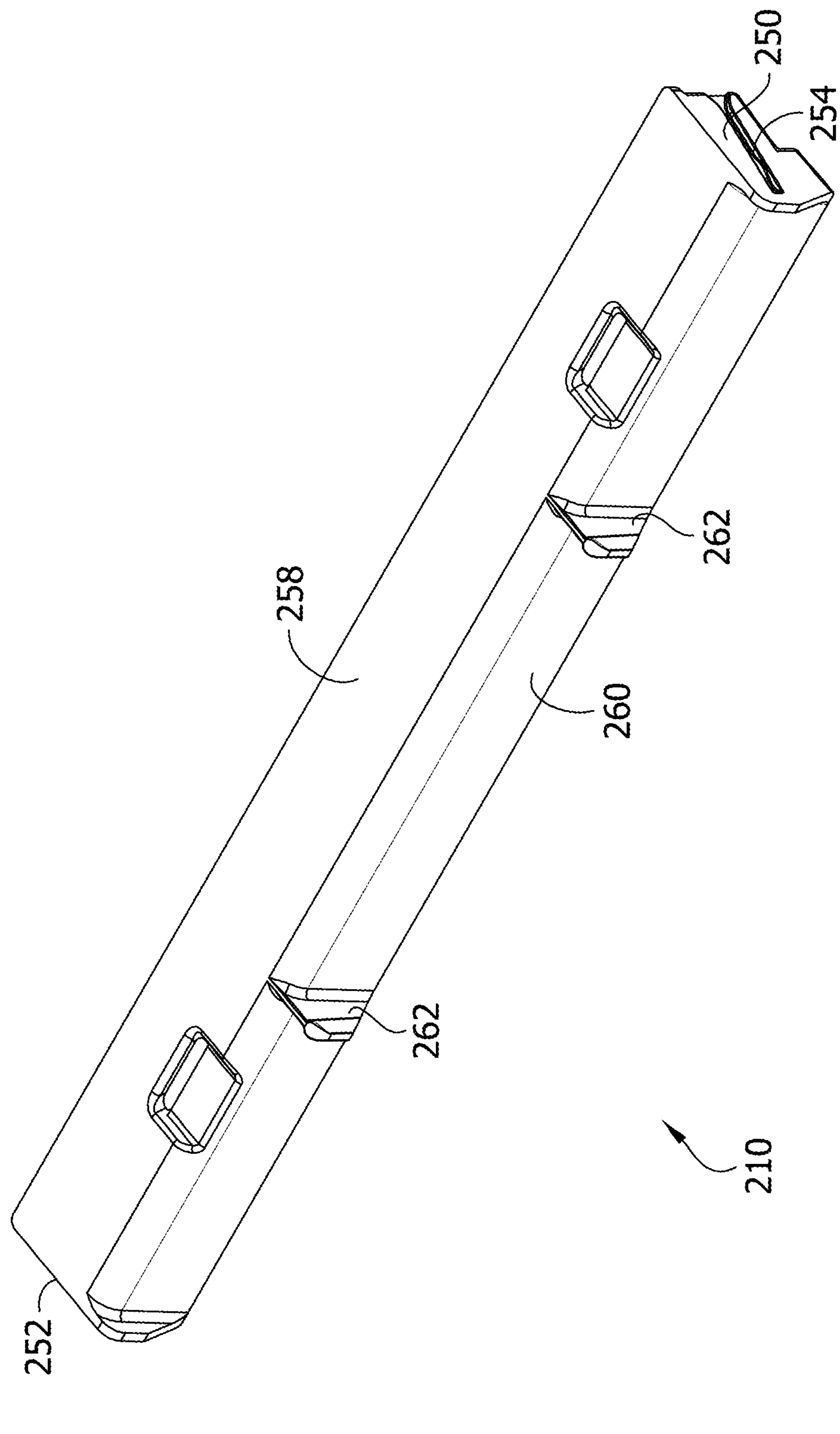


FIG. 25

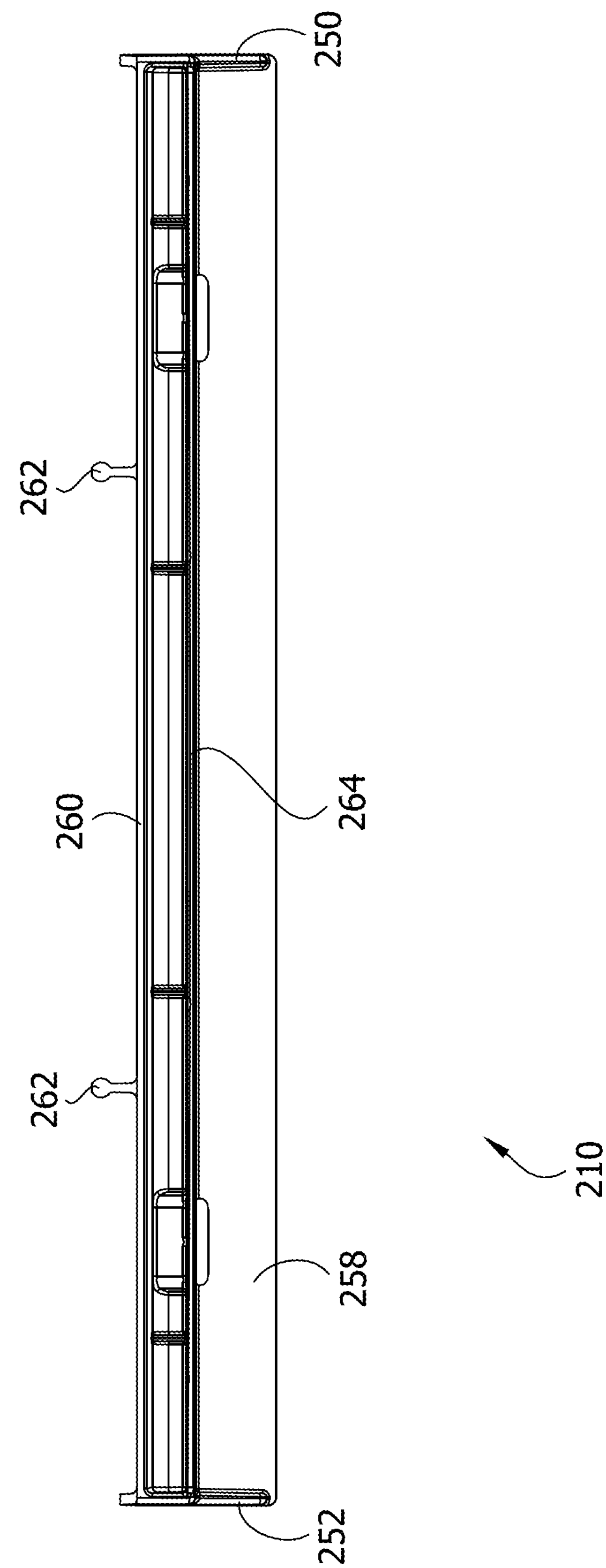


FIG. 26

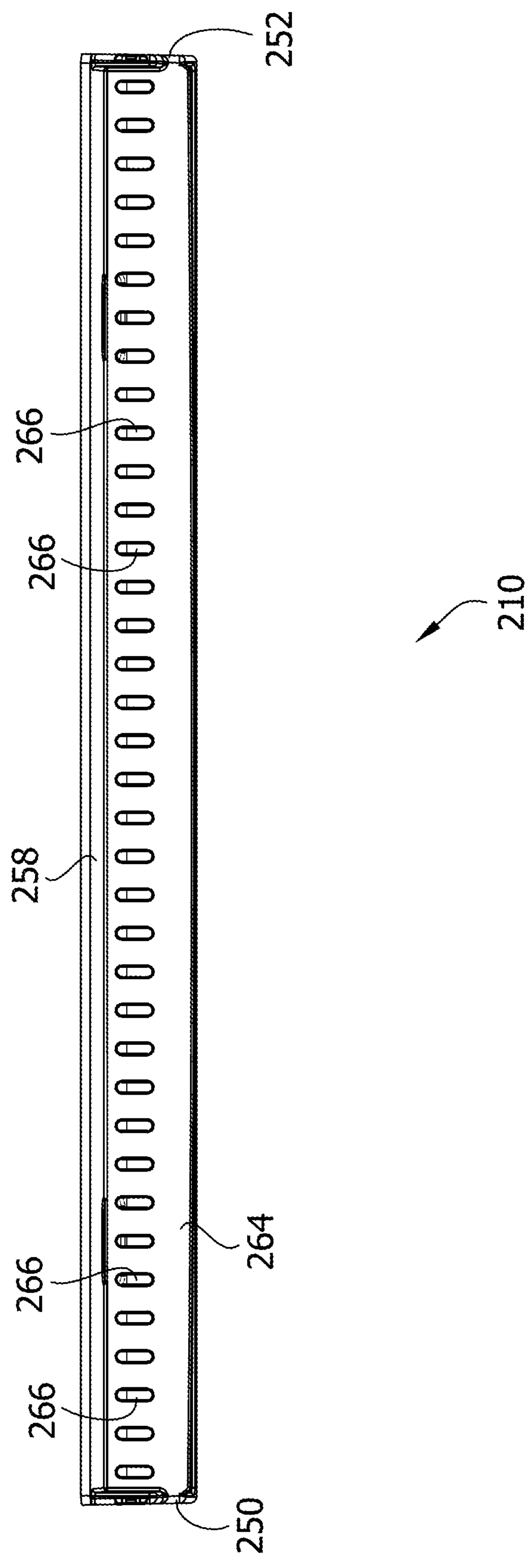
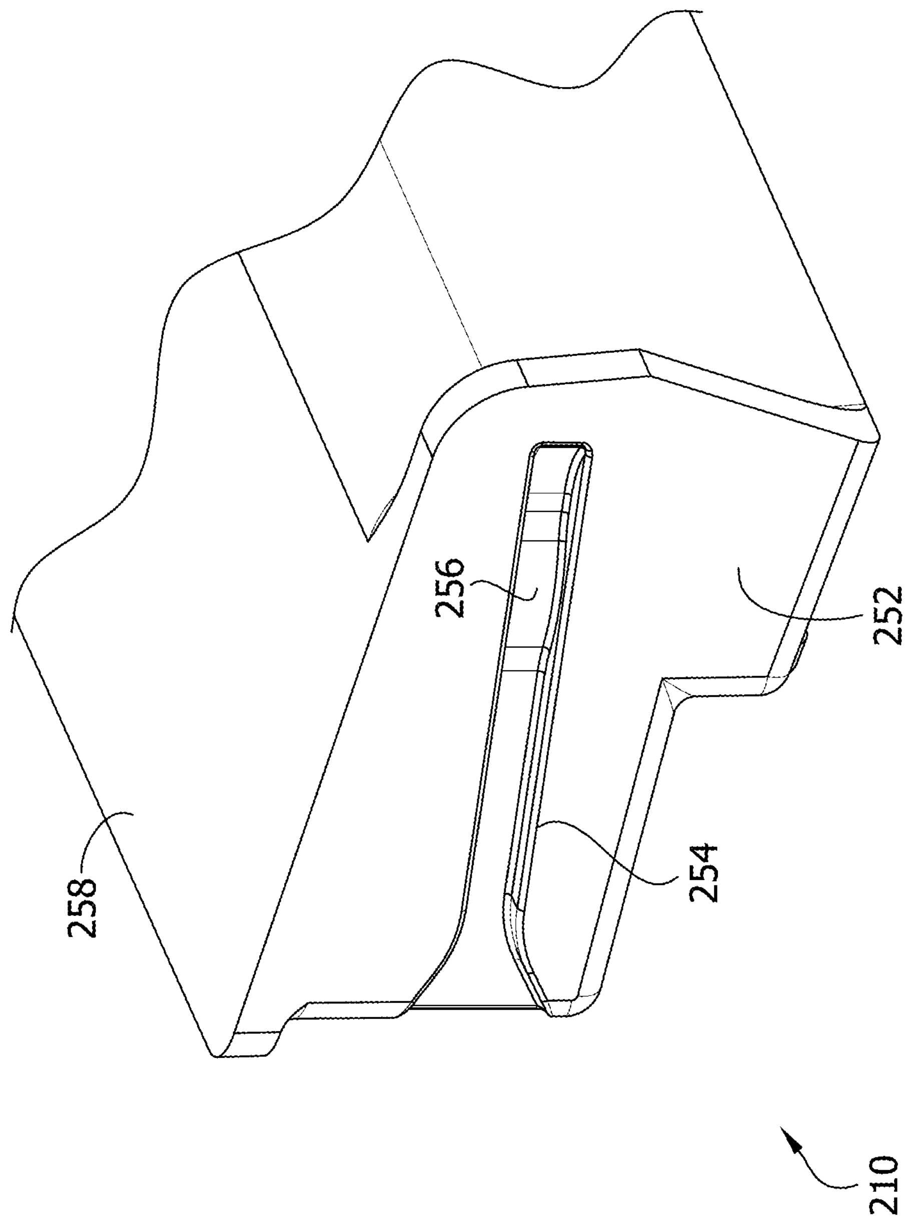


FIG. 27



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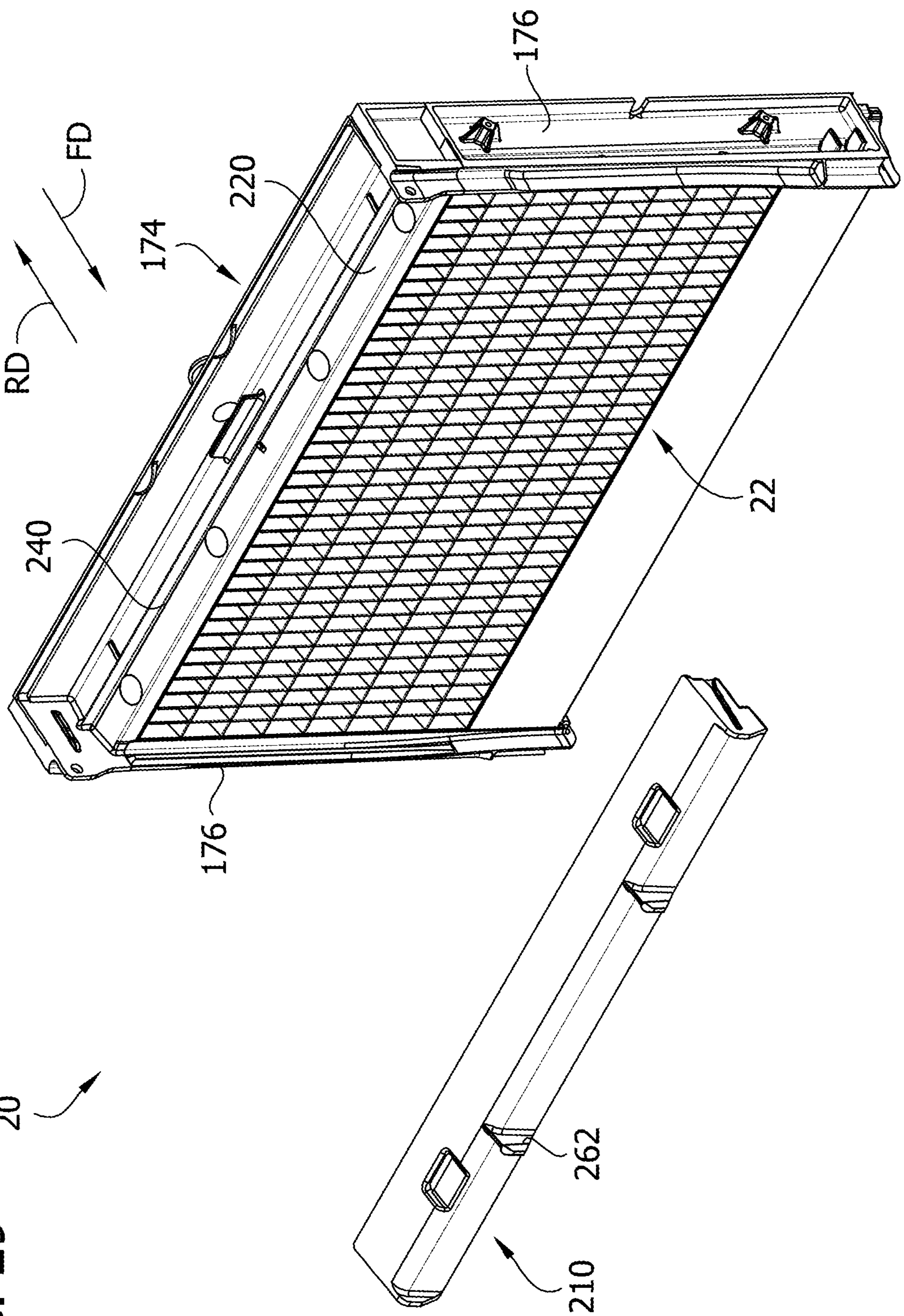

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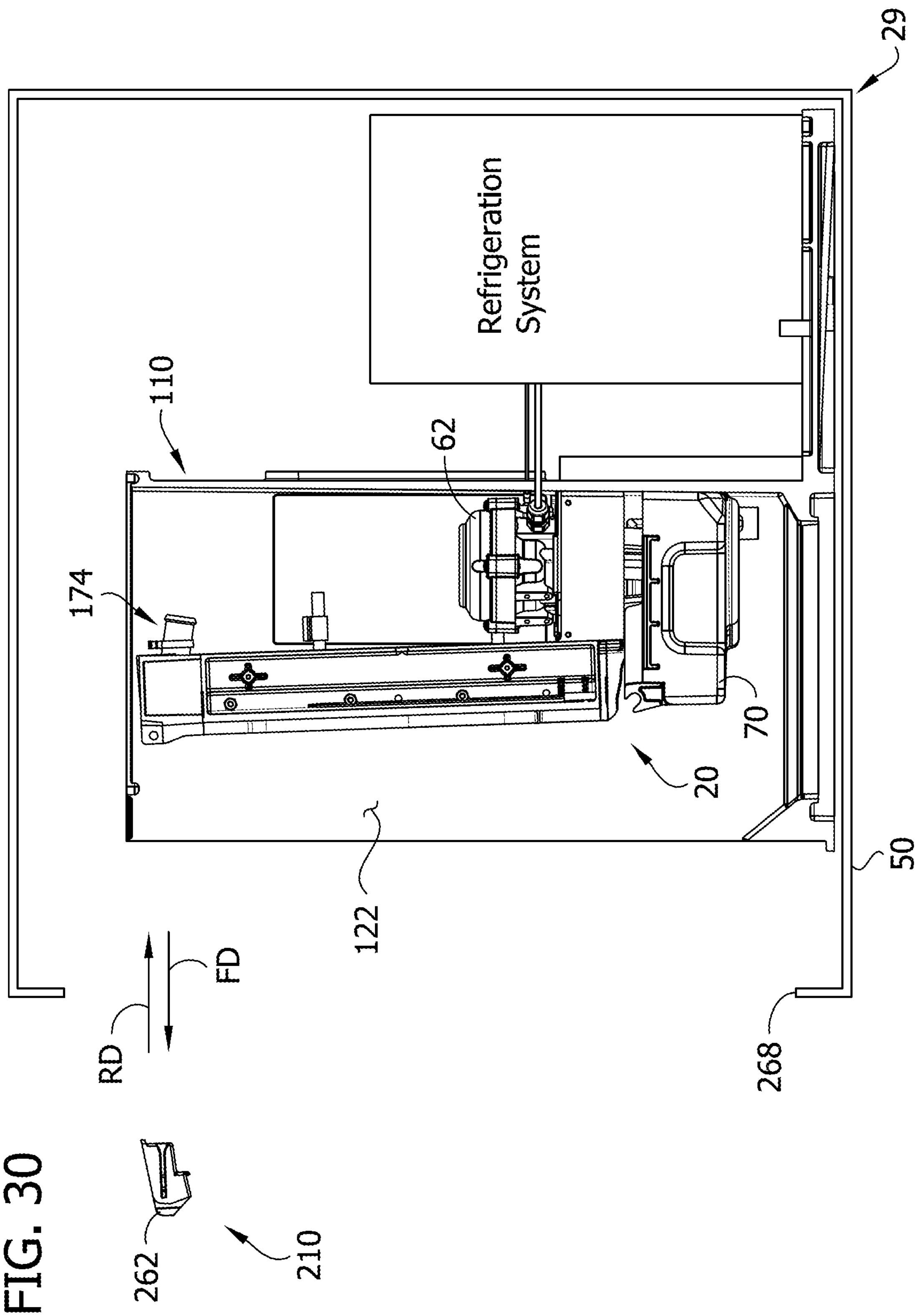
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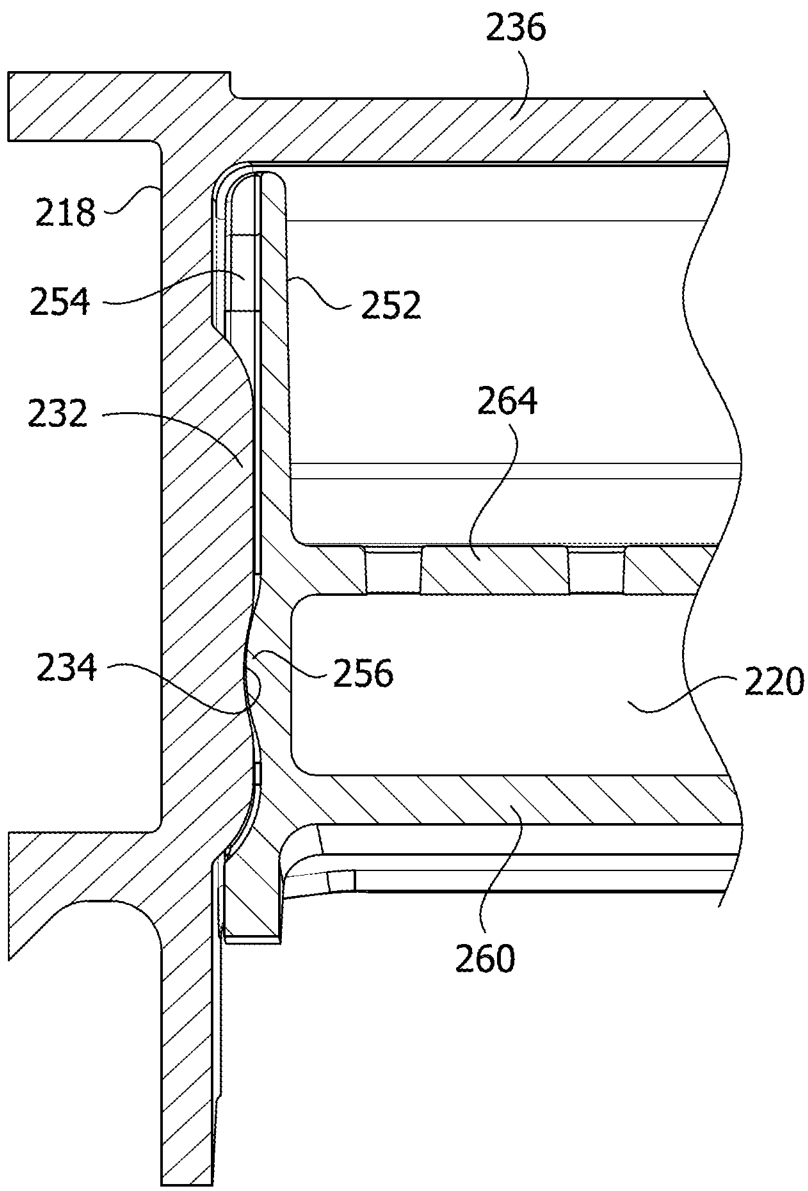
FIG. 30

FIG. 31



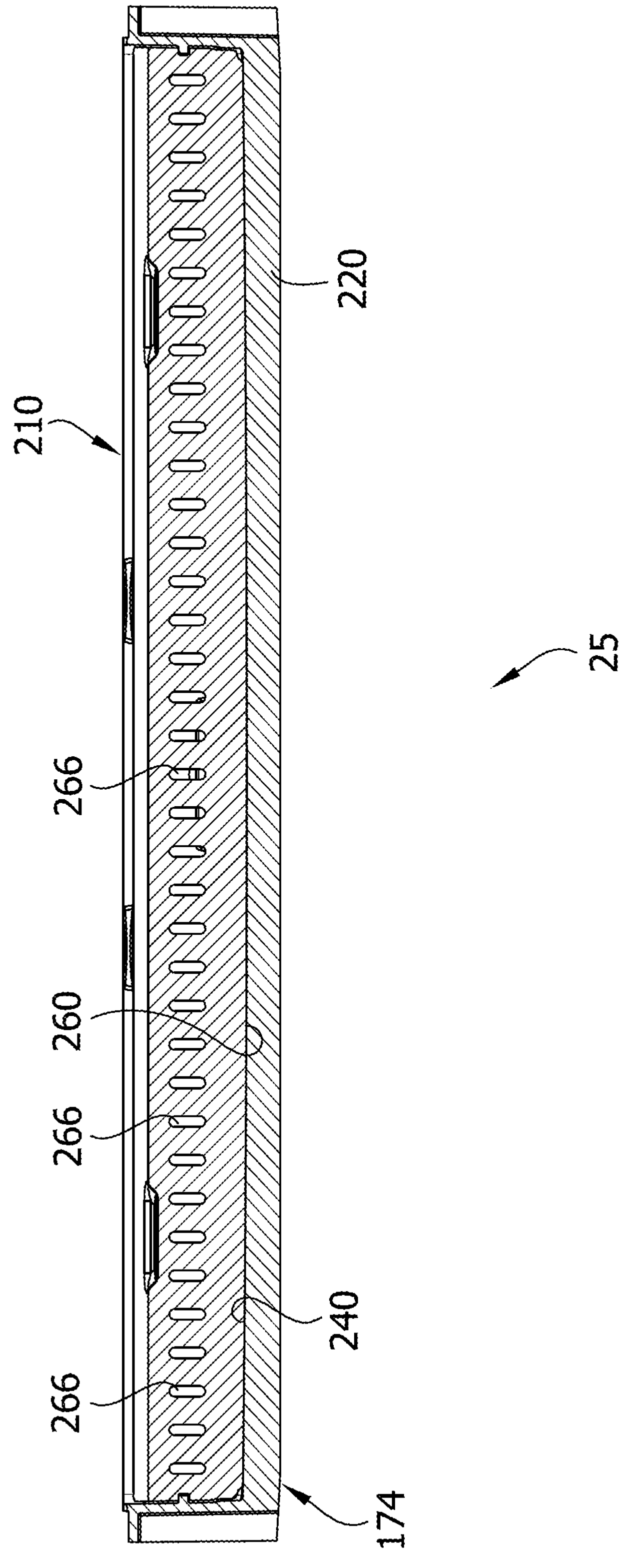


FIG. 32

FIG. 33

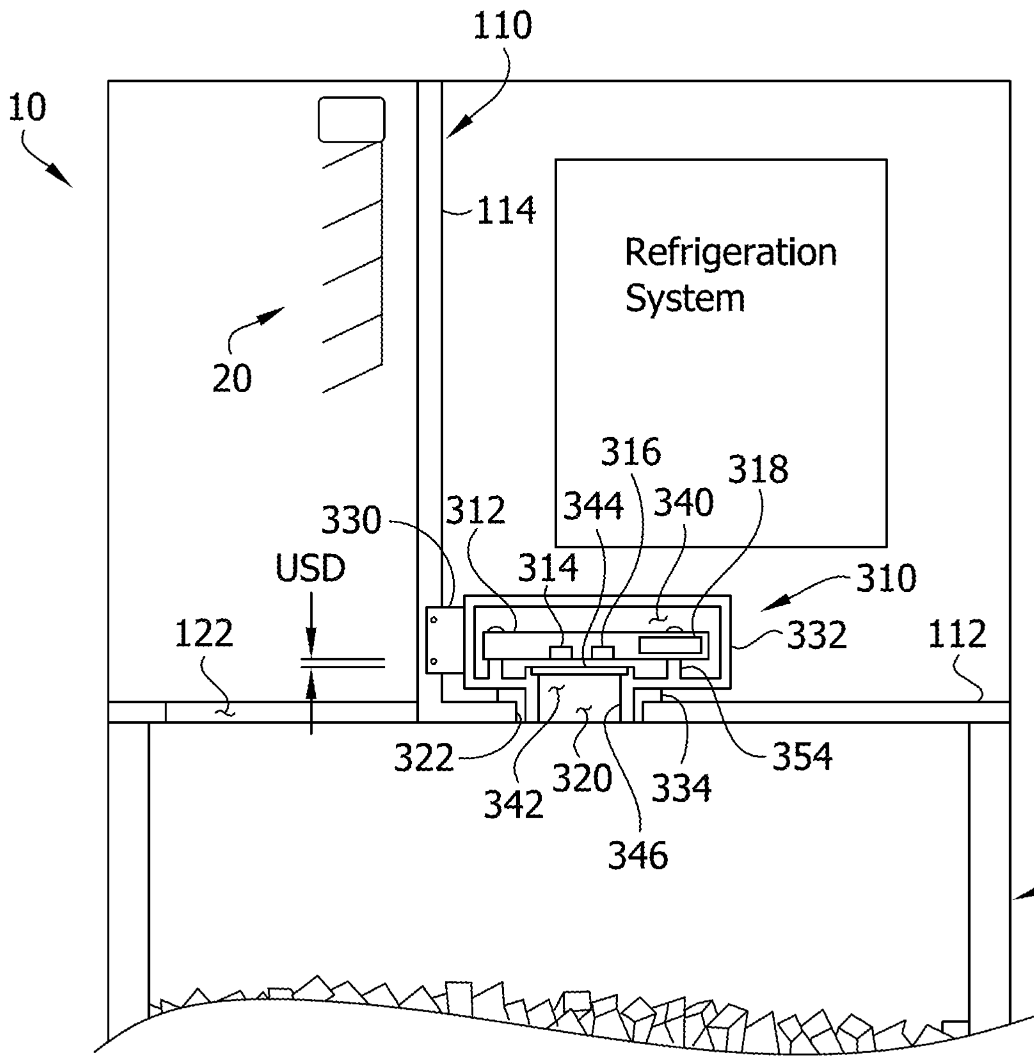

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FIG. 34

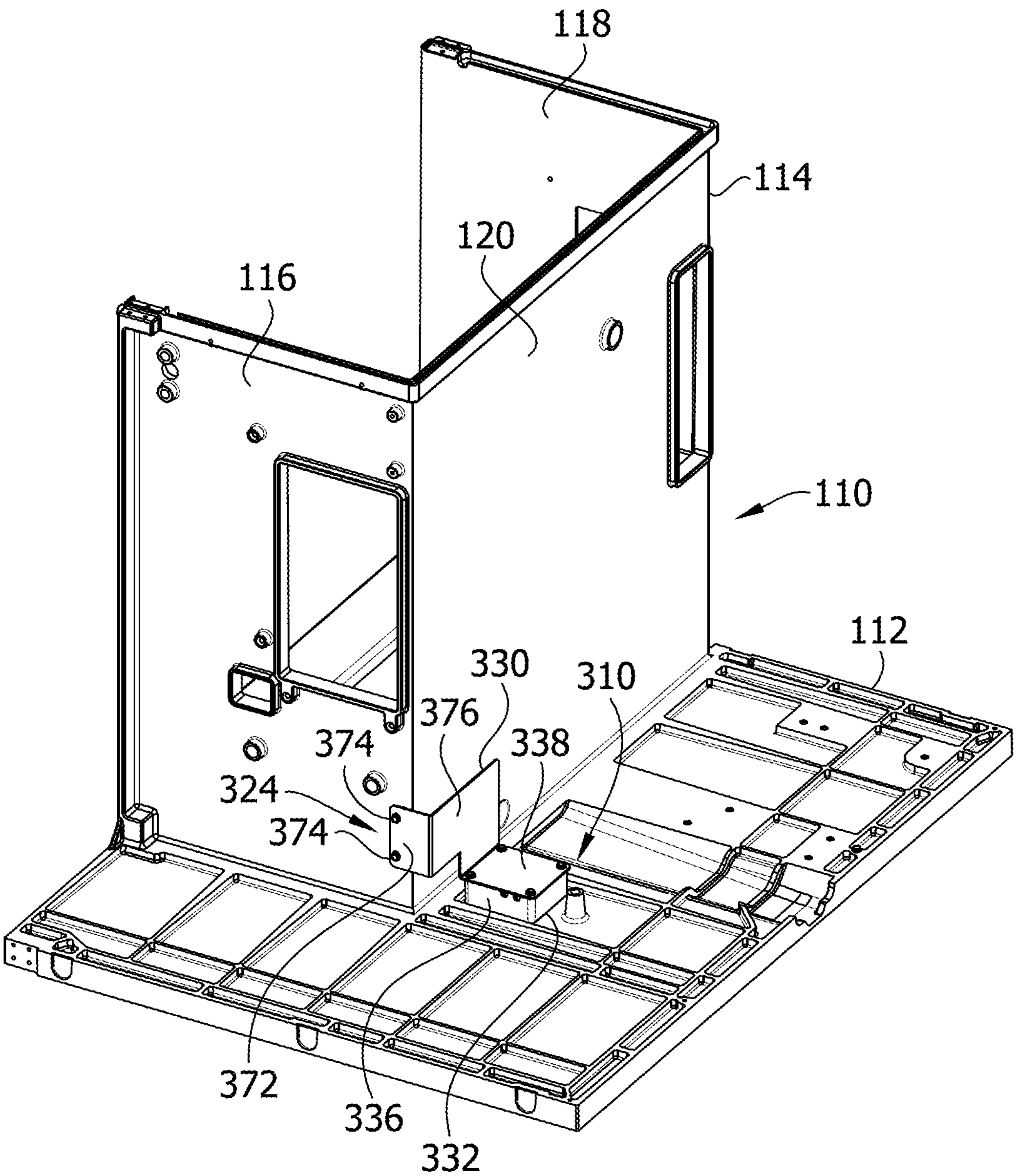

FIG. 35

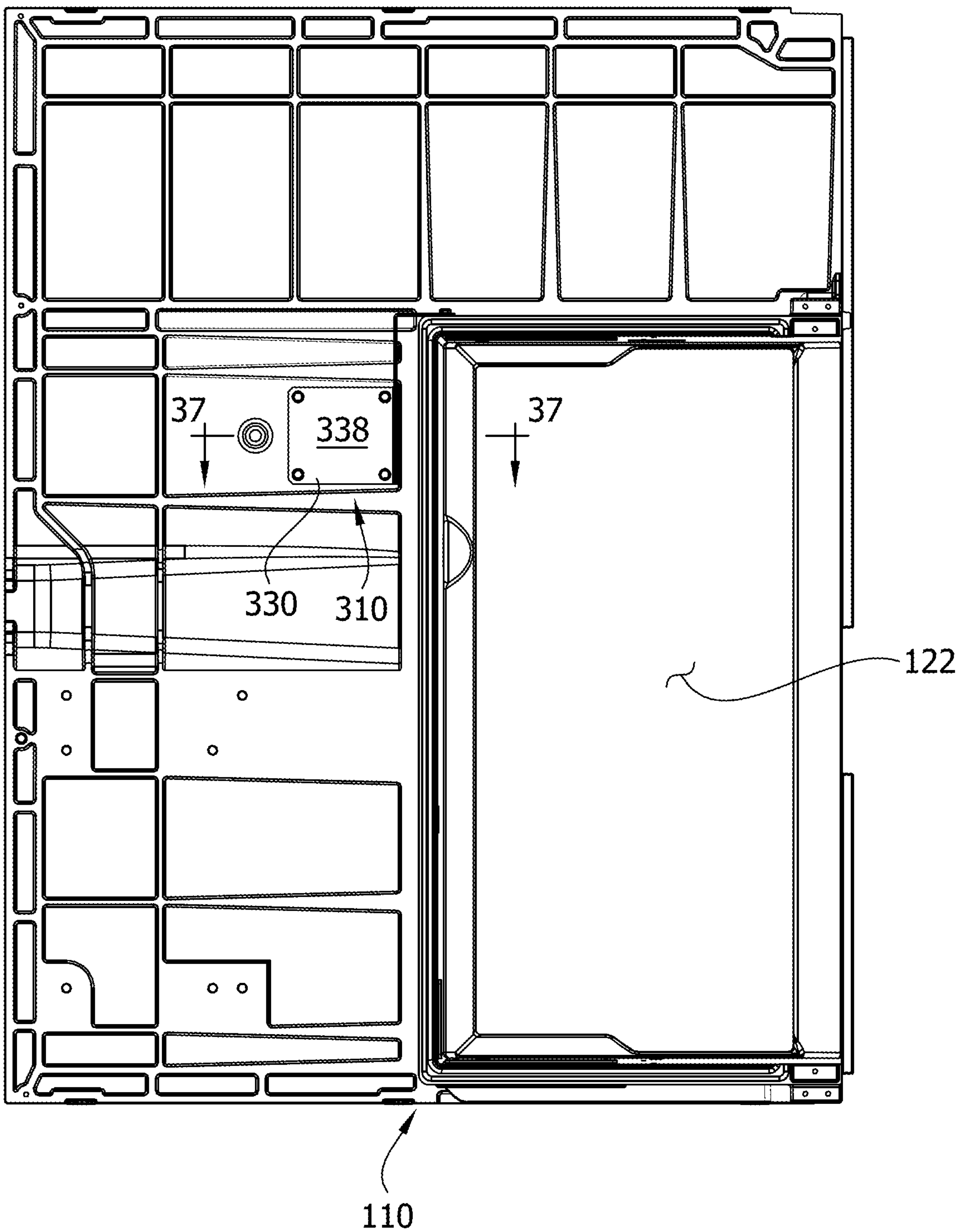

FIG. 36

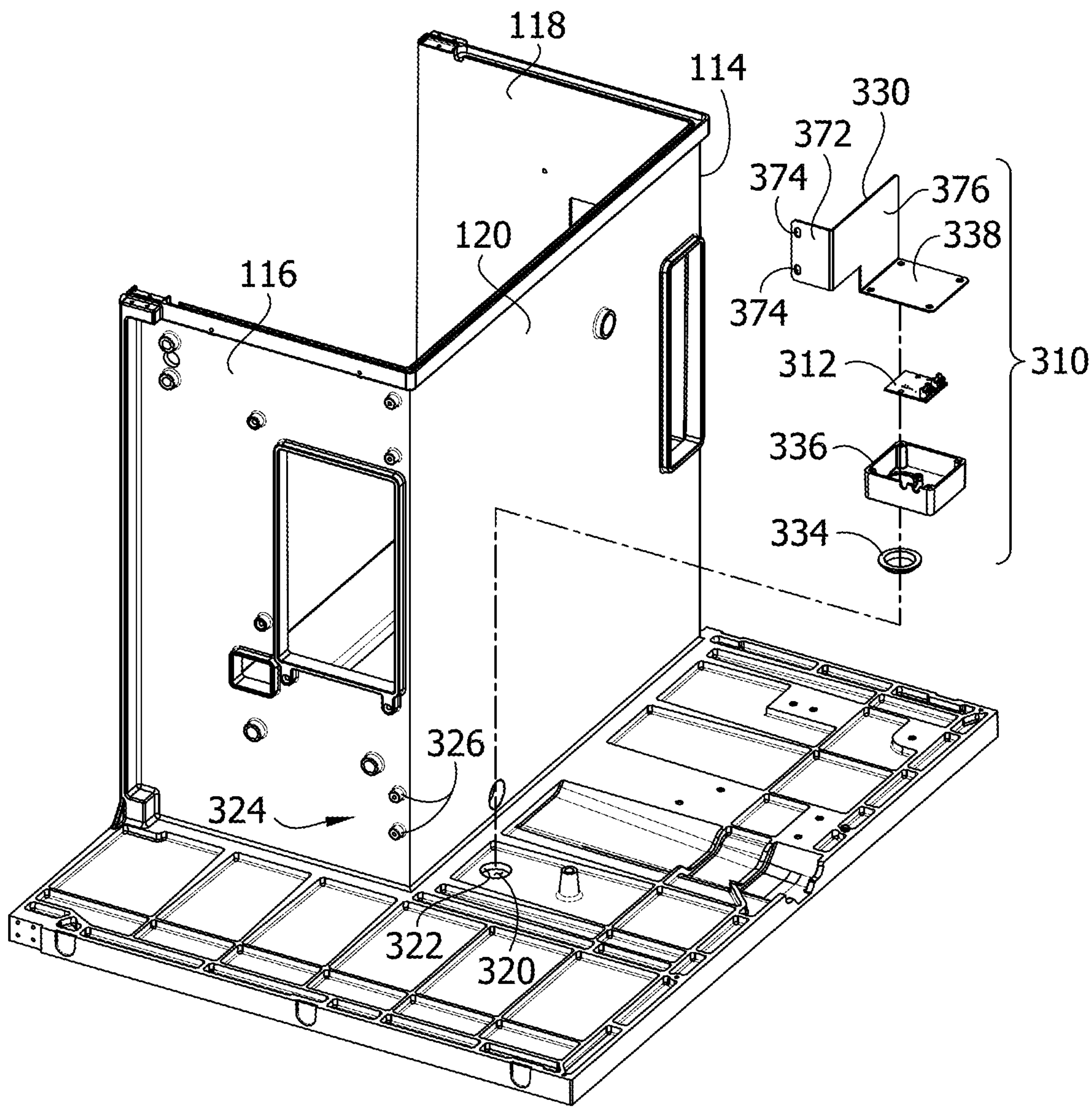
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FIG. 37

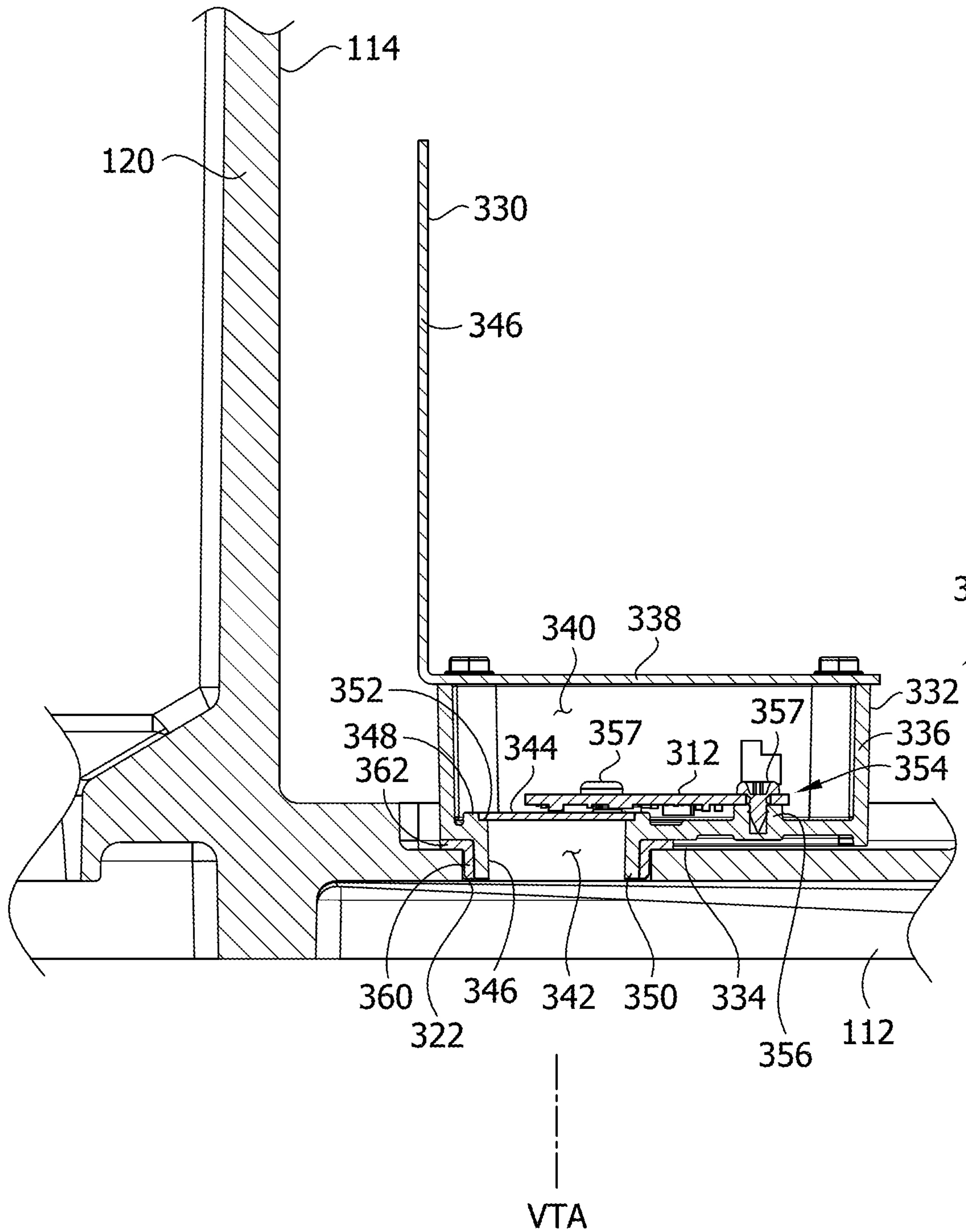

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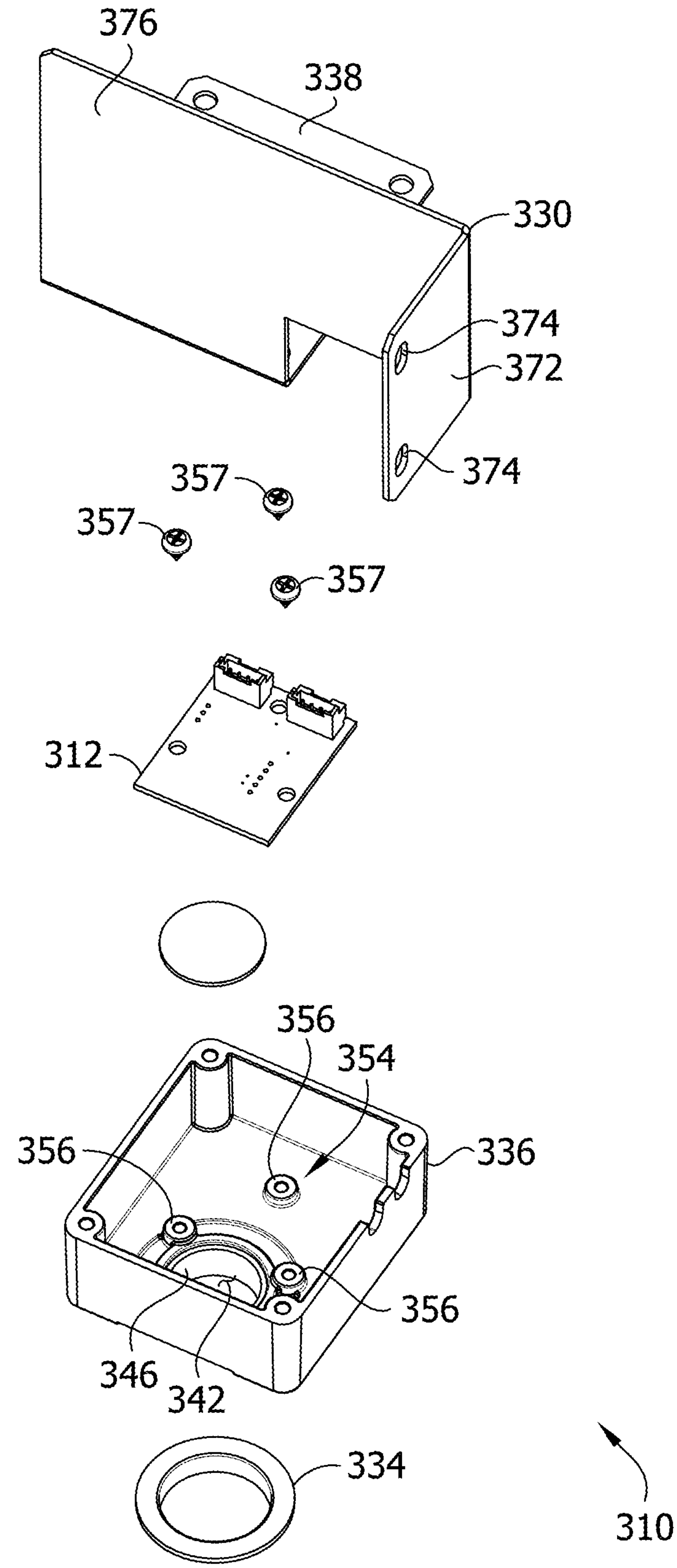
FIG. 38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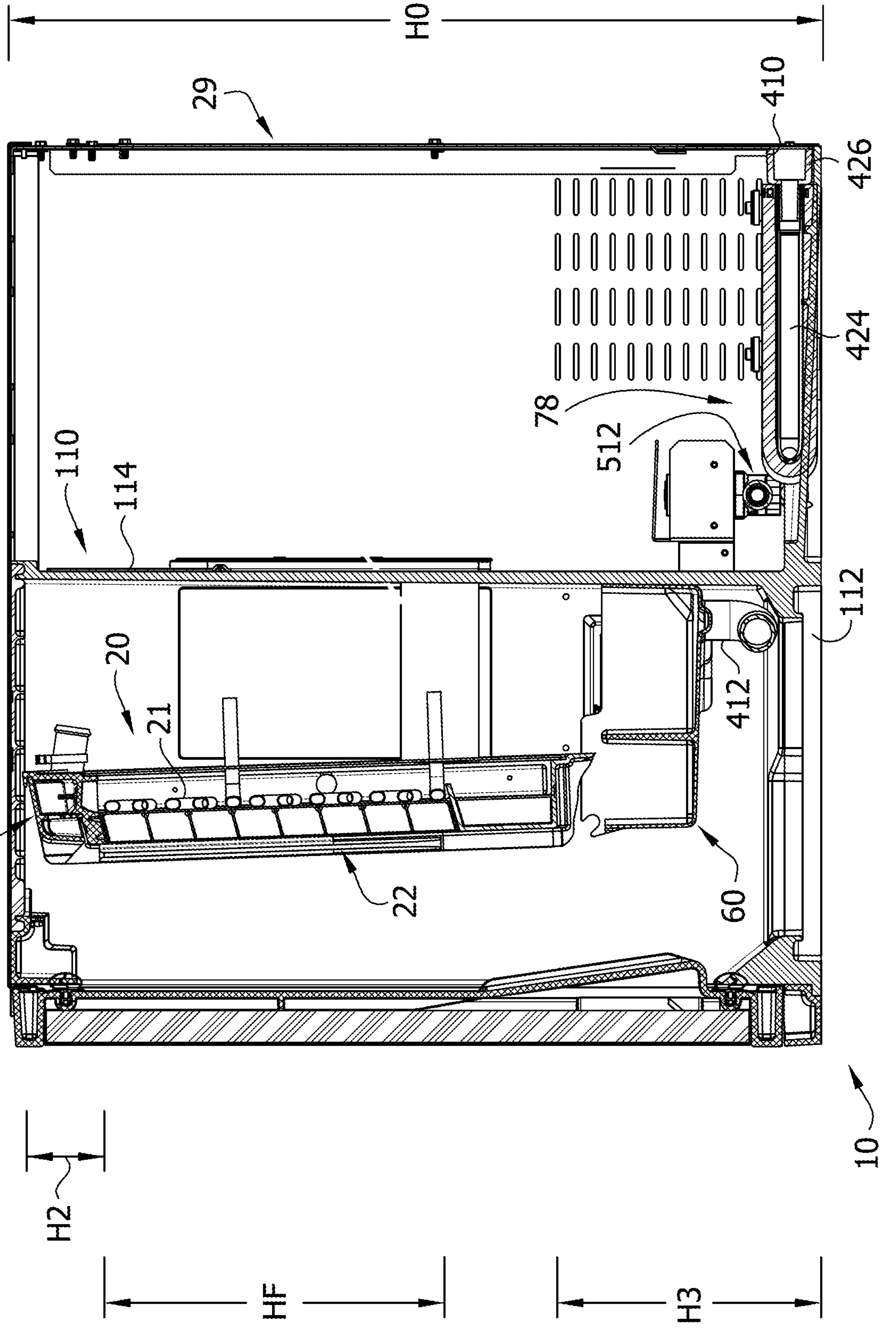

FIG. 39

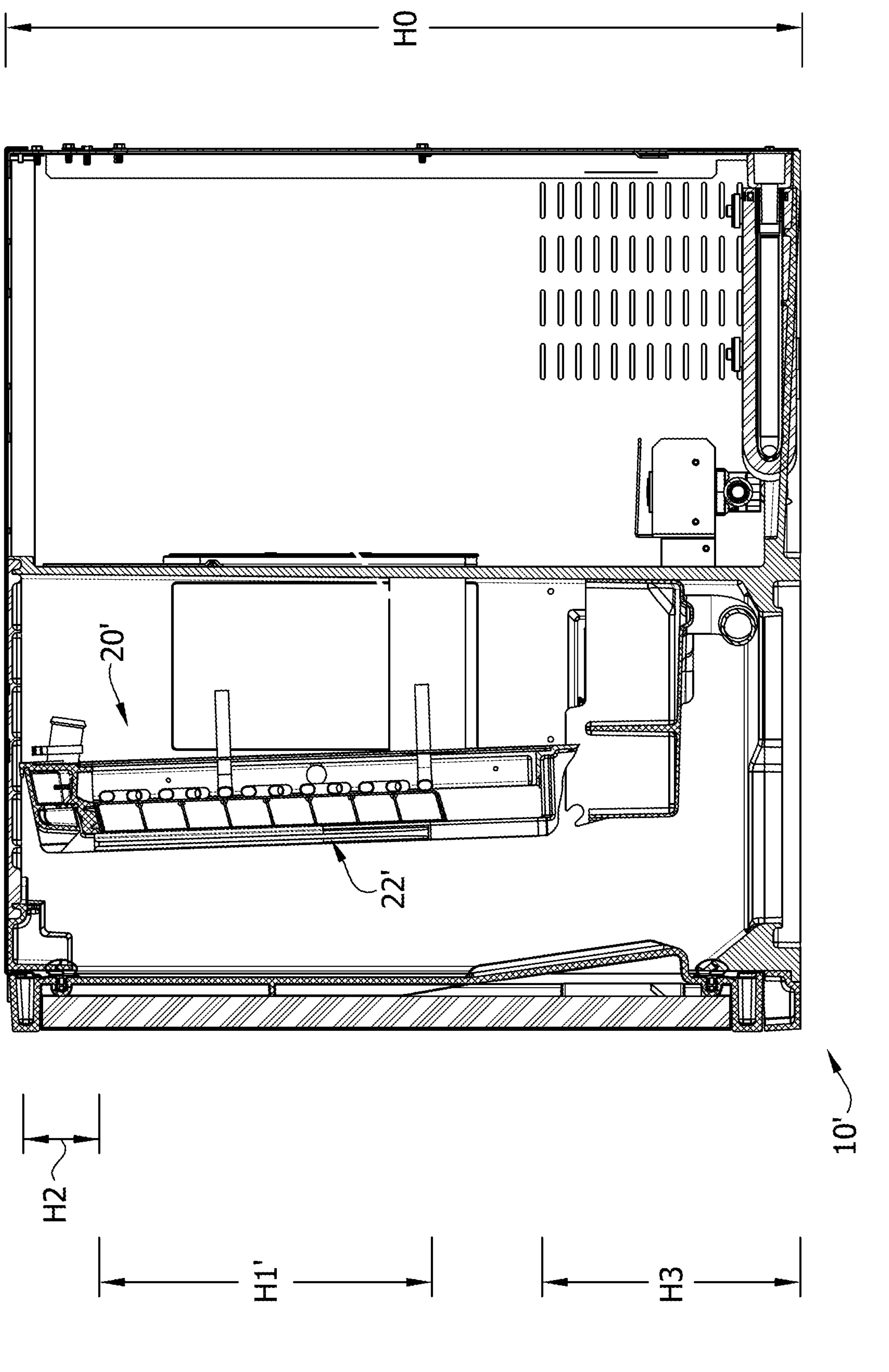

FIG. 39A

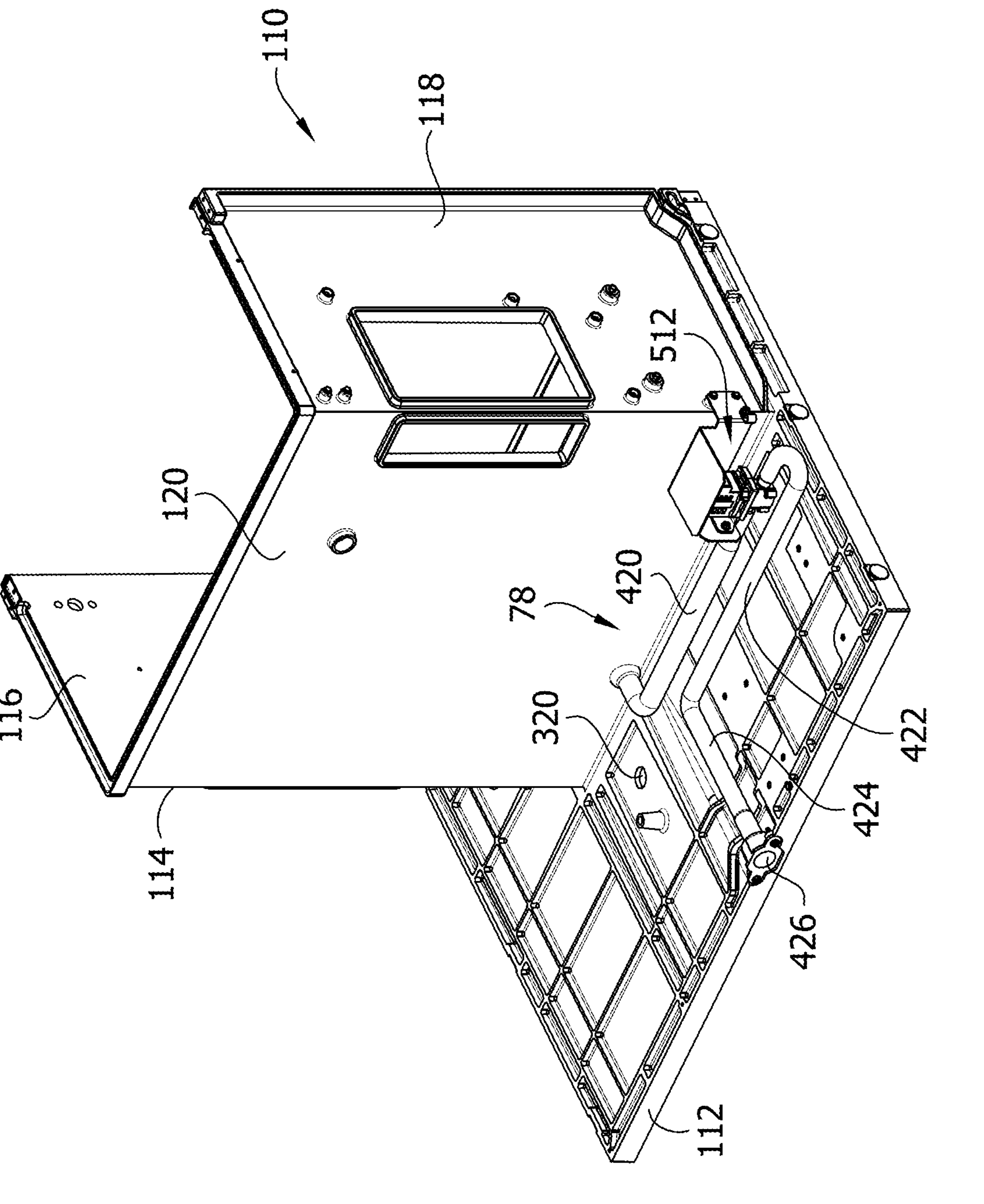

FIG. 40

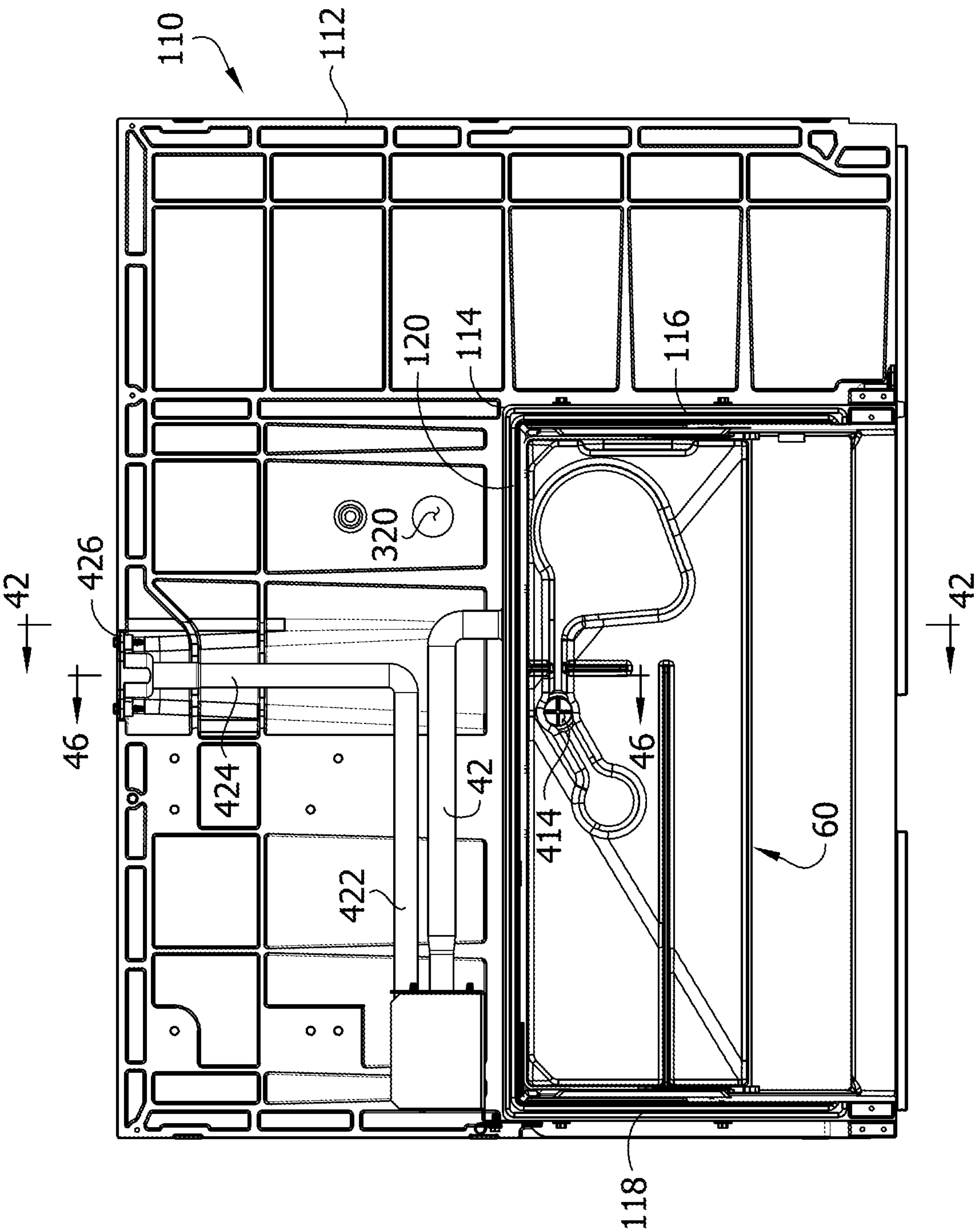

FIG. 41

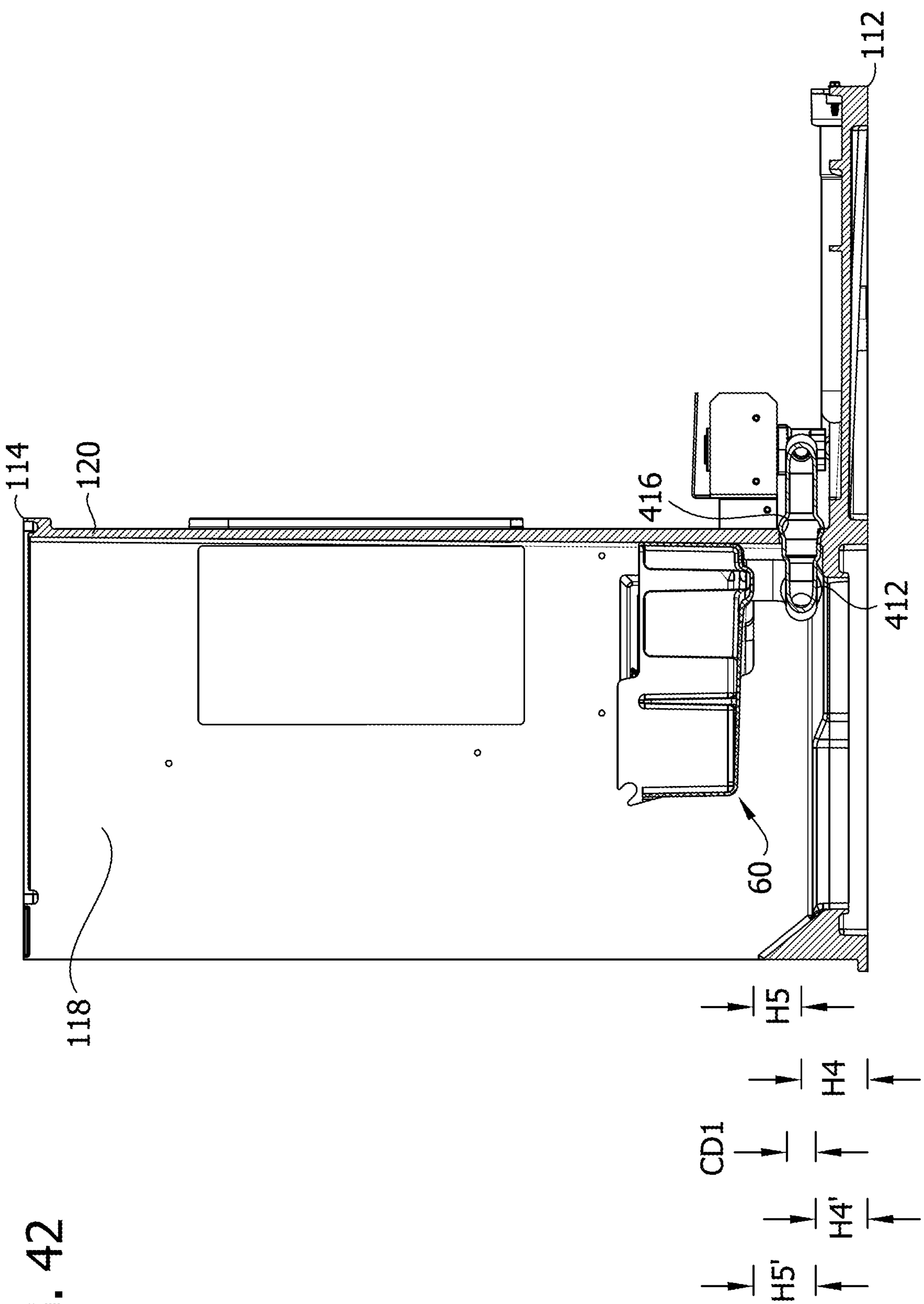

FIG. 42

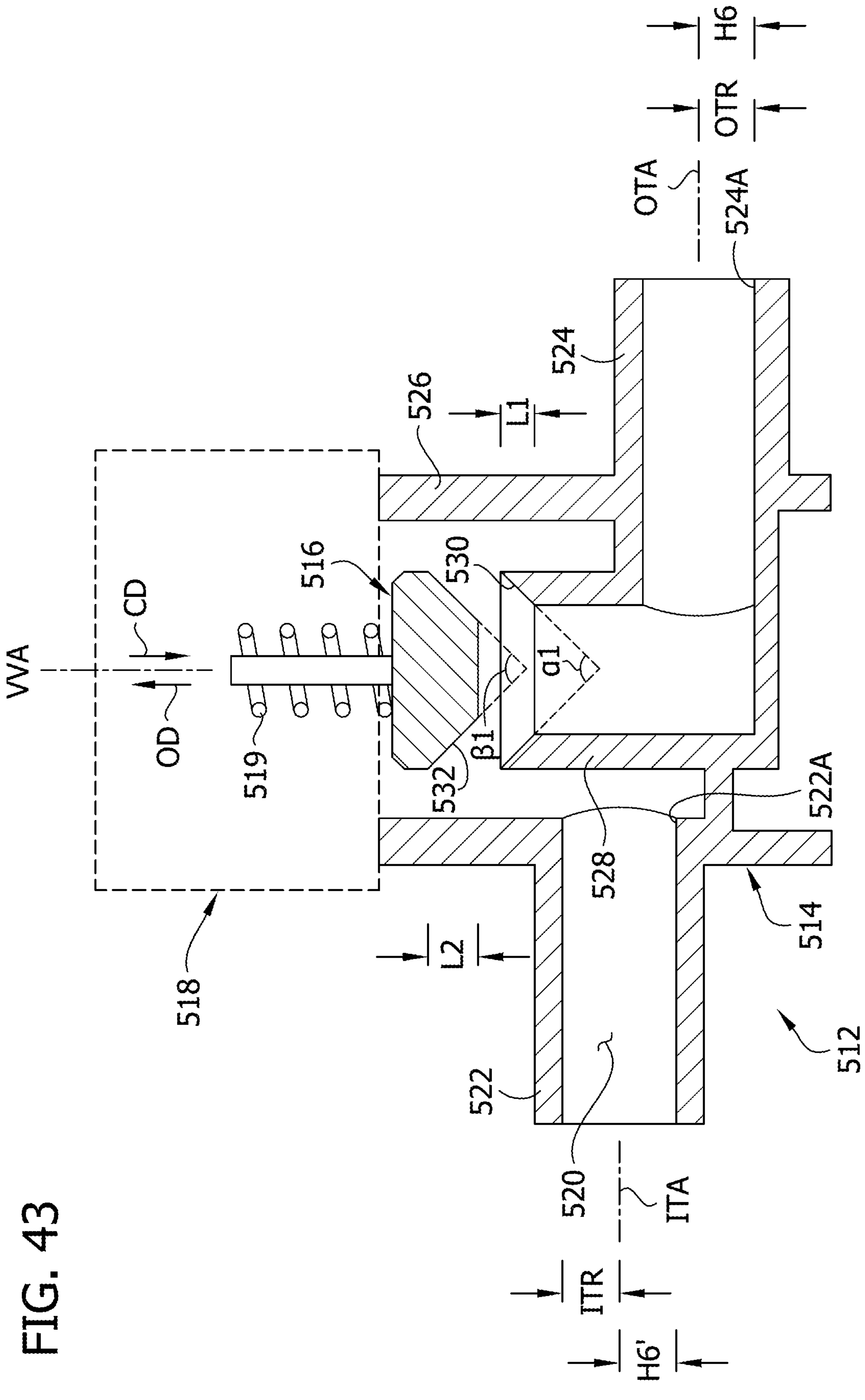
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FIG. 43

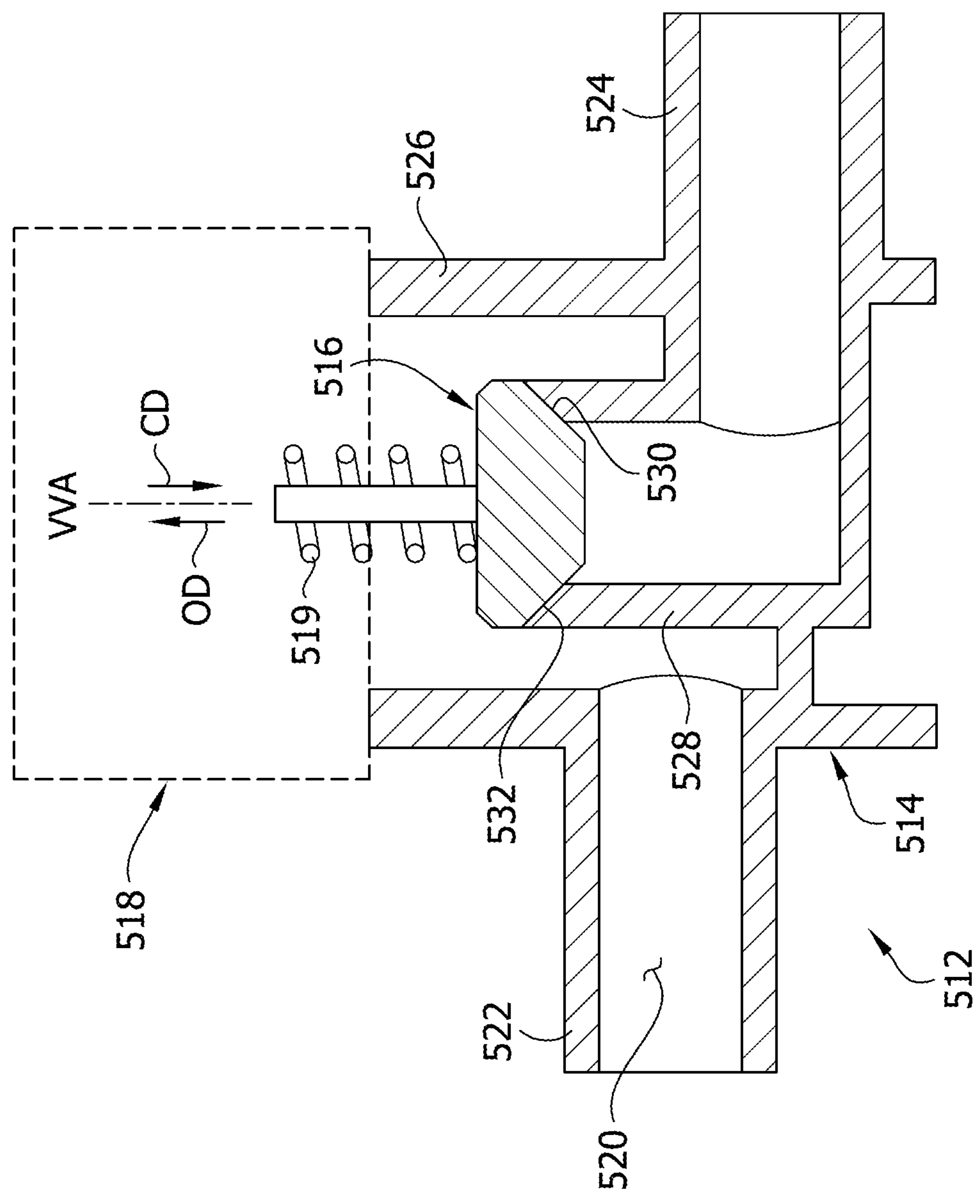


FIG. 44

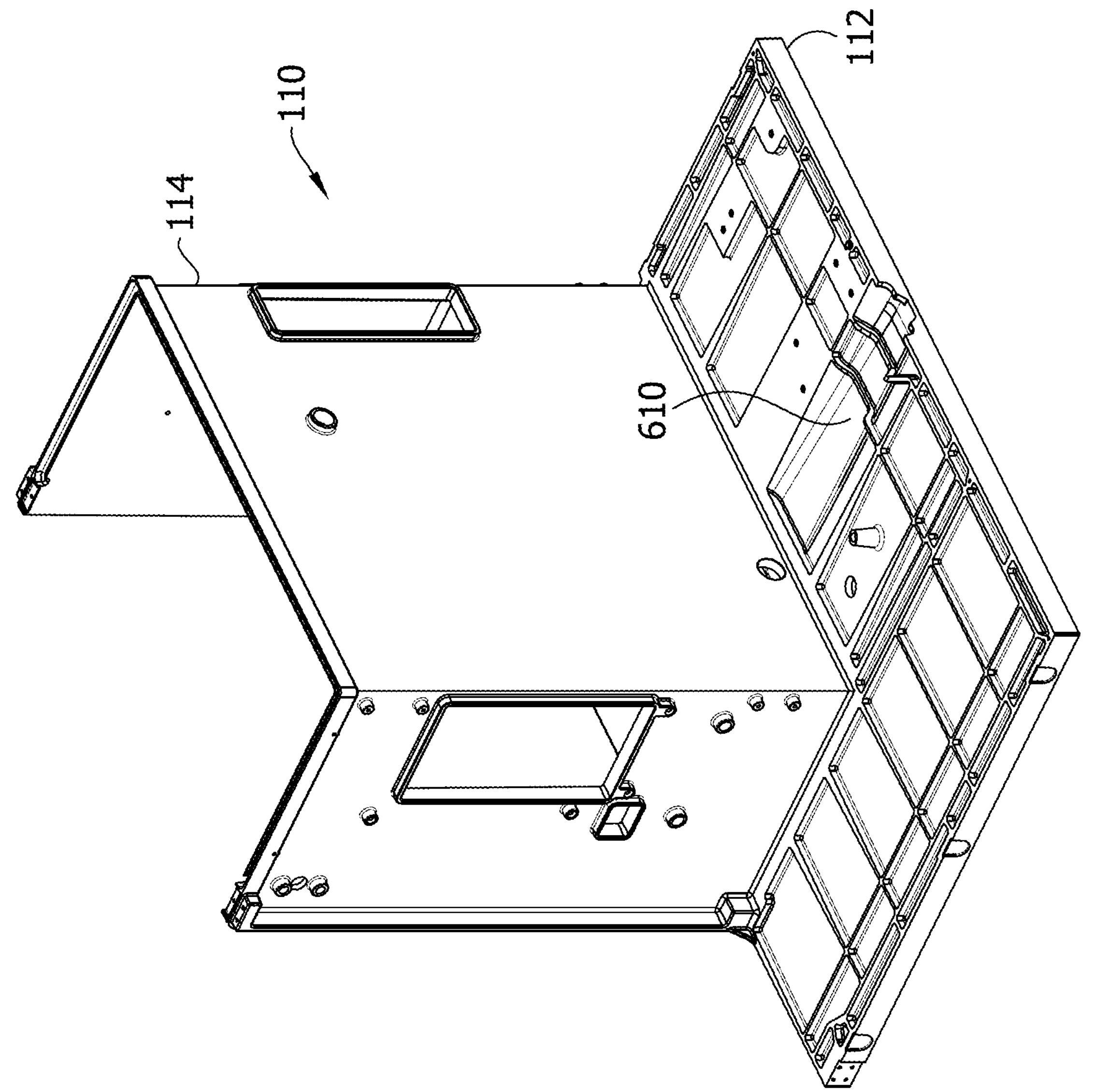
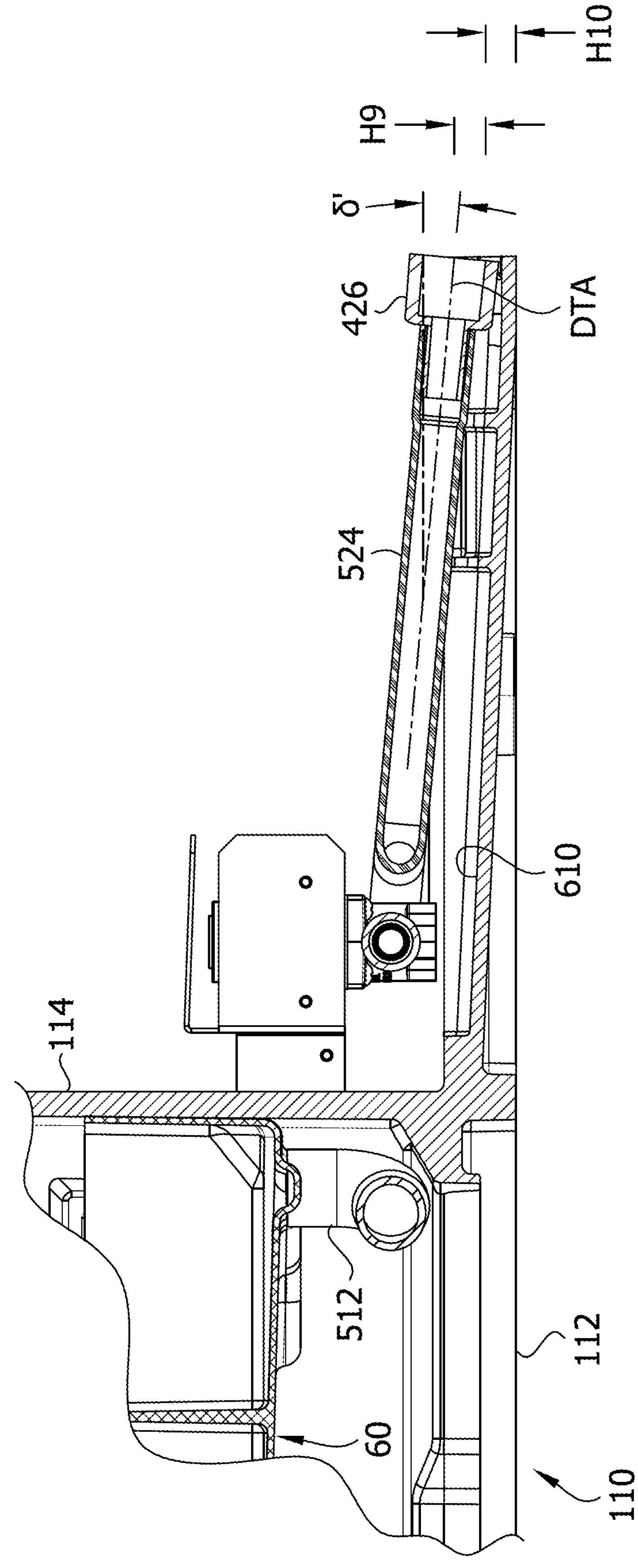


FIG. 45

FIG. 46



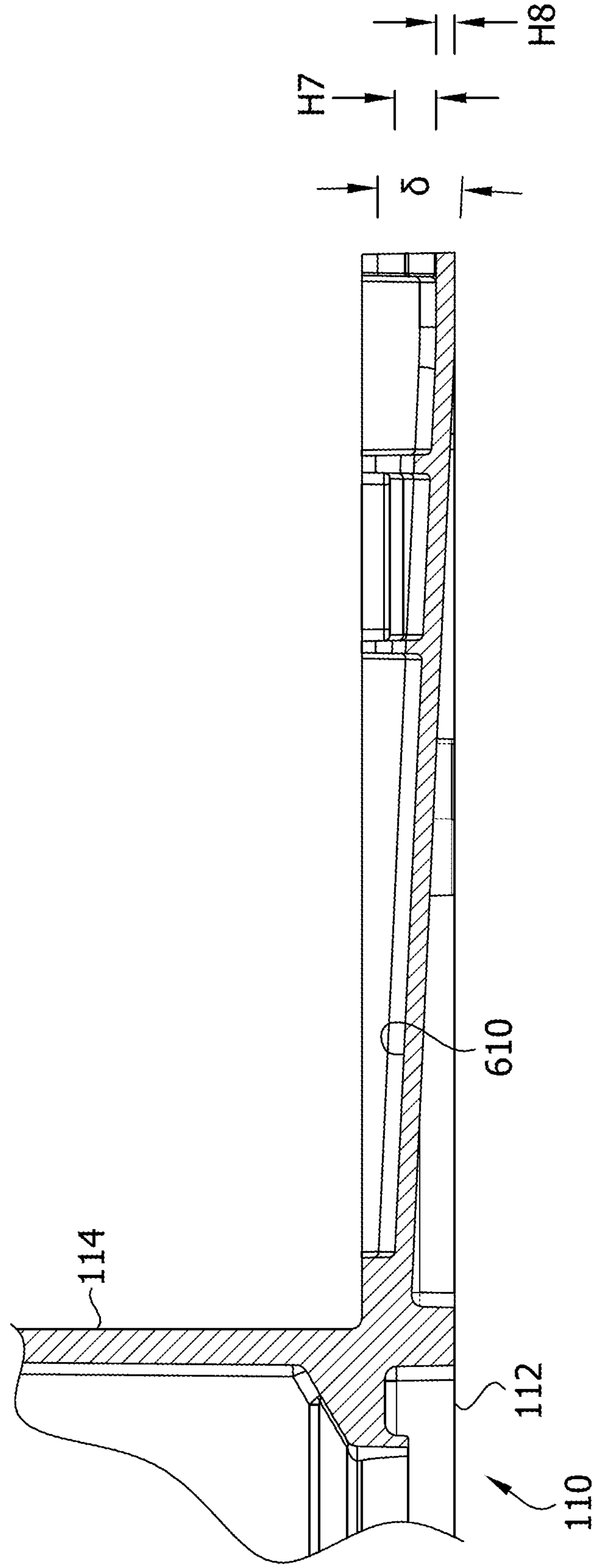


FIG. 47

ICE MAKER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/147,965, filed Jan. 13, 2021.

FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure pertains to an ice maker of the type that is configured to deposit ice into an ice bin below the ice maker.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Typical ice makers have reservoirs for holding an amount of water, some or all of which is frozen into ice by the ice maker. In ice makers that form cube ice, the water used for ice making is circulated through the water reservoir (also referred to as a sump or trough) and over a cooled freeze plate during ice making. The circulated water is thus maintained at a relatively cool temperature, near 0° C. In ice makers that form flake or nugget ice, the water reservoir (also referred to as a float chamber) is filled with incoming water and is not refrigerated. During ice making, there is a steady flow of water supplied to the ice maker which is formed into ice in an ice making chamber. In both cube-type ice makers and flake/nugget-type ice makers, when ice is not being made, water remaining in the water reservoir is not cooled. Therefore, the temperature of the water can rise and the water can become stagnant. To prevent stagnant water from contaminating an ice maker, both cube-type ice makers and flake/nugget-type ice makers include mechanisms for discharging the water from the reservoir when the ice is not being made. For example, it is known to use discharge pumps to allow for the selective removal of water from the reservoir. It may also be desirable to periodically discharge water from the water reservoir even while ice is being made to prevent high concentrations of scale or other contaminants from forming in the water that is being used to make ice.

SUMMARY

[0004] In one aspect, an ice maker comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the ice maker is configured to form ice. The freeze plate has a front defining open front ends of the molds, a back defining enclosed rear ends of the molds, a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height, and a first side portion and a second side portion spaced apart along a width. A distributor adjacent the top portion of the freeze plate is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor to flow downward along the front of the freeze plate along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor comprises a first end portion and a second end portion spaced apart along a width of the distributor. A bottom wall extends widthwise from the first end portion to the second end portion and extends generally forward from an upstream end portion to a downstream end portion. The distributor is configured to direct the water imparted therethrough to flow in a generally forward direction from the upstream end portion to the downstream end portion. A weir extends upward from the bottom wall at a location spaced apart between the upstream end portion and the downstream end portion. The weir is configured so that the water flows across the weir as it flows along the bottom wall from the upstream end portion to the downstream end portion. The bottom wall comprises a ramp surface, immediately upstream of the weir, sloping upward in the generally forward direction.

[0005] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the ice maker is configured to form ice. The freeze plate has a front defining open front ends of the molds, a back defining enclosed rear ends of the molds, a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height, and a first side portion and a second side portion spaced apart along a width. A distributor adjacent the top portion of the freeze plate is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor to flow downward along the front of the freeze plate along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor comprises a first end portion and a second end portion spaced apart along a width of the distributor. A bottom wall extends widthwise from the first end portion to the second end portion and extends generally forward from an upstream end portion to a downstream end portion. The distributor is configured to direct the water imparted therethrough to flow in a generally forward direction from the upstream end portion to the downstream end portion. The downstream end portion of the bottom wall defines a downwardly curving surface tension curve. The downwardly curving surface tension curve is configured so that surface tension causes the water imparted through the distributor to adhere to the curve and be directed downward by the curve toward the top end portion of the freeze plate.

[0006] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the ice maker is configured to form ice. The freeze plate has a front defining open front ends of the molds, a back defining enclosed rear ends of the molds, a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height, and a first side portion and a second side portion spaced apart along a width. A distributor adjacent the top portion of the freeze plate is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor to flow downward along the front of the freeze plate along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor comprises a first end portion and a second end portion spaced apart along a width of the distributor. A bottom wall extends widthwise from the first end portion to the second end portion and extends generally forward from an upstream end portion to a downstream end portion. The distributor is configured to direct the water imparted therethrough to flow in a generally forward direction from the upstream end portion to the downstream end portion. An overhanging front wall has a bottom edge margin spaced apart above the bottom wall adjacent the downstream end portion thereof such that a flow restriction is defined between the bottom wall and the overhanging front wall. The flow restriction comprises a gap extending widthwise between the first end portion and the second end portion of the distributor and is configured to restrict a rate at which water flows through the flow restriction to the downstream end portion of the bottom wall.

[0007] In yet another aspect, an ice maker comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the ice maker is configured to form ice. The freeze plate has a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height and a first side portion and a second side portion spaced apart along a width. A distributor extends along the width of the freeze plate adjacent the top portion of the freeze plate. The distributor is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor to flow from the top portion of the freeze plate to

the bottom portion along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor comprises a first distributor piece and a second distributor piece. The second distributor piece is configured to be releasably coupled to the first distributor piece without separate fasteners to form the distributor.

[0008] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the ice maker is configured to form ice. The freeze plate has a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height and a first side portion and a second side portion spaced apart along a width. A distributor adjacent the top portion of the freeze plate has a width extending along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor has an inlet and an outlet and defining a distributor flow path extending from the inlet to the outlet. The distributor is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor along the distributor flow path and discharge the water from the outlet such that the water flows from the top portion of the freeze plate to the bottom portion along the width of the freeze plate. The distributor comprises a first distributor piece and a second distributor piece. The second distributor piece is releasably coupled to the first distributor piece to form the distributor. The first distributor piece comprises a bottom wall defining a groove extending widthwise and the second distributor piece comprising a generally vertical weir defining a plurality of openings spaced apart along the width of the distributor. The weir has a free bottom edge margin received in the groove such that water flowing along the distributor flow path is inhibited from flowing through an interface between the bottom edge margin of the weir and the bottom wall and is directed to flow across the weir through the plurality of openings.

[0009] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises an evaporator assembly comprising a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the evaporator assembly is configured to form pieces of ice. The freeze plate has a front defining open front ends of the molds and a back extending along closed rear ends of the molds. An evaporator housing has a back and defines an enclosed space between the back of the freeze plate and the back of the evaporator housing. Refrigerant tubing is received in the enclosed space. Insulation substantially fills the enclosed space around the refrigerant tubing. A water system is configured to supply water to the freeze plate such that the water forms into ice in the molds. The evaporator housing includes a distributor piece formed from a single piece of monolithic material. The distributor piece is in direct contact with the insulation and has a bottom wall. The water system is configured direct the water to flow along the bottom wall as the water is supplied to the freeze plate.

[0010] In still another aspect, an ice maker comprises an evaporator assembly comprising a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the evaporator assembly is configured to form pieces of ice. The freeze plate has a front defining open front ends of the molds, a back extending along closed rear ends of the molds, a top wall formed from a single piece of monolithic material and defining a top end of at least one of the molds, and at least one stud joined to the top wall and extending upward therefrom. A distributor is configured to distribute water imparted through the distributor over the freeze plate so that the water forms into ice in the molds. The distributor comprises a distributor piece formed from a single piece of monolithic material. The distributor piece comprises a bottom wall defining a portion of a flow path along which the distributor directs water to flow through the distributor. A nut is tightened onto each stud against the distributor piece to directly mount the distributor on the freeze plate.

[0011] In another aspect, a distributor for receiving water imparted through the distributor and directing the water to flow along a freeze plate of an ice maker so that the water forms into ice on the freeze plate comprises a rear wall adjacent an upstream end of the distributor, a bottom wall extending forward from the rear wall to a front end portion adjacent a downstream end of the distributor, and a tube protruding rearward from the rear wall. The rear wall has an opening immediately above the bottom wall through which the tube fluidly communicates with the distributor. The bottom wall comprises a rear section that slopes downward to the rear wall and a front section that slopes downward to the front end portion.

[0012] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises an enclosure. A freeze plate is received in the enclosure. The freeze plate comprises a back wall and a front opposite the back wall. The freeze plate further comprises a perimeter wall extending forward from the back wall. The perimeter wall comprises a top wall portion, a bottom wall portion, a first side wall portion, and a second side wall portion. The first side wall portion and the second side wall portion define a width of the freeze plate. The freeze plate further comprises a plurality of heightwise divider plates extending from lower ends connected to the bottom wall portion to upper ends connected to the top wall portion and a plurality of widthwise divider plates extending from first ends connected to the first side wall portion to second ends connected to the second side wall portion. The heightwise divider plates and the widthwise divider plates are interconnected to define a plurality of ice molds inboard of the perimeter wall. Each widthwise divider plate defines a plurality of molds immediately above the divider plate and a plurality of molds immediately below the divider plate. Each widthwise divider plate slopes downward and forward away from the back wall of the freeze plate such that included angle between an upper surface of each widthwise divider plate and the back wall is greater than 90° and less than 180°. A distributor is configured to direct water imparted through the distributor to flow downward along the freeze plate along the width of the freeze plate. The freeze plate is supported in the enclosure so that the back wall of the freeze plate slants forward.

[0013] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises an enclosure having a bottom. An evaporator assembly is supported in the enclosure. The evaporator assembly comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the evaporator assembly is configured to form pieces of ice and an evaporator. The evaporator assembly has a bottom. A distributor is configured to distribute water imparted through the distributor over the freeze plate so that the water forms into ice on the freeze plate. A sump is supported in the enclosure below the freeze plate and is configured to collect water flowing off of the bottom of the freeze plate. A pump is configured to pump water in the sump through the distributor. A drain valve is supported in the enclosure. The drain valve is configured to be selectively opened to drain all of the water from the sump by gravity. The bottom of the evaporator assembly is spaced apart from the bottom of the enclosure by a height of less than 12 inches.

[0014] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises an enclosure having a bottom, a top, and a height extending from the bottom to the top. An evaporator assembly is supported in the enclosure. The evaporator assembly comprises a freeze plate defining a plurality of molds in which the evaporator assembly is configured to form pieces of ice and an evaporator. The evaporator assembly has a bottom. The freeze plate has a top, and the evaporator assembly has a height extending from the bottom of the evaporator assembly to the top of the freeze plate. A distributor is supported in the enclosure adjacent the top of the freeze plate. The distributor is configured to distribute water imparted through the distributor over the freeze plate so that the water forms into ice in the molds. A sump is supported in the enclosure below the freeze plate and is configured to collect water flowing off of the bottom of the freeze plate. A pump is configured to pump water in the sump through the distributor. A drain valve is supported in the enclosure. The drain valve is configured to be selectively opened to drain all of the water from the sump by gravity. The height of the enclosure is less than 24 inches and the height extending from the bottom of the evaporator assembly to the top of the freeze plate is greater than 10 inches.

[0015] In another aspect, an ice maker comprises a bottom wall. The bottom wall has a drain passaging groove formed in an upper surface of the bottom wall. An ice formation device is supported above the bottom wall. A water reservoir holds water used by the ice formation device. The water reservoir is supported above the bottom wall. A drain valve is supported above the wall. The drain valve is configured to be selectively opened to drain all of the water from the water reservoir by gravity. A drain tube is supported on the bottom wall and is at least partially received in the drain passaging groove.

[0016] In another aspect, an ice maker for forming ice comprises a refrigeration system comprising an ice formation device and a water system for supplying water to the ice formation device. The water system comprises a water reservoir configured to hold water to be formed into ice. Drain passaging is fluidly coupled to the water reservoir such that water in the water reservoir can drain through the drain passaging. The drain passaging has an upstream end portion and a downstream end portion. A drain valve selectively opens and closes the drain passaging. The drain valve comprises a valve body defining a valve passage fluidly coupled between the upstream end portion and the downstream end portion of the drain passaging. The valve body includes an annular valve seat extending longitudinally along an axis and facing radially inwardly with respect to the axis. The drain valve further comprises a valve member that is movable with respect to the valve body between an open position in which the valve member is positioned with respect to the valve body to allow water to flow through the valve passage from the upstream end portion of the drain passaging to the downstream end portion and a closed position in which the valve member engages the valve body to block flow through the valve passage from the upstream end portion of the drain passaging to the downstream end portion. The valve member comprises an annular sealing surface extending longitudinally along the axis. The annular sealing surface is configured to radially overlap and sealingly engage the valve seat along the axis when the valve member is in the closed position.

[0017] Other aspects will be in part apparent and in part pointed out hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] FIG. **1** is a schematic illustration of an ice maker;

[0019] FIG. **2** is a perspective of the ice maker supported on an ice bin;

[0020] FIG. **3** is a perspective of a subassembly of the ice maker including a support, an evaporator assembly, a sump, a mounting plate, and a sensor fitting;

[0021] FIG. **4** is an exploded perspective of the subassembly of FIG. **3**;

[0022] FIG. **5** is a side elevation of the subassembly of FIG. **3**;

[0023] FIG. **6** is a perspective of a freeze plate of the ice maker;

[0024] FIG. **7** is an exploded perspective of the freeze plate;

[0025] FIG. **8** is a vertical cross section of the freeze plate;

[0026] FIG. **9** is a perspective of the evaporator assembly;

[0027] FIG. **10** is a side elevation of the evaporator assembly;

[0028] FIG. **11** is a top plan view of the evaporator assembly;

[0029] FIG. **12** is an exploded perspective of the evaporator assembly;

[0030] FIG. **13** is a rear elevation of the evaporator assembly with back wall removed to reveal serpentine evaporator tubing;

[0031] FIG. **14** is a cross section of the evaporator assembly taken in the plane of line **14-14** of FIG. **11**;

[0032] FIG. **15** is a perspective of the evaporator assembly with a top distributor piece removed and showing a bottom distributor piece/top evaporator housing piece and components associated therewith exploded away from the remainder of the evaporator assembly;

[0033] FIG. **16** is an enlarged vertical cross section of the components of the evaporator assembly shown in FIG. **15** taken in a plane that passes through a stud of the freeze plate;

[0034] FIG. **17** is vertical cross section of the evaporator assembly mounted on the support;

[0035] FIG. **18** is a perspective of a distributor of the evaporator assembly;

[0036] FIG. **19** is an exploded perspective of the distributor;

[0037] FIG. **20** is a vertical cross section of the distributor;

[0038] FIG. **20**A is an enlarged view of a portion of FIG. **20**;

[0039] FIG. **21** is a top perspective of the bottom distributor piece;

[0040] FIG. **22** is a bottom perspective of the bottom distributor piece;

[0041] FIG. **23** is a vertical cross section similar to FIG. **15** except that the plane of the cross section passes through the center of an inlet tube of the bottom distributor piece;

[0042] FIG. **24** is an enlarged perspective of an end portion of the bottom distributor piece;

[0043] FIG. **25** is a perspective of the top distributor piece;

[0044] FIG. **26** is a bottom plan view of the top distributor piece;

[0045] FIG. **27** is a rear elevation of the top distributor piece;

[0046] FIG. **28** is an enlarged perspective of an end portion of the top distributor piece;

[0047] FIG. **29** is a perspective of the evaporator assembly with the top distributor piece spaced apart in front of the bottom distributor piece;

[0048] FIG. **30** is a vertical cross section of the subassembly of FIG. **3** received in a schematically illustrated ice maker enclosure, wherein the plane of the cross section is immediately inboard of a right side wall portion of a vertical side wall of the support as shown in FIG. **3** and wherein the top distributor piece is shown in a removed position outside of the enclosure;
[0049] FIG. **31** is an enlarged horizontal cross section of an end portion of the distributor looking downward on a plane that passes through an elongate tongue of the bottom distributor piece received in an elongate groove of the bottom distributor piece;
[0050] FIG. **32** is a vertical cross section of the distributor taken in a plane that passes through a segmented weir;
[0051] FIG. **33** is a schematic diagram of an ice level sensing system of the ice maker;
[0052] FIG. **34** is a perspective of a subassembly of the ice maker comprising the one-piece support and a time-of-flight sensor;
[0053] FIG. **35** is a top plan view of the subassembly of FIG. **34**;
[0054] FIG. **36** is an exploded perspective of the subassembly of FIG. **34**;
[0055] FIG. **37** is a cross section taken in the plane of line **37-37** of FIG. **35**;
[0056] FIG. **38** is an exploded perspective of the time-of-flight sensor;
[0057] FIG. **39** is a vertical cross section through a subassembly of the ice maker which includes the cabinet, evaporator assembly, sump, and drain passaging of the ice maker;
[0058] FIG. **39**A is a vertical cross section similar to FIG. **39** of another embodiment of an ice maker;
[0059] FIG. **40** is a perspective of a sub-assembly of the ice maker of FIGS. **1-39** that includes the support, drain passaging, and sump;
[0060] FIG. **41** is a top plan view of the sub-assembly of FIG. **40**;
[0061] FIG. **42** is a cross-section taken in the plane of line **42-42** of FIG. **41**;
[0062] FIG. **43** is a cross-section of a drain valve of the ice maker, illustrating the drain valve in an open position;
[0063] FIG. **44** is a cross section of the drain valve similar to FIG. **43**, except that the drain valve is shown in a closed position;
[0064] FIG. **45** is a perspective of the support;
[0065] FIG. **46** is an enlarged view of a portion of FIG. **39**; and
[0066] FIG. **47** is an enlarged cross-section similar to FIG. **46** of only the support of the ice maker, with the drain passaging being removed therefrom.
[0067] Corresponding reference characters indicate corresponding parts throughout the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0068] Referring to FIG. **1**, one embodiment of an ice maker is generally indicated at reference number **10**. This disclosure details exemplary features of the ice maker **10** that can be used individually or in combination to enhance ice making uniformity, ice harvesting performance, energy efficiency, assembly precision, and/or accessibility for repair or maintenance. One aspect of the present disclosure pertains to an evaporator assembly that includes an evaporator, a freeze plate, and a water distributor. As will be explained in further detail below, in one or more embodiments, the parts of the evaporator assembly are integrated together into a single unit. In certain embodiments, the water distributor includes a configuration of water distribution features that provides uniform water flow along the width of the freeze plate. In an exemplary embodiment, the water distributor is configured to provide ready access to the interior of the distributor for repair or maintenance. In one or more embodiments, the evaporator assembly is configured to mount the freeze plate within the ice maker in an orientation that reduces the time it takes to passively harvest ice using gravity and heat. Other aspects and features of the ice maker **10** will also be described hereinafter. Though this disclosure describes an ice maker that combines a number of different features, it will be understood that other ice makers can use any one or more of the features disclosed herein without departing from the scope of this disclosure.
[0069] The disclosure begins with an overview of the ice maker **10**, before providing a detailed description of an exemplary embodiment of an evaporator assembly.
[0070] I. Refrigeration System
[0071] Referring FIG. **1**, a refrigeration system of the ice maker **10** includes a compressor **12**, a heat rejecting heat exchanger **14**, a refrigerant expansion device **18** for lowering the temperature and pressure of the refrigerant, an evaporator assembly **20** (broadly, an ice formation device), and a hot gas valve **24**. As shown, the heat rejecting heat exchanger **14** may comprise a condenser for condensing compressed refrigerant vapor discharged from the compressor **12**. In other embodiments, for example, in refrigeration systems that utilize carbon dioxide refrigerants where the heat of rejection is trans-critical, the heat rejecting heat exchanger is able to reject heat from the refrigerant without condensing the refrigerant. The illustrated evaporator assembly **20** integrates an evaporator **21** (e.g., serpentine refrigerant tubing), a freeze plate **22**, and a water distributor **25** into one unit, as will be described in further detail below. Hot gas valve **24** is used, in one or more embodiments, to direct warm refrigerant from the compressor **15** directly to the evaporator **21** to remove or harvest ice cubes from the freeze plate **22** when the ice has reached the desired thickness.
[0072] The refrigerant expansion device **18** can be of any suitable type, including a capillary tube, a thermostatic expansion valve or an electronic expansion valve. In certain embodiments, where the refrigerant expansion device **18** is a thermostatic expansion valve or an electronic expansion valve, the ice maker **10** may also include a temperature sensor **26** placed at the outlet of the evaporator tubing **21** to control the refrigerant expansion device **18**. In other embodiments, where the refrigerant expansion device **18** is an electronic expansion valve, the ice maker **10** may also include a pressure sensor (not shown) placed at the outlet of the evaporator tubing **21** to control the refrigerant expansion device **19** as is known in the art. In certain embodiments that utilize a gaseous cooling medium (e.g., air) to provide condenser cooling, a condenser fan **15** may be positioned to blow the gaseous cooling medium across the condenser **14**. A form of refrigerant cycles through these components via refrigerant lines **28***a*, **28***b*, **28***c*, **28***d*.
[0073] II. Water System
[0074] Referring still to FIG. **1**, a water system of the illustrated ice maker **10** includes a sump assembly **60** that comprises a water reservoir or sump **70**, a water pump **62**,

a water line **63**, and a water level sensor **64**. The water system of the ice maker **10** further includes a water supply line (not shown) and a water inlet valve (not shown) for filling sump **70** with water from a water source (not shown). The illustrated water system further includes a drain passaging **78** (broadly, a discharge line) and a drain valve **512** (e.g., purge valve, drain valve (discussed below)) disposed thereon for draining water from the sump **70**. The sump **70** may be positioned below the freeze plate **22** to catch water coming off of the freeze plate such that the water may be recirculated by the water pump **62**. The water line **63** fluidly connects the water pump **62** to the water distributor **25**. During an ice making cycle, the pump **62** is configured to pump water through the water line **63** and through the distributor **25**. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the distributor **25** includes water distribution features that distribute the water imparted through the distributor evenly across the front of the freeze plate **22**. In an exemplary embodiment, the water line **63** is arranged in such a way that at least some of the water can drain from the distributor through the water line and into the sump when ice is not being made.

[0075] In an exemplary embodiment, the water level sensor **64** comprises a remote air pressure sensor **66**. It will be understood, however that any type of water level sensor may be used in the ice maker **10** including, but not limited to, a float sensor, an acoustic sensor, or an electrical continuity sensor. The illustrated water level sensor **64** includes a fitting **68** that is configured to couple the sensor to the sump **70** (see also FIG. **4**). The fitting **68** is fluidly connected to a pneumatic tube **69**. The pneumatic tube **69** provides fluid communication between the fitting **68** and the air pressure sensor **66**. Water in the sump **70** traps air in the fitting **68** and compresses the air by an amount that varies with the level of the water in the sump. Thus, the water level in the sump **70** can be determined using the pressure detected by the air pressure sensor **66**. Additional details of exemplary embodiments of a water level sensor comprising a remote air pressure sensor are described in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2016/0054043, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0076] In the illustrated embodiment, the sump assembly **60** further comprises a mounting plate **72** that is configured to operatively support both the water pump **62** and the water level sensor fitting **68** on the sump **70**. An exemplary embodiment of a mounting plate **72** is shown in FIG. **4**. As described in co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/746,828, filed Jan. 18, 2020, entitled ICE MAKER, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety, the mounting plate **72** may define an integral sensor mount **74** for operatively mounting sensor fitting **68** on the sump **70** at a sensing position at which the water level sensor **64** is operative to detect the amount of water in the sump. The mounting plate **72** may also define a pump mount **76** for mounting the water pump **62** on the sump **70** for pumping water from the sump through the water line **63** and the distributor **25**. Each of the sensor mount **74** and the pump mount **76** may include locking features that facilitate releasably connecting the respective one of the water level sensor **64** and the water pump **62** to the sump **70**.

[0077] III. Controller

[0078] Referring again to FIG. **1**, the ice maker **10** may also include a controller **80**. The controller **80** may be located remote from the ice making device **20** and the sump **70** or may comprise one or more onboard processors, in one or more embodiments. The controller **80** may include a processor **82** for controlling the operation of the ice maker **10** including the various components of the refrigeration system and the water system. The processor **82** of the controller **80** may include a non-transitory processor-readable medium storing code representing instructions to cause the processor to perform a process. The processor **82** maybe, for example, a commercially available microprocessor, an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC) or a combination of ASICs, which are designed to achieve one or more specific functions, or enable one or more specific devices or applications. In certain embodiments, the controller **80** may be an analog or digital circuit, or a combination of multiple circuits. The controller **80** may also include one or more memory components (not shown) for storing data in a form retrievable by the controller. The controller **80** can store data in or retrieve data from the one or more memory components.

[0079] In various embodiments, the controller **80** may also comprise input/output (I/O) components (not shown) to communicate with and/or control the various components of ice maker **10**. In certain embodiments, for example, the controller **80** may receive inputs such as, for example, one or more indications, signals, messages, commands, data, and/or any other information, from the water level sensor **64**, a harvest sensor for determining when ice has been harvested (not shown), an electrical power source (not shown), an ice level sensor (discussed infra, at § XI), and/or a variety of sensors and/or switches including, but not limited to, pressure transducers, temperature sensors, acoustic sensors, etc. In various embodiments, based on those inputs for example, the controller **80** may be able to control the compressor **12**, the condenser fan **15**, the refrigerant expansion device **18**, the hot gas valve **24**, the water inlet valve (not shown), the drain valve **510**, and/or the water pump **62**, for example, by sending, one or more indications, signals, messages, commands, data, and/or any other information to such components.

[0080] IV. Enclosure/Ice Bin

[0081] Referring to FIG. **2**, one or more components of the ice maker **10** may be stored inside of an enclosure **29** of the ice maker **10** that defines an interior space. For example, portions or all of the refrigeration system and water system of the ice maker **10** described above can be received in the interior space of the enclosure **29**. In the illustrated embodiment, the enclosure **29** is mounted on top of an ice storage bin assembly **30**. The ice storage bin assembly **30** includes an ice storage bin **31** having an open top (not shown) through which ice produced by the ice maker **10** falls. The ice is then stored in a cavity **36** until retrieved. The ice storage bin **31** further includes an opening **38** which provides access to the cavity **36** and the ice stored therein. The cavity **36**, ice hole (not shown), and opening **38** are formed by a left wall **33***a*, a right wall **33***b*, a front wall **34**, a back wall **35** and a bottom wall (not shown). The walls of the ice storage bin **31** may be thermally insulated with various insulating materials including, but not limited to, fiberglass insulation or open- or closed-cell foam comprised, for example, of polystyrene or polyurethane, etc. in order to retard the melting of the ice stored in the ice storage bin **31**. A door **40** can be opened to provide access to the cavity **36**.

[0082] The illustrated enclosure **29** is comprised of a cabinet **50** (broadly, a stationary enclosure portion) and a door **52** (broadly, a movable or removable enclosure portion). In FIG. **2**, the door **40** of the ice storage bin assembly **30** is raised so that it partially obscures the ice maker door **52**. The door **52** is movable with respect to the cabinet **50** (e.g., on a hinge) to selectively provide access to the interior space of the ice maker **10**. Thus, a technician may open the door **52** to access the internal components of the ice maker **10** through a doorway (not shown; broadly, an access opening) as required for repair or maintenance. In one or more other embodiments, the door may be opened in other ways, such as by removing the door assembly from the cabinet.

[0083] Additional details about an exemplary embodiment of an enclosure within the scope of the present disclosure are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/746,835, entitled Ice Maker, Ice Dispensing Assembly, and Method of Deploying Ice Maker, filed Jan. 18, 2020, and assigned to the assignee of the present application, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0084] V. Internal Support

[0085] Referring to FIGS. **3-5**, the illustrated ice maker **10** comprises a one-piece support **110** that is configured to support several components of the ice maker inside the enclosure **29**. For example, the illustrated support **110** is configured to support the sump **70**, the mounting plate **72**, and the evaporator assembly **20** at very precise positions to limit the possibility of misplacement of these components. The inventors have recognized that ice maker control schemes that use water level as a control input require accurate placement of the water level sensor in the sump. If the position of the water level sensor deviates from the specified position by even a small amount (e.g., millimeters or less), the control scheme can be disrupted. The inventors have further recognized that the aggregated dimensional tolerances of the parts of conventional assemblies for mounting internal ice maker components can lead to misplacement. Still further, the inventors have recognized that precisely positioning an evaporator assembly in an ice maker can enhance gravity-driven ice making and ice-harvesting performance.

[0086] In the illustrated embodiment, the support **110** includes a base **112** and a vertical support wall **114**. The illustrated vertical support wall comprises a first side wall portion **116**, a second side wall portion **118**, and a back wall portion **120** extending widthwise between the first and second side wall portions. A large opening **122** extends widthwise between the front end margins of the side wall portions **116**, **118**. When the ice maker **10** is fully assembled, this opening **122** is located adjacent a front doorway **268** (FIG. **30**) of the enclosure **29** such that a technician can access the components supported on the vertical wall through the opening when the door **52** is open. A drop opening **123** (FIG. **35**) is formed in the base **112** of the support and extends widthwise between the side wall portions **116**, **118** and forward from the rear wall portion **120**. Ice harvested from the ice maker **10** can fall through the drop opening **120** into the ice bin **30** situated below the ice maker.

[0087] Each side wall portion **116**, **118** includes an integral evaporator mount **124** (broadly, a freeze plate mount). The evaporator mounts **124** are configured to support the evaporator assembly **20** at an operative position in the ice maker **10**. Each side wall portion **116**, **118** further comprises an integral mounting plate mount **126** that is spaced apart below the evaporator mount **124**. The mounting plate mount **126** is configured to support the mounting plate **72** so that the mounting plate can mount the water level sensor fitting **68** and the pump **62** at operative positions in the ice maker **10**. An integral sump mount **128** for attaching the sump **70** to the ice maker is spaced apart below the mounting plate mount **126** of each side wall portion **116**, **118**. In FIGS. **3-5**, only the mounts **124**, **126**, **128** defined by the right side wall portion **116** are shown, but it will be understood that the left side wall portion **118** has substantially identical, mirror-image mounts in the illustrated embodiment.

[0088] At least one of the side wall portions **116**, **118** that defines the mounts **124**, **126**, **128** is formed from a single piece of monolithic material. For example, in one or more embodiments, the entire vertical support wall **114** is formed from a single monolithic piece of material. In the illustrated embodiment, the entire support **110**, including the base **112** and the vertical support wall **114**, is formed from a single piece of monolithic material. In one or more embodiments, the support **110** is a single molded piece. In the illustrated embodiment, the monolithic support **110** is formed by compression molding. Forming the support **110** from a single piece eliminates the stacking of tolerances that occurs in a multi-part support assembly and thereby increases the accuracy of the placement of the parts that are mounted on the support.

[0089] The evaporator mounts **124** are configured to mount the evaporator assembly **20** on the vertical support wall **114** in the enclosure **29** such that the freeze plate **22** slants forward. To accomplish this, each evaporator mount **124** in the illustrated embodiment comprises a lower connection point **130** and an upper connection point **132** forwardly spaced from the lower connection point. As shown in FIG. **5**, the connection points **130**, **132** are spaced apart along an imaginary line IL1 that is oriented at a forwardly slanted angle α with respect to a plane BP the back wall portion **120** of the vertical support wall **114**. In use, the ice maker **10** is positioned so that the plane BP of the back wall portion **120** is substantially parallel to a plumb vertical axis VA. As such, the imaginary line IL1 slants forward with respect to the plumb vertical axis VA at the angle α.

[0090] In the illustrated embodiment, each of the upper and lower connection points **130**, **132** comprises a screw hole. In use, the evaporator **20** is positioned between the side wall portions **116**, **118**, and a screw (not shown) is placed through each screw hole into a corresponding pre-formed screw hole associated with the evaporator assembly **20**. As explained below, the pre-formed evaporator screw-holes are arranged so that, when they are aligned with the evaporator mount screw holes **130**, **132**, the freeze plate **22** slants forward. It will be appreciated that an integral evaporator mount can include other types of connection points besides screw holes in one or more embodiments. For example, it is expressly contemplated that one or both of the screw holes **130**, **132** could be replaced by an integrally formed stud or other structure that can be used to register and attach a freeze plate to the support at the proper position.

[0091] Each mounting plate mount **126** comprises a pair of generally horizontally spaced tapered screw holes **134** (broadly, connection points). Similarly, each sump mount **128** comprises a pair of generally horizontally spaced mounting holes **136** (broadly, connection points). Again, the holes **134**, **136** of the mounting plate mount **126** and the sump mount **128** could be replaced with other types of integral connection points in one or more embodiments.

[0092] As shown in FIG. **4**, in one or more embodiments, the sump **70** is generally sized and arranged for being received in the space between the side wall portions **116**, **118** of the vertical support wall **114**. Each of a first end portion and a second end portion of the sump **70** that are spaced apart widthwise includes a pair of projections **138** at spaced apart locations. The projections **138** on each end portion of the sump **70** are configured to be received in the pair of mounting holes **136** defined by a respective one of the sump mounts **128**. The projections **138**, by being received in the mounting holes **136**, position the sump **70** at a precisely specified position along the height of the support **110**. In addition, a screw (not shown) is inserted through each mounting hole **136** and threaded into each projection **138** to fasten the sump **70** onto the support **110** at the specified position.

[0093] Like the sump **70**, the illustrated mounting plate **72** comprises a first end portion and a second end portion that are spaced apart widthwise. Each end portion of the mounting plate **114** defines a pair pre-formed screw holes that are configured to be aligned with the screw holes **134** of the corresponding mount **126** of the support **110**. Screws (broadly, mechanical fasteners; not shown) pass through the screw holes **134** and thread into the holes that are pre-formed in the mounting plate **72** to connect the mounting plate to the support **110** at a precisely specified position along the height of the support. In one or more embodiments, countersunk screws (e.g., screws with tapered heads) are used to connect the mounting plate **72** to the support **110**. The countersunk screws self-center in the tapered screw holes **134**.

[0094] It can be seen that the one-piece support **110** with integral mounts **124**, **126**,**128** can be used to ensure that the evaporator assembly **20**, the mounting plate **72**, and the sump **70** are supported in the ice maker **10** at the specified position. The support no can thereby position the freeze plate **22** to optimally balance desired performance characteristics, such as water distribution during ice making and ease/speed of ice-harvesting. Further, the support **110** can position the mounting plate **72** with respect to the sump **70** so that the pressure sensor fitting **68** mounted in the sensor mount **74** is precisely positioned with respect to the sump for accurately detecting the water level using the sensor **64**. Likewise, the support **110** positions the mounting plate **72** with respect to the sump **70** so that the pump **62** is precisely positioned for pumping water from the sump **70** through the ice maker **10** when the pump is mounted on the pump mount **76**.

[0095] VI. Freeze Plate

[0096] Referring to FIGS. **6**-**8**, an exemplary embodiment of the freeze plate **22** will now be described, before turning to other components of the evaporator assembly **20** that attach the freeze plate to the support **110**. The freeze plate **22** defines a plurality of molds **150** in which the ice maker **10** is configured to form ice. The freeze plate **22** has a front defining open front ends of the molds **150**, a back defining enclosed rear ends of the molds, a top portion and a bottom portion spaced apart along a height HF, and a right side portion (broadly, a first side portion) and a left side portion (broadly, a second side portion) spaced apart along a width WF.

[0097] Throughout this disclosure, when the terms "front," "back," "rear," "forward," "rearward," and the like are used in reference to any part of the evaporator assembly **20**, the relative positions of the open front ends and enclosed rear ends of the freeze plate molds **150** provide a spatial frame of reference. For instance, the front of the freeze plate **22** that defines the open front ends of the molds **150** is spaced apart from the rear of the freeze plate in a forward direction FD (FIG. **8**), and the back of the freeze plate that extends along the enclosed rear ends of the molds is spaced apart from the front of the freeze plate in a rearward direction RD.

[0098] In the illustrated embodiment, the freeze plate **22** comprises a pan **152** having a back wall **154** that defines the back of the freeze plate. Suitably, the pan **152** is formed from thermally conductive material such as copper, optionally having one or more surfaces coated with a food-safe material. As is known in the art, the evaporator tubing **21** is thermally coupled to the back wall **154** of the freeze plate **22** for cooling the freeze plate during ice making cycles and warming the freeze plate during harvest cycles.

[0099] The pan **152** further comprises a perimeter wall **156** that extends forward from the back wall **154**. The perimeter wall **156** includes a top wall portion, a bottom wall portion, a right side wall portion (broadly, a first side wall portion), and a left side wall portion (broadly, a second side wall portion). The side wall portions of the perimeter wall **156** define the opposite sides of the freeze plate **22**, and the top and bottom wall portions of the perimeter wall define the top and bottom ends of the freeze plate. The perimeter wall **156** could be formed from one or more discrete pieces that are joined to the back wall **154** or the pan **152**, or the entire pan could be formed from a single monolithic piece of material in one or more embodiments. Suitably, the perimeter wall **156** is sealed to the back wall **154** so that water flowing down the freeze plate **22** does not leak through the back of the freeze plate.

[0100] A plurality of heightwise and widthwise divider plates **160**, **162** are secured to the pan to form a lattice of the ice cube molds **150**. In an exemplary embodiment, each heightwise divider plate **160** and each widthwise divider plate **162** is formed from a single piece of monolithic material. Each heightwise divider plate **160** has a right lateral side surface (broadly, a first lateral side surface) and a left lateral side surface (broadly a second lateral side surface) oriented parallel to the right lateral side surface. Each widthwise divider plate **162** has a bottom surface and a top surface oriented parallel to the bottom surface. The heightwise divider plates **162** extend from lower ends that are sealingly connected to the bottom wall portion of the perimeter wall **156** to upper ends that are sealingly connected to the top wall portion of the perimeter wall. The plurality of widthwise divider plates **160** similarly extend from first ends sealingly connected to the right side wall portion of the perimeter wall **156** to second ends sealingly connected to the left side wall portion of the perimeter wall.

[0101] Generally, the heightwise divider plates **160** and the widthwise divider plates **162** are interconnected in such a way as to define a plurality of ice molds **150** within the perimeter wall **156**. For example, in the illustrated embodiment, each of the heightwise divider plates **160** has a plurality of vertically-spaced, forwardly-opening slots **164**; each of the widthwise diver plates has a plurality of horizontally-spaced, rearwardly-opening slots **166**; and the heightwise and widthwise divider plates are interlocked at the slots **164**, **166** to form the lattice. Suitably, each widthwise divider plate **162** defines a plurality of the molds **150** (e.g., at least three molds) immediately above the divider plate and a plurality of the molds (e.g., at least three molds) immediately below the divider plate. Each heightwise divider plate **160** likewise defines a plurality of the molds **150** (e.g., at least three molds) immediately to one lateral side of the divider plate and a plurality of the molds (e.g., at least three molds) immediately to the opposite lateral side of the divider plate.

[0102] Each of the divider plates **160**, **162** has a front edge and a back edge. The back edges may suitably be sealingly joined to the back wall **154** of the freeze plate pan **152**. When the freeze plate **22** is assembled, the front edges of some or all of the divider plates **160**, **162** (e.g., at least the widthwise divider plates) lie substantially on a front plane FP (FIG. **8**) of the freeze plate **22**. In one or more embodiments, the front plane FP is parallel to the back wall **154**.

[0103] A plurality of the ice molds **150** formed in the freeze plate **22** are interior ice molds having perimeters defined substantially entirely by the heightwise and widthwise divider plates **160**, **162**. Others of the molds **150** are perimeter molds having portions of their perimeters formed by the perimeter wall **156** of the freeze plate pan **152**. Each interior ice mold **150** has an upper end defined substantially entirely by the bottom surface of one of the widthwise divider plates **162** and a lower end defined substantially entirely by the top surface of an adjacent one of the widthwise divider plates. In addition, each interior mold **150** has a left lateral side defined substantially entirely by a right lateral side surface of a heightwise divider plate **162** and a right lateral side defined substantially entirely by a left lateral side surface of the adjacent heightwise divider plate.

[0104] As shown in FIG. **8**, each widthwise divider plate **162** slopes downward and forward from the back wall **154** of the freeze plate **22** such that an included angle β between an upper surface of each widthwise divider plate and the back wall is greater than 90°. In one or more embodiments, the included angle β is at least 100° and less than 180°. It can be seen that the included angle between the top surface of each widthwise divider plate **16** and the front plane FP is substantially equal to the included angle β. Further, it can be seen that the included angle between the bottom surface of each horizontal divider plate **162** and the back wall **154** (and also the included angle between the bottom surface of each horizontal divider plate **162** and the front plane FP) is substantially equal to 180° minus 13. The top and bottom portions of the perimeter wall **156** of the pan are oriented substantially parallel to the widthwise divider plates **162** in one or more embodiments.

[0105] A series of threaded studs **168** extend outward from the perimeter wall **156** at spaced apart locations around the perimeter of the freeze plate **22**. As will be explained in further detail below, the threaded studs **168** are used to secure the freeze plate **22** to an evaporator housing **170** that attaches the evaporator assembly **20** to the support **110**. The studs **168** are suitably shaped and arranged to connect the freeze plate **22** to the evaporator housing **170**, and further to the support **110**, such that the back wall **154** and front plane FP of the freeze plate slants forward when the freeze plate is installed in the ice maker **10**.

[0106] VII. Evaporator Housing

[0107] Referring to FIGS. **9-14**, the evaporator housing **170** will now be described in greater detail. In general, the evaporator housing **170** is configured to support the evaporator tubing **21** and the freeze plate **22**. As will be explained in further detail below, the water distributor **25** is integrated directly into (i.e., forms a part of) the evaporator housing **170**. The evaporator housing **170** comprises a frame including a bottom piece **172**, a top piece **174**, and first and second side pieces **176** that together extend around the perimeter of the freeze plate **22**. Each of the bottom piece **172**, the top piece **174**, and the opposite side pieces **176** is formed from a single, monolithic piece of material (e.g., molded plastic), in one or more embodiments. The inner surfaces of the bottom piece **172**, the top piece **174**, and the opposite side pieces **176** may include a gasket (not shown) to aid in watertight sealing of the evaporator housing. The top piece **174** of the evaporator housing **170** forms a bottom piece (broadly, a first piece) of the two-piece distributor **25** in the illustrated embodiment.

[0108] A back wall **178** is supported on the assembled frame pieces **172**, **174**, **176**, **178** in spaced apart relationship with the back wall **154** of the freeze plate **22**. As shown in FIG. **14**, the evaporator housing **170** defines an enclosed space **180** between the back wall **154** of the freeze plate **22** and the back wall **178** of the housing. As explained in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2018/0142932, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety, in one or more embodiments, two discrete layers **182**, **184** of insulation fills enclosed space **176** and thoroughly insulates the evaporator tubing **21**.

[0109] The bottom piece **172**, the top piece **174**, the opposite side pieces **176**, and/or the back wall **178** may have features that facilitate assembling them together to form the evaporator housing **170** in a variety of ways, including snap-fit features, bolts and nuts, etc. For example, each of the frame pieces **172**, **174**, **176** comprises stud openings **186** that are arranged to receive the studs **168** on the corresponding wall portion of the perimeter wall **156** of the freeze plate **22**. Some of the stud holes **186** are visible in FIG. **12**. In one or more embodiments, the back wall **178** is joined to the assembled frame pieces **172**, **174**, **176** by ultrasonic welding.

[0110] Referring to FIGS. **15** and **16**, one example of how the housing pieces **172**, **174**, **176** attach to the freeze plate **72** is shown in greater detail. Specifically, the top housing piece **174** is shown, but it will be understood that the other housing pieces may attach to the freeze plate in a like manner. The top piece **174** includes a front section that defines the stud openings **186**. In the illustrated embodiment, each stud opening **186** comprises a countersunk screw recess that includes an annular shoulder **192**. The top piece **174** is positioned atop the freeze plate **22** such that one stud **168** is received in each of the openings **186**. In the illustrated embodiment, a gasket **194** is located between the top of the freeze plate **22** and the bottom of the top piece **174** to seal the interface between the two parts. Nuts **196** are tightened onto each of the studs **168** to attach the top piece **174** to the freeze plate **22**. Further, because the housing top piece **174** forms the bottom piece of the distributor **25**, tightening the nuts **196** onto the studs also attaches the distributor directly to the freeze plate in the illustrated embodiment. Each nut **196** is tightened against the shoulder **192** of a respective countersunk recesses **186** (broadly, the nuts are tightened directly against the top housing piece **170** or bottom distributor piece). In the illustrated embodiment, caps **198** are placed over the tops of the countersunk recesses **186**. Suitably, the tops of the caps **198** are substantially flush with the surface of the piece **174** to present a smooth surface to water flowing through the distributor **25**.

[0111] VIII. Mounting of Evaporator Assembly so that Freeze Plate Slants Forward

[0112] Referring again to FIGS. **9** and **10**, each of the side pieces **176** of the evaporator housing **170** include preformed lower and upper screw openings **200**, **202** at vertically spaced apart locations. The upper and lower screw openings **200**, **202** are configured to be positioned in registration with the screw openings **130**, **132** of a respective side wall portion **116**, **118** of the support **110**. When each side piece **176** is secured to the freeze plate **22** via the studs **168**, the screw openings **200**, **202** are spaced apart along an imaginary line IL2 oriented substantially parallel to the back wall **154** and the front plane FP of the freeze plate **22**. Referring to FIG. **17**, when screws (not shown) secure the evaporator assembly **20** to the support **110** via the aligned lower screw openings **130**, **200** and the aligned upper screw openings **132**, **202**, the imaginary line IL2 of the evaporator housing **170** is aligned with the forwardly slanted imaginary line IL1 of the support.

[0113] Thus, the screw openings **130**, **132**, **200**, **202** position the freeze plate **22** on the support **110** so that the back wall **154** and front plane FP are oriented at the forwardly slanted angle α with respect to both the plumb vertical axis VA and the back plane BP of the support **110**. In one or more embodiments, the included angle α between the back wall **154**/front plane FP and the plumb vertical axis VA/back plane BP is at least about 1.5°. For example, in an exemplary embodiment, the included angle α is about 2.0°. Accordingly, the illustrated ice maker **10** is configured to mount the freeze plate **22** in the enclosure **29** so that the back wall **154** slants forward. It will be appreciated that, though the one-piece support **110** and the side pieces **176** of the evaporator housing **170** are used to mount the freeze plate **22** in the slanted orientation in the illustrated embodiment, other ways of mounting a freeze plate may be used in other embodiments.

[0114] It is believed that conventional wisdom in the field of ice makers held that orienting a freeze plate with grid-type divider plates so that the back wall of the freeze plate slants forward would adversely affect the water distribution performance of the ice maker. However, because of the high-quality flow distribution produced by the water distributor **25**—achieved, for example, using one or more of the water distribution features described below—water is effectively distributed to the molds **150** even though the freeze plate **22** is mounted with the back wall **154** slanted forward. Further, the slanted freeze plate **22** enables the ice maker **10** to harvest ice quickly, using gravitational forces. In one or more embodiments, the ice maker **10** is configured to execute a harvest cycle by which ice is released from the molds **150** of the freeze plate **22**, wherein substantially the only forces imparted on the ice during the harvest cycle are gravitational forces. For example, the harvest cycle is executed by actuating the hot gas valve **24** to redirect hot refrigerant gas back to the evaporator tubing **21**, thereby warming the freeze plate **22**. The ice in the molds **150** begins to melt and slides forward down the sloping widthwise divider plates **162**, off the freeze plate, and into the ice bin **30**. In a harvest cycle in which substantially the only forces imparted on the ice are gravitational forces, no mechanical actuators, pressurized air jets, or the like are used to forcibly push the ice off of the freeze plate **22**. Rather, the slightly melted ice falls by gravity off of the freeze plate **22**.

[0115] IX. Water Distributor

[0116] Referring now to FIGS. **9** and **18-19**, an exemplary embodiment of the distributor **25** will now be described. As explained above, the distributor comprises a bottom piece **174** that forms a top piece of the evaporator housing **170**. The distributor **25** further comprises a top piece **210** that releasably attaches to the bottom piece **174** to form the distributor. While the illustrated distributor **25** comprises a two-piece distributor that is integrated directly into the evaporator housing **170**, it will be understood that distributors can be formed from other numbers of pieces and attach to the ice maker in other ways in other embodiments. As shown in FIG. **9**, the distributor **25** is mounted on the evaporator assembly **20** adjacent the top of the freeze plate **22** and has a width WD that extends generally along the width WF of the freeze plate **22**. The distributor **25** extends widthwise from a right end portion (broadly, first end portion) adjacent the right side of the freeze plate **22** to a left end portion (broadly, a second end portion) adjacent the left side of the freeze plate.

[0117] The distributor **25** has a rear, upstream end portion defining an inlet **212** and a front, downstream end portion defining an outlet **214**. The downstream end portion extends widthwise adjacent the top-front corner of the freeze plate **22**, and the upstream end portion extends widthwise at location spaced apart rearward from the downstream end portion. In the illustrated embodiment, the inlet **212** formed by an opening at the upstream end portion of the distributor, and the outlet **214** is defined by an exposed lower front edge of the distributor **25**. In use, this edge is arranged so that water flows off of the edge onto the top portion of the freeze plate **22**. It is contemplated that the inlet and/or outlet could have other configurations in other embodiments.

[0118] As shown in FIG. **20**, the distributor **25** defines a distributor flow path FP extending generally forward from the inlet **212** to the outlet **214**. The distributor **25** is generally configured to direct water imparted through the distributor along the distributor flow path FP to discharge the water from the outlet **214** such that the water flows from the top portion of the freeze plate **22** to the bottom portion generally uniformly along the width WF of the freeze plate. As will be explained in further detail below, the distributor **25** includes a number of water distribution features that direct the water flowing along the flow path FP to be distributed generally uniformly along substantially the entire width of the distributor.

[0119] Each of the bottom and top pieces **174**, **210** will now be described in detail before describing how the distributor **25** is assembled and used to distribute water over the freeze plate **22**.

[0120] IX.A. Distributor Bottom Piece

[0121] Referring to FIGS. **21-22**, the bottom distributor piece **174** has a right end wall **216** (broadly, a first end wall) at the right end portion of the distributor **25**, a left end wall **218** (broadly, a second end wall) at the left end portion of the distributor, and a bottom wall **220** extending widthwise from the right end wall to the left end wall. Referring to FIG. **23**, as explained above, the bottom distributor piece **174** is directly attached to the freeze plate **22**. Further, in the illustrated embodiment, the bottom distributor piece **174** is in direct contact with the insulation **184** that fills the enclosed space **180** between the back wall **154** of the freeze plate and the back wall **178** of the evaporator housing **170**. A front section **222** of the bottom wall **220** is located generally above the freeze plate **22** to mount the distributor piece **174** on the freeze plate as described above, and a rear section **224** of the bottom wall is located generally above the enclosed space **180** to directly contact the insulation **184**.

[0122] In the illustrated embodiment, the rear section **224** includes a rear leg **226** extending downward at a rear end portion of the bottom wall and a front leg **228** extending downward at a location forwardly spaced from the rear leg. Each of the front and rear legs **226**, **224** extends widthwise between the right and left end walls **216**, **218** of the bottom distributor piece **174**. The rear leg **226** is sealingly engaged with the back wall **178** of the evaporator housing **170** (e.g., the rear leg is ultrasonically welded to the back wall). The bottom wall **220** defines a lower recess **230** located between the front and rear legs **226**, **228**. The lower recess **230** extends widthwise between the right and left end walls **216**, **218** and forms the top of the enclosed space **180**. Thus a portion of the insulation **184** is received in the recess **230** and directly contacts the bottom distributor piece along three sides defining the recess. This is thought to thermal losses between the distributor and evaporator.

[0123] Referring to FIG. **24**, each end wall **216**, **218** in the illustrated embodiment comprises an elongate tongue **232** formed along an inner surface. Only the left end wall **218** is shown in FIG. **24**, but it will be understood that the right end wall **216** has a substantially identical, mirror image tongue **232**. The elongate tongues **232** extend longitudinally in parallel, generally front-to-back directions. The elongate tongues **232** are generally configured to form male fittings that releasably couple the bottom distributor piece **174** to the top distributor piece **210** without the use of separate fasteners. Each elongate tongue **232** has a front end portion and a rear end portion spaced apart longitudinally from the front end portion. Between the front end portion and the rear end portion, each tongue comprises a slight depression **234**.

[0124] Referring to FIGS. **19** and **20**, the bottom wall **220** extends generally forward from a rear, upstream end portion to a front, downstream end portion. A rear wall **236** extends upward from the upstream end portion of the bottom wall **220**. The inlet opening **212** is formed in the rear wall **236**. In the illustrated embodiment, the inlet opening **236** is generally centered on the rear wall **236** at a spaced apart location between the end walls **216**, **218**. Thus, broadly speaking, the inlet opening **212** through which water is directed into the interior of the distributor **25** is spaced apart widthwise between the first end portion and the second end portion of the distributor. During use, the distributor **25** is configured to direct the water to flow from the inlet opening **212** along the bottom wall **220** in a generally forward direction FD from the upstream end portion of the bottom wall to the downstream end portion.

[0125] An integral inlet tube **238** protrudes rearward from the rear wall **236** and fluidly communicates through the rear wall via the inlet opening **212**. The tube **238** slopes downward and rearward as it extends away from the rear wall **236**. The inlet tube **238** is configured to be coupled to the ice maker's water line **63** (FIG. **1**). Accordingly, when ice is being made, the pump **62** pumps water from the sump **70** through the water line **63** and into the distributor **25** via the integral inlet tube **238**. When ice is not being made, residual water in the distributor **25** can drain through the inlet tube **238**, down the water line **63**, and into the sump **70**.

[0126] In the illustrated embodiment, the rear section **224** of the bottom wall **220** slopes downward and rearward along substantially the entire width of the bottom wall. Conversely, the front section **222** of the bottom wall **220** slopes downward and forward along substantially the entire width. The front section **222** thus forms a runoff section along which water flows forward and downward toward the downstream end portion of the bottom wall **220**. Between the sloping rear section **224** and the sloping front section **222** the bottom wall comprises a middle section that includes a widthwise groove **240**. The widthwise groove is configured to sealingly receive a portion of the top distributor piece **210** when the top distributor piece is coupled to the bottom distributor piece **174**. In one or more embodiments, the groove **240** is convex in the widthwise direction (see FIG. **33**). An apex of the bottom wall **220** is located immediately upstream of the widthwise groove **240**. The rear section **224** of the bottom wall slopes downward from the apex to the rear wall **236**. As shown in FIG. **23**, the rear section **224** of the bottom wall **220** includes a ramp surface **242** that defines the apex and a rearmost (or upstream-most) surface portion **244** (broadly, an upstream segment). The ramp surface **242** and the rearmost surface portion **244** extend widthwise from the right end wall **216** to the left end wall **218**. The ramp surface **242** slopes upward in the generally forward direction and downward in the generally rearward direction. The rearmost surface portion **244** slopes upward in the generally forward direction more gradually than the ramp surface **242**. The rearmost surface portion **244** is oriented at an angle of less than 180° with respect to the ramp surface **242** such that the rearmost surface portion slopes downward in the generally rearward direction at a more gradual angle than the ramp surface in the illustrated embodiment.

[0127] The bottom wall **220** is configured to passively drain water from the distributor **25** when the ice maker **10** stops making ice. Whenever the ice maker **10** stops making ice, residual water in the front portion of the distributor **25** flows forward along the sloping front section **222** (runoff section) of the bottom wall **220** and drains off of the outlet **214** onto the freeze plate **22**. Similarly, residual water in the rear portion of the distributor **25** flows rearward along the sloping rear section **224** and drains through the inlet opening **212** into the inlet tube **238**. The water directed forward flows downward along freeze plate **22** and then flows off the freeze plate into the sump **70**. The water directed rearward flows downward through the water line **63** into the sump **70**. Thus, the distributor **25** is configured to direct substantially all residual water into the sump **70** when the ice maker **10** is not making ice. Further, in one or more embodiments, the sump **70** is configured to drain substantially all of the water received therein through the drain passaging **78** when the ice maker **10** is not in use. As can be seen, the shape of the bottom wall **220** of the distributor **25** facilitates total passive draining of the ice maker **10** when ice is not being made.

[0128] Referring to FIG. **21**, a lateral diverter wall **246** extends upward from the bottom wall **220** along the rearmost surface portion **244**. The lateral diverter wall **246** is spaced apart between the rear wall **236** and the ramp surface **242**. The lateral diverter wall **246** extends upward from the bottom wall **220** to a top edge that is spaced apart below the top of the assembled distributor **25** (see FIG. **20**). The diverter wall **246** extends widthwise from a right end portion (broadly, a first end portion) spaced apart from the right end wall **216** to a left end portion (broadly, a second end portion) spaced apart from the left end wall **216**. The lateral diverter wall **246** is positioned in front of the inlet opening **214**. As water flows into the distributor **25** through the inlet opening, the lateral diverter wall **246** is configured to divert at least some of the water laterally outward, forcing the water to flow around the left and right ends of the lateral diverter wall.

[0129] Referring to FIGS. **20**A and **23**, the downstream end portion of the bottom wall **220** defines a downwardly curving surface tension curve **247** that extends widthwise from the right end wall **216** to the left end wall **218**. The downwardly curving surface tension curve **247** is configured so that surface tension causes the water flowing along the bottom wall **220** to adhere to the curve and be directed downward by the curve toward the top end portion of the freeze plate **22**. In one or more embodiments, the surface tension curve **270** is at least partially defined by a radius R of at least 1 mm. In certain embodiments, the surface tension curve **270** is defined by a radius of less than 10 mm. In one or more embodiments, the surface tension curve **270** is defined by a radius in an inclusive range of from 1 mm to 3 mm. In an exemplary embodiment, the surface tension curve **270** is defined by a radius of 1.5 mm.

[0130] The bottom wall **220** further comprises a waterfall surface **249** extending generally downward from the surface tension curve **274** to a bottom edge that defines the outlet **214** of the distributor **212**. The waterfall surface **249** extends widthwise from the right end wall **216** to the left end wall **218**. The waterfall surface **249** generally is configured so that surface tension causes the water imparted through the distributor **25** to adhere to the waterfall surface and flow downward along the waterfall surface onto the top end portion of the freeze plate **22**. In one or more embodiments, the waterfall surface **249** slants forward in the ice maker **10** such that the waterfall surface is oriented generally parallel to the back wall **254** (and front plane FP) of the forwardly slanting freeze plate **22**.

[0131] IX.B. Top Distributor Piece

[0132] Referring to FIGS. **25-27**, the top distributor piece **210** has a right end wall **250** (broadly, a first end wall) at the right end portion of the distributor **25** and a left end wall **252** (broadly, a second end wall) at the left end portion of the distributor. The width of the top distributor piece **210** is slightly less than the width of the bottom distributor piece **174** such that the top distributor piece is configured to nest between the end walls **216**, **218** of the bottom distributor piece.

[0133] Referring to FIG. **28**, each end wall **250**, **252** in the illustrated embodiment comprises an elongate groove **254** along an outer surface. Only the left end wall **252** is shown in FIG. **28**, but it will be understood that the right end wall **250** has a substantially identical, mirror image groove **254**. Generally, the elongate grooves **254** are configured to form complementary female fittings that mate with the male fittings formed by the elongate tongues **232** to releasably couple the top distributor piece **210** to the bottom distributor piece **174** without the use of separate fasteners. The elongate grooves **254** are generally parallel, extending longitudinally in a generally front-to back direction. The rear end portion of each elongate groove **254** defines a flared opening through which a respective elongate tongue **174** can pass into the groove. Each end wall further defines a protuberance **256** that protrudes into the groove at a location spaced apart between the front and rear ends of the groove **254**.

[0134] Referring again to FIGS. **25-27**, the top distributor piece **210** comprises a top wall **258** that extends widthwise from the right end wall **250** to the left end wall **252**. The top wall **258** extends generally forward from a rear edge margin. A front wall **260** extends generally downward from a front end portion of the top wall to a free bottom edge margin. Two handle portions **262** extend forward from the front wall **260** in the illustrated embodiment.

[0135] As shown in FIGS. **26-27**, the top distributor piece **210** further comprises a weir **264** that extends downward from the top wall **258** at a location spaced apart between the rear edge margin and the front wall **260**. The weir **264** extends widthwise from the right end wall **250** to the left end wall **252** and has a free bottom edge margin that is configured to be received in the widthwise groove **240** of the bottom distributor piece **174**. As shown in FIG. **27**, the bottom edge margin of the weir **264** is convex in the widthwise direction. The weir **264** defines a plurality of openings **266** at spaced apart locations along the width WD of the distributor **25**. A bottom portion of the weir **264** below the openings **266** is configured to hold back water until the water level reaches the bottom of the openings. The openings **266** are configured so that water is passable through the openings as it is imparted through the distributor **25**. Adjacent openings are separated by portions of the weir **264**, such that the weir is configured to form a segmented weir that allows water to cross at spaced apart segments along the width WD of the distributor **25** (through the openings).

[0136] IX.C. Assembly of Two-Piece Distributor

[0137] Referring to FIGS. **29-30**, to assemble the distributor **25**, the top distributor piece **210** is aligned in the widthwise direction with the space between the end walls **216**, **218** of the bottom distributor piece **174**. Then the top piece **210** is moved in the rearward direction RD into the space between the rear walls **216**, **218**, such that the elongate tongues **232** of the bottom piece are slidably received in the elongate grooves **254** of the top piece.

[0138] As seen in FIG. **30**, the evaporator assembly **20** is suitably arranged in the interior of the ice maker enclosure **29** so that the top piece **210** can be installed/removed through an access opening **268** such as the doorway of the cabinet **50**. In the illustrated embodiment, the doorway **268** is spaced apart from the front of the evaporator assembly **20** in the forward direction FD. Further, the front opening **122** in the support **110** is located between the front of the evaporator assembly **20** and the doorway **268**. Thus, the top distributor piece **210** can be installed by moving the piece through the doorway **268** and the opening **122** in the rearward direction RD. The top distributor piece **210** is removed by moving the piece through the opening **122** and the doorway **268** in the forward direction FD.

[0139] Each tongue **232** is configured to be slidably received in the respective groove **254** as the top distributor piece **210** moves toward the bottom distributor piece **174** in the rearward direction RD. That is, the parallel longitudinal orientations of the tongues **232** and grooves **254** facilitate coupling the top distributor piece **210** to the bottom distributor piece **174** simply by moving the top distributor piece in the rearward direction RD. Thus, the complementary fittings formed by the tongues **232** and grooves **254** are configured to be engaged by movement of the top distributor piece **210** inward into the interior of the enclosure **29** from the doorway **268**. Further, the complementary fittings **232**, **254** are configured to be disengaged simply by urging the top distributor piece **210** away from the bottom distributor piece **174** in the forward direction FD, toward the doorway

268. When maintenance or repair of the distributor **25** is required, a technician merely opens the door **52** (FIG. **2**), grips the handles **262**, and pulls the top distributor piece **210** outward in the forward direction FD through the doorway **268**. To replace the top distributor piece **210**, the technician inserts the piece through the doorway **268**, aligns the open ends of the grooves **254** with the tongues **232**, and pushes the top piece rearward. The tongues **232** are then slidably received in the grooves **254**, and the complementary fittings thereby couple the top distributor piece **210** to the bottom distributor piece **174** without using any additional fasters such as screws or rivets.

[0140] Though the illustrated embodiment uses the bottom distributor piece's elongate tongues **232** as male fittings and the top distributor piece's elongate grooves **254** as complementary female fittings, other forms or arrangements of complementary integral fittings can be utilized to releasably couple one distributor piece to another in one or more embodiments. For example, it is expressly contemplated that in certain embodiments one or more male fittings could be formed on the top distributor piece and one or more complementary female fittings could be formed on the bottom distributor piece. It is further contemplated that the fittings could be formed at alternative or additional locations other than the end portions of the distributor.

[0141] Referring to FIG. **31**, each pair of complementary fittings comprises a detent configured to keep the respective tongue **232** at a coupling position along the respective groove **254**. More specifically, the protuberances **256** formed in the grooves **254** are configured to be received in the depressions **234** of the tongues **232** to provide a detent when the complementary fittings are at the coupling position. The detent resists inadvertent removal of the top distributor piece **210** from the bottom distributor piece **174** and provides a tactile snap when the tongue **232** slides along the groove **254** to the coupling position. It will be appreciated that the detent can be formed in other ways in one or more embodiments.

[0142] Referring to FIGS. **20** and **32**, as the top distributor piece **210** slides in the rearward direction RD to couple the distributor pieces together, the bottom edge margin of the weir **264** slides along the downstream (front) section **222** of the bottom wall **220**. When the top distributor piece **210** reaches the coupling position, the bottom edge margin of the weir **264** is received in the groove **240**. In one or more embodiments, placing the weir **264** in the groove **240** requires pushing the top piece **210** rearward past a slight interference with the bottom piece **174**. When the bottom edge margin of the weir **264** is received in the groove **240**, the weir sealingly engages the bottom wall **220** such that water flowing along the distributor flow path FP is inhibited from flowing through an interface between the bottom edge margin of the weir and the bottom wall and is instead directed to flow across the weir through the plurality of openings **266**.

[0143] The weir **264** extends widthwise along a middle section of the assembled distributor **25**, at a location spaced apart between the front wall **260** and the rear wall **236**. The only couplings between the top distributor piece **210** and the bottom distributor piece **174** at this middle section of the distributor **25** are the tongue-and-groove connections at the left and right end portions of the distributor. Thus, in the illustrated embodiment, the middle section of the distributor **25** includes couplings at the first and second end portions of the distributor that restrain upward movement of the top distributor piece **210** with respect to the bottom distributor piece **174**, but the distributor is substantially free of restraints against upward movement of the top distributor piece relative the bottom distributor piece along the middle section of the distributor at locations between these couplings. However, because the bottom edge margin of the weir **264** is convex and the groove **240** is correspondingly concave in the widthwise direction (FIG. **32**), even as the distributor pieces **174**, **210** flex and deform during use, the seal between the weir and the bottom wall **220** is maintained and water is reliably directed to flow through of openings **266**, instead of downward through the interface between the weir and the bottom wall.

[0144] IX.D. Water Flow through Distributor

[0145] Referring to FIG. **20**, the distributor **25** is configured to direct water to flow from the inlet **212** to the outlet **214** such that the water flows along the flow path FP between the bottom and top walls **220**, **258** and then is directed downward along the surface tension curve **247** and the water fall surface **249** onto the top portion of the freeze plate **22**. Initially, the water flows generally in the forward direction from the inlet tube **238** through the inlet opening **212** in the rear wall **236**. The water then encounters the lateral diverter wall **246**. The lateral diverter wall **246** diverts at least some of the water laterally outward, such that the water continues forward through the widthwise gaps between the end portions of the lateral diverter wall and the end portions of the distributor **25**.

[0146] After flowing past the lateral diverter wall **246**, the water encounters the ramp surface **242** and the segmented weir **264**. The ramp surface **242** is immediately upstream of the weir **264** such that the water flowing along the bottom wall **220** of the distributor **25** must flow upward along the ramp surface before flowing across the weir. The weir **264** is configured so that the openings **266** are spaced apart above the bottom wall **220** (e.g., the bottom edges of the openings are spaced apart above the apex of the ramp surface **242**). Thus, in the illustrated embodiment, the water must flow upward along the ramp surface **242**, and upward along a portion of the height of the weir **264** before it can flow through the openings **266** across the weir. In one or more embodiments, the weir **264** is configured so that the portion of the distributor **25** upstream of the weir backfills with water to a level that generally corresponds with the height of the bottom edges of the openings **266** before the water begins to spill over the weir through the openings. In certain embodiments, the ramp surface **242** can direct at least some of the water flowing in the forward direction FD along the ramp surface to flow through the openings **266** before the upstream portion of the distributor **25** fills with water to a level that corresponds with the height of the bottom edges of the openings. After flowing across the weir **264**, the water drops downward onto the sloped front runoff section **222** of the bottom wall **220** and then flows downward and forward.

[0147] As can be seen, the upper rear edge of the front runoff section **222** is spaced apart below the openings **266** by a substantially greater distance than the apex of the ramp surface **242**. Thus, the water falls a relatively great distance from the segmented weir **264** onto the front runoff section **222**, which may create turbulence on impact, enhancing the distribution of water in the distributor **25**. In one or more embodiments, the vertical distance between the bottom edges of the openings **266** and the upper rear edge of the front runoff section **222** is at least 5 mm; e.g., at least 7 mm, e.g., at least 10 mm; e.g., about 12 to 13 mm.

[0148] Referring to FIG. **20**A, in the assembled distributor **25**, the front wall **260** of the top distributor piece **210** forms an overhanging front wall that overhangs the bottom wall **220**. The bottom edge margin of the front wall **260** is spaced apart above the forwardly/downwardly sloping front runoff section **222** of the bottom wall **220** such that a flow restriction **270** is defined between the runoff section and the overhanging front wall. The flow restriction **270** comprises a gap (e.g., a continuous gap) that extends widthwise between the first end portion and the second end portion of the distributor **25**. In general, the flow restriction **270** is configured to restrict a rate at which water flows through the flow restriction toward the outlet **214**. In one or more embodiments, the flow restriction **270** has a height extending vertically from the runoff section **222** to the bottom of the front wall **260** of less than 10 mm, e.g., less than 7 mm; e.g., less than 5 mm; e.g., about 2 to 3 mm.

[0149] The water flowing forward along the front section **222** reaches the flow restriction **270**, and the flow restriction arrests or slows the flow of water. In one or more embodiments, the overhanging front wall **260** acts as a kind of inverted weir. The flow restriction **270** slows the flow of water to a point at which water begins to slightly backfill the front portion of the distributor **25**. This creates a small reservoir of water behind the flow restriction **270**. A metered amount of water flows continuously from this back-filled reservoir through the flow restriction **270** along substantially the entire width WD of the distributor **25**.

[0150] The surface tension curve **247**—and more broadly the downstream end portion of the bottom wall **220**—is forwardly proud of the overhanging front wall **260** and the flow restriction **270**. After the water flows (e.g., is metered) through the flow restriction **270**, the water adheres to the downwardly curving surface tension curve **247** as it flows generally forward. The surface tension curve **247** directs the water downward onto the waterfall surface **249**. The water adheres to the waterfall surface **249** and flows downward along it. Finally the water is discharged from the outlet edge **214** of the waterfall surface **249** onto the top end portion of the freeze plate **22**.

[0151] Because of water distribution features such as one or more of the lateral diverter wall **246**, the ramp surface **242**, the segmented weir **264**, the flow restriction **270**, the surface tension curve **247**, and the waterfall surface **249**, water is discharged from the outlet **214** at a substantially uniform flow rate along the width WD of the distributor **25**. The distributor **25** thus directs water imparted through the distributor to flow downward along the front of the freeze plate **22** generally uniformly along the width WF of the freeze plate during an ice making cycle. Moreover, the distributor **25** controls the dynamics of the flowing water so that the water generally adheres to the surfaces of the front of the freeze plate **22** as it flows downward. Thus, the distributor **25** enables ice to form at a generally uniform rate along the height HF and width WF of the freeze plate **22**.

[0152] X. Use

[0153] Referring again to FIG. **1**, during use the ice maker **10** alternates between ice making cycles and harvest cycles. During each ice making cycle, the refrigeration system is operated to cool the freeze plate **22**. At the same time, the pump **62** imparts water from the sump **70** through the water line **63** and further through the distributor **25**. The distributor **25** distributes water along the top portion of the freeze plate **22** which freezes into ice in the molds **150** at a generally uniform rate along the height HF and width WF of the freeze plate **22**. When the ice reaches a thickness that is suitable for harvesting, the pump **62** is turned off and the hot gas valve **24** redirects hot refrigerant gas to the evaporator tubing **21**. The hot gas warms the freeze plate **22**, causing the ice to melt. The melting ice falls by gravity from the forwardly slanted freeze plate **22** into the bin **30**. When harvest is complete, the pump **62** can be reactivated to begin a new ice making cycle. But if additional ice is not required, the drain valve **510** is opened. Residual water in the distributor **25** drains into the sump **70** as described above, and the water from the sump drains through the drain passaging **78**. The drain valve **510** can be closed when the water level sensor **64** detects that the sump **70** is empty. If repair or maintenance of the distributor **25** should ever be required, a technician can simply open the door **52** to the enclosure and pull out the top piece **210** as described above. No fasteners are used when removing and replacing the top distributor piece **210**.

[0154] XI. Ice Level Sensing

[0155] Referring now to FIGS. **33**-**34**, the illustrated ice maker **10** comprises an ice level sensor **310** that is configured to detect the level of ice in the bin **30** while the ice maker is in use. Various uses for ice level sensing are known or may become known to those skilled in the art. For example, it is known to shut off an ice maker when an ice level sensor indicates that the ice bin is full of ice.

[0156] In one or more embodiments, the ice level sensor **310** comprises a time-of-flight sensor. In general, a suitable time-of-flight sensor **310** may comprise a sensor board **312** (e.g., a printed circuit board) including a light source **314**, a photon detector **316**, and an onboard control and measurement processor **318**. Exemplary time-of-flight sensor boards are sold by STMicroelectronics, Inc., under the name FlightSense™ Certain non-limiting embodiments of time-of-flight sensors within the scope of this disclosure are described in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2017/0351336, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. Broadly speaking, the light source **314** is configured to emit, at a first time, an optical pulse toward a target. The photon detector **316** is configured to detect, at a second time, a target-reflected photon of the optical pulse signal that returns to the time-of-flight sensor **310**. The control and measurement processor **318** is configured to direct the light source to emit the optical pulse and determine a duration (time-of-flight) between the first time and the second time. In one or more embodiments, the control and measurement processor **318** is further configured to determine, based on the determined duration, a distance between the time-of-flight sensor and the target and cause the sensor board **312** to output a signal representative of the determined distance. In certain embodiments, the ice maker controller **80** is configured to receive the measurement signal from the sensor board **312** and to use the measurement signal to control the ice maker.

[0157] In the illustrated embodiment, the target of the time-of-flight sensor **310** is the uppermost surface within the interior of the ice bin **30**. That is, the time-of-flight sensor **310** is configured to direct the optical pulse through the bottom of the ice maker **10** toward the bottom of the ice bin **30**. The optical pulse will reflect off of the bottom of the ice bin **30** if no ice is present or, if ice is present, off of the top of the ice received in the bin. Based on the duration (time-of-flight) of the photon(s), the control and measurement processor **318** determines the distance the photon(s) traveled, which indicates the level (broadly, amount or quantity) of ice that is present in the bin **30**—e.g., the determined distance is inversely proportional to the quantity of ice in the bin. The time-of-flight sensor **310** can provide a rapid, very accurate indication of level of ice in the bin. Moreover, in comparison with conventional ice level detection systems that utilize capacitive, ultrasonic, infrared, or mechanical sensors, the time-of-flight sensor **310** has been found to provide much greater measurement accuracy and responsiveness in the typical dark, irregularly-shaped conditions of an ice bin.

[0158] Referring to FIGS. **34-37**, in one or more embodiments the one-piece support **110** is constructed and arranged for time-of-flight sensor integration. For example, in the illustrated embodiment, the bottom wall **112** of the support **110** defines a sensor opening **320** through which the time-of-flight sensor **310** is configured to emit the optical pulse and receive the reflected photon(s). In one or more embodiments, the sensor opening **320** is located on a rear side of the vertical support wall **114**. Suitably, the sensor opening **320** extends through an entire thickness of the bottom wall **112**, from the upper surface thereof through the lower surface. Thus, the sensor opening **320** is defined by an inner perimeter surface **322** of the bottom wall **112** that extends circumferentially around the sensor opening and extends heightwise along the thickness of the bottom wall. In the illustrated embodiment, the perimeter of the sensor opening **320** is generally circular; although sensor openings of other shapes may be used in one or more embodiments.

[0159] In the illustrated embodiment, the vertically extending support wall **114** of the support **110** comprises an integrally formed sensor mount **324** (FIG. **36**) that is configured to mount the time-of-flight sensor **310** on the support. The illustrated sensor mount **324** comprises a pair of integral connection points **326** formed on the side wall portion **116** of the vertically extending support wall **114**. In one or more embodiments, each connection point **326** comprises an integral screw hole. In the illustrated embodiment, each connection point **326** comprises a boss projecting laterally outward from the main side surface of the side wall portion **116** and a screw hole formed within the boss. The time-of-flight sensor **310** comprises a mounting bracket **330** that is configured to couple to the vertically extending support wall **114** via the screw holes. As will be explained in further detail below, the mounting bracket **330** mounts the time-of-flight sensor board **312** so that the light source **314** can broadcast the optical pulse through the sensor opening **320** toward the bottom of the ice bin **30** and so that the photon detector **316** can detect a photon reflected from the ice bin through the sensor opening.

[0160] As will be apparent to those skilled in the art from the description of the vertically extending support wall **114** provided in Section V above, the vertically extending support wall can separate a food-safe side of the ice maker **10** from a non-food-safe side. In the illustrated embodiment, the sensor opening **320** is located on the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10** (e.g., to the rear of the vertically extending support wall **114**), which allows the time-of-flight sensor **310** to be mounted on the ice maker in the non-food-safe side, out of the wall of ice as it falls during harvest. Drain passaging and certain electrical and refrigeration system components are also located in the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10** in one or more embodiments. By contrast, the ice drop opening **123** and the ice formation device **20** are located in the food-safe side so that ice produced by the ice maker **10** and harvested into the bin **30** is never contaminated by non-food-safe equipment that may be contained in the non-food-safe side.

[0161] To prevent contamination of the food-safe side of the ice maker **10** and the ice bin **30** through the sensor opening **320**, the illustrated time-of-flight sensor **310** is sealingly engaged with the bottom wall **112** of the support **110** to seal the sensor opening. More specifically, the illustrated time-of-flight sensor **310** comprises a sensor enclosure **332** and a gasket **334** that is sealingly compressed between the sensor enclosure and the bottom wall **112**.

[0162] In the illustrated embodiment, the enclosure **332** comprises a base piece **336** and a cover portion **338** of the mounting bracket **330** that is releasably fastened to the base piece, e.g., via removable fasteners such as screws. The base piece **336** defines a lower wall of the enclosure **332**, and a cover portion **338** of the mounting bracket **330** defines an upper wall of the enclosure. In one or more embodiments, the cover portion **338** is connected to the base piece **336** to define an interior chamber **340** (FIG. **37**) between the cover portion and the base piece. The time-of-flight sensor board **312** is operatively received in the interior chamber **340** of the enclosure **332**. In one or more embodiments, the interior chamber **340** can be environmentally sealed to protect the time-of-flight sensor board **312** received in the interior chamber. For example, a compressible gasket (not shown) can be compressed between the base piece and the cover portion to seal the interface therebetween.

[0163] In the illustrated embodiment, the lower wall of the sensor enclosure **332** defines a window opening **342**. A window pane **344** is mounted on the lower wall across the window opening **342**. Suitably, the window pane **344** is transparent to the optical pulse emitted by the light source **314** of the time-of-flight sensor board **312** and is thus likewise transparent to the photon(s) reflected from the ice and/or ice bin to the photon detector **316**.

[0164] Referring to FIG. **37**, in the illustrated embodiment, the window opening **342** is defined by an annular window frame **346** formed on the lower wall. The window frame includes an inner annular projection **348** that projects upward from the lower wall and an outer annular projection **350** that projects downward from the lower wall. The inner annular projection **348** defines an annular shoulder **352** that supports the window pane **344**. Suitably, the window pane is sealingly engaged with the annular shoulder **352** such that the window pane seals the window opening **342**. In one or more embodiments, the seal between the window pane **344** and the window frame **346** is created by an adhesive (not shown) that bonds the window pane to the window frame. In certain embodiments, the window pane can be fastened to the window frame such that the window pane compresses an annular gasket (not shown) against the annular shoulder to form the seal between the window pane and the window frame. It will be apparent that providing a seal between the window pane **322** and the lower wall of the base piece **336** enables the sensor enclosure to seal the sensor opening **320**.

[0165] Referring to FIG. **33**, the base piece **336** of the sensor enclosure **332** comprises an integral board mount **354** configured to mount the sensor board **312** in the interior chamber **340** at a precise vertical spacing distance VSD from the window pane **344**. For example, the illustrated board mount **354** is configured to mount the board **312** such that the light source **314** is vertically spaced apart from the upper surface of the window pane **344** by a spacing distance VSD of greater than 0.0 mm and less than 0.5 mm. The size of the vertical spacing distance VSD is exaggerated in the schematic illustration of FIG. **33** to better illustrating the relationship between the parts. However, FIG. **37** depicts the relative positions of the window pane **344** and the sensor board **312** to scale.

[0166] Any suitable board mount for securely mounting the board at the desired spacing distance VSD may be used without departing from the scope of the disclosure. Referring to FIG. **38**, in one or more embodiments, the board mount **354** can comprise at least one integral mounting boss **356** (broadly, at least one or a plurality of integral connection points) that extends upward from the lower wall of the base **336** and or downward from the upper wall of the cover. In the illustrated embodiment, the board mount **354** comprises three spaced-apart mounting bosses **356** that extend upward from the lower wall of the base piece **336**. Suitably each mounting boss **356** is configured to receive a removable fastener **357** (e.g., a threaded fastener such as a screw) that extends through a respective fastener opening in the sensor board **312** to fasten the board to the sensor enclosure **332**. It can be seen that the mounting bosses **336** have specified heights in relation to the height of the window frame shoulder **352**, which ensures that the sensor board **312** is mounted at the proper spacing distance VSD. (In one or more embodiments, the base piece **336** can be an injection molded plastic part manufactured to very tight tolerances to ensure the proper spacing distance VSD).

[0167] Referring to FIG. **37**, the gasket **334** has a shape (e.g., an inverted top hat shape) that generally corresponds with the bottom portion of the sensor enclosure **332** and the bottom wall **112** of the support **110**. For example, the illustrated gasket **334** comprises a tube section **360** configured to extend circumferentially around the outer annular projection **350** of the window frame **346**. The tube section **360** has a vertical tube axis VTA and extends along the vertical tube axis from a lower end portion to an upper end portion. An inner perimeter surface of the tube section **360** is configured to conformingly engage an outer perimeter of the outer annular projection **350** about the entire circumference thereof. An outer perimeter surface of the tube section **360** is configured to conformingly engage the inner perimeter surface **322** of the bottom wall **112** of the ice maker support **110** about the entire circumference thereof. In one or more embodiments the tube section **360** is radially compressed (with respect to the vertical tube axis VTA) between the outer perimeter surface of the outer annular projection **350** and the inner perimeter surface **322** of the bottom wall **112**.

[0168] The illustrated gasket **334** further comprises a flange section **362** that extends radially outward from the upper end portion of the tube section **360**. An upper surface of the flange section **362** conformingly engages a bottom surface of the lower wall of the base piece **336** and a lower surface of the flange section **362** conformingly engages the upper surface of the bottom wall **112** adjacent the sensor opening **320**. The flange section **362** is axially (with respect to the vertical tube axis VTA) compressed between the lower wall of the base piece **336** and the bottom wall **112** of the support **110**. Although the illustrated ice maker **10** utilizes a time-of-flight sensor gasket **334** having an inverted top hat shape to seal the sensor opening **310** through which the time-of-flight sensor **310** operates, it will be understood that other configurations for sealing the sensor opening are also possible without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

[0169] Referring to FIG. **34**, in the illustrated embodiment, the mounting bracket **330** supports the sensor enclosure **332** such that the lower wall of the base piece **336** axially (with respect to the vertical tube axis VTA) compresses the flange section **362** against the bottom wall **112** of the ice maker support **110**. The mounting bracket **330** comprises a generally vertical, front-to-back-extending mounting flange portion **372** configured to extend along the side wall portion **116** of the vertically extending support wall **114** proximate the sensor mount **324**. The mounting flange portion **372** has first and second screw holes **374** through which respective removable fasteners are configured to extend and be relasably affixed to the connection points **326** of the vertically extending support wall **114** to mount the mounting bracket on the vertically extending support wall **114**. A generally vertical, laterally extending connecting web portion **376** extends at a transverse (e.g., perpendicular) angle relative to the mounting flange, along the rear wall portion **120** of the vertically extending support wall **114**. The generally horizontal cover portion **338** is connected to a bottom end of the connection web portion **376** and extends rearward therefrom over the top of the base piece **336**. As explained above, the base piece is fastened to the cover portion **338** to form the sensor enclosure **332**.

[0170] In addition to providing a highly accurate measurement of ice level under many conditions, the illustrated time-of-flight sensor **310** also advantageously facilitates periodic service of the time-of-flight sensor to maintain ice level measurement accuracy over the life of the ice maker. In one exemplary method of servicing the ice maker **10**, an access panel of the cabinet **29** is removed to provide access to the time-of-flight sensor **310**. Subsequently, the removable fasteners which connect the mounting bracket **330** to the connection points **326** are removed (e.g., unscrewed). Then, the user can remove the time-of-flight sensor **310** from the ice maker **10** as a unit. For example, in one or more embodiments, the user lifts the enclosure **332** and the mounting bracket **330** together to remove the sensor **310** from the sensor opening **320**. In some cases, the gasket **334** may be removed with the enclosure **332**; and in other cases, the gasket may remain in the opening **320**. In either case, after removing the removable fasteners from the connection points **326**, the time-of-flight sensor **310** is separated from the bottom wall **112** of the ice maker **10** to expose the sensor opening **320**.

[0171] When the time-of-flight sensor **310** is removed, the user can perform various servicing or maintenance tasks. For example, in one or more embodiments, the user may connect a processor to the time-of-flight sensor **310** that updates software or firmware of the time-of-flight sensor, retrieves stored data from the time-of-flight sensor, or performs another control or data processing task. In an exemplary embodiment, the user cleans the outer surface of the window pane **344** when the time-of-flight sensor **310** is removed from the ice maker. Cleaning the window pane **344** involves removing debris and scale (e.g., mineral deposits) that may form on the window pane during use of the ice maker. Maintaining a clean window pane may be important to ensure to the long-term accuracy of the time-of-flight sensor **310**. For example, debris and scale may cloud the transparency of the window pane **344** to the photons utilized in the time-of-flight measurement. Thus, periodically removing debris and scale ensures that the time-of-flight sensor **310** consistently functions as intended.

[0172] After the window pane **344** has been cleaned and/or another time-of-flight sensor service task has been performed, the sensor **310** can be reinstalled as a unit. The sensor enclosure **332** and bracket **330** are positioned as a unit to cover the sensor opening **320**. In addition, the step of repositioning the sensor **310** in the ice maker **10** suitably reestablishes the seal between the enclosure **332** and the bottom wall **112** of the support **110**. For example, the time-of-flight sensor **310** is repositioned so that the gasket **334** is compressed between the bottom wall **112** and the enclosure **332**. After repositioning the time-of-flight sensor, the removable fasteners are inserted through the holes **374** in the mounting bracket **330** and fastened to the connection points **326** of the vertical support wall **114**.

[0173] If the time-of-flight sensor **310** ever becomes inoperable, a new time-of-flight sensor unit can also be installed in the same way that the existing unit is described as being reinstalled above.

[0174] Accordingly, it can be seen that the support **110** and the time-of-flight sensor **310** have been constructed to facilitate periodic removal of the time-of-flight sensor from the ice maker **10**. Periodic removal allows the time-of-flight sensor **310** to be maintained, updated, and/or replaced as needed to preserve the accuracy of the ice level sensing measurements. Moreover, the ice maker **10** facilitates removal and reinstallation/replacement of the time-of-flight sensor **310** in such a way that ensures that the seal of the food-safe side of the ice maker is preserved when the time-of-flight sensor is placed in the operative position. Furthermore, because the time-of-flight sensor **310** is mounted in the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10**, it remains out of the way of ice harvest during use.

[0175] XII. Gravity Drain

[0176] Ice maker manufacturers typically design and make ice makers so that a pump discharges water from the ice maker sump. For example, the same pump that recirculates water from the sump through the distributor can also be selectively coupled (e.g., via a discharge valve) to discharge passaging through which the water can be pumped to drain the sump. A drain pump is operative when mounted above a sump to discharge drain water through passaging above or at the level of the sump. By contrast, gravity drains require drain passaging to be positioned below the sump. This consideration drives manufacturers to utilize active discharge pumps instead of passive gravity drains.

[0177] Passive gravity drain passaging must be located below the sump to function. In commercial ice makers, however, it is not possible to have drain passaging open through the bottom of the ice maker cabinet because the bottom must be capable of being supported directly atop an ice bin or a dispenser unit. Thus, commercial (flat bottom) ice makers with passive gravity drains must accommodate drain passaging that (i) is located below the sump and (ii) can direct water from the sump to an outlet located in the side of an ice maker. This necessitates mounting the sump at an elevated position above the bottom of the ice maker to provide necessary vertical clearance for suitable drain passaging.

[0178] However, common commercial ice makers have an industry standard total height of approximately 22 inches. For a gravity drain to function, the ice maker must accommodate the following, from top to bottom, within the 22-inch height: (a) a water distributor, (b) a freeze plate below the water distributor, (c) a sump below the freeze plate, and (d) drain passaging below the sump. It can be seen, therefore, that utilizing a gravity drain instead of a pump discharge system limits the available height for the freeze plate. Moreover, ice manufacturers have typically viewed any reduction in freeze plate size as undesirable on the presumption that it would cause the ice maker to produce ice less efficiently. As such, ice maker manufacturers have not utilized gravity drains in standard-height commercial ice makers.

[0179] However, the present inventors have recognized that pump discharge mechanisms are unable to remove all of the water from the sump. The inventors have further recognized that the residual water is prone to stagnation when the ice maker is not making ice. Moreover, stagnation can lead to the formation of bacteria or other harmful biological agents.

[0180] Thus, referring to FIG. **39**, the present inventors have conceived of an ice maker **10** having a total height H0 (height from the top to the bottom of the ice maker cabinet **29**) of approximately 22 inches that includes a gravity drain and several complementary features that facilitate accommodating the gravity drain within the standard height of the ice maker without materially reducing the size of the freeze plate **22** or materially reducing the ice production rate of the ice maker in comparison with conventional commercial ice makers with active discharge pumps. Although these complementary features are described in relation to a standard-height ice maker **10**, it will be appreciated that ice makers of other heights can utilize one or more of the features without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

[0181] As explained above, the freeze plate **22** has a height HF along the back wall **154** thereof. The illustrated evaporator assembly **20** also includes a spacer **45***o* below the bottom of the freeze plate **22** such that the evaporator assembly has a height H1 extending from the top of the freeze plate to the bottom of the evaporator assembly, which in the illustrated embodiment is defined by the spacer. Thus, in an embodiment, the bottom of the freeze plate **22** is vertically spaced above the bottom of the evaporator assembly **20**. This is because the required rate of ice production for the illustrated ice maker **10** is less than what the ice maker, within its existing footprint, could meet if the freeze plate extended along the entire height H1. Since the application for the illustrated ice maker **10** requires less ice production, the illustrated ice maker is configured to produce the required amount of ice at a relatively high energy efficiency. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that, for manufacturing efficiency, ice maker manufacturers will produce multiple models of ice makers with basically identical water systems and cabinetry, but which utilize refrigeration system components of different sizes (e.g., freeze plates of different heights) that meet different levels of ice production needs.

[0182] Referring to FIG. **39**A, another embodiment of an ice maker **10'** is shown that is configured for producing ice at a greater rate. In comparison with the ice maker **10**, the ice maker **10'** has the same cabinet size and has an evaporator assembly **20'** having the same height H1 extending from the top of the freeze plate to the bottom of the evaporator assembly. The ice maker **10'** differs from the ice maker **10** only in that the ice maker **10'** includes a refrigeration system and freeze plate **22'** that is configured to produce ice at a greater rate. The ice maker **10'** thus includes an evaporator assembly **20'** comprising a taller freeze plate **22'** and lacking a lower spacer. The freeze plate **22'** has a height HF' that extends nearly to the bottom of the evaporator assembly **20'**. Thus, in FIG. **39**A, the freeze plate height HF' is only slightly less than the height H1.

[0183] In each of FIGS. **39** and **39**A, the evaporator assembly **20**, **20'** has about the same height H1 and has a about the same height H3 extending from the bottom of the evaporator assembly **20**, **20'** to the bottom of the ice maker **10**, **10'**. In one or more embodiments, the height H1 is in an inclusive range of from about 9 inches to about 16 inches (e.g., from about 10 inches to about 15 inches, from about 11 inches to about 15 inches, from about 12 inches to about 13 inches). In certain embodiments, the height H3 is greater than 4 inches (e.g., greater than 5 inches, greater than 6 inches). In one or more embodiments, the height H3 is in an inclusive range of from about 4 inches to about 11 inches (e.g., from about 4 inches to about 10 inches, from about 5 inches to about 9 inches, e.g., from about 6 inches to about 8 inches) Those skilled in the art will appreciate that this range of height H1 is roughly equivalent to the range of corresponding heights utilized in typical ice makers that discharge ice making water via pumps, but the height H3 is greater than a typical corresponding height in a conventional pump-discharge ice maker. This in combination with additional features that maximize the available space for the drain passaging **78** facilitate use of a gravity-driven drain within the standard height cabinet **29** of the ice maker.

[0184] It can be seen that, in one or more embodiments within the scope of the present disclosure, the height H0 of an ice maker enclosure is less than 24 inches and the height H1 of the evaporator assembly is greater than 10 inches. For example, in certain embodiments, the height H0 of the enclosure is less than 23 inches and the height H1 of the evaporator assembly is greater than 11 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the height H0 of the enclosure is about 22 inches and the height H1 of the evaporator assembly is greater than or equal to 12 inches.

[0185] One feature that enables the use of a gravity drain has already been discussed at length above: the integration of the water distributor **25** into the top of the evaporator assembly **20**. This reduces the overall height of the subassembly of the water distributor **25** and evaporator **21** in comparison with corresponding subassemblies of conventional ice makers, without directly affecting the height of the freeze plate **22**. So instead of reduction in height being achieved by a reduction in the height of the freeze plate **22**, reduction in height is achieved by reducing a height H2 of the ice formation device **20** between the top of the freeze plate and the top of the distributor **25**. For example, in one or more embodiments, the height H2 is less than or equal to 5 inches (e.g., less than or equal to about 4 inches, less than or equal to 3 inches, or equal to about 2.5 inches). Thus, integration of the distributor **25** into the evaporator assembly **20** enables the freeze plate **22** to be mounted closer to the top of the ice maker **10**, which in turn provides a greater height H3 from the bottom of the ice maker **10** to the bottom of the freeze plate **22**.

[0186] Another feature that accommodates the gravity drain is the one-piece support **110**. As explained above, the support **110** securely supports the distributor **25**, the freeze plate **22**, and the sump **60** at vertically spaced locations that are precisely defined in relation with only one piece of material, the vertically extending support wall **114**. No vertical space is consumed by stacked parts because all of the major components are supported on the same piece of material defining the vertically extending wall **114**. Further, as explained above, in one or more embodiments, the support **110** is formed in a very precise compression molding process. Thus, the tolerance for variance in the vertical position of each of the components supported on the wall **114** can be very small in one or more embodiments.

[0187] As explained above, in certain embodiments, the bottom of the freeze plate **22** is spaced apart from the bottom of the enclosure by a height H3 of less than 12 inches (e.g., a height of less than 11 inches, a height of less than 10 inches). Thus, the space allowed for the sump **60** and the gravity drain in the illustrated embodiment is still somewhat limited. Additional features of the drain passaging **78** that enable it to fit within the limited available height will now be described. As will be explained in further detail below, the illustrated support **110** is also configured to support the drain passaging **78** at a precise height and to enable the drain passaging **78** to open through an outlet opening **410** in the rear side (broadly, a side wall) of the ice maker **10** located immediately adjacent the bottom of the ice maker. Furthermore, as will also be explained in detail below, the inventors have conceived of a novel, robust ice maker drain valve **512** that enables reliable, gravity-driven draining and requires only a very small height between the inlet and outlet ends thereof.

[0188] Referring to FIGS. **40**-**42**, in the illustrated embodiment, the drain passaging **78** comprises a first upstream tube section **412** (FIG. **42**) that extends from a drain opening **414** (FIG. **41**) in the bottom of the sump **60** rearward through the vertically extending support wall **114**. The sump **60** is configured so that all of the water in the sump drains through the drain opening **414** by gravity when the drain passaging **78** is open. For example, the bottom of the sump **60** can form a basin that directs water to flow into the drain opening **414** by gravity.

[0189] Referring to FIG. **42**, the vertically extending support wall **114** defines a drain passaging opening **416** that is spaced apart below the bottom of the sump. The first tube section **412** extends rearward from adjacent an upstream end portion connected to the drain opening **414** across the vertically extending support wall **114** (e.g., across the rear wall portion **120**) through the drain passaging opening **416**. Thus, the upstream end of the first tube section **412** is located on the food-safe side of the ice maker **10** and the downstream end of the first tube section is located on the non-food-safe side of the ice maker in the illustrated embodiment. Suitably, a seal is formed between the exterior of first tube section **412** and the vertically extending support wall **114** at the opening **416** to prevent contaminates from the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10** from passing through the drain passaging opening to the food-safe side. For example, a gasket (not shown) may be placed around the first tube section **412** at the interface between the first tube section and the vertically extending support wall **114**.

[0190] Referring still to FIG. **42**, in the illustrated embodiment, the center of the drain passaging opening **416** is spaced apart from the bottom of the ice maker **10** by a height H4. In one or more embodiments, the height H4 is in an inclusive range of from about 0.5 inches to about 4 inches (e.g., from about 0.5 inches to about 3 inches, from about 0.5

inches to about 2 inches, from about 0.5 inches to about 1.5 inches). It can be seen that the drain passaging opening **416** is spaced apart below the sump mount **128** (discussed above, see FIG. **5**). In one or more embodiments, the center of the drain passaging opening **416** is spaced apart below the bottom of the sump **60** by a height H5. Suitably, the height H5 is in an inclusive range of from about 1.0 inches to about 4.0 inches (e.g., from about 1.5 inches to about 3.0 inches, from about 2 inches to about 2.5 inches). The drain passaging opening **416** may have a cross-sectional dimension CD1 (e.g., a diameter) in an inclusive range of from about 0.5 inches to about 2.0 inches (e.g., from about 0.5 inches to about 1.5 inches, from about 0.5 inches to about 1.0 inches). Thus, a height H4' between the bottom of the drain passaging opening **416** and the bottom of the ice maker **10** can be in an inclusive range of from about 0.5 inches to about 4 inches (e.g., from about 0.5 inches to about 2.5 inches, from about 0.5 inches to about 1.5 inches, from about 0.5 inches to about 1.0 inches), and a height H5' between the bottom of the drain passaging opening and the bottom of the sump **60** can be in an inclusive range of from about 1.5 inches to about 4.5 inches (e.g., from about 2.0 inches to about 3.5 inches, from about 2.5 inches to about 3.0 inches).

[0191] Referring to FIGS. **40** and **41**, in the illustrated embodiment a second tube section **420** of the drain passaging **78**, located on the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10**, extends laterally along the rear side of the rear wall portion **120** and connects the downstream end of the first tube section to a drain valve **512** (described in further detail below). A third tube section **422** of the drain passaging **78** extends from the outlet of the drain valve **512** laterally back along the span of the second tube section **520** to a fourth, downstream tube section **424** of the drain passaging **78**. The support wall **114** comprises an integral drain valve mount (e.g., integrally formed connection points such as screw holes) configured to mount the drain valve **512** on the support **110** in the cabinet **29** on the non-food-safe side of the ice maker **10**. Thus, the sump mount and the drain valve mount are configured to mount the sump **60** and the drain valve **512** on the support **110** on opposite sides of the at least one vertically extending support wall **114**. The fourth tube section **424** has an upstream, inboard end portion that is connected to the downstream end portion of the third tube section and a downstream, outboard end portion that terminates in a drain coupling **426** at the drain opening **410** (FIG. **39**) through the rear wall of the cabinet **29**. In FIGS. **39-42** and **46**, insulation around each of the tube sections **412**, **420**, **422**, **424** has been omitted to provide a clearer view of other features. Additionally, throughout the drawings insulation panels are omitted to provide a clearer view of other components.

[0192] Referring to FIGS. **43** and **44**, in one or more embodiments encompassed in the scope of this disclosure, the drain valve **512** comprises a valve body, generally indicated at **514**, and a valve member, generally indicated at **516**. The valve member is movable with respect to the valve body **514** between an open position (FIG. **3**) and a closed position (FIG. **4**). The illustrated valve **512** further comprises a valve positioner **518** (broadly, an actuator) configured to selectively move the valve member **516** between the open and closed positions. In one or more embodiments, the valve positioner **518** is connected to the controller **80** (FIG. **1**), which controls the operation of the valve **512** using the valve positioner. In the illustrated embodiment, the valve positioner **518** comprises a linear actuator configured to move the valve member **516** along an axis VVA between the open and closed positions. For instance, the positioner **518** is configured to move the valve member **516** along the axis VVA in an opening direction OD toward the open position, and the positioner is configured to move the valve member along the axis in a closing direction CD toward the closed position. In the open position (FIG. **3**), the valve member **516** is positioned with respect to the valve body **514** to allow water to flow through the valve body from the first and second tube sections **412**, **420** (broadly, an upstream end portion of the drain passaging **78**) to the third and fourth tube sections **422**, **424** (broadly, a downstream end portion of the drain passaging). In the closed position (FIG. **4**), the valve member **516** engages the valve body **514** to prevent water from flowing through the valve **110** from the second tube section **420** to the third tube section **422** of the drain passaging **78** (broadly, from the upstream end portion to the downstream end portion). In the illustrated embodiment, a spring **519** is operatively connected to the valve member **516** to bias the valve member in the closing direction CD toward the closed position.

[0193] The valve body **514** defines a valve passage **520** fluidly coupled between the upstream end portion and the downstream end portion of the drain passaging **78**. In the illustrated embodiment, the valve body **514** includes an inlet tube **522** and an outlet tube **524** that extend transverse to the axis VVA. The inlet tube **522** defines an upstream section of the valve passage **520** and is configured to fluidly couple the valve **512** to the upstream end portion of the drain passaging **78**. The outlet tube **524** defines a downstream section of the valve passage **520** and is configured to fluidly couple the valve **512** to the downstream end portion of the drain passaging **78**. The illustrated valve body **516** further comprises an outer cylindrical chamber **526** and inner cylindrical chamber **528** extending lengthwise generally along the axis VVA. The inner chamber **528** is located within the outer chamber **526** and is fluidly connected to an upstream end of the outlet tube **524**. Outer chamber **526** is spaced from and extends circumferentially around the inner chamber **528** and is fluidly coupled to downstream end of the inlet tube **522**.

[0194] The inlet tube **522** has a center axis ITA, an inner radius ITR, and a bottom edge **522**A at its outlet end, e.g., the opening where the inlet tube opens into the cylindrical chamber **528**. The bottom edge **522**A is spaced apart from the center axis ITA by the radius ITR. Similarly, the outlet tube **524** has a center axis OTA, a radius OTR, and a bottom edge **524**A at its outlet end. The bottom edge **524**A is likewise spaced apart from the center axis OTA by the radius OTR. In the illustrated embodiment, the upstream bottom edge **522**A is spaced apart above the downstream bottom edge **524**A by a height H6. Thus, when the valve **512** is open, water from the sump **60** can flow through the valve passage **520** from the inlet tube **522** and fill the outer chamber **526**. The water in the outer chamber **526** flows over the top edge of the inner chamber **526** and then out of the valve **512** through the outlet tube **524**. In one or more embodiments, the height H6 is in an inclusive range of from about 0.1 inches to about 0.3 inches (e.g., from about 0.15 inches to about 0.25 inches, e.g., about 0.2 inches). In the illustrated embodiment, the radiuses ITR, OTR are substantially the same. Thus, the center axes ITA, OTA are spaced apart by a height H6' in an inclusive range of from about 0.1 inches to about 0.3 inches (e.g., from about 0.15 inches to about 0.25 inches, e.g., about 0.2 inches). Those skilled in the art will recognize that the heights H6, H6' are less than corresponding heights in conventional discharge valves. The relatively short heights H6, H6' partially enable the use of the passive gravity drain in the standard-height ice maker **10** without detracting from the ice maker's ice production rate by minimizing the required height of the drain passaging **78**. It will be appreciated that a drain valve can have valve bodies of other configurations in one or more embodiments, without departing from the scope of the disclosure.

[0195] In the illustrated embodiment, the free (upper) end portion of the inner chamber **528** defines an annular valve seat **530**. The valve seat **530** faces radially inward and extends longitudinally along the axis VVA. The valve seat **530** has a dimension (e.g., a height) L1 (FIG. **3**) extending along the axis VVA. In one or more embodiments, the dimension L1 of the annular valve seat **530** is in an inclusive range of from about 1 mm to about 10 mm, e.g., about 1.5 mm to about 5 mm, e.g., about 3 mm. Suitably, the valve seat **530** tapers radially inwardly as it extends along the axis VVA (e.g., as it extends along the axis in the closing direction CD). The illustrated valve seat **530** tapers radially inwardly along substantially the entire dimension L1 of the valve seat. In one or more embodiments, the valve seat **530** is a substantially conical surface centered about the axis VVA. The illustrated valve seat **530** has a cone angle α. In one or more embodiments, the cone angle α of the valve seat **530** is in an inclusive range of from about 30° to about 70°, e.g., about 45°.

[0196] The valve member **516** is generally configured to sealingly engage the valve seat **530** in the closed position (FIG. **4**) to prevent water in the outer chamber **526** from flowing into the inner chamber **528**. The closed valve **512** thereby blocks flow through the valve passage **520** from the upstream end portion of the drain passaging **78** to the downstream end portion. Thus, the valve member **516** is configured to close the drain passaging **78** and hold water in the sump **60** when the valve member is in the closed position. Suitably, the valve member **516** can be at least partially formed from resiliently deformable material that is resiliently compressed against the valve seat **530** when the valve member is in the closed position.

[0197] In the illustrated embodiment, the valve member **516** comprises an annular sealing surface **532** that extends longitudinally along the axis VVA. The annular sealing surface **532** is configured to radially overlap and sealingly engage the valve seat **530** along the axis VVA when the valve member **516** is in the closed position. In other words, the valve seat **530** and the sealing surface **532** are configured to engage one another at a seal interface that extends longitudinally along the axis VVA in the closed position of the valve **512**. The sealing engagement between the sealing surface **532** and the valve seat **530** closes the valve.

[0198] Suitably, the sealing surface **532** has a shape that substantially corresponds with the shape of the valve seat **530** (e.g., the valve seat and the sealing surface include surface portions that are substantially the same shape but face in opposing directions). Thus, the illustrated sealing surface **532** faces radially outwardly and has a dimension L2 (FIG. **43**) extending along the axis VVA. In one or more embodiments, the dimension L2 of the sealing surface **532** is in an inclusive range of from about 1 mm to about 10 mm, e.g., about 3 mm to about 7 mm, e.g., about 5 mm. In one or more embodiments, the dimension L2 is about 1 mm greater than the dimension L1. Suitably, the sealing surface **532** tapers radially inwardly as it extends along the axis WA (e.g., as it extends along the axis in the closing direction CD). The illustrated sealing surface **532** tapers radially inwardly along substantially the entire dimension L2 of the sealing surface. In one or more embodiments, the sealing surface **532** is a substantially conical surface centered about the axis VVA. The illustrated sealing surface **532** has a cone angle β that is suitably substantially the same as the cone angle α of the valve seat **53***o*. Thus, in one or more embodiments, the cone angle β of the valve member sealing surface **532** is in an inclusive range of from about 30° to about 70°.

[0199] In the illustrated embodiment, the annular sealing surface **532** is configured to radially overlap and sealingly engage the valve seat **530** along a substantially conical seal interface that extends contiguously along the axis VVA. In certain embodiments, in the closed position, the sealing surface **532** and the valve seat **530** are configured to engage one another at a contiguous seal interface that has a length along the axis VVA that is approximately equal to the dimension L1, e.g., a length along the axis in an inclusive range of from about 1 mm to about 10 mm, e.g., from about 1.5 mm to about 5 mm, e.g., a length of about 3 mm. For example, the sealing surface **532** and the valve seat **530** can be configured to engage one another along substantially the entire dimension L2 of the conical sealing surface. In certain embodiments, the sealing surface **532** and the valve seat **530** can be configured to engage one another along substantially the entire dimension L1 of the conical valve seat. In the illustrated embodiment, the fluid seal between the valve body **514** and the valve member **516** is formed exclusively by surfaces **530**, **532** extending longitudinally along the axis VVA. It will be understood, however, that in one or more embodiments portions of the seal interface can be defined by surfaces extending in a radial plane. For example, it is contemplated that the valve member **516** could be modified to include a flange with a downward facing surface extending in a radial plane that sealingly engages an upward facing edge of the valve seat **530** extending in a radial plane. Further, while the valve seat **530** and the valve member sealing surface **532** are substantially conical in the illustrated embodiment, one or both of the surfaces could have other annular shapes in one or more embodiments.

[0200] During use, the controller **80** directs the valve positioner **518** to open and close the drain valve **512** by moving the valve member **516** with respect to the valve body **514** in the opening and closing directions OD, CD. Simultaneously, the spring **519** biases the valve member **516** in the closing direction CD. Thus, the positioner **518** must overcome the force of the spring to open the valve **512**.

[0201] The valve member **516** and the valve seat **530** often come into contact with hard water during operation, and thus scale can form on both the valve seat and the valve member sealing surface **532**. In comparison with the discharge valves of conventional ice makers with flat sealing surfaces that define planar seal interfaces, the drain valve **512** has been found to perform better in high scale environments. Whereas scale buildup on the flat sealing surfaces of conventional ice makers can quickly lead to ineffective sealing, the drain valve **512** has been found to maintain its seal even as scale builds on the valve seat **530** and the sealing surface **532** over time.

[0202] The valve **512** was tested alongside several conventional valves in which the sealing surface between the valve member and the valve body extends in a plane perpendicular to the valve axis. Specifically, ice makers fitted with each type of valve were operated with very hard water having dissolved solids in excess of 650 ppm. The ice makers with traditional valves failed at approximately 250 to 300 hours of operation, at which point the conventional valves had a leakage rate of 2-5 cc/sec through the planar interface between the valve member and the valve body. By comparison, the ice maker equipped with valve **512** operated in excess of 1250 hours before a minimal leakage rate of 0.5 cc/sec was observed.

[0203] In addition to more robust operation in hard water environments, the valve **512** is also more energy efficient than conventional discharge valves. One reason for this is that less spring pressure is required to maintain the fluid seal between the valve body **514** and the valve member **516**. As a result, less energy is required of the positioner **518** to open the valve **512** against the force of the spring **519**. In one or more embodiments, the valve **512** is configured so that the positioner **518** uses less than 8.5 watts (e.g., in an inclusive range of from about 7.5 watts to about 8.2 watts) to open the valve. In contrast, because greater spring pressure is required to maintain the valve seal in the closed position, conventional discharge valves require 9.0 watts or greater to open the valve.

[0204] Referring to FIGS. **45-47**, the illustrated ice maker support **110** further comprises a drain passaging groove **610** that is configured to minimize the height of the drain passaging **78** and thereby minimize the height at which the sump **60** is mounted above the bottom of the ice maker **10**. The drain passaging groove **610** extends longitudinally from a front end portion (broadly, an inboard end portion) to a rear end portion (broadly, an outboard end portion) adjacent an exterior of the ice maker **10**. As shown in FIG. **47**, the drain passaging groove **610** has a bottom, and the bottom of the drain passaging groove at the rear end portion is vertically spaced apart below the bottom of the drain passaging groove at the front end portion by a height H7. In one or more embodiments, the height H7 is greater than or equal to 0.25 inches, e.g., in an inclusive range of from about 0.25 inches to about 0.75 inches, such as an inclusive range of from about 0.35 inches to about 0.55 inches or about 0.4 inches to about 0.5 inches. Thus, the bottom of the drain passaging groove **610** slopes downward as the drain passaging groove extends from the front end portion the rear end portion. For example, the drain passaging groove **610** can slope downward at a slope angle δ in an inclusive range of from about 1° to about 10° (e.g., an inclusive range of from about 1° to about 5°, an inclusive range of from about 2° to about 4°, such as about 3°). In certain embodiments, the bottom of the drain passaging groove **610** at the rear (outboard) end portion thereof is spaced apart from the bottom of the bottom wall **112**, which defines the bottom of the ice maker **10**, by a height H8 of less than 1.0 inches, e.g., less than 0.9 inches, less than 0.75 inches, or in an inclusive range of from about 0.05 inches to about 0.1 inches (e.g., an inclusive range of from about 0.1 inches to about 0.75 inches).

[0205] Referring to FIG. **46**, the drain passaging groove enables the drain coupling **426** to be positioned very low on an exterior vertical wall (in this case, the rear wall) of the ice maker cabinet **29**. In the illustrated embodiment, the fourth drain tube section **424** comprises a drain tube received in the drain passaging groove **610** such that the drain tube slopes downward as it extends from adjacent the front end portion to the rear end portion of the groove **610**. Much like the drain passaging groove **610**, in one or more embodiments, the axis DTA of the drain tube(s) making up the fourth drain tube section **424** slope downward and rearward at a slope angle δ' in an inclusive range of from about 1° to about 10° (e.g., an inclusive range of from about 1° to about 5°, an inclusive range of from about 2° to about 4°, such as about 3°). In addition, the bottom of the inner perimeter of the fourth drain tube section **424** at the front end portion thereof is spaced apart above the bottom of the inner perimeter of the fourth drain tube section at the rear end portion thereof by a height H9 that is greater than or equal to 0.25 inches, e.g., in an inclusive range of from about 0.25 inches to about 0.75 inches, such as inclusive range of from about 0.35 inches to about 0.55 inches or about 0.4 inches to about 0.5 inches. Moreover, the bottom of the inner perimeter of the fourth drain tube section **424** at the rear end thereof, which defines the bottom of the downstream end of the drain passaging **78** is spaced apart above the bottom of the ice maker **10** by a height H10 of less than of less than 1.2 inches, e.g., less than 1.1 inches, less than 1.0 inches, or in an inclusive range of from about 0.2 inches to about 1.2 inches.

[0206] Accordingly, it can be seen that the illustrated standard-height ice maker **10** includes a gravity drain yet does not reduce the ice production capacity of the ice maker in relation to comparable conventional ice makers that discharge water via pump. In the illustrated embodiment, this feat is achieved by, among other things, (i) integrating the distributor **25** with the evaporator **20**, (ii) mounting the major components of the ice maker **10** on a single monolithic support wall **110**, (iii) configuring the drain valve **512** to require only a small height H6 between its inlet **522** and outlet **522**, and (iv) forming a sloped groove **610** in the bottom wall **112** of the ice maker to allow the drain tube **624** to open through an opening **410** immediately adjacent the bottom of the ice maker. Ice makers within the scope of this disclosure may include none, all, any one, or any combination of more than one of features (i)-(iv) without departing from the scope of the disclosure.

[0207] The gravity-driven drain is thought to enhance certain aspects of the performance of the ice maker **10** in comparison with conventional ice makers having discharge pumps. For example, it is known to drain some or all water from an ice maker sump periodically to prevent the ice making water from developing high concentrations of dissolved solids. Typically this operation occurs during or immediately before a harvest cycle. However, even after a discharge valve is open, running the pump inherently causes some of the water already present in the water supply passaging to be imparted through the water distributor onto the freeze plate. During a harvest cycle, this is undesirable because it flows warmer water along the ice being harvested, which may cause premature melting of the ice. The discharge operation can also be conducted before harvesting begins, but doing so extends the duration of the freeze cycle, causing inefficient operation of the ice maker. By contrast, in an exemplary method of using the illustrated ice maker to drain water from the sump **60**, the controller **80** opens the drain valve **512** after the controller opens the hot gas valve **24** to initiate a harvest cycle. Opening the drain valve **512** causes water in the sump to drain by gravity but does not cause any flow through the distributor **25** or impart any additional water onto the freeze plate **22**. Thus, the discharge operation can be performed without introducing inefficiencies or adversely affecting ice quality. Depending on the configuration and application of an ice maker, the discharge operation can periodically drain a predefined amount of water from the sump **60** by gravity (e.g., by maintaining the drain valve open for a predefined duration of time) and/or drain all of the water from the sump by gravity (e.g., by maintaining the drain valve open until receiving a signal from the pressure sensor **82** indicating that the sump is empty before closing the drain valve).

[0208] When introducing elements of the present invention or the preferred embodiment(s) thereof, the articles "a", "an", "the" and "said" are intended to mean that there are one or more of the elements. The terms "comprising", "including" and "having" are intended to be inclusive and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

[0209] In view of the above, it will be seen that the several objects of the invention are achieved and other advantageous results attained.

[0210] As various changes could be made in the above products and methods without departing from the scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

1-20. (canceled)

21. An ice maker for forming ice, the ice maker comprising;

a refrigeration system comprising an ice formation device;

a water system for supplying water to the ice formation device, the water system comprising:

a water reservoir configured to hold water to be formed into ice,

drain passaging fluidly coupled to the water reservoir such that water in the water reservoir can drain through the drain passaging, the drain passaging having an upstream end portion and a downstream end portion, and

a drain valve for selectively opening and closing the drain passaging;

wherein the drain valve comprises a valve body defining a valve passage fluidly coupled between the upstream end portion and the downstream end portion of the drain passaging, the valve body including an annular valve seat extending longitudinally along an axis and facing radially inwardly with respect to the axis;

wherein the drain valve further comprises a valve member that is movable with respect to the valve body between an open position in which the valve member is positioned with respect to the valve body to allow water to flow through the valve passage from the upstream end portion of the drain passaging to the downstream end portion and a closed position in which the valve member engages the valve body to block flow through the valve passage from the upstream end portion of the drain passaging to the downstream end portion; and

wherein the valve member comprises an annular sealing surface extending longitudinally along the axis, the annular sealing surface configured to radially overlap and sealingly engage the valve seat along the axis when the valve member is in the closed position.

22. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the annular sealing surface has a length extending along the axis of at least 1 mm and wherein the annular sealing surface is configured to sealingly engage the valve seat along substantially the entire length when the valve member is in the closed position.

23. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the sealing surface tapers radially inwardly as it extends along the axis.

24. The ice maker as set forth in claim **23**, wherein the valve seat tapers radially inwardly as it extends along the axis.

25. The ice maker as set forth in claim **24**, wherein the valve member is movable along the axis from the open position to the closed position in a closing direction and wherein each of the sealing surface and the valve seat taper radially inwardly as it extends along the axis in the closing direction.

26. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the sealing surface is a substantially conical surface.

27. The ice maker as set forth in claim **26**, wherein the valve seat is a substantially conical surface.

28. The ice maker as set forth in claim **27**, wherein the valve seat and the sealing surface each have a cone angle and wherein the cone angles of the valve seat and the sealing surface are substantially the same.

29. The ice maker as set forth in claim **26**, wherein the sealing surface has a cone angle in an inclusive range of from about 30° to about 70°.

30. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein valve seat and the sealing surface include surface portions that are substantially the same shape but face in opposing directions.

31. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the open and closed positions of the valve member are spaced apart along the axis.

32. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the valve member is spaced apart along the axis from the valve seat when the valve member is in the open position.

33. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the sealing surface and the valve seat sealingly engage one another at an annular seal interface that extends along the axis when the drain valve is closed.

34. The ice maker as set forth in claim **33**, wherein the seal interface has a length extending along the axis and the length is at least about 1 mm.

35. The ice maker as set forth in claim **33**, wherein the seal interface is substantially conical.

36. The ice maker as set forth in claim **21**, wherein the valve body comprises an inlet tube and an outlet tube extending transverse to the axis, an outer chamber extending along the axis and fluidly coupled to the inlet tube, and an inner chamber extending along the axis within the outer chamber and fluidly coupled to the outlet tube.

37. The ice maker as set forth in claim **36**, wherein the inner chamber has a free end portion that opens inside the outer chamber and defines the valve seat.

38. The ice maker as set forth in claim **36**, wherein the valve passage includes a first segment in the inlet tube, a second segment between the outer chamber and the inner chamber, a third segment in the inner chamber, and a fourth segment in the outlet tube.

39. The ice maker as set forth in claim **38**, wherein the valve is configured so that water flows sequentially through the first, second, third, and fourth segments as it flows downstream through the valve passage.

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