



(11) **EP 1 549 556 B1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION**

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:
20.05.2009 Bulletin 2009/21

(51) Int Cl.:
B65D 39/00 (2006.01) B65D 41/04 (2006.01)
B65D 41/28 (2006.01) B65D 51/14 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **03794695.1**

(86) International application number:
PCT/AU2003/001181

(22) Date of filing: **10.09.2003**

(87) International publication number:
WO 2004/024584 (25.03.2004 Gazette 2004/13)

(54) **CLOSURE OR STOPPER FORMS A SURFACE TENSION SEAL**

VERSCHLUSS ODER STOPFEN ZUR BILDUNG EINER OBERFLÄCHENSPANNUNGSDICHTUNG
FERMETURE OU BOUCHON FORMANT UN JOINT SOUS L'EFFET DE LA TENSION
SUPERFICIELLE

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
HU IE IT LI LU MC NL PT RO SE SI SK TR**

(74) Representative: **Martin, Didier Roland Valéry**
Cabinet Didier Martin
50, chemin des Verrières
69260 Charbonnières-les Bains (FR)

(30) Priority: **10.09.2002 AU 2002951318**

(43) Date of publication of application:
06.07.2005 Bulletin 2005/27

(56) References cited:
EP-A- 0 180 286 EP-A- 0 629 559
DE-B- 1 266 161 DE-U1- 20 002 729
DE-U1- 29 515 494 FR-A- 759 885
FR-A- 1 249 702 GB-A- 507 702
GB-A- 1 270 453 US-A- 4 664 277
US-A- 5 165 560 US-A- 5 316 163
US-A- 6 024 235 US-A1- 2001 052 508
US-B1- 6 220 466 US-B1- 6 355 201

(73) Proprietor: **Manley, David William**
Bend of Islands, Vic 3775 (AU)

(72) Inventor: **Manley, David William**
Bend of Islands, Vic 3775 (AU)

Note: Within nine months of the publication of the mention of the grant of the European patent in the European Patent Bulletin, any person may give notice to the European Patent Office of opposition to that patent, in accordance with the Implementing Regulations. Notice of opposition shall not be deemed to have been filed until the opposition fee has been paid. (Art. 99(1) European Patent Convention).

Description

Field of the Invention

[0001] This invention relates to closures or stoppers for containers containing liquid, powder or pastes, particularly wine bottles.

Background of the Invention

[0002] A major technical issue in the wine industry is the unpredictable incidences of problems that occur once the wine has been bottled due to the properties of the closures used.

[0003] Traditional cork closures have problems with taint, caused in a major part by Trichloroanisoles (TCA), known more commonly as corked taint or causing "corked wine". It has been estimated that the wine in up to 10% of all bottles of wine produced worldwide may be affected in this manner. A more recently recognised problem with using cork as a closure is the physical nature of cork having variability to the permeation of oxygen which can lead to inconsistent and uneven development of the bottled wine. Leakage has always been an issue associated with cork caused by a fault line or lines or porosity in the cork.

[0004] The continued and increasing dissatisfaction amongst wine makers with the performance of natural cork as a closure has led to some use of synthetic material and varying forms of approach such as the screw top "STELVINTM" cap. There have been issues of taint and other performance issues from synthetic materials and the screw type closures and there is limited experience and testing of the performance of these materials. There is also considerable market resistance to the use of synthetic materials.

[0005] Document GB-507,702 discloses a closure with the features recited in the preamble of claim 1.

[0006] Document US-2001/052508 A1 discloses a bottle including a neck portion, and a screw closure. When said screw closure is fully inserted and secured within neck portion, the flange rimmed top of the screw closure is matingly engaged with the opening of the neck portion to enhance the air-tight seal provided by the screw closure within the neck portion.

Summary of the Invention

[0007] According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a closure for a container arranged to contain liquid, powder or paste, the container comprising means to define a first extremely flat surface, a sealing member defining a second extremely flat surface, the extremely flat surfaces adapted to form a surface tension seal when they are pressed into parallel abutting contact and means to prevent lateral relative movement whereby the sealing member prevents escape of liquid, powder or paste from the container.

[0008] The first surface may be formed on the container or on a component attached to the container. The closure may also include means to urge the extremely flat surfaces into parallel abutting contact.

[0009] In accordance with the second aspect of the present invention there is provided a closure for a wine bottle having a neck and an aperture, the closure comprising a first extremely flat surface around the neck of the bottle, a sealing member having a second extremely flat surface, the sealing member being adapted to fit onto the first surface and across the aperture with the second surface in parallel abutting contact to form a surface tension seal, and means to prevent relative lateral movement of the surfaces,

[0010] The first extremely flat surface may be defined by the neck of the bottle, preferably the top section or an opening defined at the neck. The sealing member may be a disc of glass, ceramic, carbon, metal carbide, metal oxide or other hard materials that can define a flat surface. Preferably a removable member locates the sealing member laterally of the first surface. The closure may also include means to urge the surfaces into parallel abutting contact.

[0011] An extremely flat surface is understood to embrace a surface that is finished with a roughness low enough (level of polish) to ensure a liquid-tight seal (that totally prevents escape of the liquid from the container) at maximum differential pressure allowed for the container. At the same time the roughness (level of polish) of the flat surface can be designed to create an airtight seal (hermetic seal) or to create air permeable seal (breathing seal) at specified pressure conditions inside the container. It is understood that the differential pressure allowed across the seal will be related to the degree of downward force urging of the surfaces into parallel abutting contact. In a preferred embodiment where the liquid is wine the surface is finished to have optical flatness to a few wavelengths of light. The surfaces are preferably provided on glass sintered ceramic, carbon, metal carbide, metal oxide or other hard materials which are inert to the materials it contains.

[0012] In one embodiment the sealing member will have a degree of porosity to ensure restricted entry of air to allow the wine to breathe. The breathability could relate to the material per se or use of a porous plug in the material or the level of finish of the sealing surfaces and the pressure of surface to surface contact.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0013] Embodiments of the present invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1(a) is a side elevation view of a wine bottle with a closure having an internal screw thread, Figure 1(b) is a cross section view of the bottle taken along the lines L-L of Figure 1(a),

Figures 1(c) and 1(d) are a perspective view and cross sectional view of the closure,

Figures 2(a) and 2(b) are perspective and sectional views of a closure with an internal screw thread and insert,

Figures 3(a) and 3(b) are similar illustrations of a closure with an internal screw thread and internal sealing surface,

Figures 4(a) and 4(b) are similar illustrations of a closure secured in position by an external cap,

Figures 5(a) and 5(b) are similar illustrations of a closure that incorporates a domed projection through the cap,

Figures 6(a) and 6(b) are similar illustrations of a closure that has an external screw threaded cap,

Figures 6(c) and 6(d) are perspective views of modified caps,

Figures 7(a) and 7(b) are perspective and cross sectional views of an externally mounted screw top closure,

Figures 8(a) and 8(b) are perspective and sectional views of a screw closure that incorporates a spring washer,

Figures 8(c) is an exploded view of the closure of Figure 8(b),

Figure 8(d) is a perspective view of the underside of the cap of Figure 8(c),

Figures 9(a) and 9(b) are perspective and sectional views of a screw closure with an inbuilt spring washer,

Figure 9(c) is a perspective view of a sealing disc of the closure,

Figure 9(d) is a sectional view of the closure of Figure 9(b) with a porous insert,

Figures 10(a) and 10(b) are respectively elevational and cross-sectional views of a closure that includes a push-on outer sleeve in an open configuration,

Figures 10(c) and 10(d) are elevational and cross section views of the closure in a closed sealed configuration,

Figures 11(a) and 11(b) are a perspective and sectional view of a closure incorporating an outer collar and spring cap in an open configuration,

Figures 11(c) and 11(d) are perspective and sectional views of the closure in a closed sealed configuration, and

Figure 12 is a perspective view of a closure using a wire cap.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

[0014] The embodiments of the invention described hereunder with reference to the accompanying drawings, all relate to closures for liquid containers and especially wine bottles. In essence the sealed closure is performed by the abutting contact between two extremely flat and smooth surfaces that are pressed into engagement to form a shear seal. All the embodiments include means

to urge the surfaces into parallel abutting contact and to laterally locate the flat surfaces to prevent the seal being broken.

[0015] The abutting flat surfaces are extremely flat with the flatness being in the order of a few wavelengths of light. The wavelength of light in the visible spectrum range is between about 400 nanometres for deep violet and about 700 nanometres for deep red. A nanometre is a billionth of a metre. The flat surfaces that form the shear seals may be formed in glass with one portion defined by a hardened coating on the bottle itself and the other portion being defined by a glass or other hard material sealing member. In other embodiments suitable inserts are provided in the bottle and the sealing member seals against those inserts. The surfaces of the bottle and sealing members are either manufactured from hard materials such as sintered ceramics that are lapped and polished to the desired flatness and surface finish, or alternatively the glass itself can be lapped and polished to the desired flatness and surface finish.

[0016] Shear seals operate by pressing two extremely flat surfaces together to evacuate the air between the surfaces with the resulting surface tension providing a seal that is strong in the axial direction. The seal can only be broken by either lateral relative displacement of the surfaces that shears the seal or by the application of a significant force in the axial direction i.e. perpendicular to the seal surface. Consequently in all of the embodiments described hereunder, means is provided to place the flat surfaces into parallel abutting contact under pressure. All of the seals also incorporate means to prevent lateral displacement of the surfaces and thus prevent the shear force that would break the seal.

[0017] In the embodiments described hereunder the same reference numerals are used for common features.

[0018] As shown in Figures 1(a) and 1(b) a wine bottle 10 has a main body tapering upwardly to a neck 12. The neck has an opening 13 at the top that is sealed by a closure 20 that is a subject of this invention. The closure 20, shown in detail in Figures 1(c) and 1(d), essentially comprises a sealing member 21 that has a flat annular sealing surface or seat 22 that is arranged to be pressed into a parallel sealed engagement with a similarly profiled flat surface 23 on the top of the neck of the bottle. The flat surface 23 is known as the finish of the bottle. The sealing member 21 has a central downwardly extending core 24 with an outwardly projecting coarse thread 25. The coarse thread can be coated with "giving" material that will not cause abrasion of the contacting surfaces.

The thread is arranged to engage a similarly profiled coarse thread 26 formed on the interior surface of the interior of the top of the neck 12 of the bottle 10. The sealing member 21 can also include a small annular groove 29 that houses an O-ring 30 of rubber, plastics or cork. The O-ring 30 can be replaced by an annular membrane of rectangular cross section. The upper surface of the sealing member 21 defines a slightly convex crown 31.

[0019] As shown in Figure 1(c) the crown 31 may carry a trade mark and its periphery 32 may be knurled to assist purchase when the sealing member 21 has to be rotated relative to the bottle 10. To seal the bottle after it has been filled to the desired level, the sealing member 21 is simply screwed into the threaded interior 26 of the neck. The sealing member 21 is turned until the sealing surface 22 is into tight parallel abutting contact with the annular seat 23. The rubber, cork or composite O-ring 30 or like member provides a precaution against release by vibration and acts as a secondary backup seal. The threaded engagement between the core 24 of the sealing member 21 and the neck of the body is sufficiently coarse to provide a degree of clearance that allows the parallel abutting surfaces to come into positive infinite parallelism to effect the seal. The core is preferably of a material or coated in a material which is soft or giving in nature so that the interior of the bottle is not abraded and thus no debris falls into the container. The core 24 allows the parallel abutting surfaces to come into positive infinite parallelism to effect the seal.

[0020] To release the seal it is a simple matter to turn the sealing member 21 anti-clockwise to release the threaded engagement and break the seal. The combination of the seal between the parallel abutting surfaces and the axial force required to break the seal coupled with the interconnection between the threaded core and the neck of the bottle ensures a totally efficient seal that can withstand vibration, noise and relative temperature fluctuations.

[0021] In the embodiment shown in Figures 2(a) and 2(b), the mouth of the neck of the bottle has a frustoconical cutout 40 with a triangular groove 41 towards the base. The cutout supports a similarly shaped insert 42 that is bonded to or moulded into the interior surface of the neck of the bottle. The insert provides an annular flat surface 44 on which the sealing member 21 is arranged to be in abutting sealed engagement when it is screwed into the neck of the bottle. As in the embodiment of Figures 1, the core 24 of the insert and the internal wall 27 of the bottle is internally threaded. An O-ring 30 of rubber, cork or composite or like member is also located in an annular groove 29 on the underside of the sealing surface to absorb vibration and act as a backup seal.

[0022] In the embodiment of Figures 3(a) and 3(b), the neck 12 of the bottle 10 has an internal undercut portion 50 that ends in an annular shoulder that defines the sealing surface 51 or finish on which the sealing member 21 engages. The sealing member is of cylindrical configuration with an external coarse thread 25 that mates with a similarly profiled thread 26 on the interior of the neck of the bottle. A rubber or cork O-ring 53 or like member locates between the top of the shoulder of the sealing member 21 to provide precaution against release by vibration. The sealing member is a screw fit into the threaded recess and is thus located from axial movement by the annular wall of the neck of the bottle. To release the seal an elongate cutout 55 is provided in the upper sur-

face 56 into which a coin or screwdriver can be inserted to effect anti-clockwise rotation of the sealing member to break the seal. This embodiment has the advantage that the sealing member 21 is protected from damage by the wall of the bottle. The whole of the sealing member is recessed into the top of the bottle.

[0023] In an embodiment (not shown) the construction is very similar to the embodiment of Figures 3 except that instead of using a polished surface of the bottle to support the seal a tapered recess of the kind described with reference to the embodiment of Figures 2 is incorporated into the neck of the bottle to support an insert that is bonded to the glass of the bottle. The insert provides the optically flat surface against which the sealing member engages.

[0024] In the embodiment illustrated in Figures 4(a) and 4(b) the external profile of the neck 12 of the bottle 10 has an annular land 65 that defines an undercut 64. A coarse external thread 63 is positioned above the land 65 and the top of the bottle known as the finish defines a flat annular sealing surface 67. The neck 12 is designed to accommodate a crimped metal foil cylindrical closure member 69 often referred to as a STELVIN™ or screw cap enclosure. The closure member 69 is rolled onto the neck of the bottle to form a coarse internal thread 61 and terminates in a closure band 62 that locates in the undercut 64. By rotating the top of the closure member 69 by the knurled exterior 32 shown in Figure 4(a) the foil of the closure band 62 is broken and the metal cap can be removed. The actual seal is effected through the interface between a disc like sealing member 66 that seats on the flat annular sealing surface 67 defined by the top of the neck 12 of the bottle. A rubber or cork ring or spring 68 sits on the exterior of the top of the sealing member 66 on the underside of the metal cap 69 to place the seal under axial load and protects the seal from vibration.

[0025] In the embodiment shown in Figures 5(a) and 5(b) the sealing member 70 has a domed upper surface 71 that extends through 72 an aperture in the top of the metal closure 73. In all other respects the closure is the same as the embodiment of Figures 4.

[0026] In the embodiment of Figures 6(a) and 6(b) the metallic screw cap 69 is replaced by a thicker plastics cap 80 that is in threaded engagement with the exterior of the neck of the bottle. To improve the aesthetics of the cap it is understood that it could be made in other suitable materials. The cap has an opening 81 through which the dome 71 of the sealing member 70 extends but the sealing member engages and seals with the top of the bottle as in embodiment shown in Figures 4 and 5. An annular cork or rubber ring 68, metal spring or wave washer locates under the top of the cap against the sealing member 70 to place the sealing member in axial compression against the top of the bottle.

[0027] In the embodiment shown in Figures 6(c) and 6(d), the cap 85 is not in screw threaded engagement with the exterior of the bottle but includes three equally spaced inwardly projecting lugs 86 that are adapted to

slide down elongate channels in the exterior of the bottle and then engage on a shoulder defined by the annular recess 87 shown in Figure 6(b). In this manner, the cap can be slid down the grooves in the bottle and then turned to assume a locked position similar to that shown in Figure 6(b). The annular cork or rubber ring 68 is compressed when the cover 85 is in this position to pull the sealing member 70 into compression on the top of the bottle. The embodiment shown in Figure 6(d) is similar to that of Figure 6(c) except that the cap 85 has a skeletal or open walled structure.

[0028] In the embodiment shown in Figures 7(a) and 7(b) an external screw threaded closure 120 covers the top of the neck 12 of the bottle 10. The sealing member 121 is defined by the underside of a ceramic cap with a downward skirt 122 that terminates in a lip 124 that engages in a groove 125 in the bottle neck 12. The top of the bottle 10 defines an annular flat sealing surface 128 on which the sealing member seals. The inside of the cap has a coarse thread 129 that co-operates with a similar coarse thread 127 on the exterior of the bottle neck 12.

[0029] In the embodiment shown in Figures 8(a) to 8(d) the neck 12 of the wine bottle 10 terminates in an annular land 65, an external coarse screw thread 63 and a substantially flat annular sealing surface 67 on the top of the bottle. The closure comprises a circular glass disc 66 that is adapted to sit on the sealing surface 67 on the top of the neck 12 of the bottle, a spring steel dished washer 130 and a cap 131. The cap is stepped and has a central aperture 132 bounded by an internal flange 133. The spring washer 130 locates between the top of the disc 66 and the underside of the in turned flange 133. The cap 131 has a lower rim 134 terminating in four equally spaced inwardly facing lugs 138 that as shown in Figure 8(b) engage the coarse thread 63 on the neck of the bottle. In this embodiment, as the cap 131 is turned through a quarter or half a turn on the coarse thread 63 on the neck of the bottle, it is pulled down onto the neck of the bottle and the dished washer 130 is pressed flat to further urge the sealing disc 66 into positive engagement with the upper surface 67 of the bottle to assume the assembled/sealed configuration as shown in Figure 8(b).

[0030] In the embodiment shown in Figures 9(a), 9(b) and 9(c) the bottle 10 has a similar neck portion 12 to the embodiment shown in Figures 8, namely with provision of an annular land 65 and external coarse thread 63 with the sealing surface 67 provided at the top of the bottle. A metal or plastics cap 250 has a central aperture 251 and a lateral rim 252 terminating in inwardly facing lugs 253 like the embodiment of Figure 8 which enable the cap 250 to be screwed onto the neck 12 of the bottle in the same manner as the previous embodiment. The top of the cap has an internal spring steel lip 254 that replaces the separate spring washer of the embodiment of Figure 8. The in turned lip 254 can be axially compressed to provide a degree of axial load on the sealing disc 260 in the assembled view shown in Figure 9(b). In this embod-

iment the flat sealing surfaces are held in compression by the pull of the cap on the coarse thread and the resilience of the intumed lip 254 on the top of the cap 250. The disc 260 is a slightly different configuration having a lower annular sealing surface 261 with a raised central section 242. The top of the disc 260 has an annular surface 264 on which the spring lip 254 of the cap 250 engages and a slightly raised central section 265 at the top of the disc 260. As shown in Figure 9(c), the disc includes three equally spaced projections 266 around its periphery. The effective diameter of the projections 266 is greater than an inwardly projecting rib 257 on the cap 250 such that the disc 260 can not fall out of the cap 250, thus ensuring that the disc 240 is held captive of the cap 250 even when the closure is off the bottle. The top of the cap 250 also has three radial slits 259 to increase the inherent spring capacity of the cap.

[0031] A further safety feature shown in Figure 9(b) is the provision of an outer tape seal 270 that wraps around the annular rim 252 on the neck of the bottle and the underside of the cap. The tape seal 270 can, if necessary, extend to the top of the cap 250 and provides a tamper proof indication that the closure has not been used. To open the closure the tape seal 270 must first be removed from the closure and then the closure can be released by a quarter or half turn which causes the cap 250 to spring up from the neck of the bottle and releases the seal 260.

[0032] In the embodiment shown in Figures 9(c) the same assembly is illustrated except that the sealing disc 280 includes a central porous insert 281 that is introduced to provide a degree of breathability through the seal. A rubber, cork or other slightly resilient membrane 282 is located in an undercut groove 283 in the underside of the seal 280 and sits on part of the sealing surface 67 of the neck of the bottle to provide a degree of cushioning to prevent the seal breaking through vibration. The membrane 282 also acts as a backup seal especially in the event of faulty sealing surfaces. In the embodiment shown in Figure 9(d) the anti-vibration ring or membrane 282 is of rectangular cross section. It is however understood that it could be of circular or other cross sectional shapes. The porous insert 281 is preferably positioned in the seal disc 280 during the moulding process in which the seal disc is produced.

[0033] In the embodiments that utilise coarse threads to secure the sealing member the seal can be effected or released by about a quarter turn.

[0034] In the embodiment shown in Figures 10(a) and 10(b), the closure 180 comprises a disc shaped seal 181 that seats on the upper surface of the neck 12 of the bottle 10. A metal, plastics or ceramic cap 182 sits over the top of the neck of the bottle and includes a central aperture 183 in the top of the cap 182. The cap 182 has a downwardly extending skirt 190 defined by arcuate fingers 189 as shown in Figure 10(a). The exterior of the neck 12 of the bottle includes an annular outwardly projecting land 184 and an outer collar 185 fits over the cap

182. in use, the collar 185 is pushed down over the cap 182 to assume the closed sealed position shown in Figures 10(c) and 10(d). The end of the skirt 190 of the cap defines an inwardly turned lip 187 that engages on the underside of the land 184. The collar 185 has a rectangular cutout 188 and the periphery of the skirt 190 has projections 191 that flex outwardly as shown in Figure 10(d) to engage within the cutout 188. Thus, in the position shown in Figure 10(d) the interface between the projection 191 and the cutout 188 prevents the outer collar 185 from being pulled up. A wave washer 194 sits between the underside of the cap 182 and the top of the disc seal 181 to, when in the position shown in Figure 10b, urge the seal 181 into parallel contact with the upper surface of the wine bottle to effect the seal. To release the seal the outer collar 185 is turned through a quarter of a turn that has the effect of causing the inner surface of the collar to press down the projection 191 allowing the collar to slide upwardly. This then allows the cap to be pulled off the top of the neck of the bottle and releases the pressure on the seal 181 to break the seal and release the contents of the bottle. In the open unsealed configuration, shown in Figures 10(a) and 10(b), a tab 195 formed on the skirt 190 of the cap 182 springs inwardly to engage against the underside of the disc 181 to prevent the disc 181 and washer 194 from falling out of the cap 182. The closure can thus be resealed by simply pushing down on the outer collar 185 to cause the in turned lip 187 of the skirt 190 to again clip under the base of the land 184.

[0035] In the embodiment shown in Figures 11(a) to 11(d), a similar closure is provided except that in this case the interior of the upper surface of the cap 200 has a series of spaced downwardly extending in turned fingers 201 that act as a spring member to, as shown in Figure 11(d), urge the sealing disc 181 into parallel contact with the upper surface of the neck 12 of the bottle 10. This embodiment also includes an external collar 185 that pushes down on the exterior of the bottle with a lip 187 on the skirt 190 of the cap 200 springing into engagement with the underside of the land 164 on the exterior of the bottle neck. The resilient fingers 201 formed on the interior of the aperture of the cap 200 provide the resilience that causes the sealing compression of the sealing member 181 on the sealing surface defined at the top of the bottle. As the collar 185 is pulled up to the position shown in Figure 11b the spring force is relieved thereby releasing the seal. Pushing the collar 185 back down onto the cap 200 again places the seal in compression and reseals the bottle. This embodiment may also include means to locate the disc 181 within the cap 200 when in the open unsealed configuration of Figure 11(b).

[0036] In the embodiment shown in Figure 12 the closure comprises a sealing disc 231 that sits in parallel abutting contact with the top surface of the neck 12 of the bottle 10. The abutting surfaces of the disc 231 and the bottle have the desired surface finish to produce the seal and the assembly is held in position by a wire frame 233

that is similar to the wire used on conventional champagne corks. The frame 233 pulls the disc 231 into axial compression and can be released by undoing the rim 234 of the frame 233 that sits under an external rim on the neck 12 of the bottle 10. Once the wire frame 233 has been removed, it is a simple matter to either laterally or axially displace the sealing disc off the top of the bottle thereby releasing the contents.

[0037] Still wine usually has the capacity of resisting internal pressures of 140kPa (20psi). Thus, the closures to wine bottles are usually designed to resist internal pressures of 170kPa (25psi). The closures described provide vent resistance of 200-350kPa (30-50psi). With a bottle neck having an internal diameter of 19mm the force required to hold a sealing member at an internal pressure of 140kPa is 40N (4kg) whilst at a pressure of 350kPa it would be 99N (9.9kg). The maximum acceptable extraction force for a cork closure is usually 450N (45kg).

[0038] In all of the seals described above, the optically flat contact between the sealing member and the sealing surface can provide an airtight seal. This is in contrast with more conventional corks where a certain degree of breathing is allowed, allowing air to enter the space between the top of the wine and the end of the cork. There are many in the wine industry that view this entry of air as being crucial to enhance the ageing of the wine. If seals of the kind described above are to be used with wine of that type where a degree of permeation of oxygen is required then it is understood that the sealing member could have an inherent degree of porosity that provides this access to oxygen.

[0039] The capacity of the closure to permit entry of air can be controlled not only by the material of the sealing disc but by the quality of the sealing surfaces. A rougher, less smooth and flat surface could be used to prevent liquid escape yet allow a controlled degree of air entry. In a further option the sealing disc, preferably in glass, can include a plug of porous material with its porosity and cross section controlled to provide the desired air entry. In this manner the closure of this invention can allow wine to age in the same manner as cork without the possibility of cork contamination. In embodiments where porosity is controlled by the seal and anti-vibration membranes are included it is understood that they too would have a degree of porosity to allow passage of air. Where the sealing disc is porous or includes a porous plug the closure could comprise a series of such discs superimposed one on the other. The porosity could thus be selectively varied by removing one or more of the discs to vary the rate of air passage. The cap could be designed to allow removal of one or more discs without disturbing the actual seal.

[0040] The combination of the abutting flat surfaces and the axial pressure therebetween coupled with the geometry of the closure preventing lateral or shear movement between the surfaces ensures a positive and generally airtight seal that can last for many years and with-

stand the shocks, loads and other distorting criteria that can come from vibration, noise and temperature fluctuations.

[0041] It is understood that in some circumstances the closures discussed above may be applied in a zone of partial vacuum to remove air from the top of the bottle.

[0042] It is furthermore understood that the invention is not limited to wine bottles. The closures may be used on many other types of containers for liquids, powders or pastes.

[0043] In the claims which follow and in the preceding description of the invention, except where the context requires otherwise due to express language or necessary implication, the word "comprise" or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising" is used in an inclusive sense, i.e. to specify the presence of the stated features but not to preclude the presence or addition of further features in various embodiments of the invention.

Claims

1. A closure for a glass container (10) arranged to contain liquid, powder or paste, the container (10) defining a first extremely flat annular surface (23, 44, 67), the closure (20) comprising a sealing disc (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) made of a hard material, such as glass or sintered ceramic, and adapted to sit across the annular surface (23, 44, 67), the disc (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) defining a second extremely flat surface (22, 261), means to urge the extremely flat surfaces (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) into parallel abutting contact and means to prevent lateral movement of the disc (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) relative to the first annular surface (23, 44, 67) the extremely flat surfaces (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) adapted to form a first surface tension seal when they are urged into parallel abutting contact **characterised in that** an annular resilient O-ring or gasket (30, 282) is positioned between part of the abutting flat surfaces (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) to form a secondary seal.
2. The closure according to claim 1 **characterised in that** the sealing disc (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) forms part of, or is housed by, a cap (69, 80, 85, 131, 182, 200, 250) that is adapted to engage the container (10) to urge the surfaces (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) into abutting contact and prevent the lateral movement.
3. The closure according to claim 2 **characterised in that** the cap (80) has an internal thread (61) arranged to engage an external thread (63) on the container (10).
4. The closure according to claim 2 **characterised in that** the cap has an external thread (25) arranged to engage an internal thread (26) on the container (10).
5. The closure according to any one of claims 2 to 4 **characterised in that** the cap (80) has a peripheral flange (73, 81) surrounding an aperture (72), the flange (73, 81) bearing against the sealing disc (66, 70, 260).
6. The closure according to claim 5 **characterised in that** the sealing disc (66, 70, 260) is such that it acts as a window allowing the contents of the container (10) to be viewed through the closure.
7. The closure according to any one of claims 2 to 6 **characterised in that** biasing means (130, 194, 254, 201) is disposed between the cap (131, 182, 250) and sealing disc (66, 260, 280) to urge the flat surfaces into parallel abutting contact.
8. The closure according to claim 7 **characterised in that** the biasing means is a spring washer (130), Belleville washer or wave washer (194).
9. The closure according to claim 7 **characterised in that** the cap (200) has intumed projections (201) that are compressible to act as biasing means.
10. The closure according to claim 5 **characterised in that** the sealing disc (66, 70, 260) has a domed upper surface (31, 71) that extends through the aperture (72).
11. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the O-ring (30, 282) or gasket is located in a groove (32, 283) in one (22) of the abutting surfaces.
12. The closure according to any one of claims 2 to 11 **characterised in that** the sealing disc (21, 66, 181, 280) is held captive to the cap (182, 200).
13. The closure according to any one of claims 2 to 12 **characterised in that** the cap (69) has resilient location means (62) that engages an undercut (64) on the container to hold the cap (69) against displacement relative to the container (10).
14. The closure according to claim 13 **characterised in that** a collar (185) fits over the cap (182) to hold the cap on the container (10).
15. The closure according to claim 14 **characterised in that** the collar (185) and cap (182) have inter-engaging formations (188, 191) that engage when the collar (185) and cap (182) are in one relative position to prevent separation of the collar (185) from the cap (182) and on turning of the collar (185) disengage to allow separation.

16. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** a wire frame (233) is adapted to engage the container (10) to hold the sealing disc (231) so that the flat surfaces are in parallel abutting contact. 5
17. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the porosity of the closure is controlled by varying the finish of the surface tension seal surfaces. 10
18. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the sealing disc (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) is manufactured from a material having an inherent porosity. 15
19. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the sealing disc (280) has a porous plug (281) to facilitate a degree of air entry. 20
20. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the sealing disc (21, 60, 70, 280) is made of glass, ceramic carbon, metal carbide, metal oxide or any other hard plastics that can define an extremely flat surface. 25
21. The closure according to any one of the preceding claims in combination with a wine bottle (10) having a neck (12) and an aperture **characterised in that** the first extremely flat surface (23, 44, 67) being provided around the neck (12) of the bottle (10) and the sealing disc (21, 66, 70, 280) is adapted to extend across the aperture to prevent escape of the wine. 30
22. The combination according to claim 21 **characterised in that** the first extremely flat surface (23, 44, 67) is defined by the neck 12 of the bottle (10). 35
23. The combination according to claim 22 **characterised in that** the first extremely flat surface (23, 44, 67) is at the top section or opening defined at the neck (12) of the bottle. 40
24. The combination according to any one of claims 21 to 23 **characterised in that** the closure has a degree of porosity that allows controlled air entry. 45

Patentansprüche

1. Verschluss für einen Glasbehälter (10), der zur Aufnahme von Flüssigkeiten, Pulver oder pastöse Stoffe vorgesehen ist, wobei der Behälter eine erste, extrem glatte, ringförmige Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) definiert, wobei der Verschluss (20) eine, aus einem harten Material, wie zum Beispiel Glas oder gesinterter Keramik, gefertigte und zum Aufsetzen über 55

die ringförmige Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) ausgebildete Dichtscheibe (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280), bei der die Scheibe (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) eine zweite, extrem flache Oberfläche (22, 261) definiert, Mittel zum Pressen der extrem glatten Oberflächen (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) in einen parallelen Kontakt zueinander und Mittel zur Verhinderung der seitlichen Bewegung der Scheibe (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) relativ zu der ersten, ringförmigen Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) aufweist, und wobei die extrem glatten Oberflächen (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) derart ausgebildet sind, dass sie, wenn sie in parallelem Kontakt aneinander gepresst sind, eine erste Flächenpressungsdichtung bilden, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** zur Bildung einer Sekundärdichtung zwischen Abschnitten der in parallelem Kontakt aneinander gepressten glatten Oberflächen (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) ein ringförmiger, elastischer O-Ring oder Dichtring (30, 282) angeordnet ist.

2. Verschluss nach Anspruch 1, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) von einem Teil einer Kappe (69, 80, 85, 131, 182, 200, 250) gebildet ist oder hierin aufgenommen ist, die derart ausgebildet ist, dass sie mit dem Behälter (10) so zusammenwirkt, dass die Oberflächen (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) in parallelem Kontakt aneinander gepresst werden und eine seitliche Bewegung verhindert ist.
3. Verschluss nach Anspruch 2, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Kappe (80) ein Innengewinde (61) aufweist, dass sich mit einem Außengewinde (63) an dem Behälter (10) in Eingriff befindet. 35
4. Verschluss nach Anspruch 2, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Kappe ein Außengewinde (25) aufweist, dass sich mit einem Innengewinde (26) an dem Behälter (10) in Eingriff befindet.
5. Verschluss nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 4, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Kappe (80) einen, eine Öffnung (72) umgebenden, umlaufenden Flansch (73, 81) aufweist, wobei sich der Flansch (73, 81) gegen die Dichtscheibe (66, 70, 260) abstützt.
6. Verschluss nach Anspruch 5, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (66, 70, 260) derart ausgebildet ist, dass die als Fenster dient, durch das die Inhalte des Behälters (10) sichtbar sind. 50
7. Verschluss nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 6, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** Mittel zur Erzeugung einer Vorspannung (130, 194, 254, 201) zwischen der Kappe (131, 182, 250) und der Dichtscheibe (66, 260, 280) vorgesehen sind, die die glatten Oberflächen in den parallel anliegenden Kontakt drücken.

8. Verschluss nach Anspruch 7, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Mittel zur Erzeugung einer Vorspannung von einem Federring (130), einer Tellerfeder oder federnden Wellenring (194) gebildet sind.
9. Verschluss nach Anspruch 7, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Kappe (200) nach innen gerichtete Vorsprünge (201) aufweist, die zur Bildung eines Federmittels zusammendrückbar sind.
10. Verschluss nach Anspruch 5, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (66, 70, 260) eine gerundete obere Oberfläche (31, 71) aufweist, die sich durch die Öffnung (72) erstreckt.
11. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** der O-Ring (30, 282) oder der Dichtring in einer Nut (32, 283) innerhalb einer (22) der aneinander angrenzenden Flächen angeordnet ist.
12. Verschluss nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 11, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (21, 66, 181, 280) innerhalb der Kappe (182, 200) gehalten ist.
13. Verschluss nach einem der Ansprüche 2 bis 12, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Kappe (69) ein elastisches Positionierungsmittel (62) aufweist, das mit einem Hinterschnitt (64) an dem Behälter zusammenwirkt, um die Kappe (69) gegen eine Verlagerung relativ zum Behälter (10) zu halten.
14. Verschluss nach Anspruch 13, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** ein Kragen (185) auf die Kappe (182) aufgesetzt ist, um die Kappe auf dem Behälter (10) zu halten.
15. Verschluss nach Anspruch 14, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** der Kragen (185) und die Kappe (182) ineinander greifende Strukturen (188, 191) aufweisen, die zur Verhinderung der Trennung des Kragens (185) von der Kappe (182) in Eingriff sind, wenn sich der Kragen (185) und die Kappe (182) in einer bestimmten Position relativ zueinander zu einander befinden, und bei Drehung des Kragens (185) außer Eingriff kommen, um die Trennung zu ermöglichen.
16. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** ein Drahtrahmen (233) dafür vorgesehen ist, um den Behälter (10) zu umgreifen, um die Dichtscheibe (231) so zu halten, dass sich die glatten Oberflächen parallel zueinander in Anlage befinden.
17. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die

Durchlässigkeit des Verschlusses durch die Variation der Oberflächenbehandlung der Oberflächen der Flächenpressungsdichtung eingestellt ist.

- 5 18. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) aus einem Material hergestellt ist, dass eine dem materialbedingte Durchlässigkeit aufweist.
- 10 19. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (280) einen durchlässigen Stopfen (281) aufweist, um einen Maß von Lufteintritt zu bewirken.
- 15 20. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Dichtscheibe (21, 60, 70, 280) aus Glas, keramischem Kohlenstoff, Metallocarbid, Metalloxid oder einem anderen Hartkunststoff hergestellt ist, der eine extrem glatte Oberfläche bilden kann.
- 20 21. Verschluss nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche in Verbindung mit einer Weinflasche (10), die einen Hals (12) und eine Öffnung aufweist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die erste extrem glatte Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) um den Hals (12) der Flasche (10) herum vorgesehen ist und die Dichtscheibe (21, 60, 70, 280) derart ausgebildet ist, dass sie sich quer über die Öffnung zur Vermeidung des Auslaufens des Weins erstreckt.
- 30 22. Kombination nach Anspruch 21, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die erste extrem glatte Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) von dem Hals (12) der Flasche (10) definiert ist.
- 35 23. Kombination nach Anspruch 22, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die erste extrem glatte Oberfläche (23, 44, 67) im oberen Bereich oder an der, an dem Hals (12) der Flasche ausgebildeten Öffnung angeordnet ist.
- 40 24. Kombination nach einem der Ansprüche 21 bis 23, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** der Verschluss einen Grad an Durchlässigkeit aufweist, der einen kontrollierten Lufteintritt ermöglicht.
- 45
- 50

Revendications

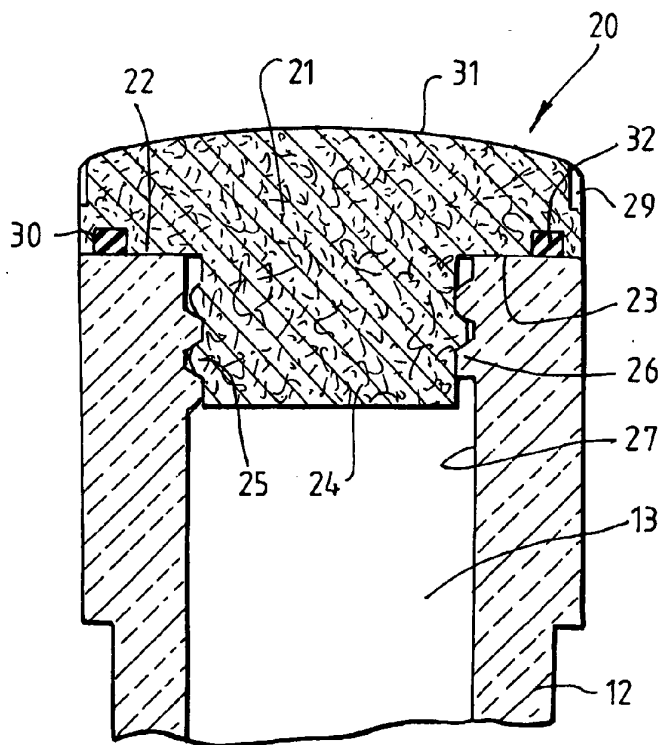
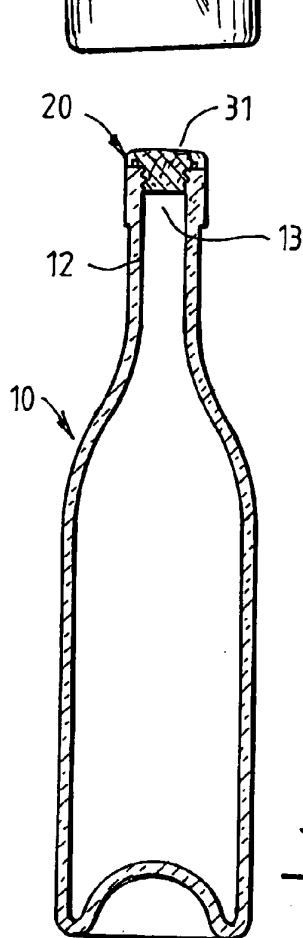
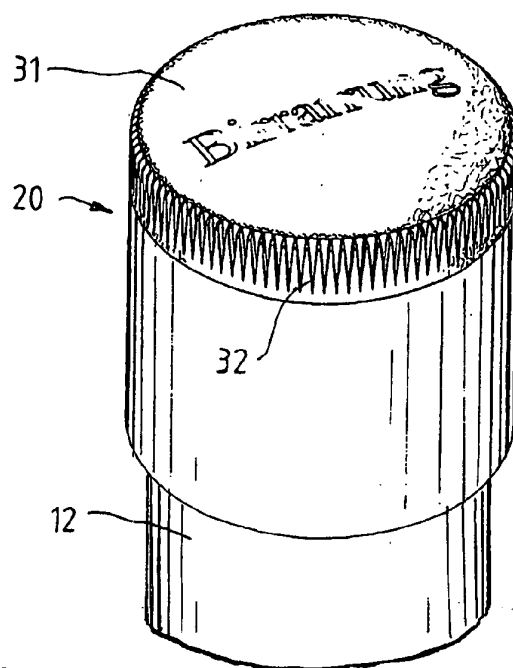
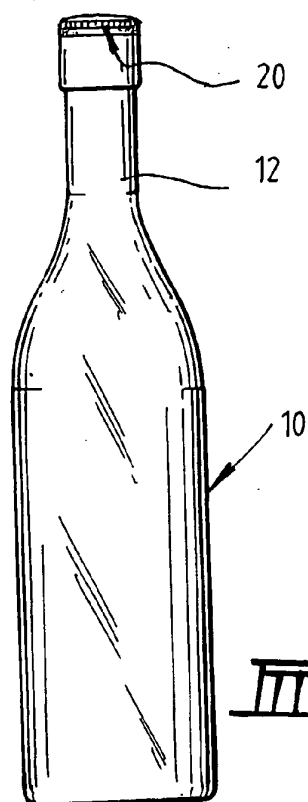
1. Fermeture pour un récipient en verre (10) destiné à contenir du liquide, de la poudre ou de la pâte, le récipient (10) définissant une première surface annulaire extrêmement plane (23, 44, 67), la fermeture (20) comprenant un disque d'étanchéité (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) fait d'une matière dure telle que

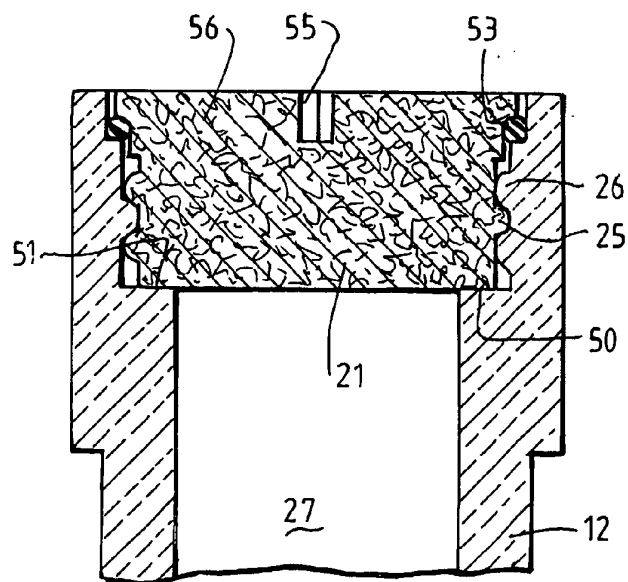
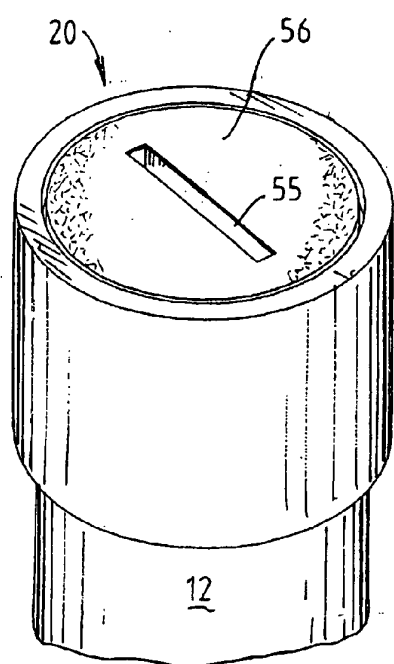
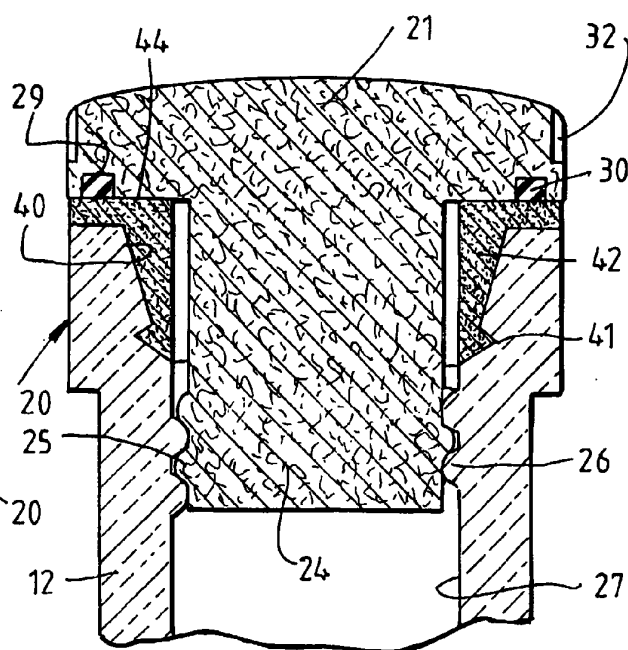
- le verre ou une céramique frittée, et adapté pour reposer en travers de la surface annulaire (23, 44, 67), le disque (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) définissant une seconde surface extrêmement plane (22, 261), des moyens destinés à presser les surfaces extrêmement planes (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) en contact en appui parallèle et des moyens destinés à s'opposer au déplacement latéral du disque (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) par rapport à la première surface annulaire (23, 44, 67), les surfaces extrêmement planes (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) étant adaptées pour former un premier joint étanche à tension superficielle lorsqu'elles sont pressées en contact en appui parallèle, **caractérisée en ce qu'**une bague torique ou une garniture d'étanchéité élastique annulaire (30, 282) est positionnée entre une partie des surfaces planes mises en appui (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) pour former un joint étanche secondaire.
2. Fermeture selon la revendication 1, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) fait partie d'une capsule, ou est logé par une capsule, (69, 80, 85, 131, 182, 200, 250), qui est adaptée pour coopérer avec le récipient (10) afin de presser les surfaces (22, 23, 44, 67, 261) en contact en appui et pour s'opposer au déplacement latéral.
 3. Fermeture selon la revendication 2, **caractérisée en ce que** la capsule (80) possède un filetage intérieur (61) destiné à coopérer avec un filetage extérieur (63) porté par le récipient (10).
 4. Fermeture selon la revendication 2, **caractérisée en ce que** la capsule possède un filetage extérieur (25) destiné à coopérer avec un filetage intérieur (26) porté par le récipient (10).
 5. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications 2 à 4, **caractérisée en ce que** la capsule (80) possède un rebord périphérique (73, 81) qui entoure une ouverture (72), le rebord (73, 81) portant contre le disque d'étanchéité (66, 70, 260).
 6. Fermeture selon la revendication 5, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (66, 70, 260) est tel qu'il joue le rôle d'une fenêtre qui permet au contenu du récipient (10) d'être vu à travers la fermeture.
 7. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications 2 à 6, **caractérisée en ce qu'**un moyen de sollicitation (130, 194, 254, 201) est disposé entre la capsule (131, 182, 250) et le disque d'étanchéité (66, 260, 280) pour presser les surfaces planes en contact en appui parallèle.
 8. Fermeture selon la revendication 7, **caractérisée en ce que** le moyen de sollicitation est une rondelle élastique (130), une rondelle Belleville ou une rondelle ondulée (194).
 9. Fermeture selon la revendication 7, **caractérisée en ce que** la capsule (200) possède des saillies (201) retournées vers l'intérieur qui sont compressibles de façon à jouer le rôle de moyens de sollicitation.
 10. Fermeture selon la revendication 5, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (66, 70, 260) possède une surface supérieure bombée (31, 71) qui s'étend à travers l'ouverture (72).
 11. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce que** la bague torique (30, 282) ou la garniture d'étanchéité est placée dans une gorge (32, 283) prévue dans l'une (22) des surfaces mises en appui.
 12. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications 2 à 11, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (21, 66, 181, 280) est retenu captif par rapport à la capsule (182, 200).
 13. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications 2 à 12, **caractérisée en ce que** la capsule (69) possède des moyens de positionnement élastiques (62) qui coopèrent avec une contre-dépouille (64) prévue sur le récipient pour retenir la capsule (69) à l'encontre d'un déplacement par rapport au récipient (10).
 14. Fermeture selon la revendication 13, **caractérisée en ce qu'**une bague (185) s'emboîte par-dessus la capsule (182) pour retenir la capsule sur le récipient (10).
 15. Fermeture selon la revendication 14, **caractérisée en ce que** la bague (185) et la capsule (182) possèdent des formations coopérant entre elles (188, 191) qui coopèrent entre elles lorsque la bague (185) et la capsule (182) sont dans une position relative prévue pour s'opposer à la séparation de la bague (185) par rapport à la capsule (182) et qui se dégagent lorsqu'on tourne la bague (185) pour permettre la séparation.
 16. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce qu'**une cage en fil (233) est adaptée pour coopérer avec le récipient (10) afin de retenir le disque d'étanchéité (231) de telle manière que les surfaces planes soient en contact en appui parallèle.
 17. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce que** la porosité de la fermeture est réglée par modification du fini des surfaces d'étanchéité à tension superficielle.

18. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (21, 66, 70, 181, 231, 260, 280) est fabriqué en une matière ayant une porosité inhérente. 5
19. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (280) possède une pastille poreuse (281) pour faciliter un certain degré d'entrée d'air. 10
20. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, **caractérisée en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (21, 60, 70, 280) est fait de verre, de céramique-carbone, de carbure métallique, d'oxyde métallique ou d'une autre matière plastique dure capable de définir une surface extrêmement plane. 15
21. Fermeture selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, en combinaison avec une bouteille de vin (10) ayant un goulot (12) et une ouverture, **caractérisée en ce que** la première surface extrêmement plane (23, 44, 67) est prévue sur le tour du goulot (12) de la bouteille (10) et **en ce que** le disque d'étanchéité (21, 66, 70, 280) est adapté pour s'étendre en travers de l'ouverture afin de s'opposer à l'échappement du vin. 20 25
22. Fermeture selon la revendication 21, **caractérisée en ce que** la première surface extrêmement plane (23, 44, 67) est définie par le goulot (12) de la bouteille (10). 30
23. Combinaison selon la revendication 22, **caractérisée en ce que** la première surface extrêmement plane (23, 44, 67) se trouve à la section sommitale ou à l'ouverture définie au niveau du goulot (12) de la bouteille. 35 40
24. Combinaison selon une quelconque des revendications 21 à 23, **caractérisée en ce que** la fermeture possède un degré de porosité qui permet une entrée d'air réglée. 45

50

55





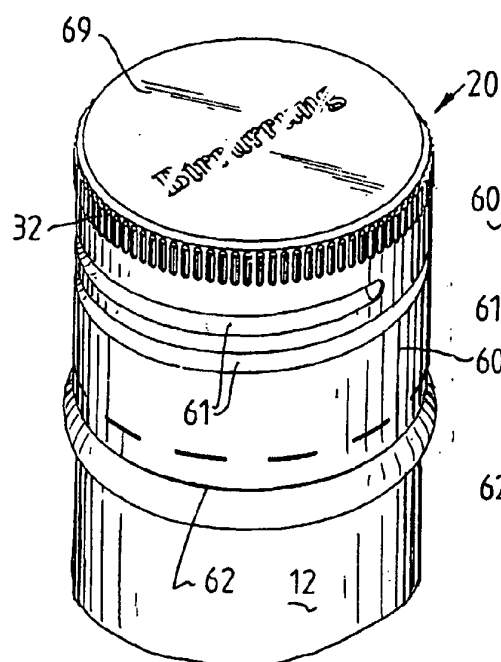


Fig. 4a

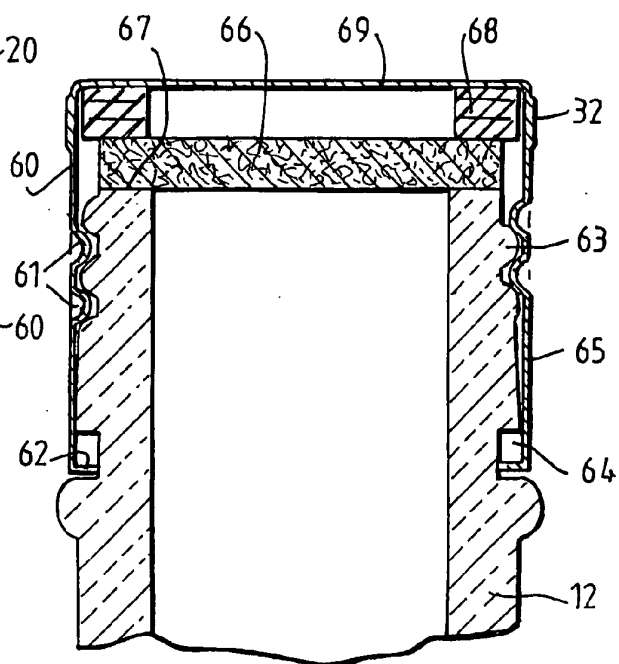


Fig. 4b

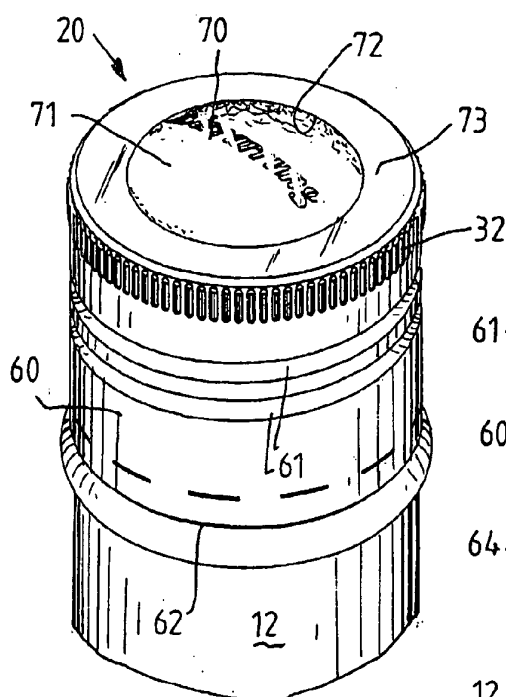


Fig. 5a

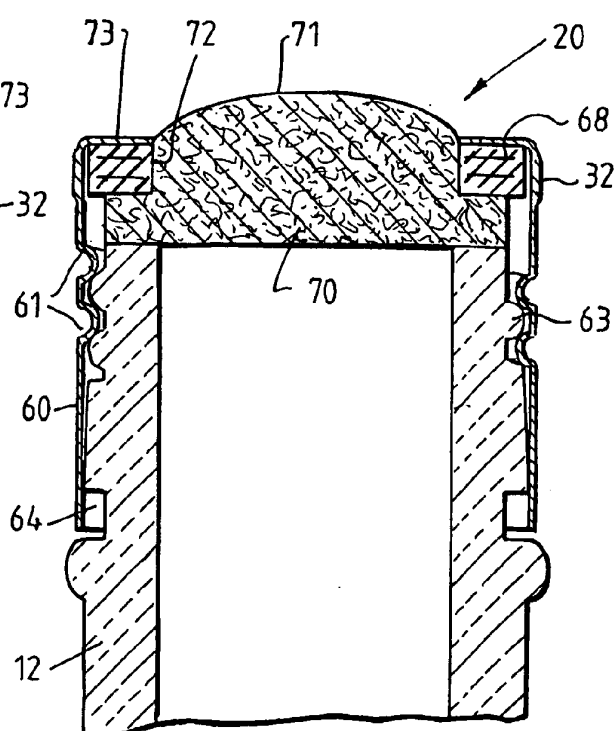
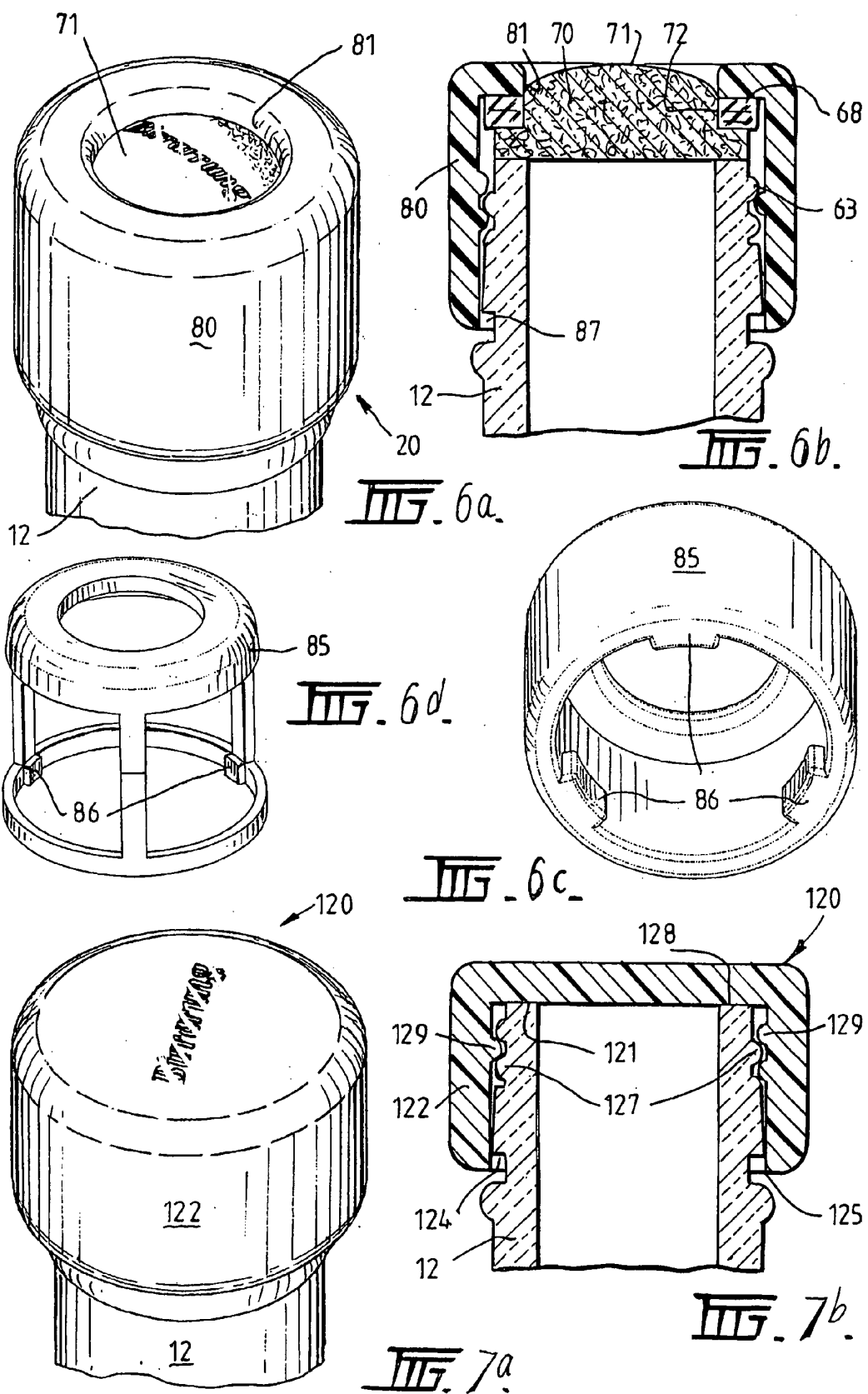


Fig. 5b



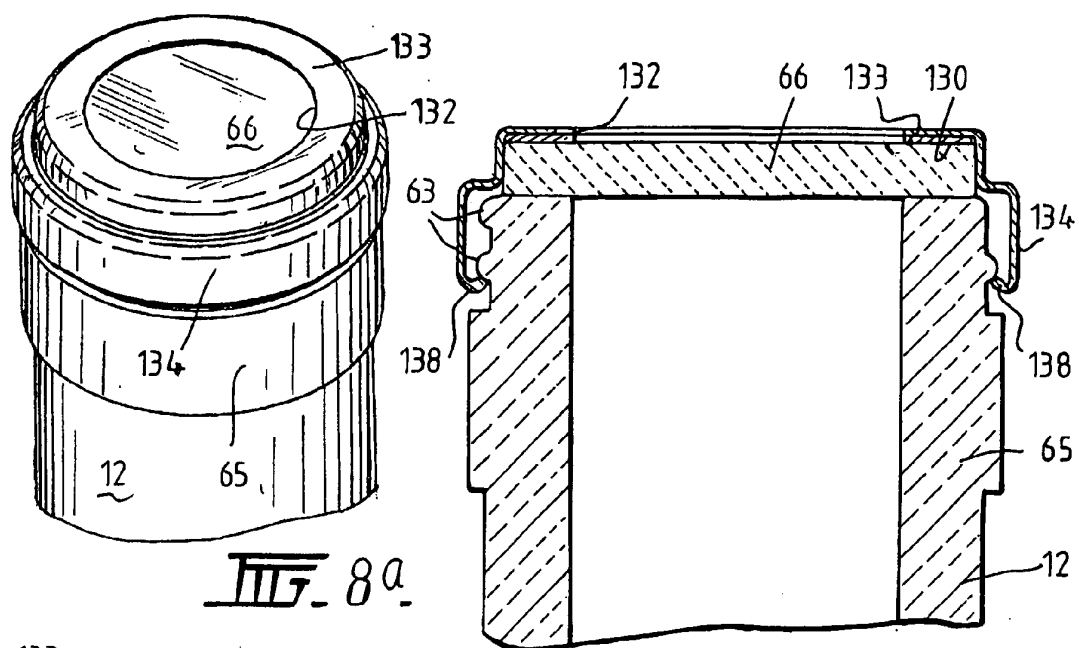


Fig. 8a.

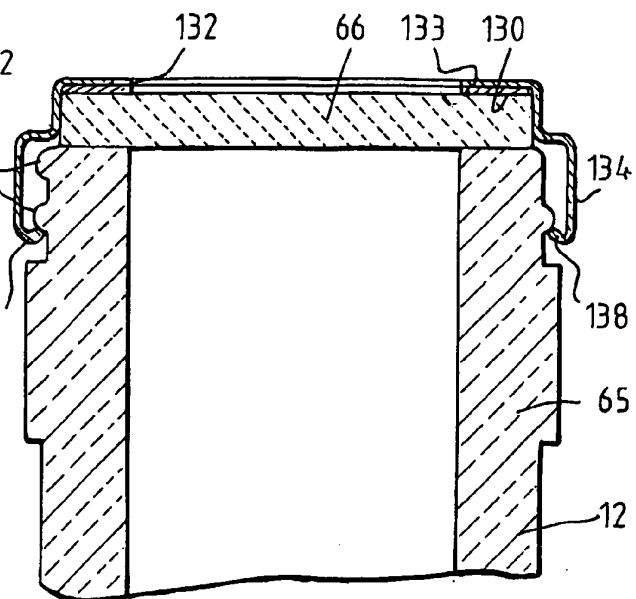


Fig. 8b.

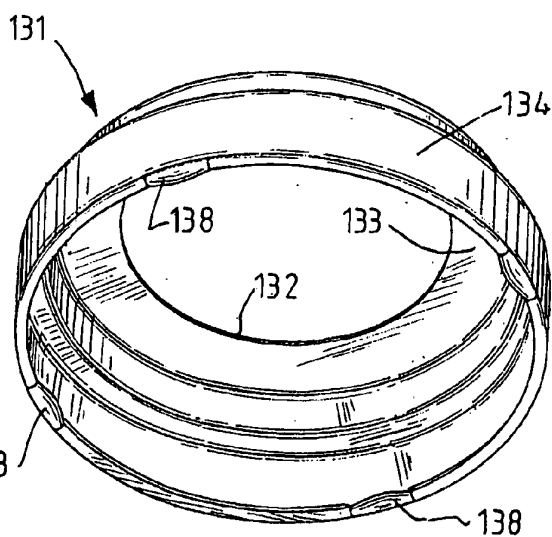
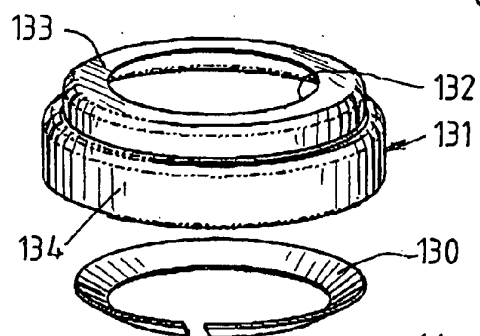


Fig. 8d.

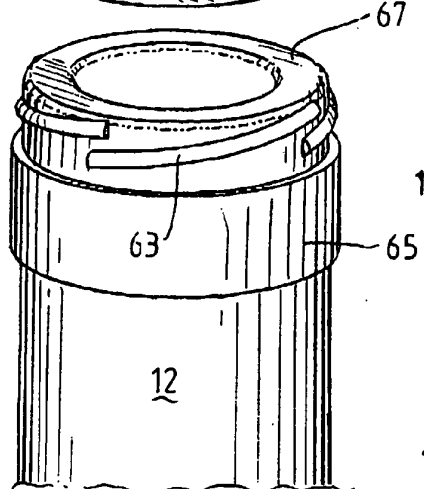


Fig. 8c.

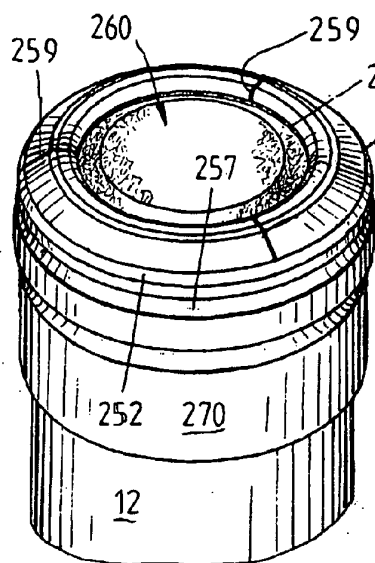


FIG. 9a.

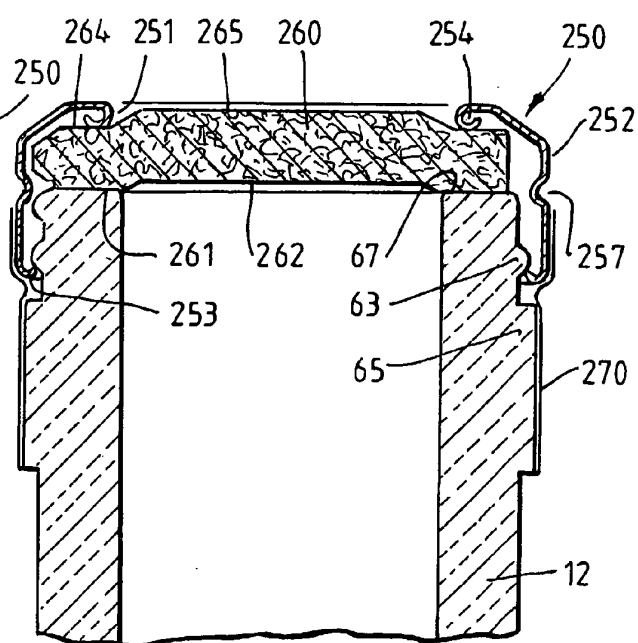


FIG. 9b.

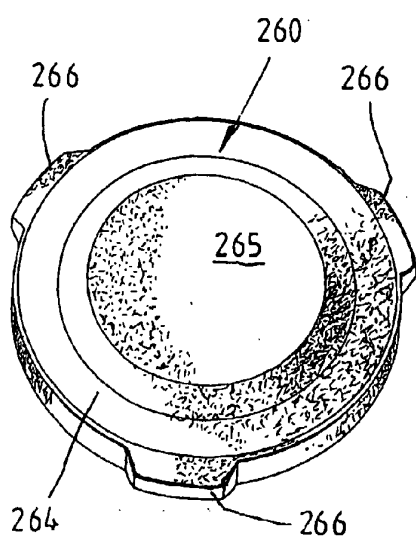


FIG. 9c.

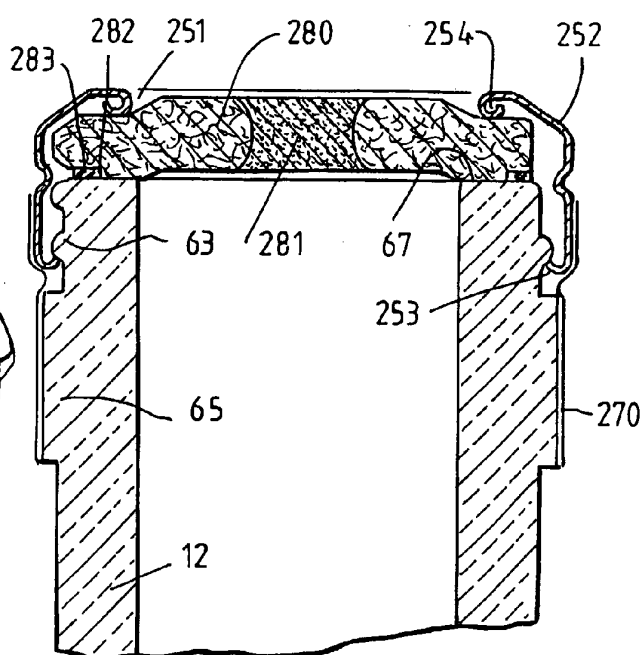
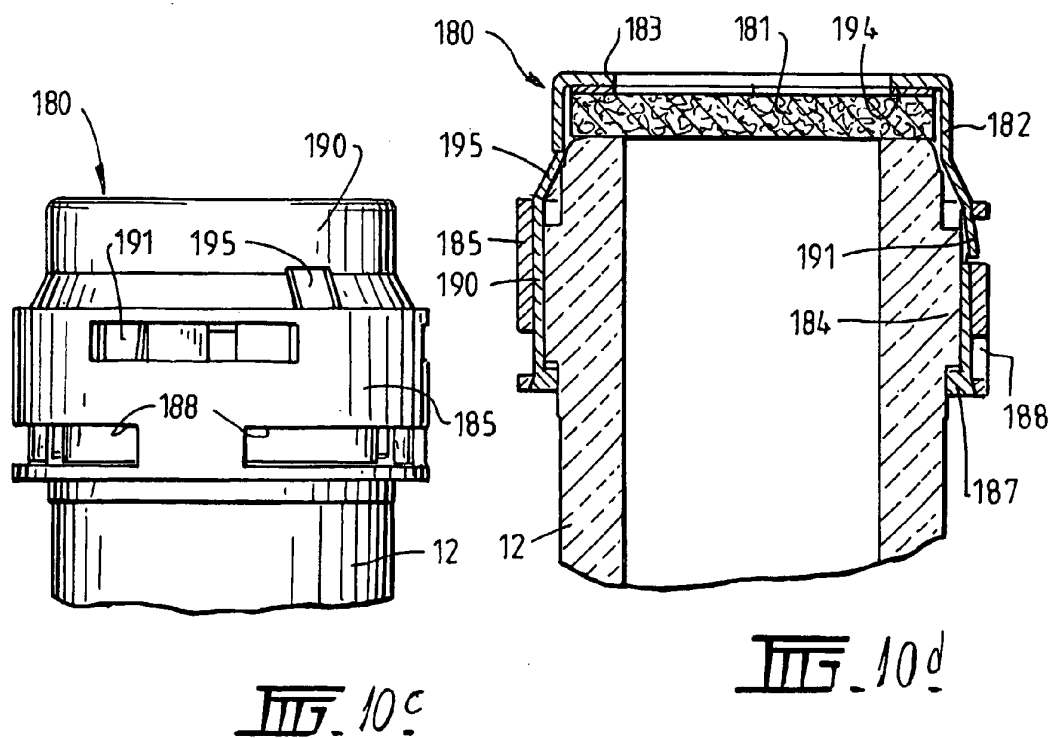
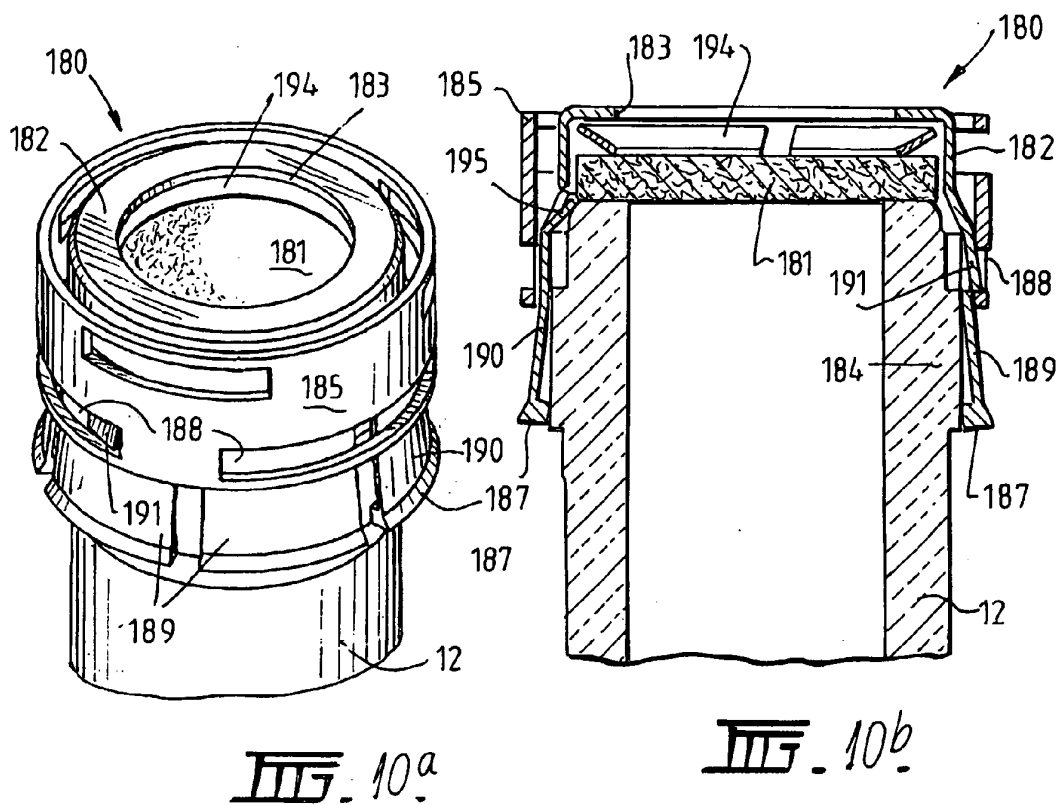


FIG. 9d.



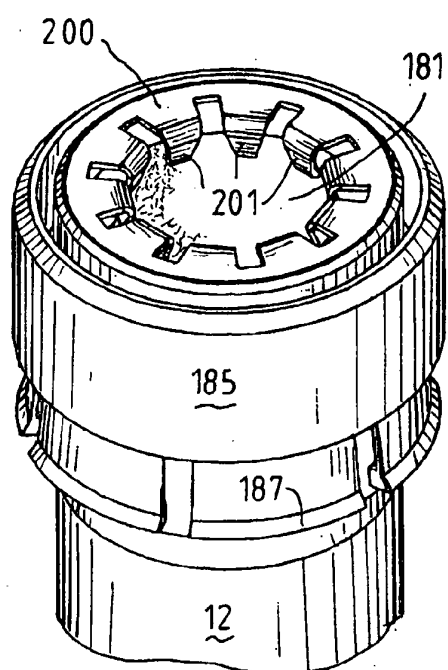


FIG. 11a

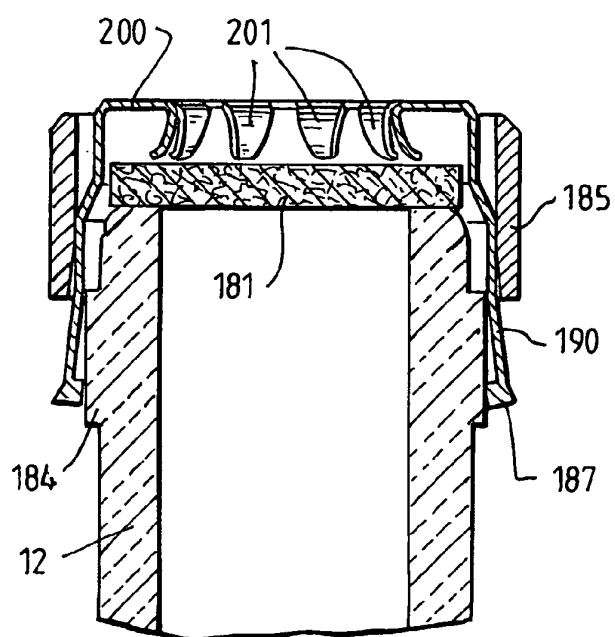


FIG. 11b

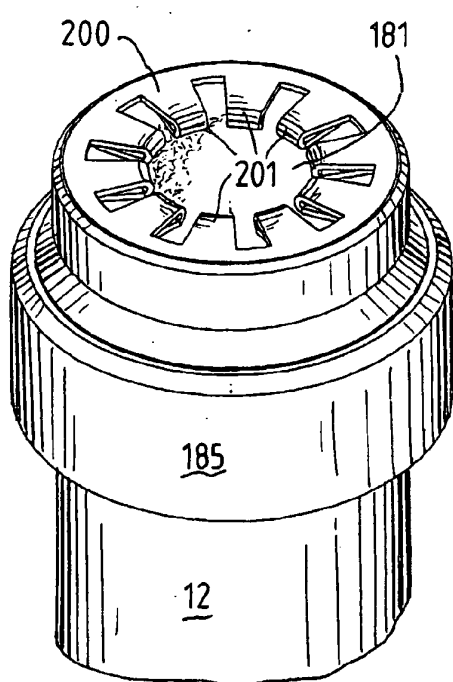


FIG. 11c

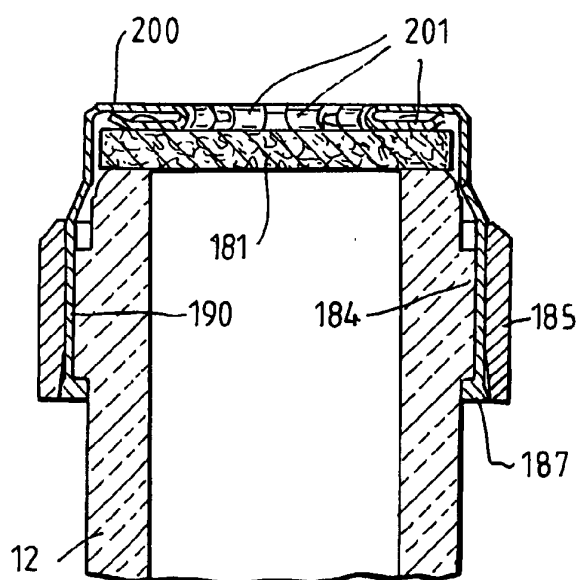


FIG. 11d

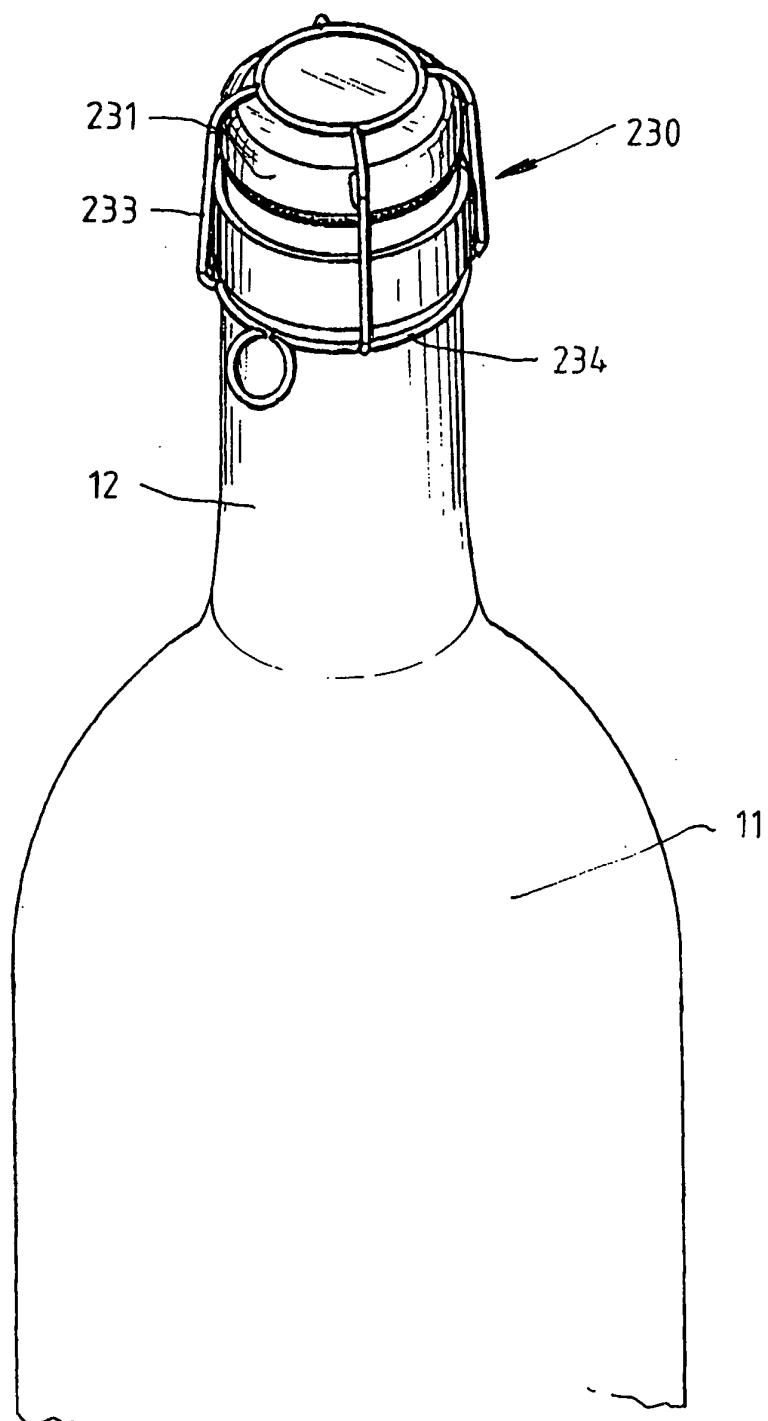


FIG. 12.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- GB 507702 A [0005]
- US 2001052508 A1 [0006]