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# Autofill pitcher assembly with hidden venting


## Abstract

An autofill pitcher assembly having hidden venting is provided. The assembly includes a pitcher wall defining an opening at a top edge of the pitcher and a lid removably received in the opening. The lid includes a top wall, a skirt extending from a bottom surface of the top wall, a gasket disposed on the skirt, and a vent formed in the skirt between the gasket and the bottom surface of the top wall.



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## Background/Summary

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

(1) The present subject matter relates generally to pitchers, and more particularly to water pitchers used with refrigerator appliances.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

(2) Liquid pitchers, commonly water pitchers, are often provided to store and serve beverages. It is becoming common for pitchers to be associated with refrigerator appliances as a convenience to provide access to chilled water. Some refrigerator appliances provide a retaining cavity on a door to receive and retain a pitcher, with some retaining cavities including an autofill feature to maintain a prescribed level of water in the pitcher. In such cases, the contents of the pitcher are subject to frequent movement as the refrigerator appliance door is open and closed. Accordingly, door-

mounted pitchers may beneficially be fitted with lids that provide a seal to prevent pitcher contents from splashing out of the pitcher volume as the door is open and closed, while still allowing the pitcher to be used for pouring out the contents of the pitcher volume. A spout may be provided to facilitate dispensing, or pouring, from the pitcher.

(3) In order to pour pitcher contents with a uniform flow, the pitcher must continuously draw in a volume of air to offset the volume of water dispensed. Known lids are directly vented to the ambient atmosphere to permit the introduction of air to the pitcher volume. However, direct venting may allow contents of the pitcher to leave the pitcher when the contents of the pitcher are splashing, for example during opening and closing of the door. This can lead to unwanted spills and user dissatisfaction. Accordingly, a pitcher having an air intake that addresses one or more of the challenges noted above would be desirable.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

(4) The present subject matter provides a pitcher and lid that allows the introduction of ambient air to the pitcher volume when liquid is being poured from the pitcher without allowing contents of the pitcher to splash out of the pitcher volume. Aspects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the following description, may be apparent from the description, or may be learned through practice of the invention.

(5) In one exemplary aspect, an autofill pitcher assembly with hidden venting is provided. The autofill pitcher assembly comprises a pitcher having a pitcher wall connected to a pitcher bottom, the pitcher wall defining an opening at a top edge of the pitcher and a lid removably received in the opening of the pitcher. The lid comprises a top wall having a bottom surface with a skirt extending from the bottom surface, a gasket disposed on the skirt spaced from the bottom surface, and a vent defined in the skirt at a location between the bottom surface of the top wall and the gasket.

(6) In another example aspect, a lid for a pitcher is provided, the lid comprising a top wall having a bottom surface, a skirt extending from the bottom surface, and a gasket disposed on the skirt spaced from the bottom surface. The skirt defines a vent formed therethrough, the vent located between the bottom surface and the gasket.

(7) These and other features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become better understood with reference to the following description and appended claims. The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

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## Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

(1) A full and enabling disclosure of the present invention, including the best mode thereof, directed to one of ordinary skill in the art, is set forth in the specification, which makes reference to the appended figures.

(2) FIG. **1** provides a front view of a refrigerator appliance with which an autofill pitcher assembly according to an exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure may be used;

(3) FIG. **2** provides a front view of the refrigerator appliance of FIG. **1** with refrigerator doors shown in an open configuration;

(4) FIG. **3** provides a perspective view of a pitcher in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;

(5) FIG. **4** provides a side sectional view of a pitcher and lid in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;

(6) FIG. **5** provides a perspective view of a pitcher lid in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;

(7) FIG. **6** provides a sectional view of portion of the pitcher lid of FIG. **5** taken along line VI-VI;
(8) FIG. **7** provides a partial perspective view of a pitcher and lid in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;
(9) FIG. **8** provides a side view of a pitcher assembly dispensing liquid in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;
(10) FIG. **9** represents a partial perspective view of an alternate embodiment of a pitcher lid in accordance with the present disclosure; and
(11) FIG. **10** represents a bottom view of the lid of FIG. **9**.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

(12) Reference now will be made in detail to embodiments of the invention, one or more examples of which are illustrated in the drawings. Each example is provided by way of explanation of the invention, not limitation of the invention. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made in the present invention without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment can be used with another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present invention covers such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.
(13) As used herein, the terms “first,” “second,” and “third” may be used interchangeably to distinguish one component from another and are not intended to signify location or importance of the individual components. The terms “includes” and “including” are intended to be inclusive in a manner similar to the term “comprising.” Similarly, the term “or” is generally intended to be inclusive (i.e., “A or B” is intended to mean “A or B or both”). In addition, here and throughout the specification and claims, range limitations may be combined and/or interchanged. Such ranges are identified and include all the sub-ranges contained therein unless context or language indicates otherwise. For example, all ranges disclosed herein are inclusive of the endpoints, and the endpoints are independently combinable with each other. The singular forms “a,” “an,” and “the” include plural references unless the context clearly dictates otherwise.
(14) Approximating language, as used herein throughout the specification and claims, may be applied to modify any quantitative representation that could permissibly vary without resulting in a change in the basic function to which it is related. Accordingly, a value modified by a term or terms, such as “generally,” “about,” “approximately,” and “substantially,” are not to be limited to the precise value specified. In at least some instances, the approximating language may correspond to the precision of an instrument for measuring the value, or the precision of the methods or machines for constructing or manufacturing the components and/or systems. For example, the approximating language may refer to being within a 10 percent margin, i.e., including values within ten percent greater or less than the stated value. In this regard, for example, when used in the context of an angle or direction, such terms include within ten degrees greater or less than the stated angle or direction, e.g., “generally vertical” includes forming an angle of up to ten degrees in any direction, e.g., clockwise or counterclockwise, with the vertical direction V.
(15) As used herein, “above” and “below” generally mean at a higher or lower vertical place or location than the referenced location or element. With reference to this disclosure, “above” and “below” are used to distinguish position in the vertical V direction or the height H direction.
(16) The word “exemplary” is used herein to mean “serving as an example, instance, or illustration.” In addition, references to “an embodiment” or “one embodiment” does not necessarily refer to the same embodiment, although it may. Any implementation described herein as “exemplary” or “an embodiment” is not necessarily to be construed as preferred or advantageous over other implementations. Moreover, each example is provided by way of explanation of the invention, not limitation of the invention. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made in the present invention without departing from the scope of the invention. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment

can be used with another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present invention covers such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

(17) Turning to the figures, FIG. **1** provides a front view of an exemplary refrigerator appliance **100** according to an exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure. Refrigerator appliance **100** extends between a top **101** and a bottom **102** along a vertical direction V, between a left side **105** and a right side **106** along a lateral direction L, and extends between a front and a back along a transverse direction T (not shown), which is a direction orthogonal to the vertical direction V and the lateral direction L. Vertical direction V, lateral direction L, and transverse direction T are mutually perpendicular and form an orthogonal direction system.

(18) Refrigerator appliance **100** includes a housing or cabinet **120** defining a chilled chamber, fresh food chamber **122**, and one or more freezer chambers, such as a first freezer chamber **124** and a second freezer chamber **125**, which may both be arranged below fresh food chamber **122** along the vertical direction V. As illustrated, fresh food chamber **122** is bounded by vertical walls at the left side **105** and at the right side **106**, such walls spaced apart in the lateral direction, a horizontal wall at the top **101** and at the bottom by a lower wall **132**. In this configuration, refrigerator appliance **100** may generally be referred to as a bottom mount, or bottom freezer, refrigerator. Cabinet **120** also defines a mechanical compartment (not shown) for receipt of a sealed cooling system (not shown).

(19) Left and right refrigerator doors **126**, **128**, respectively, are rotatably hinged to an edge of cabinet **120** at left **105** and right **106** sides, respectively, for accessing fresh food chamber **122** (FIG. **2**) or sealing fresh food chamber **122** as illustrated in FIG. **1**. For example, upper and lower hinges may couple each door **126**, **128** to cabinet **120**. When left and right doors **126**, **128** are configured as illustrated in FIG. **1**, the door arrangement is sometimes referred to as a "French door" configuration. Freezer doors, such as a first freezer door **130** and a second freezer door **131**, may be arranged below refrigerator doors **126**, **128** for accessing one or more freezer chambers, such as first and second freezer chambers **124**, **125**, respectively. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. **1**, freezer doors **130**, **131** are coupled to freezer drawers (not shown) slidably coupled within first and second freezer chambers **124**, **125**. Such drawers are thus generally "pull-out" drawers in that they can be manually moved into and out of freezer chambers **124**, **125** on suitable slide mechanisms. Each door **126**, **128**, **130**, **131** can include a handle for accessing one of the chambers **122**, **124**, **125** of refrigerator appliance **100**.

(20) FIG. **2** provides a front perspective view of refrigerator appliance **100** showing refrigerator doors **126**, **128** in an open position to reveal the interior of fresh food chamber **122**. Additionally, freezer doors **130**, **131** are shown in partially open positions to reveal a portion of the interior of freezer chambers **124**, **125**, respectively.

(21) Left door **126** of refrigerator appliance **100** includes an inner surface **134** and an outer surface **136**. Inner surface **134** generally defines a portion of the interior of fresh food chamber **122** when door **126** is in a closed position as shown in FIG. **1**. Outer surface **136** is generally opposite inner surface **134** and defines a portion of the exterior of refrigerator appliance **100** when door **126** is in the closed position.

(22) The same construction may result in a similarly formed right door **128** as left door **126** with inner surface **134** and outer surface **136**. Moreover, it will further be appreciated that freezer doors **130**, **131** can likewise include inner and outer surfaces.

(23) Doors **126**, **128** may include storage bins or shelves **138** movably or fixedly attached to the inner surface **134** of the doors **126**, **128**. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. **2**, left door **126** includes pitcher system **140**, which may include pitcher **142** and lid **154** (collectively pitcher assembly **143**), a support or shelf **108** to support and secure the pitcher assembly **143** on the door **126**, and autofill pitcher components to dispense water into the pitcher to a predetermined level. Autofill pitcher components may include a water supply conduit, valves, switches and sensors (not

shown) to provide features normally associated with an autofill pitcher system. Generally, pitcher system **140** receives and retains pitcher assembly **143** for access when the left door **126** is open as in FIG. **2**. The pitcher system **140** is illustrated on the left door **126** for convenience. In other embodiments, the pitcher system **140** may be in a different position on the left door **126**, or on the right door **128**, or elsewhere within the fresh food chamber **122**.

(24) FIG. **3** is a perspective view of a representative pitcher **142** comprising a pitcher wall **144** connected to, or formed with, pitcher bottom **146**. A top edge **150** is formed by the pitcher wall **144** at the pitcher end opposite pitcher bottom **146**. The pitcher wall **144** and pitcher bottom define a pitcher volume **148**, accessible through opening **151** defined by the top edge **150**. For convenience, top edge **150** of pitcher wall **144** may also define a spout **152** at a first end of the pitcher to facilitate directing a liquid flow out of the pitcher **142** or pitcher assembly **143**. The pitcher wall deflects away from the pitcher volume at the spout **152** to at least partially form the spout **152**. At a second end of the pitcher, opposite the spout **152**, a handle **153** may be included to provide a gripping area to aid in manipulating the pitcher **142**.

(25) Exemplary pitcher **142** is illustrated as a generally hollow rectangular cuboid for ease of illustration only. Other embodiments may have other shapes, for example a hollow cylinder, and may or may not have features such as a spout or a handle. Embodiments disclosed herein are directed to an autofill pitcher adapted for use in a refrigerator, specifically pitchers adapted to mount to a refrigerator appliance door. However, the disclosed features may be used with other types of pitchers. For example, some features may be beneficial to incorporate into a manual fill pitcher.

(26) FIG. **4** provides a side sectional view of exemplary pitcher assembly **143** comprising pitcher **142** with a lid **154**. An orthogonal coordinate system for the embodiment of water pitcher assembly **143** is defined in FIG. **4**. The height H direction is generally parallel to the vertical direction V used in reference to the refrigerator appliance **100** in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Width direction W extends perpendicular to the height H from the spout (first) end to the handle (second) end of the pitcher **142**. The depth D direction is perpendicular to the H-W plane.

(27) The pitcher assembly **143** illustrated in FIG. **4** includes a lid **154** removably received in the opening **151** at the top edge **150**. The lid **154** may include a top wall **158** joined to, or formed with, a substantially continuous peripheral skirt **156**. The skirt **156** extends from bottom surface **159** of the top wall **158**, the skirt being spaced from the perimeter **161** of the lid **154**. The skirt **156** is configured to be removably received in the opening **151** of pitcher **142**. The top wall **158** extends beyond the skirt **156** in the D-W plane. The extension of top wall **158** may facilitate an abutting relationship between the bottom surface **159** of lid **154** with top edge **150** of the pitcher **142** when the lid **154** is removably received in the pitcher **142**. The abutting relationship may sealingly engage the bottom surface **159** with top edge **150**.

(28) As illustrated, a sealing element or gasket **162** is disposed around the perimeter of the skirt **156** to provide a sealing engagement with the skirt **156** and the inner surface **160** (FIG. **3**) of the pitcher wall **144**. The gasket **162** may be formed from any material suitable to seal, or substantially seal, against infiltration of liquid, for example a polymeric material. Gasket **162** is positioned on, and extends outwardly from, the skirt **156**. Gasket **162** may be vertically constrained between upper and lower retaining walls **164**, **165** positioned, respectively, above and below the gasket **162** in the H direction. The lower retaining wall **165** is vertically (in the H direction) positioned below the vent **166** (described below) and the upper retaining wall **164** is positioned between the lower retaining wall **165** and the vent **166**. In embodiments, the gasket **162** may be a separate element disposed on the skirt **156** and may be anchored to the skirt **156** using known adhesive or mechanical methods.

(29) As illustrated, gasket **162** includes multiple sealing surfaces **163** on an outwardly directed face, positioned and configured to engage with the inner surface **160** of pitcher wall **144**. The sealing surfaces **163** may be multiple, generally horizontally oriented (i.e., in the D-W plane) thin

blades as illustrated. In other embodiments, the sealing surfaces **163** may be different in number or configuration. The multiple sealing surfaces **163** may facilitate a watertight, or substantially watertight, seal between the lid **154** and the inside surface **160** of pitcher wall **144**. As illustrated in the embodiment of FIG. **6**, the multiple sealing surfaces **163** engage with the inner surface **160** of pitcher wall **144** when the lid **154** is fully received in the opening **151** of the pitcher **142**.

(30) Gasket **162** is illustrated in the exemplary embodiments as a continuous band extending around the perimeter of skirt **156**. In other embodiments, the gasket **162** may not be continuous (e.g., gasket **186**, FIG. **9**). For example, in an embodiment, the gasket **156** may be interrupted at the spout **152**. That is, a portion of the gasket **162** that corresponds with the spout **152** area of the pitcher **142** may be removed and the gasket **162** configured as a linear length of gasket material having two ends rather than a continuous band. In some embodiments, each end may be anchored on either side of the spout **152**. Anchoring can be achieved by known methods using heat, adhesive, vibration, or mechanical fasteners to fix the ends to the skirt **156**.

(31) As may be best understood from FIG. **6**, the skirt **156**, bottom surface **159** of top wall **158**, and gasket **162** form three sides of (i.e., partially define) air flow channel **168**. The skirt **156**, bottom surface **159**, and gasket **162** cooperate with pitcher wall **144** to form an air flow channel **168** when the lid **154** is fully received within the pitcher **142**. The pitcher wall **144** and the skirt **156** are spaced apart in the width W direction providing the widthwise boundary for the air flow path. The gasket **163** spans the space between the skirt **156** and the pitcher wall **144** providing a lower (in the H direction) boundary and the bottom surface **159** of top wall **158** provides the top boundary.

(32) The air flow channel **168** is bounded on four sides around the perimeter of the pitcher **142** with the exception of at the spout **152**. As can be seen in at least FIG. **7**, at the spout **152**, the pitcher wall **144** deflects away from the skirt **156** such that the air flow channel **168** is open to ambient air. Air inlet **170** is thus formed, placing the air flow path in fluid communication with the ambient atmosphere **172**.

(33) As illustrated, fluid communication is provided between the air flow channel **168** and the pitcher volume **148** via vent **166** formed through the skirt **156**. The vents **166** therefore puts the pitcher volume **148** in fluid communication with the ambient atmosphere **172**. One or more vents **166** may be formed through the skirt **156**, the vents **166** located vertically (i.e., in the H direction) above the gasket **162** (and above upper retaining wall **164** if provided) and below the top wall **158** of the lid **154**. In the exemplary embodiments illustrated in the figures, one oval-shaped vent **166** is shown for ease of illustration. In other embodiments, other shapes are used for the vents **166** and more than one vent **166** may be formed through the skirt **156** as described above.

(34) FIG. **8** is illustrative of a pitcher assembly **143** in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure dispensing a fluid **176** by tilting or rotating the pitcher **142** in the counterclockwise direction. As the pitcher assembly **143** rotates, the fluid level **178** reaches the spout **152** and a fluid stream **180** exits the pitcher assembly **143**. With the outward flow of liquid **176**, ambient air **172** is drawn into the pitcher volume **148** as ambient air flow **174**. The ambient air flow **174** is drawn into air inlet **170**, through air flow channel **168**, entering the pitcher volume **148** through one or more vents **166**.

(35) In an alternate embodiment illustrated in FIGS. **9** and **10**, autofill pitcher lid **182** comprises a top wall **184** having a bottom surface **183** and a substantially continuous peripheral skirt **181** extending from the bottom surface **183**. The lid **182** is received in pitcher opening **151** as described above. Disposed on the skirt **181** is a gasket **186**, similar in construction to gasket **162** described above, in that gasket **186** at least has a plurality of sealing surfaces **163**. The gasket **186** may be disposed on the skirt **181** adjacent to or abutting bottom surface **183**. In the illustrated embodiment, gasket **186** is interrupted in the area of lid **182** that corresponds to spout **152**. As discussed above, portions of gasket **186**, for example the ends **187**, **188**, may be anchored to the skirt **181** using known methods. In other alternate embodiments, the gasket **186** is a continuous band disposed on the skirt **181**.

(36) As illustrated, lid **182** includes one or more (two shown) passages, tubes **190**, **192** formed through a portion of the lid **182**. For example, the channels **190**, **192** may be formed with first channel ends, vents **194**, through the skirt **181**, at or below top wall **184** as shown, between the gasket **186** and the top wall **184**. The vents **194** are shown as round in cross section for ease of illustration. Other embodiments have vents of other cross-sectional shapes. A first channel end, vent **194** of one of the one or more channels **190**, **192** is exposed to the ambient atmosphere **172** in an area corresponding to the spout **152** when the lid **182** is received in the opening **151**. The vents **194** pass through the skirt **184** and form channels **190**, **192** in or on the lid **182**. The channels **190**, **192** terminate at second channel end **196** in the interior portion **198** bounded by the skirt **184** and bottom surface **183**. When lid **182** is received in the pitcher opening **151**, interior portion **198** provides an upper boundary of pitcher volume **148**. Accordingly, pitcher volume **148** is in fluid communication with ambient atmosphere **172** via channels **190**, **192** and vents **194**. As above, when a volume of fluid is dispensed (as in FIG. **8**), a corresponding volume of ambient atmosphere is drawn into the pitcher volume **148** through vents **194** and channels **190**, **192**.
(37) This written description uses examples to disclose the invention, including the best mode, and also to enable any person skilled in the art to practice the invention, including making and using any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the invention is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to those skilled in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they include structural elements that do not differ from the literal language of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal language of the claims.

## Claims

1. An autofill pitcher assembly defining a height direction, a width direction, and a depth direction, the height, width, and depth directions being mutually perpendicular, the autofill pitcher assembly comprising: a pitcher comprising a pitcher wall connected to a pitcher bottom defining a pitcher volume, the pitcher wall defining an opening at a top edge of the pitcher; and a lid removably received in the opening of the pitcher, the lid comprising: a top wall having a bottom surface; a skirt extending from the bottom surface; a gasket disposed on the skirt spaced apart from the bottom surface; and a vent defined in the skirt at a location between the bottom surface of the top wall and the gasket, wherein: the top edge of the pitcher and the bottom surface of the top wall are abutting when the lid is removably received in the opening at the top edge of the pitcher; and the pitcher wall comprises an inner surface, further wherein the inner surface, the skirt, the gasket, and the bottom surface cooperate with the vent to form an air flow channel.
2. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 1, wherein the air flow channel is in fluid communication with the vent.
3. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 2, wherein the air flow channel is in fluid communication with the pitcher volume via the vent.
4. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 1, wherein the air flow channel is in fluid communication with an ambient atmosphere.
5. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 4, wherein: the pitcher wall defines a spout at a first end of the pitcher; and an inlet to the air flow channel is provided at the spout.
6. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 1, wherein the skirt further comprises a lower retaining wall positioned below the vent and an upper retaining wall positioned between the vent and the lower retaining wall.
7. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 6, wherein the gasket is disposed between the upper retaining wall and the lower retaining wall.
8. The autofill pitcher assembly of claim 1, wherein the gasket comprises multiple sealing surfaces engaged with the inner surface of the pitcher wall when the lid is received in the pitcher.

9. A lid for a pitcher, the lid comprising: a top wall having a bottom surface; a skirt extending from the bottom surface; and a gasket disposed on the skirt spaced apart from the bottom surface, wherein: the skirt defines a vent formed therethrough, the vent located between the bottom surface and the gasket; and the skirt is spaced apart from a perimeter of the lid such that the bottom surface, the skirt, and the gasket in communication with the vent partially define an air flow channel.
10. The lid of claim 9, wherein the air flow channel is in fluid communication with the vent.
11. The lid of claim 9, wherein the skirt comprises a lower retaining wall positioned below the vent and an upper retaining wall positioned between the vent and the lower retaining wall.
12. The lid of claim 11, wherein the gasket is disposed between the upper retaining wall and the lower retaining wall.
13. The lid of claim 9, wherein the gasket is a continuous band.
14. The lid of claim 9, wherein the gasket comprises multiple sealing surfaces.