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(54) **FOOTWEAR STRUCTURE AND METHOD OF FORMING THE SAME**

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ABSTRACT

A footwear structure includes an upper having a bottom, wherein at least a portion of the bottom extends from a first side of the upper to a second side of the upper, a welt, the welt being separate from the upper and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper by a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt, and an outsole, the outsole being separate from the upper and being coupled to the welt by an adhesive or a second stitching through the welt at a second location on the welt. A method of forming a footwear structure, whereby a welt is directly coupled to at least a portion of an upper by a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt. The welt is directly coupled to at least a portion of an outsole by an adhesive or a second stitching through the welt as a second location on the welt.

(75) Inventors: **Yi Chien Yen**, Taichung (TW);
John Galli, Endicott, NY (US);
Christopher Cataldo, Endicott,
NY (US)

(73) Assignee: **GENERAL
SHOES-U.S.-CORPORATION**,
Endicott, NY (US)

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Related U.S. Application Data

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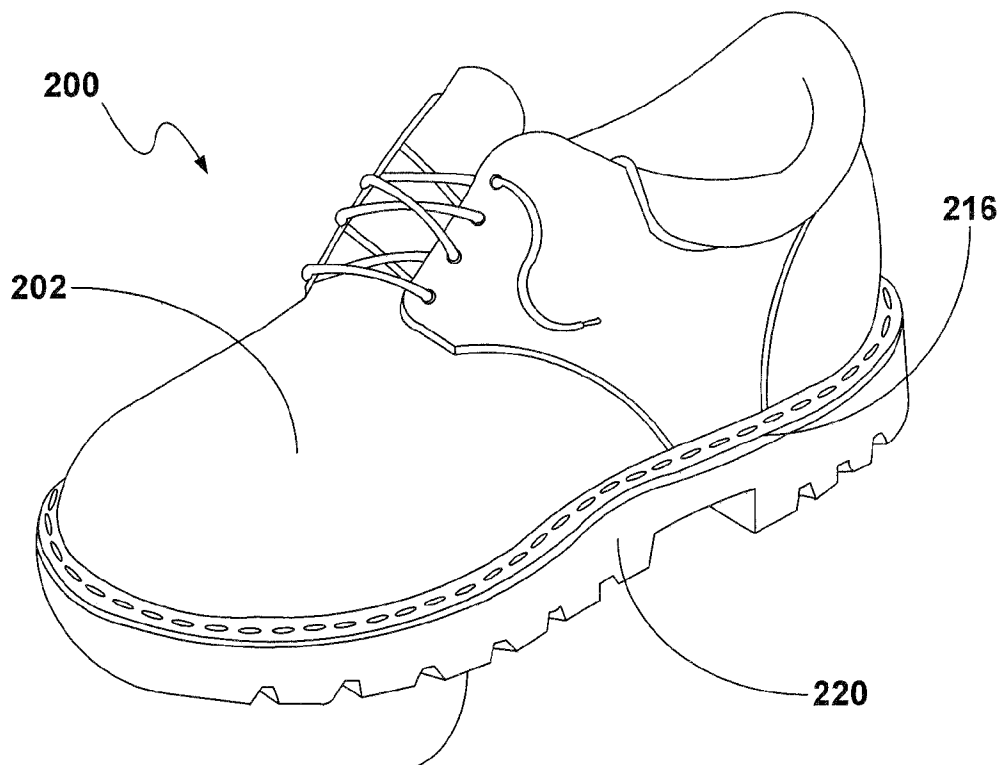


FIG. 1

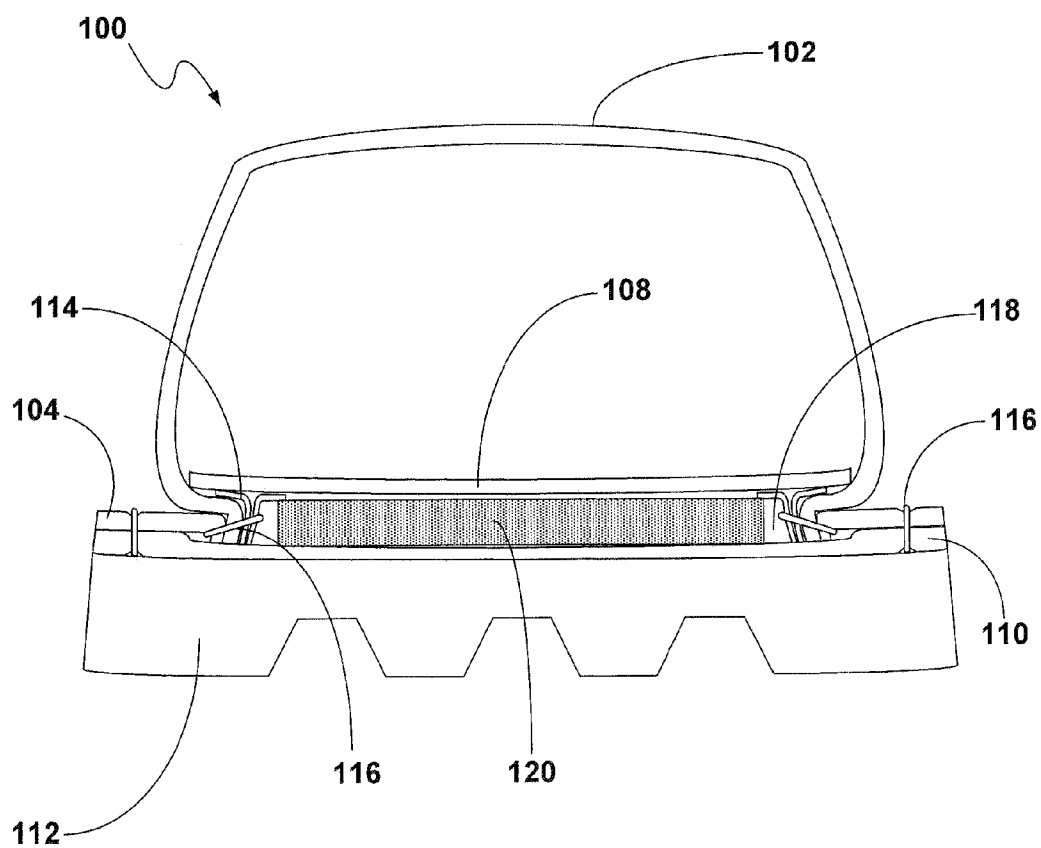


FIG. 2

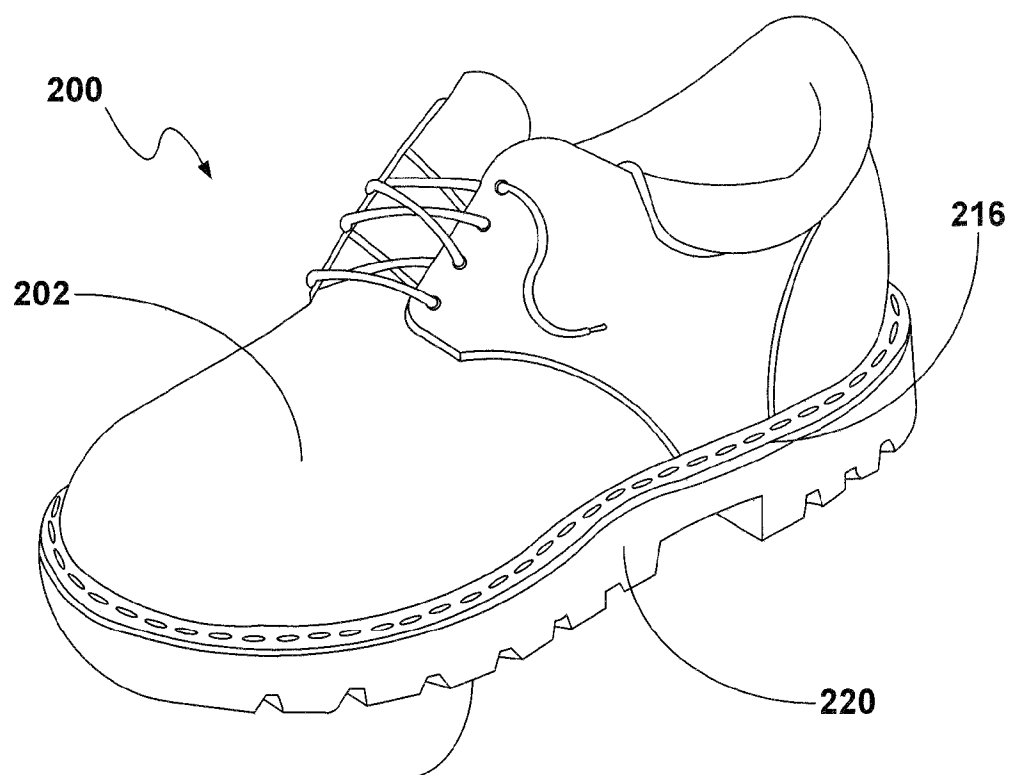
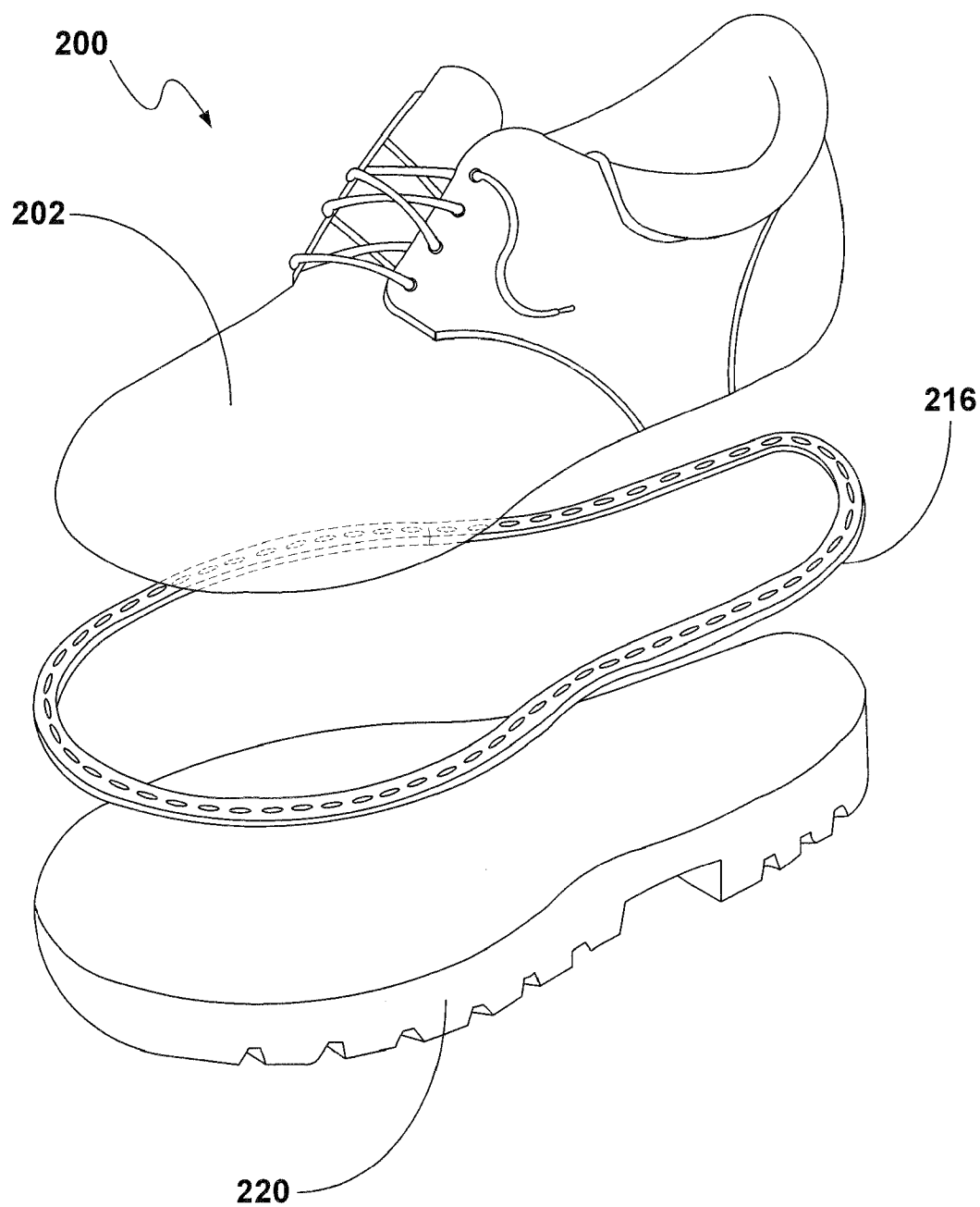
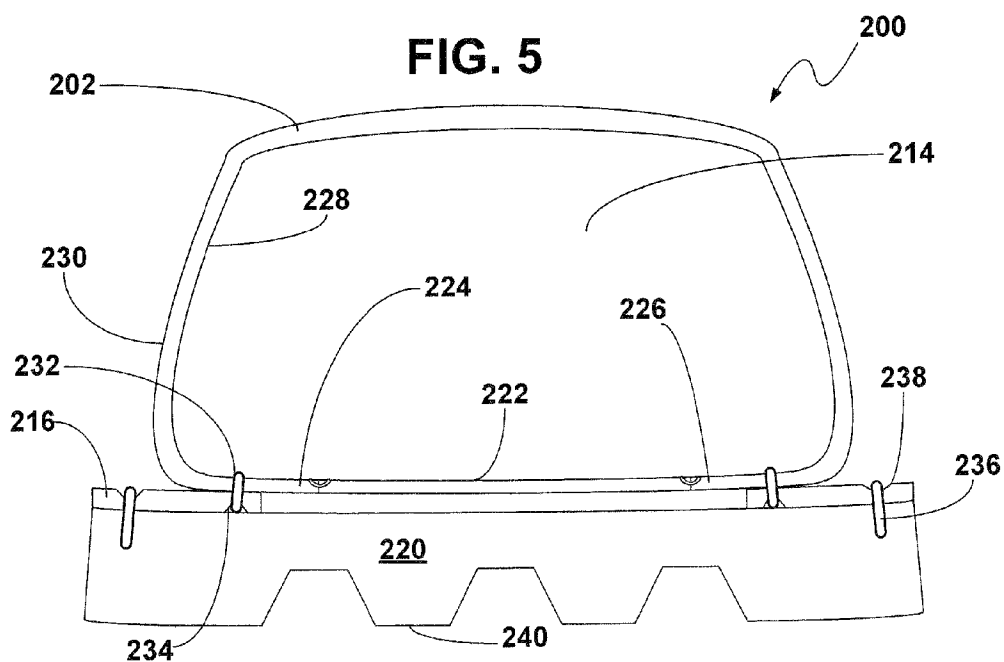
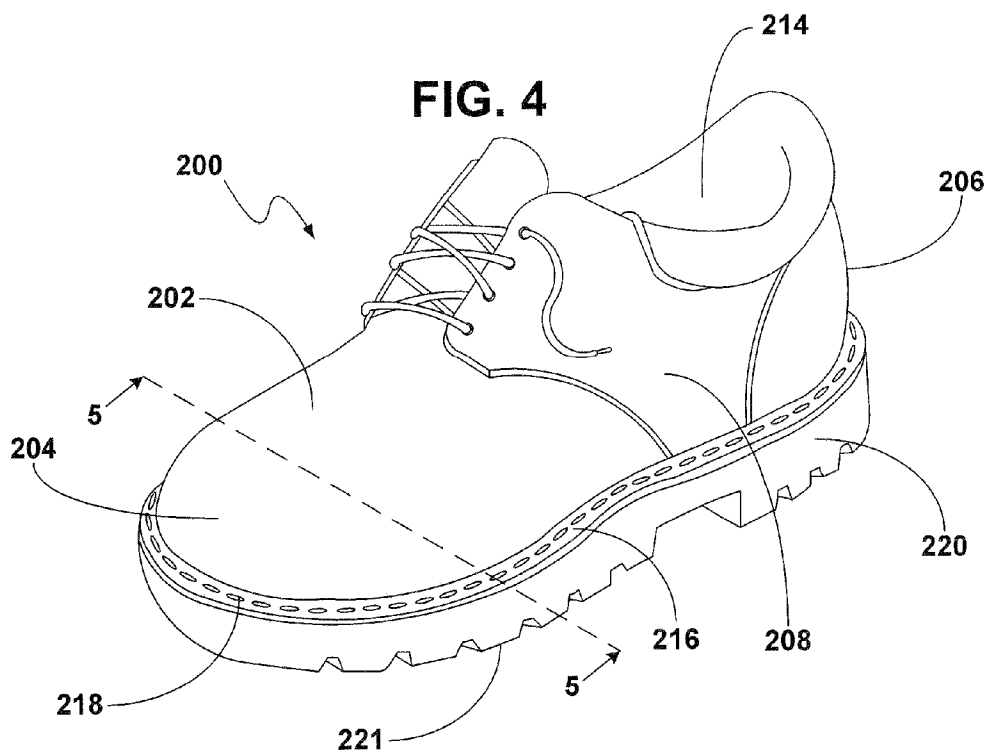


FIG. 3





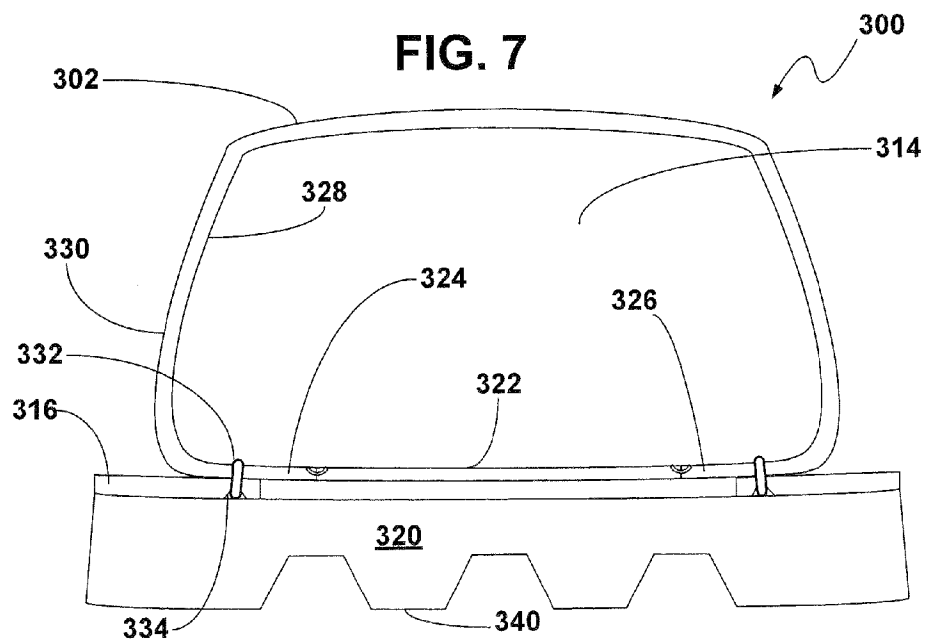
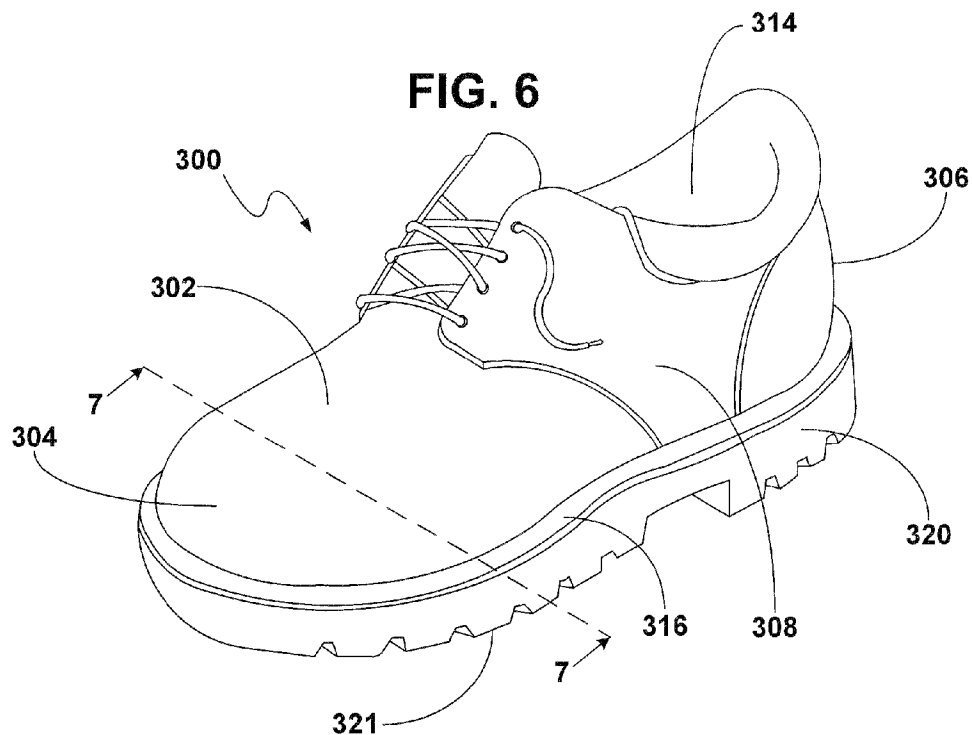
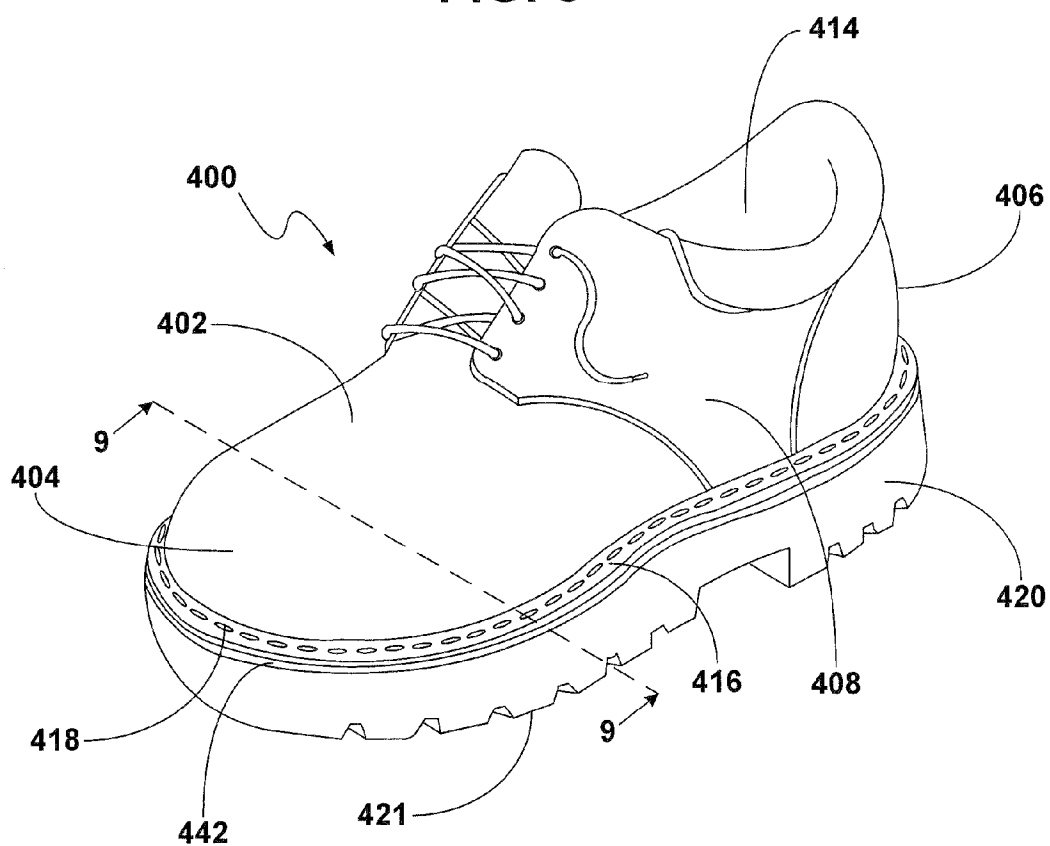
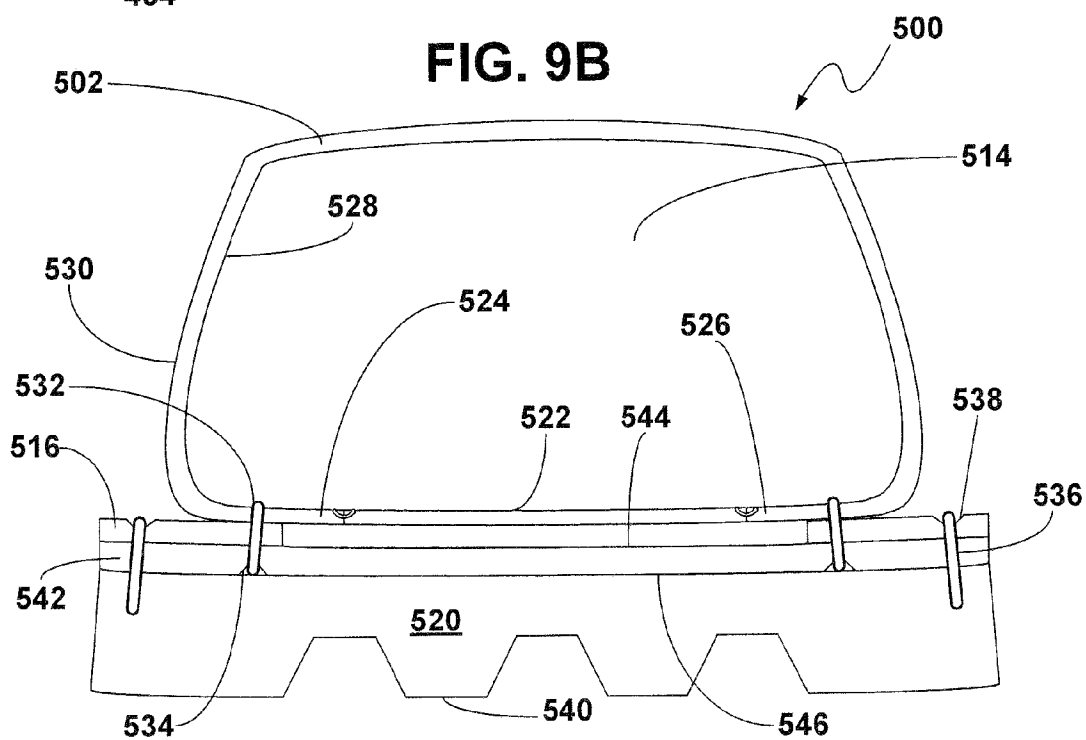
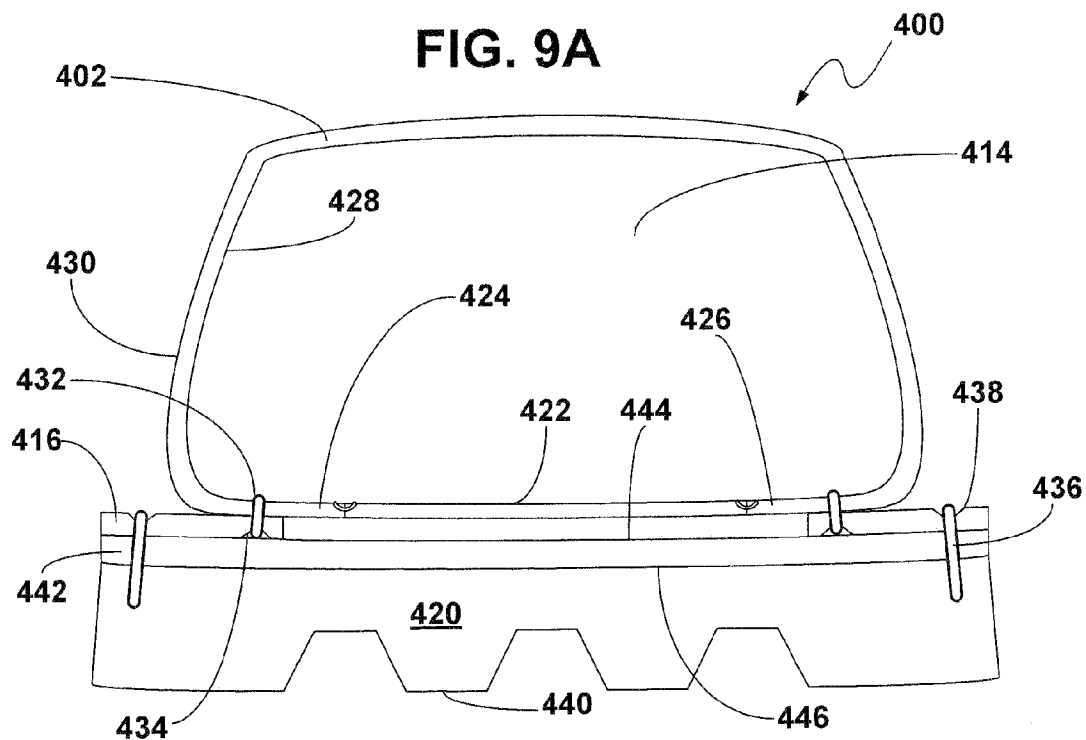


FIG. 8





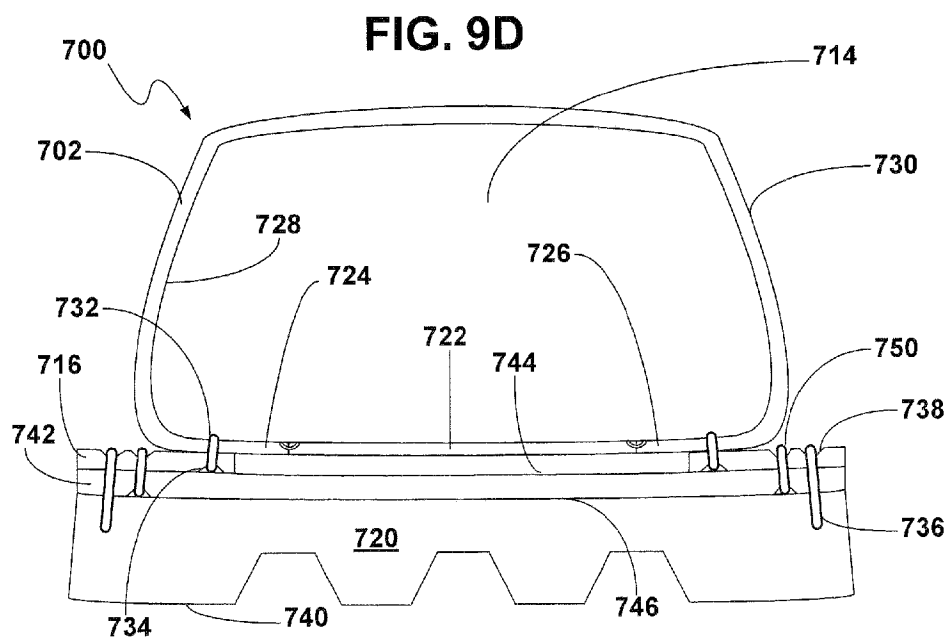
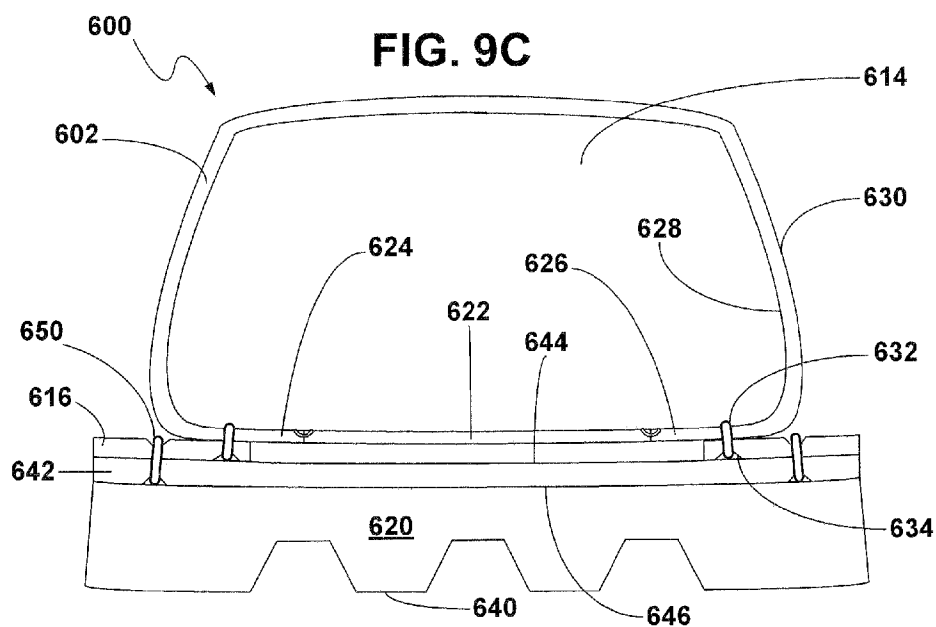
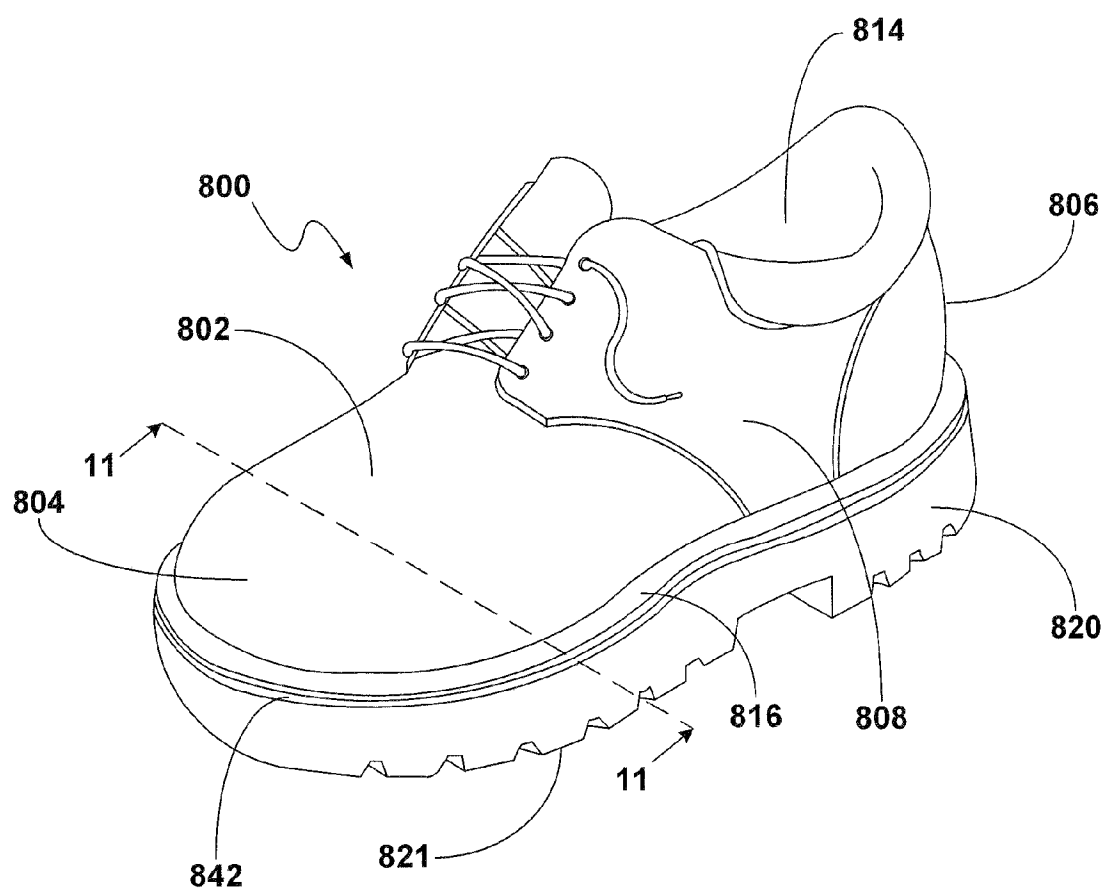
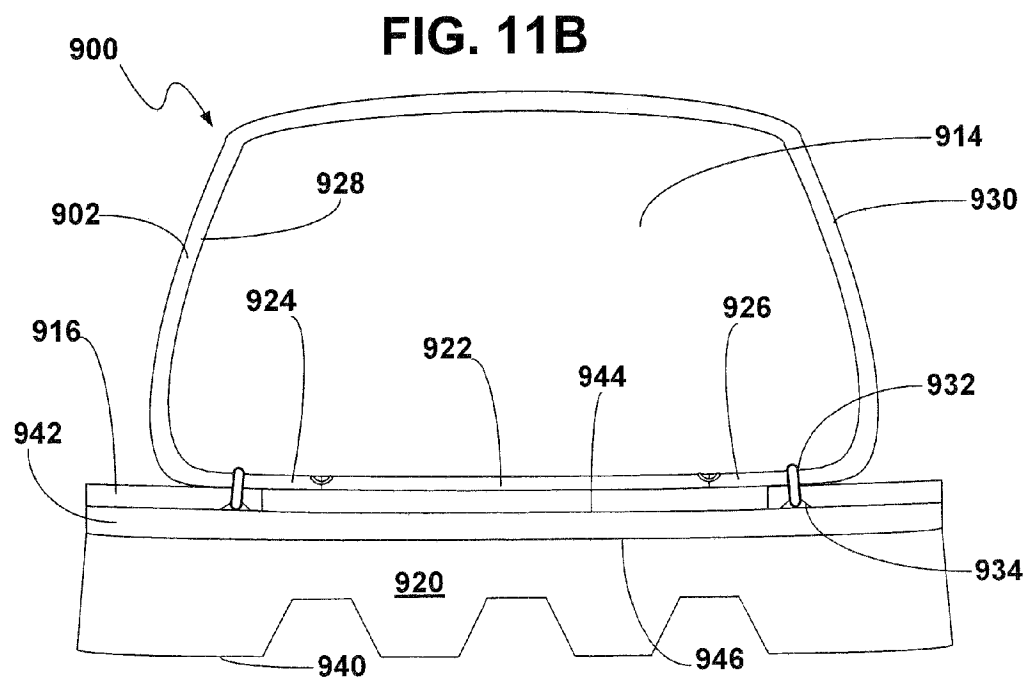
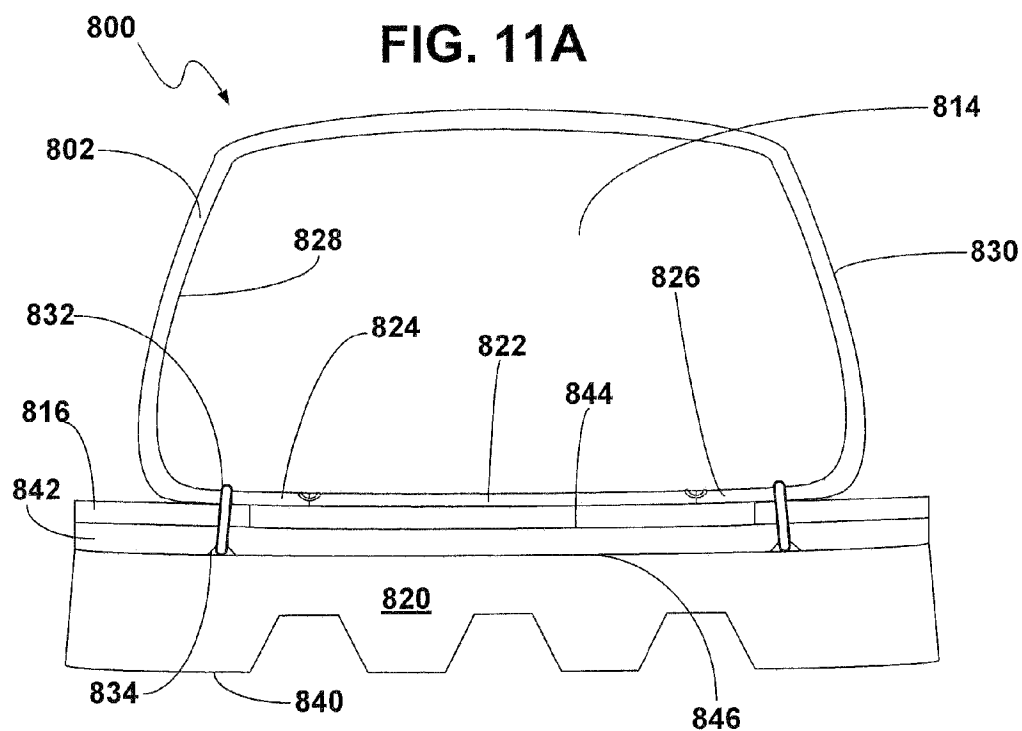


FIG. 10





FOOTWEAR STRUCTURE AND METHOD OF FORMING THE SAME

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/257,953, filed Nov. 4, 2009 and entitled Footwear Structure and Method of Forming the Same, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates to footwear structure and construction, and, more particularly, to a welted footwear structure and method of forming the same.

BACKGROUND

[0003] A variety of different footwear constructions are used by the footwear industry. Generally, each construction has characteristics that make it particularly well suited for specific applications. For example, some constructions are selected for their durability, others for their flexibility and comfort, while still others are selected for their aesthetic appeal. One particularly popular type of construction is referred to as a welt construction. Welt constructions are popular because they are durable and are aesthetically desirable. Welts are also popular because they tend to resist the entry of water into the shoe. A welt is a strip of leather, rubber, plastic, or other material that is used to secure the sole and the upper of the footwear.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0004] Features and advantages of the claimed subject matter will be apparent from the following detailed description of embodiments consistent therewith, which description should be considered with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0005] FIG. 1 provides a cross-sectional view of a forefoot portion of footwear employing the conventional Goodyear Welt construction according to one embodiment;

[0006] FIG. 2 provides a perspective view of footwear according to one embodiment;

[0007] FIG. 3 provides an exploded view of the footwear of FIG. 2;

[0008] FIG. 4 provides a perspective view of the footwear of FIG. 2;

[0009] FIG. 5 provides an enlarged sectional view taken along line 5-5 of FIG. 4;

[0010] FIG. 6 provides a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment;

[0011] FIG. 7 provides an enlarged sectional view taken along line 7-7 of FIG. 6;

[0012] FIG. 8 provides a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment;

[0013] FIGS. 9A-9D provide enlarged sectional views taken along line 9-9 of FIG. 8, according to other embodiments;

[0014] FIG. 10 provides a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment; and

[0015] FIGS. 11A-11B provide enlarged sectional views taken along line 11-11 of FIG. 10, according to other embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016] The subject matter of the present disclosure may involve, in some cases, interrelated products, alternative solutions to a particular problem, and/or a plurality of different uses of a single system or article.

[0017] There are a variety of different types of welt constructions. One type of well-known construction is the Goodyear Welt construction. In general, Goodyear Welt construction begins with an insole formed with a rib, or upstanding wall, which is positioned inwardly from the outer edge of the insole. During lasting, a stage in which the upper is fastened to an insole and takes its final shape, the upper and any optional linings are secured to this rib. The welt is then stitched to this rib. After the welt has been combined with the shoe upper, an outsole is then stitched to the welt, thereby attaching the outsole to the upper via the welt. In some cases, the outsole is cemented to the welt.

[0018] FIG. 1 depicts a cross-sectional view of a forefoot portion of a footwear 100 employing the conventional Goodyear Welt construction. Generally, footwear 100 may include a welt 104 that interconnects an upper 102 and an outsole 112. The footwear may also include an insole 108 and a midsole 110. The insole 108 may include a downwardly extending ply-rib 114 that is used to interconnect the insole 108, upper 102 and welt 104. In accordance with Goodyear Welt construction, the upper 102 is wrapped tightly around a foot-shaped form, or last, and secured to the insole 108 by stapling, stitching, or otherwise fastening it to the ply-rib 114. This step is commonly referred to as lasting and it gives the upper 102 the desired shape.

[0019] Once the upper 102 is lasted, the welt 104 is coupled to the upper 102 and insole 108 by stitches/staples 116 that extend through a portion of the welt 104, a bottom periphery of the upper 102, and the ply-rib 114. A cavity 118 created by the welt 104, upper 102 and insole 108 assembly may be filled with a filler material 120, such as cork or some other filler material (usually either porous or perforated, for breathability). The midsole 110 may then be secured to the bottom of the upper/insole assembly by stitches/staples 116. Typically, the midsole 110 is attached to the upper/insole assembly by stitching 116 that extends through the welt 104 and the midsole 110. The outsole 112 may be secured to the midsole 110, typically by cement or other adhesives, as well as stitching.

[0020] Although Goodyear Welt construction may be durable and aesthetically appealing, it is a relatively heavy construction and does not provide the flexibility of other constructions. For example, when the upper is lasted and attached to the ply-rib along with the welt, it typically creates a raised and stiff ridge below the foot, creating structural rigidity, making the shoe more rigid and less flexible. The raised ridge commonly creates a cavity, creating a need for a filler material to be placed inside. The filler is an additional layer, thus adding to the rigidity of the shoe. Along with creating a more rigid footwear, the Goodyear Welt construction is generally labor-intensive and costly to manufacture due to the number of handling steps during the construction process. Therefore, footwear structures and methods of construction that can resolve these issues will be readily implemented in the footwear industry.

[0021] By way of an overview, one embodiment of the instant application may be directed to a footwear structure and method of construction. For example, a HID lamp consistent with the present disclosure may comprise an upper having a bottom, a welt coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper by a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt, and an outsole coupled to the welt by a stitching or adhesive. The present disclosure eliminates the use of a ply-rib, as well as the need for an insole board, thus creating a lighter, more flexible footwear that requires fewer steps to manufacture, when compared to the typical Goodyear Welt construction. The present disclosure, in turn, eliminates the stiff ridge and cavity created by the ply-rib and lasted upper, and eliminates the need for a filler material to fill the cavity.

[0022] The present disclosure results in a more flexible footwear that requires less materials than the typical Goodyear Welt construction. This, in turn, leads to fewer number of steps during the manufacturing process. The steps eliminated, particularly those steps that are common during Goodyear Welt construction, include cementing the ply-rib to the insole board, stapling the lasted upper to the ply rib, trimming the excess upper material after lasting and stapling, cementing a filler into the interior of the raised ridge created by the ply-rib, heating the upper to activate cements, and in some cases, stitching the welt to a midsole board. The method of construction of the present disclosure may also require fewer machines during the manufacturing process.

[0023] FIG. 2 depicts a perspective view of footwear 200 consistent with one embodiment of the present disclosure. Generally, footwear 200 may include an upper 202 coupled to an outsole 220 by a welt 216. FIG. 3 depicts an exploded view of the footwear 200 of FIG. 2. As shown in FIG. 3, footwear 200 may include an upper 202, a welt 216, and an outsole 220. The term "welt" refers to an intermediary structural element defining a point of attachment between the upper and outsole. The welt may be comprised of leather, rubber, plastic, or other suitable material, or a combination of materials.

[0024] The term "outsole" refers generally to the structural component that includes the bottom exterior surface 221 of the footwear 200. The outsole 220 generally forms the wearing surface of the footwear 200. Outsole 220 may be constructed of a relatively durable, resilient material such as rubber, and may have an exterior bottom surface 221 that is provided with a suitable tread surface (shown in FIG. 5). In another embodiment, a sole unit (not shown) may be included in a footwear structure. The sole unit may define an outsole and a cushion element, wherein the cushion element may comprise a material selected from the group consisting of EVA and PU.

[0025] Depending on the intended purpose of the structure, the outsole may be formed of a rigid or semi-rigid material, as used, for example, in ski boots, ice skates or in-line skates. The outsole may be a unitary member having upwardly extending walls that define the upper, e.g. as in a rubber boot, molded in-line skate, ski boot, etc., or the outsole may have a separate upper secured thereto for forming a portion of the exterior surface of the structure. In other embodiments, the bottom surface 221 may have an element attached thereto, e.g. a skate blade, rollers, etc. For example, a skate blade or skate chassis may have peripheral walls that would also attach to the outsole or upper.

[0026] The term "upper" refers to a structural element defining an exterior surface and foot-receiving cavity of the

shoe. While the illustrated upper is shown only in the outline form, those skilled in the art can readily choose an appropriate upper depending on intended use and/or aesthetics. The upper can be fashioned of leather, cloth, synthetic materials or a combination of these materials. The upper may also include separate molded textile, molded foam, or molded plastic components, which are joined together. In addition, although the illustrated upper 202 is shown as only a single layer of material in FIG. 3, those skilled in the art will recognize that multiple materials could be combined in the upper to provide water proofing, moisture management, wicking, quick drying, temperature regulation, warmth, support, physical protection for the foot, etc., as exist, for example, in GORE-TEX expanded polytetrafluoroethylene material or SYMPATEX vapor-permeable membrane waterproof boot-type constructions. The upper may be made using a construction or combination of constructions selected from the group consisting of Strobel construction, cement construction, combination lasted construction, direct molded plastic construction, direct molded elastomer construction, and direct molded polymer construction.

[0027] FIG. 4 depicts a perspective view of the footwear 200 of FIG. 2, consistent with one embodiment of the present disclosure. Generally, footwear 200 may include an upper 202 coupled to an outsole 220 by a welt 216, the welt 216 being coupled to the upper 202 and outsole 220 by a stitching 218. The upper 202 may define an interior cavity 214. The footwear may also include a forefoot portion 204, rear heel portion 206, lateral portion 208, and medial portion (not shown). In one embodiment, the welt 216 may extend along the entire periphery of the upper 202. In other embodiments, the welt 216 may extend along and be coupled directly to specific portions of the upper 202. In other embodiments, the welt 216 and outsole 220 may be coupled by other means, including, but not limited to, cement, staples, and/or other suitable attachment means.

[0028] FIG. 5 depicts an enlarged sectional view taken along line 5-5 of FIG. 4. In this embodiment, footwear 200 may include an upper 202 having a bottom 222, a welt 216, being separate from the upper 202 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 202 by a first stitching 232 through the welt 216 at a first location 234 on the welt 216. The footwear 200 may also include an outsole 220 being separate from the upper 202 and being coupled to the welt 216 by a second stitching 236 through the welt 216 at a second location 238 on the welt 216. At least a portion of the bottom 222 may extend from a first side 224 of the upper 202 to a second side 226 of the upper 202. The upper 202 and bottom 222 may partially define an interior cavity 214 for receiving a foot. The upper 202 may define an inner surface 228, the inner surface 228 may be constructed and arranged to engage a foot (not shown) when the foot is received in the interior cavity 214. The upper 202 may also define an outer surface 230 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 200. The outsole 220 may define a tread surface 240.

[0029] FIG. 6 depicts a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment. This embodiment is similar to the embodiment of FIG. 4, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals. As shown in FIG. 6, footwear 300 may include an upper 302 coupled to an outsole 320 by a welt 316, the welt 316 being coupled to the upper 302 by a stitching (not shown) and outsole 320 by an adhesive. The welt 316 may extend along a periphery of the upper 302. The upper 302 may define an interior cavity 314. The foot-

wear may also include a forefoot portion 304, rear heel portion 306, lateral portion 308, and medial portion (not shown). In other embodiments, the welt 316 and outsole 320 may be coupled by other means, including, but not limited to, cement, staples, and other suitable attachment means.

[0030] FIG. 7 depicts an enlarged sectional view taken along line 7-7 of FIG. 6. This embodiment is similar to the embodiment of FIG. 5, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals. As shown in FIG. 7, footwear 300 may include an upper 302 having a bottom 322, a welt 316, being separate from the upper 302 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 302 by a first stitching 332 through the welt 316 at a first location 334 on the welt 316. The footwear 300 may also include an outsole 320 being separate from the upper 302 and being coupled to the welt 316 by an adhesive layer 348. At least a portion of the bottom 322 may extend from of first side 324 of the upper 302 to a second side 326 of the upper 302. The upper 302 and bottom 322 may partially define an interior cavity 314 for receiving a foot. The upper 302 may define an inner surface 328, the inner surface 328 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 314. The upper 302 may also define an outer surface 330 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 300. The outsole 320 may also define a tread surface 340.

[0031] FIG. 8 depicts a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment. This embodiment is similar to the embodiment of FIG. 4, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals. Generally, footwear 400 may include an upper 402, a midsole 442, and an outsole 420 coupled together by a welt 416. The welt 416 may extend along a periphery of the upper 402. The upper 402 may define an interior cavity 414. The footwear may also include a forefoot portion 404, rear heel portion 406, lateral portion 408, and medial portion (not shown). The welt 416 may be coupled directly to the upper 402 and midsole 442 and coupled to the outsole 420 by a stitching 418 (shown in FIGS. 9A, 9B, and 9D). In other embodiments, the welt 416 may be coupled directly to the upper 402 by a first stitching (shown in FIGS. 9A-9D) and coupled to the midsole 442 and outsole 420 by an adhesive.

[0032] The term "midsole" refers to an intermediary layer that may be located between a welt and an outsole or sole unit and may provide a single continuous surface upon which an outsole or sole unit may attach. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the thickness and shape of the midsole may vary greatly and be modified to accommodate desired function and style. It is to be understood that the relative thickness of the midsole in the forefoot and heel areas may vary depending on the intended application of the structure. For example, the forefoot area may have greater thickness than the heel area where increased cushioning is desired at the forefoot. Additionally, the forefoot and heel areas may be of similar thickness.

[0033] FIGS. 9A-9D depict enlarged sectional views taken along line 9-9 of FIG. 8, according to other embodiments. These embodiments are similar to the embodiment of FIG. 5, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals. As can most clearly be seen in FIG. 9A, footwear 400 may include an upper 402 having a bottom 422, a welt 416, being separate from the upper 402 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 402 by a first stitching 432 through the welt 416 at a first location 434 on the welt 416. The footwear 400 may also include an outsole 420 being

separate from the upper 402 and being coupled to the welt 416 by a second stitching 436 through the welt 416 at a second location 438 on the welt 416. The footwear may also include a midsole 442 having a top surface 444 and a bottom surface 446. The top surface 444 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 416 and/or welt by an adhesive. The bottom surface 446 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 420 by the second stitching 436.

[0034] At least a portion of the bottom 422 may extend from of first side 424 of the upper 402 to a second side 426 of the upper 402. The upper 402 and bottom 422 may partially define an interior cavity 414 for receiving a foot. The upper 402 may define an inner surface 428, the inner surface 428 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 414. The upper 402 may also define an outer surface 430 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 400. The outsole 420 may also define a tread surface 440.

[0035] As shown in FIG. 9B, footwear 500 may include an upper 502 having a bottom 522, a welt 516, being separate from the upper 502 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 502 by a first stitching 532 through the welt 516 at a first location 534 on the welt 516. The footwear 500 may also include an outsole 520 being separate from the upper 502 and being coupled to the welt 516 by a second stitching 536 through the welt 516 at a second location 538 on the welt 516. The footwear may also include a midsole 542 having a top surface 544 and a bottom surface 546. The top surface 544 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 502 and/or welt 516 by the first stitching 532. The bottom surface 546 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 520 by an adhesive.

[0036] At least a portion of the bottom 522 may extend from of first side 524 of the upper 502 to a second side 526 of the upper 502. The upper 502 and bottom 522 may partially define an interior cavity 514 for receiving a foot. The upper 502 may define an inner surface 528, the inner surface 528 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 514. The upper 502 may also define an outer surface 530 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 500. The outsole 520 may also define a tread surface 540.

[0037] As shown in FIG. 9C, footwear 600 may include an upper 602 having a bottom 622, a welt 616, being separate from the upper 602 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 602 by a first stitching 632 through the welt 616 at a first location 634 on the welt 616. The footwear 600 may also include an outsole 620 being separate from the upper 602 and being coupled to the welt 616 by an adhesive. The footwear may also include a midsole 642 having a top surface 644 and a bottom surface 646. The top surface 644 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 602 and/or welt 616 by a stitching 650. The bottom surface 646 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 620 by an adhesive.

[0038] At least a portion of the bottom 622 may extend from of first side 624 of the upper 602 to a second side 626 of the upper 602. The upper 602 and bottom 622 may partially define an interior cavity 614 for receiving a foot. The upper 602 may define an inner surface 628, the inner surface 628 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 614. The upper 602 may also define an outer surface 630 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 600. The outsole 620 may also define a tread surface 640.

[0039] As can most clearly be seen in FIG. 9D, footwear 700 may include an upper 702 having a bottom 722 and a welt 716, the welt 716 being separate from the upper 702 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 702 by a first stitching 732 through the welt 716 at a first location 734 on the welt 716. The footwear 700 may also include an outsole 720 being separate from the upper 702 and being coupled to the welt 716 by a second stitching 736 through the welt 716 at a second location 738 on the welt 716. The footwear may also include a midsole 742 having a top surface 744 and a bottom surface 746. The top surface 744 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 716 and/or welt by a stitching 750. The bottom surface 746 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 720 by an adhesive.

[0040] At least a portion of the bottom 722 may extend from of first side 724 of the upper 702 to a second side 726 of the upper 702. The upper 702 and bottom 722 may partially define an interior cavity 714 for receiving a foot. The upper 702 may define an inner surface 728, the inner surface 728 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 714. The upper 702 may also define an outer surface 730 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 700. The outsole 720 may also define a tread surface 740.

[0041] FIG. 10 depicts a perspective view of footwear according to another embodiment. This embodiment is similar to the embodiment of FIG. 4, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals. Generally, footwear 800 may include an upper 802, a midsole 842, and an outsole 820 coupled together by a welt 816. The welt 816 may extend along a periphery of the upper 802. The upper 302 may define an interior cavity 814. The footwear may also include a forefoot portion 804, rear heel portion 806, lateral portion 808, and medial portion (not shown). The welt 816 may be coupled directly to the upper 802 and the midsole 842 by a first stitching (shown in FIG. 11A) and coupled to the outsole 820 by an adhesive. In other embodiments, the welt 816 may be directly coupled to the midsole 842 and coupled to the outsole 820 by an adhesive (shown in FIG. 11B).

[0042] FIGS. 11A-11B depict enlarged sectional views taken along line 11-11 of FIG. 10, according to other embodiments. These embodiments are similar to the embodiment of FIG. 5, and like components have been assigned like reference numerals.

[0043] As can most clearly be seen in FIG. 11A, footwear 800 may include an upper 802 having a bottom 822, a welt 816, being separate from the upper 802 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 802 by a first stitching 832 through the welt 816 at a first location 834 on the welt 816. The footwear 800 may also include an outsole 820 being separate from the upper 802 and being coupled to the welt 816 by an adhesive. The footwear may also include a midsole 842 having a top surface 844 and a bottom surface 846. The top surface 844 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 802 and/or welt 816 by the first stitching 832. The bottom surface 846 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 820 by an adhesive.

[0044] At least a portion of the bottom 822 may extend from of first side 824 of the upper 802 to a second side 826 of the upper 802. The upper 802 and bottom 822 may partially define an interior cavity 814 for receiving a foot. The upper 802 may define an inner surface 828, the inner surface 828 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 814. The upper 802 may

also define an outer surface 830 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 800. The outsole 820 may also define a tread surface 840.

[0045] As shown in FIG. 11B, footwear 900 may include an upper 902 having a bottom 922, a welt 916, being separate from the upper 902 and being coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper 902 by a first stitching 832 through the welt 816 at a first location 934 on the welt 916. The footwear 900 may also include an outsole 920 being separate from the upper 902 and being coupled to the welt 916 by an adhesive. The footwear may also include a midsole 942 having a top surface 944 and a bottom surface 946. The top surface 944 may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper 902 and/or welt 916 by an adhesive. The bottom surface 946 may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole 920 by an adhesive.

[0046] At least a portion of the bottom 922 may extend from of first side 924 of the upper 902 to a second side 926 of the upper 902. The upper 902 and bottom 922 may partially define an interior cavity 914 for receiving a foot. The upper 902 may define an inner surface 928, the inner surface 928 may be constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received in the interior cavity 914. The upper 902 may also define an outer surface 930 that partially defines an exterior of the footwear 900. The outsole 920 may also define a tread surface 940.

[0047] A wide variety of footwear types may be constructed consistent with the invention, e.g. athletic shoes, casual shoes and boots, dress shoes and boots, industrial boots, ski boots, skates, inline skates, sandals, clogs, prescription wear, orthopedic wear, specialty footwear, etc. The embodiments that have been described herein, however, are but some of the several which utilize this invention and are set forth here by way of illustration but not of limitation. For example, the structure described herein can be incorporated into a wide variety of footwear types and sizes. Any particular feature described herein may be combined with other features described herein to construct a structure consistent with the invention.

[0048] In one aspect, the present disclosure may feature a footwear structure. The footwear structure may comprise an upper having a bottom, the upper and bottom may at least partially define an interior cavity sized and shaped for receiving a foot. At least a portion of the bottom may extend from a first side of the upper to a second side of the upper. The upper may have an inner surface constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received within the interior cavity. The upper may further comprise an outer surface at least partially defining an exterior of the footwear. In addition, the footwear structure may comprise a welt separate from the upper and coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper via a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt. The welt may extend along at least a portion of a periphery of the upper. The footwear structure may also comprise an outsole separate from the upper and coupled to at least a portion of said welt.

[0049] In another aspect, the present disclosure may feature a footwear structure. The footwear structure may comprise an upper having a bottom, the upper and bottom may at least partially define an interior cavity sized and shaped for receiving a foot. At least a portion of the bottom may extend from a first side of the upper to a second side of the upper. The upper may have an inner surface constructed and arranged to engage the foot when the foot is received within the interior cavity. The upper may further comprise an outer surface at least

partially defining an exterior of the footwear. In addition, the footwear structure may comprise a welt separate from the upper and coupled directly to at least a portion of the upper via a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt. The welt may extend along at least a portion of a periphery of the upper. The footwear structure may also comprise an outsole separate from the upper and coupled to at least a portion of said welt. The footwear structure may also comprise a midsole having a top surface and a bottom surface. The top surface may be coupled to at least a portion of the upper and the bottom surface may be coupled to at least a portion of the outsole.

[0050] In yet another aspect, the present disclosure may feature a method of forming a footwear structure. The method may comprise providing an upper having a bottom, wherein at least a portion of the bottom may extend from a first side of the upper to a second side of the upper. The upper and bottom may at least partially define a cavity for receiving a foot. The method may further comprise coupling a welt directly to at least a portion of the upper by a first stitching through the welt at a first location on the welt, wherein welt may be separate from the upper and may extend along at least a portion of a periphery of the upper. The method may also comprise providing an outsole, the outsole may be separate from the upper, and coupling the welt to at least a portion of the outsole.

[0051] While several embodiments of the present invention have been described and illustrated herein, those of ordinary skill in the art will readily envision a variety of other means and/or structures for performing the functions and/or obtaining the results and/or one or more of the advantages described herein, and each of such variations and/or modifications is deemed to be within the scope of the present invention. More generally, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that all parameters, dimensions, materials, and configurations described herein are meant to be exemplary and that the actual parameters, dimensions, materials, and/or configurations will depend upon the specific application or applications for which the teachings of the present invention is/are used. Those skilled in the art will recognize, or be able to ascertain using no more than routine experimentation, many equivalents to the specific embodiments of the invention described herein. It is, therefore, to be understood that the foregoing embodiments are presented by way of example only and that, within the scope of the appended claims and equivalents thereto, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described and claimed. The present invention is directed to each individual feature, system, article, material, kit, and/or method described herein. In addition, any combination of two or more such features, systems, articles, materials, kits, and/or methods, if such features, systems, articles, materials, kits, and/or methods are not mutually inconsistent, is included within the scope of the present invention.

[0052] All definitions, as defined and used herein, should be understood to control over dictionary definitions, definitions in documents incorporated by reference, and/or ordinary meanings of the defined terms.

[0053] The indefinite articles “a” and “an,” as used herein in the specification and in the claims, unless clearly indicated to the contrary, should be understood to mean “at least one.”

[0054] The phrase “and/or,” as used herein in the specification and in the claims, should be understood to mean “either or both” of the elements so conjoined, i.e., elements that are conjunctively present in some cases and disjunctively present in other cases. Other elements may optionally be present

other than the elements specifically identified by the “and/or” clause, whether related or unrelated to those elements specifically identified, unless clearly indicated to the contrary.

[0055] All references, patents and patent applications and publications that are cited or referred to in this application are incorporated in their entirety herein by reference.

[0056] Additional disclosure in the format of claims is set forth below:

1. A footwear structure comprising:

an upper having a bottom, said upper and bottom at least partially defining an interior cavity sized and shaped for receiving a foot, at least a portion of said bottom extending from a first side of said upper to a second side of said upper, said upper having an inner surface constructed and arranged to engage said foot when said foot is received in said interior cavity and an outer surface at least partially defining an exterior of the footwear;

a welt, said welt being separate from said upper and being coupled directly to at least a portion of said upper via a first stitching through said welt at a first location on said welt, said welt extending along at least a portion of a periphery of said upper; and

an outsole, said outsole being separate from said upper and being coupled to at least a portion of said welt.

2. The footwear of claim 1 wherein said first location on said welt defines a groove constructed and arranged to receive said first stitching.

3. The footwear of claim 1 wherein said outsole is coupled to said welt via a second stitching through said welt at a second location on said welt.

4. The footwear of claim 3 wherein said second location on said welt defines a groove constructed and arranged to receive said second stitching.

5. The footwear of claim 1 wherein said outsole is coupled to said welt via an adhesive.

6. A footwear structure comprising:

an upper having a bottom, said upper and bottom at least partially defining an interior cavity sized and shaped for receiving a foot, at least a portion of said bottom extending from a first side of said upper to a second side of said upper, said upper having an inner surface constructed and arranged to engage said foot when said foot is received in said interior cavity and an outer surface at least partially defining an exterior of the footwear;

a welt, said welt being separate from said upper and being coupled directly to at least a portion of said upper via a first stitching through said welt at a first location on said welt, said welt extending along at least a portion of a periphery of said upper;

an outsole, said outsole being separate from said upper and being coupled to at least a portion of said welt; and

a midsole having a top surface and a bottom surface, said top surface being coupled to at least a portion of said upper and said bottom surface being coupled to at least a portion of said outsole.

7. The footwear of claim 6 wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled to at least a portion of said upper via a stitching.

8. The footwear of claim 6 wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled to at least a portion of said upper via an adhesive.

9. The footwear of claim 6 wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled directly to at least a portion of said welt via a stitching through said welt.

10. The footwear of claim **9** wherein said stitching defines said first stitching through said welt.

11. The footwear of claim **6** wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled directly to at least a portion of said welt via an adhesive.

12. The footwear of claim **6** wherein said bottom surface is coupled to at least a portion of said outsole via a stitching.

13. The footwear of claim **6** wherein said bottom surface is coupled to at least a portion of said outsole via an adhesive.

14. A method of forming a footwear structure, the method comprising:

providing an upper having a bottom, at least a portion of said bottom extending from a first side of said upper to a second side of said upper, said upper and bottom at least partially defining a cavity for receiving a foot;

coupling a welt directly to at least a portion of said upper by a first stitching through said welt at a first location on said welt, said welt being separate from said upper and extending along at least a portion of a periphery of said upper;

providing an outsole, said outsole being separate from the upper; and

coupling said welt to at least a portion of said outsole.

15. The method of claim **15** wherein said outsole is coupled to said welt via a second stitching through said welt at a second location on said welt.

16. The method of claim **15** wherein said outsole is coupled to said welt via an adhesive.

17. The method of claim **15** further comprising:

providing a midsole having a top surface and a bottom surface;

coupling said top surface of said midsole to at least a portion of said upper; and

coupling said bottom surface of said midsole to at least a portion of said outsole.

18. The method of claim **17** further comprising coupling said top surface of said midsole directly to at least a portion of said welt.

19. The method of claim **18** wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled directly to at least a portion of said welt via a stitching through said welt.

20. The method of claim **18** wherein said top surface of said midsole is coupled directly to at least a portion of said welt via an adhesive.

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