US006138299A

United States Patent [19]

Roma et al.

[11] **Patent Number: 6,138,299**

[45] **Date of Patent: Oct. 31, 2000**

[54] **AUTOMATIC FUTON FRAME**

[75] Inventors: **John K. Roma**, Orchard Park; **James D. Stuart**, Hamburg, both of N.Y.

[73] Assignee: **Otis Bed Manufacturing Co., Inc.**, Buffalo, N.Y.

[21] Appl. No.: **09/267,457**

[22] Filed: **Mar. 12, 1999**

Related U.S. Application Data

[63] Continuation-in-part of application No. 09/080,067, May 15, 1998, Pat. No. 6,061,848, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 08/924,896, Sep. 8, 1997, Pat. No. 5,790,993.

[51] **Int. Cl.**[7] **A47C 17/17**; A47C 17/04

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **5/37.1**; 5/41; 5/47; 5/927

[58] **Field of Search** 5/37.1, 41, 47, 5/915, 927

[56] **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

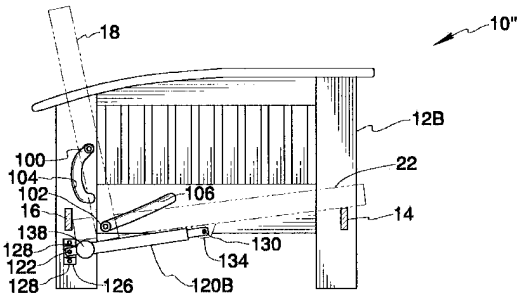
2,321,206	6/1943	Holcomb	5/47
4,105,024	8/1978	Raffel	5/915 X
5,129,114	7/1992	Withers .	
5,140,977	8/1992	Raffel	5/915 X
5,628,076	5/1997	Newton	5/37.1
5,664,268	9/1997	Stoler et al.	5/37.1
5,790,993	8/1998	Roma et al.	5/37.1
5,815,858	10/1998	Dodge	5/37.1
5,940,907	8/1999	Stoler et al.	5/37.1
5,956,785	9/1999	Fireman	5/37.1
6,061,848	5/2000	Roma et al.	5/37.1

Primary Examiner—Terry Lee Melius
Assistant Examiner—Robert G. Santos
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Simpson, Simpson & Synder, L.L.P.

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A futon frame includes a pair of linear actuators mounted at opposing sides thereof for driving a folding seat and back of the frame to automatically and continuously adjust the seat and back between a sofa position and a bed position. The back is connected to opposing sides of the frame by upper and lower follower bearings arranged for travel within corresponding upper and lower guide channels in each opposing side of the frame. A motor controller is mounted to the underside of the seat for connecting a user interface to the linear actuator motors.

4 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



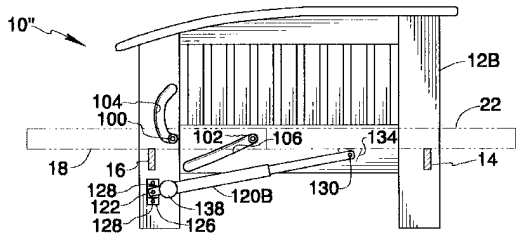


FIG. 1

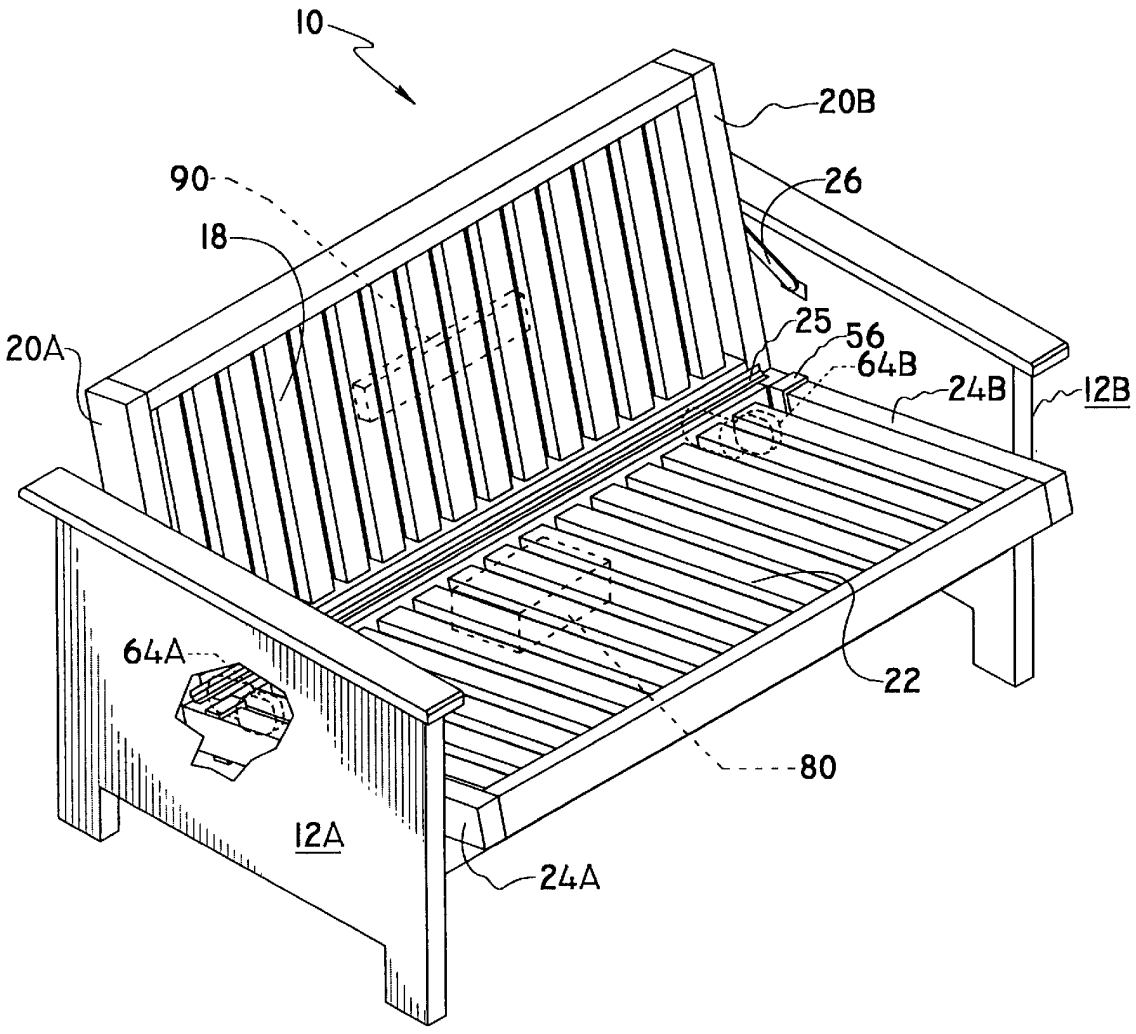


FIG. 2

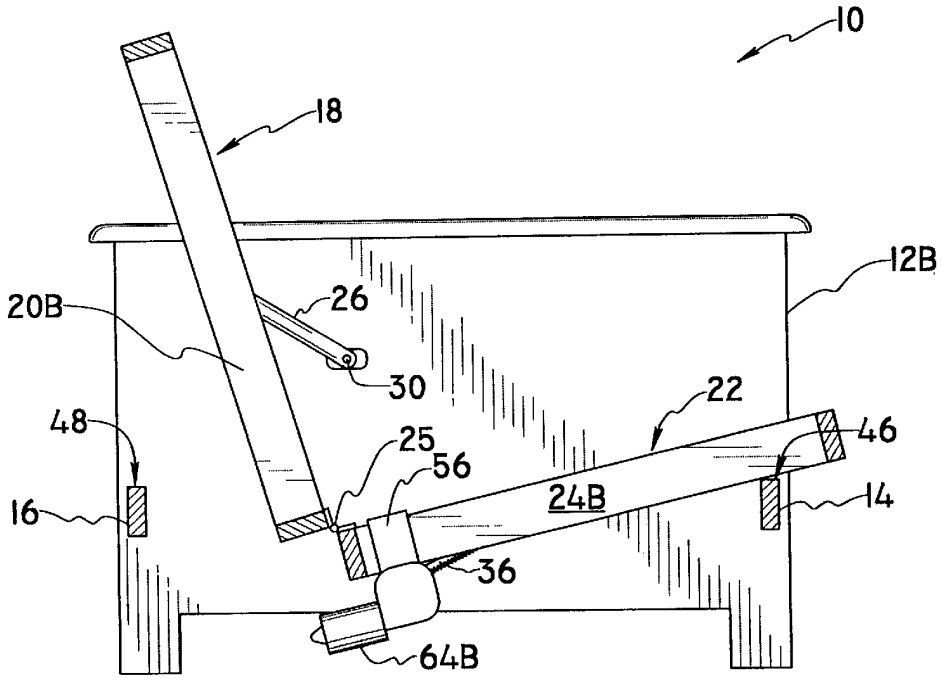

10
18
12B
20B
26
30
22
48
25
46
56
16
24B
14
36
64B

FIG. 3

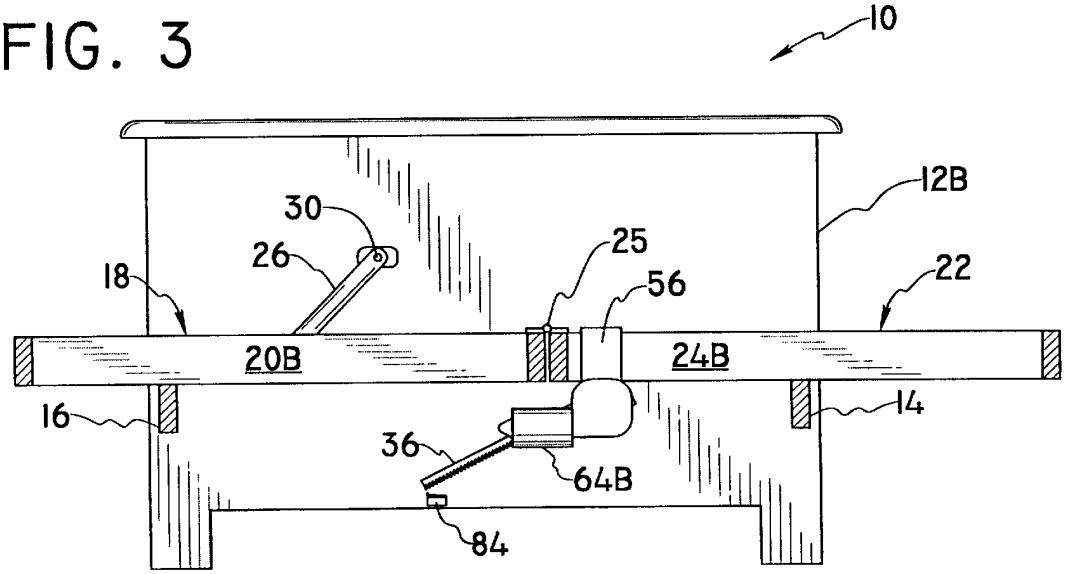

10
12B
30
26
25
18
56
22
20B
24B
16
14
36
64B
84

FIG. 4

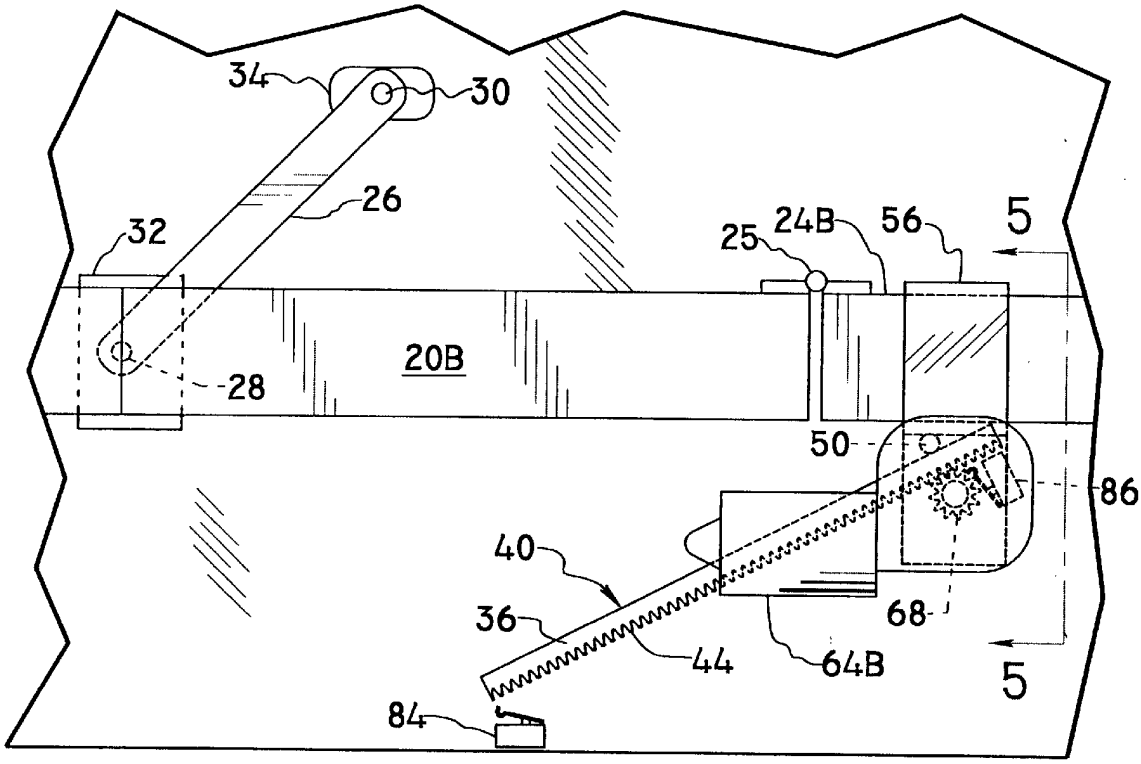

34
30
26
32
25
24B
56
5
20B
28
50
86
40
36
68
44
64B
5
84

FIG. 5

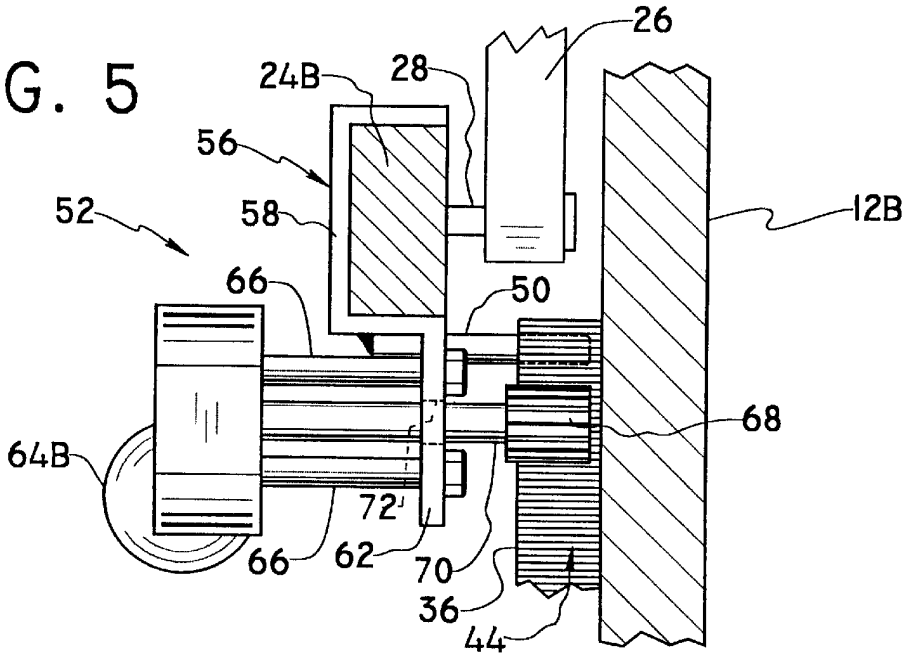

26
24B
28
56
52
58
12B
66
50
68
64B
72
66
62
70
36
44

FIG. 6

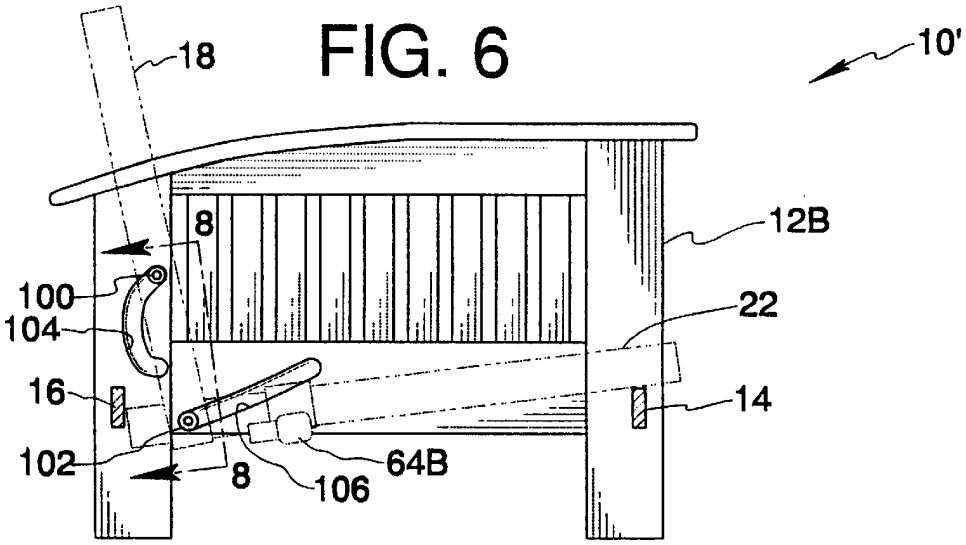
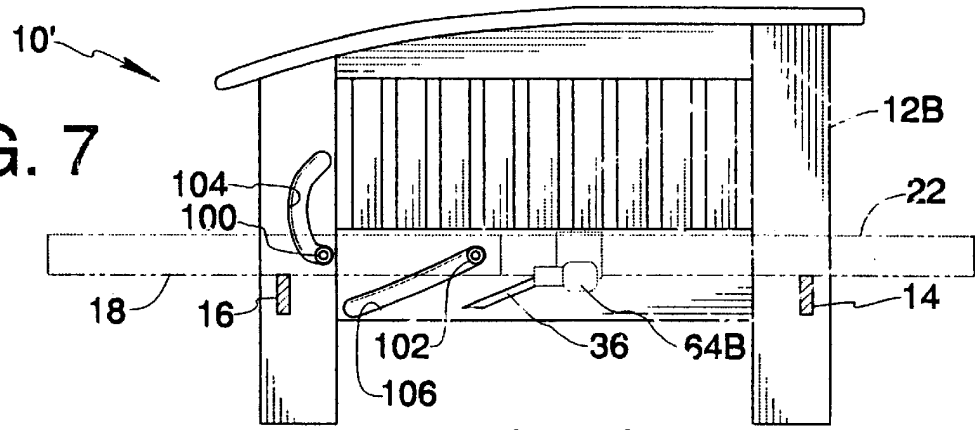


FIG. 7



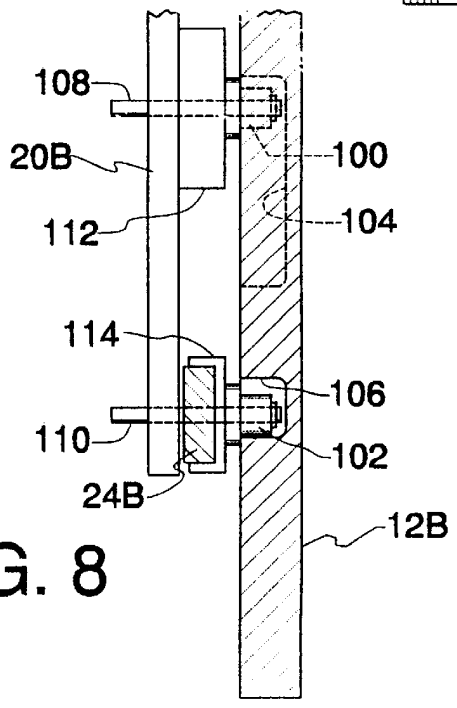


FIG. 8

FIG. 9

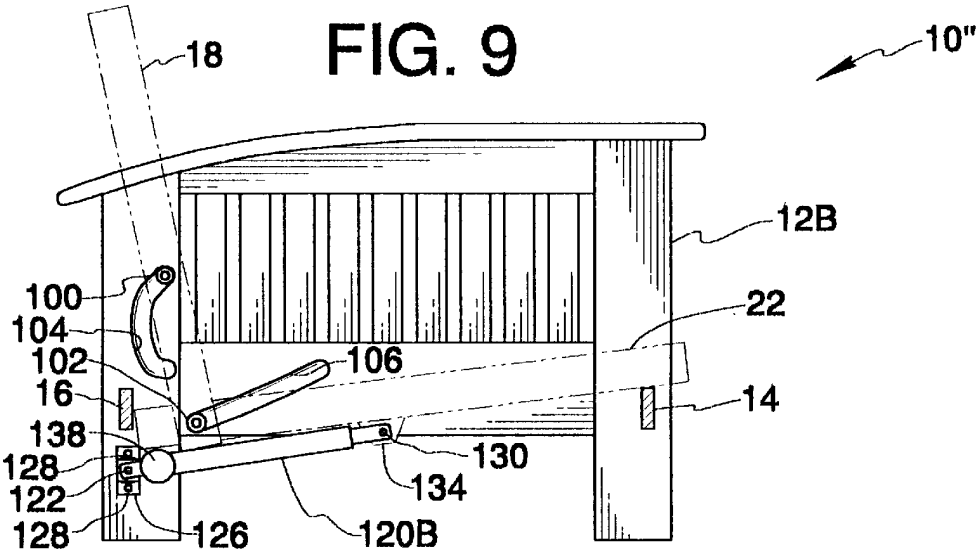
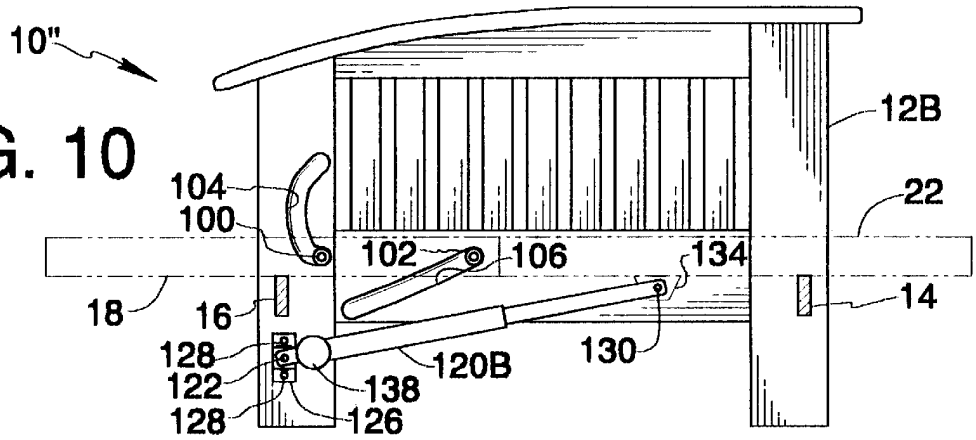


FIG. 10



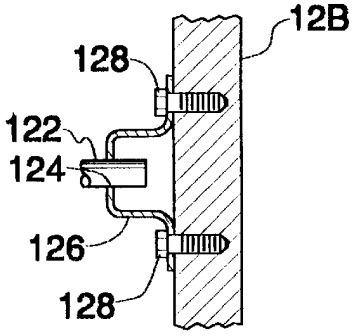


FIG. 11

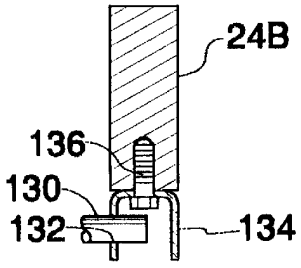


FIG. 12

AUTOMATIC FUTON FRAME

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 09/080,067 filed on May 15, 1998 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,061,848, which is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 08/924,896 filed Sep. 8, 1997, now U.S. Pat. No. 5,790,993.

BACKGROUND

A. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to sofa-bed frames for adjustably supporting a futon mattress, and more particularly to a futon mattress frame having seat and back portions automatically adjustable between a sofa position and a bed position.

B. Description of the Prior Art

Manually operated futon frames having a seat and a back linked to the seat for guided relative motion to permit adjustment between a sofa position and a bed position are well known in the art. In a common futon frame arrangement, the seat and back are pivotally connected to each other, and the back is connected to each adjacent side of the frame by respective link arms having one end pivotally connected to the back and another end pivotally connected to the associated side of the frame. In another common arrangement, pairs of follower bearings extend from the back for travel within corresponding pairs of guide channels provided in each side of the frame. With either type of arrangement, manual adjustment from a sofa position to a bed position is made by sliding the seat forward such that back is caused to follow and assume a horizontal position level with the seat. Manual adjustment from a bed position to a sofa position is carried out by pushing the seat backward at a slight downward angle to force the back into a generally vertical position. U.S. Pat. No. 5,129,114 illustrates this type of construction.

Heretofore, various attempts have been made to automate the adjustment operation of futon frames by providing a single stationary drive motor as means for indirectly driving a follower bracket connected to impart adjustment motion to the seat and back. Examples may be seen in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,458,877; 4,563,784; and 4,937,900.

A primary challenge encountered in the design of an automatically adjustable futon frame is that of providing means for moving the seat and back from their flat bed position to their angled sofa position against the natural force of gravity. More particularly, a relatively large force is required to initiate backward movement of the seat to dislodge the back from its horizontal position. Prior art automatic frames have typically relied on complex multiple-bar linkages and/or brute power in the electric motor to meet this challenge. Drawbacks of a complex linkage system include added manufacturing cost, increased frame weight, and decreased reliability. Drawbacks of using a single high-powered motor include complexities in the drive train necessary to evenly transmit force to each side of the frame for smooth adjustment motion, with corresponding increase in manufacturing cost. Consequently, despite the long-recognized desirability of an automatically adjustable futon frame, as evidenced by the patents mentioned above, such item is not widely available to consumers at a reasonable price.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide an automatically adjustable futon frame which is both reliable and relatively inexpensive to manufacture.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide an automatically adjustable futon frame which adjusts smoothly even when individuals are seated or lying thereon.

In view of these and other objects, an automatically adjustable futon frame formed in accordance with a first embodiment of the present invention comprises a seat and back pivotally connected by a laterally extending hinge and situated between a pair of sides connected by laterally extending front and rear support members underlying the seat and back. A pair of link arms pivotally connect opposite side members of the back to respective sides of the frame.

Dual electric motors are fixed to opposite side members of the seat by mounting brackets, with each motor directly driving a pinion arranged to engage a downwardly facing inclined toothed rack of a rack member secured to an inner surface of the associated side of the frame. A follower pin is also fixed to the mounting bracket for following an upwardly facing inclined guide surface, preferably integral with the rack member, for maintaining drive engagement between the pinion and toothed rack over a predetermined range of travel. A pair of limit switches are arranged near opposite ends of one of the rack members for engagement by the pinion to signal a motor controller to shut-off power to both motors when the seat and back reach a sofa position or a bed position. The motor controller is preferably mounted to the underside of the seat, and a user interface panel for signaling the motor controller allows selective adjustment of the seat and back by a user.

A second embodiment of the present invention is similar to the first embodiment, except that the link arms pivotally connecting opposite side members of the back to respective sides of the frame are removed, and instead each opposite side member of the back is provided with an upper follower bearing and a lower follower bearing received within associated upper and lower guide channels formed in the corresponding side of the frame.

A third and presently preferred embodiment of the present invention is similar to the second embodiment, except that the motorized linear actuators are used in place of the motor driven pinions and inclined rack members at the frame sides. Each linear actuator includes a first end pivotally connected to an associated side of the frame below the laterally extending rear support member, and a second end pivotally connected to a respective side member of the seat. The second end of the linear actuator is telescopically movable relative to the first end by a motor near the first end which is operably connected to the motor controller.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The nature and mode of operation of the present invention will now be more fully described in the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments taken with the accompanying drawing figures, in which:

FIG. **1** is an isometric view of a futon frame formed in accordance with a first embodiment of the present invention, in its sofa position;

FIG. **2** is a sectional view showing one side of the futon frame depicted in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a view similar to that of FIG. **2**, however the futon frame is adjusted to its bed position;

FIG. **4** is a partial view generally similar to that of FIG. **3**, but enlarged to show the motor drive arrangement of the present invention in more detail; and

FIG. **5** is a view taken generally along the line **5**—**5** in FIG. **4**.

FIG. **6** is a schematic view showing a second embodiment of the present invention, in its sofa position;

FIG. **7** is a schematic view similar to that of FIG. **6**, however showing the frame in its bed position;

FIG. **8** is a sectional view taken generally along the line **8**—**8** in FIG. **6**;

FIG. **9** is a schematic view showing a third embodiment of the present invention, in its sofa position;

FIG. **10** is a schematic view similar to that of FIG. **9**, however showing the frame in its bed position;

FIG. **11** is a cross-sectional view showing a support bracket used in the third embodiment; and

FIG. **12** is a cross-sectional view showing another support bracket used in the third embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring initially to FIGS. **1** and **2**, a futon frame formed in accordance with a first embodiment of the present invention is shown and identified generally by the reference numeral **10**. Futon frame **10** is structurally conventional to the extent that it includes a pair of opposite sides **12**A,**12**B connected by a front support member **14** and a rear support member **16** extending laterally between sides **12**A,**12**B; a rectangular back **18** situated between sides **12**A,**12**B and having first and second side members **20**A,**20**B near respective sides **12**A,**12**B; a rectangular seat **22** situated between sides **12**A,**12**B and having first and second side members **24**A,**24**B near respective sides **12**A,**12**B, and a hinge **25** fixed along adjacently matched laterally extending members of the back and seat, whereby the back and seat may be folded relative to each other along a laterally extending axis of hinge **25** between a sofa position, shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**, and a bed position, shown in FIG. **3**.

Referring primarily now to FIGS. **2**–**4**, it will be understood that structure described in general association with side **12**B of frame **10** is also provided with respect to opposite side **12**A in complementary fashion, whereby the present description is simplified by reference only to the structural elements respective of side **12**B, and not to the corresponding structural elements respective of side **12**A. Back **18** is connected to side **12**B by an elongated rigid link arm **26** having one end pivotally connected to back side member **20**B by a pivot pin **28** located at a substantially intermediate point along side member **20**B, and an opposite end pivotally connected to side **12**B by a pivot pin **30** located generally toward the rear of side **12**B above front and rear support members **14** and **16**. Where frame **10** is of wooden construction, a U-shaped metal reinforcement brace **32** is preferably provided to engage three-sides of back side member **20**B about pivot pin **28**, and a metal reinforcement plate **34** is preferably provided on side **12**B about pivot pin **30**.

A unitary rack member **36** is fixed to the inside surface of side **12**B between front and rear support members **14** and **16** and includes an adjustment guide in the form of an upwardly facing straight guide surface **40**, and rack means in the form of a downwardly facing toothed rack **44**. While guide surface **40** and toothed rack **44** of the first embodiment are integrally incorporated into a unitary piece of stock material comprising rack member **36**, a separately formed adjustment guide and rack means may also be employed without straying from the scope of the present invention. Rack member **36** is oriented at an incline relative to ground such that a front end thereof is higher than a rear end thereof and terminates approximately at a level corresponding to upper surfaces **46** and **48** of front and rear support members **14** and **16**, respectively. As will be appreciated from coming description, guide surface **40** defines an inclined travel path, and toothed rack **44** defines an inclined drive path substantially parallel to the travel path.

Referring also now to FIG. **5**, it will be seen that a follower pin **50** and automatic drive means **52** are associated with seat **22** for cooperation with adjustment guide surface **40** and toothed rack **44**. Follower pin **50** is fixed relative to seat side member **24**B adjacent an underside thereof by a mounting bracket **56** to which the follower pin may be welded such that it extends from the mounting bracket to engage guide surface **40**. Mounting bracket **56** includes a U-shaped portion **58** secured to seat side member **24**B generally proximate to hinge **25** by conventional fasteners (not shown). Mounting bracket **56** further includes a tail portion **62** extending downwardly from U-shaped portion **58** to which an electric motor **64**B is attached by bolts **66**. Electric motor **64**B drives a pinion **68** arranged to mate with toothed rack **44** via a drive shaft **70** extending through an opening **72** provided in tail portion **62**. A 24 Volt DC, 33 rpm motor manufactured by Dewert Motorized Systems, Inc. of Frederick, Maryland under part number 002.016 is known to be suitable for use in practicing the present invention, and is chosen to enable automatic adjustment even while individuals are supported by frame **10**.

A motor controller **80** is mounted to the underside of seat **22** generally at the rear center thereof, as may be seen in FIG. **1**. The Motor Master 1 controller, 115 Volts AC, 50/60 Hz, 230 Watt Max., Part No. 990.210.002 from Dewert Motorized Systems, Inc., is suitable. Motor controller **80** is wired to signal both electric motors **64**A,**64**B simultaneously. As will be understood, the directions of rotation of motors **64**A,**64**B must be oppositely set in view of the mirror-image arrangement of the motors. A hard-wired or remote control panel **82** is provided as known in the art to permit user interface with motor controller **80**. A first limit switch **84** wired to controller **80** is fixed to side **12**B near a lower end of rack member **36**, such that driven pinion **68** engages the switch mechanism when seat **22** and back **18** reach their sofa position, thereby signaling controller **80** to shut-off driving current to motors **64**A,**64**B. A similarly connected limit switch **86** is provided near an upper end of rack member **36** to be engaged by driven pinion **68** when seat **22** and back **18** reach their bed position.

As an added option, an automatic vibrating element **90** may be mounted to back **18** and wired to motor controller **80** to provide frame **10** with a desirable automatic massage feature.

During adjustment of frame **10**, rotating pinion **68** travels along toothed rack **44** while follower pin **50** helps to support seat **22** and maintain pinion **68** in mating engagement with the toothed rack. While the changing orientation of seat **22** causes a corresponding change in the orientation of follower pin **50** and driven pinion **68** relative to rack member **36** due to rotation of mounting bracket **56**, the problem of binding is effectively avoided by locating the centers of follower pin **50** and driven pinion **68** at such an orientation that an imaginary line extending between the centers will be normal to guide surface **40** and toothed rack **44** when the pinion is midway between the ends of the toothed rack during travel, this being the condition of proper alignment between the rack and pinion. The most severe misalignment occurs when the pinion is at either of its travel limits near the ends of rack **44**, thereby splitting the magnitude of misalignment between the ends rather than concentrating misalignment at one end

or the other. In this way, slight misalignment at the travel limits may be disregarded in view of normal "play" between rack and pinion. Of course, a specially designed rack member having an arcuate toothed rack may be employed to eliminate binding, however this would increase cost. Finally, link arm **26** enables pivoting reactive adjustment of back **18** in response to movement of hinge **25** as seat **22** is automatically adjusted. The user may stop automatic adjustment at any point between the sofa and bed positions, as desired.

A futon frame **10'** formed in accordance with a second embodiment of the present invention will be understood with reference to FIGS. **6** through **8**. Frame **10'** is similar to the first embodiment described above, except in its manner of connection between back **18** and sides **12A,12B**. Back side members **20A,20B** are each provided with an upper follower bearing **100** arranged for travel within a contoured upper guide channel **104** formed in an adjacent one of the opposing sides **12A,12B**, and also a lower follower bearing **102** arranged for travel within a contoured lower guide channel **106** formed in the adjacent side **12A** or **12B**.

FIG. **8** shows upper and lower stepped follower bearings **100** and **102** connected to back side member **20B** by corresponding upper and lower transversely extending pivot pins **108** and **110**. A spacer block **112** is provided between back side member **20B** and upper follower bearing **100**. Lower pivot pin **110** connects lower follower bearing **102** to back side member **20B**, and further provides a pivotal connection between back **18** and seat **22** to replace hinge **25** of the first embodiment, whereby lower follower bearing **102** is coaxial with a transverse pivot axis between back **18** and seat **22**. As is apparent, any rear transverse cross-member connecting seat side members **24A** and **24B** must be moved forward to allow space for overlapped pivoting between back **18** and seat **22**. A metal support bracket **114** is located about seat side member **24B** as reinforcement at the location where lower pivot pin **110** passes through seat side member **24B**. Of course, a corresponding construction is provided with respect to side **12A**.

The construction of the second embodiment greatly reduces or eliminates the need for support of the seat by means of follower pin **50** engaging guide surface **40**, and also eliminates the need for link arms **26**, which may loosen over time.

A third embodiment of the present invention is now described with reference to FIGS. **9–12** and is identified generally as **10"**. Frame **10"** resembles frame **10'** of the second embodiment in its use of upper follower bearings **100** arranged for travel within contoured upper guide channels **104** and lower follower bearings **102** arranged for travel within contoured lower guide channels **106**. However, in frame **10"** of the third embodiment, the automatic drive arrangement is different. More specifically, motorized linear actuators are provided to automatically move back **18** and seat **22** through the range of travel between their sofa and bed positions. FIGS. **9** and **10** show a linear actuator **120B** associated with side **12B**, it being understood that another linear actuator is associated in corresponding fashion with opposite side **12A**, but is not shown for sake of simplicity. Linear actuator **120B** includes a first end pivotally connected to side **12B** below rear support member **16** by a pivot pin **122** received within a central mounting hole **124** in a generally U-shaped support bracket **126** fixed at its opposite ends to extend laterally inward from side **12B** by fasteners **128** (see FIG. **11**). A second, opposite end of linear actuator **120B** is pivotally connected to respective side member **24B** of seat **22** by a pivot pin **130** received within a central mounting hole **132** in another U-shaped support bracket **134** fixed to depend downwardly from side member **24B** by fasteners **136** (see FIG. **12**). Linear actuator **120B** further includes automatic drive means in the form of an electric motor **138** operatively connected to motor controller **80** for automatically and reversibly changing the telescopic displacement between the first and second ends of linear actuator **120B**. As may be seen in FIGS. **9** and **10**, linear actuator **120B** is chosen and arranged such that back **18** and seat **22** are in their sofa position when linear actuator **120B** is fully retracted, and back **18** and seat **22** are in their bed position when linear actuator **120B** is fully extended. Of course, linear actuator may be stopped at any point between its fully retracted and extended conditions to provide a continuum of intermediate adjustment possibilities. It will be understood that linear actuator **120B** could be connected to frame **10"** in an opposite manner to that shown, i.e. with motor **138** proximate to the point of pivotal connection to seat side member **24B**, to achieve a similar adjustment effect. In a present reduction to practice, linear actuators and a cooperating motor controller were obtained from Phoenix Mecano Inc. of Frederick, Md.

What is claimed is:

1. An automatically adjustable futon frame comprising:

first and second opposing sides connected by front and rear support members extending laterally therebetween, each of said first and second opposing sides having an upper guide channel and a lower guide channel formed therein;

a back situated between said first and second opposing sides, said back having first and second side members respectively adjacent to said first and second opposing sides, each of said first and second side members of said back including an upper follower bearing arranged for travel within said upper guide channel of said adjacent opposing side and a lower follower bearing arranged for travel within said lower guide channel of said adjacent opposing side,

a seat pivotally connected to said back for folding along a laterally extending axis, said seat having first and second side members,

first and second linear actuators respectively coupled one to each of said first and second opposing sides and arranged to adjust said back and seat relative to each other between a sofa position and a bed position, said first and second linear actuators having automatic drive means, wherein each of said first and second linear actuators is pivotally mounted at a first end thereof to a respective side of said frame and pivotally mounted at a second end thereof to said seat, and said automatic drive means changes the displacement between the first and second ends; and

controller means connected to said automatic drive means for enabling user operation of said first and second linear actuators.

2. The futon frame according to claim **1**, wherein said automatic drive means of each of said first and second linear actuators is located proximate to said first end of said linear actuator.

3. The futon frame according to claim **1**, further comprising automatic vibrating means fixed to said back and connected to said controller means.

4. An automatically adjustable futon frame comprising:

first and second opposing sides connected by front and rear support members extending laterally

therebetween, each of said first and second opposing sides having an upper guide channel and a lower guide channel formed therein;

a back situated between said first and second opposing sides, said back having first and second side members respectively adjacent to said first and second opposing sides, each of said first and second side members of said back including an upper follower bearing arranged for travel within said upper guide channel of said adjacent opposing side and a lower follower bearing arranged for travel within said lower guide channel of said adjacent opposing side;

a seat pivotally connected to said back for folding along a laterally extending axis, said seat having first and second side members, and wherein said lower follower bearing is coaxial with said laterally extending axis;

first and second linear actuators respectively coupled one to each of said first and second opposing sides and arranged to adjust said back and seat relative to each other between a sofa position and a bed position, said first and second linear actuators having automatic drive means; and

controller means connected to said automatic drive means for enabling user operation of said first and second linear actuators.

* * * * *