

**PARABOLIC AND SPHERICAL MULTIPORT ILLUMINATORS
FOR LIGHT GUIDES**

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to reflectors and, more particularly, to reflectors for coupling light from a light source into one or more light guides.

Description of Related Art

Large diameter fiber optics, often referred to as "flexible light guides", are well known in the art, and typically comprise a single, solid core light guide which is surrounded by a cladding layer and a sheath or shielding layer. The core is the portion of a light guide which transmits light, and typically has a diameter of about 2 to 12 mm. It is formed of a very soft, semi-liquid plastic material, such as OPTIFLEX®, which is manufactured by Rohm & Haas Corporation, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The cladding layer typically comprises polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE or TEFLON®), or the like, while the outer sheath is fabricated of a material such as polyvinylchloride (PVC). Unlike small diameter light guides, which are typically used to transmit information in relatively complex control systems, these large diameter "light guides" are typically employed in a variety of illumination systems where direct lighting is difficult to maintain, dangerous, or subject to vandalism. Examples include architectural lighting, display

cases, pools and spas (to eliminate electrical connections near water), hazardous material zones (to eliminate the need for sealed lighting), and jail cells. Large diameter light guides are particularly advantageous in that only a single centralized illumination system must be maintained, rather than a plurality of individual lights.

A number of prior art approaches use reflectors for focussing light from a source of illumination into one or more light guides. U.S. Patent No. 5,222,793 and U.S. Patent No. 5,259,056, both to Davenport et al., disclose lighting systems which use a single reflector assembly for illuminating light transmissive elements. U.S. Patent No. 5,396,571 to Saadatmanesh et al. discloses a multi-segmented lens which divides light from a light beam into four separate beams, each of which is focussed onto a separate optical fiber. U.S. Patent No. 4,912,605 to Whitehead discloses an electric light source mounted between two reflectors, each of which directs light into a corresponding light guide. U.S. Patent No. 5,469,337 to Cassarly et al. discloses a light source and a plurality of curved reflectors for focussing light into lenses and then into a plurality of light guides. The use of reflectors and multi-segmented lenses in the prior art for coupling light into light guides has represented some advancement over the prior art practice of coupling light into a bundled array of light guides, which is inefficient but desirable in certain applications because of ease of manufacture and relatively low cost. However, the need for a proper and efficient coupling of a light source to a plurality of light guides still remains.

In many cases requirements for the proper and efficient coupling of a light source to a plurality of light guides change according to the particular light source being used. Modern electrodeless lamps, for example, which have a high light output level, are too intense for coupling to only one or two light guides without burning them. If an inefficient coupling is used, the effective illuminance will be reduced. This will prevent damage to the light guides, but the cost of running the system will then be unreasonably high as a result of the wasted energy. More efficient couplings are desirable so that the energy associated with generating the high luminosity of such an illumination source can be fully utilized.

Another problem associated with prior art designs is the large number of optical components associated with these designs. Reducing the number of parts of any optical design would be advantageous to an illumination system of the type herein discussed.

Summary of the Invention

This invention efficiently couples the light originating from a light source, such as an electrodeless sulfur lamp such as the lamp manufactured by Fusion Lighting, into a multiplicity of flexible macroscopic light guides, which could include bundled optical fibers. Such a system is to be used in transmitting illumination from a central source to a variety of remote locations. The combination of the several elements of the inventive system results in a very efficient transfer of the energy of the light source to the light guides.

According to one aspect of the present invention, a light guide illumination system includes a light source, a multi-sectored lens, and at least one output light guide for receiving the light. A light
5 guide illumination system, according to the present invention, includes an illumination source for emitting light, and a configuration of focussing lenses disposed substantially around the illumination source. Each of the focussing lenses is adapted for
10 focussing emitted light from the illumination source in a generally radially outwardly direction from the illumination source. The configuration of focussing lenses forms a truncated spherical structure, which is disposed around the illumination source.

15 A heat-containment barrier is disposed between the focussing lenses and the illumination source. The heat-containment barrier may be coated with an infrared (IR) and/or an ultra-violet (UV) coating to block nonvisible radiation from the illumination
20 source from contacting the focussing lenses. The focussing lenses may be made of plastic when the heat-containment barrier is used.

The illumination source may comprise an electrodeless sulfur lamp. Each of the focussing
25 lenses is adapted for focusing an approximately equal amount of emitted light from the illumination source in a generally radially outwardly direction from the illumination source. The light guide illumination system may further comprise a plurality of homogenizer
30 rods. Each of the homogenizer rods is adapted for receiving light from a corresponding one of the focussing lenses. Alternatively, the focussing lenses may comprise transfer lenses, and the light guide

illumination system may comprise a plurality of condenser lenses which are adapted for receiving light from the transfer lenses.

According to another aspect of the present invention, a spherical optical illumination system includes an illumination source having a proximal portion, a distal portion, and an intermediate portion between the proximal portion and the distal portion. The spherical optical illumination system further includes a curved reflector disposed near the proximal portion of the illumination source, and a semi-sphere of focussing lenses disposed generally around the distal portion and the intermediate portion of the illumination source. Each of the focussing lenses is adapted for focusing emitted light from the illumination source in a generally radially outwardly direction from the illumination source. The curved reflector and the semi-sphere of focussing lenses together substantially surround the illumination source. The curved reflector is adapted for redirecting proximally directed light into the semi-sphere of focussing lenses. The illumination source may comprise a 1000 watt bulb, and the curved reflector may have a generally circular perimeter. The spherical optical illumination system further includes a wire cage, which surrounds the distal portion and the intermediate portion of the illumination source.

An illumination source is placed at a focal point of a parabolic reflector, according to another aspect of the present invention. Light from the illumination source and the parabolic reflector is collimated into a plurality of transfer lenses and condenser lenses.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention, an assembly of lenses includes a plurality of radially curved lens groups. Each of the radially curved lens groups includes a plurality of focussing lenses formed therein. The plurality of lens groups is adapted for fitting substantially around an illumination source. The plurality of lens groups is adapted for contacting and fitting next to one another around the illumination source.

The assembly of lenses includes a plurality of side lens groups adapted for being disposed around an illumination source, and a top lens group adapted for being disposed above the illumination source. The plurality of side lens groups may comprise five side lens groups. Each of the five side lens groups comprises twelve focussing lenses, and the top lens group may comprise eight focussing lenses. Each of the twelve focussing lenses of each of the five side lens groups comprises five edges. Each of seven of the eight focussing lenses of the top lens group comprises four edges, and an eighth of the eight focussing lenses of the top lens group comprises seven edges.

The present invention, together with additional features and advantages thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following description taken in connection with the accompanying illustrative drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figures 1a and 1b are schematic top views of optical systems, according to the present invention;

Figure 2 is an enlarged schematic view of the lamp and right portion of the quad reflector illustrated in Figure 1a;

5 Figure 3 is a schematic side view illustrating the multi-sector lens which forms a part of the optical system shown in Figure 1a;

Figure 4 is an end view of the multi-sector lens shown in Figure 3;

10 Figure 5 is a schematic view of the spherical multiport optical illuminator and heat-containment barrier, according to the presently preferred embodiment;

Figure 6 is a side-elevational view of the spherical multiport optical illuminator shown in Figure 5;

Figure 7 is a detailed illustration of the spherical multiport optical illuminator, according to the present invention;

20 Figure 8 is a top view of the spherical multiport optical illuminator, according to the present invention;

Figure 9 is a diagram view illustrating the position of the edges of two lens groups, relative to an illumination source, according to the present invention;

Figure 10 is a side-elevational view illustrating three lens groups, according to the present invention;

Figures 11a-11d are top planar views of various transfer lenses, according to the present invention;

30 Figure 11e is a cross-sectional view of a condenser lens, according to the present invention;

Figure 12 is a schematic view of a transfer lens and a condenser lens, according to the present invention;

5 Figure 13 illustrates a three dimensional plot of light intensity focussed by the condenser lens of Figure 11e into a light guide;

Figure 14 is a three dimensional plot of light intensity focussed by the condenser lens of Figure 12 into a light guide;

10 Figure 15 is a schematic top view of a parabolic reflector optical system, according to a second preferred embodiment; and

Figure 16 is a perspective view of a dual parabolic reflector, according to an alternative
15 embodiment of the parabolic reflector optical system of the second preferred embodiment.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Referring now more particularly to the drawings, an optical system 10 is illustrated including a
20 compact light source 12, which may comprise an arc lamp or similar source. The light source 12 is placed at the focus of a quad-curved reflector 14, which comprises four reflector portions 16, 17, 18, and 19 disposed in back-to-back fashion. In each of the
25 reflector portions 16-19, the center or vertex region of the reflector has been removed, as illustrated. The four reflector portions 16-19 can be seen in the figure joined at intersection points 20-23.

Light is emitted from the light source 12, which
30 preferably comprises an electrodeless lamp, such as a Solar 1000™ sulfur lamp, manufactured by Fusion Lighting of Baltimore, MD. The light source 12,

however, can comprise any conventional means for emitting light. This 1000 watt light source 12 is reflected by the quad reflector 14, as illustrated by the lines of incidence shown in Figure 1a, in four different directions, and is then directed through an angle of approximately 90 degrees (or any other desired angle) by each of four flat reflectors or fold mirrors.

Figure 1a illustrates three fold mirrors 24, 24a, and 24b corresponding to the three reflectors 16, 18, and 19, respectively. Only three fold mirrors 24, 24a, and 24b are illustrated in Figure 1a, but up to four fold mirrors may be implemented, one corresponding to each of the reflector portions 16-19. The fold mirrors serve a primary purpose of transmitting heat generated by the light source 12, and are thus advantageous when a hot light source 12 is used. Each of the fold mirrors in Figure 1a thus serves a purpose of transmitting heat from the light source 12 away from the light source 12. Since the Solar 1000™ sulfur lamp of the presently preferred embodiment does not burn hot, the presently preferred embodiment, as shown in Figure 1b, does not incorporate fold mirrors.

Ultra-violet (UV) and/or infrared (IR) radiation blocking coatings may be placed on the exit lens faces 32, and are preferred in linear embodiments when the fold mirrors 24 are not used. As an alternative to the lens face 32 coatings, hot mirrors 24' (Figure 1b) may be used for reflecting UV and IR radiation. These hot mirrors 24' may be placed at any stage between the light source and the output light guides and, further, may be placed at perpendicular or off-axis

orientations. Each focussed beam of light impinges on a lens end of a respective one of the circular homogenizer rods 28, 28a, 28b, and 28c. Each of the four circular homogenizer rods 28, 28a, 28b, and 28c comprises a transparent material, such as glass or clear plastic, and is adapted to integrate the light beam by means of multiple reflections within the homogenizer rod. The homogenizer rods may be omitted in an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

On the right side of the system, or right channel 30, as illustrated in Figure 1a, the light beam emerges from the homogenizer rod 28 at the exit lens face 32. The diverging beam from the homogenizer rod 28 is then focussed and split into a number of separate focussed beams by means of a multi-sectored lens 36 (Figures 1a, 3 and 4). Each of the lens sectors 38 (Figure 4) focusses light onto the core of a corresponding output light guide 40.

In a conventional optical design, a focussing lens would likely be required between the circular homogenizer rod 28 and the multi-sectored lens 36. The multi-sectored lens 36 of the present invention, however, is modified over conventional lenses to obviate any need for a focussing lens. For example, the multi-sectored lens 36 is larger than would be required with a conventional focussing lens between the multi-sectored lens 36 and the circular homogenizer rod 28. Alternatively, a conventional focussing lens may be used with the multi-sectored lens 36.

The optical system for the top beam of Figure 1a focussed by the quad reflector 14 through the top channel 31 is essentially the same as that of the

right channel 30. The optical system for the left beam focussed by the quad reflector 14 through the left channel 42 can be essentially the same as that described with respect to the right channel 30 or, alternatively, different features may be incorporated into the left channel 42. For example, the right channel 30 or the top channel 31 may have a sector lens accommodating ten output light guides, while the left channel 42 may only couple to a single large light guide or multi-light guide bundle 44. Different features, including combinations of the features illustrated within the right channel 30, the top channel 31, and the left channel 42, may be incorporated and used with any of these channels, in various combinations. Additionally, combinations of these features may be used with the bottom channel 43. The bottom channel 43 is shown with a focussing lens 45c and without a fold mirror. As in the embodiment of Figure 1b, the focussing lens 45c of Figure 1a focusses light from the second reflector portion 17 to the circular homogenizer rod 28c. The focussing lens 45c may be used instead of, or in addition to, any of the fold mirrors 24, 24a, and 24b in the right, left, and top channels 30, 42, and 31, respectively, according to design parameters.

According to the embodiment of Figure 1b, which preferably implements a Solar 1000™ electrodeless lamp, the fold mirrors of the Figure 1a configuration are not used and light from the four reflector portions 16-19 is focussed directly into homogenizer rods and, subsequently, focussed into either lenses or segmented lenses.

Referring again to Figure 1a, a rotating color wheel 46 is disposed at the exit of the homogenizer rod 28 or, alternatively, in front of the sector lens 36. With the color wheel 46 at the homogenizer rod exit, the color of the light to all of the light guides is the same and changes simultaneously as the wheel rotates. With the wheel near the entrance to the sector lens 36, the colors to each light guide are different and can change at different rates depending on the pattern of the wheel. It is often desirable for one of the panels in the color wheel to be blank, to thereby function as a shutter for the purpose of selectively dousing the light. These various color controls are useful in pool lighting, signs, and other applications.

The high efficiency of this illumination system derives from the special design of a number of its elements working alone and in combination. When the electrodeless lamp is not used, the light source 12 is preferably selected to have small arc dimensions so that it will couple into light guides of relatively small diameter (preferably 3 mm to 10 mm). The quad-curved reflector 14 consists of four axially symmetrical curved halves or portions 16-19, with the light source 12 centered at their matching plane. This arrangement makes use of the very efficient collection properties of the low magnification section of the ellipsoidal (or near ellipsoidal) reflector shape. A large hole 48 in the center of each of the four reflector portions 16-19 results in a focussed light beam with a ring-shaped cross section. Light entering the hole in each reflector portion is not lost but passes into the opposite reflector portion

and is focussed into the second focussed beam. This reflector arrangement efficiently generates a ring cross-section beam which is very useful in reducing the radial aperture required of each of the sector lenses 38 (Figure 4).

Figure 2 shows a section through the right portion of the quad-reflector 14 indicating how the ring-shaped beam 50 is generated. The ring-shaped beam 50, wherein the darkened center portion 52 is represented by cross-hatching, is preserved through the homogenizer rod 28.

As best shown in Figure 3, the ring-shaped beam impinges on the sector lens 36 as well, and it can be seen that the outer boundary 54 of the beam 50 and the inner boundary 56 thereof, define the lens aperture in the radial direction. The ring beam thus very usefully limits the required lens aperture and permits lenses of relatively short focal length to be used. This ability to use short focal length lenses permits much more efficient coupling into small diameter light guides, thus unexpectedly increasing the efficiency of the system. The minimum light guide diameter is controlled by the need to match the output beam divergence to the numerical aperture of the light guide.

Another feature of the present invention is the orientation of the light source 12. As illustrated particularly in Figure 2, the light source 12 is shown at the focal point of the quad reflector 14. The long dimension of the arc discharge of the light source 12 is oriented so as to be substantially parallel and coincident with a reflector symmetry axis, which passes through the light source 12 and which is

perpendicular to the page on which Figure 2 is printed. Small output light guide diameter is usually desired in most applications. A design for a small light guide will also in general provide efficient
5 coupling to larger light guides provided the numerical aperture of the larger fiber is the same or larger than the smaller fiber. In the presently preferred embodiment, the output light guide core diameter is nominally one half inch. This large diameter is
10 required because the high output power of the light source may burn smaller light guides. Additionally, the sector lens of the present invention, which obviates any need for a focussing lens, has an aspheric shape that can be specified using standard
15 optical equations.

Although six equal lens sectors 38 are illustrated in Figure 4, the sector lens 36 can have as few as two and up to about twelve or more sectors. Also, the sectors need not be equal in area, since in some
20 applications it may be desirable to deliver different amounts of light to different locations. The sector lens as a means of splitting the incident beam has a major advantage over currently used bundled light guides in that the sector lens array separates the
25 light guides from each other (Figures 3 and 4), thereby permitting easy installation and removal of individual light guides.

As previously mentioned, the fold reflectors 24, 24a, and 24b may serve a multiple function of both
30 fold mirror and heat rejecting mirror. As a fold mirror, they may be used with or without a hot light source 12, and provide the ability of rotating the entire output optical system around mechanical axes 64

and 64a, as best shown in Figure 1a. This feature is very useful in allowing great flexibility in positioning the direction in which the light guides emerge from the unit. Independent rotation of the fold mirrors 24 and 24a, for example, on either side of the light source 12 provides additional flexibility of output light guide location.

As described above, the cylindrical homogenizer rod 28 (as well as homogenizer rods 28a, 28b, and 28c) is used to integrate the angular distribution of the light around the rod axis 66. This is advantageous since it allows the light output of each light guide to be identical (which is usually desired), because the angular light distribution from the light source 12 is not generally uniform. Additionally, a metal-halide type of arc lamp, which may be used as the illumination source, typically has some color differences in the angular distribution which also need to be integrated out in order to avoid undesirable color differences in output between light guides. A field lens 32, for example, is preferably employed on each of the homogenizer rod ends to constrain the light inside the rod so that it is totally reflected internally. Mechanically, the field lens portion 32 of the homogenizer rod 28 is larger in diameter than the rod section itself in order to provide a loss-free means of mounting the homogenizer rod 28. Anything touching the homogenizer rod surface will bleed off some of the internally reflected light unless the rod is clad, which is a disadvantageous approach since it reduces its numerical aperture and increases its cost. Each homogenizer rod may be

coated with a low-index material, according to one embodiment of the present invention.

5 The individual lens sectors 38 (Figure 4) comprise a relay lens system that roughly images the output end of the homogenizer rod onto the light guide port. The lens sectors may have aspheric or anamorphic shapes to reduce aberrations and improve efficiency, and are preferably given a thickness such that the output beam is focussed on the flat rear surface of the lens
10 sector. This allows the soft core of the usual type of light guide to "wet" the lens surface, thereby reducing reflection losses at this interface. In another embodiment of the present invention, the light guides 40 and the lens sector 38 surfaces may be
15 spaced, such that a so-called "air gap" is disposed therebetween.

The quad-curved reflector 14 illustrated in Figure 1a may be expanded or reduced to add more or less curved reflectors. For example, three curved
20 reflectors or eight curved reflectors may be embodied, instead of four curved reflectors. The number of curved reflectors (ports) will be dependent upon the particular system requirements. Each curved reflector, corresponding to a port, is independent of
25 the other ports and, accordingly, can be coupled to one or several homogenizer rods or light guides. The largest number of curved reflectors, or ports, will often be determined by the size limitations of the focussing optics, such as the focussing lenses, for
30 example.

Reflectors, such as the quad-curved reflector 14, used to collect light from a light source 12 and launch the light into light guides, are inefficient

according to principles described by the étendue invariant. The étendue or Lagrange invariant is a quantity of a beam of light that is an invariant through an optical system. The étendue can be defined
5 in several different ways which must be discerned by the context. The simplest definition is based on rays of light from a far distant object subtending an angle of 2θ at a circular aperture of radius a . According to the paraxial approximation, the étendue is denoted
10 by θa . If the circular aperture is the input to an optical system, and if there are no obstructions to the beam in the system and absorption and scattering etc. are ignored, then the étendue quantity is invariant through the system.

15 The square of this quantity θa is $\theta^2 a^2$. This squared quantity is also invariant through the system and is often referred to as the three dimensional étendue. This three dimensional form of the étendue is useful because it is proportional to the power flow
20 through the system.

In non-imaging applications (including fiber optic and light guide illuminators) the paraxial approximation is not valid and the more general definition of étendue must be used. This more general
25 definition is stated in terms of small displacements of a ray of light propagating from a point $P(x,y,z)$ in an input medium of index n to a point $P'(x',y',z')$ in an output medium of index n' . The direction cosine at point P is indicated as (L,M,N) and the direction
30 cosine at point P' is indicated as (L',M',N') . Small displacements of the ray of light at point P are indicated by dx and dy with corresponding changes dx' and dy' at point P' and, similarly, small changes in

the direction cosines are indicated by dL , dM , dL' , and dM' . With these definitions the étendue invariant relationship is given by:

$$n'^2 dx' dy' dL' dM' = n^2 dx dy dL dM$$

5 where L and M correspond to the direction cosines for the x and y axes, respectively.

Applying this result to the first definition of étendue given above, it can be determined that the étendue is proportional to $a^2 \sin^2 \theta = a^2 NA^2$ where NA is
10 the numerical aperture. In this result constant factors are dropped and the refractive index is assumed to be identical at both points. The general definition allows one to compute the étendue for arbitrary situations if the integrals can be
15 evaluated.

As stated supra, the use of reflectors to collect light from a noncoherent source and launch it into light guides is inefficient, according to fundamental principles described by the étendue invariant. A
20 reflector is typically in close proximity to a light source, with the light source generally being positioned at a focal point, and the reflector subtends a large solid angle resulting in a large value for the étendue invariant. In contrast, a light
25 guide has a relatively small opening (core diameter), with a limited numerical aperture, resulting in a relatively small value for the étendue invariant.

A spherical array or spherical shell of lenses, on the other hand, is ideal for collecting light from
30 a noncoherent light source, since substantially all of the light, ignoring absorption, scattering etc., can

be collected and directed to an array of light guides. Furthermore, the use of a spherical array or spherical shell of lenses is consistent with the principles of étendue. The constraints in a particular application include the size and shape of the illumination source, and the size and numerical aperture of the light guides. The variables include the number of lenses, which determines the number of light guides, and the lens powers. The design is constrained first by the image size, which is determined by the size of the light guide core. Therefore, the light guide size fixes the magnification. With a given magnification, the maximum lens size is constrained by the light guide numerical aperture. This in turn determines the minimum number of lenses (and light guides) that can be used. A larger number of smaller lenses can always be used, because the angular extent of the light will then be less than the light guide numerical aperture.

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate a configuration where a light source 12 is substantially surrounded by a heat-containment barrier 80 and a sphere of lenses, according to the presently preferred embodiment. The light source 12 is surrounded by a wire cage 81, which forms a microwave cavity. A motor (not shown) disposed within a microwave source 83 rotates the light source 12 about a vertical axis, to thereby facilitate a uniform plasma. The motor, the wire cage 81, the microwave source 83, and a flat reflector (not shown), disposed between the wire cage 81 and microwave source 83, can be obtained, for example, from Fusion Lighting of Baltimore, M.D., as previously mentioned in connection with the Solar 1000™ sulfur lamp. According to the present invention, a curved

semi-spherical retro-reflector 85 is advantageously used in place of the flat reflector which is normally provided with the Solar 1000™ product. The curved retro-reflector 85 more efficiently redirects light from the light source 12 generally back through the lamp toward the focussing lenses 76.

A homogenizer rod 90 is preferably coupled to each focussing lens 76. The number of homogenizer rods 90 may be increased or decreased to increase or decrease the total number of ports of the system, depending upon preference. Homogenizer rods may also be eliminated altogether or replaced in whole or in part with other light guides. Of course, the maximum number of homogenizer rods 90 is limited by the number of focussing lenses 76 in the spherical assembly. As with all of the embodiments of the present invention, sector lenses 36 and output light guides 40 (Figure 1a), as well as other optical elements and combinations thereof, may be used with or in place of the homogenizer rods 90. Reflectors, corresponding to the fold mirrors 24, 24a, and 24b, may be implemented in these embodiments as well. The curvature of the curved reflector 85 is generally spherical to focus the lamp on itself, but may alternatively be computer generated and/or empirically tested to maximize reflections from the light source 12.

The heat-containment barrier 80 preferably comprises a truncated spherical shell of glass. Other materials and shapes other than spherical shapes may be used, however, according to design preferences. The heat-containment barrier 80 operates as a shield to protect the focussing lenses 76 from excessive heat which may be generated by the light source 12. The

heat-containment barrier 80 additionally may comprise ultra-violet and/or infrared blocking coatings thereon, in order to provide additional blocking capabilities and to further protect the focussing lenses 76 from the light source 12.

The protection afforded by the heat-containment barrier 80 facilitates the manufacture of the focussing lenses 76 from molded plastic. If molded plastic focussing lenses 76 are used without the heat-containment barrier 80, the molded plastic focussing lenses 75 are likely to be damaged by radiation from the light source 12. The molded plastic lenses 76, for example, may melt or become deformed without use of the heat-containment barrier 80. In an embodiment where the heat-containment barrier 80 is not used, the focussing lenses are preferably manufactured from glass, which is relatively heavy, fragile, and expensive. Plastic focussing lenses 76 are more cost-effective to manufacture than if they must be fabricated from glass or some other more heat-resistant material.

Turning to Figure 7, the presently preferred embodiment of the spherical multiport optical illuminator 101 is schematically illustrated. The embodiment of Figures 7-14 is similar to the embodiment of Figures 5 and 6, with transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, 115 and condenser lenses 117 being substituted for the focussing lenses 76. As with the focussing lenses 76, molded plastic is the preferred material for the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, 115 and the condenser lenses 117. The presently preferred heat-containment barrier 80 (Figure 5) allows for the substitution of plastic for glass in

the manufacture of the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, 115 and/or the condenser lenses 117. A wire cage 105 surrounds the light source 103, which is similar to the light source 12 of Figures 5 and 6.

5 As presently embodied, four rows of transfer lenses encircle the light source 103, and a top layer of transfer lenses is positioned above the light source 103. The first transfer lenses 107 form a first row, the second transfer lenses 109 form a
10 second row, the third transfer lenses 111 form a third row, and the fourth transfer lenses 113 form a fourth row. Top transfer lenses 115 form the top layer of lenses, and condenser lenses 117 are positioned to receive light from the transfer lenses. A condenser
15 lens 117 can be coupled to each transfer lens. The number of condenser lenses 117 may be increased or decreased to increase or decrease the total number of ports of the system, depending upon preference. The maximum number of condenser lenses 117 is limited by
20 the number of transfer lenses.

 The first transfer lenses 107, second transfer lenses 109, third transfer lenses 111, and fourth transfer lenses 113 are preferably molded together in lens groups. The side lens group 121 preferably
25 comprises three first transfer lenses 107, three second transfer lenses 109, three third transfer lenses 111, and three fourth transfer lenses 113. A top lens group 123 preferably comprises eight top transfer lenses 115. Each side lens group 121 and the
30 top lens group 123 is preferably molded of plastic but, alternatively, glass may be used. As presently embodied, all five of the side lens groups 121 are substantially identical in shape, and each side lens

group 121 can be secured between two other side lens groups 121.

As can be seen in Figure 8, the top lens group 123 may slightly overlap the first transfer lenses 107 of each side lens group 121. The arrow A1 in Figure 7 illustrates a possible air flow path, which facilitates the escape of heat generated by the light source 103. In an alternative embodiment, the top lens group 123 may be sealed onto the first transfer lenses 107, and air may be circulated within the closed structure. In both air flow embodiments, air preferably circulates both inside the heat containment barrier 80 and also between the heat containment barrier 80 and the transfer lenses. The light source 103 is preferably placed at a focal point of all of the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, 115, and condenser lenses 117.

As shown in Figure 9, the focal point 130 of a first transfer lens 107 and a focal point 133 of a second transfer lens 109 are both evenly positioned relative to the light source 103 when the lenses are properly secured. Similarly, a focal point 135 of a third transfer lens 111 and a focal point 137 of a fourth transfer lens 113 are evenly positioned about the light source 103 when the third transfer lens 111 and the fourth transfer lens 113 are properly positioned.

Figure 10 illustrates a cross-sectional view of a side lens group 121 and a side-elevational view of another side lens group 121. Figure 10 also illustrates a cross-sectional view of the top lens group 123. Figure 11a illustrates a side-elevational view of a first transfer lens 107, and Figure 11b

illustrates a side-elevational view of a second transfer lens 109. Figure 11c illustrates a side-elevational view of a third transfer lens 111, and Figure 11d illustrates a side-elevational view of a fourth transfer lens 113. The outer surfaces of the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, and 115 are preferably shaped to a constant radius from the light source 103, when the lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, and 115 are positioned about the light source 103. The inner surfaces of the lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, and 115, however, are preferably aspherically shaped.

Figure 11e illustrates a cross-sectional view of a condenser lens 117. Each of the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, and 115 are adapted for transferring light from the light source 103 onto a corresponding condenser lens 117. The condenser lenses 117, in turn, focus light onto corresponding light guides (not shown). When an electrodeless lamp is used, the light guides preferably comprise fibers which are rated for the proper lumen output. For high-lumen output cases where the heat-containment barrier is omitted, for example, the fibers may comprise a non-plastic material such as bundled glass fibers. As shown in Figure 12, light impinging onto a second transfer lens 109, for example, is focussed onto the condenser lens 117'. Light passing through the condenser lens 117' is condensed for imaging onto a light guide.

Figures 13 and 14 illustrate three dimensional plots of light intensity over a surface area of an input end of a light guide. The plot of light intensity versus area of Figure 13 corresponds to the embodiment of Figures 7-9 which uses condenser lenses 117. The plot of Figure 14, which illustrates a

relatively consistent distribution of light over the surface area, corresponds to the embodiment of Figure 12 using a condenser lens 117'.

5 The relatively consistent distribution of light over the surface area of the input end of the light guide can be generally attributed to the shape of the condenser lenses 117'. Each of the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, and 115 is preferably configured to transmit an approximately equal amount of light
10 from the light source 103 onto a corresponding condenser lens 117'. The condenser lenses 117' differ in shape, as compared to the condenser lens 117 of Figure 11e. More particularly, each of the presently preferred condenser lenses 117' has an indentation in
15 the center that facilitates a relatively consistent distribution of light over the surface area of the input end of the light guide.

Although the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113 and 115 preferably comprise pentagon shapes having
20 five edges each, with the exception of the very top transfer lens of the top lens group 123, the transfer lenses of the present invention may comprise virtually any shape. The shapes of these transfer lenses may comprise trapezoids (including squares), triangles,
25 pentagons, hexagons, combinations of shapes, or arbitrarily undefined shapes which happen to fit together on the surface of a sphere. Generally, none of these shapes will be regular in that they will not have equal length sides, but the present invention is
30 intended to cover embodiments using regularly shaped lenses, as well. All, some, or none of the lenses may be the same size, according to the present invention. The pentagon-shaped lenses of the present invention

are fairly circular in shape, and thus facilitate focussing of light with minimum angular divergence. However, other noncircular as well as circular lenses may be used according to the present invention.

5 Although the present invention incorporates a fairly well-rounded sphere, any assembly of lenses partially or completely surrounding a light source may be implemented.

10 Alternatively to the foregoing preferred construction, the transfer lenses and condenser lenses may be formed of molded blocks or sections combined into a single unit, of either glass or plastic. The spherical heat barrier may also be divided into sections, if desired, and be included in these
15 modules.

Figure 15 is a schematic top view of a parabolic reflector optical system 172, according to a second preferred embodiment. As distinguished from elliptical reflectors which focus light in a direction
20 away from the light source, parabolic reflectors are adapted to collimate light in a direction away from the light source. Light is collimated from the light source 12 in a direction toward the transfer lenses 177 and condenser lenses 178. The transfer lenses 177
25 and condenser lenses 178 of Figure 15 are similar to the transfer lenses 107, 109, 111, 113, 115 and condenser lenses 117 of Figures 7-14 in construction, arrangement, etc. Alternatively, focussing lenses 76, such as shown in Figures 5 and 6, for example, may be
30 used in place of the transfer lenses 177 and condenser lenses 178. The transfer lenses 177 and condenser lenses 178 preferably comprise molded plastic, but other materials such as glass may be used.

Additionally, a heat-containment barrier may be disposed between the light source 12 and the plastic transfer lenses 177 in an alternative embodiment.

Figure 16 illustrates an alternative embodiment of the configuration of Figure 15. Two of the parabolic reflectors 175 of Figure 15 are truncated and placed together in a back-to-back fashion. The light source is then placed at a focal point of the resulting dual parabolic reflector 181. The transfer lenses 177 and the condenser lenses 178 of Figure 15 may be placed at one or both of the two output ends 185, 188 of the dual parabolic reflector 181. Alternatively, focussing lenses 76, such as shown in Figures 5 and 6, for example, may be used in place of the transfer lenses 177 and condenser lenses 178. The light source may comprise a Solar 1000™ sulfur lamp or, alternatively, may comprise a double-ended metal halide lamp 190, such as illustrated in Figure 16 and disclosed in co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. 08/_____, filed on March 4, 1997 and entitled MULTIPORT ILLUMINATOR FOR LIGHT GUIDES. Brackets 193, 197 are used to hold the double-ended metal halide lamp 190 to the dual parabolic reflector 181.

Although exemplary embodiments of the invention have been shown and described, many other changes, modifications and substitutions, in addition to those set forth in the above paragraphs, may be made by one having ordinary skill in the art without necessarily departing from the spirit and scope of this invention.

CLAIMS

1. A light guide illumination system,
comprising:
an illumination source adapted to emit light;
a configuration of focusing lenses disposed around
5 the illumination source, each of the focusing lenses
being adapted to focus emitted light from the
illumination source in a generally radially outwardly
direction from the illumination source; and
a heat-containment barrier disposed between the
10 illumination source and the configuration of focussing
lenses.
2. The optical fiber illumination system as
recited in Claim 1, the configuration of focussing
lenses comprising plastic.
3. The light guide illumination system as
recited in Claim 1, the configuration of focussing
lenses comprising molded plastic.
4. The light guide illumination system as
recited in Claim 1, the configuration of focusing
lenses comprising a spherical structure of focusing
lenses disposed around the illumination source, and
5 the heat-containment barrier comprising a
spherical structure disposed around the illumination
source between the illumination source and the
configuration of focusing lenses.



5. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 4, the heat-containment barrier comprising glass.

6. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 1, the illumination source comprising a sulfur lamp.

7. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 1, further comprising a plurality of homogenizer rods, each of the focusing lenses being adapted to focus light into a corresponding one of the plurality of homogenizer rods.

8. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 7, each of the focusing lenses comprising a transfer lens.

9. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 8, further comprising a plurality of condenser lenses, each of the plurality of transfer lenses being adapted for focussing light into a corresponding condenser lens.

10. A spherical light guide illumination system, comprising:

an illumination source having a proximal portion, a distal portion, and an intermediate portion between the proximal portion and the distal portion;

a curved reflector disposed near the proximal portion of the illumination source;

a heat-containment barrier disposed generally around the distal portion of the illumination source



10 and the intermediate portion of the illumination
source;

a semi-spherical array of focusing lenses disposed
generally around the heat-containment barrier, each of
the focusing lenses being adapted to focus emitted
15 light from the illumination source in a generally
radially outwardly direction from the illumination
source, the curved reflector, the heat-containment
barrier, and the semi-spherical array of focusing
lenses together substantially surrounding the
20 illumination source, the curved reflector being
adapted for redirecting proximally-directed light into
the heat-containment barrier and the semi-spherical
array of focusing lenses.

11. The spherical light guide illumination system
as recited in Claim 10, the illumination source
comprising a 1000 watt sulfur lamp.

12. The spherical light guide illumination system
as recited in Claim 11, further comprising a wire cage
surrounding the distal portion and the intermediate
portion of the illumination source, and

5 the curved reflector having a generally circular
perimeter.

13. An assembly of lenses, comprising a plurality
of plastic lens groups, each of the plurality of
plastic lens groups having a plurality of focusing
lenses formed therein, the plurality of plastic lens
5 groups being adapted for fitting substantially around
an illumination source.



14. The assembly of lenses as recited in Claim 13, each of the plurality of plastic lens groups being radially curved, and

5 the plurality of plastic lens groups being adapted for contacting and fitting next to one another around an illumination source, to thereby substantially surround the illumination source.

15. The assembly of lenses as recited in Claim 14, the plurality of plastic lens groups being adapted for contacting and fitting next to one another around a heat-containment barrier, which is disposed around
5 an illumination source.

16. The assembly of lenses as recited in Claim 15, the plurality of plastic lens groups being adapted for maintaining at least one air gap between two of the plastic lens groups.

17. The assembly of lenses as recited in Claim 15, the assembly of lenses comprising a plurality of side lens groups and a top lens group.

18. A light guide illumination system, comprising:

an illumination source adapted to emit light;
a reflector having a parabolically curved surface
5 which is adapted to receive light from the illumination source and to redirect the received light; and

a plurality of focussing lenses adapted to receive light from the illumination source and the reflector.



19. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 18, each of the focussing lenses being disposed at an approximately equal radial distance from the illumination source.

20. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 18, the plurality of focussing lenses comprising transfer lenses, the plurality of transfer lenses being adapted to receive light from the
5 reflector, and the light guide illumination system further comprising a plurality of condenser lenses adapted to receive light from the transfer lenses.

21. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 20, the reflector having a circular perimeter, and

the plurality of transfer lenses having a
5 generally circular perimeter, which is approximately the same size as the circular perimeter of the reflector.

22. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 18, the illumination source being adapted to be placed at a focal point of the reflector.

23. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 22, further comprising a bracket for holding the illumination source at a focal point of the reflector.

24. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 18, the reflector comprising two



parabolically curved surfaces which are disposed in a back-to-back fashion, and

- 5 the illumination source being adapted to be placed at a focal point between the two parabolically curved surfaces.

25. A light guide illumination system, comprising:

- an illumination source adapted to emit light;
a reflector having a curved surface and an output
5 end, the curved surface being adapted to reflect light from the illumination source out of the output end;
and

- a plurality of focussing lenses disposed in proximity to the output end, each of the plurality of
10 focussing lenses being adapted to receive light from the reflector.

26. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 25, the reflector having a parabolically curved surface which is adapted to focus light into the plurality of focussing lenses.

27. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 26, the plurality of focussing lenses comprising a plurality of transfer lenses, and the light guide illumination system further comprising a
5 plurality of condenser lenses adapted to receive light from the transfer lenses.

28. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 27, the reflector having an output



end which has a first perimeter defined around the opening of the output end, and

- 5 the plurality of transfer lenses forming a second a perimeter, which is substantially the same size as the first perimeter.

29. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 28, each of the focussing lenses being disposed at an approximately equal radial distance from the illumination source.

30. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 28, the first perimeter defining a substantially circular area, and

- 5 the second perimeter defining a substantially circular area.

31. The light guide illumination system as recited in Claim 25, the reflector comprising two parabolically curved surfaces which are disposed in a back-to-back fashion, and

- 5 the illumination source being adapted to be placed at a focal point between the two parabolically curved surfaces.