

DISPENSER WITH HOLDING SYSTEM FOR RECEPTACLES OF DIFFERENT SIZES

Field of the invention

5 The present invention relates to beverage dispensers configured for producing beverages in receptacles of different sizes.

Background of the invention

10 There is a consumer demand for beverages dispensers that can deliver a variety of beverages in receptacles of different sizes. For example, some machines are capable of preparing an espresso coffee or a long American coffee in a small or medium cup and a latte macchiato coffee in a large cup.

During the dispensing of a beverage it is usually important to maintain a short distance between the beverage outlet and the receptacle in order to produce a good quality froth particularly for getting the "crema" of an espresso coffee, besides avoiding the risk of spatter. 15 What is required, therefore, is a system that can incite the user to choose the correct holder and to set a correct distance between the beverage outlet and the receptacle.

EP 1 867 260 describes a holder and drip-collecting system that can be positioned either in a first deployed position for supporting small receptacles or in a second retracted position enabling the positioning of larger receptacles.

20 An inconvenient of the above system is that the dispenser can deliver small size beverages like an espresso coffee in receptacles positioned at a high distance from the beverage outlet. If the consumer doesn't pay attention to the choice of the receptacle size and the position of the holder and drip-collecting system an espresso coffee is not prepared with the optimal quality.

25 The object of the present invention is to propose a beverage dispenser answering the above problem and able to incite the customer to always place the right cup at the right dispensing position.

Summary of the invention

30 According to a first aspect, the invention concerns a beverage dispenser comprising a holding system that comprises a holding part positionable beneath a beverage outlet in order to accept a first, relatively small receptacle, and being configured and dimensioned to be moveable between a deployed holding position suitable for accepting the small receptacle and a second position in which the holding part is moved at least partly out of the way of the beverage outlet to

create an unoccupied space in which a second, larger receptacle can be positioned, in place of the first receptacle, beneath the beverage outlet, wherein the holding system comprises a sensor configured for detecting the position of the holding part between the first position and the second position, and

- 5 wherein the beverage dispenser comprises an alerting device for inciting the consumer to move the holding part of the holding system from one position to the other.

Usually the beverage dispenser comprises an input device for selecting different beverages differing at least by the sizes of the dispensed beverages. In particular the beverage dispenser can be configured for preparing beverages presenting volumes varying between 25
10 and 1000 ml. Preferably the list of beverages susceptible to be prepared by the dispenser comprises at least an espresso coffee and/or a ristretto coffee.

The sensor can be any presence sensor like a switch, a capacitive type sensor or an optical sensor.

The receptacle holding part is preferably associated with the base as a cantilever
15 projection when the holder is in the deployed position. Also, the holding part may be configured and positioned for rotation between the deployed position and the second position. For this, holding part may be hinged about an axis of rotation allowing the part to be moved upwards and out of the way of the beverage outlet.

If desired, the holding part may be movable along or into a housing in the base. When
20 intended, the device may further comprise a housing into which the holding part is inserted by a sliding action.

According to a second aspect the invention concerns a process for operating a beverage dispenser such as described hereabove and comprising the steps of :

- 25 - receiving an input from a consumer for selecting a beverage,
- identifying the size of the cup corresponding to the selected beverage,
- checking if the position of the holding part corresponds to the identified size of the cup,
- if not, requesting the consumer to move the holding part in the other position,
- dispensing the selected beverage when the position of the holding part corresponds to the
30 identified size of the cup.

Brief description of the drawings

The characteristics and advantages of the invention will be better understood in relation to the following figures.

- 5 - Figure 1 is a general view of a beverage dispenser in which the present invention can be implemented.
- Figures 2 and 3 are two perspective views of the dispensing area of a beverage dispenser according to the present invention with the holding part of the holding system in the first deployed position,
- Figure 4 is a view of the dispensing area of a beverage dispenser according to the present
10 invention with the holding part of the holding system moving to the second retracted position.
- Figures 5 and 6 are illustrations of the beverage dispenser screen alerting the consumer.

Detailed description of the drawings

- 15 With reference to Figures 1 to 3, the beverage dispenser bears the reference 1. The beverage dispenser according to the invention comprises a base 2. The machine comprises a beverage outlet 4 which may take various forms. The machine may comprise internally a beverage preparation module for brewing, dissolving and/or frothing a beverage ingredient and delivering the beverage through the beverage outlet 4. The dispenser according to the invention comprises a system for holding the drinking receptacle. The system is formed by a holding part
20 3 which goes underneath the beverage outlet 4 and projects cantilever-fashion from the base 2. "Projects cantilever-fashion" means that the holding part 3 continues from the device in at least one direction and is not supported from beneath, thus forming a sort of balcony. The holding part is placed at a predefined distance D_0 from the beverage outlet 4. This distance is defined so as to deliver an espresso coffee in optimal conditions that is without affecting the quality of the
25 crema prepared in the beverage preparation module. If the cup is too far from the beverage outlet the quality of the espresso coffee is not optimised : in particular the crema does not present the correct aspect big bubbles being present at the top of the coffee, coffee might go outside of the receptacle or stain the internal walls of the receptacle above the top of the beverage. Besides, the distance is defined for accepting small or medium-size receptacles
30 (meaning, for example, cups capable of holding approximately 25 to 250 ml respectively). A drip tray 5 is present at the basis of the machine. It is placed at a predefined distance D_1 from the beverage outlet 4 - bigger than D_0 - so that it can support bigger receptacles when the holding part 3 is moved out of the way of the beverage outlet. The holding part 3 is thus freely rotatable about an axis of rotation I relative to the base 2. The holding part 3 can be raised up out of the

way of the beverage outlet, in which case a large receptacle can be put in position. The holding part 3 is preferably a grid so that drips can fall in the drip tray 5. Figure 4 illustrates the upward movement of the holding part 3 to the retracted position

The holding system also comprises a sensor for detecting the position of the holding part 3 between the first position and the second position. The sensor is preferably a capacitive sensor 8 (Figure 3) that can be activated when the holding part 3 is raised up, the surface of the holding part 3 establishing the contact with the sensor when it is in the retracted position. When the holding part 3 is in the deployed position the capacitive sensor is deactivated. Consequently the sensor is able to sense either the deployed position or the retracted position. The process control of the dispenser is configured for deducing from the sensor signal or the absence of signal from the sensor that the holding part 3 is in the deployed or retracted position. The sensor can also be placed near the axis of rotation I of the holding part 3 so that when the holding part 3 is deployed its edge facing the base 2 touches or activates a sensor. In the case where an optical sensor is used, said sensor can be placed in a larger area than the area directly in contact with the holding part 3 in retracted or deployed position.

The holding part 3 can present a magnet 9 for enabling its locking in the retracted position. The magnet 9 can help for the contact with the sensor 8.

The beverage dispenser 1 also comprises an input device for selecting different beverages differing at least by the size of the dispensed beverage. In the illustrated dispenser, the input device comprises several buttons 6. According to the preferred embodiment the input device enables the preparation of an espresso coffee. The illustrated dispenser 1 also comprises an interface for displaying information to the consumer like a screen 7 and in particular to alert the consumer and incite him to move the holding part of the holding system from one position to the other if necessary as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. In a simpler dispenser, the consumer can also be alerted by a simple light button associated to a written comment on the face of the dispenser inciting the consumer to correctly position the holding support in view of the selected beverage.

The operation of the dispenser for preparing a beverage consists in receiving the selection of a beverage by a consumer for example by choosing one of the 8 buttons 6 on the face of the dispenser. Each beverage proposed by the dispenser is generally defined by its composition and its volume. Consequently further to the selection of the beverage by the consumer the process control of the dispenser associates the size of a cup to the selected beverage volume. Then the process control checks the position of the holding part 3 by sensing if it is in the first or the second position and if this position corresponds to the size of the cup associated to the

selected beverage. If not that is :

- if the holding part 3 is deployed and a large receptacle is needed for dispensing the beverage,
or

- if the holding part 3 is not deployed and a small receptacle is needed for dispensing the
5 beverage,

then the process control alerts the consumer and requests him to move the holding part in the
other position.

When the position of the holding support 3 corresponds to the size of the cup associated
to the selected beverage, the process control dispenses the selected beverage. In practice the
10 alert message simply disappears and the customer is preferably asked to launch the dispensing
of the beverage by touching a "Start" button so that he has time to place the cup on the holding
part 3 placed in the correct position before the dispenser dispenses the beverage. If the position
of the holding support 3 does not correspond to the size of the cup associated to the selected
beverage, the dispenser does not dispense the selected beverage and the alert message
15 remains apparent.

The dispenser of the present invention presents the advantage of guarantying that the
ideal distance for delivering the beverage in a receptacle is implemented and that beverages of
optimal quality are dispensed.

CLAIMS

1. A beverage dispenser (1) comprising a base (2) and a holding system that comprises a holding part (3) positionable beneath a beverage outlet (4) in order to accept a first, relatively small receptacle, and being configured and dimensioned to be moveable between a deployed holding position suitable for accepting the small receptacle and a second position in which the holding part is moved at least partly out of the way of the beverage outlet to create an unoccupied space in which a second, larger receptacle can be positioned, in place of the first receptacle, beneath the beverage outlet,
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- 10 wherein the holding system comprises a sensor (8) configured for detecting the position of the holding part between the first position and the second position, and wherein the beverage dispenser comprises an alerting device for inciting the consumer to move the holding part (3) of the holding system from one position to the other.
- 15 2. A beverage dispenser according to Claim 1, wherein it comprises an input device (6) for selecting different beverages differing at least by the size of the dispensed beverage.
3. A beverage dispenser according to Claim 1, wherein the alerting device for inciting the consumer to move the holding part (3) of the holding system from one position to the other is able to be activated based on a comparison between the beverage selected with the input device (6) and the holding part position detected by the sensor (8).
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4. A beverage dispenser according to any one of the precedent claims, wherein it is configured for preparing at least an espresso coffee and/or a ristretto coffee.
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5. A beverage dispenser according to any one of the precedent claims, wherein the sensor (8) is any presence sensor like a switch, a capacitive type sensor or an optical sensor.
6. A beverage dispenser according to any one of the precedent claims, wherein the receptacle holding part (3) is associated with the base (2) as a cantilever projection when the holder is in the deployed position.
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7. A beverage dispenser according to any one of the precedent claims, wherein the holding part (3) is configured and positioned for rotation between the deployed position and the second

position.

8. The device according to claim 7, wherein the holding part (3) is hinged about an axis of rotation (I) allowing the part to be moved upwards and out of the way of the beverage outlet.

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9. Process for operating a beverage dispenser according to any one of Claims 1 to 8 comprising the steps of :

- receiving an input from a consumer for selecting a beverage,
- identifying the size of the cup corresponding to the selected beverage,
- 10 - checking if the position of the holding part corresponds to the identified size of the cup,
- if not, requesting the consumer to move the holding part in the other position,
- dispensing the selected beverage when the position of the holding part corresponds to the identified size of the cup.

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