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(54) **ISOLATION TRENCHES FOR MEMORY DEVICES**

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This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

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H01L 21/76 (2006.01)

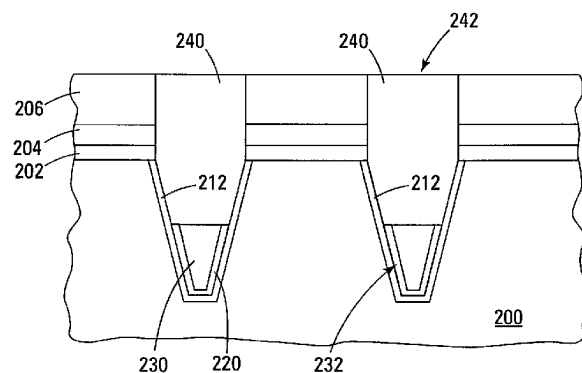
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **438/435**; 438/201; 438/257; 438/258; 438/260; 438/261; 438/262; 438/263; 438/264; 438/265; 438/266; 438/267; 438/314; 438/315; 438/316; 438/317; 438/319; 438/320; 257/E21.68

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 438/201, 438/435, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 438/264, 265, 266, 267, 314, 315, 316, 317, 438/318, 319, 320; 257/E21.68
See application file for complete search history.

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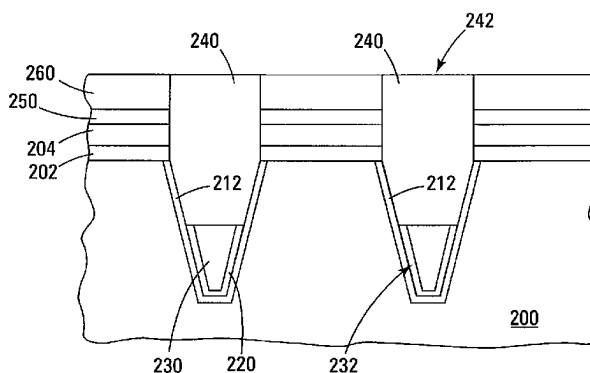
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(57)

ABSTRACT

A first dielectric plug is formed in a portion of a trench that extends into a substrate of a memory device so that an upper surface of the first dielectric plug is recessed below an upper surface of the substrate. The first dielectric plug has a layer of a first dielectric material and a layer of a second dielectric material formed on the layer of the first dielectric material. A second dielectric plug of a third dielectric material is formed on the upper surface of the first dielectric plug.

14 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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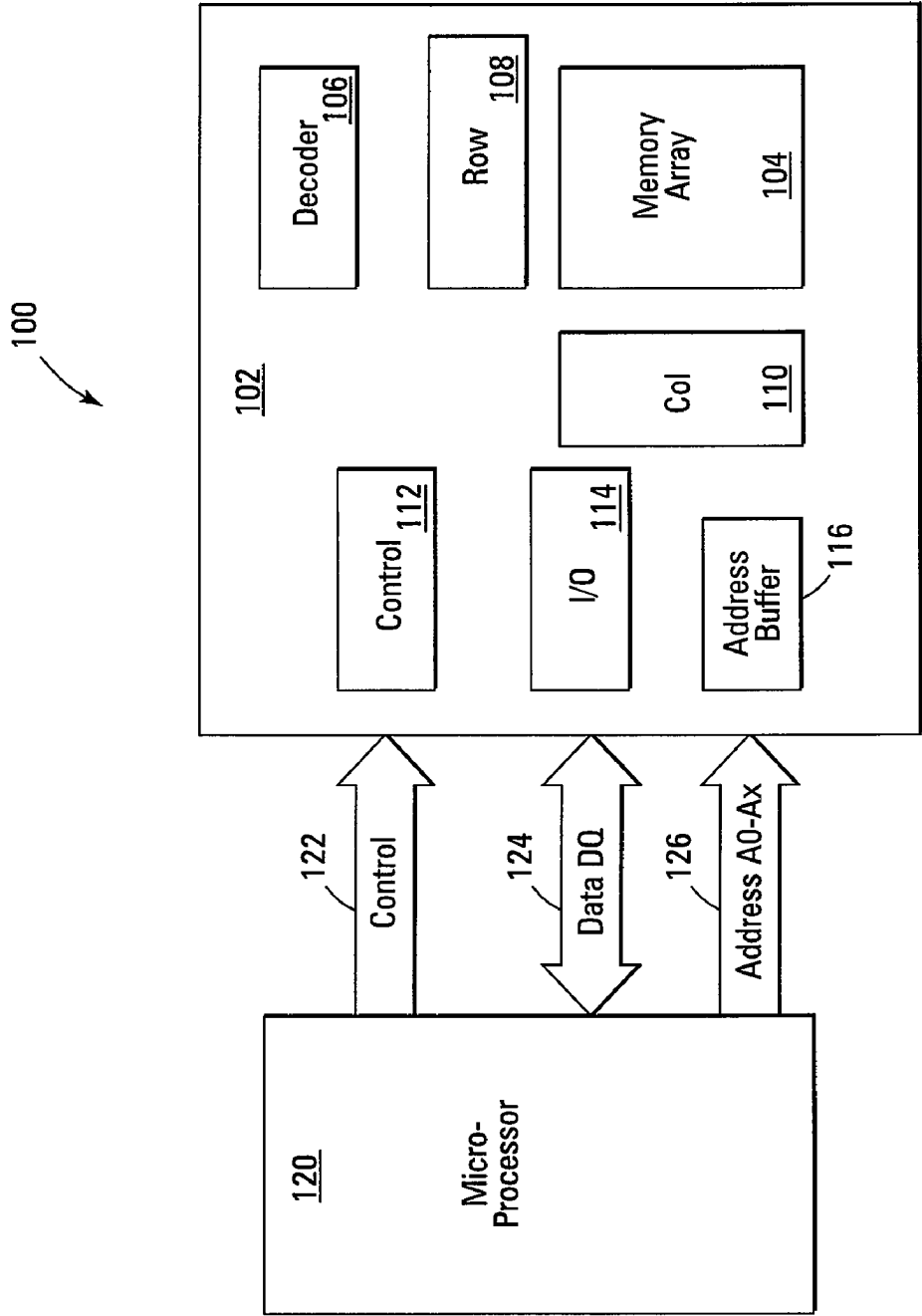


Fig. 1

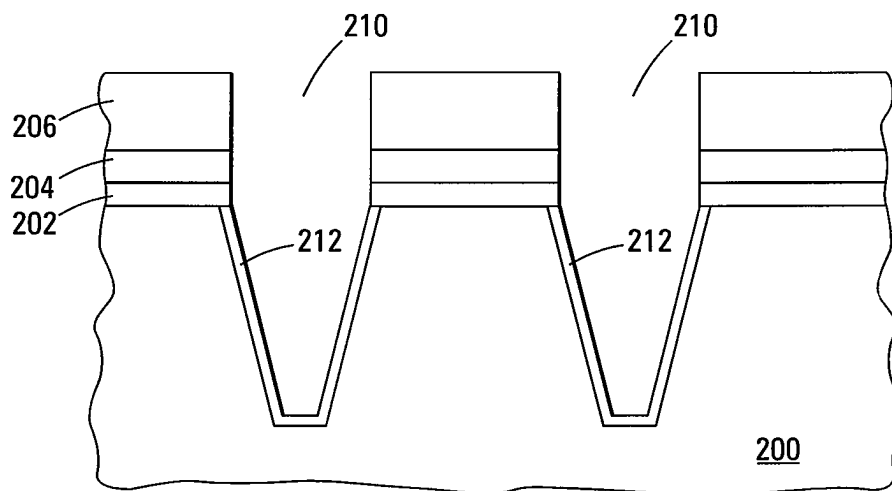


Fig. 2A

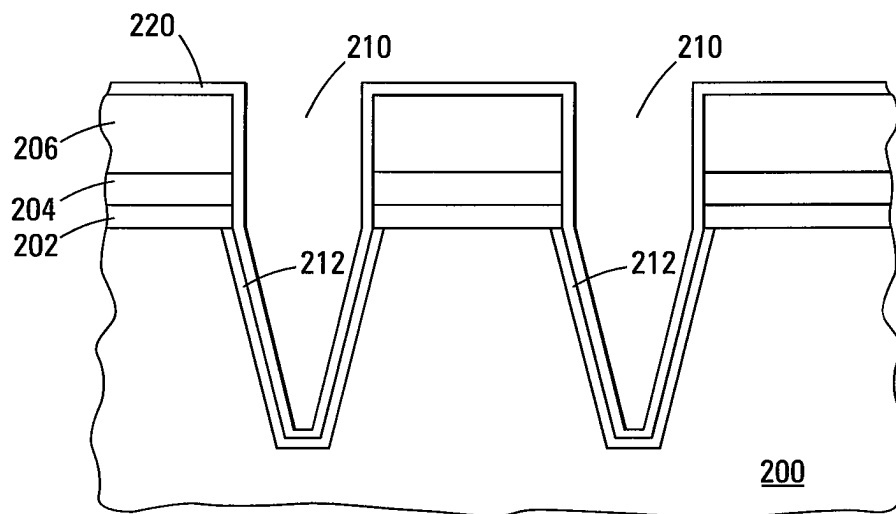


Fig. 2B

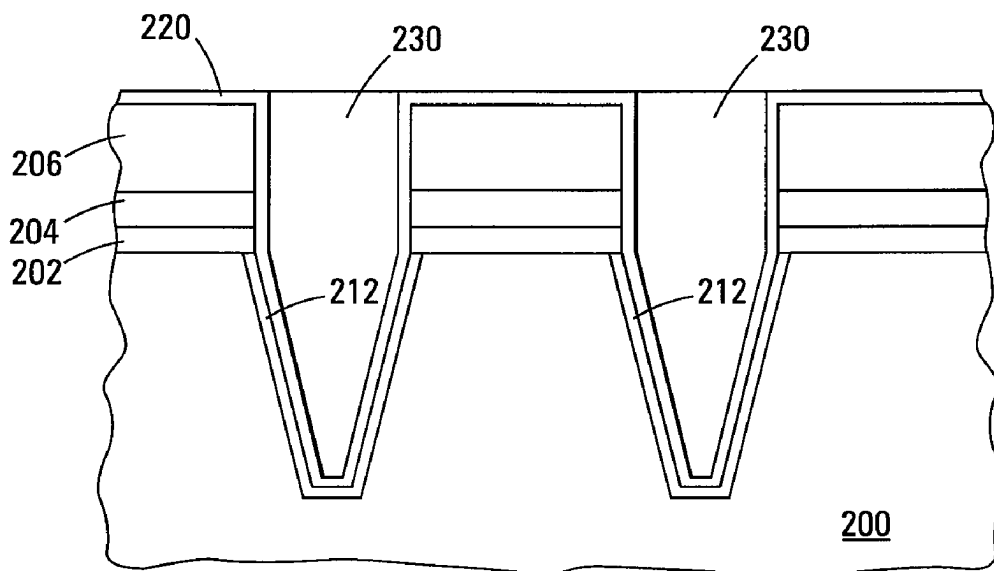


Fig. 2C

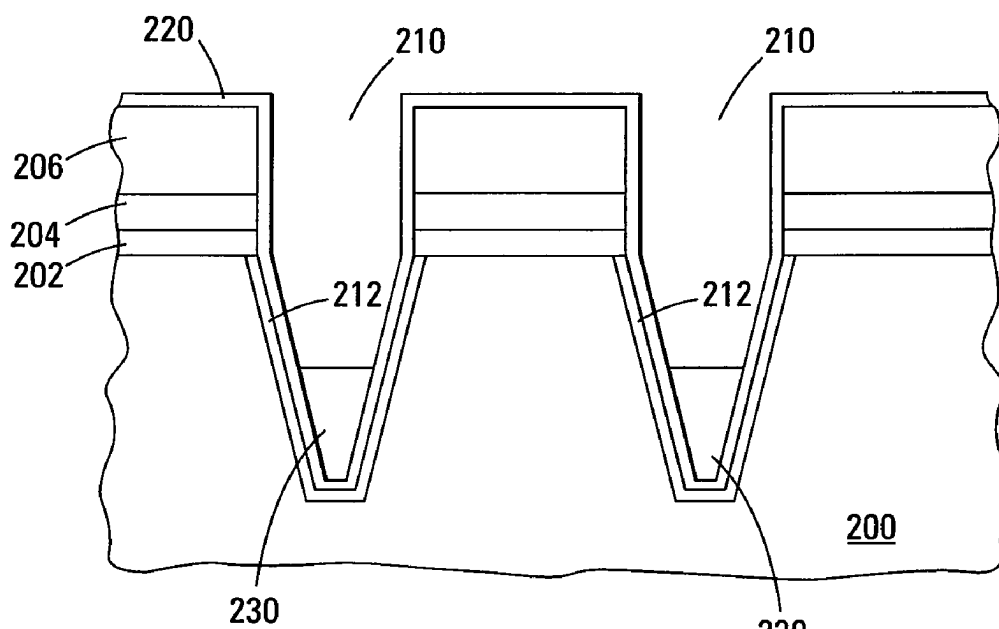


Fig. 2D

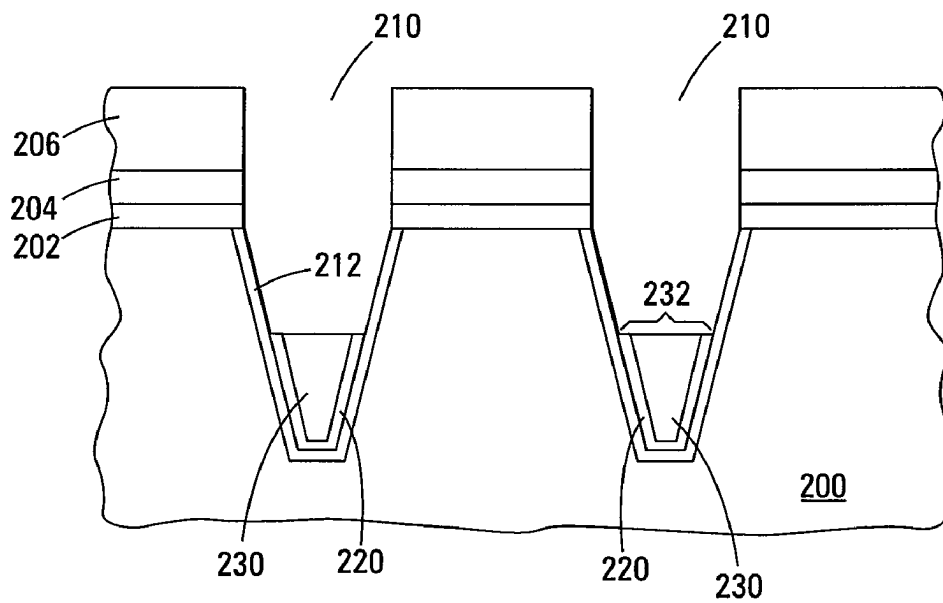


Fig. 2E

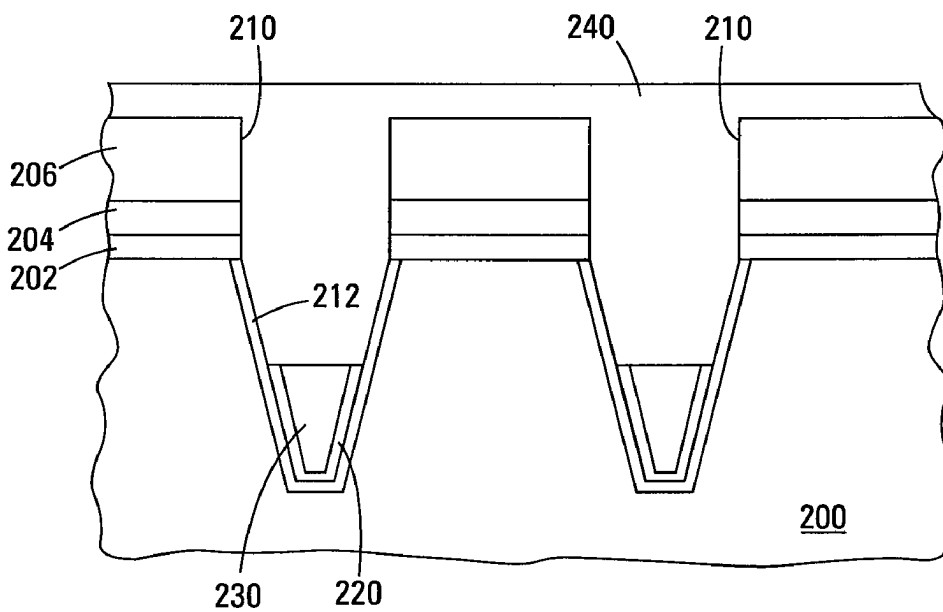


Fig. 2F

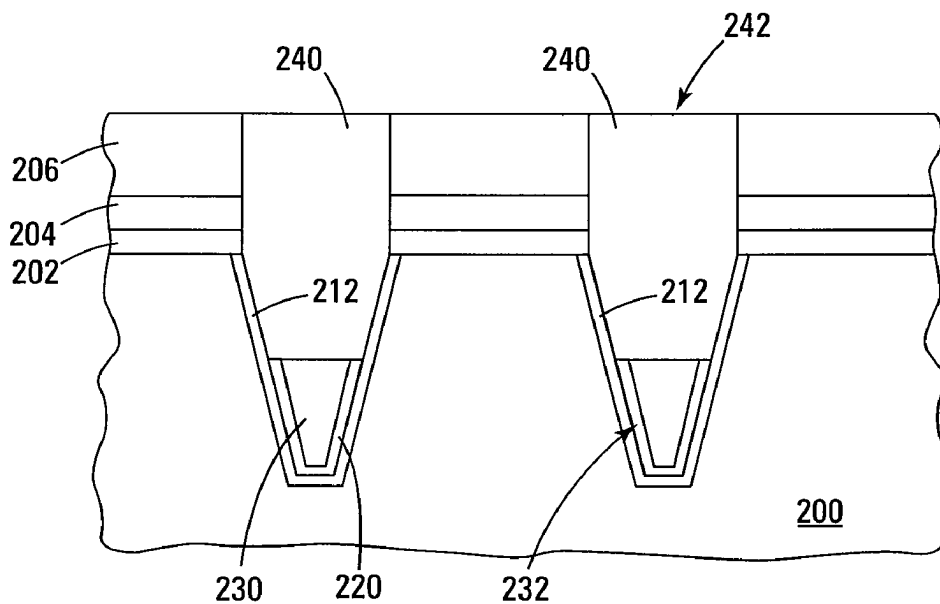


Fig. 2G

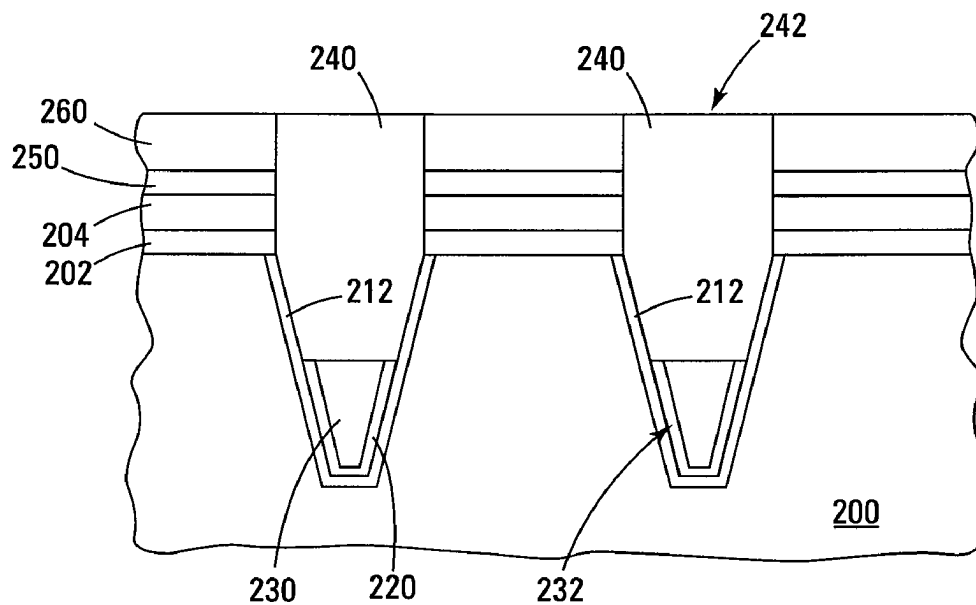


Fig. 2H

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ISOLATION TRENCHES FOR MEMORY DEVICES

RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/878,805, titled "ISOLATION TRENCHES FOR MEMORY DEVICES," filed Jun. 28, 2004 now U.S. Pat. No. 7,332,408 (allowed), which application is commonly assigned and incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to memory devices and in particular the present invention relates to isolation trenches for memory devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Memory devices are typically provided as internal storage areas in computers. The term memory identifies data storage that comes in the form of integrated circuit chips. In general, memory devices contain an array of memory cells for storing data, and row and column decoder circuits coupled to the array of memory cells for accessing the array of memory cells in response to an external address.

One type of memory is a non-volatile memory known as flash memory. A flash memory is a type of EEPROM (electrically-erasable programmable read-only memory) that can be erased and reprogrammed in blocks. Many modern personal computers (PCs) have their BIOS stored on a flash memory chip so that it can easily be updated if necessary. Such a BIOS is sometimes called a flash BIOS. Flash memory is also popular in wireless electronic devices because it enables the manufacturer to support new communication protocols as they become standardized and to provide the ability to remotely upgrade the device for enhanced features.

A typical flash memory comprises a memory array that includes a large number of memory cells arranged in row and column fashion. Each of the memory cells includes a floating-gate field-effect transistor capable of holding a charge. The cells are usually grouped into blocks. Each of the cells within a block can be electrically programmed on an individual basis by charging the floating gate. The charge can be removed from the floating gate by a block erase operation. The data in a cell is determined by the presence or absence of the charge on the floating gate.

Memory devices are typically formed on semiconductor substrates using semiconductor fabrication methods. The array of memory cells is disposed on the substrate. Isolation trenches formed in the substrate within the array and filled with a dielectric, e.g., shallow trench isolation (STI), provide voltage isolation on the memory array by acting to prevent extraneous current flow through the substrate between the memory cells. The isolation trenches are often filled using a physical deposition process, e.g., with high-density plasma (HDP) oxides. However, the spacing requirements for flash memory arrays often require the isolation trenches to have relatively narrow widths, resulting in large aspect (or trench-depth-to-trench-width) ratios. The large aspect ratios often cause voids to form within the dielectric while filling these trenches using physical sputtering processes.

Filling the trenches with spin-on-dielectrics (SODs) can reduce the formation of voids within the dielectric during filling. However, spin-on-dielectrics usually have to be cured (or annealed) after they are disposed within the trenches, e.g., using a steam-oxidation process that can result in unwanted

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oxidation of the substrate and of layers of the memory cells overlying the substrate. To protect against such oxidation, the trenches can be lined with a nitride liner prior to filling the trenches with a spin-on-dielectric. One problem with nitride liners is that they can store trapped charges that can adversely affect the reliability of the memory cells and thus the memory device.

For the reasons stated above, and for other reasons stated below which will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading and understanding the present specification, there is a need in the art for alternatives to existing trench-fill methods.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a simplified block diagram of a memory system, according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIGS. 2A-2H are cross-sectional views of a portion of a memory device during various stages of fabrication, according to another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description of the invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings that form a part hereof, and in which is shown, by way of illustration, specific embodiments in which the invention may be practiced. In the drawings, like numerals describe substantially similar components throughout the several views. These embodiments are described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention. Other embodiments may be utilized and structural, logical, and electrical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention. The term wafer or substrate used in the following description includes any base semiconductor structure. Both are to be understood as including silicon-on-sapphire (SOS) technology, silicon-on-insulator (SOI) technology, thin film transistor (TFT) technology, doped and undoped semiconductors, epitaxial layers of a silicon supported by a base semiconductor structure, as well as other semiconductor structures well known to one skilled in the art. Furthermore, when reference is made to a wafer or substrate in the following description, previous process steps may have been utilized to form regions/junctions in the base semiconductor structure, and terms wafer or substrate include the underlying layers containing such regions/junctions. The following detailed description is, therefore, not to be taken in a limiting sense, and the scope of the present invention is defined only by the appended claims and equivalents thereof.

FIG. 1 is a simplified block diagram of a memory system 100, according to an embodiment of the invention. Memory system 100 includes an integrated circuit memory device 102, such as a flash memory device, e.g., a NAND or NOR memory device, a DRAM, an SDRAM, etc., that includes an array of memory cells 104 and a region peripheral to memory array 104 that includes an address decoder 106, row access circuitry 108, column access circuitry 110, control circuitry 112, Input/Output (I/O) circuitry 114, and an address buffer 116. The row access circuitry 108 and column access circuitry 110 may include high-voltage circuitry, such as high-voltage pumps. Memory system 100 includes an external microprocessor 120, or memory controller, electrically connected to memory device 102 for memory accessing as part of an electronic system. The memory device 102 receives control signals from the processor 120 over a control link 122. The memory cells are used to store data that are accessed via a data (DQ) link 124. Address signals are received via an address

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link **126** that are decoded at address decoder **106** to access the memory array **104**. Address buffer circuit **116** latches the address signals. The memory cells are accessed in response to the control signals and the address signals. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that additional circuitry and control signals can be provided, and that the memory device of FIG. **1** has been simplified to help focus on the invention.

The memory array **104** includes memory cells arranged in row and column fashion. For one embodiment, the memory cells are flash memory cells that include a floating-gate field-effect transistor capable of holding a charge. The cells may be grouped into blocks. Each of the cells within a block can be electrically programmed on an individual basis by charging the floating gate. The charge can be removed from the floating gate by a block erase operation.

For one embodiment, memory array **104** is a NOR flash memory array. A control gate of each memory cell of a row of the array is connected to a word line, and a drain region of each memory cell of a column of the array is connected to a bit line. The memory array for NOR flash memory devices is accessed by row access circuitry, such as the row access circuitry **108** of memory device **102**, activating a row of floating gate memory cells by selecting the word line connected to their control gates. The row of selected memory cells then place their data values on the column bit lines by flowing a differing current, depending upon their programmed states, from a connected source line to the connected column bit lines.

For another embodiment, memory array **104** is a NAND flash memory array also arranged such that the control gate of each memory cell of a row of the array is connected to a word line. However, each memory cell is not directly connected to a column bit line by its drain region. Instead, the memory cells of the array are arranged together in strings (often termed NAND strings), e.g., of 32 each, with the memory cells connected together in series, source to drain, between a source line and a column bit line. The memory array for NAND flash memory devices is then accessed by row access circuitry, such as the row access circuitry **108** of memory device **102**, activating a row of memory cells by selecting the word line connected to a control gate of a memory cell. In addition, the word lines connected to the control gates of unselected memory cells of each string are driven to operate the unselected memory cells of each string as pass transistors, so that they pass current in a manner that is unrestricted by their stored data values. Current then flows from the source line to the column bit line through each series connected string, restricted only by the selected memory cells of each string. This places the current-encoded data values of the row of selected memory cells on the column bit lines.

FIGS. **2A-2H** are cross-sectional views of a portion of a memory device, such as a portion of the memory device **102**, during various stages of fabrication, according to another embodiment of the invention. FIG. **2A** depicts the portion of the memory device after several processing steps have occurred. Formation of the structure depicted in FIG. **2A** is well known and will not be detailed herein.

In general, the structure of FIG. **2A** is formed by forming a first dielectric layer **202** on a substrate **200**, e.g., of silicon or the like. For one embodiment, the first dielectric layer **202** is a gate dielectric layer (or tunnel dielectric layer), such as a tunnel oxide layer. A conductive layer **204**, e.g., a layer of doped polysilicon, is formed on the first dielectric layer **202**, and a hard mask layer **206** is formed on the conductive layer **204**. The mask layer **206** can be a second dielectric layer, such as a nitride layer, e.g., a silicon nitride (Si_3N_4) layer.

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Trenches **210** are subsequently formed through the mask layer **206**, the conductive layer **204**, and the first dielectric layer **202** and extend into substrate **200**. This can be accomplished by patterning the mask layer **206** and etching. A third dielectric layer **212** may then be formed on portions of the substrate **200** exposed by the trenches **210** so as to line the portion of trenches **210** formed in substrate **200**.

A fourth dielectric layer **220**, such as a nitride layer, e.g., a silicon nitride layer, is formed on the structure of FIG. **2A** in FIG. **2B**, such as by blanket deposition, and acts as an oxidation barrier layer for one embodiment. Specifically, the fourth dielectric layer **220** is formed on an upper surface of mask layer **206** and on portions of the mask layer **206**, the conductive layer **204**, and the first dielectric layer **202** through which trenches **210** pass. The fourth dielectric layer **220** is also formed on the third dielectric layer **212**. In this way, the fourth dielectric layer **220** lines trenches **210**. For one embodiment, the third dielectric layer **212** acts to provide adhesion between substrate **200** and the fourth dielectric layer **220** and acts as a stress release layer for relieving stresses that would otherwise form between substrate **200** and the fourth dielectric layer **220**. For another embodiment, the third dielectric layer **212** is a pad oxide layer and can be a thermal oxide layer. For another embodiment, the third dielectric layer **212** is, for example, of deposited silicon dioxide (SiO_2).

A fifth dielectric layer **230** is deposited within each of the trenches **210** on the fourth dielectric layer **220** in FIG. **2C** to either fill or partially fill trenches **210**. For one embodiment, the fifth dielectric layer **230** is spin-on dielectric (SOD) material **230**, such as a spin-on glass, hydrogen silsesquioxane (HSQ), hexamethyldisiloxane, octamethyltrisiloxane, etc. The fifth dielectric layer **230** is then cured (or annealed), e.g., using a steam-oxidation process, if necessary. For one embodiment, the fourth dielectric layer **220** acts to prevent oxidation of the substrate **200** and the conductive layer **204** during curing. In FIG. **2D**, a portion of the fifth dielectric layer **230** is removed, such as by etching in an etch-back process, so that an upper surface of the fifth dielectric layer **230** is recessed within the respective trenches **210**, e.g., below an upper surface of substrate **200**, exposing a portion of the fourth dielectric layer **220** lining each of trenches **210**.

A portion of the fourth dielectric layer **220** is selectively removed in FIG. **2E**, e.g., using a controlled wet etch, to a level of the upper surface of the fifth dielectric layer **230** such that a remaining portion of the fourth dielectric layer **220** is interposed between the fifth dielectric layer **230** and the third dielectric layer **212**. That is, the fourth dielectric layer **220** is removed from an upper surface of the mask layer **206**, and the exposed portion of the fourth dielectric layer **220** located within each of trenches **210** is removed. This exposes the upper surface of the mask layer **206**, the portions of the mask layer **206**, the conductive layer **204**, and the first dielectric layer **202** through which trenches **210** pass, and a portion of the third dielectric layer **212** lying between the upper surface of substrate **200** and the upper surface of the fifth dielectric layer. The remaining portions of the fourth dielectric layer **220** and the fifth dielectric layer **230** form a first dielectric plug **232** that fills a lower portion of trenches **210**, as shown in FIG. **2E**, having an upper surface that is recessed below the upper surface of the substrate **200**.

In FIG. **2F**, a sixth dielectric layer **240** is blanket deposited, e.g., using a physical sputtering process, over the structure of FIG. **2E** and fills an unfilled portion of each of trenches **210**. Specifically, the sixth dielectric layer **240** is deposited on the exposed upper surface of the mask layer **206**, on the exposed portions of the mask layer **206**, the conductive layer **204**, and the first dielectric layer **202** through which trenches **210** pass,

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on the portion of the third dielectric layer **212** lying between the upper surface of substrate **200** and the upper surface of the fifth dielectric layer, and on the first dielectric plug **232**. For one embodiment, the sixth dielectric layer **240** is of a high-density-plasma (HDP) dielectric material, such as a high-density-plasma (HDP) oxide. Note that the first dielectric plugs **232** reduce the remaining depths of trenches **210** and thus their aspect ratios for the deposition of the sixth dielectric layer **240**. The reduced aspect ratios of trenches **210** act to reduce the formation of voids when depositing the sixth dielectric layer **240** within the unfilled portions of trenches **210**.

A portion of the sixth dielectric layer **240** is removed from the structure of FIG. 2F in FIG. 2G, e.g., using chemical mechanical polishing (CMP). That is, the sixth dielectric layer **240** is removed so that the upper surface of the mask layer **206** is exposed and so that an upper surface of the sixth dielectric layer **240** within each of trenches **210** is substantially flush with the upper surface of the mask layer **206**. Note that the portion of the sixth dielectric layer **240** within each of the trenches **210** forms a second dielectric plug **242** that passes through the mask layer **206**, the conductive layer **204**, and the first dielectric layer **202**, extends into the substrate **200**, and terminates at the first conductive plug **232**. The third dielectric layer **212** is interposed between the portion of the second dielectric plug **242** and the substrate **200** and the first dielectric plug **232** and the substrate **200**.

Note that the fourth dielectric layer **220** is located in the lower portion of each of trenches **210** and thus away from the layers disposed on the upper surface of substrate **200** that can be used to form memory cells. This acts to reduce problems associated with the fourth dielectric layer **220** storing trapped charges, especially when the fourth dielectric layer **220** is of nitride, that can adversely affect the reliability of the memory cells and thus the memory device.

Mask **206** is subsequently removed to expose the conductive layer **204**. An intergate dielectric layer **250**, e.g., such as a layer of silicon oxide, a nitride, an oxynitride, an oxidenitride-oxide (ONO) layer, etc., is then formed on the exposed conductive layer **204**. A conductive layer **260**, such as a doped polysilicon layer, a metal layer, e.g., refractory metal layer, a metal containing layer, e.g., a metal silicide layer, or the like, is formed on the intergate dielectric layer **250**, as shown in FIG. 2H. The conductive layer **260** may include one or more conductive materials or conductive layers, a metal or metal containing layer disposed on a polysilicon layer, etc. For another embodiment, conductive layers **204** and **260** respectively form a floating gate and a control gate (or word line) of memory cells of a memory array, such as memory array **104** of FIG. 1. Source/drain regions are also formed in a portion of substrate **200** not shown in FIG. 2G as a part of the memory array. For one embodiment, conductive layer **204** is extended to improve the coupling of the floating gate. The trenches **210** filled with dielectric materials, as described above, act to prevent extraneous current flow through the substrate between the memory cells.

The components located in the region peripheral to memory array **104** of FIG. 1 are also formed on the substrate **200**, and the trenches **210** filled with dielectric materials, as described above, may be formed between the region peripheral to memory array **104** and memory array **104** and act to

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prevent extraneous current flow through the substrate between components of the peripheral region and memory array **104**.

CONCLUSION

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any arrangement that is calculated to achieve the same purpose may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown. Many adaptations of the invention will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, this application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the invention. It is manifestly intended that this invention be limited only by the following claims and equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of forming a portion of a memory device, comprising:

forming a dielectric liner overlying and in direct contact with a portion of a trench that extends into a substrate below an upper surface of the substrate;

forming a first dielectric plug in the portion of a trench that extends into the substrate below the upper surface of the substrate so that an upper surface of the first dielectric plug is recessed below the upper surface of the substrate, the first dielectric plug comprising a layer of a first dielectric material overlying and in direct contact with the dielectric liner and a layer of a second dielectric material formed on the layer of the first dielectric material so that the upper surface of the first dielectric plug comprises an upper surface of the layer of the second dielectric material and a portion of the layer of the first dielectric material coplanar with the upper surface of the layer of the second dielectric material; and

forming a second dielectric plug of a third dielectric material on the upper surface of the first dielectric plug so that the second dielectric plug extends from the upper surface of the first dielectric plug through another portion of the trench that extends above the upper surface of the substrate and that passes through a layer of a fourth dielectric material overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a conductive layer overlying the layer of fourth dielectric material, wherein the second dielectric plug contacts a portion of the layer of fourth dielectric material and a portion of the conductive layer.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein forming the second dielectric plug comprises forming a portion of the second dielectric plug on the dielectric liner.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the second dielectric plug is a high-density-plasma oxide.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein forming the first dielectric plug further comprises curing the layer of second dielectric material.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein curing the layer of second dielectric material comprises an oxidation process.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprises, after forming the second dielectric plug:

forming a layer of fifth dielectric material overlying the conductive layer; and

forming another conductive layer overlying the layer of fifth dielectric material.

7. A method of forming a portion of a memory device, comprising:

forming a first dielectric plug in a portion of a trench that extends into a substrate below an upper surface of the substrate so that an upper surface of the first dielectric

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plug is recessed below the upper surface of the substrate, the first dielectric plug comprising a layer of a first dielectric material and a layer of a second dielectric material formed on the layer of the first dielectric material; and

forming a second dielectric plug of a third dielectric material on the upper surface of the first dielectric plug so that the second dielectric plug extends from the upper surface of the first dielectric plug through another portion of the trench that extends above the upper surface of the substrate and that passes through a layer of a fourth dielectric material overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a first conductive layer overlying the layer of fourth dielectric material, wherein the second dielectric plug contacts a portion of the layer of fourth dielectric material and a portion of the conductive layer; and after forming the second dielectric plug:

forming a layer of fifth dielectric material overlying the conductive layer so that an upper surface of the fifth dielectric material is located at a depth below an upper surface of the second dielectric plug; and

forming a second conductive layer overlying the layer of fifth dielectric material.

8. A method of forming a portion of a memory device, comprising:

lining a first portion of a trench that extends into a substrate below an upper surface of the substrate with a first dielectric layer by forming the first dielectric layer on the substrate;

forming a second dielectric layer in the first portion of the trench on the first dielectric layer and in a second portion of the trench that extends above the upper surface of the substrate and that passes through a tunnel dielectric layer overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a floating gate layer overlying the tunnel dielectric layer;

forming a fourth dielectric layer on the second dielectric layer so that the fourth dielectric layer fills a portion of the first portion trench and so that an upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer is located below the upper surface of the substrate;

removing a portion of the second dielectric layer to a level of the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer to expose a portion of the first dielectric layer located between the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer and the upper surface of the substrate; and

forming a fifth dielectric layer on the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer and on the exposed portion of the first dielectric layer so as to fill a remaining portion of the first portion of the trench and to fill the second portion of the trench so that a portion of the fifth dielectric layer filling the second portion of the trench contacts a portion of the tunnel dielectric layer overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a portion of the floating gate layer overlying the tunnel dielectric layer;

after forming the fifth dielectric layer:

forming an intergate dielectric layer overlying the floating gate layer so that an upper surface of the intergate dielectric layer is located at a depth below an upper surface of the fifth dielectric layer; and

forming a control gate overlying the intergate dielectric layer.

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9. A method of forming a portion of a memory device, comprising:

lining a first portion of a trench that extends into a substrate below an upper surface of the substrate with a first dielectric layer by forming the first dielectric layer overlying and in direct contact with the substrate;

forming a second dielectric layer in the first portion of the trench overlying and in direct contact with the first dielectric layer and in a second portion of the trench that extends above the upper surface of the substrate and that passes through a third dielectric layer overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a conductive layer overlying the third dielectric layer;

forming a fourth dielectric layer on the second dielectric layer so that the fourth dielectric layer fills a portion of the first portion trench and so that an upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer is located below the upper surface of the substrate;

removing a portion of the second dielectric layer to a level of the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer to expose a portion of the first dielectric layer located between the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer and the upper surface of the substrate, and such that a portion of the second dielectric layer is coplanar with the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer; and

forming a fifth dielectric layer on the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer and on the exposed portion of the first dielectric layer so as to fill a remaining portion of the first portion of the trench and to fill the second portion of the trench so that a portion of the fifth dielectric layer filling the second portion of the trench contacts a portion of the third dielectric layer overlying the upper surface of the substrate and a portion of the conductive layer overlying the third dielectric layer.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein forming the fourth dielectric layer comprises:

filling the trench with the fourth dielectric layer to a level above the upper surface of the substrate; and

recessing the fourth dielectric layer so that the upper surface of the fourth dielectric layer is located below the upper surface of the substrate.

11. The method on claim 10 further comprises curing the fourth dielectric layer before recessing the fourth dielectric layer.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein forming the second dielectric layer comprises forming a portion of the second dielectric layer overlying an upper surface of the conductive layer.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein forming the portion of the second dielectric layer overlying the upper surface of the conductive layer comprises forming the second dielectric layer on an upper surface of a hard mask layer formed overlying the upper surface of the conductive layer.

14. The method of claim 9, wherein the third dielectric layer is a tunnel dielectric layer and the conductive layer is a floating gate layer, and further comprising after forming the fifth dielectric layer:

forming an intergate dielectric layer overlying the floating gate layer; and

forming a control gate overlying the intergate dielectric layer.

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UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

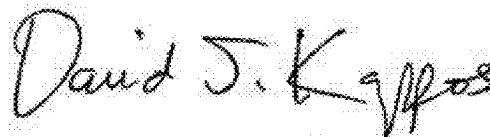
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INVENTOR(S) : Michael Violette

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It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

In column 8, line 42, in Claim 11, delete "on" and insert -- of --, therefor.

Signed and Sealed this
Twenty-sixth Day of April, 2011

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Kappos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and a stylized "K".

David J. Kappos
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office