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Multiple back side/buried power rail (BPR) cell including field-effect transistors with air void between two adjacent BPR cells

Abstract

A semiconductor device includes a semiconductor substrate. The semiconductor device includes a first fin protruding from the semiconductor substrate and extending along a first direction. The semiconductor device includes a second fin protruding from the semiconductor substrate and extending along the first direction. A first epitaxial source/drain region coupled to the first fin and a second epitaxial source/drain region coupled to the second fin are laterally spaced apart from each other by an air void.

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Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION (1) This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/149,128, filed Jan. 2, 2023, which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/199,539, filed Mar. 12, 2021, the entire contents of each of which are incorporated herein by reference for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

- (1) The present disclosure generally relates to semiconductor devices, and particularly to methods of making a non-planar transistor device.
 - (2) The semiconductor industry has experienced rapid growth due to continuous improvements in the integration density of a variety of electronic components (e.g., transistors, diodes, resistors, capacitors, etc.). For the most part, this improvement in integration density has come from repeated reductions in minimum feature size, which allows more components to be integrated into a given area.
 - (3) Fin Field-Effect Transistor (FinFET) devices are becoming commonly used in integrated circuits. FinFET devices have a three-dimensional structure that comprises one or more fins protruding from a substrate. A gate structure, configured to control the flow of charge carriers within a conductive channel of the FinFET device, wraps around the one or more fins. For example, in a tri-gate FinFET device, the gate structure wraps around three sides of each of the one or more fins, thereby forming conductive channels on three sides of each of the one or more fins.
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Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- (1) Aspects of the present disclosure are best understood from the following detailed description when read with the accompanying figures. It is noted that, in accordance with the standard practice in the industry, various features are not drawn to scale. In fact, the dimensions of the various features may be arbitrarily increased or reduced for clarity of discussion.
- (2) FIG. 1 illustrates a perspective view of a Fin Field-Effect Transistor (FinFET) device, in accordance with some embodiments.
- (3) FIG. 2 illustrates an example layout design including two abutted cells, in accordance with some embodiments.
- (4) FIG. 3 illustrates a flow chart of an example method for making a non-planar transistor device, in accordance with some embodiments.
- (5) FIGS. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11A, 11B, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 14A, 14B, 15A, 15B, 16A, 16B, 17, and 18 illustrate cross-sectional views of an example FinFET device (or a portion of the example FinFET device) during various fabrication stages, made by the method of FIG. 3, in accordance with some embodiments.
- (6) FIG. 19 illustrates a flow chart of another example method for making a non-planar transistor device, in accordance with some embodiments.
- (7) FIG. 20 illustrates a flow chart of yet another example method for making a non-planar transistor device, in accordance with some embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (8) The following disclosure provides many different embodiments, or examples, for implementing different features of the provided subject matter. Specific examples of components and arrangements are described below to simplify the present disclosure. These are, of course, merely examples and are not intended to be limiting. For example, the formation of a first feature over or on a second feature in the description that follows may include embodiments in which the first and second features are formed in direct contact, and may also include embodiments in which additional features may be formed between the first and second features, such that the first and second features may not be in direct contact. In addition, the present disclosure may repeat reference numerals and/or letters in the various examples. This repetition is for the purpose of simplicity and clarity and does not in itself dictate a relationship between the various embodiments and/or configurations discussed.

- (9) Further, spatially relative terms, such as “beneath,” “below,” “lower,” “above,” “upper” and the

like, may be used herein for ease of description to describe one element or feature's relationship to another element(s) or feature(s) as illustrated in the figures. The spatially relative terms are intended to encompass different orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the orientation depicted in the figures. The apparatus may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations) and the spatially relative descriptors used herein may likewise be interpreted accordingly.

(10) The terms “about” and “substantially” can indicate a value of a given quantity that varies within 5% of the value (e.g., $\pm 1\%$, $\pm 2\%$, $\pm 3\%$, $\pm 4\%$, $\pm 5\%$ of the value).

(11) The semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) industry has experienced exponential growth. In semiconductor IC design, standard cells methodologies are commonly used for the design of semiconductor devices on a chip. Standard cell methodologies use standard cells as abstract representations of certain functions to integrate millions, or billions, devices on a single chip. As ICs continue to scale down, more and more devices are integrated into the single chip. This scaling down process generally provides benefits by increasing production efficiency and lowering associated costs.

(12) With the trend of scaling down the ICs, in general, the area of a standard cell is scaled down accordingly. The area of the standard cell can be scaled down by reducing a cell width of the cell and/or a cell height of the cell. The cell width is typically proportional to a number of gate structures or features (e.g., typically known as “POLY”), extending along a vertical direction, that the cell can contain; and the cell height is typically proportional to a number of signal tracks, extending along a horizontal direction, that the cell can contain.

(13) To effectively reduce the total area of the cell, a trade-off between the cell width and cell height typically exists. For example, while reducing the cell height (e.g., by decreasing the number of signal tracks), the cell width (the number of gate structures) may be subjected to being increased. In this regard, the concept of moving some of interconnect structures, which are typically disposed on the front side of a substrate (or wafer), to its back side has been proposed. For example, the interconnect structures configured to provide power signals (typically known as VDD (high voltage) power rail and VSS (ground) power rail) can be formed on the back side of the substrate. In this way, the cell height of a corresponding cell can be reduced, while not being subjected to the increase of cell width. The cell containing such “back side” interconnect structures is generally referred to as a back side/buried power rail (BPR) cell. Although the area of each cell can be effectively reduced, it is noted that when an IC includes multiple BPR cells abutted to each other, some issues may arise. For example, cross-coupling (or sometimes referred to as cross-talk) of the respective conductive features (e.g., source/drain regions, active gate structures, etc.) of adjacent BPR cells becomes noticeable, which can induce noise. In turn, overall performance of the IC can be negatively impacted.

(14) Embodiments of the present disclosure are discussed in the context of forming an integrated circuit including a number of non-planar transistors, and in particular, in the context of forming a number of FinFET devices configured as BPR cells. For example, multiple BPR cells may be used to collectively form an integrated circuit. Each of the BPR cells can include one or more FinFET devices. The BPR cells may abut to each other. By replacing a dielectric typically disposed between the conductive features of two adjacent BPR cells with an air gap or air void, cross-coupling between the conductive features can be significantly reduced. This is because the cross-coupling (e.g., quantized as a capacitance) is positively proportional to the dielectric constant of a material disposed between the conductive features and the air has a much lower dielectric constant (e.g., 1) than the dielectric (e.g., 3.9 or higher). As such, performance of the BPR cells can be improved. For example, speed of the BPR cells can be increased by about 20%~50%. In some embodiments, the air void can be formed by cutting (or otherwise removing) a dummy fin disposed between the conductive features to form a trench with a relatively low aspect ratio (width to height). Next, the trench can be sealed (or otherwise capped) by a dielectric protection layer. Given

the low aspect ratio, a portion of the air void, which is disposed between the conductive features, remains after depositing the dielectric protection layer, thereby minimizing the cross-coupling between the conductive features.

(15) FIG. 1 illustrates a perspective view of an example FinFET device **100**, in accordance with various embodiments. The FinFET device **100** includes a substrate **102** and a fin **104** protruding above the substrate **102**. Isolation regions **106** are formed on opposing sides of the fin **104**, with the fin **104** protruding above the isolation regions **106**. A gate dielectric **108** is along sidewalls and over a top surface of the fin **104**, and a gate **110** is over the gate dielectric **108**. Source region **112S** and drain region **112D** are in (or extended from) the fin **104** and on opposing sides of the gate dielectric **108** and the gate **110**. FIG. 1 is provided as a reference to illustrate a number of cross-sections in subsequent figures. For example, cross-section B-B extends along a longitudinal axis of the gate **110** of the FinFET device **100**. Cross-section A-A is perpendicular to cross-section B-B and is along a longitudinal axis of the fin **104** and in a direction of, for example, a current flow between the source/drain regions **112S/112D**. Cross-section C-C is parallel to cross-section B-B and is across the source/drain region **112S/112D**. Subsequent figures refer to these reference cross-sections for clarity.

(16) Referring to FIG. 2, an example layout design **200** of an integrated circuit is depicted, in accordance with some embodiments. The layout design **200** includes two (standard) cells, **210A** and **210B**, abutted to each other along the Y direction. The cells **210A** and **210B** may sometimes be referred to as a top cell and a bottom cell, respectively. Each of the cells **210A-B** may function as a respective circuit of the integrated circuit. Each of the circuits may include one or more transistors operatively coupled to one another. For example, each of the cells **210A** and **210B** can be used to fabricate one or more transistors that collectively perform a function of the respective circuit. It is appreciated that the layout design **200** is simplified to include only the patterns used to form major features of each of the transistors (e.g., gate structures, source/drain regions). Thus, the layout design **200** can include other patterns to form various features (e.g., interconnection structures) of the respective circuits while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(17) The layout design **200** includes patterns **220**, **222**, **224**, and **226**. The patterns **220-226** may extend along the X direction, each of which is configured to form an active region over a substrate (hereinafter “active regions **220-226**”). Such an active region may form a fin-shaped region of one or more three-dimensional field-effect-transistors (e.g., FinFETs), a sheet-shaped region of one or more gate-all-around (GAA) transistors (e.g., nanosheet transistors), a wire-shaped region of one or more GAA transistors (e.g., nanowire transistors), or an oxide-definition (OD) region of one or more planar metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect-transistors (MOSFETs). The active region may serve as a source feature or drain feature (or region) of the respective transistor(s). In an example where the layout design **200** is used to fabricate one or more FinFETs (e.g., the FinFET device **100** shown in FIG. 1), each of the active regions **220-226** forms an active fin (e.g., **104**) protruding from a substrate (e.g., **102**) and extending along the X direction (e.g., cross-section A-A). It is noted that the Y direction in FIG. 2 is parallel with the cross-sections B-B and C-C shown in FIG. 1; and the X direction in FIG. 2 is parallel with the cross-section A-A shown in FIG. 1. The term “active fin” is referred to as a fin that will be adopted as an active channel to electrically conduct current in a finished semiconductor device, when appropriately configured and powered.

(18) The layout design **200** includes patterns **230**, **232**, and **234**. The patterns **230-234** may also extend along the X direction, each of which is configured to form a dummy region over the same substrate (hereinafter “dummy regions **230-234**”). The dummy regions **230-234** may be disposed alternately between the active regions **220-226**, as shown in FIG. 2. Continuing with the above example where the layout design **200** is used to fabricate one or more FinFETs (e.g., the FinFET device **100** shown in FIG. 1), each of the dummy regions **230-234** can be configured as a respective dummy fin, which is formed of a dielectric material. The term “dummy fin” is referred to as a fin that will not be adopted as an active channel (sometimes referred to as a dummy channel) to

electrically conduct current in a finished semiconductor device. In the example of FIG. 2, between adjacent ones of the active regions **220-226**, one of the dummy regions **230-234** may be disposed. (19) The layout design **200** includes patterns **240, 242, 244, and 246**. The patterns **240-246** may extend along the Y direction, that are configured to form gate structures (hereinafter “gate structures **240-246**”). In an embodiment, the gate structures **240-246** may be initially formed as dummy (e.g., polysilicon) gate structures straddling respective portions of the active regions **220-226**, and be later replaced by active (e.g., metal) gate structures. The gate structure **240** may be disposed along or over a first boundary of the layout design **200** (or the cell(s)), and the gate structure **246** may be disposed along or over a second boundary of the layout design **200** (or the cell(s)). The gate structures **240** and **246** may not provide an electrical or conductive path, and may prevent or at least reduce/minimize current leakage across components between which the gate structures **240** and **246** are located. The gate structures **240** and **246** can include polysilicon lines or metal lines, which are sometimes referred to as poly on OD edge (PODEs). Such PODEs and the underlying active/dummy regions may be replaced with a dielectric material so as to electrically isolate the cells **210A-B** from cells laterally (e.g., along the X direction) abutted to them. Each of the remaining gate structures **242** and **244**, formed of one or more conductive materials (e.g., polysilicon(s), metal(s)), can overlay (e.g., straddle) respective portions of the active regions **220-226** to define one or more transistors. Continuing with the above example where the layout design **200** is used to fabricate one or more FinFETs (e.g., the FinFET device **100** shown in FIG. 1), each of the gate structures **242** and **244** may correspond to a metal gate (e.g., **110**) straddling (or otherwise overlaying) portions of the active regions **220-226**, with the non-overlapped portions of the active regions such as, **222-1, 222-2, 222-3, 224-1, 224-2, and 224-3** serving as respective source/drain regions (e.g., **112S, 112D**) of the one or more FinFETs.

(20) The active regions **220** and **222**, including the dummy region **230** disposed therebetween, may belong to the top cell **210A**; and the active regions **224** and **226**, including the dummy region **234** disposed therebetween, may belong to the bottom cell **210B**. The gate structures **240-246** extending across the top and bottom cells, **210A-B**, may be cut during fabrication of the integrated circuit. As such, each of the gate structures **240-246** includes at least two portions that belong to the top cell **210A** and bottom cell **210B**, respectively (as indicated by dotted lines in FIG. 2).

(21) For example, the gate structure **240** includes portion **240A** belonging to the top cell **210A**, and portion **240B** belonging to the bottom cell **210B**; the gate structure **242** includes portion **242A** belonging to the top cell **210A**, and portion **242B** belonging to the bottom cell **210B**; the gate structure **244** includes portion **244A** belonging to the top cell **210A**, and portion **244B** belonging to the bottom cell **210B**; and the gate structure **246** includes portion **246A** belonging to the top cell **210A**, and portion **246B** belonging to the bottom cell **210B**.

(22) After the gate structures **240-246** are cut, a trench disposed between the cells **210A-B**, (along the Y direction) and across the gate structures **240-246** (along the X direction) can be formed. The trench can expose the dummy region **232**, disposed between the active region **222** of the top cell **210A** and the active region **224** of the bottom cell **210B**. Upon being exposed, the dummy region **232** can be removed to form a trench with a relatively low aspect ratio (a ratio of width extending along the Y direction to height extending along the Z direction). A top portion of the trench is then capped by a dielectric protection layer, which results in an air void formed between respective source/drain regions of the cells **210A** and **210B** such as, for example, between source/drain regions **222-1** and **224-1**, between source/drain regions **222-2** and **224-2**, and between source/drain regions **222-3** and **224-3**. Consequently, the cross-coupling between the respective source/drain regions of the cells **210A-B** can be significantly reduced. Details of formation of the air void will be discussed below.

(23) In accordance with various embodiments, the air void may inherit dimensions of the trench between the cells **210A-B** and across the gate structures **240-246**. For example, the air void may have a width, W, along the Y direction and a length, L, along the X direction. In some

embodiments, W can range from one times a width of the gate structures **240-246** along the X direction (which is sometimes referred to as a “critical dimension (CD)” of the gate structures **240-246**) to about 3 times the CD. In some embodiments, L can range from one times a distance of adjacent gate structures **240-246** along the X direction (which is sometimes referred to as a “pitch” of the gate structures **240-246**) to about 50 times the pitch.

(24) In accordance with various embodiments, each of the cells **210A** and **210B** may be configured as a back side power rail (BPR) cell, in which the power rails are formed on a side of the substrate opposite to a side where the active regions **220-226**, dummy regions **230-234**, and the gate structures **240-246** are formed. Thus, the patterns used to form the back side power rails are omitted in the layout design **200** of FIG. 2, for purposes of clarity of illustration.

(25) FIG. 3 illustrates a flowchart of a method **300** to form a non-planar transistor device, according to one or more embodiments of the present disclosure. For example, at least some of the operations (or steps) of the method **300** can be used to form a FinFET device (e.g., FinFET device **100**), a nanosheet transistor device, a nanowire transistor device, a vertical transistor device, or the like. It is noted that the method **300** is merely an example, and is not intended to limit the present disclosure. Accordingly, it is understood that additional operations may be provided before, during, and after the method **300** of FIG. 3, and that some other operations may only be briefly described herein. In some embodiments, operations of the method **300** may be associated with cross-sectional views of an example FinFET device at various fabrication stages as shown in FIGS. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11A, 11B, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 14A, 14B, 15A, 15B, 16A, 16B, 17, and 18, respectively, which will be discussed in further detail below.

(26) In brief overview, the method **300** starts with operation **302** of providing a substrate. The method **300** continues to operation **304** of forming active fins. The method **300** continues to operation **306** of forming dummy fins. The method **300** continues to operation **308** of forming isolation regions. The method **300** continues to operation **310** of forming dummy gate structures over the fins. The dummy gate structures each include a dummy gate dielectric and a dummy gate disposed above the dummy gate dielectric. The method **300** continues to operation **312** of forming gate spacers. The gate spacer is extended along sidewalls of each of the dummy gate structures. The method **300** continues to operation **314** of growing source/drain regions. The method **300** continues to operation **316** of forming an interlayer dielectric (ILD). The method **300** continues to operation **318** of forming active gate structures. The method **300** continues to operation **320** of cutting the active gate structures. The method **300** continues to operation **322** of cutting at least one of the dummy fins. The method **300** continues to operation **324** of depositing a dielectric protection layer to form an air void. The method **300** continues to operation **326** of forming front side interconnect structures. The method **300** continues to operation **328** of forming back side interconnect structures.

(27) As mentioned above, FIGS. 4-18 each illustrate, in a cross-sectional view, a portion of a FinFET device **400** at various fabrication stages of the method **300** of FIG. 3. The FinFET device **400** is substantially similar to the FinFET device **100** shown in FIG. 1, but with multiple gate structures and multiple fins. Further, the portion of the FinFET device **400** shown in FIGS. 4-18 may be formed based on a portion of the layout design **200** of FIG. 2, e.g., portion **201** enclosed by dotted lines.

(28) For example, FIGS. 4-9, 13B, 14A, 15A, and 16A illustrate cross-sectional views of the FinFET device **400** along cross-section B-B (as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2); FIGS. 10, 11A, 12A, and 13A illustrate cross-sectional views of the FinFET device **400** along cross-section A-A (as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2); and FIGS. 11B, 12B, 14B, 15B, 16B, 17, and 18 illustrate cross-sectional views of the FinFET device **400** along cross-section C-C (as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2). Although FIGS. 4-18 illustrate the FinFET device **400**, it is understood the FinFET device **400** may include a number of other devices such as inductors, fuses, capacitors, coils, etc., which are not shown in FIGS. 4-18, for purposes of clarity of illustration.

(29) Corresponding to operation **302** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **4** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including a semiconductor substrate **402** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **4** is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(30) The substrate **402** may be a semiconductor substrate, such as a bulk semiconductor, a semiconductor-on-insulator (SOI) substrate, or the like, which may be doped (e.g., with a p-type or an n-type dopant) or undoped. The substrate **402** may be a wafer, such as a silicon wafer. Generally, an SOI substrate includes a layer of a semiconductor material formed on an insulator layer. The insulator layer may be, for example, a buried oxide (BOX) layer, a silicon oxide layer, or the like. The insulator layer is provided on a substrate, typically a silicon or glass substrate. Other substrates, such as a multi-layered or gradient substrate may also be used. In some embodiments, the semiconductor material of the substrate **402** may include silicon; germanium; a compound semiconductor including silicon carbide, gallium arsenic, gallium phosphide, indium phosphide, indium arsenide, and/or indium antimonide; an alloy semiconductor including SiGe, GaAsP, AlInAs, AlGaAs, GaInAs, GaInP, and/or GaInAsP; or combinations thereof.

(31) In some embodiments, the substrate **402** can include areas **402A** and **402B**, as shown in FIG. **4**. The area **402A** can be configured to form one or more FinFETs that collectively function as a first circuit; and the area **402B** can be configured to form one or more FinFETs that collectively function as a second circuit. The first circuit may be represented by a first standard cell, e.g., the cell **210A** of FIG. **2**; and the second circuit may be represented by a second standard cell, e.g., the cell **210B** of FIG. **2**. The cells **210A** and **210B** can be abutted to each other along the Y direction, as shown in FIG. **2**. It is understood that the substrate **402** can include any number of areas, each of which is configured to form one or more FinFETs that can be represented by a respective standard cell. Such standard cells can be abutted to one another.

(32) Corresponding to operation **304** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **5** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including semiconductor fins **504A** and **504B** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **5** is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(33) The semiconductor fin **504A** is formed in the area **402A**, and the semiconductor fins **504B** is formed in the area **402B**. In some embodiments, the semiconductor fins **504A** and **504B** may be formed according to the active regions **222** and **224** of the layout design **200** shown in FIG. **2**, respectively. In some embodiments, the semiconductor fins **504A-B** may be each configured as an active fin, which will be adopted as an active (e.g., electrically functional) fin or channel in a completed FinFET. For example, the semiconductor fin **504A** may be configured as the active channel of a transistor belonging to the cell **210A** (FIG. **2**); and the semiconductor fin **504B** may be configured as the active channel of a transistor belonging to the cell **210B** (FIG. **2**).

(34) The semiconductor fins **504A-B** are formed by patterning the substrate **402** using, for example, photolithography and etching techniques. For example, a mask layer, such as a pad oxide layer **506** and an overlying pad nitride layer **508**, is formed over the substrate **402**. The pad oxide layer **506** may be a thin film comprising silicon oxide formed, for example, using a thermal oxidation process. The pad oxide layer **506** may act as an adhesion layer between the substrate **402** and the overlying pad nitride layer **508**. In some embodiments, the pad nitride layer **508** is formed of silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, silicon carbonitride, the like, or combinations thereof. The pad nitride layer **508** may be formed using low-pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD) or plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD), for example.

(35) The mask layer may be patterned using photolithography techniques. Generally, photolithography techniques utilize a photoresist material (not shown) that is deposited, irradiated (exposed), and developed to remove a portion of the photoresist material. The remaining photoresist material protects the underlying material, such as the mask layer in this example, from subsequent processing steps, such as etching. For example, the photoresist material is used to pattern the pad oxide layer **506** and pad nitride layer **508** to form a patterned mask **510**, as illustrated in FIG. **5**.

(36) The patterned mask **510** is subsequently used to pattern exposed portions of the substrate **402** to form trenches (or openings) **511**, thereby defining the semiconductor fins **504A-B** between adjacent trenches **511** as illustrated in FIG. 5. When multiple fins are formed, such a trench may be disposed between any adjacent ones of the fins. In some embodiments, the semiconductor fins **504A-B** are formed by etching trenches in the substrate **402** using, for example, reactive ion etch (RIE), neutral beam etch (NBE), the like, or combinations thereof. The etch may be anisotropic. In some embodiments, the trenches **511** may be strips (viewed from the top) parallel to each other, and closely spaced with respect to each other. In some embodiments, the trenches **511** may be continuous and surround the semiconductor fins **504A-B**.

(37) The semiconductor fins **504A-B** may be patterned by any suitable method. For example, the semiconductor fins **504A-B** may be patterned using one or more photolithography processes, including double-patterning or multi-patterning processes. Generally, double-patterning or multi-patterning processes combine photolithography and self-aligned processes, allowing patterns to be created that have, for example, pitches smaller than what is otherwise obtainable using a single, direct photolithography process. For example, in one embodiment, a sacrificial layer is formed over a substrate and patterned using a photolithography process. Spacers are formed alongside the patterned sacrificial layer using a self-aligned process. The sacrificial layer is then removed, and the remaining spacers, or mandrels, may then be used to pattern the fin.

(38) FIGS. 4 and 5 illustrate an embodiment of forming the semiconductor fins **504A-B**, but a fin may be formed in various different processes. For example, a top portion of the substrate **402** may be replaced by a suitable material, such as an epitaxial material suitable for an intended type (e.g., N-type or P-type) of semiconductor devices to be formed. Thereafter, the substrate **402**, with epitaxial material on top, is patterned to form the semiconductor fins **504A-B** that include the epitaxial material.

(39) As another example, a dielectric layer can be formed over a top surface of a substrate; trenches can be etched through the dielectric layer; homoepitaxial structures can be epitaxially grown in the trenches; and the dielectric layer can be recessed such that the homoepitaxial structures protrude from the dielectric layer to form one or more fins.

(40) In yet another example, a dielectric layer can be formed over a top surface of a substrate; trenches can be etched through the dielectric layer; heteroepitaxial structures can be epitaxially grown in the trenches using a material different from the substrate; and the dielectric layer can be recessed such that the heteroepitaxial structures protrude from the dielectric layer to form one or more fins.

(41) In embodiments where epitaxial material(s) or epitaxial structures (e.g., the heteroepitaxial structures or the homoepitaxial structures) are grown, the grown material(s) or structures may be in situ doped during growth, which may obviate prior and subsequent implantations although in situ and implantation doping may be used together. Still further, it may be advantageous to epitaxially grow a material in an NMOS region different from the material in a PMOS region. In various embodiments, the semiconductor fins **504A-B** may include silicon germanium ($\text{Si.sub.xGe.sub.1-x}$, where x can be between 0 and 1), silicon carbide, pure or substantially pure germanium, a III-V compound semiconductor, a II-VI compound semiconductor, or the like. For example, the available materials for forming III-V compound semiconductor include, but are not limited to, InAs, AlAs, GaAs, InP, GaN, InGaAs, InAlAs, GaSb, AlSb, AlP, GaP, and the like.

(42) Corresponding to operation **306** of FIG. 3, FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional views of the FinFET device **400** including a dummy channel layer **600** at one of the various stages of fabrication, and FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional views of the FinFET device **400** including dummy fins **700A**, **700B**, and **700C** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The views of FIGS. 6 and 7 are cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(43) In some embodiments, the dummy channel layer **600** can include a dielectric material used to form the dummy fins **700A-C**. For example, the dielectric material may include silicon oxide,

silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, silicon carbide, silicon carbonitride, silicon oxycarbonitride, silicon oxycarbide, or combinations thereof. In another example, the dielectric material may include group IV-based oxide or group IV-based nitride, e.g., tantalum nitride, tantalum oxide, hafnium oxide, or combinations thereof. The dummy channel layer **600** may be formed using low-pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD) or plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD), for example.

(44) Upon depositing the dummy channel layer **600** overlaying the semiconductor fins **504A-B**, one or more dummy fins, e.g., **700A-C**, may be formed between or next to the semiconductor fins **504A-B**. For example, the dummy fin **700A** may be formed in the area **402A** next to the semiconductor fin **504A** (or between the semiconductor fin **504A** and a non-illustrated fin corresponding to the active region **220** of FIG. 2); the dummy fin **700B** may be formed between the semiconductor fins **504A** and **504B**, which may be at the intersection of the areas **402A** and **402B**; and the dummy fin **700C** may be formed in the area **402B** next to the semiconductor fin **504B** (or between the semiconductor fin **504B** and a non-illustrated fin corresponding to the active region **226** of FIG. 2).

(45) The dummy fins **700A-C** are formed by patterning the dummy channel layer **700** using, for example, photolithography and etching techniques. For example, a patterned mask may be formed over the dummy channel layer **600** to mask portions of the dummy channel layer **600** where the dummy fins **700A-C** are to be formed. Subsequently, unmasked portions of the dummy channel layer **600** may be etched using, for example, reactive ion etch (RIE), neutral beam etch (NBE), the like, or combinations thereof, thereby defining the dummy fins **700A-C** between or next to the semiconductor fins **504A-B** (or in the trenches **511**) as illustrated in FIG. 7. The etch may be anisotropic, in some embodiments. In some other embodiments, the dummy fins **700A-C** may be formed concurrently with or subsequently to forming isolation regions (e.g., **800** of FIG. 8), which will be discussed below.

(46) Corresponding to operation **308** of FIG. 3, FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including isolation regions **800** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. 8 is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(47) The isolation regions **800**, which are formed of an insulation material, can electrically isolate neighboring fins from each other. The insulation material may be an oxide, such as silicon oxide, a nitride, the like, or combinations thereof, and may be formed by a high density plasma chemical vapor deposition (HDP-CVD), a flowable CVD (FCVD) (e.g., a CVD-based material deposition in a remote plasma system and post curing to make it convert to another material, such as an oxide), the like, or combinations thereof. Other insulation materials and/or other formation processes may be used. In an example, the insulation material is silicon oxide formed by a FCVD process. An anneal process may be performed once the insulation material is formed. A planarization process, such as a chemical mechanical polish (CMP), may remove any excess insulation material and form top surfaces of the isolation regions **800** and a top surface of the fins **504A-B** and **700A-C** that are coplanar (not shown). The patterned mask **510** (FIG. 5) may also be removed by the planarization process.

(48) In some embodiments, the isolation regions **800** include a liner, e.g., a liner oxide (not shown), at the interface between each of the isolation regions **800** and the substrate **402** (semiconductor fins **504A-B**). In some embodiments, the liner oxide is formed to reduce crystalline defects at the interface between the substrate **402** and the isolation region **800**. Similarly, the liner oxide may also be used to reduce crystalline defects at the interface between the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and the isolation region **800**. The liner oxide (e.g., silicon oxide) may be a thermal oxide formed through a thermal oxidation of a surface layer of the substrate **402**, although other suitable method may also be used to form the liner oxide.

(49) Next, the isolation regions **800** are recessed to form shallow trench isolation (STI) regions **800**, as shown in FIG. 8. The isolation regions **800** are recessed such that the upper portions of the

fins **504A-B** and **700A-C** protrude from between neighboring STI regions **800**. Respective top surfaces of the STI regions **800** may have a flat surface (as illustrated), a convex surface, a concave surface (such as dishing), or combinations thereof. The top surfaces of the STI regions **800** may be formed flat, convex, and/or concave by an appropriate etch. The isolation regions **800** may be recessed using an acceptable etching process, such as one that is selective to the material of the isolation regions **800**. For example, a dry etch or a wet etch using dilute hydrofluoric (DHF) acid may be performed to recess the isolation regions **800**.

(50) As mentioned above, the dummy fins **700A-C** may be formed concurrently with or subsequently to the formation of the isolation regions **800**. For example, when forming the semiconductor fins **504A-B** (FIG. 5), one or more other semiconductor fins may also be formed in the trenches **511**. The insulation material of the isolation regions **800** may be deposited over the semiconductor fins, followed by a CMP process to planarize the top surfaces of the isolation regions **800** and the semiconductor fins, which include the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and the semiconductor fins formed in the trenches **511**. Subsequently, an upper portion of the semiconductor fins formed in the trenches **511** may be partially removed to form cavities. The cavities are then filled with the dielectric material of the dummy channel layer **600**, followed by another CMP process to form the dummy fins **700A-C**. The isolation regions **800** are recessed to form the shallow trench isolation (STI) regions **800**. Using such a method to form the dummy fins **700A-C**, the dummy fins **700A-B** are formed on the substrate **402** and a bottom surface of the dummy fins **700A-B** is below the top surface of the isolation regions **800**. Depending on how much of the isolation regions **800** is recessed, the bottom surface of the dummy fins **700A-C** may be above the top surface of the isolation regions **800**, while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(51) Corresponding to operation **310** of FIG. 3, FIG. 9 is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including a dummy gate structure **900** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. 9 is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(52) The dummy gate structure **900** is formed to overlay (e.g., straddle) a respective portion of each of the fins (e.g., semiconductor fins **504A-B**, dummy fins **700A-C**) across the areas **402A-B**. In some embodiments, the dummy gate structure **900** may be formed according to the gate structure **244** of the layout design **200** shown in FIG. 2. It should be appreciated that the dummy gate structure **900** may be formed according to any of the other gate structures of the layout design **200** while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(53) The dummy gate structure **900** includes a dummy gate dielectric **902** and a dummy gate **904**, in some embodiments. A mask **906** may be formed over the dummy gate structure **900**. To form the dummy gate structure **900**, a dielectric layer is formed on the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and dummy fins **700A-C**. The dielectric layer may be, for example, silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, silicon carbide, silicon carbonitride, silicon oxycarbonitride, silicon oxycarbide, multilayers thereof, or the like, and may be deposited or thermally grown.

(54) A gate layer is formed over the dielectric layer, and a mask layer is formed over the gate layer. The gate layer may be deposited over the dielectric layer and then planarized, such as by a CMP. The mask layer may be deposited over the gate layer. The gate layer may be formed of, for example, polysilicon, although other materials may also be used. The mask layer may be formed of, for example, silicon nitride or the like.

(55) After the layers (e.g., the dielectric layer, the gate layer, and the mask layer) are formed, the mask layer may be patterned using suitable lithography and etching techniques to form the mask **906**. The pattern of the mask **906** then may be transferred to the gate layer and the dielectric layer by a suitable etching technique to form the dummy gate **904** and the underlying dummy gate dielectric **902**, respectively. The dummy gate **904** and the dummy gate dielectric **902** cover a respective central portion (e.g., a channel region) of each of the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and the dummy fins **700A-C**. The dummy gate **904** may have a lengthwise direction (e.g., cross-section B-

B as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2) substantially perpendicular to the lengthwise direction (e.g., cross-section A-A as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2) of the fins.

(56) The dummy gate dielectric **902** is shown to be formed over the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and the dummy fins **700A-C** (e.g., over the respective top surfaces and the sidewalls of the fins) and over the STI regions **800** in the example of FIG. 9. In other embodiments, the dummy gate dielectric **902** may be formed by, e.g., thermal oxidization of a material of the fins, and therefore, may be formed over the fins but not over the STI regions **800**. It should be appreciated that these and other variations are still included within the scope of the present disclosure.

(57) In FIGS. 10, 11A, 12A, and 13A, four dummy gate structures **900-1**, **900-2**, **900-3**, and **900-4**, which respectively correspond to the gate structures **240**, **242**, **244**, and **246** of the layout design **200** in FIG. 2, are illustrated over one of the semiconductor fins. The semiconductor fin **504A**, which corresponds to the active region **222** of the layout design **200** in FIG. 2, will be illustrated in the following figures as a representative example. Accordingly, cross-section A-A as indicated in FIGS. 1-2 corresponds to cross-section cut along a longitudinal (or lengthwise) direction of the semiconductor fin **504A**; cross-section B-B as indicated in FIGS. 1-2 corresponds to cross-section cut along a longitudinal (or lengthwise) direction of the dummy gate structure **900-3**; and cross-section C-C as indicated in FIG. 1-2 corresponds to cross-section cut along a direction that is parallel to the longitudinal direction and between the dummy gate structures **900-3** and **900-4**. For simplicity, the dummy gate structures **900-1** to **900-4** may sometimes be collectively referred to as dummy gate structures **900**. It should be appreciated that more or less than four dummy gate structures can be formed over the fin **504A** (and each of the other fins, e.g., **504B**, **700A-C**), while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(58) Corresponding to operation **312** of FIG. 3, FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including gate spacers **1000-1**, **1000-2**, **1000-3**, and **1000-4** formed around (e.g., along and contacting the sidewalls of) the dummy gate structures **900**, respectively, at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. 10 is cut along cross-section A-A, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2. For simplicity, the gate spacers **1000-1** to **1000-4** may sometimes be collectively referred to as gate spacers **1000**.

(59) As shown in FIG. 10, the gate spacer **1000-1** is formed on opposing sidewalls of the dummy gate structure **900-1**; the gate spacer **1000-2** is formed on opposing sidewalls of the dummy gate structure **900-2**; the gate spacer **1000-3** is formed on opposing sidewalls of the dummy gate structure **900-3**; and the gate spacer **1000-4** is formed on opposing sidewalls of the dummy gate structure **900-4**. It should be understood that any number of gate spacers can be formed around each of the dummy gate structures **900** while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, two or more gate spacers, formed as a multi-layer stack, may be formed on opposing sidewalls of each of the dummy gate structures.

(60) The gate spacers **1000** may be a low-k spacer and may be formed of a suitable dielectric material, such as silicon oxide, silicon oxycarbonitride, or the like. Any suitable deposition method, such as thermal oxidation, chemical vapor deposition (CVD), or the like, may be used to form the gate spacers **1000**. The shapes and formation methods of the gate spacers **1000** as illustrated in FIG. 10 are merely non-limiting examples, and other shapes and formation methods are possible. These and other variations are fully intended to be included within the scope of the present disclosure.

(61) Corresponding to operation **314** of FIG. 3, FIG. 11A is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including a number of source/drain regions **1100** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. 11A is cut along cross-section A-A, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2. Corresponding to the same operation **314**, FIG. 11B is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(62) In some embodiments, the source/drain regions **1100** are formed in recesses of the semiconductor fin **504A** adjacent to the dummy gate structures **900**, e.g., between adjacent dummy

gate structures **900** and/or next to a dummy gate structure **900**. The recesses are formed by, e.g., an anisotropic etching process using the dummy gate structures **900** as an etching mask, in some embodiments, although any other suitable etching process may also be used.

(63) The source/drain regions **1100** are formed by epitaxially growing a semiconductor material in the recess, using suitable methods such as metal-organic CVD (MOCVD), molecular beam epitaxy (MBE), liquid phase epitaxy (LPE), vapor phase epitaxy (VPE), selective epitaxial growth (SEG), the like, or a combination thereof.

(64) As illustrated in FIG. **11A**, the epitaxial source/drain regions **1100** may have surfaces raised from respective surfaces of the semiconductor fin **504A** (e.g. raised above the non-recessed portions of the semiconductor fin **504A**) and may have facets. In some embodiments, the source/drain regions **1100** of the adjacent fins may not merge together and remain separated apart from each other. For example, as shown in FIG. **11B**, the source/drain region **1100** formed in (or extended from) the semiconductor fin **504A** and the source/drain region **1100** formed in (or extended from) the semiconductor fin **504B**, which are sometimes referred to as source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B**, respectively, do not merge together. Further, the source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B** are separated apart from each other by the dummy fin **700B**. According to various embodiments, such a dummy fin **700B** may be removed to form an air void to reduce the cross-coupling between the source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B**, which will be discussed in further detail below.

(65) In some embodiments, when the resulting FinFET device is an n-type FinFET, the source/drain regions **1100** can include silicon carbide (SiC), silicon phosphorous (SiP), phosphorous-doped silicon carbon (SiCP), or the like. In some embodiments, when the resulting FinFET device is a p-type FinFET, the source/drain regions **1100** comprise SiGe, and a p-type impurity such as boron or indium.

(66) The epitaxial source/drain regions **1100** may be implanted with dopants to form source/drain regions **1100** followed by an annealing process. The implanting process may include forming and patterning masks such as a photoresist to cover the regions of the FinFET device **400** that are to be protected from the implanting process. The source/drain regions **1100** may have an impurity (e.g., dopant) concentration in a range from about $1 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ to about $1 \times 10^{21} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. P-type impurities, such as boron or indium, may be implanted in the source/drain regions **1100** of a P-type transistor. N-type impurities, such as phosphorous or arsenide, may be implanted in the source/drain regions **1100** of an N-type transistor. In some embodiments, the epitaxial source/drain regions **1100** may be in situ doped during their growth.

(67) Corresponding to operation **316** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **12A** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including an interlayer dielectric (ILD) **1200** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **12A** is cut along cross-section A-A, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Corresponding to the same operation **316**, FIG. **12B** is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(68) In some embodiments, prior to forming the ILD **1200**, a contact etch stop layer (CESL) **1202** is formed over the structure, as illustrated in FIGS. **12A-B**. The CESL **1202** can function as an etch stop layer in a subsequent etching process, and may comprise a suitable material such as silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, combinations thereof, or the like, and may be formed by a suitable formation method such as CVD, PVD, combinations thereof, or the like.

(69) Next, the ILD **1200** is formed over the CESL **1202** and over the dummy gate structures **900**. In some embodiments, the ILD **1200** is formed of a dielectric material such as silicon oxide, phosphosilicate glass (PSG), borosilicate glass (BSG), boron-doped phosphosilicate Glass (BPSG), undoped silicate glass (USG), or the like, and may be deposited by any suitable method, such as CVD, PECVD, or FCVD. After the ILD **1200** is formed, an optional dielectric layer is formed over the ILD **1200**. The dielectric layer can function as a protection layer to prevent or reduces the loss of the ILD **1200** in subsequent etching processes. The dielectric layer may be formed of a suitable

material, such as silicon nitride, silicon carbonitride, or the like, using a suitable method such as CVD, PECVD, or FCVD. After the dielectric layer is formed, a planarization process, such as a CMP process, may be performed to achieve a level upper surface for the dielectric layer or the ILD **1200**. The CMP may also remove the mask **906** and portions of the CESL **1202** disposed over the dummy gate **904** (FIG. **11A**). After the planarization process, the upper surface of the dielectric layer or the ILD **1200** is level with the upper surface of the dummy gate **904**, as shown in FIG. **12A**; and the ILD **1200** (together with the CESL **1202**) are disposed between any of adjacent features/structures, e.g., between the dummy fin **700A** and the source/drain region **1100A**, between the source/drain region **1100A** and the dummy fin **700B**, between the dummy fin **700B** and the source/drain region **1100B**, etc., as shown in FIG. **12B**.

(70) Corresponding to operation **318** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **13A** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** in which the dummy gate structures **900-1**, **900-2**, **900-3**, and **900-4** are replaced with active gate structures **1300-1**, **1300-2**, **1300-3**, and **1300-4**, respectively, at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **13A** is cut along cross-section A-A, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Corresponding to the same operation **318**, FIG. **13B** is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. For simplicity, the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4** may sometimes be collectively referred to as active gate structures **1300**. It should be appreciated that more or less than four active gate structures can be formed over the fin **504A** (and each of the other fins, e.g., **504B**, **700A-C**), while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(71) The active gate structures **1300** can each include a gate dielectric layer **1302**, a metal gate layer **1304**, and one or more other layers that are not shown for clarity. For example, each of the active gate structures **1300** may further include a capping layer and a glue layer. The capping layer can protect the underlying work function layer from being oxidized. In some embodiments, the capping layer may be a silicon-containing layer, such as a layer of silicon, a layer of silicon oxide, or a layer of silicon nitride. The glue layer can function as an adhesion layer between the underlying layer and a subsequently formed gate electrode material (e.g., tungsten) over the glue layer. The glue layer may be formed of a suitable material, such as titanium nitride.

(72) Prior to forming the active gate structures **1300**, the dummy gate structures **900** are removed to form respective gate trenches, each of which is surrounded by the corresponding gate spacer. For example, a gate trench, surrounded by the gate spacer **1000-1**, can be formed by removing the dummy gate structure **900-1** (FIG. **12A**). The gate dielectric layer **1302** is deposited (e.g., conformally) in a corresponding gate trench to surround (e.g., straddle) the fins, e.g., semiconductor fins **504A-B** and dummy fins **700A-C**, as illustrated in FIG. **13B**. The gate dielectric layer **1302** can overlay the top surfaces and the sidewalls of the dummy fin **700A**, the top surfaces and the sidewalls of the semiconductor fin **504A**, the top surfaces and the sidewalls of the dummy fin **700B**, the top surfaces and the sidewalls of the semiconductor fin **504B**, and one of the sidewalls of the dummy fin **700C**.

(73) The gate dielectric layer **1302** includes silicon oxide, silicon nitride, or multilayers thereof. In example embodiments, the gate dielectric layer **1302** includes a high-k dielectric material, and in these embodiments, the gate dielectric layers **1302** may have a k value greater than about 7.0, and may include a metal oxide or a silicate of Hf, Al, Zr, La, Mg, Ba, Ti, Pb, and combinations thereof. The formation methods of gate dielectric layer **1302** may include molecular beam deposition (MBD), atomic layer deposition (ALD), PECVD, and the like. A thickness of the gate dielectric layer **1302** may be between about 8 angstroms (Å) and about 20 angstroms, as an example.

(74) The metal gate layer **1304** is formed over the gate dielectric layer **1302**. The metal gate layer **1304** may be a P-type work function layer, an N-type work function layer, multi-layers thereof, or combinations thereof, in some embodiments. Accordingly, the metal gate layer **1304** is sometimes referred to as a work function layer. For example, the metal gate layer **1304** may be an N-type work function layer. In the discussion herein, a work function layer may also be referred to as a work

function metal. Example P-type work function metals that may be included in the gate structures for P-type devices include TiN, TaN, Ru, Mo, Al, WN, ZrSi.sub.2, MoSi.sub.2, TaSi.sub.2, NiSi.sub.2, WN, other suitable P-type work function materials, or combinations thereof. Example N-type work function metals that may be included in the gate structures for N-type devices include Ti, Ag, TaAl, TaAlC, TiAlN, TaC, TaCN, TaSiN, Mn, Zr, other suitable N-type work function materials, or combinations thereof. A work function value is associated with the material composition of the work function layer, and thus, the material of the work function layer is chosen to tune its work function value so that a target threshold voltage V_t is achieved in the device that is to be formed. The work function layer(s) may be deposited by CVD, physical vapor deposition (PVD), ALD, and/or other suitable process. The thickness of a P-type work function layer may be between about 8 Å and about 15 Å, and the thickness of an N-type work function layer may be between about 15 Å and about 30 Å, as an example.

(75) Corresponding to operation **320** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **14A** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** in which the active gate structures **1300** are cut, intercepted, or otherwise disconnected to form a trench (or cavity) **1400** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **14A** is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Corresponding to the same operation **320**, FIG. **14B** is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(76) The trench **1400** is formed by removing portions of the metal gate layers **1304** and portions of the gate dielectric layers **1302** disposed above the dummy fin **700B** (as shown in FIG. **14A**) and portions of the ILD **1200** and portions of the CESL **1202** disposed above the dummy fin **700B** (as shown in FIG. **14B**). For example, the portions of the metal gate layer **1304** and gate dielectric layer **1302** of each of the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4** overlaying the top surface of the dummy fin **700B** and the portions of the ILD **1200** and CESL **1202** overlaying the top surface of the dummy fin **700B** are removed, respectively, to form the trench **1400**. It is noted that, in addition to vertically overlaying the dummy fin **700B**, the removed portions of the ILD **1200** and CESL **1202** are also laterally disposed between adjacent ones of the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4**.

(77) As such, upon the trench **1400** being formed, the top surface of the dummy fin **700B**, which extends across the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4**, can be exposed. Since the dummy fin **700B** is disposed between the areas **402A** and **402B**, upon the trench **1400** being formed, each of the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4** is cut into two separate (isolated) active gate structures. One of the two active gate structures is disposed in the area **402A** (e.g., belongs to the top cell **210A** as shown in FIG. **2**), and the other of the two active gate structures is disposed in the area **402B** (e.g., belongs to the top cell **210B** as shown in FIG. **2**). Using FIG. **14A** as a representative example, the active gate structure **1300-3** is cut into two active gate structures **1300A** and **1300B**, which can correspond to the gate structures **244A** and **244B** of the layout design **200**, respectively, as shown in FIG. **2**. Each of the other active gate structures (e.g., **1300-1**, **1300-2**, **1300-4**) is similarly cut into two portions during operation **320**.

(78) As discussed above with respect to FIG. **2**, the trench **1400** may be formed to have the width (along the longitudinal direction of the active gate structures **1300**), W , which can range from one times a critical dimension (CD) of the active gate structures **1300** to about 3 times the CD. In some embodiments, the CD of the active gate structures **1300** is a lateral width of each of the active gate structures **1300** extending between the corresponding spacer. Referring again to FIG. **13A**, for example, the active gate structure **1300-3** has a CD extending between the gate spacer **1000-3**. In some embodiments, the active gate structures **1300** may share a common CD. However, the active gate structures **1300** may have respective different CDs while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure.

(79) In some embodiments, the trench **1400** may be formed by performing one or more patterning process, followed by one or more etching processes. For example, a patterned mask can be formed

over the active gate structures **1300** and the ILD **1200**, which are leveled with each other by a CMP. The patterned mask can have a pattern exposing an area of the to-be formed trench **1400**, for example, disposed between the areas **402A-B** and extends across the active gate structures **1300**. Next, at least one anisotropic etching process (e.g., reactive ion etch (RIE), neutral beam etch (NBE), the like, or combinations thereof) may be performed to remove the exposed portions of the active gate structures **1300** and ILD **1200**, followed by at least one isotropic etching process to remove residues. While removing the ILD **1200**, the anisotropic etching process may be stopped (or end-pointed) at the underlying CESL **1202**, which is subsequently removed by the isotropic etching process.

(80) Corresponding to operation **322** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **15A** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** in which the dummy fin **700B** is removed at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **15A** is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Corresponding to the same operation **322**, FIG. **15B** is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(81) After the dummy fin **700B** is exposed by the trench **1400**, as shown in FIGS. **14A-B**, the dummy fin **700B** may be removed by performing one or more etching processes through the trench **1400**. For example, at least one anisotropic etching process (e.g., reactive ion etch (RIE), neutral beam etch (NBE), the like, or combinations thereof) may be performed to remove the dummy fin **700B** using the trench **1400** as a window. Next, at least one isotropic etching process may be performed to remove residues. Consequently, the trench **1400** can be further extended by the one or more etching processes. As the trench **1400** is extended by the anisotropic etching process, the width, *W*, may be preserved. In some embodiments, while removing the dummy fin **700B**, a portion of the gate dielectric layer **1302** extending along the sidewalls of the dummy fin **700B** can also be removed, as shown in FIG. **15A**. In some embodiments, the removal process of the dummy fin **700B** may be extended to etch a portion of the substrate **402** beneath the dummy fin **700B**, as shown in FIGS. **15A-B**. In some embodiments, the trench **1400** may have a depth or height, *H*, which may range from about 30 nanometers (nm) and about 150 nm.

(82) As prior to further extending the trench **1400** into the substrate **402** (prior to operation **322**), the trench **1400** has been formed to laterally extend across the active gate structures **1300-1** to **1300-4** (and the ILD **1200** between adjacent active gate structures), upon performing operation **322**, the trench **1400** can also be extended toward the substrate **402** between the source/drain region **1100A** in the area **402A** and the source/drain region **1100B** in the area **402B**, as shown in FIG. **15B**. In some embodiments, the trench **1400** is extended between the source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B** by removing the dummy fin **700B**. In other words, as a result of further extending the trench **1400** toward the substrate **402** by removing the dummy fin **700B**, the cells respectively disposed in the areas **402A** and **402B** can be separated by the (extended) trench **1400**.

(83) In some embodiments, the trench **1400** can have a relatively low aspect ratio, defined as the width (*W*) to the depth/height (*H*). For example, the aspect ratio may range from about $\frac{1}{3}$ to about $\frac{1}{15}$. The width of the trench **1400** may be controlled through the patterning process in operation **320** that cuts the active gate structures **1300**; and the depth of the trench **1400** may be controlled through the etching process(es) in operation **322**. For example, various operation conditions of the etching process(es) such as, time, temperature, pressure, etc., can be tuned to reach a desired value of the height. By forming such a trench with a low aspect ratio between the source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B**, the source/drain regions **1100A** and **1100B**, which are strongly coupled to each other through the dielectric therebetween in the existing technologies, can be separated by an air void, which will be discussed as follows.

(84) Corresponding to operation **324** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **16A** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including a dielectric protection layer **1600** at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **16A** is cut along cross-section B-B, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**. Corresponding to the same operation **324**, FIG. **16B** is another cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** cut

along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(85) The dielectric protection layer **1600** is formed over the substrate **402** to cap or seal the trench **1400**. Given the low aspect ratio of the trench **1400**, the dielectric protection layer **1600** may extend to only a top portion of the trench **1400**, as shown in FIGS. 16A-B. In some other embodiments, the dielectric protection layer **1600** may not extend to any portion of the trench **1400**. By capping the trench **1400** with the dielectric protection layer **1600**, an air gap or void **1650** is formed between the semiconductor fins **504A-B** and between the source/drain regions **1100A-B**. The air void **1650** may extend between the areas **402A** and **402B**. Specifically, the air void **1650** may extend across the active gate structures **1300A-B** and between the respective source/drain regions formed along the semiconductor fins **504A** and **504B**.

(86) With the air void **1650** disposed between the two sets of source/drain regions formed along the semiconductor fins **504A** and **504B**, respectively, the cross-coupling between the two sets of source/drain regions can be significantly reduced due to the greatly reduced dielectric constant of a material disposed therebetween. For example, the dummy fin (with a dielectric constant of 3.9 or higher) that was disposed between the two sets of source/drain regions is now replaced by the air void (with a dielectric constant of 1). Consequently, the cross-coupling, which is positively proportional to the dielectric constant, can be reduced by, for example, at least 3.9 times.

(87) The dielectric protection layer **1600** includes a dielectric material. The dielectric material may be, for example, silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, silicon carbide, silicon carbonitride, silicon oxycarbonitride, silicon oxycarbide, multilayers thereof, or the like. The dielectric protection layer **1600** can be formed by depositing the dielectric material over the substrate **402** using any suitable method, such as CVD, PECVD, or FCVD. After the deposition, a CMP may be performed to planarize the dielectric protection layer **1600**.

(88) Corresponding to operation 326 of FIG. 3, FIG. 17 is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including a number of interconnect structures, e.g., **1700**, **1710**, at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. 17 is cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. 1 and 2.

(89) The interconnect structures **1700-1710** are formed on a first side **403** of the substrate **402**. The first side **403** may sometimes be referred to as “front side **403**” of the substrate **402**. Accordingly, the interconnect structures **1700-1710** may sometimes be referred to as front side interconnect structures **1700-1710**. In various embodiments, the layout design **200** of FIG. 2 is used to form various features (e.g., the semiconductor fins **504A-B**, the dummy fins **700A-C**, the source/drain regions **1100**, the active gate structures **1300**) on the front side **403**. Opposite to the front side **403**, the substrate **402** has a second side **405**. The second side **405** may sometimes be referred to as “back side **405**” of the substrate **402**.

(90) As shown in FIG. 17, the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710**, including one or more metal materials (e.g., copper, tungsten), are formed to electrically connect to the source/drain regions **1100A-B**, respectively, by extending through the dielectric protection layer **1600**, the ILD **1200**, and the CESL **1202**. The front side interconnect structures **1700-1710** can form a portion of a middle of the line (MOL) wiring network. It is appreciated that the illustrated embodiment of FIG. 17 is simplified, that is, each of the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710** can include one or more interconnect structures coupled to each other, while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, each of the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710** can include a lateral interconnect structure in contact with the source/drain regions **1100A-B** (which is typically known as “MD”) and a vertical interconnect structure in contact with the lateral interconnect structure (which is typically known as “VD”). In some embodiments, the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710** can electrically connect the source/drain regions **1100A-B** to one or more metallization layers formed over the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710**, which form a portion of a back end of the line (BEOL) wiring network. For simplicity, such metallization layers are omitted.

(91) Corresponding to operation **328** of FIG. **3**, FIG. **18** is a cross-sectional view of the FinFET device **400** including interconnect structures, e.g., **1800**, **1805**, **1810**, **1815**, at one of the various stages of fabrication. The view of FIG. **18** is cut along cross-section C-C, as indicated in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

(92) The interconnect structures **1800-1815** are formed on the back side **405** of the substrate **402**. Accordingly, the interconnect structures **1800-1815** may sometimes be referred to as back side interconnect structures **1800-1815**. In some embodiments, subsequently to forming the front side interconnect structures **1700-1710**, the substrate **402** is flipped and then is thinned down from a surface on the back side **405** (hereinafter “back surface”). For example, the substrate **402** may be thinned until a bottom surface of the source/drain regions **1100A-B** is exposed. Accordingly, an dielectric layer (e.g., an ILD) **1820** is formed over the back surface. Next, the back side interconnect structures **1800-1805** and **1810-1815**, including one or more metal materials (e.g., copper, tungsten), are formed to electrically connect to the source/drain regions **1100A-B**, respectively, by extending through the ILD **1820**.

(93) It is appreciated that the illustrated embodiment of FIG. **18** is simplified, that is, each of the back side interconnect structures **1800-1815** can include one or more interconnect structures coupled to each other, while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, each of the back side interconnect structures **1800-1815** can include a lateral interconnect structure in contact with the source/drain regions **1100A-B** and a vertical interconnect structure in contact with the lateral interconnect structure. Further, in some embodiments, the interconnect structures **1805** and **1815** can be configured as power rails. For example, the interconnect structure **1805** may be configured as a high voltage power rail to provide VDD, and the interconnect structure **1815** may be configured as a low voltage power rail to provide VSS (ground).

(94) FIG. **19** illustrates a flowchart of another method **1900** to form a non-planar transistor device that includes an air void separating two abutted cells, according to one or more embodiments of the present disclosure. It is noted that some of the operations of the method **1900** are similar to those of the method **300**, and thus, the following discussion of the method **1900** will be focused on the different operations. Further, as the device made by the method **1900** is similar to the FinFET device **400**, the method **1900** will be discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **1-2** and **4-18**.

(95) For example, operations **1902**, **1904**, **1906**, **1908**, **1910**, and **1912** of the method **1900** are similar to operations **302**, **304**, **306**, **308**, **310**, and **312** of the method **300**, respectively. Upon performing operation **1912**, a number of dummy gate structures (e.g., **240-246** in FIGS. **2** and **900-1-4** in FIG. **10**) are formed over a number of semiconductor fins (e.g., **222** and **224** in FIGS. **2** and **504A-B** in FIG. **9**) and dummy fins (e.g., **230-234** in FIGS. **2** and **700A-C** in FIG. **9**), wherein each of the dummy gate structures extends across the semiconductor fin(s) and dummy fin(s) disposed in the respective two areas (e.g., **402A-B** in FIGS. **4-10**) or cells (**210A-B** in FIG. **2**) and the dummy fin (e.g., **232** in FIGS. **2** and **700B** in FIG. **9**) disposed between the areas/cells. Next at operation **1914**, different from the method **300**, each of the dummy gate structures is cut into two portions respectively disposed in the two areas. Operation **1914** is similar to operation **320** except that the material of the gate structures to be cut. Thus, it is understood that the dummy fin **232/700B** may not be overlaid by any of the dummy gate structures **240-246/900-1-4** after operation **1914** being performed. Next, operations **1916** and **1918** are similar to operations **316** and **318**, respectively. As such, upon performing operation **1918**, source/drain regions (e.g., **222-1-3**, **224-1-3** in FIGS. **2** and **1100A-B** in FIG. **11B**) formed along each of the semiconductor fins **222-224/504A-B** and on respective sides of each of the dummy gate structures **240-246/900-1-4** are overlaid by an ILD (e.g., **1200** in FIGS. **12A-B**). Next, at operation **1920**, the dummy gate structures, configured as PODEs, (e.g., **240** and **246** in FIGS. **2** and **900-1** and **900-4** in FIG. **10**) are cut. In some embodiments, when cutting the PODEs, the PODEs and the underlying portions of each of the fins are also removed. Next, operation **1922** in which the dummy fin **232/700B** is cut and the following operations **1924-1930** are similar to operations **322**, **324**, **318**, **326**, and **328**,

respectively. Thus, the discussions are not repeated.

(96) FIG. 20 illustrates a flowchart of yet another method 2000 to form a non-planar transistor device that includes an air void separating two abutted cells, according to one or more embodiments of the present disclosure. It is noted that some of the operations of the method 2000 are similar to those of the method 300, and thus, the following discussion of the method 2000 will be focused on the different operations. Further, as the device made by the method 2000 is similar to the FinFET device 400, the method 2000 will be discussed in conjunction with FIGS. 1-2 and 4-18.

(97) For example, operations 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 of the method 2000 are similar to operations 302, 304, 306, 308, 310, 312, 314, 316, 318, and 320 of the method 300, respectively. Upon performing operation 2018, a number of active gate structures (e.g., 240-246 in FIGS. 2 and 1300-1-4 in FIG. 13A) are formed over a number of semiconductor fins (e.g., 222 and 224 in FIGS. 2 and 504A-B in FIG. 9) and dummy fins (e.g., 230-234 in FIGS. 2 and 700A-C in FIG. 9), wherein each of the active gate structures extends across the semiconductor fin(s) and dummy fin(s) disposed in the respective two areas (e.g., 402A-B in FIGS. 4-10) or cells (210A-B in FIG. 2) and the dummy fin (e.g., 232 in FIGS. 2 and 700B in FIG. 9) disposed between the areas/cells. Next at operation 2020, each of the dummy gate structures is cut into two portions respectively disposed in the two areas. Next, at operation 2022, the active gate structures, configured as PODEs, (e.g., 240 and 246 in FIGS. 2 and 1300-1 and 1300-4 in FIG. 13A) are cut. In some embodiments, when cutting the PODEs, the PODEs and the underlying portions of each of the fins are also removed. Next, operation 2024 in which the dummy fin 232/700B is cut and the following operations 2026-2030 are similar to operations 322, 324, 326, and 328, respectively. Thus, the discussions are not repeated.

(98) In one aspect of the present disclosure, a semiconductor device is disclosed. The semiconductor device includes a semiconductor substrate. The semiconductor device includes a first fin protruding from the semiconductor substrate and extending along a first direction. The semiconductor device includes a second fin protruding from the semiconductor substrate and extending along the first direction. A first epitaxial source/drain region coupled to the first fin and a second epitaxial source/drain region coupled to the second fin are laterally spaced apart from each other by an air void.

(99) In another aspect of the present disclosure, a semiconductor device is disclosed. The semiconductor device includes a semiconductor substrate having a first side and a second side opposite to each other. The semiconductor device includes a first transistor, formed on the first side, that includes a first source/drain region protruding from the first side. The semiconductor device includes a second transistor, formed on the first side and adjacent to the first transistor, that includes a second source/drain region protruding from the first side. The first source/drain region and the second source/drain region are spaced apart from each other along a first lateral direction by an air void.

(100) In yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a method of forming a semiconductor device is disclosed. The method includes forming a first semiconductor fin and a second semiconductor fin over a substrate. The first and second semiconductor fins extend along a first direction. The method includes forming a dielectric fin also extended along the first direction, the dielectric fin disposed between the first and second semiconductor fins. The method includes forming a first dummy gate structure that extends along a second direction perpendicular to the first direction, and straddles the first semiconductor fin, the dielectric fin, and the second semiconductor fin. The method includes forming a first pair of source/drain regions in the first semiconductor fin on sides of the first dummy gate structure and a second pair of source/drain regions in the second semiconductor fin on sides of the first dummy gate structure. The method includes overlaying the first pair of source/drain regions and the second pair of source/drain regions with a dielectric layer. The method includes removing the dielectric fin. The method includes depositing a protection layer over the dielectric layer to form an air void separating the first pair of source/drain regions and the

second pairs of source/drain regions.

(101) The foregoing outlines features of several embodiments so that those skilled in the art may better understand the aspects of the present disclosure. Those skilled in the art should appreciate that they may readily use the present disclosure as a basis for designing or modifying other processes and structures for carrying out the same purposes and/or achieving the same advantages of the embodiments introduced herein. Those skilled in the art should also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure, and that they may make various changes, substitutions, and alterations herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure.

Claims

1. A semiconductor device, comprising: a first cell formed on a substrate, and comprising at least one first active region extending along a first direction and a plurality of first gate structures extending along a second direction; and a second cell formed on the substrate, and comprising at least one second active region extending along the first direction and a plurality of second gate structures extending along the second direction; and an air void interposed between the first cell and the second cell along the second direction, and further interposed between each of the plurality of first gate structures and a corresponding one of the plurality of second gate structures, wherein a ratio of a width of the air void along the second direction to a height of the air void along a third direction perpendicular to the first and second directions ranges from about $\frac{1}{3}$ to about $\frac{1}{15}$.
2. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the air void partially extends into the substrate.
3. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the at least one first active region further comprises a plurality of first epitaxial source/drain regions, and the at least one second active region comprises a plurality of second epitaxial source/drain regions.
4. The semiconductor device of claim 3, wherein the air void is interposed between each of the plurality of first epitaxial source/drain regions and a corresponding one of the plurality of second epitaxial source/drain regions.
5. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the first and second cells are disposed on a first side of the semiconductor substrate.
6. The semiconductor device of claim 5, further comprising at least one conductive power rail disposed on a second side of the semiconductor substrate, the second side being opposite to the first side.
7. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein a height of the air void is between about 30 nanometers (nm) and about 150 nm.
8. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the first cell further comprises a first dummy region disposed opposite the at least one first active region from the air void along the second direction, and the second cell further comprises a second dummy region disposed opposite the at least one second active region from the air void along the second direction.
9. The semiconductor device of claim 8, wherein the plurality of first gate structures traverse the first dummy region, and the plurality of second gate structures traverse the second dummy region.
10. A semiconductor device, comprising: a first cell formed on a substrate, and comprising at least one first active region extending along a first direction and a plurality of first gate structures extending along a second direction; and a second cell formed on the substrate, and comprising at least one second active region extending along the first direction and a plurality of second gate structures extending along the second direction; and an air void interposed between the first cell and the second cell along the second direction, and further interposed between each of the plurality of first gate structures and a corresponding one of the plurality of second gate structures; wherein the air void partially extends into the substrate and wherein a height of the air void is between about 30 nanometers (nm) and about 150 nm.

11. The semiconductor device of claim 10, wherein the at least one first active region further comprises a plurality of first epitaxial source/drain regions, and the at least one second active region comprises a plurality of second epitaxial source/drain regions.
 12. The semiconductor device of claim 11, wherein the air void is interposed between each of the plurality of first epitaxial source/drain regions and a corresponding one of the plurality of second epitaxial source/drain regions.
 13. The semiconductor device of claim 10, wherein a ratio of a width of the air void along the second direction to a height of the air void along a third direction perpendicular to the first and second directions ranges from about $\frac{1}{3}$ to about $\frac{1}{15}$.
 14. The semiconductor device of claim 10, wherein the first and second cells are disposed on a first side of the semiconductor substrate.
 15. The semiconductor device of claim 14, further comprising at least one conductive power rail disposed on a second side of the semiconductor substrate, the second side being opposite to the first side.
 16. A semiconductor device, comprising: a first cell formed on a first side of a substrate, and comprising: a first active region extending along a first direction; a plurality of first gate structures extending along a second direction; and a first dummy region disposed next to the first active region along the second direction; a second cell formed on the first side of the substrate, and comprising: a second active region extending along the first direction; a plurality of second gate structures extending along the second direction; and a second dummy region disposed next to the second active region along the second direction; and an air void interposed between the first active region and the second active region along the second direction, and further interposed between each of the plurality of first gate structures and a corresponding one of the plurality of second gate structures.
 17. The semiconductor device of claim 16, wherein the air void partially extends into the substrate.
 18. The semiconductor device of claim 16, further comprising at least one conductive power rail disposed on a second side of the semiconductor substrate, the second side being opposite to the first side.
 19. The semiconductor device of claim 16, wherein a ratio of a width of the air void along the second direction to a height of the air void along a third direction perpendicular to the first and second directions ranges from about $\frac{1}{3}$ to about $\frac{1}{15}$.
 20. The semiconductor device of claim 16, wherein a height of the air void is between about 30 nanometers (nm) and about 150 nm.
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