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Piezoelectric memory

Abstract

A non-volatile memory apparatus includes a first hydrogen reservoir, which is electrically conductive; a charge of hydrogen, which is captured in the first hydrogen reservoir; a dielectric layer that has a first side that is adjacent to the first hydrogen reservoir and a second side that is opposite from the first hydrogen reservoir; a second hydrogen reservoir that is adjacent to the second side of the dielectric layer, is electrically conductive, and has a side that is opposite from the dielectric layer; and a piezoelectric layer that is adjacent to the side of the second hydrogen reservoir and that has a side that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir.

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Background/Summary

BACKGROUND

(1) The present invention relates to the electrical, electronic, and computer arts, and more specifically, to non-volatile memory devices.

(2) Computing memory devices are categorized as volatile or non-volatile. Volatile memory devices include static random access memory (SRAM) and dynamic random access memory (DRAM). Volatile memory devices do not retain data when electrical power is not supplied. In particular, SRAM requires a continuous voltage supply to keep its flip-flop register locked, while DRAM requires frequent refreshes of its capacitor. Non-volatile memory devices include NAND-gate (flash), magnetoresistive (MRAM), ferroelectric (FeRAM), resistive (RRAM), and phase change (PCM) technologies. Non-volatile memory retains data for a period of time when electrical power is not supplied.

SUMMARY

(3) Principles of the invention provide techniques for piezoelectric memory.

(4) In one aspect, an exemplary non-volatile memory apparatus includes a first hydrogen reservoir, which is electrically conductive; a charge of hydrogen, which is captured in the first hydrogen reservoir; a dielectric layer that has a first side that is adjacent to the first hydrogen reservoir and a second side that is opposite from the first hydrogen reservoir; a second hydrogen reservoir that is adjacent to the second side of the dielectric layer, is electrically conductive, and has a side that is opposite from the dielectric layer; and a piezoelectric layer that is adjacent to the side of the second hydrogen reservoir and that has a side that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir.

- (5) Another aspect provides a method for operating a non-volatile memory apparatus. The apparatus includes first and second hydrogen reservoirs, a dielectric layer that partitions the hydrogen reservoirs, a piezoelectric layer that is adjacent to the second hydrogen reservoir, and a neutral layer that is at a side of the piezoelectric layer opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir. The method includes setting a high bit on the memory apparatus by inducing a strain on the piezoelectric layer; inducing the strain includes moving hydrogen from the first hydrogen reservoir through the dielectric layer to the second hydrogen reservoir. Moving the hydrogen includes applying an electric field across the hydrogen reservoirs.
- (6) According to another aspect, a piezoelectric memory apparatus includes a piezoelectric layer; programmable means for placing and removing a strain on the piezoelectric layer; and a readout circuit that is connected to the programmable means.
- (7) In view of the foregoing, techniques of the present invention can provide substantial beneficial technical effects. For example, one or more embodiments provide one or more of:
- (8) A memory element that is electrically decoupled from its readout device.
- (9) Very low energy dissipation for reading memory.
- (10) Employment of well-known materials that are compatible with semiconductor fabrication processes.
- (11) A multilevel (analog) memory element.
- (12) Some embodiments may not have these potential advantages and these potential advantages are not necessarily required of all embodiments. These and other features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments thereof, which is to be read in connection with the accompanying drawings.
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Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- (1) FIG. 1 depicts, in a schematic, a planar configuration of a piezoelectric memory element, according to exemplary embodiments.
- (2) FIG. 2 depicts, in a schematic, a cylindrical configuration of a piezoelectric memory element, according to exemplary embodiments.
- (3) FIG. 3 depicts, in schematics, programming the piezoelectric memory element that is shown in FIG. 1.
- (4) FIG. 4 depicts, in a schematic, a symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element, according to exemplary embodiments.
- (5) FIG. 5 depicts, in a schematic, a memory circuit that includes the symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element that is shown in FIG. 4.
- (6) FIG. 6 depicts, in a schematic, another memory circuit that includes the symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element that is shown in FIG. 4.
- (7) FIG. 7 depicts, in a schematic, a hydrogen-activated memory element, according to the prior art.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (8) FIG. 1 depicts, in a schematic, a cross section through a piezoelectric memory element **100** having a generally planar configuration of a piezoelectric memory element **100**, according to exemplary embodiments. The memory element **100** includes a piezoelectric layer **102**, with a first hydrogen reservoir **104** that is adjacent to an upper side of the piezoelectric layer and a neutral layer **106** that is adjacent to a lower side of the piezoelectric layer. At an upper side of the first hydrogen reservoir there is a dielectric **108**, which is permeable to hydrogen, and at an upper side of the dielectric there is a second hydrogen reservoir **110**. Readout terminals **1, 2** are connected across the first hydrogen reservoir **104** and the neutral layer **106**. Programming terminals **3, 4** are connected across the first and second hydrogen reservoirs **104, 110**.

- (9) The hydrogen reservoirs and the neutral layer include conductive materials, e.g., metals. In one or more embodiments, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes the same metal. In one or more embodiments, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes a metal selected from the list consisting of: palladium, platinum, vanadium, tungsten, hafnium, zirconium, niobium, tantalum, and titanium.
- (10) The dielectric, as will be understood by an ordinary skilled worker, is permeable to hydrogen but is a good electrical insulator (blocks flow of electrons but allows the transport of H⁺ (protons)). Phosphosilicate glass is one non-limiting example of a suitable dielectric. Other, similar materials could be used.
- (11) The piezoelectric material, in one or more embodiments, is selected to be compatible with semiconductor fabrication processes. For example, the piezoelectric material may be any of lead zirconate titanate, lithium niobate, and ferroelectric hafnium oxide. Undoped and properly annealed (orthorhombic) hafnium oxide can be employed, or, in one or more embodiments, hafnium oxide may be doped to stabilize its ferroelectric phase, e.g., doped with one of zirconium, silicon, aluminum, lanthanum, yttrium, or nitrogen. Note also that lead zirconate titanate is an inorganic compound with the chemical formula $\text{Pb}[\text{Zr}_{\text{sub.}x}\text{Ti}_{\text{sub.}1-x}]\text{O}_{\text{sub.}3}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 1$), commonly abbreviated as PZT and also called lead zirconium titanate.
- (12) In operation of the memory element **100**, as shown in FIG. 3, a positive voltage applied from terminal **4** to terminal **3** causes a hydrogen charge *W* to move from the first hydrogen reservoir **104** through the dielectric **108** to the second hydrogen reservoir **110**. This configuration **100A** diminishes the volume of the first hydrogen reservoir, which exerts a compressive (contractive) strain on the piezoelectric layer **102**. The dynamic contraction of the piezoelectric layer **102** produces a charge, which can be read either as a low (zero) bit or as a high (one) bit in a manner to be discussed below. On the other hand, a positive voltage applied from terminal **3** to terminal **4** causes the hydrogen charge *W* to move from the second hydrogen reservoir **110** to the first hydrogen reservoir **104**. This configuration **100B** increases the volume of the first hydrogen reservoir, which exerts a tensile strain on the piezoelectric layer **102**. The dynamic expansion of the piezoelectric layer **102** produces a charge, which can be read either as a high (one) bit or as a low (zero) bit in a manner to be discussed below.
- (13) Depending on the piezoelectric material used as well as the piezoelectric layer thickness, the memory element **100** can hold a charge (latency) for seconds, hours, or even days. In one or more embodiments, the piezoelectric layer **102** is on the order of about 10 nm to about 50 nm thick while an area of the (square) piezoelectric layer is about 2500 nm². In other embodiments, the piezoelectric layer may be non-square, e.g., circular, or a rectangle with length of about 50 nm and an aspect ratio of 2:1 or even 5:1 (length:width).
- (14) FIG. 2 depicts, in a schematic, a cross section through a piezoelectric memory element **200** having a generally cylindrical configuration of a piezoelectric memory element **200**, according to exemplary embodiments. The memory element **200** includes a piezoelectric layer **202**, with a first hydrogen reservoir **204** that is adjacent to an upper or outer side of the piezoelectric layer and a neutral layer **206** that is adjacent to an inner or lower side of the piezoelectric layer. At an outer side of the first hydrogen reservoir there is a dielectric **208**, which is permeable to hydrogen, and at an outer side of the dielectric there is a second hydrogen reservoir **210**. Readout terminals and programming terminals are not shown in FIG. 2, but are connected equivalent to the terminals **1**, **2**, **3**, **4** that are shown in FIG. 1. The principles of operation of the cylindrical configuration are essentially the same as for the planar configuration. In one or more embodiments, the cylindrical shape may more effectively focus the strain in the first hydrogen reservoir onto the piezoelectric layer.
- (15) FIG. 3 depicts, in schematics, programming the piezoelectric memory element that is shown in FIG. 1, as already discussed above. In configuration **100A**, the voltage between terminals **1** and **2** is lower than ground (*V_L*). In configuration **100B**, the voltage between terminals **1** and **2** is

higher than ground (V.sub.H). Thus, the voltage would change polarity according to the directionality of stress placed on the piezoelectric layer.

(16) FIG. 4 depicts, in a schematic, a symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element **400**, according to exemplary embodiments. The memory element **400** includes a first piezoelectric layer **402**, with a first hydrogen reservoir **404** that is adjacent to an upper side of the piezoelectric layer and a first neutral layer **406** that is adjacent to a lower side of the piezoelectric layer. At an upper side of the first hydrogen reservoir there is a dielectric **408**, which is permeable to hydrogen, and at an upper side of the dielectric there is a second hydrogen reservoir **410**. At an upper side of the second hydrogen reservoir **410** there is a second piezoelectric layer **412** and at an upper side of the second piezoelectric layer **412** there is a second neutral layer **414**. The neutral layers are connected to electrical ground. Readout terminals **1**, **2** are connected across the first hydrogen reservoir **404** and the first neutral layer **406**; readout terminals **3**, **4** are connected across the second hydrogen reservoir **410** and the second neutral layer **414**; programming terminals **5**, **6** are connected across the first and second hydrogen reservoirs. Providing a voltage to the programming terminals that moves the hydrogen charge from the second hydrogen reservoir to the first hydrogen reservoir produces a contractive strain on the second piezoelectric layer and a tensile strain on the first piezoelectric layer. Such a situation results in the voltages shown in FIG. 5 and in FIG. 6, V.sub.H being further from ground than V.sub.L. Providing a voltage to the programming terminals that moves the hydrogen charge from the first hydrogen reservoir to the second hydrogen reservoir produces a contractive strain on the first piezoelectric layer and a tensile strain on the second piezoelectric layer.

(17) FIG. 5 depicts, in a schematic, a memory circuit **500** that includes the symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element **400** that is shown in FIG. 4, as well as a readout circuit **502** that is connected across the readout terminals **2**, **3**. The readout circuit **502** includes three operational amplifiers (op-amps) **A1**, **A2**, **A3**, which are connected with resistors **R1**, **R2**, **R3**, **R4** as shown to amplify the voltage difference between the two piezoelectric layers **402**, **412** of the memory element **400**. The op-amps **A1** and **A2** are connected as voltage followers and operate as input buffers to the inputs of op-amp **A3**, which functions as a differential amplifier.

(18) FIG. 6 depicts, in a schematic, another memory circuit **600** that includes the symmetric planar piezoelectric memory element **400** that is shown in FIG. 4. The memory circuit **600** also includes, as a readout circuit, a latching sense amplifier **602**. An ordinary skilled worker will be familiar with circuitry to implement a latching sense amplifier. In the circuit **602**, transistors **M1**, **M3**, **M2**, **M4** are connected to provide two cross-coupled inverters for true and complementary bit lines BL, BLB. When signal sen is not supplied to the transistors **M5**, **M6**, **M7**, the inverters latch the difference in voltage between BL and BLB. When signal sen is supplied, the inverters amplify the difference in voltage to a full-swing voltage between outputs OUT and OUTB.

(19) FIG. 7 depicts, in a schematic, a hydrogen-activated memory element **700**, according to the prior art. Applying a high (one) bit to the gate terminal G causes a hydrogen charge H.sub.+ to move from a first hydrogen reservoir **702** (Pd layer) through a dielectric **704** (PSG) to a channel layer **706** made of tungsten oxide (WO.sub.3). The channel **706** is normally highly resistive. When hydrogen is introduced to layer **706**, the WO.sub.3 changes to WO.sub.2—OH+e (e= is a free electron), effectively “doping” layer **706**, which enables it to conduct current from source terminal S to drain terminal D. Applying a low (zero) bit to the gate terminal G while applying a high (one) bit to the source terminal S drives the hydrogen charge H.sub.+ back to the first hydrogen reservoir, rendering channel **706** non-conductive again. The first hydrogen reservoir is a conductive material, preferably a noble metal such as palladium. The second hydrogen reservoir is a metal oxide, such as tungsten oxide (WO.sub.3). The dielectric **704** is permeable to hydrogen; phosphosilicate glass is an exemplary suitable material for the dielectric. An ordinary skilled worker will appreciate that the memory element **700** uses hydrogen to change the chemical structure of layer **706** so it can conduct current, so that its mechanism of operation is entirely distinct from the piezoelectric

operation of the memory elements **100, 200, 400**.

(20) The invention has been discussed in terms of a binary memory holding a logical “1” or logical “0”. However, it is also possible to use the memory as multilevel memory by changing the amount of hydrogen that is shuttled between the hydrogen reservoirs. This allows to control the amount compressive/tensile strain extracted on the piezoelectric layer. This in turn will lead to an intermediate output voltage that can be used for creating additional memory levels.

(21) Given the discussion thus far, it will be appreciated that, in general terms, an exemplary non-volatile memory apparatus **100, 200, 400** includes a first hydrogen reservoir **110, 210, 410**, which is electrically conductive; a charge of hydrogen H_{sup.}+, which is captured in the first hydrogen reservoir; a dielectric layer **108, 208, 408** that has a first side that is adjacent to the first hydrogen reservoir and a second side that is opposite from the first hydrogen reservoir; a second hydrogen reservoir **104, 204, 404** that is adjacent to the second side of the dielectric layer, is electrically conductive, and has a side that is opposite from the dielectric layer; and a piezoelectric layer **102, 202, 402** that is adjacent to the side of the second hydrogen reservoir and that has a side that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir.

(22) In one or more embodiments, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes a metal. In some embodiments, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes a same metal. For example, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes a metal selected from the list of: palladium, platinum, vanadium, tungsten, hafnium, zirconium, niobium, tantalum, and titanium.

(23) In one or more embodiments, the dielectric layer includes phosphosilicate glass.

(24) In one or more embodiments, the non-volatile memory apparatus also includes: a first programming contact **5** that is electrically connected to the first hydrogen reservoir; a second programming contact **6** that is electrically connected to the second hydrogen reservoir; a conductive neutral layer **406** that is adjacent to the side of the piezoelectric layer that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir; and a readout circuit **502, 602** that is electrically connected to at least one of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs.

(25) In one or more embodiments, the readout circuit is connected across the first and second hydrogen reservoirs. In one or more embodiments, the readout circuit is connected across the second hydrogen reservoir and the neutral layer.

(26) In one or more embodiments, the readout circuit includes an operational amplifier. In one or more embodiments, the readout circuit includes a sense amplifier. In one or more embodiments, the readout circuit includes a latch circuit.

(27) In one or more embodiments, each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs includes a film of metal that is between about 10 nm and about 50 nm thick and the longest dimension of each reservoir is about 50 nm to about 100 nm.

(28) In one or more embodiments, the piezoelectric layer includes a material selected from the list consisting of: lead zirconate titanate, barium niobate, and ferroelectric hafnium oxide.

(29) Another aspect provides a method for operating a non-volatile memory apparatus. The apparatus includes first and second hydrogen reservoirs **104, 110**, a dielectric layer **108** that partitions the hydrogen reservoirs, a piezoelectric layer **102** that is adjacent to the second hydrogen reservoir, and a neutral layer **106** that is at a side of the piezoelectric layer opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir. The method includes setting a high bit on the memory apparatus by inducing a strain on the piezoelectric layer; inducing the strain includes moving hydrogen from the first hydrogen reservoir through the dielectric layer to the second hydrogen reservoir. Moving the hydrogen includes applying an electric field across the hydrogen reservoirs.

(30) In one or more embodiments, the method also includes reading the high bit from the memory apparatus by connecting a readout circuit to at least one of the hydrogen reservoirs. In one or more embodiments, connecting the readout circuit includes connecting the readout circuit across the hydrogen reservoirs. In one or more embodiments, connecting the readout circuit includes

connecting the readout circuit across the second hydrogen reservoir and the neutral layer. In one or more embodiments, connecting the readout circuit includes connecting a pair of operational amplifiers across the hydrogen reservoirs, so that the pair of operational amplifiers form part of a high-input-impedance amplifier.

(31) According to another aspect, a piezoelectric memory apparatus **100, 200, 400** includes a piezoelectric layer **102, 202, 402**; programmable means **104, 108, 110, 204, 208, 210, 404, 408, 410, 3, 4, 5, 6** for placing and removing a strain on the piezoelectric layer; and a readout circuit **502, 602** that is connected to the programmable means.

(32) Semiconductor device manufacturing includes various steps of device patterning processes. For example, the manufacturing of a semiconductor chip may start with, for example, a plurality of CAD (computer aided design) generated device patterns, which is then followed by effort to replicate these device patterns in a substrate. The replication process may involve the use of various exposing techniques and a variety of subtractive (etching) and/or additive (deposition) material processing procedures.

(33) Materials such as palladium, lead zirconate titanate, and other metallic compounds may be deposited by, for example, chemical vapor deposition (CVD), plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), plating, thermal or e-beam evaporation, or sputtering. The various vapor deposition methods often give superior control of layer thickness and structure.

(34) Although the overall fabrication method and the structures formed thereby are novel, certain individual processing steps required to implement the method may utilize conventional semiconductor fabrication techniques and conventional semiconductor fabrication tooling. These techniques and tooling will already be familiar to one having ordinary skill in the relevant arts given the teachings herein. Moreover, one or more of the processing steps and tooling used to fabricate semiconductor devices are also described in a number of readily available publications, including, for example: James D. Plummer et al., *Silicon VLSI Technology: Fundamentals, Practice, and Modeling* 1st Edition, Prentice Hall, 2001 and P. H. Holloway et al., *Handbook of Compound Semiconductors: Growth, Processing, Characterization, and Devices*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, which are both hereby incorporated by reference herein. It is emphasized that while some individual processing steps are set forth herein, those steps are merely illustrative, and one skilled in the art may be familiar with several equally suitable alternatives that would be applicable.

(35) The descriptions of the various embodiments of the present invention have been presented for purposes of illustration, but are not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the embodiments disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the scope and spirit of the described embodiments. The terminology used herein was chosen to best explain the principles of the embodiments, the practical application or technical improvement over technologies found in the marketplace, or to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the embodiments disclosed herein.

Claims

1. A non-volatile memory apparatus that comprises: a first hydrogen reservoir, wherein the first hydrogen reservoir is electrically conductive; a charge of hydrogen, which is captured in the first hydrogen reservoir; a dielectric layer that has a first side that is adjacent to the first hydrogen reservoir and a second side that is opposite from the first hydrogen reservoir; a second hydrogen reservoir that is adjacent to the second side of the dielectric layer, wherein the second hydrogen reservoir is electrically conductive and has a side that is opposite from the dielectric layer; and a piezoelectric layer that is adjacent to the side of the second hydrogen reservoir and that has a side that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs comprises a metal.
3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs comprises a same metal.
4. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs comprises a metal selected from the list consisting of: palladium, platinum, vanadium, tungsten, hafnium, zirconium, niobium, tantalum, and titanium.
5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the dielectric layer comprises phosphosilicate glass.
6. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising: a first programming contact that is electrically connected to the first hydrogen reservoir; a second programming contact that is electrically connected to the second hydrogen reservoir; a conductive neutral layer that is adjacent to the side of the piezoelectric layer that is opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir, and a readout circuit that is electrically connected to at least one of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs.
7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the readout circuit is connected across the first and second hydrogen reservoirs.
8. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the readout circuit is connected across the second hydrogen reservoir and the neutral layer.
9. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the readout circuit comprises an operational amplifier.
10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the readout circuit comprises a sense amplifier.
11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the readout circuit comprises a latch circuit.
12. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein each of the first and second hydrogen reservoirs comprises a film of metal that is between about 10 nm and about 50 nm thick and wherein a longest dimension of each reservoir is about 50 nm to about 100 nm.
13. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the piezoelectric layer comprises a material selected from the list consisting of: lead zirconate titanate, barium niobate, and ferroelectric hafnium oxide.
14. A method for operating a non-volatile memory apparatus, which comprises first and second hydrogen reservoirs, a dielectric layer that partitions the hydrogen reservoirs, a piezoelectric layer that is adjacent to the second hydrogen reservoir, and a neutral layer that is at a side of the piezoelectric layer opposite from the second hydrogen reservoir, the method comprising: setting a high bit on the memory apparatus by inducing a strain on the piezoelectric layer, wherein inducing the strain comprises: moving hydrogen from the first hydrogen reservoir through the dielectric layer to the second hydrogen reservoir, wherein moving the hydrogen comprises: applying an electric field across the hydrogen reservoirs.
15. The method of claim 14, further comprising: reading the high bit from the memory apparatus by connecting a readout circuit to at least one of the hydrogen reservoirs.
16. The method of claim 15, wherein connecting the readout circuit comprises connecting the readout circuit across the hydrogen reservoirs.
17. The method of claim 15, wherein connecting the readout circuit comprises connecting the readout circuit across the second hydrogen reservoir and the neutral layer.
18. The method of claim 15, wherein connecting the readout circuit comprises connecting a pair of operational amplifiers across the hydrogen reservoirs, wherein the pair of operational amplifiers form part of a high-input-impedance amplifier.
19. A piezoelectric memory apparatus comprising: a piezoelectric layer; programmable means for placing and removing a strain on the piezoelectric layer so as to store a value directly in the piezoelectric layer; and a readout circuit that is connected to the programmable means to read out the value stored directly in the piezoelectric layer.
20. A piezoelectric memory apparatus comprising: a piezoelectric layer; programmable means for placing and removing a strain on the piezoelectric layer; and a readout circuit that is connected to the programmable means; wherein the programmable means comprise a dielectric layer, a first hydrogen reservoir that is disposed at a first side of the dielectric layer, a second hydrogen reservoir

that is disposed at a second side of the dielectric layer that is opposite from the first hydrogen reservoir and between the dielectric layer and the piezoelectric layer, and a charge of hydrogen in at least one of the hydrogen reservoirs.
