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Method of fabricating semiconductor device with reduced trench distortions

Abstract

A method includes forming a material layer over a substrate, forming a first hard mask (HM) layer over the material layer, forming a first trench, along a first direction, in the first HM layer. The method also includes forming first spacers along sidewalls of the first trench, forming a second trench in the first HM layer parallel to the first trench, by using the first spacers to guard the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the first trench and the second trench, removing the first HM layer and the first spacers, forming a second HM layer over the material layer, forming a third trench in the second HM layer. The third trench extends along a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction and overlaps with the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the third trench.

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Background/Summary

PRIORITY DATA (1) The present application is a continuation application of U.S. application Ser. No. 17/861,586, filed Jul. 11, 2022, which is a continuation application of U.S. application Ser. No. 17/080,248, filed Oct. 26, 2020, which is a continuation application of U.S. application Ser. No. 16/229,339, filed Dec. 21, 2018, which is a divisional application of U.S. application Ser. No. 15/237,898, filed Aug. 16, 2016, which is a continuation application of U.S. application Ser. No. 14/657,763, filed Mar. 13, 2015, each of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

(1) The semiconductor integrated circuit (IC) industry has experienced rapid growth. Technological advances in IC design and material have produced generations of ICs where each generation has smaller and more complex circuits than previous generations. In the course of IC evolution, functional density (i.e., the number of interconnected devices per chip area) has generally increased while geometry size (i.e., the smallest component (or line) that can be created using a fabrication process has decreased. When a semiconductor device such as a metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor (MOSFET) is scaled down through various technology nodes, challenges rise to reduce irregularities/distortions in features/patterns formed over a wafer.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

(1) Aspects of the present disclosure are best understood from the following detailed description when read in association with the accompanying figures. It is noted that, in accordance with the standard practice in the industry, various features in drawings are not drawn to scale. In fact, the dimensions of illustrated features may be arbitrarily increased or decreased for clarity of discussion.

(2) FIG. 1 is a flowchart of an example method for fabricating a semiconductor device constructed

in accordance with some embodiments.

(3) FIG. 2 is a cross section view of an example of a workpiece of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(4) FIGS. 3A and 3B are schematic views of patterns formed over a resist layer by a lithography process.

(5) FIGS. 4A and 4C are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(6) FIGS. 4B and 4D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 4A and 4C, respectively.

(7) FIG. 5A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(8) FIG. 5B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 5A.

(9) FIGS. 6A and 6C are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(10) FIGS. 6B and 6D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 6A and 6C, respectively.

(11) FIGS. 7A, 7C, 7E and 7G are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(12) FIGS. 7B, 7D, 7F and 7H are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 7A, 7C, 7E and 7G, respectively.

(13) FIGS. 8A, 8C and 8E are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(14) FIGS. 8B, 8D and 8F are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 8A, 8C and 8E, respectively.

(15) FIG. 9A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(16) FIG. 9B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 9A.

(17) FIGS. 10A and 10C are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(18) FIGS. 10B and 10D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 10A and 10C, respectively.

(19) FIG. 11A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(20) FIG. 11B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 11A.

(21) FIGS. 12A and 12C are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(22) FIGS. 12B and 12D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIGS. 12A and 12C, respectively.

(23) FIGS. 13A and 13C are top views of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(24) FIGS. 13B and 13D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIGS. 13A and 13C, respectively.

(25) FIG. 13E is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(26) FIG. 13F is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 13E.

(27) FIG. 13G is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with

some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 13E.

(28) FIG. 13H is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(29) FIG. 13I is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 13H.

(30) FIG. 14A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(31) FIG. 14B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 14A.

(32) FIG. 14C is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 14A.

(33) FIG. 14D is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(34) FIG. 14E is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 14D.

(35) FIG. 14F is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(36) FIG. 14G is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 14F.

(37) FIG. 14H is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 14F.

(38) FIG. 14I is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(39) FIG. 14J is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 14J.

(40) FIG. 15A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(41) FIG. 15B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 15A.

(42) FIG. 15C is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 15A.

(43) FIG. 15D is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(44) FIG. 15E is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 15D.

(45) FIGS. 16A and 16C are top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(46) FIGS. 16B and 16D are cross-sectional views of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIGS. 16A and 16C, respectively.

(47) FIG. 17A is a top view of an example of a semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments.

(48) FIG. 17B is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line A-A in FIG. 17A.

(49) FIG. 17C is a cross-sectional view of an example semiconductor device in accordance with some embodiments, along the line B-B in FIG. 17A.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

(50) The following disclosure provides many different embodiments, or examples, for implementing different features of the invention. 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 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.

(51) 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.

(52) FIG. 1 is a flowchart of a method **100** of fabricating one or more semiconductor devices in accordance with some embodiments. The method **100** is discussed in detail below, with reference to a workpiece **205** of a semiconductor device **200** shown in FIG. 2 and the semiconductor device **200**, shown in FIGS. 4A to 17C.

(53) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, the method **100** starts at step **102** by receiving a workpiece **205** of the semiconductor device **200**. The workpiece **205** includes a substrate **210**. The substrate **210** may be a bulk silicon substrate. Alternatively, the substrate **210** may comprise an elementary semiconductor, such as silicon (Si) or germanium (Ge) in a crystalline structure; a compound semiconductor, such as silicon germanium (SiGe), silicon carbide (SiC), gallium arsenic (GaAs), gallium phosphide (GaP), indium phosphide (InP), indium arsenide (InAs), and/or indium antimonide (InSb); or combinations thereof. Possible substrates **210** also include a silicon-on-insulator (SOI) substrate. SOI substrates are fabricated using separation by implantation of oxygen (SIMOX), wafer bonding, and/or other suitable methods.

(54) Some exemplary substrates **210** also include an insulator layer. The insulator layer comprises any suitable material, including silicon oxide, sapphire, and/or combinations thereof. An exemplary insulator layer may be a buried oxide layer (BOX). The insulator is formed by any suitable process, such as implantation (e.g., SIMOX), oxidation, deposition, and/or other suitable process. In some exemplary semiconductor device **200**, the insulator layer is a component (e.g., layer) of a silicon-on-insulator substrate.

(55) The substrate **210** may also include various p-type doped regions and/or n-type doped regions, implemented by a process such as ion implantation and/or diffusion. Those doped regions include n-well, p-well, light doped region (LDD), doped source and drain (S/D), and various channel doping profiles configured to form various integrated circuit (IC) devices, such as a complimentary metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor (CMOSFET), imaging sensor, and/or light emitting diode (LED). The substrate **210** may further include other functional features such as a resistor or a capacitor formed in and on the substrate.

(56) The substrate **210** may also include various isolation features. The isolation features separate various device regions in the substrate **210**. The isolation features include different structures formed by using different processing technologies. For example, the isolation features may include shallow trench isolation (STI) features. The formation of a STI may include etching a trench in the substrate **210** and filling in the trench with insulator materials such as silicon oxide, silicon nitride, or silicon oxynitride. The filled trench may have a multi-layer structure such as a thermal oxide liner layer with silicon nitride filling the trench. A chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) may be performed to polish back excessive insulator materials and planarize the top surface of the isolation features.

(57) The substrate **210** may also include gate stacks formed by dielectric layers and electrode

layers. The dielectric layers may include an interfacial layer (IL) and a high-k (HK) dielectric layer deposited by suitable techniques, such as chemical vapor deposition (CVD), atomic layer deposition (ALD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), thermal oxidation, combinations thereof, or other suitable techniques. The electrode layers may include a single layer or multi layers, such as metal layer, liner layer, wetting layer, and adhesion layer, formed by ALD, PVD, CVD, or other suitable process.

(58) The substrate **210** may also include a plurality of inter-level dielectric (ILD) layers and conductive features integrated to form an interconnect structure configured to couple the various p-type and n-type doped regions and the other functional features (such as gate electrodes), resulting a functional integrated circuit.

(59) In the present embodiment, the workpiece **205** includes a first material layer **220** (or main layer) over the substrate **210**, a second material layer **230** (or middle layer) over the first material layer **220** and a first hard mask (HM) **310** deposited over the second material layer **230**. The first material layer **220** and the second material layer **230** may include a dielectric layer, such as silicon oxide, silicon nitride, or silicon oxynitride, low-k dielectric material, or other suitable materials. The first material layer **220** may also include a conductive layer such as a polysilicon, a metal layer, or/and other suitable material. In the present embodiment, the second material layer **230** may include a material which is different from the first material layer **220** to achieve etching selectivity during subsequent etch processes. The first HM **310** may include silicon oxide, silicon nitride, oxynitride, silicon carbide, titanium oxide, titanium nitride, tantalum oxide, tantalum nitride, and/or any suitable materials. In the present embodiment, the first HM **310** may include a material which is different from the first material layer **220** and the second material layer **230** to achieve etching selectivity during subsequent etch processes. The first material layer **220**, the second material layer **230** and the first HM **310** may be deposited over the substrate **210** by suitable techniques, such as chemical vapor deposition (CVD), atomic layer deposition (ALD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), thermal oxidation, combinations thereof, or other suitable techniques.

(60) In the present embodiment, a plurality of features (e.g. trenches) is to be formed in the first material layer **220**. In order to form trenches in the first material layer **220**, it is usually to form a patterned resist layer with openings over the first HM **310** first, then etching the first HM **310** through openings to pattern the first HM **310**, and then etching the first material layer **220** through the patterned first HM **310** to form trenches. The patterned resist layer may be formed by a lithography process equipped with an optical imaging tool.

(61) FIG. 3A shows an ideal patterned resist layer **330** which includes a first opening **340** having a L-shape, that has a first portion **340A** extending along a first direction (Y direction) and a second portion **340B** extending along a second direction (X direction), which is perpendicular to the first direction. The first portion **340A** connects to the second portion **340B** at a location A. The patterned resist layer **330** also includes a second opening **350** having a T-shape that has a third portion **350A** and a fourth portion **350B**. The third portion **350A** extends along the Y direction and spaces from the first portion **340A** by a first distance $d_{sub.1}$. The fourth portion **350B** extends along the X direction and connects to (or intersects) the first portion **340A** at a location B. The fourth portion **350B** is spaced from the second portion **340B** by a second distance $d_{sub.2}$. The third portion **350B** is located close to an end of the second portion **340B** at a location C. It desired that the first and second openings, **340** and **350** remain regular contour (such as a rectangular contour) at each end of the openings. It is also desired that the first portion **340A** connects to the second portion **340B** with a right angle (90 degree) at the location A and similarly that the third portion **350A** connects to the fourth portion **350B** and the fourth portion **350B** connects to the first portion **340A** at the location B with right angle (90 degree) connecting angles.

(62) However, due to diffraction, resolution and other process effect of the optical imaging tool in a lithography process, irregularities/distortions in resist patterns (openings) may happen. FIG. 3B shows such problems that can occur to patterned resist layer **330**. For example, when the first and

second openings, **340** and **350**, are formed over a resist layer, rounded corner distortions may be formed at the locations A and B, instead of right angle connecting angles. Furthermore, when the first and second openings, **340** and **350** locate closely to each other such that a distance between them is smaller than a threshold distance $d_{sub.th}$ of a lithography exposure process, they may have line end shortening distortions at locations (see e.g. location C of FIG. 3B). Furthermore, when the first and second distance, $d_{sub.1}$ and $d_{sub.2}$, are small, challenges raise for overcoming misalignment. If these irregularities/distortions and misalignment are transferred to form features (such as trenches) over a layer (such as the first material layer **220**), it may significantly alter the electrical properties of the semiconductor device **200**. The present discourse provides methods to reduce irregularities/distortions and overcome misalignment in forming features in the first material layer **220**.

(63) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **4A-4D**, once the workpiece **205** is received, method **100** proceeds to step **104** by forming a first trench **425** in the first HM **310**. In some embodiment, in order to form the first trench **425**, a first patterned resist layer **410** is formed over the first HM **310** by a lithography process. The first patterned resist layer **410** has a first opening **415**, which has a rectangular shape and extends along the Y-direction. Respective portions of the first HM **310** are exposed in the first opening **415**, as shown in FIGS. **4A-4B**. An exemplary lithography process may include forming a resist layer, exposing the resist layer by a lithography exposure process, performing a post-exposure bake process, and developing the resist layer to form the patterned resist layer.

(64) The first HM **310** is then etched through the first patterned resist **410** to transfer the first opening **415** to the first trench **425**. The etch process may include wet etch, dry etch, or a combination thereof. In some embodiments, the etch process includes an anisotropic dry etch. For example, the etch process is a plasma anisotropic etch. In some embodiments, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the first HM **310** without substantially etching the second material layer **230**. As has been mentioned previously, with an adequate etch selectivity, the second material layer **230** serves as an etch stop layer, which improves etch process window and profile control. A resist strip process is then applied to remove any remaining first patterned resist layer **410**, as shown in FIGS. **4C-4D**.

(65) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **5A-5B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **106** by forming first spacers **430** along sidewalls of the first trench **425**. In the present embodiment, the first spacers **430** include a material which is different from the first HM **310** to achieve etching selectivity subsequent etch. The first spacers **430** may be formed by depositing a spacer layer over the first HM **310**, and followed by a spacer etch to etch the spacer layer anisotropically. The spacer layer may include silicon oxide, silicon nitride, oxynitride, silicon carbide, titanium oxide, titanium nitride, tantalum oxide, tantalum nitride, or any suitable materials. The spacer layer may be deposited by CVD, ALD, PVD, or other suitable techniques. In one embodiment, the spacer layer is etched by an anisotropic dry etch to form a vertical profile, which will be transferred to a profile of a trench feature later. By controlling the thickness of the spacer layer and spacer etching process, the first spacers **430** are formed to have a first width $w_{sub.1}$.

(66) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **6A-6B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **108** by forming a second patterned resist layer **510** over the first HM **310** and within first trench **425**. The second patterned resist layer **510** has a second opening **515**, which extends along the X direction and is parallel to the first trench **425**. A respective portion of the first HM **310** is exposed within the second opening **515**. The second patterned resist layer **510** is formed similarly in many respects to the first patterned resist layer **410** discussed above association with FIGS. **4A-4B**.

(67) In the present embodiment, the second opening **515** is defined by the second patterned resist layer **510** while the first opening **415** has been defined by the first patterned resist layer **410**. Thus line end shortening distortions, induced by threshold distance $d_{sub.th}$ constrain in the lithography exposing process, are greatly reduced.

(68) In some embodiments, referring to FIGS. 6C-6D, the second opening is positioned closer to the first trench **425**. Thus, in some embodiments the first HM **310** and a portion of the adjacent first spacer **430** are exposed within the second opening (referred to as **516** as shown in FIGS. 6C-6D). Sometimes the exposure of the adjacent first spacer **430** is caused by adverse process impacts, such as misalignment, pattern irregularities/distortions in the lithography process of forming the second patterned resist layer **510**. In still other embodiments, the second opening **516** has a larger width such that it extends to the adjacent first spacer **430** to obtain advantages, such as relaxing lithography process resolution constraints.

(69) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 7A—7B (in conjunction with the process described with respect to FIGS. 6A-6B), method **100** proceeds to step **110** by etching the first HM **310** through the second opening **515** to form a second trench **525** in the first HM **310**. A portion of the second material layer **230** is exposed in the second trench **525**. The etch process may include wet etch, dry etch, or a combination thereof.

(70) As discussed above in reference to FIGS. 6C-6D, in some embodiments the second opening is positioned closer to the first trench **425** such that the first HM **310** and a portion of the adjacent first spacer **430** are exposed within the second opening (referred to as **516** as shown in FIGS. 6C-6D). In such a scenario, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the first HM **310** without substantially etching the first spacer **430**. Thus, the portion of the adjacent first spacer **430** exposed within the second opening **516** serves as a sub-etch-mask (or guards the first trench **425**) during etching the first HM **310** through the second opening **516** to form a third trench **526**, as shown in FIGS. 7C-7D in this alternative embodiment.

(71) A resist strip process is then applied to remove any remaining second patterned resist layer **510**. In conjunction with the process described above with respect to FIGS. 7A-7B, the first trench **425** having the first spacer **430** along its sidewalls and second trench **525** are formed in the first HM **310**, as shown in FIGS. 7E-7F after the removal of the second patterned resist layer **510**. Alternatively, in conjunction with the process described with respect to FIGS. 7C-7D, the first trench **425** having the first spacer **430** along its sidewalls and third trench **526** are formed in the first HM **310**, as shown in the FIGS. 7G-7H after removal of the second patterned resist layer **510**. Specifically, the first spacer **430** separates the first trench **425** away from the third trench **526** as shown in FIGS. 7G-7H. Therefore, the spacer **430** ensures a designed minimum space (w.sub.1) between the first trench **425** and the third trench **526** and it is referred to as a first safeguarding-spacer.

(72) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 8A-8D, the method **100** proceeds to step **112** by etching the second material layer **230** through the first and second trenches, **425** and **525**, (as shown in FIGS. 8A-8B), or through the first and third trenches, **425** and **526** (as shown in FIGS. 8C-8D in the alternative embodiment), to form a fourth trench **530** and a fifth trench **540** in the second material layer **230**. In the present embodiment, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the second material layer **230**, but does not substantially etch the first HM **310** and the first spacer **430**. Thus, the first HM **310** and the first spacer **430** serve as an etching-mask. Thereafter, the embodiments described in FIGS. 8A-8B and the embodiment described in FIGS. 8C-8D proceed to removing the first HM **310** and the first spacer **430** by other proper etching processes, as shown in FIGS. 8E and 8F.

(73) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 9A-9B, the method **100** then proceeds to step **114** by depositing a planarization layer **550** over the second material layer **230** and depositing a second HM **560** over the planarization layer **550**. In the present embodiment, the planarization layer **550** is deposited over the second material layer **230**, including filling in the third and fourth trenches, **530** and **540**, to provide a planar top surface, which is desirable for subsequent lithography process. In some embodiment, a CMP is performed to further planarize the planarization layer **550**. The planarization layer **550** may include spin-on glass, silicon oxide, silicon nitride, oxynitride, silicon carbide, low-k dielectric material, and/or other suitable materials. The second HM **560** may include silicon oxide, silicon nitride, oxynitride, silicon carbide, titanium oxide, titanium nitride, tantalum

oxide, tantalum nitride, and/or any suitable materials. In the present embodiment, the second HM **560** may include a material which is different from the planarization layer **550** to achieve etching selectivity during subsequent etch processes. The second HM **560** carries a planar top surface from the planarization layer **550**. The planarization layer **550** and the second HM **560** may be deposited by CVD, PVD, ALD, spin-on coating, or other suitable techniques.

(74) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **10A-10B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **116** by forming a third patterned resist layer **610** over the second HM **560**. The second patterned resist layer **510** is formed similarly in many respects to the first patterned resist layer **410** discussed above association with FIGS. **4A-4B**. The second patterned resist layer **610** has a third opening **615** extending along the X direction. By forming on a planar top surface of the second HM **560**, uniformity of critical dimension and process window are improved. The third opening **615** overlaps and extends perpendicularly with respect to the third trench **530** at a first location M and the fourth trench **540** at a second location N. In some embodiments, the third opening **615** extends to outside of the third trench **530** at the first location M and outside of the fourth trench **540** at the second location N.

(75) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **10C-10D**, method **100** proceeds to step **118** by etching the second HM **560** through the third patterned resist layer **610** to form a sixth trench **625** in the second HM **560**. The second HM **560** is etched similarly in many respects to the etching process first patterned discussed above association with FIGS. **4C-4D**. The etch process is properly chosen to selectively remove the second HM **560** but does not substantially etch the planarization layer **550**. A resist strip process is then applied to remove any remaining third patterned resist layer **610**.

(76) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **11A-11B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **120** by forming second spacers **630** along sidewalls of the sixth trench **625**. In the present embodiment, the second spacers **630** include a material which is different from the second HM **560** to achieve etching selectivity subsequent etch. The second spacers **630** are formed similarly in many respects to the etching process first patterned discussed above association with FIGS. **5A-5B**. The second spacer **630** has a second width $w_{sub.2}$.

(77) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **12A-12B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **122** by forming a fourth patterned resist layer **710** over the second HM **560**. The fourth patterned resist layer **710** is formed similarly in many respects to the first patterned resist layer **410** discussed above association with FIGS. **4A-4B**. The fourth patterned resist layer **710** has a fourth opening **715**, which extends along the X direction. The fourth opening **715** is parallel to the sixth trench **625**. In some embodiments, the fourth opening **715** overlaps with the fourth trench **530** at a third location O (an end of the fourth trench **530**). A portion of the second HM **560** is exposed within the fourth opening **715**.

(78) In the present embodiment, the fourth opening **715** is defined by the fourth patterned resist layer **710** while the third opening **615** is defined by the third patterned resist layer **610**. Thus, line end shortening distortions induced by threshold distance $d_{sub.th}$ constrain in the lithography exposing process are greatly reduced. The third and fourth openings, **615** and **715**, are formed with regular contours (such as rectangular contours) at their opening ends.

(79) In some embodiments, referring to FIGS. **12C-12D**, the fourth opening is positioned closer to the sixth trench **625**. Thus, in some embodiments the second HM **560** and a portion of the adjacent second spacer **630** is exposed within the fourth opening (referred to as **716** as shown in FIGS. **12C-12D**). Sometimes the exposure of the adjacent second spacer **630** is caused by adverse process impacts, such as misalignment, pattern irregularities/distortions in the lithography process of forming the fourth patterned resist layer **710**. In still other embodiments, the fourth opening **716** has a larger width such that it extends to the adjacent second spacer **630** to obtain advantages, such as relaxing lithography process resolution constraints.

(80) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **13A-13B** (in conjunction with the process described with respect to FIGS. **12A-12B**), method **100** proceeds to step **124** by etching the second HM **560** through the fourth opening **715** to form a seventh trench **725** in the second HM **560**. A portion of the second material layer **230** is exposed in the seventh trench **725**. The etch process may include wet etch, dry

etch, or a combination thereof.

(81) As discussed above in reference to FIGS. 12C-12D, in some embodiments the fourth opening is positioned closer to the sixth trench 625 such that the second HM 560 and a portion of the adjacent second spacer 630 is exposed within the fourth opening (referred to as 716 as shown in FIGS. 12C-12D). In such a scenario, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the second HM 560 without substantially etching the second spacer 630. Thus, the portion of the adjacent second spacer 630 exposed within the fourth opening 716 serves as a sub-etch-mask (or guards the sixth trench 625) during etching the second HM 560 through the fourth opening 716 to form an eighth trench 726 as shown in FIGS. 13C-13D in this alternative embodiment.

(82) A resist strip process is then applied to remove any remaining fourth patterned resist layer 710. In conjunction with the process described above with respect to FIGS. 13A-13B, the sixth trench 625 having the second spacer 630 along its sidewalls and the seventh trench 725 are formed in the second HM 560, as shown in FIGS. 13E-13G after the removal of the fourth patterned resist layer 710. Alternatively, in conjunction with the process described with respect to FIGS. 13C-13D, the sixth trench 625 having the second spacer 560 along its sidewalls and eighth trench 726 are formed in the second HM 560, as shown in the FIGS. 13H-13I after the removal of the fourth patterned resist layer 710. Specifically, the second spacer 560 separates the sixth trench 625 away from the eighth trench 726 as shown in FIGS. 13H-13I. Therefore the second spacer 560 ensures a designed minimum space (w.sub.2) between the sixth trench 625 and the eighth trench 726 and it is referred to as a second safeguarding-spacer.

(83) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 14A-14E, the method 100 proceeds to step 126 by etching the planarization layer 550 through the sixth and seventh trenches, 625 and 725 to extend the sixth and seventh trenches, 625 and 725 to the planarization layer 550 (as shown in FIGS. 14A-14C), or through the sixth and eighth trenches, 625 and 726 to extend the sixth and eighth trenches, 625 and 727 to the planarization layer 550 (as shown in FIGS. 14D-14E in the alternative embodiment). In the present embodiment, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the planarization layer 550, but does not substantially etch the second HM 560, the second spacer 630 and the second material layer 230. Thus, the second HM 560 and the second spacer 630 serve as an etching-mask.

(84) Thereafter, the embodiments described in FIGS. 14A-14C and the embodiment described in FIGS. 14D-14E proceed to removing the second HM 560 and the second spacer 630 by other proper etching processes, as shown in FIGS. 14F-14J. The planarization layer 550 carries the sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, 625 and 725 (or 726), and portions of the second material layers 230 are exposed within the sixth and seventh/or eighth trenches, 625 and 725 (or 726).

(85) Referring to FIGS. 1 and 15A-15C, the method 100 proceeds to step 128 by removing the second material layer 230 within the sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, 625 and 727 (or 726). In the present embodiment, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the second material layer 230, but does not substantially etch the planarization layer 550 and the first material layer 220. Thus, the planarization 550 serve as an etching-mask and the first material layer 220 serves as an etch-stop layer. The planarization layer 550 is then removed by other proper etching processes, as shown in FIGS. 15D and 15E.

(86) Referring again to FIGS. 15D-15E, thus the second material layer 230 has the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, 530, 540, 625 and 725 (or 726), such that the fourth and fifth trenches are parallel to each other, along the Y direction and the sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches are parallel to each other, along the X direction. The fourth trench 530 connects to the seventh trench 725 at the location O with a first connecting angle θ to form a L-shape trench 810, the sixth trench 625 connects to the fourth trench 530 at location M with a second connecting angle α and the sixth trench 625 connects to the fifth trench 540 at locations N with a third connecting angle β to form a T-shape trench 820. Since the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, 530, 540, 625 and 725 (or 726) are defined by the first, second, third and fourth patterned resist

layers, **410**, **510**, **610** and **710**, respectively, rounded corner distortions induced in the lithography exposing process are greatly reduced. The first, second and third connecting angles, θ , α and β , are about 90 degree.

(87) FIGS. **15D-15E** also show that, in some embodiments, the sixth trench **625** is formed to have trench ends **625A** and **625B** extending outside the fourth trench **530** and fifth trench **540**, respectively, and the seventh (or eighth) trench **725** (or **726**) has a trench end **725A** extending outside the fourth trench **530**. All these trench ends provide insurance-like portions for reducing adverse impacts of line end shortening distortion.

(88) Referring to FIGS. **1** and **16A-16B**, the method **100** proceeds to step **130** by etching the first material layer **220**, using the material layer **230** as an etch mask, to transfer the fifth, sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, **530**, **540**, **625** and **725** (or **726**) to the first material layer **220**, with 90-degree connecting angles θ and regular line-end contour (such as a rectangular contour). In some embodiment, respective portions of the substrate **210** are exposed in the fifth, sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, **530**, **540**, **625** and **725** (or **726**). In present embodiment, the etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the first material layer **220** but does not substantially etch the second material layer **230**. The etch process includes an anisotropic dry etch. For example, the etch process is a plasma anisotropic etch. The second material layer **230** is then removed by a proper etch process, as shown in FIGS. **16C-16D**.

(89) Additional steps can be provided before, during, and after the method **100**, and some of the steps described can be replaced, eliminated, or moved around for additional embodiments of the method **100**. Other alternatives or embodiments may present without departure from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. For example, in some embodiments, in step **126**, not only the planarization layer **550** but also the second material layer **230** is etched through the sixth and seventh trenches, **625** and **725** to extend the sixth and seventh trenches, **625** and **725** to the planarization layer **550**, as shown in FIGS. **17A-17C**. The etch process is properly chosen to selectively etch the planarization layer **550** and the second material layer **230**, but does not substantially etch the second HM **560** and the second spacer **630**. Thus, the second HM **560** and the second spacer **630** serve as an etching-mask. The second HM **560**, the second spacer **630** and the planarization layer **550** are then removed by other proper etching processes, as shown in FIGS. **15D-15E**.

(90) The semiconductor device **200** may undergo further CMOS or MOS technology processing to form various features and regions known in the art. For example, subsequent processing may form metal lines in the fifth, sixth and seventh (or eighth) trenches, **530**, **540**, **625** and **725** (or **726**). For another example, various contacts/vias and multilayers interconnect features (e.g., interlayer dielectrics) over the substrate **210**, configured to connect the various features or structures of the semiconductor device **200**.

(91) Based on the above, it can be seen that the present disclosure provides methods of forming L-shape and T-shape trenches and trenches which have small space between each other. The method employs forming a L-shape or T-shape trench by two sub-trenches formed by two individual lithography/etch cycles. The two sub-trenches are formed extending along two directions perpendicular to each other. The method also employs guarding-spacers to ensure a space between trenches. The method demonstrates reducing rounded corner distortion in forming the L-shape or T-shape trench. The method also demonstrates reducing line end shortening distortion and overcoming misalignment in forming trenches having small spacing between each other.

(92) The present disclosure provides many different embodiments of fabricating a semiconductor device that provide one or more improvements over existing approaches. In one embodiment, a method for fabricating a semiconductor device includes forming a material layer over a substrate, forming a first hard mask (HM) layer over the material layer, forming a first trench in the first HM layer. The first trench extends along a first direction. The method also includes forming first spacers along sidewalls of the first trench, forming a second trench in the first HM layer parallel to

the first trench, by using the first spacers to guard the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the first trench and the second trench, removing the first HM layer and the first spacers, forming a second HM layer over the material layer, forming a third trench in the second HM layer. The third trench extends along a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction. The third trench overlaps with the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the third trench.

(93) In another embodiment, a method includes forming a material layer over a substrate, forming a first hard mask (HM) layer over the material layer, forming a first trench in the first HM layer. The first trench extends along a first direction. The method also includes forming first spacers along sidewalls of the first trench, forming a second trench in the first HM layer parallel to the first trench, by using the first spacers to guard the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the first trench and the second trench, removing the first HM layer and the first spacers, forming a planarization layer over the material layer, including filling in the first trench and the second trench. The method also includes forming a second HM layer over the planarization layer, forming a third trench in the second HM layer. The third trench extends along a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction and overlaps with the first trench at an end of the first trench. The method also includes transferring the third trench to the planarization layer, removing the second HM layer and the second spacers and etching the material layer through the third trench in the planarization layer.

(94) In yet another embodiment, a method includes forming a material layer over a main layer, forming a first hard mask (HM) layer over the material layer, forming a first trench in the first HM layer. The first trench extends along a first direction. The method also includes forming first spacers along sidewalls of the first trench, forming a second trench in the first HM layer parallel to the first trench, by using the first spacers to guard the first trench. The method also includes etching the material layer through the first trench and the second trench, removing the first HM layer and the first spacers, forming a planarization layer over the material layer, including filling in the first trench and the second trench. The method also includes forming a second HM layer over the planarization layer, forming a third trench in the second HM layer. The third trench extends along a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction and overlaps with the first trench at an end of the first trench. The method also includes etching the planarization layer and the material layer through the third trench, removing the second HM layer, second spacers and the planarization layer and etching the main layer by using the material layer, which has the first, second and third trenches, as an etch mask to transfer the first trench, the second trench and third trench to the main layer.

(95) 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 method comprising: forming a first trench and a second trench in a first material layer disposed over a substrate, wherein, in a top view, the first trench comprising a length extending along a first direction and a width smaller than the length; forming a second material layer in the first trench and the second trench; removing a first portion of the second material layer to form a third trench that exposes a portion of the first material layer, wherein the third trench extends lengthwise along a

second direction that is different than the first direction, wherein the third trench at least partially overlaps the first trench; and removing the portion of the first material layer through the third trench.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the second direction is substantially perpendicular to the first direction.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising forming a first hard mask layer directly on the second material layer; and performing a first patterning process on the first hard mask layer to expose the first portion of the second material layer.

4. The method of claim 3, further comprising performing a second patterning process on the first hard mask layer to expose a second portion of the second material layer.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the removing of the first portion of the second material layer to form the third trench includes removing the second portion of the second material layer.

6. The method of claim 4, forming a spacer layer directly on the second portion of the second material layer prior to the removing of the first portion of the second material layer to form the third trench that exposes the portion of the first material layer.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the spacer layer is disposed directly on the second portion of the second material layer after the removing of the first portion of the second material layer to form the third trench that exposes the portion of the first material layer.

8. The method of claim 6, further comprising removing the spacer layer to expose the second portion of the second material layer after the removing of the first portion of the second material layer to form the third trench that exposes the portion of the first material layer.

9. A method comprising: forming a first material layer over a substrate; forming a second material layer over the first material layer; forming a first trench in the second material layer, wherein the first trench extends along a first direction; forming a second trench in the second material layer, wherein the first and second trenches are separated from each other by a remaining portion of the second material layer; removing a first portion of the first material layer to extend the first trench into the first material layer and removing a second portion of the first material layer to extend the second trench into the first material layer thereby forming a patterned first material layer; forming a third material layer over the patterned first material layer; forming a third trench extending through the third material layer to thereby form a patterned third material layer, wherein the third trench extends along a second direction that is different than the first direction, wherein the third trench overlaps the extended first trench; and removing a third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising: forming a fourth material layer over the substrate prior to forming the first material layer over the substrate, and after the removing of the third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench, patterning the fourth material layer while using the patterned first material layer as a mask.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the fourth material layer includes a conductive material.

12. The method of claim 10, further comprising removing the patterned third material layer prior to the patterning of the fourth material layer while using the patterned first material layer as a mask.

13. The method of claim 9, further comprising forming a spacer layer directly on the third material layer prior to the forming of the third trench extending through the third material layer to thereby form the patterned third material layer.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising removing the spacer layer prior to the removing of the third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench.

15. The method of claim 9, wherein the forming of the third material layer over the patterned first material layer includes forming the third material layer in the extended first trench.

16. A method comprising: forming a first material layer over a substrate; forming a second material layer over the first material layer; forming a first trench in the second material layer, wherein the first trench extends along a first direction; forming a second trench in the second material layer,

wherein the second trench extends along the first direction; removing a first portion of the first material layer to extend the first trench into the first material layer and removing a second portion of the first material layer to extend the second trench into the first material layer thereby forming a patterned first material layer; forming a third material layer over the patterned first material layer and within the extended first trench and the extended second trench; forming a spacer layer directly on the third material layer; forming a third trench through the spacer layer and into the third material layer to thereby form a patterned third material layer, wherein the third trench extends along a second direction that is different than the first direction, wherein the third trench overlaps the extended first trench; and removing a third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising removing any remaining portion of the second material layer after removing the first portion of the first material layer to extend the first trench into the first material layer and removing the second portion of the first material layer to extend the second trench into the first material layer thereby forming the patterned first material layer.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising forming a patterned fourth material layer directly on a first portion of the third material layer, the patterned fourth material layer defining an opening exposing a second portion of the third material layer, and wherein the forming of the spacer layer directly on the third material layer includes forming the spacer layer within the opening and directly on the second portion of the third material layer.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising removing the patterned fourth material layer and the spacer layer prior to the removing of the third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising removing any remaining portion of the patterned third material layer after removing the third portion of the patterned first material layer through the third trench.
