

TITLE OF INVENTION

Photomask Blank and Making Method

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TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to photomask blanks from which photomasks for use in the microfabrication of semiconductor integrated circuits or the like are produced, and a
15 method for preparing the photomask blank.

BACKGROUND ART

In the semiconductor technology field, research and development efforts continue for further miniaturization of circuit patterns. Recently, a challenge to higher integration
20 of large-scale integrated circuits places increasing demands for further miniaturization of circuit patterns, size reduction of wiring patterns, and miniaturization of contact hole patterns for cell-constructing inter-layer connections. As a consequence, in the manufacture of photomasks for use in the photolithography of forming such fine patterns, a technique capable of accurately writing finer circuit patterns or mask patterns is needed to meet the
25 miniaturization demand.

In general, the photolithography adopts reduction projection in forming patterns on semiconductor substrates. Thus the photomask pattern typically has a size of about 4 times the size of a pattern to be formed on the semiconductor substrate. In the currently prevailing photolithography, a circuit pattern to be written has a size far smaller than the wavelength of
30 light used for exposure. If a photomask pattern which is a mere 4-time magnification of the circuit feature is used, the desired shape is not transferred to the resist film on semiconductor substrate due to influences such as optical interference occurring during exposure.

To mitigate such influences as optical interference, in some cases, the photomask pattern is designed to a more complex shape than the actual circuit pattern. For example, the so-called optical proximity correction (OPC) is applied to the actual circuit pattern to design a complex pattern shape. Besides, various techniques such as modified illumination, immersion lithography, and double-patterning lithography are applied to meet the demands for pattern miniaturization and high accuracy.

Photomask patterns are formed, for example, by furnishing a photomask blank having a light-shielding film on a transparent substrate, forming a photoresist film on the blank, writing a pattern with EB, developing to form a resist pattern, and etching the light-shielding film through the resist pattern serving as an etching mask, to form a light-shielding pattern. In an attempt to miniaturize the light-shielding pattern, if it is processed while maintaining the thickness of the resist film the same as before miniaturization, a ratio of film thickness to pattern size, known as aspect ratio, becomes high. Then the profile of resist pattern is degraded, pattern transfer fails and sometimes, the resist pattern collapses or strips off. The resist film must be thinned in compliance with size reduction.

One of prior art attempts to mitigate the burden on resist film during dry etching is the use of a hard mask. For example, Patent Document 1 discloses the steps of forming a SiO₂ film on a MoSi₂ film and dry etching the MoSi₂ film with a chlorine-containing gas while using the SiO₂ film as the etching mask. It is described that the SiO₂ film also functions as an antireflective film. Also Patent Document 2 describes that a light-shielding film of chromium is formed on a phase shift film and a SiO₂ film is formed thereon as a hard mask.

Citation List

Patent Document 1: JP-A S63-085553

Patent Document 2: JP-A H07-049558

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

A photomask is prepared from a photomask blank having a hard mask film by first forming a mask pattern in the hard mask film, and etching an underlying optical functional film such as a light-shielding film or phase shift film, with the mask pattern of the hard mask film serving as an etching mask, for thereby transferring the mask pattern of the hard mask film to the optical functional film. In this course, if the hard mask film contains

pinhole defects penetrating through the film in thickness direction, the penetrating pinhole defects are transferred intactly to the optical functional film, becoming defects in the mask pattern of the optical functional film. In the defect inspection of the hard mask film, it is critical to detect penetrating pinhole defects.

5 On the other hand, a thinner hard mask film is preferable from the standpoint of pattern size reduction. The thinner the film, the more difficult it becomes to detect penetrating pinhole defects. From the standpoint of defect formation in a resist film (resist pattern) on the hard mask film during development, a SiO₂ film is preferred as the hard mask film. However, materials like SiO₂ have low optical constants including
10 refractive index n and extinction coefficient k . It is difficult to detect penetrating pinhole defects in a film of low optical constant material.

The invention pertains to a photomask blank comprising an optical functional film and a hard mask film of silicon-containing material disposed contiguous thereto. An object of the invention is to provide a photomask blank including a hard mask film which enables
15 positive detection of penetrating pinhole defects, and a method for preparing the same.

In connection with a photomask blank which is processed into a transmissive photomask for use in photolithography for forming a pattern on a recipient using exposure light of wavelength up to 200 nm, comprising a transparent substrate, a first film formed of a material which is etchable by chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching with a gas mixture of
20 chlorine and oxygen gases and resistant against fluorine-based dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas, and a second film formed of a silicon-containing material which is not substantially etched during the chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching of the first film, the inventors have found that the object is attained when the second film is composed of a single layer or multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at
25 least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3 as an optical constant with respect to the wavelength of inspection light used in a defect inspection step, which is longer than the wavelength of exposure light. With this construction, the photomask blank comprising a hard mask film of silicon-containing material disposed contiguous to an optical functional film becomes a photomask blank including a hard mask film which enables positive
30 detection of penetrating pinhole defects.

In one aspect, the invention provides a photomask blank which is processed into a transmissive photomask for use in photolithography for forming a pattern on a recipient

using exposure light of wavelength up to 200 nm, the photomask blank comprising a transparent substrate, a first film disposed on the substrate and formed of a material which is etchable by chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching with a gas mixture of chlorine and oxygen gases and resistant against fluorine-based dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas, and a second film disposed
5 contiguous to the first film and formed of a silicon-containing material which is not substantially etched during the chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching of the first film. The second film is composed of multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3 with respect to the wavelength of inspection light used in a defect inspection step, which is longer than the exposure light wavelength, and the
10 difference in refractive index n with respect to the inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest refractive index and a layer having the lowest refractive index is at least 0.5, or the difference in extinction coefficient k with respect to the inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest extinction coefficient and a layer having the lowest extinction coefficient is at least 0.3.

15 In a preferred embodiment, the second film has a thickness of 2 nm to 20 nm.

In a preferred embodiment, the silicon-containing material of the second film is silicon alone, a silicon-containing compound containing silicon and at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, or a transition metal/silicon-containing compound containing silicon, at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, and up to 20 at% of
20 a transition metal. Typically the light element comprises oxygen and/or nitrogen.

In a preferred embodiment, the second film is composed of multiple layers, and the difference in refractive index n with respect to inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest refractive index and a layer having the lowest refractive index is at least 0.5, or the difference in extinction coefficient k with respect to inspection light wavelength between a
25 layer having the highest extinction coefficient and a layer having the lowest extinction coefficient is at least 0.3.

In a preferred embodiment, in the second film, a layer disposed remotest from the first film has a total content of oxygen and nitrogen and a layer disposed contiguous to the first film has a total content of oxygen and nitrogen, the former content being higher than the latter content.

30 Often the defects are penetrating pinhole defects. Typically, the exposure light is ArF excimer laser light and the inspection light has a wavelength of up to 600 nm.

The invention also provides a method for preparing the photomask blank, comprising the step of inspecting the photomask blank for defects at the inspection light wavelength.

ADVANTAGEOUS EFFECTS OF INVENTION

The photomask blank comprising a hard mask film of silicon-containing material disposed on an optical functional film makes it possible to detect penetrating pinhole defects in the hard mask film.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of a photomask blank in one embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of a photomask blank in another embodiment of the invention.

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DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The photomask blank of the invention is processed into a transmissive photomask which is used in photolithography for forming a pattern on a recipient using exposure light of wavelength up to 200 nm. As used herein, the exposure light is light used in exposure through the photomask. In conjunction with the photomask blank and photomask of the invention, the exposure light is preferably ArF excimer laser light of wavelength 193 nm.

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One embodiment of the invention is a photomask blank comprising a transparent substrate, a first film disposed on the substrate, and a second film disposed contiguous to the first film. In a photomask blank as shown in FIG. 1, a first film 21 and a second film 22 are formed in order on a transparent substrate 1.

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The transparent substrate is typically a quartz substrate which is transparent at the exposure wavelength although the type and size of the substrate are not particularly limited. Preference is given to transparent substrates of 6 inch squares and 0.25 inch thick, known as 6025 substrate, as prescribed in the SEMI standards, or transparent substrates of 152 mm squares and 6.35 mm thick when expressed in the SI units.

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The first film may be formed either contiguous to the transparent substrate (i.e., in direct contact with the substrate) or on the transparent substrate via an intervening film such as phase shift film. In one exemplary photomask blank, as shown in FIG. 2, another film (third film) 3, a first film 21, and a second film 22 are formed in order on a transparent substrate 1. The other film is preferably formed of a material having different etching properties from the first film, especially a material which is etchable with fluorine-based

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dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas, but resistant against chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching with a gas mixture of chlorine and oxygen gases, typically a silicon-containing material. The other film may be composed of a single layer or multiple layers.

The first film is formed of a material which is etchable by chlorine/oxygen-based
5 dry etching with a gas mixture of chlorine and oxygen gases, but resistant against fluorine-based dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas. Suitable materials include chromium alone, and chromium compounds, for example, chromium oxide (CrO), chromium nitride (CrN), chromium carbide (CrC), chromium oxynitride (CrON), chromium oxycarbide (CrOC), chromium nitride carbide (CrNC), and chromium oxide
10 nitride carbide (CrONC).

In the embodiment wherein the first film is a film of a chromium compound, the chromium content is preferably at least 30 at%, especially at least 40 at% and less than 100 at%, especially up to 90 at%. Also preferably, the oxygen content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 60 at%, especially up to 40 at%; the nitrogen content is
15 at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 50 at%, especially up to 40 at%; the carbon content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% when an etching rate must be adjusted, and up to 20 at%, especially up to 10 at%. The total content of chromium, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon is preferably at least 95 at%, more preferably at least 99 at%, and especially 100 at%.

The first film may be composed of a single layer or multiple layers. Where the
20 first film is a single layer, it may be a homogeneous layer having a constant composition in thickness direction or a compositionally graded layer having a composition continuously graded in thickness direction. Where the first film is composed of multiple layers, it may be a combination of at least one homogeneous layer and/or at least one graded layer, for
25 example, a combination of homogeneous layers, a combination of graded layers, or a combination of a homogeneous layer and a graded layer. In the graded layer, the content of a certain element may increase or decrease in thickness direction.

The (total) thickness of the first film is preferably at least 20 nm, more preferably at least 40 nm, and up to 100 nm, more preferably up to 70 nm. The first film is preferably
30 constructed as an optical functional film such as a light-shielding film or antireflective film. The first film may also function as a hard mask (or etching mask) during etching of the transparent substrate or the other film (as mentioned above) on the substrate.

The second film is formed of a silicon-containing material which is not substantially etched during the chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching of the first film, i.e., chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching with a gas mixture of chlorine and oxygen gases. Preferably the material of the second film is etchable by fluorine-based dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas.

For the film, typically hard mask film, which functions as an etching mask for any film disposed on the substrate side, the detection of penetrating pinholes is important. The step of detecting defects in the photomask blank preparing process generally uses inspection light having a longer wavelength than the exposure light (light used in exposure through the photomask). When the exposure light is ArF excimer laser, a wavelength in a range of up to 600 nm, for example, 213 nm, 355 nm, 488 nm or 532 nm is selected as the inspection light. A defect inspection system using inspection light of such wavelength is commercially available as model M6640 (inspection wavelength 532 nm) or M8350 (inspection wavelength 355 nm) from Lasertec Corp. It is believed that as the photomask pattern is further miniaturized in the future, the inspection light wavelength for defect inspection will shift toward shorter wavelength side for improving the detection sensitivity of microscopic defects.

In the step of detecting defects, especially penetrating pinhole defects in a photomask blank, the detection sensitivity of microscopic defects is affected by optical constants of a film including refractive index n and extinction coefficient k . In the inventive photomask blank, the second film is composed of a single layer or multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3 with respect to the wavelength of inspection light used in the defect inspection step, which is longer than the exposure light. Higher values of refractive index n and extinction coefficient k are preferable. From the standpoint of defect detection, a refractive index n of at least 1.7 and an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.5 are preferred. Most often, the refractive index n is up to 7 and the extinction coefficient k is up to 6.

Typical of the silicon-containing material of which the second film is formed is silicon alone. Elemental silicon having high values of refractive index n and extinction coefficient k is the most effective material from the standpoint of defect detection. Also suitable as the silicon-containing material are silicon-containing compounds, for example,

silicon-containing compounds containing silicon and at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon, such as silicon oxide (SiO), silicon nitride (SiN), silicon carbide (SiC), silicon oxynitride (SiON), silicon oxycarbide (SiOC), silicon nitride carbide (SiNC), and silicon oxide nitride carbide (SiONC), and transition metal/silicon-containing
5 compounds containing silicon, at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon, and a transition metal (Me), such as transition metal silicon oxide (MeSiO), transition metal silicon nitride (MeSiN), transition metal silicon carbide (MeSiC), transition metal silicon oxide nitride (MeSiON), transition metal silicon oxide carbide (MeSiOC), transition metal silicon nitride carbide (MeSiNC), and transition metal silicon
10 oxide nitride carbide (MeSiONC). The transition metal (Me) is at least one element selected from among titanium (Ti), vanadium (V), cobalt (Co), nickel (Ni), zirconium (Zr), niobium (Nb), molybdenum (Mo), hafnium (Hf), tantalum (Ta), and tungsten (W).

In the embodiment wherein the silicon-containing material of the second film is a silicon-containing compound, the silicon content is preferably at least 20 at%, more
15 preferably at least 33 at% and up to 95 at%, more preferably up to 80 at%. Also preferably, the oxygen content is at least 0 at%, specifically at least 1 at% when an etching rate must be adjusted, especially at least 20 at% and up to 70 at%, especially up to 66 at%; the nitrogen content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 50 at%, especially up to 30 at%; the carbon content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 20 at%,
20 especially up to 10 at%. The total content of silicon, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon is preferably at least 95 at%, more preferably at least 99 at%, and especially 100 at%.

In the embodiment wherein the silicon-containing material of the second film is a transition metal/silicon-containing compound, the silicon content is preferably at least 20 at%, more preferably at least 33 at% and up to 90 at%, more preferably up to 80 at%.
25 Also preferably, the oxygen content is at least 0 at%, specifically at least 1 at% when an etching rate must be adjusted, especially at least 20 at% and up to 70 at%, especially up to 66 at%; the nitrogen content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 50 at%, especially up to 30 at%; the carbon content is at least 0 at%, especially at least 1 at% and up to 20 at%, especially up to 10 at%. The transition metal content is up to 20 at%,
30 preferably up to 15 at%, more preferably up to 10 at%. The total content of silicon, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon and transition metal is preferably at least 95 at%, more preferably at least 99 at%, and especially 100 at%.

The silicon-containing compound or transition metal/silicon-containing compound of the second film preferably contains one or both of oxygen and nitrogen as light element, more preferably oxygen.

The second film may be composed of a single layer or multiple layers, typically two to four layers. Where the second film is a single layer, it may be a homogeneous layer having a constant composition in thickness direction or a compositionally graded layer having a composition continuously graded in thickness direction. Where the second film is composed of multiple layers, it may be a combination of at least one homogeneous layer and/or at least one graded layer, for example, a combination of homogeneous layers, a combination of graded layers, or a combination of a homogeneous layer(s) and a graded layer(s). In the graded layer, the content of a certain element may increase or decrease in thickness direction. Also the compositionally graded layer is constructed such that refractive index n or extinction coefficient k may increase or decrease in thickness direction. From the standpoint of detection of penetrating pinhole defects, the overall second film or the graded layer of which the second film is composed is preferably constructed such that refractive index n or extinction coefficient k may decrease in a direction remote from the substrate.

Although the second film may be a single layer, it is preferred from the standpoints of an etching rate of a film and defect generation during film deposition that the second film be composed of multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3. In the embodiment wherein the second film is composed of multiple layers, it may consist of layers having specific values of refractive index n or extinction coefficient k . Alternatively, the second film may be a combination of a layer having a value of refractive index n or extinction coefficient k within the range and a layer having a value of refractive index n or extinction coefficient k outside the range, wherein the former layer is a layer contributing to an improvement in accuracy of defect inspection and the latter layer is a layer serving for another function other than the accuracy improvement of defect inspection. Then the overall second film has better functions.

It is preferred from the standpoints of adhesion to photoresist and development defects, for example, that the outermost layer (layer disposed remotest from the substrate) of the second film be silicon dioxide (SiO_2). However, since silicon dioxide has low values of

refractive index n and extinction coefficient k with respect to the inspection light wavelength, the second film should preferably be composed of multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3.

In the embodiment wherein the second film is composed of multiple layers, it is
5 preferred from the standpoint of improving the accuracy of defect inspection that the layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3 account for at least 20%, more preferably at least 30% of the total thickness of the second film. It is also preferred from the standpoint of acquiring a function other than the accuracy improvement of defect inspection that the layer having a value of refractive index n or
10 extinction coefficient k outside the range account for at least 40%, more preferably at least 50% of the total thickness of the second film.

In the embodiment wherein the second film is composed of multiple layers, the difference in refractive index n with respect to inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest refractive index and a layer having the lowest refractive index is
15 preferably at least 0.5, especially at least 0.7; or the difference in extinction coefficient k with respect to inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest extinction coefficient and a layer having the lowest extinction coefficient is preferably at least 0.3, especially at least 0.5. In this preferred embodiment, the layer having the highest refractive index and the layer having the lowest refractive index, or the layer having the
20 highest extinction coefficient and the layer having the lowest extinction coefficient may be disposed at any desired level in the second film. In the case of two-layer film, for example, of the layer having the highest refractive index and the layer having the lowest refractive index, or of the layer having the highest extinction coefficient and the layer having the lowest extinction coefficient, either one may be disposed adjacent to the
25 substrate and the other be disposed remote from the substrate. In the case of three or multilayer film, of the layer having the highest refractive index and the layer having the lowest refractive index, or of the layer having the highest extinction coefficient and the layer having the lowest extinction coefficient, preferably either one is disposed adjacent to the substrate, especially most adjacent to the substrate and the other is disposed remote
30 from the substrate, especially remotest from the substrate.

As alluded to previously, the silicon-containing compound or transition metal/silicon-containing compound of the second film preferably contains one or both of

oxygen and nitrogen as light element, more preferably oxygen. In the embodiment wherein the second film is composed of multiple layers, the layers are preferably constructed such that the total content of oxygen and nitrogen in the layer disposed remotest from the first film is higher than the total content of oxygen and nitrogen in the layer disposed contiguous to the first film.

The second film has a sufficient thickness not to vanish during etching of the first film, although it is preferred from the standpoint of pattern formation that the second film be not too thick. In this regard, the (total) thickness of the second film is preferably at least 2 nm, more preferably at least 5 nm, and up to 20 nm, more preferably up to 10 nm. The second film is preferably formed as a hard mask film or etching mask film. At the later stage when the photomask blank is processed into a photomask, the second film may be completely removed, or left on the photomask, for example, an outer peripheral portion of the substrate as a film taking on part of the function of light-shielding film or antireflective film.

In the embodiment wherein the first film is formed on the transparent substrate via another film or third film intervening therebetween, the other film is formed of a silicon-containing material. Examples of the silicon-containing material include silicon-containing compounds, for example, silicon-containing compounds containing silicon and one or both of oxygen and nitrogen, such as silicon oxide (SiO), silicon nitride (SiN), silicon oxynitride (SiON), and transition metal/silicon compounds, for example, transition metal/silicon compounds containing silicon, at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon, and a transition metal (Me), such as transition metal silicon oxide (MeSiO), transition metal silicon nitride (MeSiN), transition metal silicon carbide (MeSiC), transition metal silicon oxide nitride (MeSiON), transition metal silicon oxide carbide (MeSiOC), transition metal silicon nitride carbide (MeSiNC), and transition metal silicon oxide nitride carbide (MeSiONC). The transition metal (Me) is at least one element selected from among titanium (Ti), vanadium (V), cobalt (Co), nickel (Ni), zirconium (Zr), niobium (Nb), molybdenum (Mo), hafnium (Hf), tantalum (Ta), and tungsten (W). Of these, molybdenum (Mo) is preferred from the standpoint of dry etching.

In the embodiment wherein the other film is a phase shift film, it may be either a full transmissive phase shift film or a halftone phase shift film, for example, having a transmittance of 5 to 30% with respect to exposure light. The phase shift film is generally

formed to such a thickness as to provide a phase shift of at least 150°, preferably at least 170° and up to 200°, preferably up to 190°, typically a phase shift of about 180° with respect to exposure light during use of the photomask. Specifically, the other film preferably has a thickness of at least 50 nm, more preferably at least 55 nm and up to 80 nm, more preferably up to 75 nm.

In one embodiment wherein the first film in the form of a light-shielding film or a light-shielding film and antireflective film is directly formed on the transparent substrate, the photomask blank may be a binary photomask blank. In another embodiment wherein the first film is formed on the transparent substrate via the other film in the form of a phase shift film, the photomask blank may be a phase shift photomask blank. From the binary photomask blank, a binary photomask (or binary mask) may be manufactured. From the phase shift photomask blank, a phase shift photomask (or phase shift mask) may be manufactured.

Preferably the single layer or each of the multiple layers of which the first film, second film or other film is composed is deposited by a sputtering technique because a fully homogeneous film is readily obtained. The sputtering technique may be either DC sputtering or RF sputtering. The target and sputtering gas are selected as appropriate depending on the desired value of refractive index or extinction coefficient, layer arrangement and composition. When the film is formed by reactive sputtering, the content of light element(s) may be adjusted by using a reactive gas as the sputtering gas and adjusting the flow rate thereof. Suitable reactive gases include oxygen-containing gas, nitrogen-containing gas and carbon-containing gas, for example, oxygen gas (O₂ gas), nitrogen gas (N₂ gas), nitrogen oxide gas (NO gas, N₂O gas, NO₂ gas), and carbon oxide gas (CO gas, CO₂ gas). The sputtering gas contains an inert gas such as helium, neon or argon gas. The preferred inert gas is argon gas. The sputtering pressure is typically at least 0.01 Pa, preferably at least 0.03 Pa and up to 10 Pa, preferably up to 0.1 Pa.

When the film is composed of multiple layers, the layers may be deposited in different sputtering chambers or in a common sputtering chamber while changing sputtering conditions stepwise or continuously. From the standpoint of productivity, deposition in a common chamber is recommended. In this case, it is preferred for sputter deposition and deposit properties that deposition is controlled such that the content of light element(s) may increase with the progress of deposition, because the generation of particles

during deposition is suppressed. This is also advantageous because of a possibility that a layer having the highest value of refractive index or extinction coefficient is disposed nearest to the substrate and a layer having the lowest value of refractive index or extinction coefficient is disposed remotest from the substrate.

5 When a film of chromium-containing material is deposited, the target may be selected from a chromium target and a target containing chromium and at least one element selected from oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, depending on the desired composition of the film. When a film of silicon-containing material is deposited, the target may be selected from a silicon target, transition metal target, and transition metal/silicon target, depending
10 on the desired composition of the film.

 When the photomask blank is prepared by the above-described method, the method should involve the step of inspecting the photomask blank for defects, especially penetrating pinhole defects, using inspection light of longer wavelength than exposure light. Then defects, especially penetrating pinhole defects in the photomask blank can be
15 detected at a high sensitivity.

EXAMPLE

Examples and Comparative Examples are given below by way of illustration and not by way of limitation.

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Example 1 and Comparative Example 1

 In a chamber of a sputtering system, a 6025 quartz substrate of 152 mm squares and 6.35 mm thick was placed. By sputtering a Si target with argon and nitrogen gases, a phase shift film (third film) of SiN having a thickness of 60 nm was deposited directly on
25 the transparent substrate. Next, by sputtering a Cr target with argon gas, a light-shielding film (first film) of Cr having a thickness of 54 nm was deposited on the phase shift film. Next, by sputtering a Si target with argon gas and optionally oxygen or nitrogen gas, a mono-layer hard mask film (second film) of silicon-containing material having a thickness of 10 nm was deposited on the light-shielding film.

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 Hard mask film samples #1 to #5 were prepared as a layer of silicon alone, a layer of silicon oxide (SiO), or a layer of silicon nitride (SiN) by suitably selecting the flow rate of oxygen or nitrogen gas, and sputtering under five different sets of conditions (condition

sets 1 to 5). The hard mask film was analyzed for composition by X-ray photoelectron spectrometer XPS K-Alpha (Thermo Fisher Scientific). The optical constants (refractive index n , extinction coefficient k) of the hard mask film at several wavelengths were determined by a spectroscopic ellipsometer VUV-VASE Gen-II (J. A. Woollam Co.).

5 The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Sample (condition set)	Composition	Atomic ratio	Refractive index n at wavelength				
			193 nm	213 nm	355 nm	488 nm	532 nm
#1	Si : O(SiO ₂)	33 : 67	1.561	1.535	1.474	1.460	1.458
#2	Si : O	67 : 33	1.429	1.621	2.943	3.095	3.038
#3	Si	100	0.883	1.119	5.657	4.367	4.159
#4	Si : N	63 : 37	1.303	1.601	3.914	4.163	4.069
#5	Si : N	46 : 54	2.612	2.529	2.113	2.052	2.042

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Table 2

Sample (condition set)	Composition	Atomic ratio	Extinction coefficient k at wavelength				
			193 nm	213 nm	355 nm	488 nm	532 nm
#1	Si : O(SiO ₂)	33 : 67	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
#2	Si : O	67 : 33	1.448	1.538	1.284	0.472	0.324
#3	Si	100	2.778	3.025	3.019	0.079	0.043
#4	Si : N	63 : 37	2.255	2.453	2.046	0.743	0.495
#5	Si : N	46 : 54	0.356	0.162	0.000	0.000	0.000

Next, each of hard mask film samples #1 to #5 was inspected for penetrating pinhole defects having a diameter of 120 nm. The sensitivity of defect detection was evaluated by computing a contrast at inspection light wavelength 532 nm from simulation based on the measured refractive index n and extinction coefficient k of samples #1 to #5.

5 The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Condition set 1	Condition set 2	Condition set 3	Condition set 4	Condition set 5
0.007	0.037	0.072	0.058	0.017

Example 2 and Comparative Example 2

10 In a chamber of a sputtering system, a 6025 quartz substrate of 152 mm squares and 6.35 mm thick was placed. By sputtering a Si target with argon and nitrogen gases, a phase shift film (third film) of SiN having a thickness of 60 nm was deposited directly on the transparent substrate. Next, by sputtering a Cr target with argon gas, a light-shielding film (first film) of Cr having a thickness of 54 nm was deposited on the phase shift film.

15 Next, by sputtering a Si target with argon gas and optionally oxygen or nitrogen gas, a two-layer or mono-layer hard mask film (second film) of silicon-containing material was deposited on the light-shielding film.

Hard mask film samples #6 to #14 were prepared as a layer of silicon alone, a layer of silicon oxide (SiO), or a layer of silicon nitride (SiN) by suitably selecting the flow rate of oxygen or nitrogen gas, and sputtering under the same five condition sets as in Example 1

20 and Comparative Example 1. The hard mask film samples #6 to #13 were hard mask films of two-layer structure selected from (1) a surface side layer (i.e., layer remote from substrate) of 8 nm thick and a substrate side layer of 2 nm thick (overall thickness of hard mask film 10 nm), (2) a surface side layer of 3 nm thick and a substrate side layer of 2 nm

25 thick (overall thickness of hard mask film 5 nm), and (3) a surface side layer of 5 nm thick and a substrate side layer of 5 nm thick (overall thickness of hard mask film 10 nm). The hard mask film sample #14 was a mono-layer hard mask film having an overall thickness of 10 nm or 5 nm. The layer construction of each sample is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

	Sample								
	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14
Surface side layer	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	Condition set 3	Condition set 4	Condition set 2	Condition set 5	Condition set 1
Substrate side layer	Condition set 3	Condition set 4	Condition set 2	Condition set 5	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	Condition set 1	

Next, each of hard mask film samples #6 to #14 was inspected for penetrating pinhole defects having a diameter of 120 nm. The sensitivity of defect detection was evaluated by computing a contrast at inspection light wavelength 532 nm from simulation based on the measured refractive index n and extinction coefficient k under condition sets 1 to 5 of Example 1 and Comparative Example 1. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

thickness of surface side layer + thickness of substrate side layer = overall thickness (nm)	Sample								
	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14
(1) $8 + 2 \text{ nm} = 10 \text{ nm}$	0.019	0.017	0.012	0.008	0.067	0.055	0.033	0.015	0.007
(2) $3 + 2 \text{ nm} = 5 \text{ nm}$	0.015	0.014	0.009	0.005	0.024	0.021	0.012	0.006	0.003
(3) $5 + 5 \text{ nm} = 10 \text{ nm}$	0.039	0.033	0.020	0.011	0.051	0.042	0.025	0.012	0.007

CLAIMS:

1. A photomask blank which is processed into a transmissive photomask for use in photolithography for forming a pattern on a recipient using exposure light of wavelength
5 up to 200 nm, the photomask blank comprising
 - a transparent substrate,
 - a first film disposed on the substrate and formed of a material which is etchable by chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching with a gas mixture of chlorine and oxygen gases and resistant against fluorine-based dry etching with a fluorine-containing gas, and
 - 10 a second film disposed contiguous to the first film and formed of silicon-containing material which is not substantially etched during the chlorine/oxygen-based dry etching of the first film,
 - said second film being composed of multiple layers including at least one layer having a refractive index n of at least 1.6 or an extinction coefficient k of at least 0.3 with
15 respect to the wavelength of inspection light used in a defect inspection step, which is longer than the exposure light wavelength, and
 - the difference in refractive index n with respect to the inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest refractive index and a layer having the lowest refractive index is at least 0.5, or
 - 20 - the difference in extinction coefficient k with respect to the inspection light wavelength between a layer having the highest extinction coefficient and a layer having the lowest extinction coefficient is at least 0.3.
2. A photomask blank of claim 1 wherein the second film has a thickness of 2 nm to
25 20 nm.
3. A photomask blank of claim 2 wherein the second film has a thickness of at least 5 nm.
- 30 4. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims wherein the second film is composed of two to four layers.

5. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims wherein the silicon-containing materials of the layers of the second film are selected from silicon alone, silicon-containing compounds containing silicon and at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, and transition metal/silicon-containing compounds containing silicon, at least one light element selected from oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, and up to 20 at% of a transition metal.
6. A photomask blank of claim 5 wherein the light element comprises oxygen and/or nitrogen.
7. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims wherein in the second film the layer disposed remotest from the first film has a total content of oxygen and nitrogen which is higher than that of the layer disposed contiguous to the first film.
8. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims wherein in the second film the layer disposed remotest from the substrate is of silicon dioxide SiO₂.
9. A photomask blank of any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the first film comprises chromium or a chromium compound, such as chromium alone, chromium oxide (CrO), chromium nitride (CrN), chromium carbide (CrC), chromium oxynitride (CrON), chromium oxycarbide (CrOC), chromium nitride carbide (CrNC) or chromium oxide nitride carbide (CrONC).
10. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims which is for use in said photolithography using ArF excimer laser light as said exposure light.
11. A photomask blank of any one of the preceding claims wherein said second film has said properties of refractive index or extinction coefficient with respect to a said inspection light having a wavelength of up to 600 nm, such as 213 nm, 355 nm, 488 nm or 532 nm.

12. A method of preparing a photomask blank as defined in any one of claims 1 to 10, comprising a step of inspecting the photomask blank for defects at said inspection light wavelength.
- 5 13. A method of preparing a photomask from a photomask blank of any one of claims 1 to 11, comprising first forming a mask pattern in the second film and then etching the underlying first film, which may constitute an optical functional film such as a light-shielding film or phase shift film, using the mask pattern of the second film which serves as an etching mask, thereby transferring the mask pattern of the second film to the first film.
- 10 14. A method of claim 13 in which the photomask blank is inspected for defects using said inspection light before being used for preparing the photomask.
- 15 15. A method of claim 12 or 14 in which the inspection is for penetrating pinhole defects.