

PHOTOVOLTAIC GENERATOR WITH DIELECTRIC
ISOLATION AND BONDED, INSULATED WAFER LAYERS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 This invention relates to photovoltaic
generators for producing a control signal for the control
of a semiconductor switching device, and more
specifically relates to a novel structure for such a
device in which an array of planar cells formed in a
silicon substrate are dielectrically isolated from one
10 another in an insulated wafer-bonded assembly.

Photovoltaic generators (PVG) are well known
and are commonly used for producing a control signal for
a solid state relay. Such devices employ an LED which is
energized by input terminals to irradiate the
15 photosensitive surface of a spaced and insulated
photovoltaic device. The output of the photovoltaic
device may serve as the input to a switching device, such
as a MOS-gated device, typically a power MOSFET, which
has load terminals which are switched "on" in response to
20 the energization of the LED. The input and output
terminals of the relay are isolated by the gap between
the LED and the photovoltaic device. Commonly, the
photovoltaic device consists of a large number of series-
connected photovoltaic cells in order to produce a
25 voltage sufficiently high to turn on the power switching
device. Such devices are well known and are sold under
the name "PVI" (photovoltaic isolator) by the
International Rectifier Corporation of El Segundo, CA,
the assignee of the present invention.

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The plural cell photogenerator can be made in many different ways. One known generator employs a stack or pile of photovoltaic cells as shown in U.S. Patent 4,755,697 to Kinzer. Other devices employ a planar array of cells which are junction isolated from one another and are connected in series at their surfaces. Still other devices are known in which individual cells disposed over the surface of a silicon chip are junction-isolated from one another or may be dielectrically isolated, as shown in U.S. Patents 4,227,098 and 4,390,790.

The prior art devices have the drawback of being expensive to manufacture and having low manufacturing yields. It is desirable to produce a photovoltaic generator which is capable of producing a large number of insulated cells which can be connected in series to produce a turn-on signal for a power MOS-gated device but which is easily manufactured, using existing reliable processing equipment and techniques.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention, dielectrically isolated planar photogenerating cells are formed in a flat, thin dielectrically bonded silicon wafer consisting of a relatively thick "handle" wafer which is oxide-bonded to and insulated from a thin device wafer (a junction-receiving layer). Individual planar and spaced wells or tubs are formed by an array of intersecting trenches which extend through the thin device layer to the oxide bonding region to fully dielectrically insulate each of the tubs. Each of the tubs has an N^+ bottom surface and N^+ top contact region and a P^+ diffusion defining a "P on N" solar cell type arrangement. The N^+ top contact of each cell is

connected to the P⁺ contact of an adjacent cell to connect each of a predetermined cells, for example, 16 cells in series.

5 The upper surface of the device is then exposed to the radiation output of a spaced LED to produce output voltages from each of the cells. These outputs, connected in series, produce a signal which can control the switching of a MOS-gated device.

10 Other features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following description of the invention which refers to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 Figure 1 shows a small portion of an oxide bonded handle wafer and device wafer.

 Figure 2 shows the wafer of Figure 1 following the formation of isolation trenches to dielectrically separate and define isolated cells or tubs.

20 Figure 2a shows a detail of the isolation trench of Figure 2.

 Figure 3 shows the diffusion of spaced, shallow P⁺ regions and N⁺ contacts in the device wafer or layer of Figure 2.

25 Figure 3a is a top view of a portion of the wafer of Figure 3, and shows an N⁺ finger extending from the N⁺ contact ring.

 Figure 4 shows a top view of a portion of the device of Figure 3 after the formation of contacts to connect the devices in series.

30 Figure 5 is a cross-sectional view of the structure of Figure 4, taken across the section line 5-5 in Figure 4.

Figure 6 is a cross-section of one cell of a second embodiment of the present invention, and is a cross-section along lines 6-6 of Figure 7.

Figure 7 is a top plan view of the cell of Figure 6.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Referring first to Figure 1, there is shown therein a starting wafer which consists of an N^+ handle wafer 10 and a coextensive N device layer 11 which is bonded to handle wafer 10 by oxide layer 12. The bottom of N device layer 11, which is very thin compared to the thickness of handle wafer 10, contains a shallow N^+ diffusion 13 adjacent oxide layer 12.

In one preferred embodiment of the invention, handle wafer 10 may have a non-critical thickness of from about 375 to 525 micrometers, and a high, non-critical concentration of N^+ carriers. A metal layer 14 may be disposed over the bottom of wafer 10 for mounting purposes.

The device layer or wafer 11 is of monocrystalline silicon, and contains the diffusions defining each of the photovoltaic cells of the device. Layer 11 may have a thickness of about 20 micrometers, although it could range from 5 to 50 micrometers, and a resistivity of about 2 to about 12 ohm centimeters.

The dielectric bonding layer 12 has a thickness of about 0.45 micrometers and electrically insulates wafers 10 and 11. Other oxide thicknesses can be used, and are chosen to allow monitoring of the subsequent trench etch for completion of the etch.

Any desired known process can be used to bond wafers 10 and 11. Such processes are described; for

example, in Wafer Bonding Technique etc. by Abe et al. in the publication Solid State Technology, November 1990, pages 39, 40 and in Silicon Wafer Bonding etc. by Abe et al. in Proceedings of 4th Intl. Symposium On Silicon-On-Insulator Technology and Devices, May 6-11, 1990, Montreal.

After forming the bonded assembly of Fig. 1, the wafer 11 is processed to form a grid of deep trench isolations 40 which surround and isolate each of the N⁺ collector contact regions and extend through N⁺ buried layer 13 to the dielectric layer 12. Portions of the trench are shown in cross-section as portions 40a, 40b, 40c, 40d and 40e. The trenches create dielectrically isolated "tubs" in layer 11, each of a surface area of about 10 mils by 10 mils with a trench gap which typically may be 20 to 25 micrometers. Other dimensions can be used.

After the trench array 40 is formed, a thin oxide is thermally grown on its interior walls, shown in Figure 3a as oxide layers 50 and 51, and the central gap between them is then filled with polysilicon 52. Thus, a plurality of identical dielectrically isolated photogenerator cells is formed in layer 11. The thickness of the oxides (or other dielectric) 50 and 51 is chosen to optimize reflectance of radiation at the interface with the silicon 11. (This improves the efficiency of the device.)

After forming the dielectrically isolated tubs of Figure 2, diffusions forming the photovoltaic cells are formed in the surface of wafer 11. Thus, using suitable photolithography techniques, an array of rectangular or other shape shallow P⁺ diffusions 20 to 24 and square ring-shaped N⁺ contact diffusions 25 to 29,

which encircle P⁺ diffusions 20 to 24 respectively, is formed in wafer 11. Typically, for a wafer which is 5 inches in diameter, 88,000 spaced P⁺ diffusions may be formed across the wafer to make about 9,000 die.

5 Obviously, all P and N⁻ conductivity types can be reversed.

In one preferred embodiment of the invention, P⁺ regions 20 to 24 have a depth of 2 micrometers and an area of 9 mils by 9 mils. The P⁺ regions may be formed
10 by an implant dose of boron (?) of 5E18 per cm² with a peak concentration of 5E18 per cm³.

The N⁺ rings 25 to 28 have a depth of 1 micrometer and a width of 0.5 mil and an inner circumference of 34 mils. Rings 25 to 28 may be formed
15 of an arsenic implant at a dose of 8E15 per cm² with a peak concentration of 4E20 per cm³. A central N⁺ collecting finger 30, shown in Figure 2a for ring 25, can be disposed at the center of each P⁺ diffusion. Finger
20 30 may have a width of 0.5 mil and a length of about 7 mils.

As next shown in Figure 5, an oxide layer 60 is deposited atop the surface of wafer 11. A contact mask then patterns the oxide to form contact openings to the N⁺ and P⁺ regions. Thereafter, a contact metal is
25 deposited atop the oxide layer 60 and the metal is etched to form contact strips 70, 71, 72 and 73, shown in Figures 4 and 5, to connect the P⁺ diffusion of one cell to the N⁺ contact diffusion of an adjacent cell.

After the device is completed, the wafer may be
30 coated with a protective transparent coating. The wafer is thereafter diced into units of 16 series-connected cells which have respective solder pad terminals (not

shown) to produce devices which can produce 7 volts and 2.5 microamperes when illuminated by an LED.

Thus, the individual devices may be mounted with an LED 80 (in Figure 5) insulated therefrom but arranged to produce radiation which illuminates the surface of the wafer or chip. LED 80 is turned on by a suitable input to its terminals 81 and 82 which are dielectrically insulated from the output terminals of the chip. Any suitable LED can be used.

If desired, the PVG structure described above (except for the LED) can be integrated into the same chip which contains the power MOS-gated device to be controlled by the photogenerator structure.

Figures 6 and 7 show a second embodiment of a cell arrangement with a different contact configuration. In the description of Figures 6 and 7, similar numerals identify similar parts to those of Figures 1 to 5. The processing sequence is also the same except for changes specifically described. Thus, the device of Figures 6 and 7 employs a larger area P^+ diffusion 100. Further, in the embodiment of Figures 6 and 7, the N^- wafer 11 has a concentration greater than about 27 ohm centimeters. P^+ region 100 is identical in depth and concentration to that of Figures 2 to 5. However, only a small N^+ contact diffusion is employed which is 1 micrometer deep but only 0.5 mil by 0.5 mil. Further, the interior walls of trenches 40 receive a thin N^+ coating 105 formed, for example, by diffusion from $POCl_3$, to a depth of about 5 micrometers and with a surface concentration of about 2×10^{18} per cm^3 .

Although the present invention has been described in relation to particular embodiments thereof, many other variations and modifications and other uses

will become apparent to those skilled in the art. It is preferred, therefore, that the present invention be limited not by the specific disclosure herein, but only by the appended claims.



WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A photovoltaic generator comprising, in combination, a wafer consisting of a first flat relatively thick handle wafer and a second flat relatively thin junction receiving wafer; characterized
5 in that said first and second wafers being joined together by a thin dielectric bonding layer; said second wafer being a lightly doped wafer of one conductivity type; a mesh-shaped thin trench which extends from the outer surface of said second wafer to said thin
10 dielectric bonding layer dividing said wafer into a plurality of electrically insulated tubs; the flat outer surface of each of said tubs having a relatively shallow diffusion of the opposite conductivity type therein, whereby radiation which reaches the junction between said
15 shallow diffusion and the body of said lightly doped material of said tub will generate an output photovoltaic voltage; and connector means for connecting said shallow diffusion of at least a plurality of said tubs to the lightly doped material of adjacent tubs.

2. The photovoltaic generator of claim 1, which is further characterized in that the walls of said trench are lined with a thin dielectric layer.

3. The photovoltaic generator of claim 1, which is further characterized in including an increased concentration contact diffusion at the top of each of said tubs, which is laterally spaced from said diffusion
5 of said other conductivity type.



4. The photovoltaic generator of claims 1 to 3, which is further characterized in that said first conductivity type is the N type.

5 5. The photovoltaic generator of claims 1 to 4, which is further characterized in that said second wafer contains a thin high concentration buffer layer of said one conductivity type adjacent said thin dielectric bonding layer.

6. The photovoltaic generator of claims 1 to 5, which is further characterized in that said trench contains a polysilicon filler between said liners of dielectric material.

7. The photovoltaic generator of claims 1 to 6, which is further characterized in that the opposite walls of said trench contain a shallow diffusion of said one conductivity type.

5 8. The photovoltaic generator of claim 3, which is further characterized in that said contact diffusion in each of said tubs has a ring shape which surrounds and is spaced from the periphery of said diffusion of said other conductivity type.

5 9. The photovoltaic generator of claim 3, which is further characterized in that said contact diffusion is a small area rectangle which is spaced from the periphery of said diffusion of said other conductivity type.



10. The photovoltaic generator of claim 1, which is further characterized in that each of said tubs has a polygonal shape at its upper surface.