

**Method, control system and plant for processing a semiconductor wafer,
and semiconductor wafer**

5 Description

The present invention relates to a method of processing a semiconductor wafer,
to a control system for controlling a coating apparatus for processing a
semiconductor wafer, to a plant for processing a semiconductor wafer having
10 such processing apparatuses and such a control system, and to a
semiconductor wafer.

Prior art

15 Semiconductor wafers, especially silicon wafers, are suitable, for example, for
use in the semiconductor industry, especially for fabrication of highly integrated
electronic components, for example microprocessors or memory chips. For
modern microelectronics, starting materials, called substrates, having high
demands on global and local flatness, edge geometry, thickness distribution,
20 single side-based local flatness, called nanotopology, and freedom from defects
are required.

In order to obtain semiconductor wafers having such properties, these
semiconductor wafers can be subjected to various processing operations.
25 These especially include double-sided polishing (called DSP), in which both
sides of a semiconductor wafer are processed simultaneously with removal of
material in one processing step by means of two working surfaces, preferably in
such a way that the processing forces that act on the front and back sides of the
semiconductor wafer during the removal of material are essentially in balance
30 and no constraining forces are exerted on the semiconductor wafer by a guide
apparatus, i.e. the semiconductor wafer is processed in a "free-floating"

manner. In this context, it is especially possible for multiple semiconductor wafers to be inserted into one or more "carrier plates" having recesses for the semiconductor wafers, and then to be polished by forces acting on both sides of the semiconductor wafers. DSP processing of silicon wafers is described, for example, in US 2003/054650 A1, and an apparatus suitable therefor in DE 100 07 390 A1.

A useful further processing operation is chemical-mechanical polishing ("CMP"), as known, for example, from DE 10 2008 045 534 B4. In this case, a semiconductor wafer is pressed by means of a carrier onto a polishing pad (which may be on a polishing plate) and then moved, usually with rotation, under pressure. Through the use of a suitable polishing medium or a polishing medium suspension, one side of the semiconductor wafer is then polished.

A useful further processing operation is a coating operation as known, for example, from DE 10 2005 045 339 A1. In epitaxial coating of semiconductor wafers, for example, in an epitaxial reactor, a deposition gas is passed through the epitaxial reactor, as a result of which material can be epitaxially deposited on a surface of the semiconductor wafers. However, apart from on the semiconductor wafers, the material is always deposited within the epitaxial reactor. It is therefore typically necessary to remove such residues that have been deposited in an uncontrolled manner on surfaces in the epitaxial reactor during the deposition from time to time.

Inhomogeneities occur in all the processing steps mentioned above, both in radial and in circumferential direction. A prominent example to be mentioned here is what is called the fourfold symmetry of the epitaxially deposited layer, one cause of which is different growth rates along different crystal axes.

Against this background, the problem addressed is that of specifying a way of obtaining even better semiconductor wafers, especially with regard to the flatness of their surfaces.

Disclosure of the invention

What are proposed in accordance with the invention are a method, a control
5 system and a plant for processing a semiconductor wafer, and also a
semiconductor wafer, having the features of the independent claims.
Advantageous embodiments are subjects of the dependent claims and of the
description which follows.

10 The invention proceeds from a method of processing a semiconductor wafer, in
which the semiconductor wafer is disposed on a susceptor in a coating
apparatus. A useful coating apparatus here is especially an epitaxial reactor.
This method comprises one or more processing operations, wherein one such
processing operation comprises an etching step and optionally a deposition
15 step. In the course of the etching step, an etching gas is passed through the
coating apparatus. The etching gas preferably consists of a mixture of hydrogen
chloride and hydrogen, although the etching gas may also consist of hydrogen
chloride only or of hydrogen only.

20 In the course of any deposition step conducted, a deposition gas is passed
through the coating apparatus for epitaxial deposition of a layer on the
semiconductor wafer. A useful deposition gas here is especially trichlorosilane.
It is especially preferable when the processing operation comprises the etching
step and then the deposition step.

25 The etching step can serve to at least partly remove any deposits or depositions
in the coating apparatus or in the epitaxial reactor that originate from a
preceding deposition step. Such deposits affect the flow of gas in the coating
apparatus and also temperature gradients, and hence also the layer depositable
30 epitaxially by the deposition gas on the semiconductor wafer. The etching step
can also be utilized to achieve higher removal of material in the middle of the
semiconductor wafer than at the edge.

It has now been found that, under the conditions chosen in the context of this invention, material is removed on the side of the semiconductor wafer remote from the susceptor in the etching step, but material is deposited on the side
5 facing the susceptor, especially in the edge region or in the region in which the semiconductor wafer adjoins the susceptor. The way in which this arises is especially that the etching gas (in an equilibrium reaction) dissolves material present in the coating apparatus, for example material deposited in a prior deposition operation, and deposits it again on the semiconductor wafer, or that
10 material present on the susceptor from a prior processing step is bonded to the material of the wafer to be processed and is entrained in the unloading of the coating apparatus.

What is envisaged in accordance with the invention is that one of two sides of
15 the semiconductor wafer is coated with a protective layer prior to the processing operation. A first side (FS) of the semiconductor wafer that has been subjected to a polishing operation by CMP (chemical mechanical polishing), or a second side (BS) of the semiconductor wafer which is opposite the first side and may have been subjected to a polishing operation by CMP, is coated. Preferably, the
20 semiconductor wafer which is coated with a protective layer is a semiconductor wafer having first and second sides that have been polished simultaneously by double-sided polishing (DSP), the first side (FS) of which has been polished in a polishing operation by CMP after the double-sided polishing. The semiconductor wafer is preferably a semiconductor wafer composed of
25 monocrystalline silicon and preferably has a diameter of not less than 200 mm, more preferably a diameter of not less than 300 mm. Useful protective layers preferably include an oxide layer, especially a low-temperature oxide (LTO) layer. The term "low-temperature oxide layer" or "LTO" refers here to an oxide layer applied by a particular method. A conceivable example is silicon dioxide. A
30 thickness of the layer may especially be at most 200 nm, preferably at most 150 nm, more preferably at most 100 nm, in order to achieve particularly good results. The protective layer may additionally appropriately be formed with an

- edge exclusion of not more than 0.5 mm, preferably not more than 0.2 mm, more preferably not more than 0.1 mm, meaning that a corresponding region at the edge of the semiconductor wafer is not coated or covered by the protective layer. In that case, the etching step can appropriately be undertaken at a
- 5 temperature between 1000°C and 1250°C, preferably between 1100°C and 1150°C, in the coating apparatus. The protective layer may alternatively be a protective layer of silicon dioxide which is produced by an RTA (rapid thermal anneal) heat treatment.
- 10 The presence of the protective layer on the first side (FS) or the second side (BS) prevents material from being removed from the side of the semiconductor wafer provided with the protective layer in the etching step. This exploits the fact that, for example, an oxide of a semiconductor material is attacked and hence
- 15 semiconductor material. Moreover, the material transport on contact with the susceptor that has been described at the outset and deposition of material is also prevented by the protective layer.

If the protective layer is on that side which is remote from the susceptor during

20 the etching step, the operation of removal of material from this side does not occur. In a first preferred embodiment of the invention, the first side (FS) is that side provided with the protective layer, and the second side (BS) is that facing the susceptor during the etching step. The etching step is employed in this case in order to deposit material especially in the edge region of the second side

25 (BS). After the etching step and the removal of the protective layer, an epitaxial layer can be deposited on the first side (FS).

If the protective layer, during the etching step, is on that side which faces the susceptor during the etching step, the operation of material deposition

30 especially in the edge region of this side does not occur. In a second preferred embodiment of the invention, the second side (BS) is that side which has been provided with the protective layer and which is facing the susceptor during the

etching step. The etching step is employed in this case in order to remove material from the first side (FS). Preferably, the etching step is followed by a deposition step, in the course of which an epitaxial layer is deposited on the first side (FS). The protective layer is removed before or after the deposition of the epitaxial layer.

In a third preferred embodiment of the invention, the processing operation is divided into a first etching step and a second etching step, and the second etching step is followed by a deposition step, in the course of which an epitaxial layer is deposited on the first side (FS). During the first etching step, the first side (FS) is that side which has been provided with the protective layer, and the second side (BS) is that facing the susceptor during the etching step. After the first etching step, the protective layer is removed from the first side (FS) and the second side (BS) is provided with the protective layer. During the second etching step, the second side (BS) is that side which has been provided with the protective layer and which is facing the susceptor. The protective layer is removed from the second side (BS) after the second etching step or after the deposition of the epitaxial layer on the first side (FS) of the semiconductor wafer.

If the method is conducted in one of the embodiments described, the two sides of the semiconductor wafer can be processed independently of one another and in a controlled manner.

The second preferred embodiment of the invention is suitable especially in order to counteract symmetric variation in thickness that occurs in the edge region of the semiconductor wafer after coating of the semiconductor wafer with an epitaxial layer. The variation in thickness is due to the fact that, in the deposition of the epitaxial layer, material is deposited at different rates in the edge region depending on the polar angle. For example, an epitaxial layer of monocrystalline silicon, without additional measures, grows more quickly at polar angle positions of 0°, 90°, 180° and 270° than at polar angle positions

offset by 45° relative to the positions mentioned on a {100}-oriented semiconductor wafer of monocrystalline silicon having an orientation notch that indicates a $\langle 110 \rangle$ direction and defines the polar angle position of 0° . The thickness of the epitaxially coated semiconductor wafer is therefore greater in
5 four regions of the circumference at equal distances from one another than in the regions in between (called fourfold symmetry).

It has been found that the thickness of the epitaxially coated semiconductor wafer in the edge region can be homogenized when, prior to the deposition of
10 the epitaxial layer, the process according to the second preferred embodiment of the invention is conducted. The rate of material removal that takes place in the course of the etching step on the first side (FS) is greater in the edge region at those points where material is deposited at the higher rate during the deposition of the epitaxial layer. This effect that occurs in the course of the
15 etching step is referred to hereinafter as anti-fourfold symmetry etching (4FSE). The removal of material to be achieved locally is especially guided by the duration of the etching step. For instance, it is possible to use the procedure in the second preferred embodiment of the invention in combination with the deposition of an epitaxial layer in order to obtain an epitaxially coated
20 semiconductor wafer having a more homogeneous thickness profile in circumferential direction.

The second preferred embodiment of the invention is therefore preferably employed in order to produce a semiconductor wafer of silicon in which the first
25 side (FS) has been coated with an epitaxial layer of silicon and in which the first side (FS) has a {100} orientation or a {110} orientation.

The first preferred embodiment of the invention is especially suitable in order to counteract any edge roll-off that has been caused by DSP and possibly by CMP
30 on the first side (FS) and/or second side (BS). The material deposited in the edge region of the second side (BS) locally increases the thickness of the semiconductor wafer and ensures that the radial profile of the thickness is

homogenized. The amount and position of the material deposited can be affected by configuring the susceptor and via the duration of the etching step. At least within a period of 60 s of etching time, linear growth of deposited material is to be observed. The susceptor preferably has a ledge inclined downward, on which the semiconductor wafer rests in the edge region. The radial width of the ledge and the angle of inclination of the ledge are influencing parameters that should especially be taken into account in the configuring of the susceptor.

The third preferred embodiment of the invention essentially comprises a combination of the first preferred embodiment and the second preferred embodiment.

During the etching step or during the first and second etching steps, the volume flow rate of hydrogen chloride is preferably not less than 2 slm and not more than 5 slm; the volume flow rate of hydrogen is preferably not less than 30 slm and not more than 110 slm, more preferably not less than 40 slm and not more than 70 slm (standard liters per minute). Particularly smooth surfaces result at a volume flow rate of hydrogen chloride of 4 slm and a volume flow rate of hydrogen of 50 slm. These gas flow rates can achieve, for example, higher removal of material in the middle of the semiconductor wafer than at the edge.

The proposed process, with regard to the anti-fourfold symmetry etching (4FSE), allows a reduction in the fourfold symmetry after the coating, with longer durations of the etching step (with flow of etching gas) leading to lesser remaining fourfold symmetry. A maximum possible duration in the procedure conventionally results from the fact that the deposition on the second side (BS), in the case of excessively long durations of the etching step, leads to a deterioration in the local geometry (flatness) of the semiconductor wafer. This problem is solved here by the protective layer, since the unwanted material deposition is suppressed. In addition, by skillful combination of the inhomogeneities that occur in processing with the coating apparatus and other preceding polishing operations, distinctly better flatness close to the edge can be achieved than to date.

- It should be noted that a processing operation after the etching step may also – as is customary – include a deposition step in which the protective layer is then also present. However, it is also possible to use just an etching step in order to selectively remove material only, but not to deposit material again. In the case of multiple processing operations, it is also conceivable to conduct the deposition step only in some of the processing operations, i.e., for example, only in the first of two.
- 10 With the method proposed, it is possible to obtain semiconductor wafers, especially silicon wafers, having much better values with regard to the demands stated at the outset. A semiconductor wafer of this kind may be a semiconductor wafer of monocrystalline silicon having at least one side face which has been polished by CMP, or a semiconductor wafer of monocrystalline silicon that has been epitaxially coated with a layer of monocrystalline silicon. The semiconductor wafer has an $ESFQR_{max}$ of not more than 5 nm with an edge exclusion of not more than 2 mm and 72 sectors each having a length of 30 mm. Preferably, the semiconductor wafer has an $ESFQR_{max}$ of not more than 10 nm with an edge exclusion of not more than 1 mm and 72 sectors each having a length of 30 mm. More preferably, the semiconductor wafer has an $ESFQR_{max}$ of not more than 15 nm with an edge exclusion of not more than 0.5 mm and 72 sectors each having a length of 30 mm. Semiconductor wafers of this kind also form part of the subject matter of the present invention.
- 25 SFQR stands for "Site Frontsurface-referenced least-sQuares/Range", and the value thereof indicates the flatness of the semiconductor wafer. More particularly, this correlates positive and negative deviations of a surface from a flat reference surface. In general, the deviations are each used for the calculation for an area having particular dimensions at the surface of the semiconductor wafer. ESFQR stands for "Edge Site Frontsurface-referenced least sQuares/Range", and the value thereof is defined as for the SFQR value, but only for an edge region of the semiconductor wafer.
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ESFQD_{av} stands for "Edge Site Frontsurface-referenced least sQuares/Deviation", and the index av denotes the average of the ESFQD values of edge sites in the circumferential region of the semiconductor wafer. Typically, the circumferential region comprises 72 sites of this kind (sectors).

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Definitions and test methods for the wafer parameters mentioned are included in the standards SEMI M67 (ESFQR and ESFQD) and SEMI M1, 5 SEMI MF1530 and SEMI M49 (SFQR).

- 10 A further advantage of the protective layer when it is adjoining the susceptor during a deposition step is that the semiconductor wafer cannot become fixed to the susceptor through growth. The reason for this is that the protective layer is of a different material. For example, silicon dioxide barely bonds to silicon. What can be achieved in this way is that, on removal of the semiconductor wafer from
- 15 the susceptor, no material is removed from the susceptor as well and thus, more particularly, only distinctly smaller stresses, if any, occur in the semiconductor wafer, especially in the edge region. This effect already occurs on the heating of the coating apparatus, i.e. irrespective of whether an etching step or a deposition step is conducted or not.

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Preferably, the protective layer, after a processing operation – especially depending on what is subsequently supposed to happen to the semiconductor wafer – is removed again from the semiconductor wafer. For example, a further processing operation can then be effected, before which the other side is

25 provided with the protective layer. At the end of all processing operations to be conducted with the coating apparatus, the protective layer can be removed in order to obtain the finished semiconductor wafer. The protective layer can, especially in the case of an oxide layer on a silicon wafer, be removed using hydrofluoric acid (HF), for example, since hydrofluoric acid dissolves the oxide,

30 but not silicon.

It is also particularly preferable when the semiconductor wafer is polished on at least one of the two sides in one or more polishing operations with a polishing apparatus before the one or more processing operations. An appropriate apparatus here is the polishing apparatus mentioned at the outset for chemical-mechanical polishing (CMP), which permits controlled processing of just one side. More particularly, polishing can be effected here in such a way that, in radial direction of the semiconductor wafer, regions are affected to different degrees in processing, especially in each case by specification of different pressures onto the regions of the semiconductor wafer.

Such different pressures can be generated, for example, by a suitably designed carrier of the corresponding polishing apparatus, by means of which the pressure is exerted on the semiconductor wafer. It is thus possible to define the pressure specifically for individual regions or else zones of the semiconductor wafer. It is thus possible to define recipes (for the corresponding operating parameters of the polishing apparatus) individually for each semiconductor wafer. It is thus especially possible to counteract the unwanted components of the material buildup at the edge of the semiconductor wafer that occurs in the coating apparatus in the subsequent processing operation.

It is particularly advantageous here when at least one operating parameter in a polishing operation is defined as a function of at least one operating parameter in the processing operation and/or as a function of a wafer parameter to be expected by virtue of the polishing operation or processing operation. Useful wafer parameters include, for example, the $ESFQD_{av}$ value or other parameters by which the flatness or planarity can be reported. In this way, it is thus possible, in a controlled manner, to exploit interactions between the polishing operation on the one hand and the processing operation in the coating apparatus on the other hand in order to achieve flatter semiconductor wafers overall. More particularly, it is namely possible to compensate for any adverse removal of material in the polishing operation in a controlled manner in the coating, and vice versa. In particular, it is possible in this way also to give

consideration to operating parameters for the individual apparatuses that would not be considered in conventional processes in which each apparatus is optimized individually, since they would give, for example, poorer results for the individual apparatus per se. However, this is no longer the case with combined
5 consideration of multiple apparatuses.

For the sake of completeness, it should also be noted that, prior to a polishing operation for chemical-mechanical polishing, a polishing operation for double-sided polishing (as mentioned at the outset) may also be provided. This
10 polishing operation too can then be taken into account with regard to its operating parameters for the other polishing and/or processing operations and their operating parameters.

The invention further provides a control system for controlling a coating
15 apparatus for processing a semiconductor wafer, in which an etching gas can be passed through and/or a layer can be deposited epitaxially on the semiconductor wafer in a processing operation, and especially also for controlling a polishing apparatus in which the semiconductor wafer can be polished in a polishing operation. This control system has been set up, in the
20 case of use with the coating apparatus, and especially also of the polishing apparatus, to conduct a method of the invention.

The invention further provides a plant for processing a semiconductor wafer, having a coating apparatus in which an etching gas can be passed through in a
25 processing operation and/or a layer can be deposited epitaxially on the semiconductor wafer, and especially also having a polishing apparatus in which the semiconductor wafer can be polished in a polishing operation, and also having a control system of the invention.

30 With regard to further configurations and advantages and the control system and the plant, in order to avoid repetition, reference is made to the remarks on the method proposed, which are correspondingly applicable here.

Further advantages and embodiments of the invention will be apparent from the description and the appended drawings.

- 5 It will be appreciated that the features identified above and those still to be elucidated hereinafter can be used not only in the particular combination indicated but also in other combinations, or on their own, without departing from the scope of the present invention.
- 10 The invention is described hereinafter with reference to drawings.

Description of figures

- Figure 1 shows a schematic of a plant of the invention in a preferred
15 embodiment, with which a method of the invention can be performed.

Figure 2 shows a schematic of a first polishing apparatus as usable in the context of a method of the invention.

- 20 Figure 3 shows a schematic of a second polishing apparatus as usable in the context of a method of the invention.

Figure 4 shows a schematic of a coating apparatus as usable in the context of a method of the invention.

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Figure 5 shows a schematic of a semiconductor wafer with a protective layer in various views.

- Figure 6 shows a schematic of the profile of the difference in thickness across
30 the diameter of two semiconductor wafers after undergoing an etching step in a coating apparatus in the context of a method of the invention.

Figure 7 shows a schematic of the profile of the difference in thickness across the circumference of a semiconductor wafer after undergoing an etching step in a coating apparatus in the context of a method of the invention.

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Figure 8 shows a schematic of the procedures of three preferred embodiments of the method of the invention.

Figure 9 and figure 10 show measurement results for two epitaxially coated semiconductor wafers, relating to differences in thickness in the edge region.

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Figure 11 shows a flow diagram for control of operating parameters.

15 Detailed description of the drawings

Figure 1 shows a schematic of a plant 500 of the invention in a preferred embodiment, with which a method of the invention can be performed. The plant 500 serves for processing of a semiconductor wafer 600 and comprises, as processing apparatuses, a first polishing apparatus 100, a second polishing apparatus 200 and a coating apparatus 300. These three processing apparatuses serve for processing of a semiconductor wafer 600, which can pass through the individual processing apparatuses successively. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned once again at this point that it is also possible for further processing apparatuses to be provided before, between and/or after the processing apparatuses, but these are at least barely of any relevance, if any, for the present invention. Of particular relevance for the present invention are the coating apparatus 300 and – according to the embodiment – also the second polishing apparatus 200, incidentally also referred to merely as polishing apparatus. Nevertheless, the processing of the semiconductor wafer can also be effected using the first polishing apparatus 100 shown here, which more particularly is indeed customary. For a more

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detailed description of the individual processing apparatuses, reference is made at this point to figures 2 to 4.

5 In addition, the plant 500 comprises a control system 400 which can be used together with the three processing apparatuses shown, in order to actuate or to operate them. In the example shown, the control system 400 comprises three individual control units 410, 420 and 430, each of which are provided for actuation or for operation of one of the three processing apparatuses. By means of the respective control unit, it is especially possible to define or set at least
10 one operating parameter in each case for the respective processing apparatus.

For each of the control units 410, 420 and 430, a respective measurement apparatus 411, 421 and 431 is provided in each case. By means of these measuring apparatuses, it is possible to measure a semiconductor wafer after it
15 has been processed in the respective processing apparatus with regard to at least one wafer parameter. It will be apparent that such measurement apparatuses – according to the application – may also be integrated into the respective control unit.

In addition, a central control unit 440 is shown here, which is connected to each
20 of the control units 410, 420 and 430 and to each of the measurement apparatuses 411, 421 and 431. Such a connection comprises at least one connection for data transfer, for example in wired or wireless form. The values determined by the individual measurement apparatuses 411, 421 and 431 can be transmitted in this way to the central control unit 440, such that, by means of
25 the central control unit 440, it is then possible to determine suitable operating parameters for the respective processing apparatuses, which can then be transmitted to the respective control unit 410, 420 or 430. It will be apparent that the determination of the respective processing parameters can also be effected in some other way, for example directly in one of the individual control units.

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Figure 2 shows, in schematic form and in more detail than in figure 1, a first polishing apparatus 100 (for DSP) in cross section. In this case, four

semiconductor wafers 600 (of which only two in the left-hand half are given a reference numeral) in corresponding recesses of carrier plates 130 which are moved by means of an inner ring gear 131 and an outer ring gear 132, called a rolling apparatus, are inserted between an upper polishing plate 110 and a lower polishing plate 111.

There is a polishing pad 121 on the lower polishing plate 111. There is a polishing pad 120 on the upper polishing plate 210. The polishing plate 110 together with the polishing pad 120 is pressed in the direction of the polishing or contact pressure p_1 against the carrier plates 130, the semiconductor wafers 600 and the lower polishing plate 111 with the polishing pad 121.

The upper polishing plate 110 and the lower polishing plate 111 can be turned or rotated at the rotational velocities ω_1 and ω_2 . The two rotational velocities are shown here in opposing directions, but these may also have, for example and according to the application, the same direction of rotation but different magnitudes. It is likewise conceivable to alter the rotational velocities during operation – and likewise the contact or polishing pressure. For polishing, it is possible here to apply a suitable polishing medium to the polishing pads.

Figure 3 shows, in schematic form and in more detail than in figure 1, a (second) polishing apparatus 200 (for CMP) in a preferred embodiment as usable in the context of a method of the invention, in cross section. The semiconductor wafer 600 here has been applied to a polishing pad 220, which is in turn disposed on a polishing plate 210. By means of a carrier 230, the semiconductor wafer 600 is pressed onto the polishing pad 220. During the polishing, the carrier 230 rotates about a first axis with the rotational velocity ω_3 , and the polishing plate 210 rotates about a second axis with the rotational velocity ω_4 . In addition, the carrier can be moved at a radial velocity v_1 (either inward or outward). For polishing, it is possible here to apply a suitable polishing medium to the polishing pads.

More particularly, it is additionally the case that, by means of the carrier 230, the pressures that can be exerted on the semiconductor wafer 600 can be set differently for different regions. In the simplified example shown, a pressure p_2 can be exerted in the radially outer region 231, and a pressure p_3 in the radially inner region 232. These pressures p_2 and p_3 in particular are useful operating parameters for the second polishing apparatus. It is likewise conceivable to use both the rotational velocities ω_3 and ω_4 and the radial velocity v_1 additionally or alternatively as operating parameters.

10 The pressures may be chosen such that, for example, the pressure p_2 is greater than the pressure p_3 . More particularly, the pressures may alternatively be set specifically with regard to their magnitude. It will be apparent that even more different regions may be provided in radial direction, in which the pressure is individually adjustable.

15 Figure 4 shows, in schematic form and in more detail than in figure 1, a coating apparatus 300 in a preferred embodiment, here in the form of a gas phase epitaxial reactor as usable in the context of a method of the invention, in cross section. In the middle of the coating apparatus 300 there is a susceptor 310 on which a semiconductor wafer 600 to be coated can be disposed, i.e. placed.

20 The susceptor 310 has a depression in the middle, such that the semiconductor wafer 600 lies on the susceptor 310, for example, only in the region of a few millimeters of its edge.

Gas can be passed through the epitaxial reactor 300, in the present example from an opening on the left-hand side as far as an opening on the right-hand side of the epitaxial reactor 300, as indicated by two arrows. By means of heat generators, for example heating lamps 330 at the upper and lower sides of the epitaxial reactor 300, of which one by way of example has been provided with a reference numeral, the gas passed through the epitaxial reactor 300 and the semiconductor wafer can be brought to a desired temperature as required.

In the context of a coating operation, an etching gas, for example a mixture of hydrogen chloride and hydrogen, is then passed through the epitaxial reactor 300 in an etching step, such that the semiconductor wafer is pretreated in a controlled manner before any subsequent deposition step. Without such a
5 subsequent deposition step, it is also possible, for example, for just a controlled removal of material to be effected. Preferably, the volume flow rate of hydrogen chloride can be set here to 4 slm, and the volume flow rate of hydrogen to 50 slm.

10 For coating of a semiconductor wafer 600 or for epitaxial deposition of a layer, a deposition gas, for example trichlorosilane, optionally mixed with hydrogen, is then passed through the epitaxial reactor 300. Volume flow rate f_1 and/or duration of the passage and/or temperature can be adjusted here, for example, according to the desired thickness of the layer to be deposited epitaxially on the
15 semiconductor wafer 600 as operating parameters. In addition, the susceptor 310 with the semiconductor wafer 600 disposed thereon can be rotated about an axis with a definable rotational velocity ω_5 , which is likewise an additional or alternative operating parameter, as indicated in the figure. In this way, homogeneous deposition of the epitaxial layer can be achieved.

20 In the context of a coating operation, prior to the passage of the deposition gas, an etching gas, for example a mixture of hydrogen chloride and hydrogen, can then be passed through the epitaxial reactor 300 in an etching step, such that the semiconductor wafer is pretreated in a controlled manner before the actual
25 coating operation. Preferably, the volume flow rate of hydrogen chloride can be set here to 4 slm, and the volume flow rate of hydrogen to 50 slm.

Figure 5 shows a semiconductor wafer 600 in various views, as usable in a method of the invention in various preferred embodiments.

30 In the upper view, a protective layer 601, for example silicon dioxide, has been applied to a first side (FS) of two sides of the semiconductor wafer 600. Silicon

dioxide can be applied, for example, by customary methods in which the layer is then in the form of an LTO (low-temperature oxide) layer. The second side (BS) of the two sides is uncoated. The protective layer 601 is provided here up to an edge exclusion d_1 which may, for example, be 0.1 mm.

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In the middle view, a protective layer 601, for example likewise silicon dioxide, has been applied on the second side (BS) of the semiconductor wafer 600. The first side (FS) is uncoated.

10 In the lower view, the semiconductor wafer 600 has now been applied to the susceptor 310 of the coating apparatus or of the epitaxial reactor 300, as already similarly shown in figure 4. In this case, the protective layer 601 has been applied on the second side (BS), on which the semiconductor wafer 600 then also lies on the susceptor 310 in an application region 311 of the susceptor
15 310. The semiconductor wafer overlaps with the application region 311 or the susceptor 310 in radial direction by a measure d_2 . This measure d_2 may, for example, be 1 mm. It should be noted in this regard that the figures are not to scale; instead, individual measures are disproportionate.

20 Figure 6 shows, in each case, the radial profile of the difference in thickness th in nm across the diameter d in mm for two semiconductor wafers after passing through a coating apparatus in the context of a method of the invention, here in each case after an etching step in the coating apparatus having a duration of 60 s, in which one side was covered with the semiconductor wafer having a
25 protective layer. The difference in thickness is found by comparison of the thickness of the respective semiconductor wafer measured before and after the etching step. For reasons of legibility of the graph, a global offset has been subtracted such that the minimum in the wafer thickness is close to zero.

30 The drawing at the top shows a typical profile of the difference in thickness that results when the second side (BS) is covered with the protective layer during the etching step and this side is that facing the susceptor. It can clearly be seen

here that differences occur in the material removal in radial direction. Owing to the protective layer, this is removal of material essentially from the first side (FS).

- 5 The drawing at the bottom shows a typical profile of the difference in thickness when the first side (FS) is covered with the protective layer during the etching step and the second side (BS) is that facing the susceptor. It can clearly be seen here that, during the etching step, there is selective growth of material very close to the edge, i.e. especially in the region that rests on the susceptor,
10 as shown in figure 5 at the bottom. Owing to the protective layer on the first side (FS), this is material deposited essentially on the second side (BS).

By means of the method proposed, it is therefore especially possible to process the two sides of the semiconductor wafer separately from one another, and to
15 utilize the modes of action of material removal and material growth separately from one another and in a controlled manner. More particularly, for each processing operation, it is possible to establish a set of operating parameters tailored for the processing of one side. Without the protective layer, this would not be possible because the processing operation would simultaneously alter
20 the characteristics of both sides, irrespective of the operating parameters chosen.

Figure 7 shows, in schematic form, a typical profile of the difference in thickness
25 th in circumferential direction (versus the polar angle φ in $^\circ$ with a radius around 148 mm) of a semiconductor wafer with the {100} orientation already mentioned after undergoing an etching step in a coating apparatus when, during the etching step, the second side (BS) has been covered with the protective layer and the second side (BS) is that facing the susceptor.

- 30 Four regions each offset by 90° are clearly apparent, in which the removal of material is much greater. Owing to the crystal structure, it is found that the removal of material is greater here when the etching gas is employed than in

the regions in between. The difference in thickness is about 10 nm. The position of the regions having the greater removal of material at the circumference of the semiconductor wafer corresponds to the position of the four regions where an epitaxial layer grows more quickly. This result can be utilized, preferably by combining the etching step and the deposition step with the aim that the greater removal of material in the course of the etching step and the greater increase in material in the course of the deposition step result in the thickness of the epitaxially coated semiconductor wafer being virtually homogeneous in circumferential direction and having a desired value.

Figure 8 shows a schematic of the procedures of three preferred embodiments of the method of the invention. Regardless of this, the invention also includes embodiments that relate to a non-illustrated combination of coating of a particular side of the semiconductor wafer with a protective layer and laying of a particular side on the susceptor of the coating apparatus in order that this side faces the susceptor. The preferred embodiments (a), (b) and (c) shown comprise, first of all, a polishing operation by means of the polishing apparatus 200. It will be apparent that the polishing operation (CMP here) may also be preceded by other processing operations (including other polishing operations such as, more particularly, a DSP polishing operation in which both sides are polished simultaneously). The polished semiconductor wafer has a radial thickness profile.

In the course of the first preferred embodiment (a), in the coating apparatus, an etching step is undertaken, wherein the first side (FS) of the semiconductor wafer is provided with the protective layer and placed on the susceptor such that the second side (BS) faces the susceptor. In this way, by means of the etching step, material can be deposited in a controlled manner at the edge of the second side (BS), for example in order to counteract an edge roll-off that has been produced by a prior polishing operation. After the removal of the protective layer, the result is a semiconductor wafer having at least one side polished by CMP and particularly homogeneous thickness, especially in the

edge region. More particularly, a comparatively low $ESFQR_{\max}$ value is achieved even with low edge exclusion.

5 In the second preferred embodiment (b), in the coating apparatus, an etching step is undertaken, wherein the second side (BS) of the semiconductor wafer is provided with the protective layer and the semiconductor wafer is placed on the susceptor such that the second side faces the susceptor. In this way, material can be removed in a controlled manner from the first side (FS), for example with the aim of creating the prerequisites to result in minimum differences in
10 thickness owing to the fourfold symmetry in a subsequent deposition of an epitaxial layer on the first side (FS). At the same time, unwanted growth of material on the second side (BS) is counteracted, this having an adverse effect on the local flatness of the semiconductor wafer.

15 In the third preferred embodiment (c), the first and second preferred embodiments (a) and (b) are essentially combined. The etching step is divided into a first etching step and a second etching step. After the polishing operation, a first protective layer is formed on the first side (FS), and the semiconductor wafer is placed on the susceptor in such a way that the second side faces the
20 susceptor. Then, in the coating apparatus 300, the first etching step is undertaken, in the course of which material is deposited in the edge region of the second side (BS). Subsequently, the first protective layer is removed from the first side (FS), and a second protective layer is formed on the second side (BS). Thereafter, in the coating apparatus 300, the second etching step is
25 undertaken, in the course of which material is removed from the first side (FS). After the second etching step, the deposition step is undertaken in the coating apparatus, in the course of which an epitaxial layer is deposited on the first side (FS).

30 Figure 9 and fig. 10 show, on two epitaxially coated semiconductor wafers, measurement results for differences in thickness th in the edge region. What is shown in each case is the profile of the respective difference in thickness which

is found after an etching step having the duration 60 s, according to the manner of performance of the method. The difference in thickness arises by a comparison of the thickness of the respective semiconductor wafer in the condition before and after the etching step. In a smaller figure, the critical profile at the distance R from the edge of the semiconductor wafer is emphasized by enlargement.

If the procedure of the first preferred embodiment is followed, i.e. the semiconductor wafer, during the etching step with hydrogen chloride, lies on the susceptor such that the second side (BS) faces the susceptor and the first side (FS) bears a protective layer, a typical steep rise in the thickness profile in the edge region is apparent, which is emphasized by an arrow (fig. 9). It is precisely this steep rise in the thickness profile which, specifically in the case of epitaxially coated semiconductor wafers according to the prior art, crucially limits the achievable flatness with low edge exclusion (< 2 mm).

If the procedure of the second preferred embodiment is followed, i.e. the semiconductor wafer, during the etching step, lies on the susceptor such that the second side (BS) faces the susceptor and the second side bears a protective layer (BS), the semiconductor wafer remains virtually homogeneously flat during the heating and etching operation, which is likewise emphasized by an arrow (fig. 10). This advantage allows the manufacturing of semiconductor wafers with superior flatness/planarity with an edge exclusion of 2 mm and down to very small edge exclusions of < 0.5 mm.

In addition, for performance of each embodiment, it may be the case that at least one operating parameter of the respective processing operation is defined for every respective processing operation (for example polishing by DSP, polishing by CMP, etching step(s) and deposition of an epitaxial layer (EPI)), specifically based on at least one wafer parameter which is determined on the semiconductor wafer to be processed;

based on an actual state of a processing apparatus with which the respective processing operation is conducted; and

based on an optimization of wafer parameters for characterization of flatness with regard to the condition thereof after undergoing the three processing

5 operations instead of an optimization of these wafer parameters with regard to the condition thereof after every individual processing operation of the three.

Figure 11 shows this in a representative manner for the processing steps of DSP, CMP and EPI. For each of the three processing operations, information is
10 provided in order to be able to define at least one operating parameter specific to each processing apparatus:

At least one wafer parameter is determined on the semiconductor wafer to be processed, in order to define at least one operating parameter for the

15 subsequent processing operation (cross-process feedforward, ff).

The actual state of the respective processing apparatus (DSP, CMP, EPI) is assessed with reference to the semiconductor wafer being processed, and on this basis at least one operating parameter of the processing apparatus being
20 assessed is defined for the processing of a subsequent semiconductor wafer with this processing apparatus (within-process feedback, wp).

After passing through the three processing operations, parameters of the processed semiconductor wafer which characterize the flatness thereof are
25 considered, for example $ESFQR_{max}$ and $SFQR_{max}$, and compared with the respective target values in order to define at least one operating parameter for one or more of the three processing operations for processing of a subsequent semiconductor wafer (cross-process feedback, fb).

Claims

- 5 1. A method of processing a semiconductor wafer (600), in which the semiconductor wafer (600) is disposed on a susceptor (310) in a coating apparatus (300) and then processed in a processing operation,
 wherein an etching gas is passed through the coating apparatus (300) in an etching step in the processing operation,
- 10 **characterized in that** a first side (FS) of the semiconductor wafer (600) which has been subjected to a polishing operation by CMP, or a second side (BS) of the semiconductor wafer (600) opposite the first side, is coated with a protective layer (601) before the processing operation.
- 15 2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the semiconductor wafer is placed on the susceptor in such a way that the first side (FS) coated with the protective layer lies at the top during the passage of the etching gas, remote from the susceptor.
- 20 3. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the semiconductor wafer is placed on the susceptor in such a way that the second side (BS) coated with the protective layer lies at the bottom during the passage of the etching gas, facing the susceptor.
- 25 4. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein, in the course of the processing operation, the etching step and then a deposition step are undertaken, wherein, during the deposition step, a deposition gas is passed through the coating apparatus (300) for deposition of an epitaxial layer on the semiconductor wafer (600).

5. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the protective layer (601) is removed again from the semiconductor wafer (600) after the processing operation.
- 5 6. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the etching step is divided into a first etching step and a second etching step and a first and a second protective layer are formed, and the first protective layer is removed before the forming of the second protective layer, and the semiconductor wafer is placed on the susceptor in such a way that the first side
10 (FS) coated with the first protective layer lies at the top during the first etching step, remote from the susceptor, and the second side (BS) coated with the protective layer lies at the bottom during the second etching step, facing the susceptor, and after the second etching step the deposition step is conducted.
- 15 7. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the protective layer (601) is formed as an oxide layer, especially low-temperature oxide layer.
8. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the
20 protective layer (601) is formed with a thickness of not more than 200 nm, preferably not more than 150 nm, more preferably not more than 100 nm.
9. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the protective layer (601) is formed with an edge exclusion (d_1) of not more than
25 0.5 mm, preferably not more than 0.2 mm, more preferably not more than 0.1 mm.
10. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the etching step or the first and second etching steps is/are conducted at a
30 temperature between 1000°C and 1250°C, preferably between 1100°C and 1150°C, in the coating apparatus (300).

11. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, wherein the first side (FS) and the second side (BS) of the semiconductor wafer (600) are each subjected to the polishing operation by CMP prior to the processing operation.

5 12. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first side (FS) of the semiconductor wafer (600) is polished during the polishing operation in such a way that, in the radial direction of the semiconductor wafer (600), regions (231, 232) are polished differently in the processing, specifically by definition of different pressures (p2, p3) onto the regions (231, 232) of the semiconductor
10 wafer.

13. The method as claimed in claim 12, wherein at least one operating parameter (p2, p3) in the at least one polishing operation is defined as a function of at least one operating parameter (f1) in the processing operation
15 and/or as a function of a wafer parameter to be expected by virtue of the at least one polishing operation and/or processing operation.

14. A control system (400) for controlling a coating apparatus (300) for processing a semiconductor wafer (600), in which an etching gas can be
20 passed through and/or a layer can be deposited epitaxially on the semiconductor wafer (600) in a processing operation, and especially also for controlling a polishing apparatus (200) in which the semiconductor wafer (600) can be polished in a polishing operation, wherein the control system (400) has been set up, in the case of use with the coating apparatus (300), and especially
25 also of the polishing apparatus (200), to conduct a method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 13.

15. A plant (500) for processing a semiconductor wafer (600), having a coating apparatus (300) in which an etching gas can be passed through in a
30 processing operation and/or a layer can be deposited epitaxially on the semiconductor wafer (600), and especially also having a polishing apparatus

(200) in which the semiconductor wafer (600) can be polished in a polishing operation, and also having a control system (400) as claimed in claim 14.

16. A semiconductor wafer (600), especially silicon wafer, having an
5 ESFQR_{max} of not more than 5 nm with an edge exclusion (R₁) of not more than 2 mm and 72 sectors (625) each having a length (R₂) of 30 mm.
17. The semiconductor wafer (600) as claimed in claim 16 having an
10 ESFQR_{max} of not more than 10 nm with an edge exclusion (R₁) of not more than 1 mm and 72 sectors (625) each having a length (R₂) of 30 mm.
18. The semiconductor wafer (600) as claimed in claim 16 having an
15 ESFQR_{max} of not more than 15 nm with an edge exclusion (R₁) of not more than 0.5 mm and 72 sectors (625) each having a length (R₂) of 30 mm.