

MAGNETIC TUNNEL JUNCTIONS SUITABLE FOR HIGH TEMPERATURE THERMAL PROCESSING

FIELD

[0001] Embodiments of the present disclosure relate to methods for fabricating structures used in spin-transfer-torque magnetic random access memory (STT-MRAM) applications. More specifically, embodiments of the disclosure relate to methods for fabricating magnetic tunnel junction structures for MRAM applications.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Magnetic random access memory (MRAM) is a type of memory device containing an array of MRAM cells that store data using their resistance values instead of electronic charges. Generally, each MRAM cell includes a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure. The MTJ structure typically includes a stack of magnetic layers having a configuration in which two ferromagnetic layers are separated by a thin non-magnetic dielectric, e.g., an insulating tunneling layer. A top electrode and a bottom electrode are utilized to sandwich the MTJ structure so electric current may flow between the top and the bottom electrode.

[0003] One type of MRAM cell is spin-transfer-torque magnetic random access memory (STT-MRAM). In such a fabrication process flow, a stable magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) stack is needed to sustain high temperature backend thermal processing while still producing high tunnel magnetoresistance (TMR) ratio. MTJ stack often starts with a buffer layer to improve adhesion and the seeding of the subsequent layers. MTJ stack also includes a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer to couple the first pinning layer and the second pinning layer antiparallely. A capping layer is utilized on top of the MTJ stack that ends with a noble metal material, which protects the stack from corrosion and also acts as a etch stop layer for hard mask etching.

[0004] During manufacturing of conventional STT-MRAM devices, a thermal annealing process is often performed right after the film layer deposition process to assist crystallization of the ferromagnetic layers as well as the insulator material sandwiched in the device structure. Insufficient thermal energy or inaccurate temperature control during the annealing process may cause the film bonding structures or properties formed in an undesirable manner. For example, inaccurate temperature control or undesired drift of the thermal diffusion during the annealing process may result in insufficient crystallization of the film layer, leading to failure of the device to meet its intended performance.

[0005] Conventional methods use a Ta- and/or Ru-based buffer layer for purposes adhesion and seeding of the subsequent layers. However, the buffer layer is easy to be segregated. The texture from the bottom contact tends to affect the texture of the MTJ film stack through the buffer and becomes detrimental to TMR ratio and magnetic properties of the stack, i.e., the texture roughness is carried from the substrate/bottom contact layers to the other layers of the MTJ film stack. Ru is also used in conventional methods for fabricating SyF coupling layers and capping layers. However, Ru tends to diffuse towards the MgO based tunnel barrier layer to bond with oxygen ion. Such detrimental diffusion lowers the TMR ratio of the film stack. The effect becomes severe during thermal process at elevated temperatures.

[0006] Therefore, there is a need in the art for improved methods and apparatus for fabricating MTJ structures for STT-MRAM applications with high volume manufacturability. There is also a need for improved MTJ stacks that are able to sustain high temperature thermal processing while preserving high TMR ratio and magnetic properties such as high SyF coupling, high perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of pinned layers and reference layer, and controllable perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of free layer.

SUMMARY

[0007] Embodiments of the disclosure provide methods for fabricating magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structures on a substrate in MRAM applications, particularly for

spin-transfer-torque magnetic random access memory (STT-MRAM) applications. Some embodiments provide compositions of film stacks for MTJ structures.

[0008] In an embodiment, a film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate is provided. The film stack includes a buffer layer; a seed layer disposed over the buffer layer; a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer; a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer; a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer; a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer; a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer; a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer; a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer; a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers; and a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.

[0009] In another embodiment, a film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate is provided is provided. The film stack includes a buffer layer, wherein the buffer layer comprises a CoFeB containing layer; seed layer disposed over the buffer layer; a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer; a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer, wherein the SyF coupling layer comprises an Ir containing layer; a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer; a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer; a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer; a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer; a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer; a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers; and a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.

[0010] In another embodiment, a film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate is provided is provided. The film stack includes a buffer layer, wherein the buffer layer comprises a CoFeB containing layer, wherein

the wt% of boron is greater than about 20%; a seed layer disposed over the buffer layer; a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer; a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer, wherein the SyF coupling layer comprises an Ir containing layer; a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer; a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer; a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer; a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer; a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer; a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers, and a top layer of the capping layer is an Ir containing layer; and a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] So that the manner in which the above recited features of the present disclosure can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the disclosure, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to embodiments, some of which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only exemplary embodiments and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, and may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

[0012] FIG. 1 depicts a flow diagram illustrating a method for fabricating magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structures, according to some embodiments.

[0013] FIG. 2A shows a schematic diagram of a portion of a film stack, according to some embodiments.

[0014] FIG. 2B shows a schematic diagram of a portion of the film stack, according to some embodiments.

[0015] FIG. 2C shows a schematic diagram of a portion of the film stack, according to some embodiments.

[0016] FIG. 3A shows a schematic diagram of a capping layer, according to some embodiments.

[0017] FIG. 3B shows a schematic diagram of a capping layer, according to some embodiments.

[0018] FIG. 3C shows a schematic diagram of a capping layer, according to some embodiments.

[0019] FIG. 3D shows a schematic diagram of a capping layer, according to some embodiments.

[0020] To facilitate understanding, identical reference numerals have been used, where possible, to designate identical elements that are common to the figures. It is contemplated that elements and features of one embodiment may be beneficially incorporated in other embodiments without further recitation. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only typical embodiments of this disclosure and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, for the disclosure may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0021] Embodiments of the disclosure generally provide apparatus and methods for forming MTJ structures from a film stack disposed on a substrate for MRAM applications. The apparatus and methods include forming the film properties of material layers from the film stack with desired crystallinity by a thermal process performed after the patterning of the material layers in the film stack. While patterning, a sidewall passivation layer may be formed along sidewalls of the film stack. Thus, by performing the thermal process after the patterning process and the sidewall passivation deposition process, the thermal energy provided from the thermal process may efficiently diffuse dopants into the material layers laterally outward toward the sidewall passivation layer, rather than vertically to adjacent material layers formed in the film stack. By doing so, a controllable degree of crystallinity of the material layers in

the film stack may be obtained without damage or interference from the dopants that might potentially be cross-diffused from the adjacent materials. The film stack as patterned and annealed with desired degree of crystallinity may be used to form MTJ structures with desired dimension and features for MRAM applications.

[0022] FIG. 1 depicts a flow diagram illustrating a process **100** for manufacturing MTJ structures on a substrate for MRAM applications according to one embodiment of the present disclosure. In some embodiments, process **100** is a process flow, and operations **101-106** are individual processes. The process **100** is configured to be performed in a plasma processing chamber and a thermal processing chamber or other suitable plasma immersion ion implantation systems or etching chamber, including those from other manufacturers. Process **100** may also use other tools such as a PVD chamber, CVD chamber, lithography tool.

[0023] The process **100** begins at operation **101** by providing a substrate having a film stack disposed thereon. In some embodiments, the substrate includes metal or glass, silicon, dielectric bulk material and metal alloys or composite glass, crystalline silicon (e.g., Si<100> or Si<111>), silicon oxide, strained silicon, silicon germanium, germanium, doped or undoped polysilicon, doped or undoped silicon wafers and patterned or non-patterned wafers silicon on insulator (SOI), carbon doped silicon oxides, silicon nitride, doped silicon, germanium, gallium arsenide, glass, or sapphire. The substrate may have various dimensions, such as about 200 mm, about 300 mm, about 450 mm or other diameter, as well as, being a rectangular or square panel. Unless otherwise noted, examples described herein are conducted on substrates with a 200 mm diameter, a 300 mm diameter, or a 450 mm diameter substrate. In one embodiment, the substrate includes the film stack disposed on the substrate.

[0024] It is noted that pinned magnetic layer(s), optional structure decoupling layer(s), tunnel barrier layer(s), magnetic storage layer(s), magnetic reference layer(s), and capping layer(s) may be formed by any suitable techniques and any suitable manners, such as PVD processes. Examples of systems that may be used to form these layers include ENDURA® PVD system available from Applied Materials Inc.,

Santa Clara, Calif. It is contemplated that other processing system, including those available from other manufacturers, may be adapted to practice the disclosure.

[0025] Prior to performing MTJ stack deposition at operation **102**, there may be some other processes to form transistor and interconnect layers, known to those of skill in the art. After performing a post-patterning anneal at operation **106**, additional operations may be performed, such as operations to complete remaining interconnect layers and contact pads.

[0026] At operations **102-104**, MTJ stack deposition, pre-patterning anneal, and MTJ patterning is performed. These operations include a patterning process, e.g., an etching process, performed to remove a portion of the film stack exposed and defined by an etching mask layer (not shown) from the substrate until the underlying substrate is exposed. The patterning process for patterning the film stack may include several steps or different recipes configured to supply different gas mixtures or etchants to etch different layers in accordance with the materials included in each layer. During patterning, an etching gas mixture or several gas mixtures with different etching species are sequentially supplied into the substrate surface to remove the portion of the film stack from the substrate. The end point of the patterning process at operation **104** may be controlled by time or other suitable methods. For example, the patterning process may be terminated after performing for between about 200 seconds and about 10 minutes until the substrate is exposed. The patterning process may be terminated by determination from an endpoint detector, such as an OES detector or other suitable detector as needed.

[0027] A further deposition process may be performed to form an encapsulation and insulation layer on the portion of the substrate where the film stack was removed during the patterning process at operation **104**. Encapsulation allows for good step coverage and hermeticity, and is often composed of silicon nitride based materials. Insulation is often composed of oxide based materials, and typically much thicker than encapsulation. The insulation layer may be any suitable insulating materials that may later under series of etching and deposition processes to form interconnection structure

(e.g., a backend process) in the insulation layer to complete the device structure fabrication process. In one example, the insulation layer is a silicon oxide layer or other suitable material.

[0028] At operation **106**, a thermal annealing process is performed. One example of a system that may be used for annealing includes rapid thermal anneal chambers available from Applied Materials Inc., Santa Clara, Calif. It is contemplated that other processing system, including those available from other manufacturers, may be adapted to practice the disclosure. The thermal annealing process is performed to repair, densify and enhance lattice structures of the film stack, particularly the magnetic storage layer(s) and the magnetic reference layer(s) included in the film stack. After the thermal annealing process, the magnetic storage layer(s) and magnetic reference layer(s) may be turned into a crystallized magnetic storage layer(s) and crystallized magnetic reference layer(s), having crystal orientation mostly in one plane. As desired crystallization of the magnetic storage layer(s) and the magnetic reference layer(s) is obtained, the overall electrical properties of the film stack for manufacturing MTJ devices are improved.

[0029] In some embodiments, one of operations **103** and **106** (or any other equivalent anneal process) can be used, depending on applications.

[0030] As described below, the MTJ film stacks of the present disclosure are capable of sustaining high temperature thermal processes and improved electrical and magnetic properties.

[0031] Each of FIGS. **2A-2C** individually show a schematic diagram of a portion of the film stack, according to some embodiments. **200** is a substrate. **204** is a bottom electrode, which is patterned in some embodiments. Although not depicted in FIGS. **2A-2C**, other layers such as transistor and interconnect structures in the form of one or more layers may be disposed between substrate **200** and bottom contact **204** according to some embodiments. Differences between film stacks illustrated in FIG. **2B** and FIG. **2C** include the buffer layer **205/205'**, seed layer **210/210'**, and first pinning layer **215/215'**. In some embodiments, a film stack includes one or more of a bottom

contact, a buffer layer, a seed layer, a first pinning layer, a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer, a second pinning layer, a structure blocking layer, a magnetic reference layer, a tunnel barrier layer, a magnetic storage layer, a capping layer, and a hard mask. In some embodiments, each of these layers individually comprises one or more layers.

[0032] In some embodiments, and as shown in FIG. **2A-2C**, the film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure is disposed over a bottom contact **204**. The MTJ structure includes a buffer layer **205/205'** disposed over the bottom contact **204**; a seed layer **210/210'** disposed over the buffer layer **205/205'**; a first pinning layer **215/215'** disposed over the seed layer **210/210'**; a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer **220** disposed over the first pinning layer **215/215'**; a second pinning layer **225** disposed over the SyF coupling layer **220**; a structure blocking layer **230** disposed over the second pinning layer **225**; a magnetic reference layer **235** disposed over the structure blocking layer **230**; a tunnel barrier layer **240** disposed over the magnetic reference layer **235**; a magnetic storage layer **245** disposed over the tunnel barrier layer **240**; a capping layer **250** disposed over the magnetic storage layer **245**, wherein the capping layer includes one or more layers; and a hard mask **255** disposed over the capping layer **250**, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.

[0033] The film stack includes a buffer layer **205/205'** disposed over a bottom contact **204**. The buffer layer **205/205'** may be sandwiched between bottom contact **204** and seed layer **210/210'**. MTJ film stacks often start with a buffer layer to improve adhesion and the seeding of the subsequent layers. In some embodiments, buffer layer **205/205'** includes one or more layers. In some embodiments, the buffer layer is not fabricated from Ru.

[0034] In some embodiments, the buffer layer includes a CoFeB containing layer **205a/205a'**. The weight % (wt%) of boron (B) in the buffer layer is between about 10 wt% and about 40 wt%, preferably between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%, more preferably between about 25 wt% and about 40 wt%. The wt% of iron in the buffer

layer is between about 20 wt% and about 60 wt%, preferably between about 40 wt% and 60 wt%, more preferably between about 45 wt% and about 60 wt%. The thickness of the CoFeB containing layer **205a/205a'** is between about 0 Å and about 20 Å, preferably about 10 Å.

[0035] In some embodiments, the buffer layer **205/205'** may comprise a TaN containing layer **205b/205b'** and/or a Ta containing layer **205c/205c'**. The TaN containing layer **205b/205b'** and the Ta containing layer **205c/205c'** may be disposed over the CoFeB layer. Alternately, the TaN containing layer **205b/205b'** and the Ta containing layer **205c/205c'** may be disposed under the CoFeB layer. The thickness of the TaN containing layer and the Ta containing layer is between about 0 Å and about 40 Å, preferably about 15 Å.

[0036] The film stack includes a seed layer **210/210'** disposed over the buffer layer **205/205'**. The seed layer **210/210'** may be sandwiched between the buffer layer **205/205'** and first pinning layer **215/215'**.

[0037] In some embodiments, seed layer **210** includes one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer. The thickness of seed layer **210** having one or more of Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer is between about 0 Å and about 60 Å, preferably about 25 Å. In some embodiments, when the seed layer **210** includes one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer, the CoFeB containing layer **205a** of the buffer layer is disposed under the TaN containing layer **205b** (and/or Ta containing layer **205c**) of the buffer layer.

[0038] In some embodiments, seed layer **210'** includes a NiCr containing layer. The thickness of seed layer **210'** having a NiCr containing layer is between about 0 Å and about 100 Å, preferably about 50 Å. In some embodiments, when the seed layer includes a NiCr containing layer, the CoFeB containing layer **205a'** of the buffer layer is disposed over the TaN containing layer **205b'** (and/or Ta containing layer **205c'**) of the buffer layer.

[0039] In some embodiments, the film stack includes a first pinning layer **215/215'** disposed over seed layer **210/210'**. The first pinning layer **215/215'** may be sandwiched between seed layer **210/210'** and SyF coupling layer **220**. The first pinning layer **215/215'** may comprise one or more layers. The first pinning layer may be constructed of several magnetic materials such as a metal alloy with dopants, such as boron dopants, oxygen dopants or other suitable materials. Metal alloys may include a Ni containing material, a Pt containing material, a Ru containing material, a Co containing material, a Ta containing material, and Pd containing materials. Suitable examples of the magnetic materials include Ru, Ta, Co, Pt, Ni, TaN, NiFeO_x, NiFeB, CoFeO_xB, CoFeB, CoFe, NiO_xB, CoBO_x, FeBO_x, CoFeNiB, CoPt, CoPd, CoNi, and TaO_x.

[0040] In some embodiments, first pinning layer **215** includes a Co containing layer **215b** disposed over a Co/Pt containing layer **215a**. The thickness of the Co containing layer **215b** is between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably about 5 Å. The Co/Pt containing layer **215a** may have a composition comprising

$$[\text{Co}_{(x)}/\text{Pt}_{(y)}]_m$$

wherein x has a thickness of Co between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably between about 0.5 Å and about 7 Å, y has a thickness of Pt between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably between about 0.5 Å and about 8 Å, and m is an integer between about 3 and about 10, wherein m represents the number of Co/Pt containing layers **215a** repeatedly formed in the film stack. For example, when x is 5 Å, y is 3 Å, and m is integer 2, it represents a Co/Pt layer of Co layer(5 Å)/Pt layer(3 Å)/Co layer(5 Å)/Pt layer(3 Å).

[0041] In some embodiments, first pinning layer **215'** includes a Co containing layer **215b'** disposed over a Co/Ni containing layer **215a'**. The thickness of the Co containing layer **215b'** is between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably about 5 Å. The Co/Ni containing layer **215a'** may have a composition comprising

$$[\text{Co}_{(x1)}/\text{Ni}_{(y1)}]_n$$

wherein $x1$ has a thickness of Co between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably between about 1 Å and about 8 Å, $y1$ has a thickness of Ni between about 0 Å and

about 10 Å, preferably between about 1 Å and about 8 Å, and n is an integer between about 1 and about 10, where n represents the number of Co/Ni containing layers **215a**' repeatedly formed in the film stack.

[0042] In some embodiments, when the first pinning layer **215** includes Co/Pt containing layer **215a**, the seed layer **210** includes one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer.

[0043] In some embodiments, when the first pinning layer **215'** includes a Co/Ni containing layer **215a'**, the seed layer **210** includes a NiCr containing layer.

[0044] The film stack includes a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer **220** disposed over the first pinning layer **215/215'**. In some embodiments, the SyF coupling layer **220** is sandwiched between first pinning layer **215/215'** and second pinning layer **225**. The SyF coupling layer **220** is used to couple the first pinning layer and the second pinning layer antiparallely. In some embodiments, the SyF coupling layer **220** includes one or more of an Ir containing layer, a Ru containing layer, a Rh containing layer, and a Cr containing layer. Preferably the SyF coupling layer is an Ir containing layer. Preferably, the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru. The thickness of SyF coupling layer **220** is between about 3 Å and about 10 Å. When the SyF coupling layer is a Ru containing layer, the thickness of the layer is preferably between about 4 Å and about 5 Å or between about 7 Å and about 9 Å. When the SyF coupling layer is an Ir containing layer, the thickness of the layer is preferably between about 4 Å and about 6 Å.

[0045] The film stack includes a second pinning layer **225** disposed over SyF coupling layer **220**. In some embodiments, the second pinning layer **225** is sandwiched between SyF coupling layer **220** and structure blocking layer **230**. The second pinning layer **225** may comprise one or more layers. The second pinning layer may be constructed of several magnetic materials such as a metal alloy with dopants, such as boron dopants, oxygen dopants or other suitable materials. Metal alloys may include a Ni containing material, a Pt containing material, a Ru containing material, a Co containing material, a Ta containing material, and Pd containing materials. Suitable

examples of the magnetic materials include Ru, Ta, Co, Pt, Ni, TaN, NiFeO_x, NiFeB, CoFeO_xB, CoFeB, CoFe, NiO_xB, CoBO_x, FeBO_x, CoFeNiB, CoPt, CoPd, CoNi, and TaO_x.

[0046] In some embodiments, second pinning layer **225** includes a Co containing layer **225b** disposed over a Co/Pt containing layer **215a**. The thickness of the Co containing layer **225b** is between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably about 5 Å. The Co/Pt containing layer **215a** may have a composition comprising

$$[\text{Co}_{(x2)}/\text{Pt}_{(y2)}]_p$$

wherein x_2 has a thickness of Co between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably between about 0.5 Å and about 7 Å, y_2 has a thickness of Pt between about 0 Å and about 10 Å, preferably between about 0.5 Å and about 8 Å, and p is an integer between about 0 and about 5, where p represents the number of Co/Pt containing layers **225a** repeatedly formed in the film stack.

[0047] The film stack includes structure blocking layer **230** disposed over second pinning layer **225**. In some embodiments, structure blocking layer **230** is sandwiched between second pinning layer **225** and magnetic reference layer **235**. In some embodiments, structure blocking layer **230** includes one or more layers. In some embodiments, the structure blocking layer **230** includes one or more of a metal containing material or a magnetic material, such as Mo, Ta, W, CoFe, and CoFeB, preferably one or more of a Ta containing layer, a Mo containing layer, and a W containing layer. The thickness of second pinning layer **225** is between about 0 Å and about 8 Å, preferably about 4 Å.

[0048] The film stack includes a magnetic reference layer **235** disposed over a structure blocking layer **230**. In some embodiments, magnetic reference layer **235** is sandwiched between structure blocking layer **230** and tunnel barrier layer **240**. In some embodiments, the magnetic reference layer **235** comprises one or more layers. Magnetic reference layer **235** may be constructed of several magnetic materials such as a metal alloy with dopants, such as boron dopants, oxygen dopants or other suitable materials. Metal alloys may include a Ni containing material, a Pt containing material, a

Ru containing material, a Co containing material, a Ta containing material, and Pd containing materials. Suitable examples of the magnetic materials include Ru, Ta, Co, Pt, Ni, TaN, NiFeO_x, NiFeB, CoFeO_xB, CoFeB, CoFe, NiO_xB, CoBO_x, FeBO_x, CoFeNiB, CoPt, CoPd, CoNi, and TaO_x.

[0049] In some embodiments, one or more of the layers of the magnetic reference layer **235** includes a CoFeB containing layer. The weight % (wt%) of boron (B) in the magnetic reference layer is between about 10 wt% and about 40 wt%, preferably between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%, more preferably between about 25 wt% and about 40 wt%. The wt% of iron in the magnetic reference layer is between about 20 wt% and about 60 wt%, preferably between about 40 wt% and 60 wt%, more preferably between about 45 wt% and about 60 wt%. The thickness of the magnetic reference layer **235** is between about 5 Å and about 20 Å, preferably about 10 Å.

[0050] In some embodiments, the film stack includes a tunnel barrier layer **240** disposed over magnetic reference layer **235**. In some embodiments, tunnel barrier layer **240** is sandwiched between magnetic reference layer **235** and magnetic storage layer **245**. Tunnel barrier layer **240** may be an oxide barrier layer. The tunnel barrier layer **240** may include MgO, HfO₂, TiO₂, TaO_x, Al₂O₃, or other suitable materials. In some embodiments, the tunnel barrier layer **240** may comprise MgO having a thickness of between about 1 Å and about 15 Å, preferably about 10 Å. The tunnel barrier layer **240** may be annealed either during or post deposition, for example, using a rapid thermal anneal (RTP) process.

[0051] In some embodiments, the film stack includes a magnetic storage layer **245** disposed over tunnel barrier layer **240**. In some embodiments, magnetic storage layer **245** is sandwiched between tunnel barrier layer **240** and capping layer **250**. The magnetic storage layer **245** may be constructed of several magnetic materials such as a metal alloy with dopants, such as boron dopants, oxygen dopants or other suitable materials. Metal alloys may include a Ni containing material, a Pt containing material, a Ru containing material, a Co containing material, a Ta containing material, and/or Pd containing materials. Suitable examples of the magnetic materials include Ru, Ta, Co,

Pt, Ni, TaN, NiFeO_x, NiFeB, CoFeO_xB, CoFeB, CoFe, NiO_xB, CoBO_x, FeBO_x, CoFeNiB, CoPt, CoPd, CoNi, and TaO_x.

[0052] In some embodiments, magnetic storage layer **245** may be a CoFeB, CoFeNiB, Ta, Mo or W, combinations thereof or other suitable layer(s). For example, in the embodiment depicted in FIG. 2, the magnetic storage layer **245** includes a first CoFeB containing layer **245a** and a second CoFeB containing layer **245c** sandwiching an intermediate layer **245b**. The first CoFeB containing layer **245a** may have a thickness of about 5 Å to about 20 Å, preferably about 10 Å. The weight % (wt%) of boron (B) in the first CoFeB containing layer **245a** is between about 10 wt% and about 40 wt%, preferably between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%, more preferably between about 25 wt% and about 40 wt%. The wt% of iron in the first CoFeB containing layer **245a** is between about 20 wt% and about 60 wt%, preferably between about 40 wt% and 60 wt%, more preferably between about 45 wt% and about 60 wt%.

[0053] The second CoFeB containing layer **245c** may have a thickness of about 5 Å to about 20 Å, preferably about 10 Å. The weight % (wt%) of boron (B) in the second CoFeB containing layer **245c** is between about 10 wt% and about 40 wt%, preferably between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%, more preferably between about 25 wt% and about 40 wt%. The wt% of iron in the second CoFeB containing layer **245a** is between about 20 wt% and about 60 wt%, preferably between about 40 wt% and 60 wt%, more preferably between about 45 wt% and about 60 wt%.

[0054] The intermediate layer **245b** of the magnetic storage layer **245** may include one or more layers of at least one or more of a Ta containing layer, a Mo containing layer, and a W containing layer. The intermediate layer **245b** may have a thickness of about 0 Å to about 8 Å, for example about 3 Å.

[0055] The film stack includes capping layer **250** disposed over magnetic storage layer **245**. In some embodiments, capping layer **250** is sandwiched between magnetic storage layer **245** and hard mask **255**. A capping layer is utilized on top of the MTJ stack that ends with a noble metal material, which protects the stack from corrosion and

also acts as a etch stop layer for hard mask etching. In some embodiments, capping layer **250** includes one or more layers.

[0056] In some embodiments, the capping layer **250** includes a first layer **250a**, a second layer **250b**, a third layer **250c**, and a fourth layer **250d**.

[0057] The first layer **250a** may include one or more layers of oxygen containing layers such as MgO or other suitable materials. Preferably, the oxygen containing layer is MgO. The first layer **250a** may have a thickness of between about 0 Å to about 15 Å, for example about 7 Å. The second layer **250b** may include one or more layers of CoFeB. The second layer **250b** may have a thickness of between about 0 Å to about 50 Å, for example about 8 Å. The weight % (wt%) of boron (B) of second layer **250b** is between about 10 wt% and about 40 wt%, preferably between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%, more preferably between about 25 wt% and about 40 wt%. The wt% of iron in second layer **250b** is between about 20 wt% and about 60 wt%, preferably between about 40 wt% and 60 wt%, more preferably between about 45 wt% and about 60 wt%.

[0058] The third layer **250c** may include one or more layers of a Ta containing material. The third layer **250c** may have a thickness of between about 0 Å to about 30 Å, for example about 10 Å. The fourth layer **250d** may include one or more of an Ir containing layer and a Ru containing layer, preferably one or more of an Ir containing layer. The fourth layer **250d** may have a thickness of between about 0 Å to about 50 Å, for example about 30 Å.

[0059] In some embodiments, the one or more layers of capping layer **250** include one or more layers of an Ir containing layer, one or more layers of a Ru containing layer, or a combination thereof.

[0060] In some embodiments, the one or more layers of capping layer **250** include one or more of an Ir containing layer, a Ru containing layer, a Ta containing layer, a CoFeB containing layer, an Mo containing layer, a W containing layer, and a oxygen containing layer (for example, MgO). Preferably an Ir containing layer or an Ru containing layer (more preferably an Ir containing layer) is the top layer of the capping

layer as the hard mask etch stop. In some embodiments, the capping layer is not fabricated from Ru.

[0061] In some embodiments, the capping layer includes an optional layer **250x**. Optional layer may be disposed between the first layer **250a** and the second layer **250b**. The optional layer **250x**, may include one or more layers of a Ir containing layer and/or a Ru containing layer, preferably Ir. Optional layer **250x** may have a thickness of between about 0 Å to about 30 Å, for example about 20 Å.

[0062] In some embodiments, when the capping layer **250** includes optional layer **250x**, second layer **250b** is not used. In such an embodiment, optional layer **250x** is above first layer **250a**. In some embodiments, optional layer **250x** is disposed directly above first layer **250a**. In some embodiments, additional layers may be disposed above **250x**.

[0063] In some embodiments, the capping layer comprises optional layer **250x** and first layer **250a**. In this embodiment, for example, the capping layer would be an Ir and/or Ru containing layer and an oxygen containing layer, with the Ir and/or Ru containing layer above the oxygen containing layer. In other embodiments, the capping layer includes optional layer **250x**, first layer **250a**, and one or more of second layer **250b**, third layer **250c**, and fourth layer **250d**, where optional layer **250x** is disposed directly above oxygen containing layer **250a**.

[0064] FIGS. **3A-3D** illustrates various, nonexclusive embodiments of the capping layer **250** as discussed above.

[0065] For example in FIG. **3A**, capping layer **250** includes a first layer **250a**; an optional layer **250x** disposed above the first layer **250a**; a second layer **250b** disposed above the optional layer **250x**; a third layer **250c** disposed above the second layer **250b**; and a fourth layer **250d** disposed above the third layer **250c**. Materials, compositions, and thickness ranges for each of these layers are discussed above.

[0066] In the example of FIG. 3B, capping layer 250 includes a first layer 250a; a second layer 250b disposed above the first layer 250a; a third layer 250c disposed above the second layer 250b; and a fourth layer 250d disposed above the third layer 250c. Materials, compositions, and thickness ranges for each of these layers are discussed above.

[0067] In the example of FIG. 3C, capping layer 250 includes a first layer 250a; an optional layer 250x disposed above the first layer 250a; a third layer 250c disposed above the optional layer 250x; and a fourth layer 250d disposed above the third layer 250c. Materials, compositions, and thickness ranges for each of these layers are discussed above.

[0068] In the example of FIG. 3C, capping layer 250 includes a first layer 250a; and an optional layer 250x disposed above the first layer 250a. Materials, compositions, and thickness ranges for each of these layers are discussed above.

[0069] FIGS. 2A-2C illustrate exemplary MTJ film stacks wherein one or more of the buffer layer, the SyF coupling layer, and the capping layer is not fabricated from Ru. In some embodiments, the MTJ film stack includes a CoFeB based buffer layer 205/205', which optionally may contain some TaN and/or Ta. The CoFeB layer may be disposed over or under a layer containing TaN and/or Ta. The wt% of boron of the CoFeB based buffer layer should be greater than about 10 wt%, preferably greater than about 25 wt%. In some embodiments, Ir, Ru, Rh, and/or Cr may be used as a SyF coupling layer 220, preferably Ir is the SyF coupling layer. In some embodiments, Ir and/or Ru may be the top layer metal for a capping layer 250. Ir is preferred as the top layer metal for a capping layer 250.

[0070] Use of a CoFeB based buffer layer in place of a Ru containing buffer layer has demonstrated an increase in the tunnel magnetoresistance (TMR) with excellent magnetic pinning even after annealing at temperatures up to 450°C. High SyF coupling, high perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of pinned layers and reference layer, and controllable perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of free layer are achieved. Some embodiments implementing a CoFeB buffer layer (with boron at 25 wt%) show a TMR

(%) improvement of more than 10% from conventional Ta/Ru/Ta buffer layer. The CoFeB layer blocks increased roughness from carrying from the bottom contact into the MTJ film stack.

[0071] Additionally, replacing Ru with Ir in the SyF coupling layer and capping layer also has demonstrated an increase in the TMR (%) even after annealing at temperatures up to 450°C. Some embodiments implementing an Ir containing SyF coupling layer show a TMR (%) improvement of more than 10% from conventional Ru containing SyF coupling layer. Moreover, by eliminating Ru in the SyF coupling layer and the capping layer, the film TMR is enhanced by eliminating Ru diffusion towards the MgO. It is likely that the higher thermal stability of IrO₂ than RuO₄ plays a role in eliminating diffusion.

[0072] Configurations such as those of FIGS. **2A-2C** provide advantages over conventional film stacks. The first advantage is the buffer stays amorphous even with high temperature thermal process and blocks the texture from the bottom contact. The second advantage is the strong antiparallel coupling between the pinning layers brought by Ir. The third advantage is the TMR improvement by using the new buffer layer and removing Ru from the stack. These advantages lead to higher MTJ performance (such as high TMR, high SyF coupling, high perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of pinned layers and reference layer, and controllable perpendicular magnetic anisotropy of free layer) and improved manufacturability. The MTJ film stack can be used to fabricate memory cells for STT-MRAM application as well as other memory and logic devices that use MTJs as the unit building block. Physical vapor deposition systems (such as ENDURA® STT MRAM) can be used to deposit the MTJ film stack for high performance STT-MRAM chips. As described herein, the MTJ film stack capable of sustaining high temperature thermal process improves both electrical and magnetic properties of the MTJs.

[0073] Table 1 and Table 2 show exemplary compositions for film stacks utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate. Materials,

compositions, and thicknesses for hard mask layer and bottom contact layer are known to persons of ordinary skill in the art.

[0074] An additional (and optional) Ir and/or Ru layer within the capping layer, as described above (represented by **250x**), may be placed on top of the oxygen containing layer. The thickness of this layer may be between about 0 Å to about 30 Å. In some embodiments, the CoFeB layer of the capping layer is not used when the additional Ir and/or Ru layer is used.

Table 1

Layer	Material	Composition	Thickness (Å)
Hard mask	--	--	--
Capping layer	Ir and/or Ru	--	0-50
	Ta	--	0-30
	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	0-50
	Ir and/or Ru		0-30
	MgO	--	0-15
Magnetic storage layer	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
	Ta, Mo, and/or W		0-8
	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
Tunnel barrier layer	MgO	--	1-15
Magnetic reference layer	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
Structure blocking layer	Ta, Mo, and/or W	--	0-8
Second pinning layer	Co	--	0-10
	[Co/Pt] _p	p: 0-5	Co: 0.5-7; Pt: 0.5-8
SyF coupling layer	Ir or Ru	--	3-10
First pinning layer	Co	--	0-10
	[Co/Pt] _m	m: 3-10	Co: 0.5-7; Pt: 0.5-8
Seed layer	Pt, Ir, and/or Ru		0-60
Buffer layer	TaN and/or Ta		0-40
	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	0-20
Bottom contact	--	--	--

All values for composition and thickness are listed as approximate ranges.

Table 2

Layer	Material	Composition (wt%)	Thickness (Å)
Capping layer	Ir and/or Ru	--	0-50
	Ta	--	0-30
	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	0-50
	Ir and/or Ru		0-30
	MgO	--	0-15
Magnetic storage layer	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
	Ta, Mo, and/or W		0-8
	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
Tunnel barrier layer	MgO	--	1-15
Magnetic reference layer	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	5-20
Structure blocking layer	Ta, Mo, and/or W	--	0-8
Second pinning layer	Co	--	0-10
	[Co/Pt] _p	p: 0-5	Co: 0.5-7; Pt: 0.5-8
SyF coupling layer	Ir or Ru	--	3-10
First pinning layer	Co	--	0-10
	[Co/Ni] _n	n: 1-10	Co: 1-8; Ni: 1-8
Seed layer	NiCr	--	0-100
Buffer layer	CoFeB	B: 10-40%, Fe: 20-60%	0-20
	TaN and/or Ta	--	0-40

All values for composition and thickness are listed as approximate ranges.

[0075] Although the invention herein has been described with reference to particular embodiments, it is to be understood that these embodiments are merely illustrative of the principles and applications of the present invention. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made to the method and apparatus of the present invention without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Thus, it is intended that the present invention include modifications and variations that are within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

CLAIMS

1. A film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate, comprising:
 - a buffer layer;
 - a seed layer disposed over the buffer layer;
 - a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer;
 - a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer;
 - a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer;
 - a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer;
 - a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer;
 - a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer;
 - a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer;
 - a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers; and
 - a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.
2. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more of an Ir containing layer, a Ru containing layer, or a combination thereof.
3. The film stack of claim 2, wherein the capping layer further comprises:
 - an oxygen containing layer.
4. The film stack of claim 3, wherein the capping layer further comprises:
 - a CoFeB containing layer.
5. The film stack of claim 3, wherein the capping layer further comprises:
 - a Ta containing layer.

6. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the capping layer comprises:
an Ir containing layer, a Ru containing layer, or a combination thereof as a top layer; and
an oxygen containing layer, wherein the top layer is disposed directly above the oxygen containing layer.
7. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the capping layer comprises:
an Ir containing layer as a top layer; and
one or more of a W containing layer, an oxygen containing layer, a second Ir containing layer disposed directly above the oxygen containing layer, a CoFeB containing layer, a Ta containing layer, and a Mo containing layer.
8. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the SyF coupling layer comprises:
an Ir containing layer.
9. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the buffer layer comprises:
a CoFeB containing layer.
10. The film stack of claim 9, wherein a wt% of boron in the buffer layer is between about 20 wt% and 40 wt%.
11. The film stack of claim 1, wherein the seed layer comprises:
(a) a NiCr containing layer, or (b) one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer.
12. The film stack of claim 9, wherein:
the seed layer comprises a NiCr containing layer; and
the buffer layer further comprises one or more of a TaN containing layer and a Ta containing layer, wherein the CoFeB containing layer of the buffer layer is disposed over one or more of the TaN containing layer of the buffer layer and the Ta containing layer of the buffer layer.

13. The film stack of claim 9, wherein
the seed layer comprises one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer; and
the buffer layer further comprises one or more of a TaN containing layer and a Ta containing layer, wherein the CoFeB containing layer of the buffer layer is disposed under one or more of the TaN containing layer of the buffer layer and the Ta containing layer of the buffer layer.
14. A film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate, comprising:
a buffer layer, wherein the buffer layer comprises a CoFeB containing layer;
a seed layer disposed over the buffer layer;
a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer;
a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer, wherein the SyF coupling layer comprises an Ir containing layer;
a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer;
a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer;
a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer;
a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer;
a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer;
a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers; and
a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.
15. The film stack of claim 14, wherein the capping layer comprises:
an Ir containing layer as a top layer.
16. The film stack of claim 15, wherein the capping layer further comprises:

one or more of a W containing layer, an oxygen containing layer, a second Ir containing layer disposed directly above the oxygen containing layer, a CoFeB containing layer, a Ta containing layer, and a Mo containing layer.

17. The film stack of claim 14, wherein

the buffer layer further comprises one or more of a TaN containing layer and a Ta containing layer; and

the seed layer comprises (a) a NiCr containing layer or (b) one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer.

18. A film stack utilized to form a magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) structure on a substrate, comprising:

a buffer layer, wherein the buffer layer comprises a CoFeB containing layer, wherein a wt% of boron is greater than about 20%;

a seed layer disposed over the buffer layer;

a first pinning layer disposed over the seed layer;

a synthetic ferrimagnet (SyF) coupling layer disposed over the first pinning layer, wherein the SyF coupling layer comprises an Ir containing layer;

a second pinning layer disposed over the SyF coupling layer;

a structure blocking layer disposed over the second pinning layer;

a magnetic reference layer disposed over the structure blocking layer;

a tunnel barrier layer disposed over the magnetic reference layer;

a magnetic storage layer disposed over the tunnel barrier layer;

a capping layer disposed over the magnetic storage layer, wherein the capping layer comprises one or more layers, and a top layer of the capping layer is an Ir containing layer; and

a hard mask disposed over the capping layer, wherein at least one of the capping layer, the buffer layer, and the SyF coupling layer is not fabricated from Ru.

19. The film stack of claim 18, wherein

the seed layer comprises a NiCr containing layer; and

the buffer layer further comprises one or more of a Ta containing layer and a TaN containing layer, wherein the CoFeB containing layer of the buffer layer is disposed over one or more of the Ta containing layer of the buffer layer and a TaN containing layer of the buffer layer.

20. The film stack of claim 18, wherein

the seed layer comprises one or more of a Pt containing layer, an Ir containing layer, and a Ru containing layer; and

the buffer layer further comprises one or more of a Ta containing layer and a TaN containing layer, wherein the one or more of the Ta containing layer of the buffer layer and a TaN containing layer of the buffer layer is disposed over the CoFeB containing layer of the buffer layer.