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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

WORKPIECE PROCESSOR HAVING
PROCESSING CHAMBER WITH IMPROVED PROCESSING FLUID FLOW

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application claims priority from the following US Provisional Applications:
U.S.S.N. 60/129,055, entitled "WORKPIECE PROCESSOR HAVING IMPROVED PROCESSING CHAMBER", filed April 13, 1999 (Attorney Docket No. SEM4492P0830US;
U.S.S.N. 60/143,769, entitled "WORKPIECE PROCESSOR HAVING IMPROVED PROCESSING CHAMBER", filed July 12, 1999 (Attorney Docket No. SEM4492P0831US);
U.S.S.N. 60/182,160 entitled "WORKPIECE PROCESSOR HAVING IMPROVED PROCESSING CHAMBER", filed February 14, 2000 (Attorney Docket No. SEM4492P0832US).

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED
RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not Applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The fabrication of microelectronic components from a microelectronic workpiece, such as a semiconductor wafer substrate, polymer substrate, etc., involves a substantial number of



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processes. For purposes of the present application, a microelectronic workpiece is defined to include a workpiece formed from a substrate upon which microelectronic circuits or components, data storage elements or layers, and/or micro-mechanical elements are formed.

There are a number of different processing operations performed on the workpiece to fabricate the microelectronic component(s). Such operations include, for example, material deposition, patterning, doping, chemical mechanical polishing, electropolishing, and heat treatment. Material deposition processing involves depositing thin layers of material to the surface of the workpiece. Patterning provides removal of selected portions of these added layers.

Doping of the microelectronic workpiece is the process of adding impurities known as "dopants" to the selected portions of the microelectronic workpiece to alter the electrical characteristics of the substrate material. Heat treatment of the microelectronic workpiece involves heating and/or cooling the microelectronic workpiece to achieve specific process results. Chemical mechanical polishing involves the removal of material through a combined chemical/mechanical process while electropolishing involves the removal of material from a workpiece surface using electrochemical reactions.

Numerous processing devices, known as processing "tools", have been developed to implement the foregoing processing operations. These tools take on different configurations depending on the type of workpiece used in the fabrication process and the process or processes executed by the tool. One tool configuration, known as the Equinox(R) wet processing tool and

available from Semitool, Inc., of Kalispell, Montana, includes one or more workpiece processing stations that utilize a workpiece holder and a process bowl or container for implementing wet processing operations. Such wet processing operations include electroplating, etching, cleaning, electroless deposition, electropolishing, etc.

In accordance with one configuration of the foregoing Equinox(R) tool, the workpiece holder and the processing container are disposed proximate one another and function to bring the microelectronic workpiece held by the workpiece holder into contact with a processing fluid disposed in the processing container thereby forming a processing chamber. Restricting the processing fluid to the appropriate portions of the workpiece, however, is often problematic. Additionally, ensuring proper mass transfer conditions between the processing fluid and the surface of the workpiece can be difficult. Absent such mass transfer control, the processing of the workpiece surface can often be non-uniform.

Conventional workpiece processors have utilized various techniques to bring the processing fluid into contact with the surface of the workpiece in a controlled manner. For example, the processing fluid may be brought into contact with the surface of the workpiece using a controlled spray. In other types of processes, such as in partial or full immersion processing, the processing fluid resides in a bath and at least one surface of the workpiece is brought into contact with or below the surface of the processing fluid. Electroplating, electroless plating, etching, cleaning, anodization, etc. are examples of such partial or full immersion

processing.

Existing processing containers often provide a continuous flow of processing solution to the processing chamber through one or more inlets disposed at the bottom portion of the chamber. Even distribution of the processing solution over the workpiece surface to control the thickness and uniformity of the diffusion layer conditions is facilitated, for example, by a diffuser or the like that is disposed between the one or more inlets and the workpiece surface. A general illustration of such a system is shown in Figure 1A. The diffuser 1 includes a plurality of apertures 2 that are provided to disburse the stream of fluid provided from the processing fluid inlet 3 as evenly as possible across the surface of the workpiece 4.

Although substantial improvements in diffusion layer control result from the use of a diffuser, such control is limited. With reference to Figure 1A, localized areas 5 of increased flow velocity normal to the surface of the microelectronic workpiece are often still present notwithstanding the diffuser 1. These localized areas generally correspond to the apertures 2 of the diffuser 1. This effect is increased as the diffuser 1 is placed closer to the microelectronic workpiece 4 since the distance over which the fluid is allowed to disburse as it travels from the diffuser to the workpiece is decreased. This reduced diffusion length results in a more concentrated stream of processing fluid at the localized areas 5.

The present inventors have found that these localized areas of increased flow velocity at the surface of the workpiece affect the diffusion layer conditions and can result in non-uniform

processing of the surface of the workpiece. The diffusion layer tends to be thinner at the localized areas 5 when compared to other areas of the workpiece surface. The surface reactions occur at a higher rate in the localized areas in which the diffusion layer thickness is reduced thereby resulting in radially, non-uniform processing of the workpiece. Diffuser hole pattern configurations also affect the distribution of the electric field in electrochemical processes, such as electroplating, which can similarly result in non-uniform processing of the workpiece surface (e.g., non-uniform deposition of the electroplated material).

Another problem often encountered in immersion processing of the workpiece is disruption of the diffusion layer due to the entrapment of bubbles at the surface of the workpiece. Bubbles can be created in the plumbing and pumping system of the processing equipment and enter the processing chamber where they migrate to sites on the surface of the workpiece under process. Processing is inhibited at those sites due, for example, to the disruption of the diffusion layer.

As microelectronic circuit and device manufacturers decrease the size of the components and circuits that they manufacture, the need for tighter control over the diffusion layer conditions between the processing solution and the workpiece surface becomes more critical. To this end, the present inventors have developed an improved processing chamber that addresses the diffusion layer non-uniformities and disturbances that exist in the workpiece processing tools currently employed in the microelectronic fabrication industry. Although the improved

processing chamber set forth below is discussed in connection with a specific embodiment that is adapted for electroplating, it will be recognized that the improved chamber may be used in any workpiece processing tool in which process uniformity across the surface of a workpiece is desired.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1A is schematic block diagram of an immersion processing reactor assembly that incorporates a diffuser to distribute a flow of processing fluid across a surface of a workpiece.

Figure 1B is a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of a reactor assembly that may incorporate the present invention.

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of one embodiment of a reactor chamber that may be used in the reactor assembly of Figure 1B and includes an illustration of the velocity flow profiles associated with the flow of processing fluid through the reactor chamber.

Figures 3-5 illustrate a specific construction of a complete processing chamber assembly that has been specifically adapted for electrochemical processing of a semiconductor wafer and that has been implemented to achieve the velocity flow profiles set forth in Figure 2.

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate two embodiments of processing tools that may incorporate one or more processing stations constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A processing container for providing a flow of a processing fluid during immersion processing of at least one surface of a microelectronic workpiece is set forth. The processing container comprises a principal fluid flow chamber providing a flow of processing fluid to at least one surface of the workpiece and a plurality of nozzles disposed to provide a flow of processing fluid to the principal fluid flow chamber. The plurality of nozzles are arranged and directed to provide vertical and radial fluid flow components that combine to generate a substantially uniform normal flow component radially across the surface of the workpiece. An exemplary apparatus using such a processing container is also set forth that is particularly adapted to carry out an electrochemical process, such as an electroplating process.

In accordance with a still further aspect of the present disclosure, a reactor for immersion processing of a microelectronic workpiece is set forth that includes a processing container having a processing fluid inlet through which a processing fluid flows into the processing container. The processing container also has an upper rim forming a weir over which processing fluid flows to exit from processing container. At least one helical flow chamber is disposed exterior to the processing container to receive processing fluid exiting from the processing container over the weir. Such a configuration assists in removing spent processing fluid from the site of the reactor while concurrently reducing turbulence during the removal process that might otherwise entrain air in the fluid stream or otherwise generate an unwanted degree of contact between the air and

the processing fluid.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTIONS

BASIC REACTOR COMPONENTS

With reference to FIGURE 1B, there is shown a reactor assembly 20 for immersion-processing a microelectronic workpiece 25, such as a semiconductor wafer. Generally stated, the reactor assembly 20 is comprised of a reactor head 30 and a corresponding processing base, shown generally at 37 and described in substantial detail below, in which the processing fluid is disposed. The reactor assembly of the specifically illustrated embodiment is particularly adapted for effecting electrochemical processing of semiconductor wafers or like workpieces. It will be recognized, however, that the general reactor configuration of FIGURE 1B is suitable for other workpiece types and processes as well.

The reactor head 30 of the reactor assembly 20 may be comprised of a stationary assembly 70 and a rotor assembly 75. Rotor assembly 75 is configured to receive and carry an associated microelectronic workpiece 25, position the workpiece in a process-side down orientation within a processing container in processing base 37, and to rotate or spin the workpiece. Because the specific embodiment illustrated here is adapted for electroplating, the rotor assembly 75 also includes a cathode contact assembly 85 that provides electroplating power to the surface of the microelectronic workpiece. It will be recognized, however, that backside

contact and/or support of the workpiece on the reactor head 30 may be implemented in lieu of front side contact/support illustrated here.

The reactor head 30 is typically mounted on a lift/rotate apparatus which is configured to rotate the reactor head 30 from an upwardly-facing disposition in which it receives the microelectronic workpiece to be plated, to a downwardly facing disposition in which the surface of the microelectronic workpiece to be plated is positioned so that it may be brought into contact with the processing fluid that is held within a processing container of the processing base 37. A robotic arm, which preferably includes an end effector, is typically employed for placing the microelectronic workpiece 25 in position on the rotor assembly 75, and for removing the plated microelectronic workpiece from within the rotor assembly. During loading of the microelectronic workpiece, assembly 85 may be operated between an open state that allows the microelectronic workpiece to be placed on the rotor assembly 75, and a closed state that secures the microelectronic workpiece to the rotor assembly for subsequent processing. In the context of an electroplating reactor, such operation also brings the electrically conductive components of the contact assembly 85 into electrical engagement with the surface of the microelectronic workpiece that is to be plated.

It will be recognized that other reactor assembly configurations may be used with the inventive aspects of the disclosed reactor chamber, the foregoing being merely illustrative.

PROCESSING CONTAINER

FIGURE 2 illustrates the basic construction of processing base 37 and the corresponding flow velocity contour pattern resulting from the processing container construction. As illustrated, the processing base 37 generally comprises a main fluid flow chamber 505, an antechamber 510, a fluid inlet 515, a plenum 520, a flow diffuser 525 separating the plenum 520 from the antechamber 510, and a nozzle/slot assembly 530 separating the plenum 520 from the main fluid flow chamber 505. These components cooperate to provide a flow (here, of the electroplating solution) at the microelectronic workpiece 25 with a substantially radially independent normal component. In the illustrated embodiment, the impinging flow is centered about central axis 537 and possesses a nearly uniform component normal to the surface of the microelectronic workpiece 25. This results in a substantially uniform mass flux to the microelectronic workpiece surface that, in turn, enables substantially uniform processing thereof.

Processing fluid is provided through fluid inlet 515 disposed at the bottom of the container 35. The fluid from the fluid inlet 515 is directed therefrom at a relatively high velocity through antechamber 510. In the illustrated embodiment, antechamber 510 includes an acceleration channel 540 through which the processing fluid flows radially from the fluid inlet 515 toward fluid flow region 545 of antechamber 510. Fluid flow region 545 has a generally inverted U-shaped cross-section that is substantially wider at its outlet region proximate flow diffuser 525 than at its inlet region proximate acceleration channel 540. This variation in the

cross-section assists in removing any gas bubbles from the processing fluid before the processing fluid is allowed to enter the main fluid flow chamber 505. Gas bubbles that would otherwise enter the main fluid flow chamber 505 are allowed to exit the processing base 37 through a gas outlet (not illustrated in FIGURE 2, but illustrated in the embodiment shown in FIGURES 3-5) disposed at an upper portion of the antechamber 510.

Processing fluid within antechamber 510 is ultimately supplied to main fluid flow chamber 505. To this end, the processing fluid is first directed to flow from a relatively high-pressure region 550 of the antechamber 510 to the comparatively lower-pressure plenum 520 through flow diffuser 525. Nozzle assembly 530 includes a plurality of nozzles or slots 535 that are disposed at a slight angle with respect to horizontal. Processing fluid exits plenum 520 through nozzles 535 with fluid velocity components in the vertical and radial directions.

Main fluid flow chamber 505 is defined at its upper region by a contoured sidewall 560 and a slanted sidewall 565. The contoured sidewall 560 assists in preventing fluid flow separation as the processing fluid exits nozzles 535 (particularly the uppermost nozzle(s)) and turns upward toward the surface of microelectronic workpiece 25. Beyond breakpoint 570, fluid flow separation will not substantially affect the uniformity of the normal flow. As such, slanted sidewall 565 can generally have any shape, including a continuation of the shape of contoured sidewall 560. In the specific embodiment disclosed here, sidewall 565 is slanted and, in those

applications involving electrochemical processing, is used to support one or more anodes/electrical conductors.

Processing fluid exits from main fluid flow chamber 505 through a generally annular outlet 572. Fluid exiting annular outlet 572 may be provided to a further exterior chamber for disposal or may be replenished for re-circulation through the processing fluid supply system.

In those instances in which the processing base 37 forms part of an electroplating reactor, the processing base 37 is provided with one or more anodes. In the illustrated embodiment, a central anode 580 is disposed in the lower portion of the main fluid flow chamber 505. If the peripheral edges of the surface of the microelectronic workpiece 25 extend radially beyond the extent of contoured sidewall 560, then the peripheral edges are electrically shielded from central anode 580 and reduced plating will take place in those regions. However, if plating is desired in the peripheral regions, one or more further anodes may be employed proximate the peripheral regions. Here, a plurality of annular anodes 585 are disposed in a generally concentric manner on slanted sidewall 565 to provide a flow of electroplating current to the peripheral regions. An alternative embodiment would include a single anode or multiple anodes with no shielding from the contoured walls to the edge of the microelectronic workpiece.

The anodes 580, 585 may be provided with electroplating power in a variety of manners. For example, the same or different levels of electroplating power may be multiplexed to the anodes 580, 585. Alternatively, all of the anodes 580, 585 may be connected to receive the same

level of electroplating power from the same power source. Still further, each of the anodes 580, 585 may be connected to receive different levels of electroplating power to compensate for the variations in the resistance of the plated film. An advantage of the close proximity of the anodes 585 to the microelectronic workpiece 25 is that it provides a high degree of control of the radial film growth resulting from each anode.

Gasses may undesirably be entrained in the processing fluid as the is circulated through the processing system. These gasses may form bubbles that ultimately find their way to the diffusion layer and thereby impair the uniformity of the processing that takes place at the surface of the workpiece. To reduce this problem, as well as to reduce the likelihood of the entry of bubbles into the main fluid flow chamber 505, processing base 37 includes several unique features. With respect to central anode 580, a Venturi flow path 590 is provided between the underside of central anode 580 and the relatively lower pressure region of acceleration channel 540. In addition to desirably influencing the flow effects along central axis 537, this path results in a Venturi effect that causes the processing fluid proximate the surfaces disposed at the lower portion of the chamber, such as at the surface of central anode 580, to be drawn into acceleration channel 540 and may assist in sweeping gas bubbles away from the surface of the anode. More significantly, this Venturi effect provides a suction flow that affects the uniformity of the impinging flow at the central portion of the surface of the microelectronic workpiece along central axis 537. Similarly, processing fluid sweeps across the surfaces at the upper portion of

the chamber, such as the surfaces of anodes 585, in a radial direction toward annular outlet 572 to remove gas bubbles present at such surfaces. Further, the radial components of the fluid flow at the surface of the microelectronic workpiece assists in sweeping gas bubbles therefrom.

There are numerous processing advantages with respect to the illustrated flow through the reactor chamber. As illustrated, the flow through the nozzles/slots 535 is directed away from the microelectronic workpiece surface and, as such, there are no substantial localized normal of flow components of fluid created that disturb the substantial uniformity of the diffusion layer. Although the diffusion layer may not be perfectly uniform, any non-uniformity will be relatively gradual as a result. Further, in those instances in which the microelectronic workpiece is rotated, such remaining non-uniformities in the diffusion layer can often be tolerated while consistently achieving processing goals.

As is also evident from the foregoing reactor design, the flow that is normal to the microelectronic workpiece has a slightly greater magnitude near the center of the microelectronic workpiece. This creates a dome-shaped meniscus whenever the microelectronic workpiece is not present (i.e., before the microelectronic workpiece is lowered into the fluid). The dome-shaped meniscus assists in minimizing bubble entrapment as the microelectronic workpiece is lowered into the processing solution.

The flow at the bottom of the main fluid flow chamber 505 resulting from the Venturi flow path influences the fluid flow at the centerline thereof. The centerline flow velocity is

otherwise difficult to implement and control. However, the strength of the Venturi flow provides a non-intrusive design variable that may be used to affect this aspect of the flow.

A still further advantage of the foregoing reactor design is that it assists in preventing bubbles that find their way to the chamber inlet from reaching the microelectronic workpiece. To this end, the flow pattern is such that the solution travels downward just before entering the main chamber. As such, bubbles remain in the antechamber and escape through holes at the top thereof. Further, bubbles are prevented from entering the main chamber through the Venturi flow path through the use of the shield that covers the Venturi flow path (see description of the embodiment of the reactor illustrated in FIGURES 3-5). Still further, the upward sloping inlet path (see FIGURE 5 and appertaining description) to the antechamber prevents bubbles from entering the main chamber through the Venturi flow path.

FIGURES 3-5 illustrate a specific construction of a complete processing chamber assembly 610 that has been specifically adapted for electrochemical processing of a semiconductor microelectronic workpiece. More particularly, the illustrated embodiment is specifically adapted for depositing a uniform layer of material on the surface of the workpiece using electroplating.

As illustrated, the processing base 37 shown in FIGURE 1B is comprised of processing chamber assembly 610 along with a corresponding exterior cup 605. Processing chamber assembly 610 is disposed within exterior cup 605 to allow exterior cup 605 to receive spent

processing fluid that overflows from the processing chamber assembly 610. A flange 615 extends about the assembly 610 for securement with, for example, the frame of the corresponding tool.

With particular reference to FIGURES 4 and 5, the flange of the exterior cup 605 is formed to engage or otherwise accept rotor assembly 75 of reactor head 30 (shown in Figure 1B) and allow contact between the microelectronic workpiece 25 and the processing solution, such as electroplating solution, in the main fluid flow chamber 505. The exterior cup 605 also includes a main cylindrical housing 625 into which a drain cup member 627 is disposed. The drain cup member 627 includes an outer surface having channels 629 that, together with the interior wall of main cylindrical housing 625, form one or more helical flow chambers 640 that serve as an outlet for the processing solution. Processing fluid overflowing a weir member 739 at the top of processing cup 35 drains through the helical flow chambers 640 and exits an outlet (not illustrated) where it is either disposed of or replenished and re-circulated. This configuration is particularly suitable for systems that include fluid re-circulation since it assists in reducing the mixing of gases with the processing solution thereby further reducing the likelihood that gas bubbles will interfere with the uniformity of the diffusion layer at the workpiece surface.

In the illustrated embodiment, antechamber 510 is defined by the walls of a plurality of separate components. More particularly, antechamber 510 is defined by the interior walls of

drain cup member 627, an anode support member 697, the interior and exterior walls of a mid-chamber member 690, and the exterior walls of flow diffuser 525.

FIGUREs 3B and 4 illustrate the manner in which the foregoing components are brought together to form the reactor. To this end, the mid-chamber member 690 is disposed interior of the drain cup member 627 and includes a plurality of leg supports 692 that sit upon a bottom wall thereof. The anode support member 697 includes an outer wall that engages a flange that is disposed about the interior of drain cup member 627. The anode support member 697 also includes a channel 705 that sits upon and engages an upper portion of flow diffuser 525, and a further channel 710 that sits upon and engages an upper rim of nozzle assembly 530. Mid-chamber member 690 also includes a centrally disposed receptacle 715 that is dimensioned to accept the lower portion of nozzle assembly 530. Likewise, an annular channel 725 is disposed radially exterior of the annular receptacle 715 to engage a lower portion of flow diffuser 525.

In the illustrated embodiment, the flow diffuser 525 is formed as a single piece and includes a plurality of vertically oriented slots 670. Similarly, the nozzle assembly 530 is formed as a single piece and includes a plurality of horizontally oriented slots that constitute the nozzles 535.

The anode support member 697 includes a plurality of annular grooves that are dimensioned to accept corresponding annular anode assemblies 785. Each anode assembly 785 includes an anode 585 (preferably formed from platinized titanium or in other inert metal) and a

conduit 730 extending from a central portion of the anode 585 through which a metal conductor may be disposed to electrically connect the anode 585 of each assembly 785 to an external source of electrical power. Conduit 730 is shown to extend entirely through the processing chamber assembly 610 and is secured at the bottom thereof by a respective fitting 733. In this manner, anode assemblies 785 effectively urge the anode support member 697 downward to clamp the flow diffuser 525, nozzle assembly 530, mid-chamber member 690, and drain cup member 627 against the bottom portion 737 of the exterior cup 605. This allows for easy assembly and disassembly of the processing chamber 610. However, it will be recognized that other means may be used to secure the chamber elements together as well as to conduct the necessary electrical power to the anodes.

The illustrated embodiment also includes a weir member 739 that detachably snaps or otherwise easily secures to the upper exterior portion of anode support member 697. As shown, weir member 739 includes a rim 742 that forms a weir over which the processing solution flows into the helical flow chamber 640. Weir member 739 also includes a transversely extending flange 744 that extends radially inward and forms an electric field shield over all or portions of one or more of the anodes 585. Since the weir member 739 may be easily removed and replaced, the processing chamber assembly 610 may be readily reconfigured and adapted to provide different electric field shapes. Such differing electrical field shapes are particularly useful in those instances in which the reactor must be configured to process more than one size or shape of

a workpiece. Additionally, this allows the reactor to be configured to accommodate workpieces that are of the same size, but have different plating area requirements.

The anode support member 697, with the anodes 585 in place, forms the contoured sidewall 560 and slanted sidewall 565 that is illustrated in FIGURE 2. As noted above, the lower region of anode support member 697 is contoured to define the upper interior wall of antechamber 510 and preferably includes one or more gas outlets 665 that are disposed therethrough to allow gas bubbles to exit from the antechamber 510 to the exterior environment.

With particular reference to FIGURE 5, fluid inlet 515 is defined by an inlet fluid guide, shown generally at 810, that is secured to mid-chamber member 690 by one or more fasteners 815. Inlet fluid guide 810 includes a plurality of open channels 817 that guide fluid received at fluid inlet 515 to an area beneath mid-chamber member 690. Channels 817 of the illustrated embodiment are defined by upwardly angled walls 819. Processing fluid exiting channels 817 flows therefrom to one or more further channels 821 that are likewise defined by walls that angle upward.

Central anode 580 includes an electrical connection rod 581 that proceeds to the exterior of the processing chamber assembly 610 through central apertures formed in nozzle assembly 530, mid-chamber member 690 and inlet fluid guide 810. The Venturi flow path regions shown at 590 in FIGURE 2 are formed in FIGURE 5 by vertical channels 823 that proceed through drain cup member 627 and the bottom wall of nozzle member 530. As illustrated, the fluid inlet

guide 810 and, specifically, the upwardly angled walls 819 extend radially beyond the shielded vertical channels 823 so that any bubbles entering the inlet proceed through the upward channels 821 rather than through the vertical channels 823.

The foregoing reactor assembly may be readily integrated in a processing tool that is capable of executing a plurality of processes on a workpiece, such as a semiconductor microelectronic workpiece. One such processing tool is the LT-210TM electroplating apparatus available from Semitool, Inc., of Kalispell, Montana. Figs. 6 and 7 illustrate such integration.

The system of Fig. 6 includes a plurality of processing stations 1610. Preferably, these processing stations include one or more rinsing/drying stations and one or more electroplating stations (including one or more electroplating reactors such as the one above), although further immersion-chemical processing stations constructed in accordance with the of the present invention may also be employed. The system also preferably includes a thermal processing station, such as at 1615, that includes at least one thermal reactor that is adapted for rapid thermal processing (RTP).

The workpieces are transferred between the processing stations 1610 and the RTP station 1615 using one or more robotic transfer mechanisms 1620 that are disposed for linear movement along a central track 1625. One or more of the stations 1610 may also incorporate structures that are adapted for executing an in-situ rinse. Preferably, all of the processing stations as well as the robotic transfer mechanisms are disposed in a cabinet that is provided with filtered

air at a positive pressure to thereby limit airborne contaminants that may reduce the effectiveness of the microelectronic workpiece processing.

Fig. 7 illustrates a further embodiment of a processing tool in which an RTP station 1635, located in portion 1630, that includes at least one thermal reactor, may be integrated in a tool set. Unlike the embodiment of Fig. 6, in this embodiment, at least one thermal reactor is serviced by a dedicated robotic mechanism 1640. The dedicated robotic mechanism 1640 accepts workpieces that are transferred to it by the robotic transfer mechanisms 1620. Transfer may take place through an intermediate staging door/area 1645. As such, it becomes possible to hygienically separate the RTP portion 1630 of the processing tool from other portions of the tool. Additionally, using such a construction, the illustrated annealing station may be implemented as a separate module that is attached to upgrade an existing tool set. It will be recognized that other types of processing stations may be located in portion 1630 in addition to or instead of RTP station 1635.

Numerous modifications may be made to the foregoing system without departing from the basic teachings thereof. Although the present invention has been described in substantial detail with reference to one or more specific embodiments, those of skill in the art will recognize that changes may be made thereto without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention as set forth herein.

WE CLAIM:

1. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container comprising:
a principal fluid flow chamber providing a flow of processing fluid to at least one surface of the workpiece;
a plurality of nozzles disposed to provide a flow of processing fluid to the principal fluid flow chamber, the plurality of nozzles being arranged and directed to provide vertical, and radial fluid flow components that combine to generate a substantially uniform normal flow component radially across the at least one surface of the workpiece.
2. A microelectronic workpiece processing immersion container as claimed in claim 1 wherein the plurality of nozzles are disposed so that the substantially uniform normal flow component is slightly greater at a radial central portion thereby forming a meniscus that assists in preventing air entrapment as the workpiece is brought into engagement with the surface of the processing fluid in the processing container.
3. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 1 and further comprising an antechamber disposed in a flow path of the processing fluid prior to

the plurality of nozzles, the antechamber being dimensioned to assist in the removal of gaseous components entrained in the processing fluid.

4. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 3 and further comprising a plenum disposed in the fluid flow path between the antechamber and the plurality of nozzles.
5. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 3 wherein the antechamber comprises an inlet portion and an outlet portion, the inlet portion having a smaller cross-section compared to the outlet portion.
6. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 1 wherein at least some of the plurality of nozzles are in the form of generally horizontal slots.
7. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 1 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber is defined by one or more sidewalls, at least some of the plurality of nozzles being disposed through the one or more sidewalls.

8. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 7 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber comprises one or more contoured sidewalls at an upper portion thereof to inhibit fluid flow separation as the processing fluid flows toward an upper portion of the principal fluid flow chamber to contact the surface of the microelectronic workpiece.
9. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 1 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber is defined at an upper portion thereof by an angled wall.
10. A microelectronic workpiece immersion processing container as claimed in claim 1 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber further comprises an inlet disposed at a lower portion thereof that is configured to provide a Venturi effect that facilitates recirculation of processing fluid flow in a lower portion of the principal fluid flow chamber.

11. A reactor for immersion processing at least one surface of a microelectronic workpiece, the reactor comprising:
a reactor head including a workpiece support;
a processing container including a plurality of nozzles angularly disposed in a sidewall of a principal fluid flow chamber at a level within the principal fluid flow chamber below a surface of a bath of processing fluid normally contained therein during immersion processing.
12. A reactor as claimed in claim 10 and further comprising an electrode disposed at a lower portion of the processing container to provide electrical contact between an electrical power supply and the processing fluid.
13. A reactor as claimed in claim 12 wherein the processing container is defined at an upper portion thereof by an angled wall, the processing container further comprising at least one further electrode in fixed positional alignment with the angled wall to provide electrical contact between an electrical power supply and the processing fluid.

14. A reactor as claimed in claim 1 and further comprising a motor connected to rotate the workpiece support and an associated microelectronic workpiece at least during processing of the at least one surface of the microelectronic workpiece.
15. A reactor for immersion processing of a microelectronic workpiece, the reactor comprising:
a processing container having a processing fluid inlet through which a processing fluid flows into the processing container, the processing container further having an upper rim forming a weir over which processing fluid flows to exit from processing container;
at least one helical flow chamber disposed exterior to the processing container to receive processing fluid exiting from the processing container over the weir.
16. A reactor as claimed in claim 15 wherein the helical flow chamber is disposed about and circumvents exterior sidewalls of the processing container.
17. A reactor as claimed in claim 16 wherein the processing container comprises one or more projections circumventing exterior sidewalls thereof that at least partially define the helical flow chamber.

18. A reactor as claimed in claim 17 wherein the reactor further comprises an outer container exterior to the processing container, interior sidewalls of the outer container cooperating with the one or more projections to define the helical flow chamber therebetween.
19. An apparatus for processing a microelectronic workpiece comprising:
a plurality of workpiece processing stations;
a microelectronic workpiece robotic transfer;
at least one of the plurality of workpiece processing stations including a reactor having a processing container comprising
 a principal fluid flow chamber;
 a plurality of nozzles angularly disposed in one or more sidewalls of the principal fluid flow chamber at a level within the principal fluid flow chamber below a surface of a bath of processing fluid normally contained therein during immersion processing.
20. An apparatus as claimed in claim 19 wherein the plurality of nozzles are disposed with respect to one another to provide vertical and radial fluid flow components that combine

to generate a substantially uniform normal flow component radially across the at least one surface of the workpiece.

21. An apparatus as claimed in claim 19 wherein the plurality of nozzles are arranged so that the substantially uniform normal flow component is slightly greater at a radial central portion as referenced to the workpiece thereby forming a meniscus that assists in preventing air entrapment as the workpiece is brought into engagement with the surface of the processing fluid in the processing container.
22. An apparatus as claimed in claim 19 wherein the processing container further comprises a vented antechamber upstream of the plurality of nozzles.
23. An apparatus as claimed in claim 22 wherein the processing container further comprises a plenum disposed between the vented antechamber and the plurality of nozzles.
24. An apparatus as claimed in claim 22 wherein the vented antechamber comprises an inlet portion and an outlet portion, the inlet portion having a smaller cross-section compared to the outlet portion.

25. An apparatus as claimed in claim 21 wherein at least some of the plurality of nozzles are generally horizontal slots in the one or more sidewalls of the principal fluid flow chamber.
26. An apparatus as claimed in claim 19 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber further comprises a Venturi effect inlet.
27. An apparatus as claimed in claim 25 wherein the Venturi effect inlet generates a Venturi effect that facilitates recirculation of processing fluid flow in a lower portion of the principal fluid flow chamber.
28. A processing container for providing a flow of a processing fluid during immersion processing of at least one surface of a microelectronic workpiece, the processing container comprising:
- a principal fluid flow chamber;
- a plurality of nozzles angularly disposed in one or more sidewalls of the principal fluid flow chamber at a level within the principal fluid flow chamber below a surface of a bath of processing fluid contained therein during immersion processing.

29. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 28 wherein the plurality of nozzles are disposed in the one or more sidewalls of the principal fluid flow chamber so as to form a the substantially uniform normal flow component radially across the surface of the workpiece in which the substantially uniform normal flow component is slightly greater at a radial central portion thereby forming a meniscus that assists in preventing air entrapment as the workpiece is brought into engagement with the surface of the processing fluid in the processing container.
30. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 26 and further comprising an antechamber upstream of the plurality of nozzles, the antechamber being dimensioned to assist in the removal of gaseous components entrained in the processing fluid.
31. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 30 and further comprising a plenum disposed between the antechamber and the plurality of nozzles.

32. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 31 wherein the antechamber comprises an inlet and an outlet, the inlet having a smaller cross-section compared to the outlet.
33. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 28 wherein at least some of the plurality of nozzles are generally horizontal slots disposed through the one or more sidewalls of the principal fluid flow chamber.
34. A processing container as claimed in claim 28 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber comprises one or more contoured sidewalls at an upper portion thereof to inhibit fluid flow separation as the processing fluid flows toward an upper portion of the principal fluid flow chamber to contact the surface of the microelectronic workpiece.
35. A processing container as claimed in claim 28 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber is defined at an upper portion thereof by an angled wall.

36. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 28 wherein the principal fluid flow chamber further comprises a Venturi effect inlet disposed at a lower portion thereof.
37. A microelectronic workpiece processing container as claimed in claim 36 wherein the Venturi effect inlet is configured to provide a Venturi effect that facilitates recirculation of processing fluid flow in a lower portion of the principal fluid flow chamber.