

Description

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to liquid phase epitaxial growth of Group III—V compound semiconductor substrates.

Background of the Invention

Epitaxial layers of Group III—V compound semiconductors — such as InP (indium phosphide), InGaAs (indium gallium arsenide), and InGaAsP — are commonly grown on single crystal substrates, such as InP, by a process known as liquid phase epitaxy (LPE). This process entails bringing molten solution(s) of the corresponding chemical constituents of the desired epitaxial layer(s) into contact with the heated substrate in a furnace. A controlled cooling program causes material to precipitate from the solution onto the substrate and thus to grow the corresponding epitaxial layer. During growth the furnace atmosphere is typically one of hydrogen, helium, nitrogen, argon, or combinations thereof. Typically, the substrate is located in a recess of a sliding member ("slider") which is pushed into contact with different molten solutions ("melts") contained in successive wells in a meltholder, in order to grow a succession of epitaxial layers of differing chemical composition ("heterostructure"). The slider and meltholder are typically made of graphite, and both slider (with substrate) and meltholder (with melt) are initially pre-heated in the furnace to a common temperature for homogenizing the melt(s) prior to pushing the substrate into contact with any melt.

One problem with known processes, using substrates containing compounds of phosphorus, e.g., substrates of InP, is the decomposition of the phosphorus compound caused by the disproportionate loss of phosphorus by dissociation from the substrate above 365 degrees C, which occurs when the surface of the substrate is exposed and heated before contact with any melt. This phosphorus loss creates phosphorus deficient pits that propagate through the grown layers as undesirable inclusions which degrade the performance of the devices. Therefore, minimizing substrate decomposition is very important.

In prior art, during pre-heating necessary for homogenizing the melt(s) prior to LPE growth, the phosphorus-containing substrate is subjected to a localized partial pressure of phosphorus, as provided by a variety of techniques, to retard substrate decomposition. These techniques include the use of a phosphorus-containing (e.g., InP) cover piece as a source of phosphorus, to create a local phosphorus overpressure and thus suppress loss of phosphorus from the substrate, in a hydrogen (H₂) growth atmosphere. An alternative approach, reported by K. Pak et al, *Japan Journal of Applied Physics*, Vol. 18, No. 9, page 1859 (1979), is to introduce Ar into the growth ambient, in order to produce Ar—H₂ gas

mixtures in the furnace atmosphere. However, neither of these approaches suppresses the decomposition of the substrate as much as desired.

Summary of the Invention

We have found in connection with LPE growth processes that the thermal decomposition of P-containing Group III—V compound semiconductor substrates is desirably reduced by the use of a nonreducing gas atmosphere, e.g., nitrogen or helium, during the pre-heating step. This reduces thermal decomposition of the phosphorus compound of the substrate. However, we also discovered that if such nonreducing gas atmosphere is used during the subsequent epitaxial growth process, a problem caused thereby is that the solidified melt adheres very strongly to the slider (particularly if it is of graphite) often resulting in damage to the system during attempts to separate the slider from the meltholders. The solution to this problem, we discovered, is the use of a reducing gas atmosphere, e.g., hydrogen, during the subsequent epitaxial growth process. Thus, according to this invention, two processing steps, pre-heating and growing, are done in different atmospheres.

Detailed Description

As previously noted, the present invention addresses and solves two problems: (1) decomposition of phosphorus compounds of the substrate during pre-heating of the substrate and melts together in a furnace before LPE growth, and (2) adhesion of solidified melts upon cooling after LPE growth. We have found that the use of a helium or nitrogen atmosphere (together with an InP cover as in the prior art) in which to heat the substrate and melts to a common temperature immediately before LPE growth followed by the use of a hydrogen atmosphere during LPE growth alleviates both the problem of phosphorus dissociation from the substrate and the problem of the adhesion of solidified melts to the slider. It is theorized that when the substrate is in contact with a melt during LPE growth, there is no further need to suppress dissociation, and thus hydrogen can then be used, and the hydrogen, being a reducing atmosphere, helps reduce undesirable oxide impurities which otherwise may form during the LPE growth. It should be understood, however, that the utility of this invention does not depend upon the correctness of this theory.

In one embodiment of the invention, LPE growth upon an InP substrate of an epitaxial layer of material is accomplished by a process comprising the steps of:

(a) heating the substrate in a recess in a graphite sliding member and the material in a graphite well to a predetermined temperature in a nonreducing gas atmosphere, such as essentially helium or nitrogen; (b) pushing the sliding member so that the substrate comes into contact with a melt; and (c) changing the atmosphere to

a reducing gas, such as essentially hydrogen, substantially immediately before (or after) pushing the substrate into contact with the melt.

The following detailed example describes the growth of a double heterostructure of InP/InGaAsP suitable for a light emitting diode of wavelength about 1.3 μm . All gases are at a pressure of essentially one atmosphere.

A single crystal substrate of InP is prepared with a major surface oriented normal to the (100) crystallographic direction. This crystal substrate is n-type semiconductor, as a result of being doped with sulfur impurity in a concentration of about 5×10^{18} per cm^3 . The substrate is located in a recess of a graphite sliding member, and the sliding member is located in a suitable initial position in a graphite meltholder. The meltholder contains a multiple-well structure, each well of which contains a (different) suitable melt, as more fully described below. The meltholder is placed in a furnace initially maintained at a temperature of about 665 degrees C and is kept at this temperature for about an hour, in order to homogenize the melts in the wells. The furnace contains an atmosphere of pure nitrogen gas, as by flowing the gas at a rate of about 500 cm^3/min . After the hour during which this homogenization is accomplished, the temperature is continuously lowered at a constant rate of about 0.7 $^\circ\text{C}/\text{min}$. Advantageously, the hydrogen is purified just before introduction into the furnace by passage through a palladium filter. When the temperature goes down to about 647 $^\circ\text{C}$, the gas flow is switched from nitrogen to hydrogen at the same rate of gas flow. When the temperature goes down to about 646 $^\circ\text{C}$, the sliding member is pushed to bring the InP substrate successively in contact with the various wells, one at a time.

More specifically, a first well contains pure In, a second well contains In, Sn, and excess InP, a third well contains In, Ga, As, and excess InP, a fourth well contains In, Zn, and excess InP, and a fifth well contains In, As, Ga, Zn, and excess InP. The purpose of the melt in the first well is to dissolve the resulting phosphorus-poor indium phosphide, typically a few μm thick, at the exposed top surface of the InP substrate; the purpose of the melt in the second well is to form an n-type InP "buffer" layer having a thickness in the range of about 3 to 5 μm ; the purpose of the melt in the third well is to form an undoped InGaAsP "active" layer for emitting the 1.3 μm light; the purpose of the melt in the fourth well is to form a p-type InP light-confining layer having a thickness of about 1.0 μm ; and the purpose of the melt in the fifth well is to form a p-type InGaAsP contact layer ("cap") having a thickness of about 0.5 μm . The thickness of each such layer is controlled by the time of contact allowed between the exposed top surface of the substrate and the corresponding melt.

The exposed top surface of the substrate is pushed into contact with the melt in the first well for about 10 seconds, and then the melt in the second well for enough time until the tempera-

ture goes down to about 639 $^\circ\text{C}$. The temperature is then held at this temperature of about 639 $^\circ\text{C}$ while the substrate is pushed into contact with the melt in the third well for about 4 minutes. Then the temperature is continuously lowered at a rate of about 0.7 $^\circ\text{C}$ per minute, and the growing substrate is immediately pushed into contact with the melt in the fourth well and remains there until the temperature goes down to about 636 $^\circ\text{C}$. At this time, the temperature of the furnace is maintained at this temperature of about 636 $^\circ\text{C}$, and the substrate is pushed into contact with the melt in the fifth well and kept there for about 1 minute. Finally, the substrate is pushed out of contact with the melts, wiped off, and the meltholder and slider assembly pulled out of the furnace.

The invention is particularly useful when using fine grain graphite (grain size less than about 10 μm) as the material for the slider and the meltholder. Such fine grain graphite provides the advantage of close or tight tolerances of the parts dimensions while allowing for ease of sliding movement therebetween. However, we have found that the use of such fine grain material (rather than coarser grain graphite) particularly exacerbates the problem of the adhesion of the solidified melt to the slider upon cooling to room temperature after the growth process is completed. As described, this problem is avoided by the use of the reducing gas atmosphere during the growth process.

Various modifications can be made without departing from the scope of the invention. Instead of hydrogen, other reducing gases might be found to be useful. Moreover, instead of switching to hydrogen substantially immediately (within about 5 minutes or less) before pushing the substrate into contact with the melt in the first well, the switching to hydrogen can be done substantially immediately thereafter. The invention is also applicable to LPE growth of any Group III-V compound semiconductor upon a substrate of InP or indeed upon any Group III-V semiconductor compound substrate which contains phosphorus.

Claims

1. A method for liquid phase epitaxially growing, upon a Group III-V semiconductor compound substrate containing phosphorus, a layer of a Group III-V semiconductor compound comprising the steps of heating both the substrate and a molten solution from which the layer is to be grown to a predetermined temperature in a nonreducing gas atmosphere while the substrate and molten solution are not in contact, and thereafter contacting the substrate with the molten solution in a reducing gas atmosphere.

2. The method of claim 1 in which the molten solution is located in a well and the substrate in a sliding member, the surface of the well comprising graphite.

3. The method of claim 2 in which the non-reducing gas atmosphere comprises nitrogen or



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a reducing gas, such as essentially hydrogen, substantially immediately before (or after) pushing the substrate into contact with the melt.

The following detailed example describes the growth of a double heterostructure of InP/InGaAsP suitable for a light emitting diode of wavelength about 1.3 μm . All gases are at a pressure of essentially one atmosphere.

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2. The method of claim 1 in which the molten solution is located in a well and the substrate in a sliding member, the surface of the well comprising graphite.

3. The method of claim 2 in which the non-reducing gas atmosphere comprises nitrogen or



helium and the reducing gas atmosphere comprises hydrogen.

4. The method of claim 1 in which the work-piece ambient atmosphere is changed from the nonreducing gas to the reducing gas atmosphere prior to the contacting step.

Patentansprüche

1. Verfahren zum epitaktischen Züchten einer III—V-Verbindungshalbleiterschicht auf einem Phosphor enthaltenden III—V-Verbindungshalbleitersubstrat aus flüssiger Phase, umfassend die Schritte

— Erwärmen sowohl des Substrates als auch einer erschmolzenen Lösung, aus der die Schicht zu züchten ist, auf eine vorbestimmte Temperatur in einer nichtreduzierenden Gasatmosphäre, während Substrat und erschmolzene Lösung nicht in Kontakt miteinander sind, und

— anschließendes Inkontaktbringen des Substrates mit der erschmolzenen Lösung in einer reduzierenden Gasatmosphäre.

2. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, bei der die erschmolzene Lösung in einem Trog untergebracht ist, und das Substrat in einem Schieber, wobei die Oberfläche des Troges Graphit beinhaltet.

3. Verfahren nach Anspruch 2, bei dem die nichtreduzierende Gasatmosphäre Stickstoff oder Helium beinhaltet, und die reduzierende Gasatmosphäre Wasserstoff.

4. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, bei dem die Werkstück-Umgebungsatmosphäre vor dem Kontaktierungsschritt von der nichtreduzierenden

Gasatmosphäre in die reduzierende Gasatmosphäre geändert wird.

Revendications

1. Un procédé pour faire croître par épitaxie en phase liquide une couche d'un composé semi-conducteur du Groupe III—V, sur un substrat semiconducteur composé du Groupe III—V contenant du phosphore, comprenant les opérations qui consistent à chauffer à une température prédéterminée à la fois le substrat et une solution à l'état fondu à partir de laquelle on doit faire croître la couche, dans une atmosphère consistant en un gaz non réducteur, pendant que le substrat et la solution à l'état fondu ne sont pas en contact, et à mettre ensuite en contact le substrat avec la solution à l'état fondu, dans une atmosphère consistant en un gaz réducteur.

2. Le procédé de la revendication 1, dans lequel la solution à l'état fondu se trouve dans un puits et le substrat se trouve dans une glissière, et la surface du puits est en graphite.

3. Le procédé de la revendication 2, dans lequel l'atmosphère consistant en un gaz non réducteur consiste en azote ou en hélium, et l'atmosphère consistant en un gaz réducteur consiste en hydrogène.

4. Le procédé de la revendication 1, dans lequel on change l'atmosphère ambiante de l'article qui est fabriqué, pour remplacer l'atmosphère consistant en un gaz non réducteur par l'atmosphère consistant en un gaz réducteur, avant l'opération de mise en contact.

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