

RECORDING MEDIUM AND METHOD FOR MANUFACTURING THE SAME

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a magnetic recording medium that is installed in a variety of magnetic recording devices such as an external memory of a computer, and a method for manufacturing such a magnetic recording medium.

Prior Art

With a rapidly increasing demand for a high-density and low-noise magnetic recording medium in recent years, a variety of compositions and structures of a magnetic layer, a variety of materials for a non-magnetic under-layer and a seed layer, and the like have been proposed. In particular, there has been proposed a magnetic layer that is generally called a granular magnetic layer, in which ferromagnetic grains are surrounded by non-magnetic non-metallic substance such as oxide or nitride.

For example, Japanese Patent Laid-Open Publication No. 8-255342 discloses that a non-magnetic layer, a ferromagnetic layer and a non-magnetic layer are sequentially laminated on a non-magnetic substrate and a heating process is then carried out to form a granular recording layer, in which ferromagnetic grains are dispersed in the non-magnetic layer, in order to decrease noise. The magnetic layer is made of a cobalt alloy or a cobalt-based alloy, and the non-magnetic layer is made of metal, oxide, nitride, carbon or carbide. USP 5,679,473 discloses RF (Radio Frequency) sputtering using a CoNiPt target with oxide such as SiO₂ added thereto to form a granular recording layer, in which grains of magnetic substance surrounded by non-magnetic oxide are dispersed separately, thus achieving high H_c and low noise.

The granular magnetic layer with the above arrangement is considered to achieve the low noise characteristics since the physical separation of magnetic particles by a non-magnetic nonmetallic grain

boundary phase reduces the magnetic interaction between magnetic particles to thus control the formation of a zigzag magnetic domain wall in a transitional region of a recording bit.

The noise of the recording medium is caused by the fluctuation of magnetization that occurs according to the size of magnetic particles constituting the medium and the magnetic particle-to-particle interaction. To maintain a high S/N in conformity with the increase in the recording density, it is necessary to keep the number of magnetic particles per bit cell at a predetermined value or more, i.e. it is necessary to refine the magnetic particles. When there is a great exchange interaction between the magnetic particles, refining the grain particles does not necessarily refine a unit of magnetic inversion in many cases. Therefore, it is necessary to inhibit the particle-to-particle exchange interaction in order to refine a unit of magnetic inversion expressed by magnetic moment of activation. Further, in refining the magnetic particles, the magnetic particles themselves require magnetic anisotropy energy being large to a certain extent in order to achieve the magnetic characteristics (high H_c/M_r) required for high-resolution recording without coming into a super-paramagnetic state. The granular structure in which the magnetic particles with high magnetic anisotropy energy are dispersed in a non-magnetic matrix is intended to satisfy all of the above strict requirements for higher S/N.

In a CoCr metal magnetic layer that is conventionally used is formed at a high temperature, Cr is segregated from Co magnetic grains to be deposited on grain boundaries to thus reduce the magnetic interaction between magnetic particles. On the other hand, a granular magnetic layer is capable of accelerating the isolation of grains of magnetic substance relatively easily because a grain boundary phase is made of non-magnetic non-metallic substance to thus make it easier the segregation of Cr compared with the conventional magnetic layer. Particularly, the conventional CoCr metal magnetic layer requires the increase in the temperature of a substrate to 200° C or more during the formation thereof in order to sufficiently segregate Cr, whereas the granular magnetic layer enables segregation of its non-magnetic non-metallic substance even if it is formed without heating.

Problem to be Solved by the Invention

In the case of a magnetic recording medium having a granular magnetic layer, it is necessary to add a relatively large amount of Pt to a Co alloy in order to achieve desired magnetic characteristics and, more particularly, high magnetic coercive force H_c . In order to achieve H_c of about 2800 Oe, the granular magnetic layer requires expensive Pt of 16 atomic %, whereas a normal CoCr metallic magnetic layer requires Pt of only about 8 atomic %. In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for very high H_c of 3200 Oe or more with the increase in the magnetic recording density, and thus, the granular magnetic layer requiring a large amount of expensive Pt is disadvantageous because it increases the manufacturing cost. There has also been a demand for decreasing media noise with the increase in the recording density.

Further, the granular magnetic layer causes deterioration of the magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics at a small $Br\delta$ (product of residual magnetic flux density and layer thickness) since a clear granular structure cannot be formed due to the unstable grain growth in a region with a small layer thickness (initial growth region). As the small layer thickness of the magnetic layer increases with the increase in the recording density in the future, it is important to develop the technique for preventing the deterioration of the media characteristics in the initial growth region in the granular magnetic layer.

Means for Solving the Problem

To solve the above described problems, the present invention provides a magnetic recording medium in which at least a non-magnetic under-layer, a magnetic layer, a protective layer and a liquid lubricant layer are sequentially laminated on a non-magnetic substrate, the magnetic recording medium wherein: the magnetic medium comprises ferromagnetic grains and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the grains; and a non-magnetic intermediate layer comprised of grains of non-magnetic substance and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the grains of

non-magnetic substance is provided between the non-magnetic under-layer and the magnetic layer.

In one preferred form of the present invention, the non-magnetic intermediate layer is formed of two or more laminated layers having identical or different compositions.

In another preferred form of the present invention, the grains of non-magnetic substance in the non-magnetic intermediate layer are CoCr alloys or CoCrPt alloys.

In yet another preferred form of the present invention, the non-magnetic under-layer is made of Cr or Cr alloy.

In yet another preferred form of the present invention, the non-magnetic substrate is crystallized glass, reinforced glass, or plastic.

The present invention also provides a method for manufacturing a magnetic recording medium in which at least a non-magnetic under-layer, a magnetic layer, a protective layer and a liquid lubricant layer are sequentially laminated on a non-magnetic substrate, the method comprising the steps of: laminating a non-magnetic under-layer on the non-magnetic substrate; laminating, on the non-magnetic under-layer, a non-magnetic intermediate layer comprised of grains of non-magnetic substance and a non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the grains of non-magnetic substance; laminating, on the non-magnetic intermediate layer, the magnetic layer comprised of ferromagnetic grains and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the ferromagnetic grains; laminating the protective layer on the magnetic layer; laminating the liquid lubricant layer on the protective layer; and wherein each step is carried out without heating the non-magnetic substrate in advance.

In one preferred form of the present invention, the step of laminating the non-magnetic intermediate layer comprises laminating two or more non-magnetic layers each comprised of grains of non-magnetic substance

and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the grains of non-magnetic substance, the non-magnetic layers having identical or different compositions.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1(a) is a schematic sectional view showing the structure of a magnetic recording medium according to the present invention, and FIG. 1(b) is a schematic sectional view showing the structure of an intermediate layer in the magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1(a).

FIG. 2 is a diagram showing the change in a magnetic coercive force H_c with the change in a product of residual magnetic flux density and layer thickness.

The present invention will hereinafter be described in further detail.

Embodiments of the Invention

The present invention provides a magnetic recording medium having a granular magnetic layer with a high-quality segregation structure so as to exhibit high magnetic coercive force (H_c) and low noise. A non-magnetic granular intermediate layer with the same granular structure as a magnetic layer, i.e. a non-magnetic granular intermediate layer, which is comprised of grains of non-magnetic substance and a non-magnetic layer grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide surrounding the grains of non-magnetic substance, is formed between the granular magnetic layer and a non-magnetic under-layer in the magnetic recording medium. It was found that such structure increases the magnetic coercive force (H_c) and reduces the noise to a larger degree compared with a conventional magnetic recording medium having a granular magnetic layer.

This results from the increase in crystallinity caused by the epitaxial growth of ferromagnetic grains in the magnetic layer having the granular structure due to the presence of the non-magnetic intermediate layer having the granular structure in the formation of the magnetic layer.

It was also found that forming the non-magnetic granular intermediate layer by two or more layers reduces the size of the grains in the intermediate layer formed just under the magnetic layer and clarifies the granular structure of the intermediate layer itself, so that the granular magnetic layer, which is grown by the epitaxial method, can be controlled desirably to further improve the characteristics.

With the above arrangement, it is possible to realize a magnetic recording medium with a small layer thickness and a small product of residual magnetic flux density and layer thickness ($B_r \delta$) to satisfy a demand for a high recording density in recent years. The deterioration of the magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics with $B_r \delta$ being small is mainly caused by a granular structure made unclear by the unstable growth of grains in a region with a small layer thickness (initial growth region).

The use of the non-magnetic intermediate layer according to the present invention easily achieves a high H_c and therefore eliminates the need for heating a substrate in the formation of the magnetic recording medium. This simplifies the manufacturing process, reduces the cost, and enables the use of inexpensive plastic as well as conventionally used Al or glass for the substrate.

The magnetic recording medium according to the present invention as well as the process of manufacturing the same will now be described in further detail with reference to FIGS. 1(a) and 1(b). FIG. 1(a) is a schematic sectional view showing a magnetic recording medium according to an example of the present invention. In the magnetic recording medium in FIG. 1(a), a non-magnetic under-layer 2, a non-magnetic intermediate layer 3, a magnetic layer 4 and a protective layer 5 are sequentially formed on a non-magnetic substrate 1, and a liquid lubricant layer 6 is formed on the protective layer 5. FIG. 1(b) is a sectional view showing the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 comprised of two or more layers. The respective layers 3a, 3b, 3c are non-magnetic layers having the granular structure.

The non-magnetic substrate 1 is made of Al alloy plated with NiP, reinforced glass, crystallized glass, or the like. In addition, it is possible to use a substrate that is molded by injecting polycarbonate, polyolefin and other resins (plastic) since the present invention does not require the substrate to be heated in the manufacturing process.

The non-magnetic under-layer 2 is laminated on the non-magnetic substrate 1 by an electron beam deposition method, a sputtering method, or the like. The non-magnetic under-layer 2 is made of non-magnetic material such as NiAl or Cr. Preferably, the non-magnetic under-layer 2 is made of Cr or Cr alloy such as CrMo, CrTi, CrV or CrW alloy. Although the layer thickness of the under-layer 2 is not particularly restricted, it is preferably between 5nm and 50nm.

The non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is then laminated on the non-magnetic under-layer 2. The non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 has the granular structure. More specifically, in the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3, non-magnetic and non-metallic substance such as oxide and carbide is segregated around grains of non-magnetic substance made of metal or alloy. For example, the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is formed, e.g. by sputtering of non-magnetic and metallic substance containing oxide or carbide constituting non-magnetic grain boundaries as a target, although the method for forming the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is not particularly restricted. Alternatively, the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is formed by reactive sputtering of non-magnetic and metallic substance as a target in an Ar gas containing oxygen.

The grains of non-magnetic substance in the non-magnetic intermediate layer used in the present invention are made of, e.g. CoCr alloy or CoCrPt alloy, but there is no intention to limit a material for the grains of non-magnetic substance to them. Such alloy is magnetic or non-magnetic according to the composition thereof, and thus, such a composition is selected that the alloy can be non-magnetic. Although a material for the non-magnetic grain boundaries is not particularly restricted, the non-magnetic grain boundaries are made of, e.g. non-magnetic and metallic oxide or carbide, such as Al, Si, Cr or Ti (including Si in this

specification) oxide or carbide. More specifically, a desired effect such as high H_c and low noise can be achieved, e.g. in the case where SiO_2 is segregated around a CoCr alloy containing Cr of about 30 to 50%.

As stated above, the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 having the granular structure provided in the magnetic recording medium of the present invention controls the crystallinity of ferromagnetic grains in the magnetic layer laminated on the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 and the initial growth of the oxide or carbide grain boundaries. Further, as shown in FIG. 1(b), the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is formed by laminating two or more non-magnetic layers (3a, 3b, 3c) having the granular structure, and this improves the crystallinity of the non-magnetic layer formed just under the magnetic layer and reduces the grain size. Therefore, the magnetic layer can be controlled desirably.

If the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is comprised of laminated layers as shown in FIG. 1(b), a desired effect can be achieved regardless of whether the respective layers have identical or different compositions. If the layers have different compositions, the Cr concentration of the CoCr alloy or the like is different. The use of the layers having different compositions achieves more preferable magnetic characteristics and electromagnetic conversion characteristics.

Although the layer thickness of the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is not particularly restricted, the total layer thickness is preferably between 1nm and 20nm irrespective of whether the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is comprised of one or more layers.

The magnetic layer 4 is laminated on the obtained non-magnetic intermediate layer 3. The magnetic layer 4 is a so-called granular magnetic layer that is comprised of ferromagnetic grains and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of metallic oxide or carbide. Such arrangement can be achieved by forming a layer by sputtering of, e.g. a ferromagnetic metal containing oxide or carbide constituting non-magnetic grain boundaries as a target, or by reactive sputtering of a ferromagnetic metal as a target in an Ar gas containing oxygen.

Although a material for ferromagnetic grains is not particularly restricted, it is preferable to use a CoPt alloy. In particular, it is preferable to add at least one element selected from a group consisting of Cr, Ni and Ta to the CoPt alloy in order to decrease media noise. On the other hand, a material for the non-magnetic grain boundaries is oxide or carbide of metal (including Si in this specification). More specifically, it is particularly preferable to use oxide of at least one element selected from a group consisting of Cr, Co, Si, Al, Ti, Ta, Hf and Zr in order to form a stable granular structure. Although the layer thickness of the magnetic layer is not particularly restricted, the layer thickness is determined so that a sufficient head output can be ensured in magnetic recording.

The protective layer 5 is laminated on the magnetic layer 4. The protective layer may be formed by any conventional methods such as the sputtering method. For example, the protective layer 5 is formed of a thin layer that is made mainly of carbon.

The liquid lubricant layer 6 is then laminated on the protective layer 5. For example, the liquid lubricant layer 6 can be formed by coating a lubricant of perfluoro polyether.

In this manner, the magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 can be produced.

The magnetic recording medium according to the present invention is capable of increasing Hc and decreasing media noise without heating the substrate as in the manufacture of a conventional magnetic recording medium. The magnetic recording medium according to the present invention therefore reduces the manufacturing cost by simplifying the manufacturing process.

Embodiments

Embodiments of the present invention will be described hereinbelow, but it is to be understood that there is no intention to limit the present invention to those embodiments.

Embodiment 1

A reinforced glass substrate with smooth surface (N-10 glass substrate produced by HOYA Corp.) was used as the non-magnetic substrate 1. After cleaning the non-magnetic substrate 1, it was placed into a sputtering apparatus to form the non-magnetic under-layer 2 with a thickness of 15nm comprised of a Cr - 20 atomic % Mo (a Cr alloy containing 20 atomic % Mo, hereinafter expressed in the same manner) target under an Ar gas pressure of 50 mTorr. The non-magnetic granular intermediate layer 3 with a thickness of 20 nm was then formed under an Ar gas pressure of 30 mTorr by the RF sputtering method using a Co - 32 atomic % Cr target with SiO₂ of 6 mol % added thereto.

The granular magnetic layer 4 with a thickness of 15 nm was then formed under an Ar gas pressure of 30 mTorr by the RF sputtering method using a Co - 10 atomic % Cr - 14 atomic % Pt target with SiO₂ of 7 mol % added thereto. Then, the carbon protective layer 5 with a thickness of 10 nm is laminated on the granular magnetic layer 4, and a laminated product was taken out of vacuum. A liquid lubricant was then coated on the protective layer 5 to form the liquid lubricant layer 6 with a thickness of 1.5 nm, thus producing the magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1.

It should be noted that the substrate is not heated prior to the formation of the layers.

With regard to the magnetic characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium, H_c and Br δ were measured using a vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM). With respect to the electromagnetic conversion characteristics, a regenerated output TAA of an isolated regeneration waveform, media noise and SNR (signal-to-noise ratio) were measured using a spin stand tester with a GMR head at a linear recording density of 120 kFCI.

Table 1 shows the composition of the lamination, and Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

Embodiment 2

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner as in the first embodiment except that the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 was comprised of two non-magnetic layers (3a, 3b) having the granular structure and each having a thickness of 10 nm (i.e. a total layer thickness of 20 nm).

The magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium were measured in the same manner as in the first embodiment.

Table 1 shows the composition of the lamination, and Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

Embodiment 3

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner as in the first embodiment except that the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 was comprised of three non-magnetic layers (3a, 3b, 3c) having a granular structure and each having a thickness of about 6.7 nm (i.e. a total layer thickness of 20 nm).

The magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium were measured in the same manner as in the first embodiment.

Table 1 shows the composition of the lamination, and Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

Embodiment 4

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner as in the first embodiment except that the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 was comprised of the following two layers each having a thickness of about 10 nm (i.e. a total layer thickness of 20 nm): the lower

layer being formed of a Co - 32 atomic % Cr target with SiO₂ of 6 mol % added thereto and the upper layer being formed of a Co - 40 atomic % Cr target with SiO₂ of 8 mol % added thereto.

The magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium were measured in the same manner as in the first embodiment.

Table 1 shows the composition of the lamination, and Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

Embodiment 5 through Embodiment 11

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner as in the first embodiment except that the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 with the composition shown in Table 1 is comprised of two layers each having a thickness of 10 nm (i.e. a total layer thickness of 20 nm).

The magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium were measured in the same manner as in the first embodiment.

Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

Comparative Example 1

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner as in the first embodiment except that the magnetic layer 4 was laminated on the non-magnetic under-layer 2 without forming the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3.

The magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics of the produced magnetic recording medium were measured in the same manner as in the first embodiment.

Table 1 shows the composition of the lamination, and Table 2 shows the results of measurement representing the characteristics.

[Table 1]

	Composition of Magnetic Layer	Intermediate Layer		
		The Number of Lamination Layers	Composition of Lower Layer	Composition of Upper Layer
Embodiment 1	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	1	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂	-
Embodiment 2	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂
Embodiment 3	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	3	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂
Embodiment 4	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂	Co-40Cr-80iO ₂
Embodiment 5	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6SiO ₂	Co-30Cr-10Pt-6SiO ₂
Embodiment 6	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-2Cr ₂ O ₃	Co-32Cr-2Cr ₂ O ₃
Embodiment 7	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-2Al ₂ O ₃	Co-32Cr-2Al ₂ O ₃
Embodiment 8	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-30Cr-10Pt-6SiO ₂	Co-30Cr-10Pt-6SiO ₂
Embodiment 9	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6SiC	Co-32Cr-6SiC
Embodiment 10	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6TiC	Co-32Cr-6TiC
Embodiment 11	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	2	Co-32Cr-6SiC	Co-32Cr-6SiC
Comparative Example 1	Co-10Cr-14Pt-7SiO ₂	0	-	-

[Table 2]

	Hc (Oe)	Br δ (G μ m)	Regenerated Output (mVp-p)	Media Noise (μ V)	SNR (dB)
Embodiment 1	3345	60	0.71	24.1	22.6
Embodiment 2	3423	63	0.72	22.4	22.9
Embodiment 3	3470	59	0.70	22.2	23.1
Embodiment 4	3518	60	0.69	21.9	23.4
Embodiment 5	3553	62	0.72	21.2	23.8
Embodiment 6	3451	61	0.71	22.6	22.8
Embodiment 7	3412	62	0.71	22.1	23.1
Embodiment 8	3514	59	0.70	21.9	23.5
Embodiment 9	3011	60	0.70	24.3	22.2
Embodiment 10	2965	61	0.71	25.4	22.0
Embodiment 11	3122	63	0.73	23.8	22.5
Comparative Example 1	3088	59	0.71	29.2	21.6

As is apparent from Table 2, the magnetic recording medium of the present invention having the non-magnetic granular intermediate layer 3 is able to increase the magnetic coercive force Hc and decrease the media noise to a larger degree than in the comparative example 1. In particular, it was found that the characteristics of the magnetic recording medium having the non-magnetic intermediate layer comprised of two or more layers were effectively improved. More specifically, compared with the comparative example 1, the Hc is increased by about 260 Oe and the SNR is increased by +1 dB in the embodiment 1 wherein the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is comprised of a single layer formed of Co-32 atomic % Cr-6 SiO₂ with a total layer thickness of 20nm, the Hc is increased by about 340 Oe and the SNR is increased by +1.3 dB in the embodiment 2 wherein the non-magnetic intermediate layer is comprised of two layers having the same composition with a total layer thickness of 20nm, and the Hc is increased by about 380 Oe and the SNR is increased by +1.5 dB in the embodiment 3 wherein the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is comprised of three layers having the same composition with a total layer thickness of 20nm.

In the embodiments 4 and 5 wherein the non-magnetic intermediate layer 3 is comprised of two non-magnetic granular layers having different compositions and has a total layer thickness of 20 nm, the Hc was increased by about 430 Oe and the SNR was increased by +1.8 dB in the embodiment 4 and the Hc was increased by about 460 Oe and the SNR was increased by +2.2 dB in the embodiment 5. Thus, the embodiments 4 and 5 achieve the most advantageous effects among the embodiments of the present invention.

This is considered to be because a degree to which the grain size is reduced and the segregation structure is made clear in the granular intermediate layer just under the magnetic layer and the granular magnetic layer is varied according to materials for the non-magnetic intermediate layer.

Likewise, in the case of the magnetic recording medium in which the non-magnetic grain boundaries in the non-magnetic intermediate layer were made of Cr (Embodiment 6) and Al (Embodiment 7) oxide, not Si oxide, the Hc was increased by about 320 to 360 Oe and the SNR was increased by about 1.2 to 1.5 dB.

In the magnetic recording medium in which the non-magnetic grain boundaries in the non-magnetic intermediate layer were made of the Co-Cr-Pt alloy (Embodiment 8), the Hc was increased by about 430 Oe and the SNR was increased by 1.9 dB.

Further, the higher Hc and SNR can be achieved by a magnetic recording medium whose non-magnetic layer is comprised of layers with different compositions as is the case with the magnetic recording mediums (Embodiments 2 and 4) containing the corresponding oxides, compared with the magnetic recording mediums (Embodiments 9 to 11) containing carbide, not oxide. Although the Hc in the embodiments 9 and 10 was slightly decreased from Hc in the comparative example, a preferable magnetic recording medium exhibiting decreased media noise and increased SNR was produced.

Embodiment 12

The magnetic recording medium shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner in the embodiment 2 except that the thickness of the magnetic layer 4 was changed to 5 to 15 nm.

With regard to each magnetic recording medium, the magnetic coercive force H_c and $Br \delta$ were measured using a vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM). FIG. 2 shows the results of the measurement.

Comparative Example 2

The magnetic recording medium having the structure shown in FIG. 1 was produced in the same manner in the embodiment 1 except that the magnetic layer 4 with a thickness of 7 to 15 nm was formed directly on the non-magnetic under-layer.

With regard to each magnetic recording medium, the magnetic coercive force H_c and $Br \delta$ were measured using a vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM). FIG. 2 shows the results of the measurement.

As is apparent from FIG. 2 showing the dependency of the magnetic coercive force H_c of the magnetic recording medium on $Br \delta$ in the comparative example 2, the magnetic characteristics are considerably deteriorated if $Br \delta$ is not greater than $50 \text{ G}\mu\text{m}$. This results from the unclear granular structure in the initial growth region (with a small $Br \delta$) in the granular magnetic layer. However, the magnetic recording medium according to the embodiment 12 of the present invention having the non-magnetic granular intermediate layer has the granular structure just under the granular magnetic layer to facilitate the epitaxial growth of the granular magnetic directly upward. This achieves a relatively clear segregation structure even in the initial growth region. Thus, in the region with a small $Br \delta$, the magnetic characteristics are improved to a larger extent than in the comparative example 2.

Advantageous Effect of the Invention

As stated above, compared with the conventional magnetic recording medium in which the granular magnetic layer is provided without forming the intermediate layer, the magnetic recording medium of the present invention comprising non-magnetic intermediate layer having the granular structure under the magnetic layer exhibits higher H_c and lower noise. Moreover, the present invention achieves a high H_c can even if the amount of Pt in the magnetic layer target is reduced, and the decrease in the amount of Pt decreases the noise.

In addition, the present invention improves the media characteristics in the region with a small $Br \delta$, and therefore the present invention is advantageous to the decrease in $Br \delta$ of the magnetic layer accompanying the increase in the recording density in the future.

On the other hand, oxide of at least one element selected from Cr, Co, Si, Al, Ti, Ta, Hf and Zr is used as the non-magnetic and non-metallic substance in the granular magnetic layer and the CoPt alloy to which at least one element selected from a group consisting of Cr, Ni and Ta is used as the ferromagnetic grains in the granular magnetic layer, and Cr or Cr alloys are used to form the non-magnetic under-layer. This further improves the magnetic characteristics and the electromagnetic conversion characteristics.

Further, the laminating structure of the non-magnetic intermediate layer easily increases H_c , and this eliminates the need for heating the substrate in the formation of the magnetic recording medium according to the present invention. This enables the use of inexpensive plastic as well as conventionally used Al or glass for the substrate.

What is claimed is:

1. A magnetic recording medium comprising:

a non-magnetic substrate;

a non-magnetic underlayer on said non-magnetic substrate;

a non-magnetic intermediate layer on said non-magnetic underlayer;

a magnetic layer on said non-magnetic intermediate layer;

a protective layer on said magnetic layer;

a liquid lubricant layer on said protective layer;

said magnetic layer includes ferromagnetic grains and nonmagnetic grain boundaries, formed of at least one of a metallic oxide and a carbide, surrounding said ferromagnetic grains; and

wherein said non-magnetic intermediate layer comprises at least two laminated layers having identical or different compositions, and wherein said at least two laminated layers both comprise grains of non-magnetic substance, and non-magnetic grain boundaries formed of at least one of a metallic oxide and a carbide, surrounding said grains of non-magnetic substance.

2. The magnetic recording medium according to claim 1, wherein said grains of non-magnetic substance in said non-magnetic intermediate layer are CoCr alloys or CoCrPt alloys.

3. The magnetic recording medium according to claim 1, wherein said non-magnetic underlayer is made of either Cr or a Cr alloy.

4. The magnetic recording medium according to claim 1, wherein said non-magnetic substrate is made from a substance selected from the group consisting of crystallized glass, reinforced glass, and plastic.
5. The magnetic recording medium according to claim 1, wherein said magnetic layer has a thickness between 5 and 15 nm.