

NANOPARTICULATE ENCAPSULATION BARRIER STACK

[001] The present invention relates generally to the field of encapsulation barrier stacks, and more particularly to encapsulation barrier stacks comprising
5 reactive nanoparticles.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[002] Organic Light Emitting Displays (OLEDs) are widely seen as the next
10 generation display technology that will come to replace existing display technology. Amongst the various challenges to be dealt with in the development of OLEDs, effective encapsulation remains one of the most significant.

[003] One commonly known problem with OLED structures and other oxygen
15 and/or moisture sensitive electroluminescent devices is that they degrade rapidly under atmospheric conditions. In order to protect them from degradation, various types of encapsulation have been used to isolate the electroluminescent devices from the environment. It is estimated that for an OLED to achieve reliable performance with a lifetime exceeding 10,000 hours, the encapsulation around
20 the reactive electroluminescent material should have an oxygen transmission rate (OTR) less than about 5 to 10 cc/m²/day and a water vapor transmission rate (WVTR) of less than about 10⁻⁵ g/m²/day at 39°C and 95% RH. The technical challenges brought about by these stringent requirements have driven constant developments in encapsulation technology over the years.

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[004] Conventional encapsulation structures comprise a substrate on which the electroluminescent device is formed, and a covering structure which seals the electroluminescent device against the substrate. In certain types of electronics applications, such as hard disk drives, one approach in improving the
30 barrier properties of an encapsulation is to utilise thick, gas impermeable encapsulation structures. However, this approach is not suitable for applications such as OLEDs or solar cells in which opacity is a requirement and the quality of light transmitted through the encapsulation must be maintained.

35 [005] Recent developments in OLED technology has seen the rise of flexible

OLEDs which require that the encapsulation structures are flexible, thereby making it more apparent that encapsulation technology has not kept pace with developments in OLED technology. The substrate for a flexible OLED should ideally combine the gas barrier properties, chemical resistance and surface properties of glass with the flexibility, toughness and processability of conventional plastics. Transparent polymers were used to form various parts of an encapsulation structure because they were inexpensive and easily processed. However, due to their permeability to moisture and oxygen, encapsulation structures formed from polymers alone are nowadays considered to be inadequate for achieving low permeation rates as the required standard for oxygen and water vapor impermeability are orders of magnitude lower than what is achievable with the best polymer substrates using today's state of the art in industrial polymer technology.

15 **[006]** More recently, barrier laminates derived from certain types of inorganic materials were found to have better barrier properties than polymeric barrier laminates. Metals such as aluminium are now used as barrier materials (e.g. aluminium foils) for packaging food substances and pharmaceutical drugs. Despite possessing improved barrier properties, it has been found that the performance of inorganic barrier laminates is still limited by inherent structural defects. Recent studies have shown that structural defects such as pinholes, cracks, grain boundaries, etc., allows oxygen and moisture to permeate over time, leading to poorer than expected barrier performance. It is difficult to control fabrication to such an extent that defects are completely eradicated because
25 such defects are randomly formed, independent of the method of fabrication.

[007] One approach that has been used to overcome the problems of poor barrier properties in polymer barrier stacks and the problems in forming defect-free inorganic barrier layers is to stack multiple polymer/metal oxide layers together to form a barrier stack. It has been found that combining polymer layers with metal oxide layers enables the defects of one polymer/barrier oxide stack to be decoupled from the next polymer/barrier oxide stack, thereby slowing down the propagation of oxygen/moisture from one inorganic layer to the next.

35 **[008]** Vitex Inc. discloses in US Patent No. 6,866,901 a multilayer barrier

stacks comprising multiple sputter-deposited aluminium oxide inorganic layers separated by polymer multilayers (PML) comprising organic polymers. This multilayer barrier stack design is based on the principle of decoupling the defects of two successive barrier oxide layers in the multilayer barrier stack. A recent
5 modelling study suggests that defect decoupling due to the organic/inorganic multilayers forces a tortuous path for moisture and oxygen diffusion, thus reducing the permeation rate by several orders of magnitude.

[009] Despite this development, a large number of thick barrier oxide and
10 polymer interlayers are needed in order to achieve ultra high barrier properties of better than 10^{-5} g/m²/day, or even better levels of 10^{-6} g/m²/day. Variations in overall barrier performance still arise due to factors such as whether the pinholes in one layer are lined up with the defects in the other layers. Other limitations of the multilayer stack approach is that it suffers from poor adhesion and frequent
15 delamination occurs, especially during the thermal cycles of the OLED fabrication processes, since the inorganic and organic layers have sharp interfaces with weak bonding structure due to nature of the sputter deposition and PML formation processes. It also results in thick panels with poor transmission qualities and which cracks easily.

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[010] HELICON Research, Inc. discloses in US Patent Application No. 2005/0051763 an organic/inorganic nanocomposite structure formed by infiltration of a porous inorganic layer by an organic material. The composite structure is produced by vacuum deposition techniques. In contrast with the
25 aforementioned techniques, this document teaches the fabrication of porous inorganic barrier layer onto plastic substrate and then depositing organic material in the barrier layer such that it infiltrates the porous inorganic material to form a continuous layer.

30 **[011]** General Electric Inc. discloses in EP 1 164 644 a barrier system which utilizes the high temperature resistance and high clarity of transparent LexanTM film properties to enable a 125-micron-thick substrate to withstand the heat involved in OLED fabrication and to allow optimal light transmission from the device. The barrier coating comprises silicon oxide compounds which are applied
35 onto the substrate using plasma enhanced chemical vapour deposition. The

barrier coating prevents degradation of the device from oxygen, moisture, chemicals, and electronic conductivity while promoting light transmission. Additionally, nanoparticles reactive with moisture are incorporated into the base substrate.

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[012] Nanocomposite barrier materials comprising mineral clay nanoparticles distributed in a polymeric binder have been developed for use in food packaging materials. For example, US Patent No. 5,916,685 discloses a multilayer barrier laminate comprising an exterior polymeric layer containing non-reactive clay
10 nanoparticles in the quantity of about 0.1 to 10% by weight of a polymer layer in which it is distributed. The polymer layer is arranged on an inner metal oxide barrier layer. The barrier laminate achieves a water vapour transmission rate of about 0.61 g/m²/day over a 24 hr period, and is clearly unsuitable for OLED encapsulation.

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[013] Accordingly, limitations in the barrier performance of existing encapsulation structures still exists. An object of the present invention is to provide an alternative barrier stack that has improved barrier properties and is inexpensively fabricated.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[014] According to a first aspect of the present invention, an encapsulation barrier stack capable of encapsulating a moisture and/or oxygen sensitive article
25 is provided, comprising:

a multilayer film having at least one barrier layer having low moisture and/or oxygen permeability, and at least one sealing layer arranged to be in contact with a surface of the at least one barrier layer, thereby covering defects present in the barrier layer, wherein the at least one sealing layer comprises
30 reactive nanoparticles capable of interacting with moisture and/or oxygen to retard the permeation of moisture and/or oxygen through the defects present in the barrier layer.

[015] According to another aspect of the invention, an electronic device
35 comprising a moisture and/or oxygen sensitive reactive component is provided in

which said reactive component is arranged within an encapsulation barrier stack according to the first aspect of the invention.

[016] The invention is also directed to a method for the manufacture of an
5 encapsulation barrier stack according to the first aspect of the invention, comprising:

forming at least one barrier layer and at least one sealing layer in alternating sequence, wherein forming the at least one sealing layer comprises mixing a polymerisable compound with a nanoparticle dispersion to form a
10 sealing mixture, and polymerising the sealing mixture over the at least one barrier layer under vacuum.

[017] The present invention is based on the finding that coupling a sealing layer which comprises reactive nanoparticles to an inorganic barrier layer can
15 effectively reduce the rate at which moisture or oxygen permeates the barrier layer. Rather than seeking to improve existing barrier layer fabrication methods, the present invention utilises reactive nanoparticles that either adsorbs or chemically react with moisture and/or oxygen to plug the defects present in the barrier layer. This approach of dealing with the problem of defects typically
20 present in metal oxide barrier layers can be implemented inexpensively given that it can be integrated with existing processes. Apart from the improvement in barrier properties, the inventors have also found that the use of sealing layers containing nanoparticles result in improved lamination between barrier layers due to the high surface roughness provided by the nanoparticles. For stringent
25 applications, a plurality of barrier films with intervening polymeric interlayers containing reactive nanoparticles may be used to achieve a high level of gas impermeability. This solution to the problem of defects in inorganic barrier films is supported by two-dimensional finite element modelling, which has shown that a key requirement for achieving ultra high barrier performance is that the organic
30 defect decoupling layer thickness is smaller than the typical offset distance between the defects in barrier layers.

[018] In accordance with the above findings, the encapsulation barrier stack of the invention comprises a multilayer film having at least one barrier layer with low
35 gas permeability, and at least one sealing layer arranged to be in contact with a

surface of the barrier layer. The sealing layer comprises reactive nanoparticles that can interact with moisture and/or oxygen, thereby retarding their permeation through the barrier stack via defects present in the barrier layer.

5 **[019]** "Defects" in the barrier layer refer to structural defects, such as pits, pinholes, microcracks and grain boundary. Such structural defects are known to exist in all types of barrier layers that are fabricated from deposition processes from which barrier layers are typically produced, such as chemical vapour deposition, as well as roll-to-roll processes. Gases can permeate these defects,
10 thereby leading to poor barrier properties (see Mat. Res. Soc. Symp. Proc. Vol. 763, 2003, B6.10.1-B610.6).

[020] "Reactive" nanoparticles refer to nanoparticles capable of interacting with moisture and/or oxygen, either by way of chemical reaction (e.g. hydrolysis
15 or oxidation), or through physical or physico-chemical interaction (e.g. capillary action, adsorption, hydrophilic attraction, or any other non-covalent interaction between the nanoparticles and water/oxygen). Reactive nanoparticles may comprise or consist of metals which are reactive towards water and/or oxygen, i.e. metals which are above hydrogen in the reactivity series, including metals
20 from Group 2 to 14 (IUPAC) may be used. Some preferred metals include those from Groups 2, 4, 10, 12, 13 and 14. For example, these metals may be selected from Al, Mg, Ba and Ca. Reactive transition metals may also be used, including Ti, Zn, Sn, Ni, and Fe for instance.

25 **[021]** Other than metals, reactive nanoparticles may also include or consist of certain metal oxides which are capable of interacting with moisture and/or oxygen may also be used, including TiO_2 , Al_2O_3 , ZrO_2 , ZnO , BaO , SrO , CaO and MgO , VO_2 , CrO_2 , MoO_2 , and LiMn_2O_4 . In certain embodiments, the metal oxide may comprise a transparent conductive metal oxide selected from the
30 group consisting of cadmium stannate (Cd_2SnO_4), cadmium indate (CdIn_2O_4), zinc stannate (Zn_2SnO_4 and ZnSnO_3), and zinc indium oxide ($\text{Zn}_2\text{In}_2\text{O}_5$).

[022] In this conjunction, it is evident for a person skilled in the art that reactivity may depend on the size of the used material (see J. Phys. Chem.

Solids 66 (2005) 546-550). For example, Al_2O_3 and TiO_2 are reactive towards moisture in the form of nanoparticles but are unreactive (or reactive only to a very small extent) in the (continuous) bulk phase, such as a microscale or millimetre scale barrier layer which is beyond the nanoscale dimension of several 5 nanometres to several hundred nanometres typically associated with nanoparticles. Accordingly, using Al_2O_3 and TiO_2 as illustrative examples, Al_2O_3 and TiO_2 nanoparticles are considered to be reactive towards moisture, whereas Al_2O_3 and TiO_2 bulk layers are passive barrier layers having low reactivity towards moisture. In general, reactive metal or metal oxide nanoparticles, for 10 example Al_2O_3 , TiO_2 or ZnO nanoparticles, may be present in suitable colloidal dispersions for the preservation of reactivity and may be synthesised via any conventional or proprietary method such as the NanoArc® method from Nanophase Technologies Corporation.

15 **[023]** Apart from metals and metal oxides, reactive nanoparticles in the sealing layer may also comprise or consist of carbon nanoparticles, such as carbon nanotubes, nanoribbons, nanofibres and any regular or irregular shaped carbon particles with nanoscale dimensions. For carbon nanotubes, single-walled or multi-walled carbon nanotubes may be used. In a study carried out by 20 the present inventors, it was found that carbon nanotubes (CNTs) can serve as a desiccant. Carbon nanotubes can be wetted by low surface tension liquids via capillary action, particularly liquids whose surface tension does not exceed about 200 Nm^{-1} (Nature, page 801, Vol. 412, 2001). In principle, this would mean that water molecules can be drawn into open-ended carbon nanotubes by capillary 25 suction. It is suggested that water molecules may form quasi-one-dimensional structures within carbon nanotubes, thereby helping to absorb and retain a small volume of oxygen and water molecules. While the quantity of carbon nanotubes may be maximised for maximum moisture and/or oxygen absorption, the inventors have found that in practice lower amounts are also suitable. For 30 example, carbon nanotubes may be used in low quantities of about 0.01% to 10% by weight of the nanoparticles present. Higher concentrations of carbon nanotubes may also be used, but with a corresponding decrease in the transparency of the encapsulation barrier stack.

35 **[024]** In one embodiment, inert nanoparticles are included in the sealing layer

and used in conjunction with reactive nanoparticles. As used herein, "inert nanoparticles" refer to nanoparticles which do not interact at all with moisture and/or oxygen, or which react to a small extent as compared to reactive nanoparticles. Such nanoparticles may be included into the sealing layer to
5 obstruct the permeation of oxygen and/or moisture through the sealing layer. Examples of inert particles include nanoclays as described in US Patent No. 5,916,685. Such nanoparticles serve to plug the defects in the barrier layer, thereby obstructing the path through which permeation takes place, or at least reducing the defect cross-sectional area, thus rendering permeation pathways by
10 which water vapour or oxygen diffuses through the defect much more tortuous, thus leading to longer permeation time before the barrier layer is breached and thereby improving barrier properties.

[025] Other suitable materials for inert nanoparticles may also include
15 unreactive metals such as copper, platinum, gold and silver; minerals or clays such as silica, wollastonite, mullite, monmorillonite; rare earth elements, silicate glass, fluorosilicate glass, fluoroborosilicate glass, aluminosilicate glass, calcium silicate glass, calcium aluminum silicate glass, calcium aluminum fluorosilicate glass, titanium carbide, zirconium carbide, zirconium nitride, silicon carbide, or
20 silicon nitride, metal sulfides, and a mixture or combination thereof. Encapsulation barrier stacks which comprise sealing layers having only inert nanoparticles, such as nanoclay particles, do not belong to the invention.

[026] Without wishing to be bound by theory, the inventors believe that strong
25 barrier properties can be achieved by using a combination of different types of nanoparticles. By studying the absorption/reaction characteristics of different types of nanoparticles, it is possible to select a combination of nanoparticles which compliment each other to achieve stronger barrier effects than with a single type of material. For example, different types of reactive nanoparticles
30 may be used in the sealing layer, or a combination of reactive and inert nanoparticles may be used.

[027] In accordance with the above, the sealing layer may comprise a combination of carbon nanotubes and metal and/or metal oxide nanoparticles.
35 One exemplary embodiment would be the combination of TiO_2 / Al_2O_3

nanoparticles with carbon nanotubes. Any range of quantitative ratios may be used and optimised accordingly using regular experimentation. In an exemplary embodiment, the quantity of metal oxide nanoparticles present is between 500 to 15000 times (by weight) the quantity of carbon nanotubes. For oxides of metals having low atomic weight, lower ratios can be used. For example, TiO₂ nanoparticles can be used in combination with carbon nanotubes, with the weight ratio of carbon nanotubes to TiO₂ being between about 1:10 to about 1:5, but not limited thereto.

10 **[028]** The encapsulation barrier stack of the invention may be used to encapsulate any type of moisture and/or oxygen sensitive article, such as electronic devices, drugs, foods, and reactive materials, for example. For encapsulating electroluminescent devices, the quality of light transmitted through the encapsulation barrier stack is particularly important. Thus, when the
15 encapsulation barrier stack is used as a cover substrate over a top-emitting OLED, or when the encapsulation layer is designed for TOLED or see-through displays, the encapsulation barrier stack should not cause the quality of light transmitted by the electroluminescent device to be substantially degraded.

20 **[029]** Based on the above requirement, the size of the particles may be chosen in such a way that optical transparency is maintained. In one embodiment, the sealing layer comprises nanoparticles having an average size of less than 1/2, or more preferably less than 1/5, the characteristic wavelength of light produced by the electroluminescent electronic component. In this context,
25 the characteristic wavelength is defined as the wavelength at which the peak intensity of the light spectrum that is produced by the electroluminescent device. For electroluminescent devices emitting visible light, this design requirement translates into nanoparticles having a dimension of less than about 350 nm, or more preferably less than 200 nm.

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[030] As the random packing density of nanoparticles in the defects of the barrier layer is determined by the shape and size distribution of the nanoparticles, it is advantageous to use nanoparticles of different shapes and sizes to precisely control the sealing of defects of the barrier oxide layer. The
35 nanoparticles may be present in one uniform shape or it may be formed in two or

more shapes. Possible shapes that the nanoparticles can assume include spherical shapes, rod shapes, elliptical shapes or any irregular shapes. In the case of rod shaped nanoparticles, they may have a diameter of between about 10 nm to 50 nm, a length of 50 to 400 nm, and an aspect ratio of more than 5, but not limited thereto.

[031] In order to provide efficient interaction between the reactive nanoparticles and the water vapour/oxygen permeating the barrier layer, the nanoparticles occupying the defects may have suitable shapes that would maximise the surface area that can come into contact with the water vapour and oxygen. This means that the nanoparticles may be designed to have a large surface area to volume, or surface area to weight ratio. In one embodiment, the nanoparticles have a surface area to weight ratio of between about 1 m²/g to about 200 m²/g. This requirement can be achieved by using nanoparticles with different shapes, such as 2, 3 or more different shapes as described above.

[032] A binder in which the nanoparticles are distributed may be used in the sealing layer. Materials suitable for use as the binder include polymers, such as polymers derivable from monomers having at least one polymerisable group, and which can be readily polymerised. Examples of polymeric materials suitable for this purpose include polyacrylate, polyacrylamide, polyepoxide, parylene, polysiloxanes and polyurethane or any other polymer. For strong adhesion between 2 successive barrier layers, or to adhere the multilayer film onto a substrate, the polymers with good adhesive quality may be chosen. The sealing layer containing the nanoparticles is typically formed by coating the barrier with a dispersion containing nanoparticles mixed with a monomer solution, e.g. an unsaturated organic compound having at least one polymerisable group. Thickness of the sealing layer comprising binder with distributed nanoparticles therein can be in the range of about 2 nm to about several micrometers.

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[033] In some embodiments, the sealing layer is arranged to be in close proximate contact with the entire surface of the barrier layer. For example, the sealing layer may be formed over the barrier layer in such a manner that it conforms to the shape of defects present on the surface of the barrier layer, i.e. either occupying or filling up entirely the pits present in the at least one barrier

layer, or levelling rough protrusions over the surface of the barrier layer. In this manner, defects giving rise to the permeation of corrosive gases through the encapsulation barrier stack are "plugged", while protrusions which would otherwise give rise to poor interfacial contact between barrier layers are levelled.

- 5 Any conformal coating or deposition method can be used, e.g. chemical vapour deposition or spin coating. Atomic layer deposition and pulsed laser deposition may also be used to form the sealing layer.

[034] The barrier material used for forming the barrier layer of the multilayer
10 film may comprise any typical barrier material with low permeability to water vapour and/or oxygen in the bulk phase. For example, the barrier material may comprise metals, metal oxides, ceramics, inorganic polymers, organic polymers and combinations thereof. In one embodiment, the barrier material is selected from indium tin oxide (ITO), TiAlN, SiO₂, SiC, Si₃N₄, TiO₂, HfO₂, Y₂O₃, Ta₂O₅,
15 and Al₂O₃. The thickness of a barrier layer may be between 20 nm to 80 nm. In this respect, materials for reactive nanoparticles can be used as the barrier layer since the reactivity of the material depends on its size. For example, although nanoparticulate Al₂O₃ is reactive towards water, a bulk layer of Al₂O₃ which has larger than nanoscale dimensions does not display the same level of reactivity
20 with water, and can thus be used for the barrier layer.

[035] For certain applications which require the encapsulation barrier stack to have good mechanical strength, a substrate may be provided to support the multilayer film. The substrate may be flexible or rigid. The substrate may
25 comprise any suitable variety of materials such as polyacetate, polypropylene, polyimide, cellophane, poly(1-trimethylsilyl-1-propyne, poly(4-methyl-2-pentyne), polyimide, polycarbonate, polyethylene, polyethersulfone, epoxy resins, polyethylene terephthalate, polystyrene, polyurethane, polyacrylate, polyacrylamide, polydimethylphenylene oxide, styrene-divinylbenzene
30 copolymers, polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF), nylon, nitrocellulose, cellulose, glass, indium tin oxide, nano-clays, silicones, polydimethylsiloxanes, biscyclopentadienyl iron, or polyphosphazenes, to name some illustrative examples. The base substrate may arranged to face the external environment and or it may face the encapsulated environment. In food packaging, the
35 substrate may face the internal surface that is in contact with food while the

encapsulation barrier stack forms the external surface in contact with atmospheric conditions.

[036] Although it may be possible to form the multilayer film directly onto a substrate, a substrate with a rough surface may be undesirable for direct contact with the barrier layer of the multilayer film. An interface layer between the multilayer film and the substrate may be provided to improve the contact between them. In one embodiment, a planarising layer is interposed between the substrate and the multilayer film so that the interface between the substrate and the multilayer film is improved. The planarising layer may comprise any suitable type of polymeric adhesive material such as epoxy. In a preferred embodiment, the planarising layer comprises polyacrylate (acrylic polymer), as polyacrylate is known for having strong water absorption properties. In the absence of a planarising layer, the multilayer film may be orientated such that the sealing layer is in contact with the surface of the substrate, for example.

[037] The barrier effect of a single barrier layer coupled with a sealing layer, i.e. a single 'paired layer', is additive, meaning that the number of pairs of barrier/sealing layers coupled together is proportional to the overall barrier property of the multilayer film. Accordingly, for applications requiring high barrier properties, a plurality of paired layers may be used. In one embodiment, each barrier layer is stacked on top of each sealing layer in alternating sequence. In other words, each sealing layer acts as an interface layer between 2 barrier layers. In some embodiments, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 paired layers are present in the multilayer film. For general purpose applications in which water vapour and oxygen permeation rates are less stringent (e.g. less than 10^{-3} g/m²/day), the multilayer film may include only 1 or 2 barrier layers (1, 2 or 3 sealing layers would correspondingly be present), whereas for more stringent applications, 3, 4, 5 or more barrier layers may be included in the multilayer film to achieve water vapour permeation rates of less than 10^{-5} g/m²/day or preferably less than 10^{-6} g/m²/day. Where more than 2 paired layers are used, each paired layer may be formed on opposing sides of the substrate to provide a double-laminated substrate, or they be formed on the same side of the substrate.

[038] In order to protect the multilayer film from mechanical damage, the

multilayer film may be capped or overlaid with a terminal protective layer. The terminal layer may comprise any material having good mechanical strength and is scratch resistant. In one embodiment, the terminal layer comprises an acrylic film having distributed therein LiF and/or MgF₂ particles.

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[039] The encapsulation barrier stack according to the invention may be used for any suitable barrier application, such as in the construction of a casing or housing, or a barrier foil for blister packs, or it may be used as an encapsulating layer over an electronic component. The encapsulation barrier stack may also be
10 laminated over any existing barrier material, such as packaging materials for food and drinks, to improve their existing barrier properties. In a preferred embodiment, the encapsulation barrier stack is used to form an encapsulation for protecting electroluminescent electronic components comprising moisture and/or oxygen sensitive reactive layers, wherein the electroluminescent component is
15 encapsulated within the encapsulation. Examples of such devices include, but are not limited to, reactive components comprised in Organic Light Emitting Devices (OLEDs), charged-coupled devices (CCDs), and micro-electro-mechanical sensors (MEMS).

20 **[040]** In OLED applications, the encapsulation barrier stack may be used to form any part of an encapsulation for isolating the active component of the OLED device. In one embodiment, the encapsulation barrier stack is used to form a base substrate for supporting the reactive layers of the electroluminescent component. In a rim-sealing structure, the encapsulation barrier stack may be
25 used to form a rigid cover that is arranged over the reactive layers of the electroluminescent component. The rigid cover may be attached to the base substrate by means of an adhesive layer, the adhesive layer being arranged at least substantially along the edge of the cover substrate for forming an enclosure around the reactive component. In order to minimise lateral diffusion of
30 oxygen/moisture into the enclosure containing the reactive component, the width of the covering layer or the adhesive layer may be made larger than the thickness of the encapsulation barrier stack.

[041] In another embodiment, the encapsulation barrier stack is used to form a
35 flexible encapsulating layer which seals the electroluminescent component

against the base substrate. In this case, such an encapsulating layer may wrap around the surface of the electroluminescent component to form a 'proximal encapsulation'. The shape of the encapsulating layer thus conforms to the shape of the reactive component, leaving no gap between the electroluminescent component to be encapsulated and the encapsulating layer.

[042] The present invention is further directed to a method of forming an encapsulation barrier stack according to the invention. The method comprises forming at least one barrier layer and at least one sealing layer. As the sealing layer contains reactive nanoparticles, steps involving the preparation and the use of the sealing layer is preferably carried out under vacuum to preserve the reactivity of the nanoparticles towards the moisture and/or oxygen. The step of forming the sealing layer comprises mixing a polymerisable compound with a nanoparticle dispersion to form a sealing mixture, and polymerising the sealing mixture under vacuum to form a sealing layer. The nanoparticle dispersion may comprise nanoparticles dispersed in at least one organic solvent. The at least one organic solvent may include any suitable solvent, such as ethers, ketones, aldehydes and glycols for example.

[043] Nanoparticles may be synthesised by any conventional method known in the art, including vapor phase synthesis (Swihart, Current Opinion in Colloid and Interface Science 8 (2003) 127–133), sol-gel processing, sonochemical processing, cavitation processing, microemulsion processing, and high-energy ball milling, for instance. Nanoparticles are also commercially available either as nanoparticle powders or in a ready-made dispersion from Nanophase Technologies Corporation, for example. Proprietary methods may be used to synthesise commercially obtained nanoparticles such as NanoArc® synthesis.

[044] In one embodiment, surface-activation of the nanoparticles is carried out in order to remove contaminants from the surface of the nanoparticles that may interfere with their ability to react with moisture and/or oxygen. Surface activation may comprise treating the nanoparticles with an acid, including mineral acids such as hydrochloric acid or sulphuric acid. The acid used for said treatment is preferably a dilute acid. Treatment comprises immersing the nanoparticles in the acid for a period of about 1 hour. It is to be noted that nanoparticles which can be

easily contaminated such as carbon nanotubes and carbon nanofibres may require surface activation. On the other hand, nanoparticles such as aluminium oxide and titanium oxide may not require surface activation since these nanoparticles have high surface energy.

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[045] The polymerisable compound may be any readily polymerisable monomer. Suitable monomers are preferably readily polymerisable via UV curing or heat curing or any other convenient curing method.

10 **[046]** In one embodiment, polyacrylamide is used as polymer for binding the nanoparticles. Acrylic acid monomer powder may be dissolved in polar organic solvents such as 2-methoxyethanol (2MOE) and ethylene glycol (EG). In order to obtain a uniform distribution of the nanoparticles in the sealing mixture, sonification of the sealing mixture may additionally be carried out. For instance,
15 sonification may be carried out for at least about 30 minutes prior to polymerisation.

[047] A substrate may be a part of the device to be encapsulated, such as a part of a circuit board, or it may be an additional structure that is included as part
20 of the encapsulation, such as a flexible substrate. It is also possible that the substrate is part of the encapsulation barrier stack, comprising a thick barrier layer on which further sealing layers and barrier layers are subsequently deposited. Otherwise, the substrate may be the surface of a worktop for fabricating the multilayer film and as such does not form part of the
25 encapsulation barrier stack.

[048] Once the substrate has been provided, it can be coated with barrier layers and the sealing solution. The barrier layer can be formed via physical vapor deposition (e.g. magnetron sputtering, thermal evaporation or electron
30 beam evaporation), plasma polymerization, CVD, printing, spinning or any conventional coating processes including tip or dip coating processes.

[049] The sealing solution may be formed on the barrier layer via any solgel method such as spin coating, screen printing, WebFlight method, tip coating,
35 CVD methods or any other conventional coating methods. Metal oxide and metal

nano-particles, as well as carbon nanotubes, can be co-evaporated along with monomer or dimers of parylene based polymer films. Any type of parylene dimers including parylene C or D or any other grades can be evaporated along with nano particles.

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[050] If multiple barrier/sealing layers, i.e. paired layers, are to be formed, a substrate can be repetitively coated with the barrier material and sealing solution in . In order to establish an alternating arrangement comprising successive barrier layer and sealing layer, the substrate may be successively coated first
10 with the barrier material and then the sealing solution repeating over several times until the intended number of layers are formed. Each time the sealing solution is applied, it is preferably UV cured prior to the formation of the next barrier layer over it.

15 **[051]** After the sealing and barrier layers have been formed, optional steps may be taken to complete the construction of the encapsulation barrier stack, such as the formation of a glass cover, ITO lines and ITO coating. For example, Passive Matrix displays may require ITO lines to be formed on the encapsulation barrier stack. After the cover has been formed, the exposed surface of the cover
20 may be further protected with a protective coating via deposition of a capping layer (MgF/LiF coating).

[052] These aspects of the invention will be more fully understood in view of the following description, drawings and non-limiting examples.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[053] Illustrative embodiments will now be described by way of non-limiting examples only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

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[054] **Fig. 1A** depicts an encapsulation barrier stack according to one embodiment of the invention. **FIG. 1B** depicts a conventional barrier stack. **Fig. 1C** and **1D** depicts other embodiments of the encapsulation barrier stack which comprise a base substrate.

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[055] FIG. 2A, FIG. 2B and FIG. 2C depict various implementations of the encapsulation barrier stack for encapsulating an OLED device.

[056] FIG. 3 shows a process flow diagram for fabricating an encapsulation
5 barrier stack.

[057] FIG. 4 and FIG. 5 shows a setup for carrying out an investigation of the barrier properties of fabricated encapsulation barrier stacks using a calcium sensor.

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[058] FIG. 6 shows the optical images of 4 different encapsulation barrier stacks, Stacks A, B, C, and D, after exposure to moisture.

[059] FIG. 7 shows 70X magnification SEM images of 3 encapsulation barrier
15 Stacks A to C made according to the invention.

[060] FIG. 8 shows the morphology of the 3 encapsulation barrier Stacks A to C made according to the invention.

20 [061] FIG. 9 shows an embodiment of the encapsulation barrier stack of the invention comprising a capping acrylic film. The encapsulation barrier stack was used for quantitative analysis.

[062] FIG. 10 shows a graph of Electrical Conductance vs Time for the
25 encapsulation barrier stack shown in FIG. 9.

[063] FIG. 11 shows a graph of Transmittance vs Wavelength for the encapsulation barrier stack shown in FIG. 9.

30 [064] FIG. 12 shows the scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of barrier stacks D, E and F.

[065] FIG. 13 shows the graph of transmittance vs. wavelength for encapsulation barrier stacks A, C, D, E and F.

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[066] FIG. 14 shows the graph of Conductance vs. Time for encapsulation barrier stacks D, E and F.

[067] FIG. 15 shows the Load Strain performance curve for barrier stacks D, G 5 and H.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[068] FIG. 1A shows one embodiment of an encapsulation barrier stack 100 10 according to the invention. The encapsulation barrier stack 100 comprises a multilayer film 102 comprising barrier layers 103 and sealing layers 105. The barrier layers 103 have low permeability to oxygen and/or moisture. It will be noted that barrier layers 103 contain pinhole defects 107 which extend through the thickness of the barrier layer 103. Pinhole defects along with other types of 15 structural defects limit the barrier performance of barrier layers as oxygen and water vapour can permeate into the barrier layer via these defects, eventually traversing the encapsulation barrier stack and coming into contact with the oxygen/moisture sensitive device. For illustrative purposes, FIG. 1A depicts only pinhole defects. In reality, other types of structural defects such as pits and cracks 20 may also be present.

[069] The sealing layers 105 comprise reactive nanoparticles capable of interacting with water vapour and/or oxygen, thereby retarding the permeation of oxygen/moisture through the encapsulation barrier stack. In accordance with the 25 present invention, these defects are at least partially covered up, or in some embodiments, entirely filled up by the nanoparticles in the sealing layer 105.

[070] FIG. 1B depicts a conventional barrier stack 120 which comprises barrier layers 123 and planarising adhesive layers 125 are arranged on a substrate 30 121. Although inorganic metal oxide barrier layers have relatively high gas impermeability, pinhole defects present in the barrier layer allow moisture and oxygen to permeate through the barrier layer. In the figure, pinhole defects 127 in the barrier layers 123 are exposed to the environment, so moisture and oxygen are able to permeate through the barrier layer. For example, oxygen and moisture can 35 permeate through the barrier layer 1231 via pinhole defects, and then

progressively permeate through the adhesive layer 1251, and subsequently permeate through barrier layer 1232 and adhesive layer 1252 to reach the substrate 121 where an oxygen/moisture sensitive device is typically located.

5 **[071] FIG. 1C** depicts yet another embodiment of a barrier stack 140 according to the invention wherein the multilayer film 142 comprises one barrier layer 143 and only one sealing layer 145 arranged over it. The barrier stack 140 further comprises a base substrate 141 for supporting the multilayer film. A planarising layer 144 is interposed between the base substrate 141 and the
10 multilayer film 142 included to improve the contact between the multilayer film and the substrate. A single paired layer in accordance with this embodiment can be used for applications with less stringent barrier requirements.

[072] The foregoing embodiments show an encapsulation barrier stack in
15 which the multilayer film is laminated onto only one side of a substrate. **FIG. 1D** shows a double-laminated substrate in which a multilayer film is laminated to both sides of a base substrate. Encapsulation barrier stack 160 comprises a substrate 161 that is sandwiched between two multilayer films 1621 and 1622. Multilayer film 1621 comprises 3 barrier layers 163 and three nanoparticulate sealing layers 165.
20 Multilayer film 1622 comprises 1 barrier layer and 2 sealing layers. Each respective layer is arranged in alternating sequence such that the sealing layers form the interlayer between any 2 barrier layers. In this embodiment, sealing layers 165 are in direct contact with the substrate 161, thereby serving as planarising layers. By forming 5 paired layers on the substrate, this embodiment provides an
25 encapsulation barrier stack with high gas barrier properties.

[073] The encapsulation barrier stack of the invention can be used in several ways for encapsulating a moisture and oxygen sensitive device such as an OLED. For example, it can be laminated onto a conventional polymer substrate that is
30 used to support the OLED. **FIG. 2A** shows an encapsulated OLED comprising electrodes 214 and reactive layer 216 within a rim-sealed encapsulation. In this embodiment, the encapsulation barrier stack comprises a base substrate 201 and a multilayer film 212. The base substrate 201 is laminated with the multilayer film 212 comprising barrier layer 203 and two sealing layers 205 sandwiching the
35 barrier layer 203. Pinhole defects 207 in the barrier layer 203 are sealed by the

nanoparticulate material of the sealing layer. The OLED is arranged directly on the multilayer film 212, and encapsulated under a glass cover 210. Rim adhesive 209 serves to adhere the glass cover 210 to the encapsulation barrier stack, thereby forming an encapsulation around the OLED.

5

[074] FIG. 2B shows another embodiment in which the encapsulation barrier stack of the invention is used as a cover substrate. The substrate 201 is not laminated by the encapsulation barrier stack (although it may be laminated if desired). In place of the glass cover is the encapsulation barrier stack comprising
10 rigid multilayer film 222 (without a substrate). The multilayer film similarly comprises barrier layer 203 sandwiched between sealing layers 205, and its defects 207 are filled with the nanoparticulate material. The OLED is encapsulated underneath the multilayer film, meaning that in order for the light emitted by the OLED to be clearly seen, the multilayer film 222 should be sufficiently transparent.
15 The multilayer film 222 is attached to the base substrate by means of rim adhesive 209. when implementing rim sealing as shown in Fig. 2A or Fig. 2B, the width of the rim adhesive is typically in the millimetre or centimetre scale, which is substantially larger than the thickness of the base substrate or the encapsulation barrier stack. Accordingly, lateral diffusion of water vapour and oxygen through the
20 rim adhesive would in such a case be substantially longer than transverse diffusion through the encapsulated barrier stack.

[075] Other than rim sealing as depicted in FIG. 2A and FIG. 2B,. In the following figure, thin-film encapsulation comprising the attachment of an
25 encapsulation barrier stack over the OLED, hereinafter referred to as 'proximal encapsulation', is also possible. Proximal encapsulation is in particular suitable for flexible OLED devices. FIG. 2C shows an embodiment in which an OLED comprising electrodes 214 and reactive layer 216 is encapsulated between a flexible base substrate 201 and a flexible encapsulation barrier stack arranged
30 proximally over the OLED comprising multilayer film 232. It will be noted that the multilayer film 232 conforms to the external shape of the OLED device.

[076] Although FIG. 2A, 2B and 2C depict the encapsulation of an OLED, the encapsulation barrier stack of the present invention is by no means limited to such
35 an application. It will be understood by the skilled person the any article can be

encapsulated in place of an OLED, including pharmaceutical drugs, jewellery, reactive metals, electronic components, and food substances, for example.

[077] The general scheme of fabrication of the encapsulation barrier stack according to the invention is shown in **FIG. 3**. A polycarbonate or PET substrate is provided for forming the encapsulation barrier stack. The substrate is plasma treated and coated with alumina barrier material via magnetron sputtering, thereby forming a barrier layer. Concurrently, a sealing solution comprising alumina and TiO₂ nanoparticles is mixed with an acrylic acid monomer solution, thereby forming a sealing solution. The sealing solution is web flight coated onto the barrier layer, for example, via a roll-to-roll process. The coating of barrier layer and sealing layer is repeated for a predetermined number of times to obtain a multilayer film with a desired barrier property. For example, a multilayer film comprising 5 paired layers will require the magnetron sputtering and web flight coating to be repeated 5 times to form 5 paired layer. It is to be noted that it is also possible, in other embodiments, to form an initial coat of sealing layer over the substrate. The sealing layer acts as a planarising material which smoothens the surface of the substrate thereby covering defects on the substrate which could provide pathways for the infiltration of moisture/oxygen.

20

[078] After the multilayer film is formed, ITO is magnetron sputtered over the multilayer film to form an ITO coating. If the encapsulation barrier stack is to be used in Passive Matrix displays, only ITO lines are required instead of a complete coat of IOT. A protective liner is subsequently formed on the ITO coating. Any suitable material may be used, depending on the intended purpose, e.g. scratch resistant films or glare reduction films, such as MgF/LiF films. After forming the protective film, the encapsulation barrier stack is packed in aluminium foil packaging or slit into predetermined dimensions for assembly with other components.

30

[079] Specific examples will now be described to illustrate the fabrication process as described above as well as the barrier performance of fabricated encapsulation barrier stacks.

35 **EXAMPLE 1: FABRICATION AND CHARACTERISATION OF**

ENCAPSULATION BARRIER STACKS WITH SEALING LAYER COMPRISING METAL OXIDE NANOPARTICLES

a) Synthesis of encapsulation barrier stacks A, B and C

- 5 **[080]** As an illustrative example, three different encapsulation barrier stacks each comprising different nanoparticles in the sealing layer were fabricated. Each of the encapsulation barrier stacks were made according to the following specification:

10 Stack A

1. Base substrate - Polycarbonate film (188 μ m thick)
2. Planarizing layer - Plain acrylic polymer
3. First Barrier layer - ITO (indium tin oxide)
4. Sealing layer - aluminium oxide nanoparticle
- 15 5. Second barrier layer - ITO

Stack B

1. Base substrate - Polycarbonate film (188 μ m thick)
2. Planarizing layer - Plain acrylic polymer
- 20 3. First Barrier layer - ITO
4. Sealing layer - titanium oxide nanoparticle
5. Second barrier layer - ITO

Stack C

- 25 1. Base polymer Substrate - Polycarbonate film (188 μ m thick)
2. Planarizing layer - Plain acrylic polymer
3. First Barrier layer - ITO
4. Sealing layer - Aluminium oxide and Titanium oxide nanoparticle
- 30 5. Second barrier layer - ITO

[081] For comparison, a conventional barrier stack, Stack D, comprising a conventional multi-layer stack structure, was fabricated. Stack D comprised the following stack structure:

Stack D

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| | 1. Base substrate | - Polycarbonate film (188 μ m thick) |
| | 2. Planarising layer | - Plain acrylic polymer |
| 5 | 3. First Barrier layer | - ITO |
| | 4. Second Planarising layer | - Plain acrylic polymer |
| | 5. Second Barrier layer | - ITO |

Step (i): Surface Preparation of Substrate

10 **[082]** Polycarbonate substrates are transparent and can be cut into preferred dimensions. Pneumatically operated hollow die punch-cutting equipment or any conventional slitting machine can be used to slit the polycarbonate substrates into the specified or required dimensions.

15 **[083]** The substrates are rinsed with isopropyl alcohol (IPA) and blow-dried with nitrogen to remove macro-scale adsorbed particles on the surface. After nitrogen blow-dry, the substrates are placed in the vacuum oven at a pressure of 10^{-1} mbar for degassing absorbed moisture or oxygen.

20 **[084]** Immediately after the degassing process, the substrates are transferred to the plasma treatment chamber (e.g. ULVAC SOLCIET Cluster Tool). RF argon plasma is used to bombard the surface of the barrier film with low energy ions in order to remove surface contaminants. The base pressure in the chamber was maintained below 4×10^{-6} mbar. The argon flow rate is 70 sccm. The RF power is
25 set at 200 W and an optimal treatment time usually 5 to 8 eight minutes is used depending on the surface condition.

30 **[085]** After cleaning of the base substrate was carried out, plain acrylic polymer was spin coated onto the polycarbonate substrates to form an interface planarising layer.

Step (ii): Metal Oxide Barrier Layer Coating

[086] Indium tin oxide barrier layers were prepared by unbalanced magnetron sputtering techniques as follows. Sputtering was used to deposit the metal oxide

barrier layer onto the planarising layer. Unbalanced magnetron sputtering technique was used to form high density oxide barrier films. In this sputtering technique, a metal layer of typically a few mono-layers will be deposited from an unbalanced magnetron, and then oxygen will be introduced to the system to create oxygen plasma, directed towards the substrate to provide argon and oxygen ion bombardment for a high packing-density oxide film. Plasma helps to increase the reactivity of the oxygen directed onto the growing film surface and provides for more desirable rheology. In order to deposit dense films without introducing excessive intrinsic stresses, a high flux (greater than 2 mA/cm²) of low energy (~25 eV) oxygen and argon ions to bombard the growing barrier oxide films.

[087] The continuous feedback control unit is used to control the reactive sputtering processes. The light emitted by the sputtering metal in the intense plasma of the magnetron racetrack is one indicator of the metal sputtering rate and the oxygen partial pressure. This indication can be used to control the process and hence achieve an accurate oxide film stoichiometry. By using a continuous feedback control unit from a plasma emission monitor, reproducible films and desirable barrier properties were obtained.

20 Step (iii): Sealing Layer Coating

[088] Commercially available nanoparticles (e.g. #44931 NanoDur® 99.5% aluminium oxide particles from Nanophase Technologies) were pre-treated with plasma and added to an organic solvent, such as 2-methoxyethanol (2MOE) and ethylene glycol (EG) for dispersion in the ratio of 1:1 2MOE to EG. Propylene glycon monomethyl ether or Ethyl Acetate or Methyl Isobutyl Ketone, Methyl Ethyl, 2 MOE or any mixture of solvents or wetting additive agents can be used as well. Alternatively, commercially available nanoparticle dispersions such as aluminium oxide, zinc oxide, or titanium oxide dispersed in Hexane diol diacrylate, Isobornyl acrylate, Tripropylene glycol diacrylate can be used (e.g. a colloidal dispersion of 45nm APS aluminum oxide dry powder, NanoDur® X1130PMA, 50% dispersed in 1,2-Propanediol monomethyl ether acetate from Nanophase Technologies).

[089] A polymerizable group compound like commercially available UV curable acrylate monomers (Addison Clear Wave – HC-5607) is added to the

nanoparticle mixture to form a sealing solution. The polymer coating weight may be between the amount of 30% to 50%. For example, the total concentration of nanoparticles in the polymer may at 66% by weight of the sealing solution, while polymer coating weight is at about 34% by weight of the sealing solution.

5

[090] The synthesis was undertaken under inert gas environment. The set of experiments were carried out with different mixture of nanoparticles in acrylic polymer solutions and spin coated onto the plain polymer substrate (above figure 5).

10

[091] Each of the samples A, B and C were made according to the general steps (i), (ii) and (iii) using different constituents as explained in the following.

[092] For sample encapsulation barrier stack A, 30 ml of UV curable acrylate monomer with a coating weight of about 50% of the sealing solution was added to 15ml of a dispersion of aluminium oxide in tripropylene glycol diacrylate (35% weight), obtainable from Nanodur of Nanophase Technologies. 5ml of an organic solvent of 2-MOE and EG (1:1) ratio was added to the mixture. Sonification of the mixture was then carried out for about 1 hour prior to deposition onto a barrier oxide layer.

[093] For sample encapsulation barrier stack B, 30 ml of UV curable acrylate monomer with a coating weight of about 50% of the sealing solution was added to 10ml of titanium (IV) oxide dispersed in isopropanol 40% by weight, obtainable from Nanodur of Nanophase Technologies. 10 ml of an organic solvent of 2-MOE and EG (1:1) ratio was added to the mixture. Sonification of the mixture was then carried for about 1 hour prior to deposition onto a barrier oxide layer.

[094] For sample encapsulation barrier stack C, 30 ml of UV curable acrylate monomer with a coating weight of about 50% by weight of the sealing solution was added to (a) 7.5ml of dispersed aluminium oxide in tripropylene glycol diacrylate (35% weight), obtainable from Nanodur of Nanophase Technologies, and (b) 5ml of Titanium (IV) oxide dispersed in Isopropanol with 40% weight with 2 MOE and Ethylene glycol (1:1 ratio). Sonification of the mixture was then carried for about 1 hour prior to deposition onto a barrier oxide layer.

[095] The formation of the sealing layer via spin coating was undertaken in a nitrogen atmosphere in a glove box. The oxygen and water vapour contents were reduced to less than 1ppm level in the glove box.

5

Characterisation of encapsulation barrier stacks A, B and C

[096] After plasma treatment process, the encapsulation barrier stacks are transferred to a vacuum evaporation chamber (thermal evaporation) under vacuum. The barrier stacks are then evaluated for their barrier properties using
10 the calcium sensor described in WO 2005/095924. Both qualitative evaluation and quantitative evaluation were carried out.

[097] In qualitative evaluation, a test cell as shown in FIG. 4 is formed using the fabricated encapsulation barrier stacks. Briefly, two metal tracks with
15 dimensions of 2 cm by 2 cm are fabricated. A sensing element having dimensions of 1 cm length, 2 cm width and 150 nm thickness is formed in between the two electrodes. The measured resistivity of the sensing element is 0.37 Ω -cm. After the deposition process, a load lock system is used to transfer the sample to a glove box under dry nitrogen at atmospheric pressure. After the
20 calcium deposition, a 100 nm silver protection layer was deposited for the qualitative analysis.

[098] In the case of the quantitative resistance measurement, a test cell as shown in FIG. 5 is formed using the fabricated encapsulation barrier stacks. 300
25 nm of silver was used for the conductive track, 150 nm calcium was used as the sensor and 150 nm lithium fluoride was used as a protection layer. After the deposition processes, a UV curable epoxy was applied on the rim of the substrate and then the whole substrate was sealed with a 35mm x 35mm glass slide. Desiccants were attached to the 35mm x 35mm cover glass slide for
30 absorbing any water vapour present due to out gassing or permeation through the epoxy sealing. A load lock system was used for the entire process and the test cells were encapsulated in the glove box under dry nitrogen at atmospheric pressure. To accelerate the permeation tests, the samples were placed into a humidity chamber at constant temperature and humidity of 80°C & 90% RH
35 respectively. These were viewed optically at regular intervals for a qualitative

degradation test and analysis of the defects, and measured electrically for the quantitative analysis of the degradation. The calcium test cell's conductive track terminals are connected to a constant current source (Keithley source meter), which is interfaced with a computer. Resistance of the calcium sensor/silver track is monitored every second and plotted automatically by the computer using lab view software. A Dynamic Signal Analyzer with a FFT analysis is used to take the noise spectrum measurement automatically at periodic intervals of one second.

10 **[099]** The calcium degradation test provides qualitative visual information on defects such as pinholes cracks and nano-pores, because the permeated water vapors diffuse through the defects of the substrate and its barrier layer(s) and react with the calcium sensor to form distinguishable patches on the calcium sensing element. Micro-pores and sub-micron sized pores such as pinholes and
15 cracks in a transparent coating are very difficult to discern or to study even by sophisticated surface microscopy techniques (e.g. SEM). In the present experiment, the colour contrast between oxidized and non-oxidized calcium was used for qualitative analysis. The degradation was monitored using optical microscopy. The images were taken at intervals of typically several hours. From
20 the images the calcium-corroded spots could be directly linked to defects of the barrier films. Further, growth dynamics of the calcium corrosion could provide qualitative information of barrier properties.

[0100] The images in **FIG. 6** highlight the nature of the defects exhibited on A
25 B, C films that have been tested and the barrier structure is shown in FIG. 6. The degradation images in FIG. 6 show that the barrier stacks A and C have significantly better barrier properties as compared to conventional barrier stacks as exemplified by barrier stack D. Calcium sensor degradation in barrier stack A commenced at 80 hours and the entire calcium degraded by 270 hours. Calcium
30 sensor degradation in barrier stack C did not show any significant degradation until after 470 hours.

[0101] **FIG. 7** shows scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of barrier stacks A, B & C immediately after fabrication. The surfaces of these three barrier
35 stacks are smooth and no agglomeration of nanoparticles is observed. These

images confirm that the dispersion of the nanoparticles in the sealing layer is uniform, so that the barrier stack is consequently transparent. The further investigation on water vapor transport properties were carried out with permeation measurement system and discussed with next section.

5

[0102] FIG. 8 shows images of the surface of the sealing layers as studied with SEM and AFM. The surface properties were compared with that of plain acrylic polymer coatings. The AFM picture shows that the uniform dispersion of nanoparticles in solution A, B and C was achieved. The surface roughness measured for barrier stacks A and B films are well within 0.75 nm at 1 μm to 10 μm scans and comparable with plain acrylic polymer films. However, for barrier stack C, the surface is relatively rough (6.5nm). Roughness may be advantageously used to improve the adhesion between the barrier layer and the substrate.

15

[0103] A test encapsulation barrier stack having the structure shown in FIG. 9 was fabricated to carry out a quantitative analysis of the encapsulation barrier stack samples fabricated in accordance with the above. An encapsulation barrier stack was fabricated with two ITO barrier layers were fabricated by magnetron sputtering method and one sealing layer (comprising aluminium oxide nanoparticles) was used to seal the ITO defects. The outermost terminating layer is plain acrylic film which is normally used for WVTR measurement purpose. In principle, only one ITO barrier layer's defects were sealed. In this embodiment, the sealing layer comprises Al_2O_3 nanoparticles with sizes of 20 nm to 40 nm.

25

[0104] The plot of calcium conductance against time is shown in FIG. 10 for the encapsulation barrier stack. The corresponding change in calcium (mol) can be derived from the graph. The water vapour transmission rate of the encapsulation barrier stack comprising one barrier layer and one sealing layer is determined to be $1 \times 10^{-3} \text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ at 80°C & 90% relative humidity. In contrast, conventional multi-layer stacks with two barriers SiN layer and plain acrylic interlayer showed performance of only about $10^{-1} \text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ level at 70°C & 90% relative humidity condition.

35 **[0105]** Therefore, these results demonstrate that by sealing off the defects of

one barrier layer with a nanoparticulate sealing layer, the barrier performance is improved up to two orders in higher magnitude as compared to the plain acrylic film based multi-layer substrate. If the defects in three or more barrier layers are sealed using two or more sealing layers comprising reactive nanoparticles, the water vapour barrier performance can be less than $10^{-5}\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$, or even less than $10^{-6}\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$.

[0106] The single-layered encapsulation barrier stack comprising polycarbonate (188 μm)/ITO/Nanostructured sealing layer with aluminium and titanium nanoparticle and the double-layered encapsulation barrier stack with PC/ITO/sealing layer/ITO/sealing layer was fabricated. The optical properties measured the spectral transmission in the UV and visible region of the spectrum was measured with UV-Vis spectrometer. It shows that the light transmittance of double stack is 82% and single stack is about 85%. The reduction of transmission is due to ITO film properties and nature.

EXAMPLE 2: FABRICATION AND CHARACTERISATION OF ENCAPSULATION BARRIER STACKS WITH SEALING LAYER COMPRISING CARBON NANOTUBES

20

[0107] The following encapsulation barrier stacks with differing carbon nanotube compositions in the sealing layers were prepared:

Stack E

- 25
1. Polycarbonate (188 μm) as base substrate
 2. ITO as barrier layer
 3. Nanostructured sealing layer with MCNTs at 0.006% concentration as sealing layer

30 Stack F

1. Polycarbonate (188 μm) as base substrate
2. ITO as barrier layer
3. Nanostructured sealing layer with MCNTs at 0.05% concentration as sealing layer

35

[0108] Pre-treated 10 nm diameter multiwalled nanotubes (hereinafter 'MCNT') were first added to a solution mixture of 2-methoxyethanol (2MOE) and ethylene glycol (EG) for dispersion. The ratio of 2MOE to EG is 1:1. The nanotubes were dispersed uniformly into the acrylic polymer via sonification. The synthesis was undertaken under inert gas environment.

[0109] Stack E comprises MCNT in the amount of 0.006% by weight, and solution F comprises MCNT in the amount of 0.05% by weight. The sealing layers were 2 μm thick. The synthesis and fabrication of thin films of sealing layers were undertaken in the glove box which has partial pressure of nitrogen. The oxygen and water vapour contents were controlled with less than 1ppm level in the glove box.

[0110] Stack D as fabricated in Example 1 was used for the comparison of the characteristics of the barrier stacks E and F.

[0111] The stacks comprising MCNT in the sealing layer were compared with Stack D. **FIG. 12** shows scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of Stacks D, E & F films. The surfaces of E and F sealing films are smooth and no agglomeration of MCNT is noticed. These results show that the dispersion of MCNT in the sealing layer is uniform and that the films are transparent. Further investigation on water vapour transport properties and optical properties were carried out with permeation measurement system and spectrometer and discussed below.

25

[0112] The optical properties of each barrier stack were measured with spectral transmission in the UV and visible region of the spectrum with UV-Vis Spectrometry.

30 [0113] As can be seen from **FIG. 13**, conventional acrylic film coated substrate (D) has very high transmission with 99%. However, it does not block UV light. It shows that the light transmittance of double stack is 82% and single stacks are about 85%. The CNT contained encapsulation barrier stack E & F shows transparency about 85%. The reduction of double stack transmission is due to ITO film properties and nature. The figure also shows that the

nanoparticle dispersion of the films A, C, E & F are uniform, have no agglomeration and therefore, the light transmission is in the range of 82 to 89%.

[0114] The quantitative calcium degradation results of **FIG. 14** show that the barrier stack E and barrier stack F shows significantly better overall barrier properties than conventional barrier stack D. The initial calcium sensor degradation/water vapour desorption rates similar for all encapsulation barrier stacks E, F and D at 15 hours and the measured WVTR is $0.03\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ level. However, after reaching 20 hours, the steady state water vapour transmission rates of D is $0.1\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ and the entire calcium was degraded before 30 hours. The CNT-containing encapsulation barrier stacks E and F shows the rates of $0.01\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ and $0.009\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$ level respectively. After reaching 100hrs, the barrier stacks E and F shows a significant improvement in barrier properties and the WVTR rates was $0.003\text{g/m}^2/\text{day}$.

15

[0115] Without wishing to be bound by theory, it is thought that in barrier stacks E and F, water vapour is drawn into open-ended nanotubes by capillary suction after 30hrs of exposure. It is postulated that the time taken for the water molecule to diffuse into the carbon nanotubes is longer as compared to normal modes of diffusion and therefore, the initial water vapour desorption was very high. The initial desorption/permeability results of this invention demonstrated that the probability of sealing the defects of the barrier layer by CNTs is relatively low. This may be due to the concentration (0.05%) of CNT used in the interlayer as compared to the nanoparticles concentration (30% to 60%).

25 .

[0116] To quantify the adhesion properties of an encapsulation barrier stack according to the invention, standard peel tests were performed using an Instron test system. The following encapsulation barrier stacks were tested upon:

30 Stack G

1. Polycarbonate as base substrate
2. ITO as barrier layer
3. sealing layer comprising aluminium oxide particles (Al_2O_3 (20% by weight) dispersed in acrylic film

35

Stack H

1. Polycarbonate as base substrate
4. ITO as barrier layer
5. sealing layer comprising aluminium oxide particles (Al_2O_3 (15% by weight) dispersed acrylic film

[0117] Conventional barrier stack D as fabricated in Example 1 was again used for comparison. The $2\mu\text{m}$ thick sealing layers were deposited onto ITO coated polycarbonate test substrates and these substrates. They were cut into the pieces of 10cm length and 1cm width and the UV curable epoxy (Three Bond) were applied to a 3cm long and 1cm wide area at one end of the sample similar to the ASTM requirements. Surface preparation involves the argon plasma cleaning of the above substrates before the application of epoxy.

[0118] The Load/Strain curve for sample barrier stacks D, G and H were plotted and the results of the test can be seen in **FIG. 15**. The barrier stacks D with the plain conventional acrylic film on ITO surface, the initial interfacial failure occurred at the interface between the acrylic film and ITO at 18 N/m and levelling off to steady-state peel strength of about 12N/m. Therefore the adhesion strength of conventional acrylic polymer onto barrier oxide layer is only 18N/m. When the barrier stacks G and H were tested, the initial interfacial failure occurred at the interface between the nanostructured organic sealing layer and ITO at 45N/m for barrier stacks H and 48 N/m for barrier stacks G and levelling off to steady-state peel strength of about 14 -15 N/m for barrier stacks H and G. Therefore the adhesion strength of nanostructured sealing barrier stacks (G & H) onto barrier oxide layer is 12 -15N/m. This result demonstrates clearly that the adhesion between barrier oxide layer and nanostructured sealing layer is significantly improved due to the sealing of the barrier layer's pinholes and defects.

[0119] Although this invention has been described in terms of illustrative embodiments, it has to be understood that numerous variations and modifications may be made, without departing from the spirit and scope of this invention as set out in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An encapsulation barrier stack capable of encapsulating a moisture and/or oxygen sensitive article, comprising:

5 a multilayer film to be arranged on a substrate, said multilayer film having at least one barrier layer having low moisture and/or oxygen permeability, and at least one sealing layer arranged to be in contact with a surface of the at least one barrier layer, thereby covering defects present in the barrier layer,

10 wherein

the at least one sealing layer comprises reactive nanoparticles distributed therein which are capable of interacting with moisture and/or oxygen to retard the permeation of moisture and/or oxygen through the defects present in the barrier layer.

15 2. The barrier stack of Claim 1, wherein the at least one sealing layer conforms substantially to the shape of the defects present on the surface of the at least one barrier layer.

20 3. The barrier stack of Claim 1 or 2, wherein the sealing layer is formed by conformal deposition.

25 4. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 3, wherein the multilayer film comprises a plurality of sealing layers and barrier layers arranged in an alternating sequence.

5. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 4, wherein the reactive nanoparticles interact with moisture and/or oxygen through chemical reaction.

30 6. The barrier stack of Claim 5, wherein the nanoparticles comprise a material selected from the group consisting of metals and metal oxides.

7. The barrier stack of Claim 6, wherein the nanoparticles comprise a metal selected from the group consisting of Al, Ti, Mg, Ba and Ca.

8. The barrier stack of Claim 6 or 7, wherein the nanoparticles comprise a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of TiO_2 , Al_2O_3 , ZrO_2 , ZnO , BaO , SrO , CaO and MgO , VO_2 , CrO_2 , MoO_2 , and LiMn_2O_4 .
- 5 9. The barrier stack of Claim 6 or 7, wherein the nanoparticles comprise a transparent conductive oxide selected from the group consisting of cadmium stannate (Cd_2SnO_4), cadmium indate (CdIn_2O_4), zinc stannate (Zn_2SnO_4 and ZnSnO_3), and zinc indium oxide ($\text{Zn}_2\text{In}_2\text{O}_5$).
- 10 10. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 9, wherein the reactive nanoparticles interact with moisture and/or oxygen through adsorption.
11. The barrier stack of Claim 10, wherein the nanoparticles comprise carbon nanotubes.
- 15 12. The barrier stack of Claim 11, wherein the carbon nanotubes have a multiwall conformation.
13. The barrier stack of Claim 11 or 12, wherein the amount of carbon nanotubes present is about 0.01% to about 10% of the total weight of nanoparticles present in the sealing layer.
- 20 14. The barrier stack of any of Claims 5 to 13, wherein the sealing layer comprises carbon nanotubes and metal oxide nanoparticles, the quantity of metal oxide nanoparticles present being between 500 to 15000 times (by weight) the quantity of carbon nanotubes present.
- 25 15. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 14, further comprising inert nanoparticles capable of obstructing the permeation of moisture and/or oxygen through the defects present in the barrier layer.
- 30 16. The barrier stack of Claim 15, wherein the inert nanoparticles comprise a material selected from the group consisting of gold, copper, silver, platinum, silica, wollastonite, mullite, monmorillonite, silicate glass, fluorosilicate glass, fluoroborosilicate glass, aluminosilicate glass, calcium
- 35

silicate glass, calcium aluminum silicate glass, calcium aluminum fluorosilicate glass, titanium carbide, zirconium carbide, zirconium nitride, silicon carbide, or silicon nitride, metal sulfides, and a mixture or combination thereof.

5

17. The barrier stack of Claim 1 to 16, wherein the size of the nanoparticles is smaller than the average diameter of defects present in the at least one barrier layer.

10

18. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 17, wherein when the oxygen and/or moisture sensitive article comprises an electroluminescent electronic component, the average size of the nanoparticles is less than one-half the characteristic wavelength of light produced by the electroluminescent electronic component.

15

19. The barrier stack of Claim 18, wherein the nanoparticles have a length of less than 200 nm.

20

20. The barrier stack of any of Claims 17 to 19, wherein the nanoparticles are rod-shaped, wherein said rod-shape has a diameter of between about 10 nm to 50 nm, a length of 50 to 400 nm, and an aspect ratio of 5 or more.

25

21. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 20, wherein the nanoparticles have at least two different shapes.

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22. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 21, wherein the nanoparticles have a surface area to weight ratio of between about 1 m²/g to about 200 m²/g.

23. The barrier stack of any of Claim 1 to 22, wherein the sealing layer further comprises a polymeric binder, wherein the nanoparticles are distributed within the polymeric binder.

24. The barrier stack of Claim 23, wherein the polymeric binder is derived from a monomer having at least one polymerisable group.
- 5 25. The barrier stack of Claim 24, wherein the polymeric binder comprises a material selected from the group consisting of polyacrylate, polyacrylamide, polyepoxide, parylene, polysiloxanes and polyurethane.
- 10 26. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 25, wherein the barrier layer comprises a material selected from indium tin oxide (ITO), TiAlN, SiO₂, SiC, Si₃N₄, TiO₂, HfO₂, Y₂O₃, Ta₂O₅, and Al₂O₃.
27. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 27, further comprising a substrate for supporting the multilayer film.
- 15 28. The barrier stack of Claim 28, wherein the multilayer film is orientated such that the sealing layer is arranged on the substrate.
- 20 29. The barrier stack of Claims 28 or 29, wherein the substrate comprises a material selected from polyacetate, polypropylene, polyimide, cellophane, poly(1-trimethylsilyl-1-propyne), poly(4-methyl-2-pentyne), polyimide, polycarbonate, polyethylene, polyethersulfone, epoxy resins, polyethylene terephthalate, polystyrene, polyurethane, polyacrylate, and polydimethylphenylene oxide, styrene-divinylbenzene copolymers, polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF), nylon, nitrocellulose, cellulose, glass, 25 indium tin oxide, nano-clays, silicones, polydimethylsiloxanes, biscyclopentadienyl iron, and polyphosphazenes.
- 30 30. The barrier stack of any of Claims 28 to 30, wherein the substrate is flexible.
31. The barrier stack of any of Claims 28 to 30, wherein the substrate is rigid.
- 35 32. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 26, wherein the multilayer film comprises at least 3 or at least 5 barrier layers.

33. The barrier stack of any of Claims 32, wherein the multilayer film is arranged on one surface of the substrate.
- 5 34. The barrier stack of any of Claims 28 to 32, wherein each multilayer film is arranged on each opposing surface of the substrate.
35. The barrier stack of any of Claims 28 to 33, further comprising a planarising layer interposed between the substrate and the multilayer film.
- 10 36. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 34, further comprising a terminal layer for protecting the multilayer film.
37. The barrier stack of Claim 35, wherein the terminal layer comprises an acrylic film.
- 15 38. The barrier stack of Claim 36, wherein the acrylic film has distributed therein LiF and/or MgF₂ particles.
- 20 39. The barrier stack of any of Claims 1 to 38, wherein the water vapour permeation rate of the encapsulation barrier stack is less than about 10⁻⁵ g/m²/day or 10⁻⁶ g/m²/day.
- 25 40. An electronic device comprising an active component that is sensitive to moisture and/or oxygen, said active component being arranged within an encapsulation barrier stack according to any of claims 1 to 39.
- 30 41. The electronic device of Claim 40, wherein the barrier stack forms a base substrate for supporting the reactive component.
42. The electronic device of Claim 40 or 41, wherein the encapsulation barrier stack further comprises
- 35 a covering layer arranged proximally over the active component to form a proximal encapsulation, said reactive component being

sandwiched between the covering layer and the encapsulation barrier stack.

5 43. The electronic device of Claim 41, wherein the shape of the covering layer conforms to the external shape of the reactive component.

44. The electronic device of any of Claims 39 to 42, wherein the encapsulation further comprises
10 a cover substrate attached to the base substrate by means of an adhesive layer, said adhesive layer being arranged at least substantially along the edge of the cover substrate for forming a rim-sealed enclosure around the reactive component.

15 45. The electronic device of Claim 40, wherein the active component is arranged on a base substrate, and the encapsulation barrier stack forms an encapsulation layer over the reactive component that seals the reactive component against the base substrate.

20 46. The electronic device of any of Claims 40 to 45, wherein the reactive component is selected from the group consisting of an Organic Light Emitting Device (OLED), charged-coupled device (CCD), and micro-electro-mechanical sensors (MEMS).

25 47. A method for the manufacture of an encapsulation barrier stack according to any of Claims 1 to 39, comprising:

 forming at least one barrier layer and at least one sealing layer in alternating sequence on a surface for receiving the barrier stack,
 wherein
 forming the at least one sealing layer comprises mixing a
30 polymerisable compound with a nanoparticle dispersion to form a sealing mixture, and polymerising the sealing mixture over the at least one barrier layer under vacuum.

48. The method of any of Claims 47, further comprising

providing a substrate for supporting the barrier stack, wherein said at least one sealing layer is first formed on the substrate.

5 49. The method of Claim 48, wherein the substrate comprises a barrier layer.

50. The method of Claim 48, wherein the substrate comprises a polymer substrate.

10 51. The method of any of Claims 48 to 50, wherein the substrate is degassed at a temperature of between about 30°C to about 100°C under vacuum for at least about 1 hour.

15 52. The method of any of Claims 48 to 51, wherein the nanoparticle dispersion comprises nanoparticles dispersed in at least one organic solvent.

20 53. The method of Claim 52, wherein said at least one organic solvent is selected from ethers, ketones, aldehydes and glycols.

54. The method of any of Claims 48 to 52, wherein the sealing mixture is spin coated onto the barrier layer.

25 55. The method of any of Claims 46 to 49, further comprising carrying out sonification of the sealing mixture prior to polymerisation.

56. The method of Claim 55, wherein sonification is carried for at least about 30 minutes.

30 57. The method of any of Claims 48 to 55, wherein the mixing of the polymerisable compound with the nanoparticle dispersion is carried out in a polar organic solvent.

58. The method of Claim 57, wherein the polar organic solvent comprises a mixture of ethylene glycol and 2-methoxyethanol in 1:1 molar ratio.

5 59. The method of any of Claims 48 to 58, wherein the polymerisable compound is curable by ultraviolet light.

60. The method of Claim 59, wherein the polymerisable compound is selected from acrylic acid, methyl acrylate, ethyl acrylate and butyl
10 acrylate.

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