WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A processing method in which a focal point of a laser beam with such a wavelength as to be transmitted through a workpiece is positioned inside the workpiece and the workpiece is irradiated with the laser beam to form a modified layer inside the workpiece, the processing method comprising:

a holding step of holding the workpiece by a chuck table including a holding surface that holds the workpiece in an upper surface;

a sheet covering step of covering the upper surface of the chuck table in addition to the workpiece by a sheet having transmissibility;

a close contact step of generating a suction force for the holding surface of the chuck table and reducing a pressure on a region covered by the sheet, to bring the workpiece into close contact with the upper surface of the chuck table by an atmospheric pressure applied to the sheet; and

after the close contact step, a modified layer forming step of positioning the focal point of the laser beam inside the workpiece through the sheet and irradiating the workpiece with the laser beam to form the modified layer, in a state where the pressure on the

region covered by the sheet is reduced, and with the sheet covering the upper surface of the chuck table in addition to the workpiece.

2. The processing method according to claim 1, wherein

the workpiece is a wafer on which a plurality of devices are formed on a front surface in such a manner as to be marked out by a plurality of planned dividing lines that intersect each other, and the modified layers are formed inside the wafer along the planned dividing lines in the modified layer forming step.

3. The processing method according to claim 1, wherein

the workpiece is an ingot, and the modified layers are formed in a whole region of an inside of the ingot corresponding to a thickness of a wafer to be generated from the ingot, in the modified layer forming step.