

Description

Background of the Invention

This invention relates to microelectronic memories and, more particularly, to floating gate memory devices.

In recent years considerable effort has been devoted to the development of GaAs-based static random access memories (SRAMS). There has been, on the other hand, very limited activity on dynamic random access memories (DRAMS), although AlGaAs/GaAs structures for such applications have been proposed. See, for example, T. E. Dungan et al, IEEE Electron Dev. Lett., Vol. EDL-8, p. 743 (1987), M. R. Melloch et al, Appl. Phys. Lett., Vol. 49, p. 1471 (1986), and M. R. Melloch et al, Appl. Phys. Lett., Vol. 50, p. 1657 (1987). Likewise there has been little, if any, work on GaAs-based read only memories (ROMs) whether electronically programmable (EPROMs) or not.

Previously, however, workers in the art have demonstrated the storage of carriers in heterostructures following hot electron injection by real-space transfer (M. Keever et al, IEEE Electron Dev. Lett., Vol. 3, p. 297-299 (1983)). Luryi et al observed a long-term memory effect in a charge injection transistor at 77° K when the collector electrode was disconnected (S. Luryi et al, Appl. Phys. Lett., Vol. 45, p. 1294-1296 (1984). This effect is due to charge accumulation in the floating substrate due to hot electron injection. Hot electron programmable random access memories based on the effect were subsequently proposed (S. Luryi et al, Superlattices and Microstructures, Vol. 5, p. 389-400 (1985)).

An important class of Si-based non-volatile memories utilize floating gate devices which are described by S. M Sze, Physics of Semiconductor Devices, Wiley, New York (1981), p. 496. These devices are currently being commercially used in a large variety of applications ranging from computers to microprocessor-controlled equipment. In conventional Si-based floating gate memory devices, electrons are injected from the channel into a polysilicon floating gate surrounded by insulators. Injection occurs via either an avalanche or a tunneling mechanism after application of a large positive voltage (several tens of volts) to the control gate. The stored charge in the floating gate then modifies the channel conductance. To erase the memory a large negative voltage is applied to the control gate so that the charge is injected from the floating gate back into the channel by tunneling.

The standard Si-based floating gate memory circuit utilizes the same electrical path to perform the read and write functions and a single FET to control current flow in that path. Three voltage levels, including a switched power supply, are used to perform read, write and erase functions (Ong, D.G. Modern

Mos Technology: Processes, Devices & Design. McGraw Hill, 1984, pp.215-217.

A memory device as set out in the preamble of claim 1 is disclosed in EP-A-0202 755. The channel region is of semi-insulating material, normally substantially free of charge carriers in the absence of an applied gate voltage. A potential well region close to the channel region is doped n-type. To write into the device a positive gate voltage is applied. A graded-bandgap region between the control gate and the potential well has a bandgap which increases towards the control gate.

Summary of the Invention

According to the invention there is provided a memory device as set out in claim 1.

Another aspect of the invention resides in a memory circuit made possible by the inventive memory device in which the read, write and erase functions require only two voltage levels on the row and column select (write) lines, with the power supply being a constant voltage rather than a switched one. Each memory cell includes a first FET having its channel connected between the control gate of the memory device and a write line and a second FET having its channel connected between the drain of the memory device and a read line, with the gates of the two FETs connected to the same (e.g. row) select line.

In addition, unlike some Si-based floating gate memories, the entire memory does not have to be erased before a particular cell can be written because a logic "0" can be written into that cell without changing the state of any other cell, if so desired.

Brief Description of the Drawing

The invention, together with its various features and advantages, can be readily understood from the following, more detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, in which the various figures are not drawn to scale in the interest of clarity. In FIGs. 1, 11 and 12, corresponding components have been given identical reference numerals, but with primed notation in FIG. 11 and double-primed notation in FIG. 12. In FIGs. 2-10 the energy band diagrams are schematic and do not account for subtleties resulting from the direct-indirect band structure transitions.

FIG. 1 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a self-aligned floating gate memory device in accordance with one embodiment of the invention including, at the right, an equilibrium conduction band energy diagram of the structure.

FIGs. 2-5 show the conduction band energy diagrams of the device of FIG. 1 in state logic state "0" with no carriers in the potential well or floating gate (FIG. 2), during a write operation (FIG. 3), in

logic state "1" with carriers in the well (FIG. 4), and during an erase operation (FIG. 5);

FIG. 6 shows a conduction band energy diagram of a memory device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention in which the injector is graded on both sides and/or the channel-side barrier is of increased height;

FIG. 7 shows a conduction band energy diagram of yet another embodiment of our invention in which the well is deeper adjacent the channel barrier;

FIGs. 8-10 show conduction band energy diagrams of an embodiment of the invention in equilibrium (FIG. 8) corresponding to FIG. 6 with the channel-side grading of the injector being depicted by line 44, in logic state "1" with carriers in the potential well (FIG. 9), and during an erase operation (FIG. 10);

FIG. 11 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an illustrative embodiment in which the mesa is etched by reactive ion etching (RIE);

FIG. 12 is a schematic cross-sectional view of still another embodiment in which the floating gate is located in the mesa, the sidewalls of which are passivated;

FIG. 13 is a memory circuit in accordance with another aspect of the invention; and

FIG. 14 is a schematic of an imaging application of an array of memory devices in accordance with still another aspect of the invention.

Detailed Description

Turning now to FIG. 1 there is shown a floating gate memory device 10 in accordance with one embodiment of the invention comprising source electrode means 12, drain electrode means 14, control gate electrode means 16 and a semiconductor channel 18 for conducting carriers from the source to the drain. In this context, the electrode means is understood to include not only the metal layers (contacts) 12.1, 14.1 and 16.1, but also zones 12.2 and 14.2 utilized to provide low resistance path between the channel 18 and the source and drain contacts. These zones may be formed, for example, by ion-implantation or by alloying the contacts, as is well known in the art. Likewise, the electrode means include contact-facilitating layer 34 and mesa 16.2 which may be formed therefrom.

A semiconductor heterostructure 20 is disposed between the channel 18 and the control gate means 16. The heterostructure includes a narrow bandgap region 20.1 forming a potential well 24 (or floating gate) which is located sufficiently proximate the channel 18 to at least partially deplete it when carriers are present in the well. The heterostructure also includes a graded bandgap injector region 20.2 for controlling the injection of carriers from the control gate

16 into the potential well 24 and conversely. To confine (store) carriers in the potential well, region 20.1 is typically bounded by a wider bandgap channel-side barrier layer 20.3 and an optional, wider bandgap gate-side barrier layer 20.4. The latter is optional because the wide bandgap portion of the injector region may serve as the gate-side barrier. The thickness of the channel-side barrier is chosen to be large enough to prevent carriers from tunneling from the well into the channel 18, yet, at the same time, thin enough to allow carriers in the well to at least partially deplete the channel. To provide better confinement of carriers in the channel 18 an additional barrier layer or superlattice (not shown) may be disposed between the channel and the buffer layer 32.

In a practical embodiment, the device also includes a semi-insulating substrate 30 on which the buffer layer 32 may be epitaxially grown. In addition, the configuration depicted in FIG. 1 relies upon an inverted trapezoidal mesa 16.2 on which the gate contact 16.1 is formed and which further utilizes the undercut of the mesa to effect self-aligned deposition of the source and drain contacts 12.1 and 14.1, as is well known in the art.

In operation, which will be described in conjunction with FIGs. 2-5, the memory device is in a logic "0" state, as shown in FIG. 2, when there are no carriers in the potential well 24. Under these conditions the channel is not depleted and the magnitude of current flowing from the source to the drain can be detected during a read operation as corresponding to logic "0". To perform a write operation a negative voltage is applied to the gate in order to depress the graded bandgap region 20.2 and the gate barrier 20.4, as shown in FIG. 3, thereby enabling carriers to be injected via thermionic injection (arrow 39) into the well 24. When the write voltage is removed, the band diagram is depicted in FIG. 4 with carriers in the well 24 causing at least partial depletion of the channel 18; that is, the carriers in the well repel the carriers in the channel causing the latter to move away from the interface between the channel-side barrier and the channel itself. This depletion of the channel adjacent to the interface means that the effective channel width where carriers flow is smaller and its resistance is higher. The magnitude of current which flows from the source to the drain is thereby reduced and can be detected as corresponding to logic state "1". The carriers are stored in the well for an extended period of time and thus the memory device need not be refreshed. To erase the memory a positive voltage is applied to the gate and, as shown in FIG. 5, carriers in the well 24 are injected back into the control gate principally via tunneling (arrow 42) although some thermionic emission may occur.

Since the removal of carriers from the potential well by tunneling is an inefficient mechanism, in that it involves use of relatively high electric fields, it is pre-

ferred that the structure be designed to enhance thermionic emission. To do so the graded bandgap injector region 20.2 is preferably graded on both sides, as shown in FIG. 6. In one embodiment depicted by dashed line 48 of FIG. 6, the grading on the channel side of the injector region extends only part way to the channel-side barrier 20.3. Preferably, however, the grading of the injector region, as depicted by dashed line 44, extends all the way to the channel-side barrier 20.3. The latter embodiment has the virtue of symmetrical (or nearly so) write and erase operations. FIGs. 8-10 depict this embodiment in three stages: no charge in the well 24 (FIG. 8), charge in the well (FIG. 9), and during an erase operation (FIG. 10) which points out how the double-sided grading of the barrier facilitates efficient erasure.

Alternatively, carriers may be confined adjacent the channel-side barrier 20.3 by forming there a deeper potential well 50, as shown in FIG. 7. Well 50 may be realized by growing a narrower bandgap (e.g., compositionally graded) layer adjacent to barrier 20.3.

The barrier layers are preferably made of indirect bandgap semiconductor material, whereas the potential well 24 (i.e., region 20.1) is preferably made of direct bandgap semiconductor material. In general, the object of these choices is to create an energy band structure mismatch; that is, to position the energy minima of the conduction bands of the well and barrier materials at different points in momentum space (known as symmetry points). This feature increases the time it takes for a carrier in the potential well to traverse a barrier via thermionic emission; hence it increases the storage time of the memory device. Storage time can also be increased by making the height of the barriers greater as depicted, for example, by the dashed line 52 in FIG. 6.

In general, the various embodiments of the invention can be realized with semiconductor layers fabricated from Group III-V compound semiconductors which are essentially lattice-matched to one another, for example, GaAs/AlGaAs. Using this materials system, for example, the device of FIG. 1 could comprise GaAs for channel 18, potential well 24 (region 20.1), contact-facilitating layer 34, buffer layer 32 and substrate 30. Alternatively, the gate electrode means 16 may comprise a strained layer of highly doped InGaAs under a refractory metal layer 16.1 (e.g., W or WSi). The barrier layers 20.3 and 20.4 could comprise AlAs and the injector region 20.2 would be graded from a composition of GaAs adjacent layer 34 to AlAs adjacent layer 20.4. However, other semiconductor materials, including strained layers, are not precluded. For example, it may be desirable to exploit the high mobility of InGaAs by utilizing it as the material for channel 18. In addition, the embodiment of FIG. 7 utilizing a narrow bandgap material to form the deeper potential well 50 contemplates utilizing a narrower

bandgap material which, if used in conjunction with the GaAs system, also implies a strained layer. Finally, materials other than the Group III-V compounds may be utilized to fabricate all or part of the layers of the device. For example, the channel-side barrier layer 20.3 could comprise calcium fluoride (bandgap 12 eV) which can be epitaxially grown on GaAs (and conversely), thus enabling higher barrier energies compared to the lower ones available from AlGaAs. As noted before, in conjunction with FIG. 6, a higher barrier 52 enhances storage time.

From a processing standpoint, the embodiment of FIG. 1 may employ relatively standard wet chemical etching to produce the undercut mesa 16.2 as well as ion implantation of, for example, oxygen, boron or protons to create electrical isolation regions 33. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 11, a relatively straight-walled mesa 16.2' can be realized using reactive ion etching and a suitable stop-etch layer (not shown) at the bottom of the mesa, such as a semiconductor layer containing Al. In both FIGs. 1 and 11 the carriers in the potential well 24 are laterally confined to a zone 22.1 or 22.1' underneath the gate due to Fermi-energy pinning (band bending) at the surface regions 13 or 13' which causes depletion from the surface through the floating gate layer 20.1 or 20.1', but only in zones 22.2 or 22.2' outside the overlying gate. Some additional confinement is due to the screening of the source-drain field under the control gate by the high density of stored carriers there. Consequently, the position of the potential well layer 20.1 and the channel 18 below the surface should be chosen so as to enhance the desired depletion of the former, but minimize that of the latter (outside the overlying gate). This goal can be facilitated also by suitable doping and thickness of contact-facilitating layer 34 or 34' in region 13 or 13'.

On the other hand, FIG. 12 differs from FIG. 11 in several respects. First, the floating gate layer 20.1" is located in the mesa 16.2", and the mesa has its vertical sidewalls passivated by dielectric layers 54 (e.g., SiO₂ or SiN_x) to reduce surface leakage. Second, the lateral extent of the zone in which carriers are confined in the floating gate layer is physically defined by the edges of the mesa 16.2", as compared to being defined by the depletion and screening effects mentioned above. In addition, FIG. 12 demonstrates self-aligned ion implanted contact regions 12.2" and 14.2".

The floating gate memory devices described above are incorporated into a unique memory circuit, as shown in FIG. 13, which is capable of operating from a constant (non-switched) supply voltage source V_{DD} and with only two voltage levels required to perform write, read, erase and row select functions. Typically, a two level d.c. voltage signal is coupled to the row select lines, but opposite polarity pulses are applied to the write lines. See also claim 11. The floating

gate memory device Q_{FG} is incorporated in a memory cell which also includes a pair of field effect transistors (FETs) Q1 and Q2. Q1 has its channel connected between the control gate of Q_{FG} and a write line. Q2 has its channel connected between the drain of Q_{FG} and both a write line and the supply voltage. The source of Q_{FG} is connected to a reference potential (e.g., ground), and the gates of Q1 and Q2 are connected together and to a row select line. The write line and read (or output) lines of each column are connected to a select switch 60 (or multiplexer) which is controlled (together with all other such switches of other columns) by a computer processor 85 to set the memory to a read or write operation mode. Processor 85 supplies the opposite polarity pulses shown to control the states of switches 60 and 80.

In order to write a logic "1" into the memory device Q_{FG} the row select voltage is made positive if Q1 and Q2 are enhancement mode n-channel FETs, which close Q1 and Q2, and a negative pulse is applied to the write line through Q1 in order to charge the floating gate of Q_{FG} . (Opposite polarity select voltages would be employed if Q1 and Q2 are depletion mode n-channel FETs.) All other rows are at select line voltages which are negative, therefore the Q1's of those rows are open and the corresponding Q_{FG} 's are not charged. Conversely, in order to write a logic "0" (which is equivalent to the erase function) the same procedure is followed, except that a positive pulse is applied to the write line.

In order to perform the read operation, the row select line is again made positive in order to close Q1 and Q2 associated with the Q_{FG} to be read. Then, the output line will be at the supply voltage V_{DD} if Q_{FG} is open (logic state "1"); i.e., no current flows through Q2 and Q_{FG} to ground. On the other hand, the output line is at ground if Q_{FG} is closed (logic state "0"); i.e., Q_{FG} and Q2 are short circuits to ground. Note, during the read operation, only the selected Q2 is closed, all others are open. Therefore, even if the Q_{FG} 's associated with the other Q2's are closed, no current flows to their outputs.

In order to write a word (byte) of information into the memory circuit, an off-chip coding circuit 70, which illustratively includes an array of inverters with enable inputs, is coupled to the select lines 60. Each bit of the byte of information to be stored is supplied on separate input line to coding circuit 70. If the memory utilizes negative clock pulses, which are also supplied to the circuit 70, the clock pulse will be transferred unaltered from a coding circuit output to a particular write line if the bit supplied to the corresponding input to the coding circuit is a logic "1". In contrast, the clock pulse will be inverted if the corresponding bit is logic "0". The converse operation occurs if the memory uses positive clock pulses instead of negative ones. An illustrative write path includes line 92 connecting circuit 70 and switch 80, line 81 connect-

ing switch 80 and switch 60, and line 62 connecting switch 60 and Q1.

In order to perform a read operation, an output line 61 is coupled through switch 60 and line 81 to switch 80 which decouples the coding circuit 70 and connects the output line 61 to a sense amplifier 90 via line 91.

Example

A memory device having a structure corresponding to the energy band diagram of FIG. 2 was grown by molecular beam epitaxy on a semi-insulating LEC GaAs substrate. The channel layer 18 comprised 750 Å (10Å=1nm) of n-type GaAs Si doped to $1 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, and the barrier layer 20.3 comprised 1000 Å of undoped AlAs. An undoped ($p \approx 1 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-3}$) 2000 Å thick GaAs floating gate region 20.1 was grown on top of barrier 20.3 and was followed by an undoped barrier 20.4 comprising 200 Å of AlAs and an undoped injector region 20.2 comprising 1800 Å of $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{As}$ compositionally graded from $x=1$ adjacent barrier 20.4 to $x=0$ adjacent contact layer 34. The GaAs n^+ contact layer 34 was Si doped to $2 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and was 5000 Å thick.

To process the devices the gate contact was evaporated (Ge/Au/Ag/Au, $40 \mu\text{m} \times 150 \mu\text{m}$) and the gate mesa was defined with standard photolithographic techniques. The etching, performed with a (3:1:50) $\text{H}_3\text{PO}_4\text{:H}_2\text{O}_2\text{:H}_2\text{O}$ solution, was stopped a few hundred Angstroms above the graded region 20.2. The source and drain contacts were evaporated (Ni/Au/Ge/Ag/Au, $80 \mu\text{m} \times 150 \mu\text{m}$, $60 \mu\text{m}$ separation) and alloyed together with the gate contact (450°C , 18 s). The different composition of the contacts insured that, while the gate contact is shallow, the source and drain contacts deeply penetrate and reach the channel 18. To finish the processing the devices were further etched while monitoring the source-to-drain conductance until it dropped to the expected channel value. This procedure guaranteed that the surface potential depleted primarily the barrier and floating gate layers and only marginally affected the channel conductance.

The device was operated as follows. The drain was positively biased (typically at $\approx 1 \text{ V}$) and the electrons were injected into the floating gate via a negative gate pulse. The band diagram during this write phase is shown in FIG. 3. The width of the floating gate layer was such that most of the injected electrons were collected. This negative charge partially depleted the channel causing a decrease in the drain current. The device can be subsequently erased by applying a pulse of opposite polarity to the gate or by using visible light (similar to what is done in FAMOS devices with uv light). In the latter mode, the holes photogenerated throughout the structure preferentially accumulate in the floating gate layer and re-

combine with the electrons stored in the GaAs well, while the majority of photoexcited electrons drift away with from it.

It is important to note that the electrons once injected by the graded bandgap region 20.2 into the potential well do not drift laterally towards the drain (e.g., the electrons are confined to region 22.1 under the gate as shown in FIG. 1). Such drift is prevented by the following mechanism. The surface potential of the etched region between the gate and drain electrode depletes the portion of the floating gate layer beneath it. This depletion provides both electrostatic lateral confinement and a high lateral spreading resistance which also aids confinement of the injected electrons. The high density of the latter (typically $\geq 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2}$) simultaneously screens the source-to-drain field in the portion of the floating gate layer beneath the control gate metallization. Thus, practically all the source-to-drain voltage drops across the highly resistive portion of the floating gate layer between the control gate and the source and drain, which further reduces the lateral leakage of electrons. These electrons accumulate primarily at the interface with the AlAs gate-side barrier 20.4. They are confined there in a quasi-equilibrium situation by the interface electric field associated with the positive charge of the ionized donors in the channel region depleted by the stored electrons. Electrons eventually leak-out of the floating gate potential well by thermionic emission across the AlAs channel-side barrier 20.3. This emission restores, after a certain time, the initial value of the drain current.

The measurements were performed in a Helitran dewar from liquid helium to room temperature. With the source at ground, electrons were injected in the well by applying negative pulses of different amplitude and duration to the gate contact, causing a drop of the drain current I_D . I_D was measured as a function of time at a constant positive drain-to-source bias V_{DS} . The state of the memory can be read by measuring the drain current at any given time.

The drain current as a function of time at 140° K was measured following electron injection with a -5 V gate pulse of 1 ms duration at $V_{DS} = +0.8 \text{ V}$. After an initial drop, the current tended to return to its original value with a time constant related to the discharging of the floating gate potential well. From the values of the drain current before and immediately after the injection pulse, the charge accumulated in the well was estimated. From such data, the doping level of the channel and the dimensions of the structure, calculations show that $\approx 10^8$ electrons were stored in the well, corresponding to a sheet density of $\approx 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$. Following an initial short nonexponential decay, the current decayed exponentially with a time constant of 4 hrs., the storage or retention time of the memory. Similar measurements at liquid nitrogen temperatures under identical injection and bias conditions re-

vealed no visible decay of the drain current after several hours. From a plot of the time constant vs. reciprocal temperature an activation energy of 0.2 eV was deduced. This is close to the measured value of the conduction band discontinuity between AlAs/GaAs, indicating that thermionic emission across the channel-side barrier represents the main discharge mechanism of the floating gate. Extrapolating the Arrhenius plot down to 77 K, a storage time of ≈ 700 yrs. was estimated. These results illustrate the potential of these devices for non-volatile memory applications in GaAs/AlGaAs-based low temperature electronics.

At room temperature, the devices exhibited storage times of a few seconds. These time constants place these devices in the realm of interest for dynamic memories as well. Measurements were made of the effect of varying the gate pulse amplitude from -2.5 V to -7 V for the same pulse duration (1 ms). An increasing drain current drop was observed and was a manifestation of the greater charge injected in the floating gate. In this gate voltage range, injection is controlled by space charge limited transport in the strongly biased graded bandgap injector region.

To erase the memory a light pulse (< 1 s duration) from a microscope lamp was turned on sometime after a negative pulse was applied to the drain. After a transient the measured drain current returned to the original value.

In order to electronically erase the memories with a positive gate pulse, which would be useful for E²PROM's (Electrically Erasable Programmable Read Only Memories), leakage currents need to be reduced by reducing the thickness of the graded injector region 20.2. Such a design would allow use of considerably reduced gate voltages to erase the device by tunneling. The erase operation is also facilitated by making the injector region with both sides graded as described with reference to FIGs. 6 and 7. Without such a modification the devices are still suitable for EAROM's (Electrically Alterable Read Only Memories) at cryogenic temperatures and for DRAMS at room temperature.

It should be noted that the quasi-stationary value reached by the current after the gate pulse, was lower than that before the pulse by about 10%. This suggests that deep levels are present, particularly in the AlAs barriers. The drain current did not return to the original value for times significantly longer than the dominant time constant. To restore the original drain current the samples were briefly illuminated.

The ratio of the drain currents between the logic states of the memory is presently about 3:1 but in some applications (e.g., simple read circuits) a ratio of 10:1 would be desirable and can be obtained by reducing the channel layer doping and/or thickness. In addition, well-known electrical isolation zones, surrounding the active region of the device, may be used

to reduce leakage current between source and drain. The lateral portions of such isolation are depicted by zones 33 (FIG. 1), 33' (FIG. 11) and 33" (FIG. 12).

It is to be understood that the above-described arrangements are merely illustrative of the many possible specific embodiments which can be devised to represent application of the principles of the invention. In particular, although holes have lower mobility than electrons, making n-type devices preferred, p-type devices are not precluded. In addition, an array of memory devices in accordance with the invention may be used as an array of photodetectors in a variety of different applications; for example, to detect optical signals transmitted by self-electro-optic effect devices (SEEDs) or to detect optical images. The latter application is illustrated in FIG. 14 where object 102 is imaged onto array 100 of charged floating gate memory devices 101 in accordance with the invention. The spatially varying light intensity of the image erases selected devices 101 creating an electrical signal detected by equipment 104. The amount of charge coupled out of each well is related to the intensity of light incident on that well, hence the device provides as a grey-scale capability.

Claims

1. A memory device comprising
 - source, drain and control gate electrode means (12,14,16),
 - a semiconductor channel (18) for conducting carriers of a first conductivity type from said source to said drain means,
 - a semiconductor heterostructure (20) disposed between said channel and control gate means, said heterostructure including a graded bandgap injector region (20.2) for controlling the flow of carriers between said control gate means and a potential well (20.1), CHARACTERIZED IN THAT
 - said channel (18) comprises a thin layer normally having a population of charge carriers of said first conductivity type in the absence of charge injected into the potential well by application at voltage to said control gate means;
 - said potential well is arranged to confine charge carriers of said first conductivity type injected from said control gate means to produce a charge in a region sufficiently close to said thin layer to at least partially deplete it; and
 - said graded-bandgap injector region comprising a grading in which the bandgap decreases toward said control gate means.
2. The device of claim 1 wherein said channel and said well are formed in relatively narrow bandgap semiconductor materials and said heterostructure includes between said well and said channel a barrier layer (20.3) comprising relatively wider bandgap semiconductor material, said injector region (20.2) having a composition which grades from a relatively narrow bandgap proximate said control gate means to a relatively wider bandgap proximate said well.
3. The device of claim 1 wherein said injector region includes first and second (48,46) regions of graded bandgap, the bandgap of said first region increasing from a point proximate said gate means toward said second region and the bandgap of said second region decreasing from said first region towards said channel.
4. The device of claim 3 wherein said potential well is graded (46) across its entire thickness.
5. The device of claim 3 wherein the bandgap of said potential well is graded (50) so that the well is deepest in a region thereof proximate said channel.
6. The device of any of the preceding claims wherein said gate electrode means comprises a mesa (16.2) which includes relatively narrow bandgap semiconductor material adjacent said injector region.
7. The device of claim 6 wherein said floating gate potential well is formed in said mesa.
8. The device of any of the preceding claims further including
 - surface region (13) between said gate electrode means and both said source and drain electrode means which cause depletion of the underlying semiconductor layers, and said well is positioned so as to be depleted in zones thereof under said surface regions, thereby confining carriers thereon to a zone under said gate electrode means.
9. The device of claim 2 wherein said potential well is formed in direct bandgap semiconductor material and said barrier layer comprises indirect bandgap semiconductor material.
10. The device of claim 9 wherein said semiconductor materials comprise Group III-V compound semiconductors.
11. A memory circuit comprising
 - a plurality of write lines (62), read lines (61), power supply lines, and row select lines,



to reduce leakage current between source and drain. The lateral portions of such isolation are depicted by zones 33 (FIG. 1), 33' (FIG. 11) and 33'' (FIG. 12).

It is to be understood that the above-described arrangements are merely illustrative of the many possible specific embodiments which can be devised to represent application of the principles of the invention. In particular, although holes have lower mobility than electrons, making n-type devices preferred, p-type devices are not precluded. In addition, an array of memory devices in accordance with the invention may be used as an array of photodetectors in a variety of different applications; for example, to detect optical signals transmitted by self-electro-optic effect devices (SEEDs) or to detect optical images. The latter application is illustrated in FIG. 14 where object 102 is imaged onto array 100 of charged floating gate memory devices 101 in accordance with the invention. The spatially varying light intensity of the image erases selected devices 101 creating an electrical signal detected by equipment 104. The amount of charge coupled out of each well is related to the intensity of light incident on that well, hence the device provides as a grey-scale capability.

Claims

1. A memory device comprising
 - source, drain and control gate electrode means (12,14,16),
 - a semiconductor channel (18) for conducting carriers of a first conductivity type from said source to said drain means,
 - a semiconductor heterostructure (20) disposed between said channel and control gate means, said heterostructure including a graded bandgap injector region (20.2) for controlling the flow of carriers between said control gate means and a potential well (20.1), CHARACTERIZED IN THAT
 - said channel (18) comprises a thin layer normally having a population of charge carriers of said first conductivity type in the absence of charge injected into the potential well by application at voltage to said control gate means;
 - said potential well is arranged to confine charge carriers of said first conductivity type injected from said control gate means to produce a charge in a region sufficiently close to said thin layer to at least partially deplete it; and
 - said graded-bandgap injector region comprising a grading in which the bandgap decreases toward said control gate means.
2. The device of claim 1 wherein said channel and said well are formed in relatively narrow bandgap semiconductor materials and said heterostructure includes between said well and said channel a barrier layer (20.3) comprising relatively wider bandgap semiconductor material, said injector region (20.2) having a composition which grades from a relatively narrow bandgap proximate said control gate means to a relatively wider bandgap proximate said well.
3. The device of claim 1 wherein said injector region includes first and second (48,46) regions of graded bandgap, the bandgap of said first region increasing from a point proximate said gate means toward said second region and the bandgap of said second region decreasing from said first region towards said channel.
4. The device of claim 3 wherein said potential well is graded (46) across its entire thickness.
5. The device of claim 3 wherein the bandgap of said potential well is graded (50) so that the well is deepest in a region thereof proximate said channel.
6. The device of any of the preceding claims wherein said gate electrode means comprises a mesa (16.2) which includes relatively narrow bandgap semiconductor material adjacent said injector region.
7. The device of claim 6 wherein said floating gate potential well is formed in said mesa.
8. The device of any of the preceding claims further including surface region (13) between said gate electrode means and both said source and drain electrode means which cause depletion of the underlying semiconductor layers, and said well is positioned so as to be depleted in zones thereof under said surface regions, thereby confining carriers thereon to a zone under said gate electrode means.
9. The device of claim 2 wherein said potential well is formed in direct bandgap semiconductor material and said barrier layer comprises indirect bandgap semiconductor material.
10. The device of claim 9 wherein said semiconductor materials comprise Group III-V compound semiconductors.
11. A memory circuit comprising a plurality of write lines (62), read lines (61), power supply lines, and row select lines,



a plurality of memory cells connected to said lines, each of said cells comprising

a memory device (Q_{F0}) according to any of the preceding claims having its source means connected to a source of reference potential,

a first FET (Q_1) having its channel connected between said gate means of said memory device and one of said write lines,

a second FET (Q_2) having its channel connected between said drain means of said memory device and one of said read lines and one of said power supply lines,

the gate of said FETs being connected to one of said row select lines, and

circuit means for maintaining the voltage on said supply line essentially constant.

12. The circuit of claim 11 further including a coding circuit (70) comprising

an array of inverters coupling a plurality of input lines, on which a byte of information to be stored is applied, to a corresponding plurality of output lines (92), each of which is coupled to a separate one of said write lines,

means for receiving clock pulses,

means for transferring a clock pulse unaltered to a write line whenever a bit from said byte on the corresponding input lines is a logic "1", and

means for inverting said clock pulse if the corresponding bit of said byte is a logic "0", said unaltered transfer and inverting occurring whenever said memory circuit utilizes negative clock pulses, and conversely whenever said memory circuit utilizes positive clock pulses.

13. Optical detection apparatus comprising

an array (100) of memory devices (101) according to any of claims 1-10,

means for injecting carriers into the wells of said devices,

means for making light incident on said array so as to remove carriers from at least one of said devices, thereby generating an electrical signal therefrom, and

means (104) for detecting said signal.

Patentansprüche

1. Speichereinrichtung mit einer Source-, Drain- und Steuer-Gate-Elektrodeneinrichtung (12, 14, 16), einem Halbleiterkanal (18) zum Leiten von Ladungsträgern eines ersten Leitfähigkeitstyps aus der Source- zur Drain-Einrichtung, eine Halbleiter-Heterostruktur (20), die zwischen der Kanal- und Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung angeordnet ist, wobei die Heterostruktur einen Gradienten-

Bandlücken-Injektorbereich (20.2) zum Steuern des Flusses der Ladungsträger zwischen der Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung und einem Potentialwall (20.1) umfaßt,

dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß der Kanal (18) eine dünne Schicht umfaßt, die in Abwesenheit von Ladungsträgern, die in den Potentialwall durch Anlegen einer Spannung an die Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung injiziert wurden, normalerweise eine Population von Ladungsträgern des ersten Leitfähigkeitstyps hat, wobei der Potentialwall ausgebildet ist, Ladungsträger des ersten Leitfähigkeitstyps, die aus der Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung injiziert wurden, einzuschließen, um eine Ladung in einem Bereich zu erzeugen, der an der dünnen Schicht ausreichend nahe ist, um diese wenigstens teilweise zu verarmen, und wobei der Gradienten-Bandlücken-Injektorbereich einen (sich ändernden, d.h.) Gradientenbereich aufweist, in welchem die Bandlücke auf die Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung zu abnimmt.

2. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 1, in welcher der Kanal und der Wall in Halbleitermaterialien mit relativ enger Bandlücke ausgebildet sind und die Heterostruktur zwischen dem Wall und dem Kanal eine Barrierenschicht (20.2) mit Halbleitermaterial relativ breiterer Bandlücke umfaßt, wobei der Injektorbereich (20.2) eine Zusammensetzung hat, die sich von einer relativ engen Bandlücke in der Nähe der Steuer-Gate-Einrichtung zu einer relativ breiten Bandlücke in der Nähe des Walls ändert.

3. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 1, in welcher der Injektorbereich einen ersten und zweiten (48, 46) Bereich sich ändernder Bandlücke (Gradienten-Bandlücke) umfaßt, wobei die Bandlücke des ersten Bereichs von einem Punkt in der Nähe der Steuer-Einrichtung auf den zweiten Bereich zu zunimmt und die Bandlücke des zweiten Bereichs von dem ersten Bereich auf den Kanal zu abnimmt.

4. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 3, in welcher der Potentialwall über seine gesamte Breite sich ändert (46).

5. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 3, in welcher die Bandlücke des Potentialwalls sich so ändert (50), daß der Wall in seinem dem Kanal nächstliegenden Bereich am tiefsten ist.

6. Einrichtung nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, in welcher die Gate-Elektrodeneinrichtung eine Mesa (16.2) umfaßt, die Halbleitermaterial mit relativ enger Bandlücke benachbart dem Injektorbereich umfaßt.



7. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 6,
in welcher der schwimmende Gate-Potentialwall
in der Mesa ausgebildet ist.

8. Einrichtung nach einem der vorstehenden An-
sprüche, ferner umfassend:
einen Oberflächenbereich (13) zwischen Gate-
Elektrodeneinrichtung und sowohl der Source-
als auch der Drain-Elektrodeneinrichtung, wel-
che die Verarmung der darunter liegenden Halb-
leiterschichten bewirken, wobei der Wall so ange-
ordnet ist, daß in diesem Zonen unter den Ober-
flächenbereichen verarmt werden, wodurch La-
dungsträger in diesem in einer Zone unter der
Gateelektrodeneinrichtung eingeschlossen wer-
den.

9. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 2,
in welcher der Potentialwall in Halbleitermaterial
mit direkter Bandlücke ausgebildet ist und die
Barrierenschicht Halbleitermaterial mit indirekter
Bandlücke umfaßt.

10. Einrichtung nach Anspruch 9,
in welcher die Halbleitermaterialien Gruppe-III-V-
Verbindungshalbleiter umfassen.

11. Speicherschaltung mit
einer Vielzahl von Schreibleitungen (62), Leselei-
tungen (61), Versorgungsleitungen und Reihen-
auswahlleitungen, einer Vielzahl von Speicher-
zellen, die mit diesen Leitungen verbunden sind,
wobei jede der Zellen umfaßt:
eine Speichereinrichtung (Q_{FG}) gemäß einem der
vorstehenden Ansprüche, deren Source-Einrich-
tung mit einer Source auf Bezugspotential ver-
bunden ist,
einem ersten FET (Q_1), dessen Kanal zwischen
der Gate-Einrichtung der Speichereinrichtung
und einer der Schreibleitungen angeschlossen
ist,
einem zweiten FET (Q_2), dessen Kanal zwischen
der Drain-Einrichtung der Speichereinrichtung
und einer der Leseleitungen und einer der Ver-
sorgungsleitungen angeschlossen ist, wobei das
Gate der FETs an eine der Reihenauswahlleitun-
gen angeschlossen ist, und einer Schaltungsein-
richtung, um die Spannung an der Versorgungs-
leitung im wesentlichen konstant zu halten.

12. Schaltung nach Anspruch 11,
ferner umfassend eine Codierungsschaltung
(70) mit einem Feld von Invertern, die eine Viel-
zahl von Eingangsleitungen, an welchen ein zu
speicherndes Informationsbyte angelegt wird, an
eine entsprechende Vielzahl von Ausgangslei-
tungen (92) koppeln, von denen jede an eine se-
parat Schreibleitung angeschlossen ist, einer

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

9

Einrichtung zum Empfangen von Taktpulsen, ei-
ner Einrichtung zum Übertragen eines ungeän-
derten Taktpulses zu einer Schreibleitung, wenn
ein Bit aus dem Byte an den entsprechenden Ein-
gangsleitungen eine logische "1" darstellt, und
einer Einrichtung zum Invertieren der Taktpulse,
falls das entsprechende Bit des Bytes eine logi-
sche "0" ist, wobei die ungeänderte Übertragung
und das Invertieren auftreten, wenn die Spei-
cherschaltung die negativen Taktpulse verwen-
det und das Umgekehrte auftritt, wenn die Spei-
cherschaltung die positiven Taktpulse verwen-
det.

13. Optische Erfassungsvorrichtung mit
einem Feld (100) aus Speichereinrichtungen
(101) gemäß einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 10,
einer Einrichtung zum Injizieren von Ladungsträ-
gern in die Wälle der Einrichtungen,
einer Einrichtung zum Einfallenlassen von Licht
auf das Feld, um so Ladungsträger aus wenig-
stens einer der Einrichtungen zu entfernen, wo-
bei daraus ein elektrisches Signal erzeugt wird,
und
einer Einrichtung (104) zum Erfassen des Si-
gnals.

Revendications

1. Un dispositif de mémoire comprenant
des structures d'électrodes de source, de
drain et de grille de commande (12, 14, 16),
un canal de semiconducteur (18) pour
conduire des porteurs d'un premier type de
conductivité, de la structure de source vers la
structure de drain,
une hétérostructure à semiconducteurs
(20) disposée entre les structures de canal et de
grille de commande, cette hétérostructure
comprenant une région d'injecteur à bande in-
terdite progressive (20.2) pour commander la cir-
culation de porteurs entre la structure de grille de
commande et un puits de potentiel (20.1),
CARACTERISE EN CE QUE
le canal (18) comprend une couche mince
ayant normalement une population de porteurs
de charge du premier type de conductivité, en
l'absence de charge injectée dans le puits de po-
tentiel par l'application d'une tension à la struc-
ture de grille de commande;
le puits de potentiel est conçu de façon à
confiner des porteurs de charge du premier type
de conductivité qui sont injectés à partir de la
structure de grille de commande, pour produire
une charge dans une région suffisamment pro-
che de la couche mince précitée, de façon à la fai-
re passer au moins partiellement dans une condi-



tion de désertion; et

la région d'injecteur à bande interdite progressive présente une variation progressive dans laquelle la bande interdite diminue en direction de la structure de grille de commande.

2. Le dispositif de la revendication 1, dans lequel le canal et le puits sont formés dans des matériaux semiconducteurs à bande interdite relativement étroite et l'hétérostructure comprend, entre le puits et le canal, une couche de barrière (20.3) consistant en un matériau semiconducteur à bande interdite relativement plus large, cette région d'injecteur (20.2) ayant une composition qui varie progressivement depuis une bande interdite relativement étroite à proximité de la structure de grille de commande, jusqu'à une bande interdite relativement plus large à proximité du puits.
3. Le dispositif de la revendication 1, dans lequel la région d'injecteur comprend des première et seconde régions (48, 46) à bande interdite progressive, la bande interdite de la première région augmentant à partir d'un point proche de la structure de grille en direction de la seconde région, et la bande interdite de la seconde région diminuant à partir de la première région vers le canal.
4. Le dispositif de la revendication 3, dans lequel le puits de potentiel présente une variation progressive (46) sur toute son épaisseur.
5. Le dispositif de la revendication 3, dans lequel la bande interdite du puits de potentiel présente une variation progressive (50) de façon que le puits soit le plus profond dans une région du puits qui est proche du canal.
6. Le dispositif de l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel la structure d'électrode de grille comprend une mésa (16.2) qui comprend un matériau semiconducteur à bande interdite relativement étroite en position adjacente à la région d'injecteur.
7. Le dispositif de la revendication 6, dans lequel le puits de potentiel de la grille flottante est formé dans la mésa.
8. Le dispositif de l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, comprenant en outre des régions de surface (13) entre la structure d'électrode de grille et les structures d'électrodes de source et de drain qui provoquent une désertion des couches de semiconducteurs

sous-jacentes, et le puits est placé de façon à prendre une condition de désertion dans des zones de ce puits qui se trouvent sous les régions de surface précitées, ce qui a pour effet de confiner dans une zone située sous la structure d'électrode de grille des porteurs se trouvant sur les régions de surface.

9. Le dispositif de la revendication 2, dans lequel le puits de potentiel est formé dans un matériau semiconducteur à bande interdite directe et la couche de barrière consiste en un matériau semiconducteur à bande interdite indirecte.
10. Le dispositif de la revendication 9, dans lequel les matériaux semiconducteurs consistent en semiconducteurs composés du type III-V.
11. Un circuit de mémoire comprenant un ensemble de conducteurs d'écriture (62), de conducteurs de lecture (61), de conducteurs d'alimentation et de conducteurs de sélection de ligne, un ensemble de cellules de mémoire connectées aux conducteurs précités, chacune de ces cellules comprenant un dispositif de mémoire (Q_{FG}) conforme à l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dont la structure de source est connectée à une source de potentiel de référence, un premier transistor à effet de champ (Q_1) dont le canal est connecté entre la structure de grille du dispositif de mémoire et l'un des conducteurs d'écriture, un second transistor à effet de champ (Q_2) dont le canal est connecté entre la structure de drain du dispositif de mémoire et l'un des conducteurs de lecture et l'un des conducteurs d'alimentation, La grille de ces transistors à effet de champ étant connectée à l'un des conducteurs de sélection de grille, et un circuit pour maintenir pratiquement constante la tension sur le conducteur d'alimentation.
12. Le circuit de la revendication 11, comprenant en outre un circuit de codage (70) qui comporte un réseau d'inverseurs connectant un ensemble de conducteurs d'entrée, sur lesquels est appliqué un multiplet d'information à enregistrer, à un ensemble correspondant de conducteurs de sortie (92), chacun d'eux étant connecté à l'un séparé des conducteurs d'écriture, des moyens pour recevoir des impulsions d'horloge, des moyens pour transférer une impulsion d'horloge sans modification vers un conducteur



d'écriture, chaque fois qu'un bit du multiplet sur les conducteurs d'entrée correspondants est un "1" logique, et

des moyens pour inverser l'impulsion d'horloge si le bit correspondant du multiplet est un "0" logique, le transfert sans modification et l'inversion ayant lieu chaque fois que le circuit de mémoire utilise des impulsions d'horloge négatives, tandis que c'est la condition inverse qui s'applique lorsque le circuit de mémoire utilise des impulsions d'horloge positives.

13. Appareil de détection optique comprenant un réseau (100) de dispositifs de mémoire (101) conformes à l'une quelconque des revendications 1-10, des moyens pour injecter des porteurs dans les puits de ces dispositifs, des moyens pour projeter de la lumière sur le réseau de façon à extraire des porteurs de l'un au moins des dispositifs, pour générer ainsi un signal électrique à partir de celui-ci, et des moyens (104) pour détecter ce signal.

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

11