

INTEGRATED CIRCUIT INDUCTOR

The present invention relates to an integrated circuit inductor and a method of making the same.

An integrated circuit inductor is an inductive component built up on a substrate in a similar manner to other components, and generally includes a spiral conductive trace. This arrangement suffers from the disadvantage of high parasitic losses, in the form of resistive and capacitive losses to the semiconductor substrate on which the integrated circuit is built.

A solution to this problem is to selectively etch the silicon substrate beneath the conductive trace, as described in US patent specification No. 5,539,241. This solution is shown in the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a plan view of the prior integrated circuit inductor and

Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view on the line II-II in Figure 1 of the prior inductor.

The inductor 1 comprises a spiral aluminium track 2. It is laid down on a insulating oxide layer 3, which itself covers the semiconductor substrate 4. From its inner end 5, an underpass track 6 at a lower level in deposited layers making up the inductor passes from the inner end 5 to a connection 7. The other, outer end 8 is directly connected to another connection 9 at the same level. The spiral track 2 has a substantial extent. If spaced from the semiconductor substrate by the thickness of the insulating layer alone, which has a comparatively high dielectric value, the inductive track has an appreciable capacitive connection to the substrate and hence at high frequencies, the component is liable to lose its inductive effect and act as a capacitor.

In accordance with the improvement of the said US patent, the oxide layer

has apertures 10 formed in it, with a track supporting portion 11 connected to the surround layer by bridges 12. Via the apertures, the substrate is etched away, leaving an air gap 14 beneath the oxide portion 11. Thus the inductive track 2 is spaced from semiconductor, reducing its capacitive connection thereto, air having a low dielectric constant. Whilst this is a distinct improvement, the formation of the air gap 14 requires the use of aggressive chemicals and is a slow process. Further, the air gap can be formed only as a post fabrication step, because the liquid etchant required is not used in the CMOS fabrication.

The object of the invention is to provide an improved integrated circuit inductor and method of making the same.

According to the invention there is provided an integrated circuit inductor, the integrated circuit having a silicon substrate and an oxide layer on the silicon substrate, the inductor comprising:

- an inductive loop deposited on the oxide layer;
- apertures in the oxide layer beneath the inductive loop;
- bridges adjacent the apertures and provided by portions of the oxide between an inner region and an outer region of the oxide layer, respectively within and without the inductive loop, the loop being supported on the bridges;
- a trench formed in the silicon substrate beneath the bridges, to provide an air gap between the inductive loop and the silicon substrate.

Preferably, the apertures and the bridges extend generally radially of the inner region; and the trench extends circumferentially of the inner region.

Normally the inductive loop will have a plurality of spirally arranged turns; and the oxide layer includes an underpass connection in one of the bridges from a peripheral connection for one end of the inductor to its inner end.

According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method of making an integrated circuit inductor, the integrated circuit having a silicon substrate

and an oxide layer on the silicon substrate, as claimed in claim 1, the method consisting in the steps of:

- depositing the inductive loop on the oxide layer;
- opening the apertures in the oxide beneath the inductive loop and
- providing the bridges to support the loop;
- forming the trench in the silicon substrate beneath the bridges.

Preferably, the trench is formed by etching of the silicon substrate; and the etching is continued until the trench is continuous beneath the extent of the inductive loop.

To help understanding of the invention, a specific embodiment thereof will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 3 is a plan view of an integrated circuit inductor according to the invention;

Figure 4 is a cross-sectional view on the line IV-IV in Figure 3 of the inductor of the invention,

Figures 5(i) to 5(vii) are cross-sectional views similar to Figure 4, but on a larger scale, of steps in the production of the inductor of Figure 3;

Figure 6 is a perspective scrap view of a corner portion of the inductor of Figure 3.

Referring to Figures 3 and 4, in common with the prior inductor, the inductor 101 of the invention has a spiral aluminium track 102. It is deposited on an oxide layer 103 over the silicon substrate 104. The latter is etched away in a trench 114 which extends around the beneath the track, to provide a low dielectric air gap 115. The oxide 103 has an inner region 1031 within the track 102, an outer region 1032 outside the track and a bridging region 1033 extending between the other regions,

the bridging region being comprised of intact bridges 1034 and gaps 1035 therebetween, which open to the trench and through which the etchant had access to the silicon substrate for its etching to form the trench.

Referring now to Figures 5(i.) to 5(vii.), a first oxide layer 1036 is first laid down on the silicon substrate 104, with a first metal layer 106 on top. As shown in Figure 5(ii.), the metal is etched back to leave only a short track 1061, which will form an "underpass" connection to the inner end of the spiral track of the inductor. Additional oxide 1037 is deposited over the top of the bottom layer to at least temporarily enclose it in insulating material. Then, via a temporary mask 140, Figure 5(iv.), vias 141 are etched to the underpass track 1061. With the mask removed again, further metal 1021 is deposited to fill the vias and provide metal for the spiral track 102. For the definition of this, another mask 142 is laid down, see Figure 5(vi.) and the metal between the individual turns of the track is removed. The mask is removed. At this stage, the metal of the track is fully defined in an analogous manner to that of the prior art.

Now as shown in Figure 5(vii.), a further mask 143 is laid down, to etch away gaps 1035 in the oxide, that is in both the first and second layers 1036, 1037, down to the silicon substrate 104. The bridges 1034 from the central region 1031 to the circumferential regions 1032 are left intact, with the conductive track 102 spanning from one bridge to the next. Finally, the silicon substrate beneath the gaps 1035 is etched away. The etching is continued until the voids formed beneath the track coalesce to form the trench 114.

Figure 6 shows a scrap view of the trench under a corner portion of the inductor.

Since the etching of the substrate is from directly above where the trench is to be formed, as opposed to from outside the inductor as in the prior art referred to above, no extra area is consumed. Further, the etching is fully CMOS compatible in the use of CMOS RIE tools and gases such as SF₆, He, O₂, etc.

The material details of the above steps are the same as those employed in CMOS technology, and as such are familiar to the man skilled in the art and will not be described in more detail. Certain of the described steps will be useful in the formation of other components elsewhere on the substrate; and indeed other steps may be incorporated in the process for forming components elsewhere without interfering with the formation of the inductor.

Utilising the invention, we have achieved an inductor with a low parasitic capacitance and a Q value of 15 at 1.9GHz.

CLAIMS

1. An integrated circuit inductor, the integrated circuit having a silicon substrate and an oxide layer on the silicon substrate, the inductor comprising:
 - an inductive loop deposited on the oxide layer;
 - apertures in the oxide layer beneath the inductive loop;
 - bridges adjacent the apertures and provided by portions of the oxide between an inner region and an outer region of the oxide layer, respectively within and without the inductive loop, the loop being supported on the bridges;
 - a continuous tunnel formed in the silicon substrate beneath the bridges, between the inductive loop and the silicon substrate filled with air.
2. An integrated circuit inductor as claimed in claim 1, wherein the apertures and the bridges extend generally radially of the inner region.
3. An integrated circuit inductor as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the continuous tunnel extends circumferentially of the inner region.
4. An integrated circuit inductor as claimed in claim 1, claim 2 or claim 3, wherein the inductive loop has a plurality of spirally arranged turns.
5. An integrated circuit inductor as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the oxide layer includes an underpass connection in one of the bridges from a peripheral connection for one of the inductor to its inner end.
6. A method of making an integrated circuit inductor, the integrated circuit having a silicon substrate and an oxide layer on the silicon substrate, as claimed in claim 1, the method consisting in the steps of:
 - depositing the inductive loop on the oxide layer;
 - opening the apertures in the oxide beneath the inductive loop
 - and providing the bridges to support the loop;

forming the tunnel in the silicon substrate beneath the bridges.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the continuous tunnel is formed by etching of the silicon substrate.
8. A method as claimed in claim 6 or claim 7, wherein the etching is continued until the continuous tunnel is continuous beneath the extent of the inductive loop.